Doctoral Students’ Emotions in Thesis Proposal Writing: Feelings, Triggers, Appraisals, and Coping Strategies

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Abstract

Studies of doctoral writing have proliferated in the past three decades; however, little attention has been given to the emotional dimension of writing a thesis proposal, the first major writing threshold that beginning doctoral candidates must cross. My research aims to fill this gap, focusing on the experiences of first-year Chinese doctoral students studying in an English-speaking country for the first time. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, I administered an online survey (n=73) followed by semi-structured interviews with 24 participants from a wide range of disciplines. Informed by Roseman's (1996) cognitive appraisal theory and Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) coping framework, I analysed the data to identify: (a) which emotions the students expressed towards their writing, (b) what factors triggered their emotions and how they appraised those triggers as impeding and/or facilitating writing, and (c) what coping strategies the students employed to deal with their writing emotions. First, I classified eight categories of emotion expressions using a lexicon corpus approach, with sadness being the most frequently reported emotion, followed by inspiration and happiness. Next, I identified a range of triggers for these emotions, which fell under four broad situations: Supervision, Writing Process, Research, and Collegial Community. Supervision, and particularly supervisors' feedback, proved to be the most influential triggering situation. Finally, I developed three types of coping strategies commonly employed by the students in my study: emotion-focused coping, academic skills-focused coping, and passive coping. The first two types of strategies were further differentiated into *self-facilitation-oriented coping* and *external facilitation-oriented coping*, to highlight the types of support students sought for dealing with their emotions and writing. My thesis contributes a novel method for categorising free format emotion expressions in Chinese and English, and it builds on previous researchers' work to propose a nuanced framework for understanding the multifaceted, dynamic and iterative nature of doctoral students' writing emotions. I conclude with a set of practical recommendations to help supervisors, doctoral support staff, and students recognise and respond to the complex emotional dimension of doctoral writing.

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Chapter One: Introduction

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

- Lao Zi, *Dao De Jing*, Chapter 64, Line 12

This project was driven by my personal writing experiences, as well as my research interest in the emotional dimension of doctoral writing. My doctoral journey began in July 2016 at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. When I was asked to work on my thesis proposal for my provisional year review, I had no real idea of what I would find or even what I was trying to look for. In the first few months, when I was reading through the thick academic articles and books piled up on my desk, I felt like a person wandering around a dark forest not knowing where the exit route was. One day, I decided to jump out of my messy workstation and go on a boat trip to Rotoroa Island in New Zealand. It was early morning; the sun rose above the sea level. I lay down on a sandy beach, gazed at the blue sky, and listened to the birdsong, as well as the sound of the waves lapping on the shore. Inspired by the freshness of the wind, I sat up, opened my laptop, and wrote the following self-reflection.

1.1 Self-Reflection: My Academic Writing Experiences as a Master's Student

In the late autumn of 2014 in Beijing, I packed my bags, said goodbye to my parents, and caught my first flight to the United Kingdom (UK). While waiting at the airport, I dreamed about what my new life in the UK would be like. I believed that as long as I studied hard, I would be a top student, an excellent academic writer, and a professional research scholar. At the same time, I also felt a bit uncertain about the foreign life awaiting me, because this was the first time I was going to leave my family, travel abroad, and study in an English-speaking country. I was not sure whether I could deal with the challenges that I would have to face in an unfamiliar learning environment.

By early 2016, I had successfully completed my master's studies. However, the goals I set myself at Beijing Airport in 2014 had not been accomplished. I was not a top student, not a professional researcher, and particularly not an excellent scholarly writer. My academic life in

the UK had felt like riding a roller coaster, with ups and downs.

A range of transitional problems ambushed me as soon as I landed in the UK. The first problem was the language; I still remember the first day, after an almost 20-hour-flight, when I was checked by a staff member from British immigration in Manchester. He asked me a few questions, but I did not understand his English and had to ask him to repeat every single question, until eventually, he was not patient anymore. As soon as I settled into a coach heading towards York where my university was located, I began to question myself: Why couldn't I understand the immigration officer's English even after I had gained a bachelor's degree in English with a high GPA? Other adjustment difficulties emerged within the first semester, such as following the English social rules, understanding British humour, making friends with the English students, communicating with the university lecturers and academic staff, taking notes during the lectures, and reading the long list of books. Even talking to the British people when installing broadband in my house was challenging, as they spoke very fast and had a Yorkshire accent which I could not understand at all, at that time.

Among all of these transitional challenges in the UK, academic English writing was the toughest for me and yet it also was the most essential academic task at the university. In late December 2014, within a three-week semester break, I had to complete two essays (around 5,000 words each) and prepare for one exam (three hours on Research Methods). One of the essays was about assessing non-native English speakers' oral English in the classroom context. I assured myself that my writing would be 'okay' because I wrote my bachelor dissertation in English and it received the highest mark among all the students in the same academic year at my Chinese university. Because I was confident about my first submitted essay, I spent the longest time on it, reading books in the library, searching for papers, and writing the essay. The lecturer had suggested that I could add some appendices such as other researchers' assessment materials for measuring students' oral English. I carefully selected the research papers and book chapters, extracted five assessment models proposed by prior scholars, and began to write what I thought was expected, first introducing the theoretical framework and then moving on to describe the assessment materials. Before submitting it, I

read the whole essay more than ten times to check for grammatical mistakes, and then I passed it to a professional proof-reader.

One month later when I received the mark on my first assignment, my high expectations were shattered. My essay barely scraped a pass, which made me feel – to quote a Chinese idiom – like an ant burning on a hot pan not knowing what to do next. At that time, I did not know who would be an ideal person to talk to about my writing. I was not assigned a supervisor until I was working on my graduation thesis. I wanted to talk to my peers, but my self-esteem and pride made me afraid that they might think I was an incapable academic writer. Then I was about to tell my parents, but I abandoned this idea after two seconds of thought. My parents had high expectations of me, and they expected me to do a doctoral degree after my master’s. If I told them about my low mark, they would be disappointed with me. One night, I shut myself in my room and hid under the duvet. I thought my academic life was over. If my other assignments were graded with low marks like my first submitted essay, I would not be able to have a position in a university for my doctoral studies. I lost confidence in my future academic plan.

Finally, I plucked up the courage to email the examiner who marked my first essay and ask for detailed feedback. I thought he would not reply to my email because the first semester was over, and he was very busy with his new students. However, surprisingly, he was happy to help me and invited me for a coffee at a university lounge. The meeting went for more than one hour. Sitting in front of a person who was willing to help with my writing, I could not help but cry over the pressure, helplessness, unhappiness, and frustration I had experienced over the past few months. He comforted me explaining that my English writing was fine, but there were different expectations around critical thinking. He said I did a good literature review, but I was not showing my own opinions. There was no critical thinking being displayed but I was expected to justify why I went with one choice over another. He said it was like the difference between a cook and a chef: a cook follows the recipe, but a chef understands the elements and can recombine them because he understands why each ingredient is there. I was writing like a cook when there was the expectation that I should be a chef.

1.2 My Research Focus: Emotional Dimension of Doctoral Writing

My writing experiences that I recalled in the above self-reflection led to my interest in researching the emotional dimension of doctoral writing. Writing is the foundation of an academic career but also "an academic craft that is rarely explicitly taught", challenging many doctoral candidates with technical writing skills, as well as "emotions that writing stirs up" (Cameron et al., 2009, p. 269). Over time, doctoral students are trained to "write like a hard scientist, [to] be clinical, unemotional and objective" (Aitchison et al., 2012, p. 444), to ensure success in acculturating into their disciplinary discourse communities (Williams & Lee, 1999). Opening up the emotional domain of writing or confessing to having difficulties with writing has been perceived as "an admission of fundamental incompetence" (Torrance et al., 1994, p. 106), that could contaminate doctoral students' research by "impeding objectivity" (Williams & Lee, 1999, p. 7).

In their seminal work *Acknowledging the affective in higher education*, Beard et al. (2007) challenge the view of denying emotions in students' learning, arguing that "emotion is rarely acknowledged and is under- or mis-theorised" in higher education (p. 236). This call has initiated research into emotions as an integral part of a student's doctoral journey. As Cotterall (2013) suggests, 'if acknowledged, emotions can inspire, guide and enhance research; if ignored or suppressed, they can delay and even derail it" (p. 185). Studies have found that a student's PhD journey can be an emotional rollercoaster affected by, for example, loneliness and isolation from peers (Janta et al., 2014), struggles with academic identity and belonging (Cotterall, 2013), and frustration when communicating with supervisors (Mcclure, 2005).

Thesis writing is the fundamental work of a student's doctoral scholarship. The path to producing a PhD thesis is more than typing an 80,000 word-document; instead, according to many scholars, it is an identity transformation process, from being a student to being a scholar, entering and joining a disciplinary discussion within an academic community (Kamler & Thomson, 2006; Lee & Aitchison, 2009). As previous researchers have shown, such transformations are not "unidirectional" and do not occur "automatically" or "linearly" (Ross et al., 2011, p. 15). Doctoral students, as apprentice writers, often get stuck during their transformation

processes (Meyer & Land, 2005) and experience high emotions in their thesis writing journey, such as anxiety, stress, fear, angst, annoyance, and confusion (Cameron et al., 2009; Wellington, 2010). As I will explain in Chapter Two of my thesis, the emotional dimension of thesis writing can significantly impact a students' writing progress; yet, this area receives insufficient consideration in the existing doctoral education literature. As Wellington (2010) states, "[This] is an area which was often given little attention or sometimes neglected totally in guidance on writing from sources such as handbooks and guidelines" (p. 149). The author proposes that the emotional domain of doctoral writing needs to be fully recognised and acknowledged, and supervisors should invite students to "reflect on and discuss it" (Wellington, 2010, p. 149).

Building and expanding on the above scholars' work, my research promotes an understanding of the emotionality of doctoral students writing a thesis proposal, the first substantial piece of academic writing for most beginning candidates, as well as a distinct milestone in their doctoral scholarship. Given my own writing experiences as an international doctoral student from mainland China, I have decided to focus my study on Chinese doctoral students studying in an English-speaking country for the first time. This group of students must make a "triple transition": moving to a foreign country, moving to a new education system with different expectations, and moving to a different level of academic study (Jindal-Snape & Ingram, 2013, p. 17). Cross-cultural research has shown that international students going through these transitions can experience high levels of sociocultural adjustment difficulties, psychological distress, loss of self-esteem, and a lowering of educational attainment (e.g., O'Reilly et al., 2010). As Jindal-Snape and Ingram (2013) poignantly state, these students are "in a culture different to their own" and they "have to deal with, sometimes implicit, rules and expectations of social and educational organisations, as well as dealing with all the problems of adjustment common to students in general" (p. 17).

Grounded in this context, I am interested in finding out how Chinese doctoral students studying in an English-speaking country for the first time experience their proposal writing emotionally: particularly, what emotions are at play and whether resources and/or support

provisions are available to students dealing with their writing emotions. In response to the call that the emotional dimension of doctoral writing needs to be viewed from a pedagogical perspective (Aitchison et al., 2012; Wellington, 2010), my research contributes to this field as follows: first, a novel method was developed to analyse and categorise free-format emotion expressions in both the English and Chinese languages; second, a new framework was created to understand the complexity of emotions in the context of doctoral writing; last, a set of practical recommendations were suggested to act upon this dimension appropriately.

1.3 Thesis Structure

This thesis includes seven chapters to tell the story of my doctoral research. The first chapter, the one you are reading at this moment, signals my humble beginnings to take on a new challenge: exploring the emotional dimension of doctoral thesis proposal writing.

Chapter Two maps the literature landscape of the aims and research questions underpinning my project. In this chapter, I review a body of literature on doctoral writing published within the last three decades (from 1989 to 2019), to argue that the emotional dimension of doctoral writing is under-researched yet should be given significant attention. To address this topic, I review three dominant theories of studying emotions in social sciences, as well as the two most influential models of cognitive appraisal theory. The purpose is to justify my decision of using Roseman's (1996) appraisal theory to understand the emotionality of students' proposal writing. Informed by this theory, I focus on exploring the triggers for their writing emotions and how students appraise the triggers towards writing facilitation and impediment. In addition, I explain why I choose to use Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) coping framework to investigate students' coping strategies when responding to the emotions that writing stirs up. Finally, based on the gaps signalled throughout my literature review, as well as my critical evaluation of the theories mentioned above, I develop three research questions for my thesis:

(a) Which emotions are associated with thesis proposal writing for first-year Chinese doctoral students studying in an English-speaking country for the first time?

(b) What are the triggers for their writing emotions and how do students appraise the triggers towards writing facilitation and impediment?

(c) How do students cope with their writing emotions?

Chapter Three presents my interpretative philosophical stance and qualitative phenomenological research methods that I adopted to address the corresponding research questions above. As I explain in this chapter, I collected my data in two phases comprising online survey (phase one) and semi-structured interviews (phase two). The online survey was designed to scope students' writing-related emotions and the general triggering situations for their emotions, as well as to select a pool of eligible participants for the second phase of data collection. Based on the survey data from phase one, I then conducted 24 individual in-depth interviews to elaborate on participants': (a) emotions towards proposal writing, (b) triggers for their emotions, (c) appraisals of the triggers (i.e., how the triggers facilitated and/or impeded writing), and (d) coping strategies for their emotions. In this chapter, I detail the development of the online survey and interview protocol and how I undertook the research, including sampling techniques, procedures of data collection and analysis and how I ensured trustworthiness and ethical conduct of my research.

Chapter Four reports on students' emotions towards their thesis proposal writing. Participants' emotion responses collected as part of the online survey were analysed and reported according to valence (i.e., positive and negative emotions). To systematically analyse free-format expressions from interviews, I constructed a lexicon corpus and developed a novel method to classify around 500 expressions into eight emotion categories. The corpus included four forms of emotion expressions along with English and Chinese descriptions, such as metaphors and Chinese idioms. My method development in this chapter contributes to analysing emotions in Chinese texts and translating them into the field of Western academic emotion research. My findings cast new light on the rich languages that doctoral students use to describe their writing emotions, which may help them develop a better understanding of and come to terms with the highs and lows of their writing processes.

Chapter Five addresses the topics that I regard as crucially important for institutional practitioners: the triggering situations in which doctoral students feel emotional about their proposal writing. Specifically, I focus on describing a range of triggers with respect to

supervision, writing process, research, and the collegial community. The triggers are then further evaluated through Roseman's (1996) cognitive appraisal theory, to understand how they are appraised by the students. This chapter extends our knowledge of how beginning Chinese doctoral candidates experience their writing emotionally and how different triggering situations impede and/or facilitate their proposal writing.

Chapter Six paints a picture of coping strategies that are commonly used by doctoral students to reduce their negative emotions and accentuating positive ones in their writing processes. Informed by Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) coping framework, I present three types of coping strategies: emotion-focused coping, academic skills-focused coping, and passive coping. The first two are active or positive strategies, while passive coping refers to negative behaviours which participants exhibited when reacting or responding to their emotions. Based on my interview data, I further differentiated active coping into *self-facilitation-oriented coping* and *external facilitation-oriented coping*, to highlight the support students ask for when dealing with their emotions and proposal writing. Overall, this chapter contributes to a new way of categorising coping strategies in the context of doctoral writing and an understanding of Chinese candidates' writing emotion-coping experiences.

Chapter Seven, the final chapter of my thesis, discusses the contributions of my doctoral research. Based on my findings from Chapters Four to Six, I developed a conceptual framework that better reflects the multifaceted, dynamic, and iterative nature of writing emotions. This framework informed a set of practical recommendations to help institutional practitioners and doctoral students to recognise and respond to this dimension. My contributions narrow the gaps in the field of doctoral writing, as well as creating some exciting beginnings for future researchers to continue exploring this topic.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.

- Isaac Newton, 1675

The purpose of this chapter is to rationalise the aims and research questions underpinning my doctoral project. In the first section, I highlight the emotional or affective competencies that scholars require to carry out their academic writing tasks (Murray & Moore, 2006). I then argue that research students' academic writing can be complicated, as their writing practices are often shaped by a range of personal, social, and situational factors within their disciplinary discourse communities (Braine, 2002; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007). For international research students, their writing practices are further influenced by their previous learning and writing experiences and how well they adapt to an unfamiliar linguistic environment, a foreign culture, and a new education system (Young & Schartner, 2014).

In the second section, I provide the context for academic writing at a doctoral level, particularly on doctoral thesis writing (including the thesis proposal). As previous scholars have shown, the production of a doctoral thesis is fundamental to students' research and doctoral studies (Lee & Aitchison, 2009, p. 87) and symbolises an identity transformation from a student to a scholar entering into an existing academic community (Paré et al., 2011, p. 233). However, this transformation is challenging due to the emotional, intellectual, and practical struggles along the way (Amran & Ibrahim, 2012; Bosanquet & Cahir, 2016; Hodgson, 2017).

In the third section, I review the literature on doctoral writing published from 1989 to 2019. The literature on supervisory writing pedagogies is presented to provide evidence that little research is done to support supervisors to act upon the emotional dimension of doctoral writing. Then, I address students' perspectives by exploring four common dimensions within doctoral student writing: the technical dimension, the cognitive dimension, the social dimension, and the emotional dimension. In the literature, I found considerable attention has been accorded to the first three dimensions (e.g., Bottery & Wright, 2019; Doody et al., 2017; Starke-Meyerring,

2011), but little attention has been given to the emotional dimension.

In the fourth section, I firstly identify the main gaps in the field of doctoral writing, to emphasise a need to pay attention to students' emotions in their writing processes. I then identify three main drawbacks in the previous related studies, to justify how my research addresses this dimension. Issues surrounding emotion data collection, the genre of doctoral writing, and student groups are also discussed. Based on my critical evaluations of the literature and my own interest in this field, I frame my general research direction and provide a rationale for my focus on first-year Chinese doctoral students studying in an English-speaking country for the first time working on a thesis proposal.

In the fifth section, I shift my focus to concepts and theories of emotion in the field of social sciences. I distinguish the major differences between *emotion* and other psychological states, such as *affect*, *feeling*, and *mood*, to define the scope of my research and to clarify the meaning of *writing emotion* in this thesis. Next, I review three dominant theories of studying emotions in social sciences - basic emotion theory (e.g., Ortony & Turner, 1990), cognitive appraisal theory (e.g., Roseman et al., 1996), and social constructionist emotion theory (e.g., Fisher & Chon, 1989) - and justify my decision to use cognitive appraisal theory to investigate doctoral students' writing emotions. Following this, I present the two most influential models of cognitive appraisal theory - Lazarus and Folkman's (1987) cognitive appraisal and Roseman's (1996) appraisal theory of emotions - and provide a rationale for using Roseman's appraisal theory to understand the triggers of students' writing emotions and how those are appraised towards writing facilitation and impediment. Finally, I introduce Lazarus and Folkman's (1984, 1987) coping framework to explain how students cope with their emotions during their writing processes. A large body of research shows that the coping process is essential for students to recover from academic difficulties, to re-engage in learning activities, and to maintain their effort and determination in completing academic goals (e.g., Hirai et al., 2015; Khawaja & Stallman, 2011; Yan & Berliner, 2011b). Therefore, to better propose pedagogical actions to act upon the emotional dimension of doctoral writing, there is a need to understand which coping strategies might be most effective.

In the sixth and final section of this chapter, I briefly revisit the gaps identified in the literature on doctoral writing, to argue that the emotional dimension of doctoral writing is under-researched and should be given more consideration. Informed by Roseman's (1996) appraisal theory and Lazarus and Folkman's (1984, 1987) coping framework, I finally develop three main research questions.

2.1 Academic Writing: A Challenging Journey

For most scholars, academic writing is the foundation of their professional development. Their writing practice often involves "integrat[ing] disparate ideas, synthesiz[ing] perspectives, and extend[ing] theory - which demands a higher level of construction skills and perspective-taking, as well as greater concern for accuracy, voice, and audience" (Lavelle & Bushrow, 2007, p. 809). The process of working on a piece of writing, according to Murray and Moore (2006), is "continuous" and "iterative"; it involves "starting, progressing and finishing a complicated, challenging combination of tasks" (p. 4) and requires "lots of different skills and orientations, sometimes at different stages and phases in the process, sometimes all at the same time" (p. 6).

Academic writing is more than a printed display of a scholar's fully formed thoughts in their expertise areas. Lavelle and Bushrow (2007) note that scholars regard writing as one of the most difficult academic skills, which needs neurological, physical, cognitive, and affective competencies. Indeed, Murray and Moore (2006, pp. 7-14) have identified five challenging "paradoxes" that academic writers need to resolve:

(a) The *starting* versus *finishing* paradox: starting a writing project and persistently working on it to finish it.

(b) The *originality* versus *convention* paradox*:* finding an individual voice and articulating new ideas in the midst of other voices, many of which seem more expert and knowledgeable.

(c) The *logic* versus *emotion* paradox: maintaining the objective nature in writing and incorporating emotional awareness into the writing process.

(d) The *easy* versus *difficult* paradox: navigating the easy and difficult stages of writing.

(e) The *public* versus *private* paradox*:* enhancing and restraining the private and the public rituals of the writing.

However, academic writing for tertiary students, especially research students, requires more than just resolving the above five “paradoxes”. As previous scholars have shown, students’ writing practices are also shaped by their academic literacies, disciplinary knowledge, own interests, research projects, and other social and situational factors, such as power relations, interactions with writing instructors or thesis supervisors, as well as a sense of self and identity in an unfamiliar disciplinary discourse community (e.g., Braine, 2002; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007).

For international graduate students whose native language is not English but who are undertaking studies on a Western campus where the English language is the medium of academic communication, the situation is even more complicated. Their writing experiences are further affected by their previous educational experiences in their own country and culture (Andrade, 2006; Campbell, 2015) as well as by how well they accustom to an unfamiliar linguistic environment, a foreign culture, and a new education system which follows different academic conventions, and learning and writing practices (Young & Schartner, 2014). These international research students are expected to quickly adapt to the new learning environment, successfully navigate these differences in a foreign language, and independently develop specific knowledge, research strategies and the necessary academic writing skills (Park, 2016). This adaptation process, however, can be lengthy, difficult, and stressful (Andrade, 2006; Campbell & Li, 2008).

2.2 Doctoral Writing Context

My research focuses on academic writing at a doctoral level. The doctorate is a complex and expanding educational system. My research context is different from other contexts such as the United States of America (USA), where the doctorate involves thesis proposal writing, advanced-level coursework, passing a comprehensive examination, as well as defending a thesis. I have been undertaking my doctorate in New Zealand, where the most common form is the *Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) by supervised research*. Students undertaking this form of

doctorate often work on a project supervised by one or two primary supervisors (sometimes also by doctoral advisors depending on the student's institutional structures). In the first year of enrolment (i.e., the provisional year), students are required to develop a research proposal (or thesis proposal) stating the direction of their research. By the end of the provisional year, students are expected to present the proposal through a written document, as well as at a seminar, a prerequisite to the confirmation of the doctoral candidature moving forward into the research phase. The research proposal, therefore, is an initial development of the thesis and the first threshold for most beginning doctoral scholars to cross, leading up to a substantial piece of writing, the 80,000- to 100,000-word thesis.

According to Lee and Aitchison (2009, p. 87), doctoral thesis writing is not a technical activity that students start to work on after completing their research projects; instead, it is fundamental to students' research and doctoral studies. The thesis is a "highly contingent genre" (Rogers et al., 2016, p. 72), which entails "negotiating an intricate set of explicit and implicit rules" and is mostly concerned with "disciplinary subject formation" (Paré et al., 2011, p. 230). Thesis writing is challenging because students need to familiarise themselves with institutional and disciplinary writing conventions to develop an appropriate voice, learning to adopt an authoritative stance in their writing (Lindsay, 2015). As Kamler and Thomson (2014) note, writing for doctoral students is "text work" and "identity work" (p.15), as it entails the genres of the discipline (Negretti & McGrath, 2018) and "disciplinary becoming" (Dressen-Hammouda, 2008, p. 234), and the pathway to producing a thesis helps students enter an academic and scholarly community (Amran & Ibrahim, 2012; Stracke & Kumar, 2010). However, this process, according to many researchers, is a particularly challenging transformation, due to the emotional, intellectual, and practical struggles along the way (Amran & Ibrahim, 2012; Bosanquet & Cahir, 2016; Hodgson, 2017).

2.3 Three Decades of Literature on Doctoral Writing

In this section, I review the literature published from 1989 to 2019 addressing the topic of doctoral writing. I used a number of search engines and databases, including Google Scholar, PsychINFO, ERIC, ProQuest, Scopus, and Research Gate, to seek specific keywords (e.g.,

doctoral thesis, PhD students' writing) as well as the year of publishing (i.e., in the last 30 years). Because my focus is on the writing aspect of doctoral education, I excluded the studies examining students' general learning experiences, although some briefly mentioned their challenging writing experiences (e.g., Hopwood et al., 2011; Soong et al., 2015).

2.3.1 An Overview of the Literature

In the last thirty years, around 350 pieces of literature have been published addressing doctoral writing for different target audiences. The majority (70%) examine various aspects of doctoral writing (e.g., authorial voice, identity, and thesis structure) to provide instructions, suggestions, or guidelines for students to write well (e.g., Badenhorst & Guerin, 2015; Bottery & Wright, 2019; Joyner et al., 2018). Approximately 20% of the literature focuses on supervisory writing pedagogical strategies, i.e., how to supervise students' writing and support them to write (e.g., Bastalich, 2017; Fullagar et al., 2017; Wisker, 2016). Some attention has been accorded to thesis examiners' views, particularly their expectations and advice to students for writing quality (e.g., Hodgson, 2017; Holbrook et al., 2004; Johnston, 1997; Mullins & Kiley, 2002; Starfield et al., 2015). A few studies have investigated faculty perspectives, for example, promoting students' research writing self-efficacy (e.g., Overall et al., 2011), evaluating students' writing with disciplinary-specific criteria (e.g., Casanave & Hubbard, 1992), and designing doctoral programmes for developing students' academic writing skills (e.g., Harreveld, 2008).

My research interest is in the traditional doctorate, the most common one in many universities. The examination of this type of doctorate tends to be different from doctorates of *thesis-by-publication* and *thesis-by-performance* (or *thesis-by-practice*) which have extensively studied recently (e.g., Grant, 2011; Guerin, 2016; Gustavii, 2012; Klocko et al., 2015; Lei, 2019; Lei & Hu, 2019; Li, 2016; Kamler, 2008; Marchant et al., 2011; Merga et al., 2019). Candidates undertaking thesis-by-publication are examined based on a series of peer-reviewed articles that have been published or written as publications and are coherently related to a topic (Guerin, 2016, p. 33). Candidates working on thesis-by-practice or performance are most often required to prepare a "double thesis": "a body of creative work which may be exhibited, written, presented, performed, uploaded or displayed and a written dissertation/exegeses/exposition, an

academic treatise that provides the context of and argument for the research" (Bolt, 2018, p. 144). Finally, candidates (like me) managing a traditional or monograph thesis, are free to publish during their candidature if they wish to, and their doctoral studies are examined mainly by their thesis (Starfield et al., 2015). My focus of the literature review is on the traditional form of doctoral thesis writing (including thesis proposal writing).

2.3.2 Supervisory Writing Pedagogies

The role of doctoral research is to make and contribute to new knowledge, and this new knowledge is often manifested through students' writing. Therefore, in a general sense, supervisors are students' "writing teachers", promoting students' learning and research development, guiding them through the thesis production process, and introducing them to discipline-specific discourse practices, for example "advis[ing] on how and where certain things should be said, on what must and must not be mentioned, and on who should or should not be cited or criticised" (Paré, 2011, p. 59).

Around one-fifth of the literature on doctoral writing published in the last 30 years examines how supervisors support students to write or to help students "locate themselves on complex disciplinary maps" (Paré et al., 2011, p. 233). This trend aligns with the view that "joining the disciplinary research discussion is a challenging task for new researchers - one that involves a complex process of knowledge and identity work" (Paré et al., 2011, p. 233). Therefore, doctoral candidates need supervisors' assistance on the way to become competent and confident scholarly writers (Cotterall, 2011), and writing clearly is one of the core activities in the interactions between supervisors and students (González-Ocampo & Castelló, 2018).

Apart from handbooks or guidelines offering generic suggestions for supervisors to support a student's overall PhD journey (e.g., Taylor & Beasley, 2005), most related literature focuses on presenting strategies to help supervisors to improve their writing-supervising pedagogies and practices, for example, supporting students in developing a confident and articulate voice within their discipline discourse communities (e.g., Wisker, 2016), helping students to generate new and original knowledge in their theses (e.g., Bastalich, 2017), providing effective feedback on students' writing (e.g., Wei et al., 2019), creating a collaborative

writing community for students (e.g., Fullagar et al., 2017), encouraging students to write with creativity and style (e.g., Manathunga et al., 2010), and guiding students to write specific sections of their thesis such as the methodology, research direction, thesis title, literature review, and thesis argument structure (e.g., Badley, 2014; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007; Taylor & Beasley, 2005; Wisker, 2012). Among the above studies, some special attention is given to developing academic literacies for international doctoral students writing in English as an Additional Language (EAL), as well as providing various forms of writing support to achieve this aim, such as writing workshops, peer collaboration, and learning advisors (e.g., Chatterjee Padmanabhan & Rossetto, 2017).

Seeing writing as a cognitive, social, and situational activity, González-Ocampo and Castelló (2018) further develop our understanding of the supervisors' roles in doctoral writing by probing into supervisors' perspectives, suggesting that supervisors attribute three primary roles to students' writing practices: (a) *instrumental*: helping students produce academic texts with technical writing skills, (b) *epistemic*: promoting students' learning processes, knowledge construction, and self-regulation, (c) *communicative*: promoting research communication and facilitating the socialisation of students within their academic fields (pp. 391-393).

Most of the literature and guidebooks, including González-Ocampo and Castelló's (2018) newest insights into supervisors' roles in doctoral writing, assert that writing is emotionally taxing for both students and supervisors, but surprisingly, few of them provide practical strategies to support supervisors to act upon the emotional dimension of students' writing. It seems that our current understanding of doctoral writing mostly is concerned with rhetorical, identity transformation, and epistemic construction matters. In the book *Helping Doctoral Students Write: Pedagogies for supervision*, Kamler and Thomson (2014, p. 3) argue that research writing should be reconceptualised, claiming that thesis writing is more than merely "writing it up" or putting words on the page; it entails cognitive inquiry (i.e., "we write to work out what we think"), conscious choices (i.e., "data and subsequent written texts are shaped and crafted by the research through a multitude of selections"), as well as physical, emotional, and aesthetic labour (i.e., "most scholars carry their scholarship deep in their psyche,

bones and muscles").

Building and expanding on Kamler and Thomson's (2014) claims, in the past ten years, a few researchers have called supervisors' attention to the tangled emotional and intellectual labour that doctoral writing involves. Emotions in doctoral education is not a new concept. For example, Morrison Saunders et al. (2010) describe the doctoral process as an "emotional rollercoaster" (p. 206), which is confirmed by Cotterall (2013), stating that emotions pervade students' doctoral experiences, and educators and researchers should acknowledge and strategically act upon the emotional dimension of students' doctoral experiences. However, the current literature often either focuses on the overall emotional challenges in the students' doctoral journey or on the interactive tensions between supervisors and students (e.g., Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013; Lau, 2019; Wisker & Robinson, 2013), whilst ignoring the question of how to help students deal with the emotional dimension of thesis writing.

Carlino (2012) suggests that supervisors should reflect on students' challenges of producing a doctoral thesis, which are "beyond conceptual, methodological and writing knowledge" and are often accompanied by "tensions and emotions" (p. 218). The author developed a 33-hour writing workshop and created a secure environment for students to share emotions through their academic writing work. In her article, she analyses students' self-reflective notes and develops two main ideas that contribute to supervisory writing pedagogies: (a) learning to write for the academic field involves "threats and opportunities experienced with deep affect" for students and (b) supervisors taking into account both "writing and emotional issues" can foster students' writing and academic enculturation (Carlino, 2012, p, 234).

In response to Carlino's suggestions about acknowledging students' writing emotions, Määttä (2015), a doctoral supervisor, has shared her own perceptions of supervising thesis writing and has introduced ten elements of "caring supervision" (pp. 186-189). The suggestions highlight the importance of interaction and collaboration between supervisors and students in supervising writing practices, proposing that a caring supervisor has to "constantly evaluate what he or she is capable of as a supervisor, how to inspire students to toil and persevere, and to marvel their own abilities" (Määttä, 2015, pp. 189-190).

A report published by a group of researchers based in Aotearoa, New Zealand expands the frontiers of understanding emotions in supervising-writing practices by exploring supervisory feedback (Carter et al., 2016). The authors state that doctoral students tend to take feedback, especially critical feedback, personally and to react emotionally (Carter et al., 2016, p. 17), and they advise supervisors to "lead your students through the personal growth …to handle emotions around writing critique" (Carter et al., 2016, p. 65). Despite a number of practical suggestions for effective and productive supervision work, Carter et al. (2016) claim that supervisors as professional educators should "[be] aware of likely trouble spots" but are not required to "act as psychologists", as students can seek support from "either generic learning advisors or counsellors as to how to manage their own emotions" (p. 18).

The risk of such an approach is highlighted in Wisker and Robinson's (2013, p. 305) concept of the "doctoral orphans", which refers to the students who lose their supervisors in their learning journey due to various causes, such as a breakdown of supervisor-student relationships or supervisors changing jobs. The orphaned students, according to the authors, tend to experience emotions of "neglect, confusion, disorientation and stuckness", which can shake their confidence and affect their academic achievements, research projects, and skill development (Wisker & Robinson 2013, p. 305). As a doctoral student, I have experienced changing co-supervisors in my first-year candidature, because my previous co-supervisor moved back to her home country for professional development, and I thus understand the anxieties of not being looked after or being neglected. As my experiences show, being orphaned can be both physical (i.e., supervisors physically moving away, leaving students 'alone') and psychological (i.e., supervisors failing to respond to students' needs and students feeling neglected, even if they are still in collaboration).

In claiming that supervisors are not psychologists and that students need to seek help with emotion management from somewhere else such as learning advisors or counsellors, Carter et al. (2016) suggest that it is the doctoral students' own responsibility to deal with the emotional pitfalls that writing creates and supervisors do not have to take on this responsibility. However, what do students think? Do students think supervisors should be caring (Määttä,

2015) and help them confront the emotional turmoil in their writing journey? If they do and supervisors fail to provide caring supervision, this mismatched expectation could produce more doctoral orphans who feel neglected. The breakdowns in communication, as Wisker and Robinson (2013) articulate, can negatively impact on the student's academic identity, ability, and confidence in producing a sound thesis. Therefore, the core issue here is the perspectives of students themselves: What have researchers or educators done to help students to 'get ready' for their PhD writing journey? Given the complex nature of thesis writing which involves emotional, intellectual, and practical struggles (Kamler & Thomson, 2006), what has been researched to help doctoral students to face and defeat these struggles? To address these questions, I now review the literature published from 1989 to 2019 that targets doctoral students and their thesis writing development.

2.3.3 Four Dimensions of Doctoral Student Writing

Technical Dimension. In the last three decades, there has been a constant and growing interest in researching the technical aspects of doctoral student writing, i.e., the mechanics of written texts. A large amount of research has been undertaken to examine and improve the mechanisms of students' thesis writing, for example, through attention to organisations and structures (e.g., Bottery & Wright, 2019), citations (e.g., Kushkowski et al., 2003), disciplinary writing conventions (e.g., Barnard, 2012), hedging and boosting (e.g., Kondowe, 2014), normalisation (e.g., Starke-Meyerring et al., 2014), clarity and consistency (e.g., Lunenburg & Irby, 2008), textual typologies (e.g., MacDonald, 2009), intertextual references (e.g., Thompson, 2005), plagiarism (e.g., Marcovici, 2019), integrity (e.g., Bowden & Green, 2019), and agency/articulation (e.g., Wisker, 2016). Some special attention has been given to thesis proposal writing, such as structure and content (e.g., Iqbal, 2007), typical components (e.g., Kilbourn, 2006), and quality assessment (e.g., Heath & Tynan, 2010).

In addition, researchers have investigated distinctive features of writing specific sections or chapters of a PhD thesis, including the literature review (e.g., Kwan, 2006), introduction (e.g., Bunton, 2014), research design (e.g., Jogulu & Pansiri, 2011), result/conclusion (e.g., Faryadi, 2019), and particularly, discussion (e.g., Geng & Wharton, 2016; Shen et al., 2019). The

literature on writing for specific disciplinary communities includes applied linguistics (e.g., Kwan, 2006), hard sciences (e.g., Dong, 1996), behavioural sciences (e.g., Lunenburg & Irby, 2008), and the humanities and social sciences (e.g., Diamond & Anderson, 2019).

Finally, some student handbooks or guidebooks provide comprehensive strategic approaches to managing a PhD thesis, ranging from selecting a suitable topic, finding a research problem, conducting the research, and analysing/interpreting data to planning, writing, crafting, revising, and finishing the thesis (e.g., Brennan, 2019; Bolker, 1998; Joyner et al., 2018; Thomson & Kamler, 2016).

Cognitive Dimension. In the early 2000s, researchers started moving beyond the technical aspects of doctoral writing and bringing their attention to the cognitive dimension, probing into how students think during their writing processes. This trend reflects earlier research on student cognition and writing, which can be traced back to the 1970s and 1980s when writing was regarded as an act of "making meaning-making thought" (Elbow, 1973, p. 15). Already then, the role of writing was viewed as promoting learning (Zemelman, 1977), thinking (Berthoff, 1982), and independent thought (Fulwiler, 1982). For example, Flower and Hayes (1981) developed the first "cognitive process theory of writing" (p. 370), claiming that the process of writing "is best understood as a set of distinctive thinking processes which writers orchestrate or organise during the act of composing" (p. 366). Since 2000, an increasing number of studies on doctoral students' cognitive/thinking activities with regard to their writing processes have been conducted. This trend highlights that the core nature of producing a PhD thesis is more than following disciplinary writing practices and displaying research through a written document. Instead, it implies that students are expected to join a disciplinary research discussion, contribute new knowledge, and position themselves in the existing scholarly world.

The related literature has discussed various aspects of the cognitive dimension of doctoral writing, for instance, students' perceptions/attitudes towards writing feedback (e.g., Can & Walker, 2011), conceptual/theoretical work (e.g., Barrett & Hussey, 2015), academic identity construction (e.g., Liming, 2012), knowledge production (e.g., Starke-Meyerring, 2011), writing progress evaluation (e.g., Mu & Carrington, 2007), giving and receiving critiques (e.g., Caffarella

& Barnett, 2000), self-regulated writing strategies (e.g., Castelló et al., 2009), finding authorial voice (e.g., Aitchison, 2014), metadiscoursal expressions (e.g., Hyland, 2004), critical thinking (e.g., Wisker, 2015), epistemological development (e.g., Xu & Zhang, 2019), managing reading/thinking/writing relationships (e.g., Bitchener, 2017), decision-making with integrity (e.g., Bowden & Green, 2019), and genre knowledge (e.g., Negretti & McGrath, 2018). Among these studies, greater attention is given to students' identity, voice, and knowledge construction during their thesis writing processes.

Social Dimension. Research on the social dimension of doctoral writing began to receive great consideration in the late 2000s and early 2010s. This body of work challenges the cognitive view assuming that writing is individual-oriented; it focuses on how writers create meaning from the social factors that make up their writing experiences. This trend is influenced by Vygotsky's work in sociocultural theory (Mighton, 2008), suggesting that people think and learn by making meaning socially. According to Mighton, as people interact with others, surrounding contexts and languages are communicated as mediators between the external world and the people's internal experiences. In the context of writing, sociocultural scholars believe that writers' social experiences determine and shape their writing practices (Brandt, 1992), which "always [are] intertwined with the writers' language community, social position, values, and actions in the world" (Magnifico, 2010, p. 173). In the past ten years, scholars have increasingly viewed doctoral writing as a social and situational practice (González-Ocampo & Castelló, 2018), highlighting that research writing is collaborative and often multidisciplinary (Guerin, 2013).

A related body of literature focuses on how to use students' relationships within and beyond academic settings to facilitate their writing, especially in the form of writing groups (or writers' groups). Such groups have been used to help students build confidence and become scholarly writers through engaging in a collaborative community (Aitchison & Lee, 2006; Lee & Boud, 2003). The purpose of using such groups, according to the literature, is to help students to transform disciplinary communities of practice (e.g., Colombo, 2018), construct inter/multi/cross-disciplinary knowledge allied with peers (e.g., Johnson, 2019), practice

offering/receiving critical feedback among peers (Guerin, 2014), learn writing communication skills (e.g., Ferguson, 2009), develop collective/reflexive thinking abilities (e.g., Danvers et al., 2019), achieve writing progress/productivity (e.g., Maher et al., 2013), and build confidence as apprentice writers (e.g., Larcombe et al., 2007).

Scholars also have researched the forms of writing groups, which either are student-directed (e.g., Guerin, 2013, Maher et al.2008; Murphy et al.,2014) or faculty/institution-initiated (e.g., Aitchison, 2009; Ferguson, 2009; Guerin, 2013; Johnson, 2019). Some attention is given to the structures of writing groups, including writing retreats (e.g., Murray, 2014), writing centres (e.g., Kinney, et al., 2019), writing marathon groups (Wolfsberger, 2014), online writing groups (e.g., Kozar & Lum, 2015), Pick-n-Mix (Haas, 2014), Shut-up & Write (Mewburn et al., 2014), and especially, peer writing groups (e.g., Doody et al., 2017; Johnson, 2014). In addition, Collins's (1991) cognitive apprenticeship model has inspired subsequent researchers to study how doctoral students write with their mentoring supervisors or experienced faculty scholars (e.g., Maher, 2014). Such a form of writing groups is believed to promote transparency of disciplinary writing practices, as well as to help students write for their research fields (Maher, 2014).

Emotional Dimension. Since 2009, an increasing number of studies have explored the emotional (or affective) dimension of students' doctoral writing processes. This rising trend aligns with the perceptions of Beard et al. (2007), who argue that emotions in tertiary learning have shifted from "concern for the therapeutic" to "the pedagogic" (p. 237), and it is important to rethink studentship from the perspective of "a full embodied, affective, human self" (p. 236). With respect to doctoral education, William and Lee (1999) developed one of the earliest profound insights into the emotional dimension of thesis writing. In their seminal work *Forged in Fire*, using terms such as "trauma" and "distress", the authors argue that the emotionality and irrationality of doctoral writing should not be regarded as "noise" and should not be "silenced" in the system of pedagogic practices (William & Lee, 1999, p. 8). Instead, they claim that working through the emotional dimension or the "under life" of the thesis production constitutes students as capable scholars, moving forward with a "graduated and certificated 'doctor'" (William & Lee,

1999, p. 7).

Building on William and Lee's (1999) work, a growing body of literature has challenged the polarisation between rationality and emotionality in students' doctoral journey (e.g. Hallowell et al. 2005), proposing that denying emotions means ignoring the relation between emotion and reason, i.e., the emotional nature of learning. Bazerman (2001) states that learning is "particularly drenched in deep emotional issues" because it "expands us beyond the secure realms of habits and prior senses of the self into new areas of competence and participation" (pp. 185-186). For doctoral students, learning how to write or becoming an academic writer is an identity transformative process (Aitchison & Lee, 2006), from "novice to expert" (Ross et al., 2010, p. 6) to "[take] up a position of expertise and authority" (Kamler & Thomson, 2014, p. 16). This transformation, according to Cameron et al. (2009), results from a process of "coming to terms with writing emotions and developing procedural and technical writing know-how" (p. 279). Students are expected to cope with disorientation (Delamont & Atkinson, 2001), and at the same time, develop literacy competencies and ontological knowledge to write a new genre (Ross et al., 2011, p. 15).

My first impression of this body of literature is the emotion words and expressions reported by the researchers in their publications. Most of these studies appear to emphasise doctoral candidates' negative emotions, with little attention to the positive side of their writing experiences. The current research climate seems to assume that students' writing emotions are problems that need to be solved, even though many scholars have shown that writing can be associated with both positive and negative emotions (e.g., Bosanquet & Cahir, 2016; Dwyer et al., 2012). Within the literature, a range of negative emotions have been explored, for example, self-doubt, insecurity, intimidation, agony, pain, fear, exhilaration, annoyance, confusion, frustration, uncertainty, anger, stress, anxiety, and loneliness (e.g., Cameron et al., 2009; Huerta et al., 2017; Lonka, 2003; Ogolo, 2017; Ross et al., 2011; Russell-Pinson & Harris, 2019; Shin et al., 2019). In addition to these negative feelings, positive emotions, such as pleasure, relief, joy, and pride, have been researched (e.g., Carlino, 2012; Cotterall, 2013; Wellington, 2010).

Two autoethnographic studies exclusively narrate students' positive emotions: resistance and passion (Tulloch, 2013) and promoting wellbeing in thesis writing (Doody et al., 2017).

Because so much of the existing literature focuses on students' negative emotions, a range of 'stressors', 'challenges', 'problems', or 'difficulties' that awaken students' negative emotions in their writing journey have been examined (e.g., Cotterall, 2013; Wellington, 2010). These stressors, according to the researchers, are primarily related to students' writing processes, for instance, perfectionism, procrastination, poor time/project management, a lack of technical writing skills, difficulties with knowledge transfer, writer's block, challenges with writing in English, and problems developing ideas and arguments (e.g., Cotterall, 2013; Lonka et al., 2019; Russell-Pinson & Harris, 2019). Some stressors are associated with people, aligning with the claim of "betweenness" of writing relationships (Cameron et al., 2009, p. 274), for example, maintaining relationships/interactions with supervisors, receiving critiquing feedback from others, and writing in an unfriendly disciplinary community (e.g., Aitchison et al., 2012; Cotterall, 2013). A few sources of students' negative writing emotions are research-oriented, echoing the views of "no research without writing" (Thomson & Kamler, 2010, p. 150), such as insufficient guidance and instruction in constructing research questions and choosing and justifying methodological approaches (e.g., Shin et al., 2019).

Regarding what should be done to respond to students' writing emotions, scholars have made some suggestions. For example, Cotterall (2013) suggests that the emotional dimension of doctoral writing should be acknowledged: "If acknowledged, emotions can inspire, guide and enhance research; if ignored or suppressed, they can delay and even derail it" (p. 185). Russell-Pinson and Harris (2019) highlight that it is important to "recognize the signs or symptoms" of students' writing emotions (p. 68). Wellington (2010), moving beyond acknowledging and recognising, draws attention to the pedagogical implications of "deal [ing] with" this dimension (p. 136). He argues: "We should fully recognise it, explore it with students, invite them to reflect on and discuss it, and take cognisance of it as supervisors" (Wellington, 2010, p. 149). Although scholars have proposed that actions need to be taken by the people involved in the candidates' thesis writing and learning processes, for instance, by writing specialists, writing group/circle

members, peers, faculty members, supervisors, and mental-health professionals (e.g., Doody et al., 2017; Huerta et al., 2017; Ogolo, 2017; Ross et al., 2011; Russell-Pinson & Harris, 2019; Sparkman & Doran, 2019), little research has been done thus far to develop specific pedagogical strategies for helping students confront the emotional situations associated with their writing. This gap may be because we still know little about how students themselves perceive the emotions that writing stirs up and how the emotions are produced, experienced, and managed in their scholarly daily life.

2.4 Research Gaps and Challenges

2.4.1 Gaps in the Literature

My review revealed three main gaps in the field of doctoral writing research. First, there is a need to inform supervisors about the pedagogies that they may use to engage with students' writing emotions, in order to better support them in developing research writing and becoming scholarly writers. The current literature on supervisory writing pedagogies places great emphasis on helping students with thesis production and knowledge construction but gives insufficient consideration to the emotional dimension of writing.

Second, it is imperative to promote doctoral candidates' understanding of the emotionality of their thesis writing journey. They also need to be advised on how to manage these emotions, to be stronger scholars. However, despite paying significant attention to researching the technical, cognitive, and social dimensions, previous scholars have provided few opportunities for students to express how they feel about their writing.

Third, although some scholars have done significant work exploring students' writing emotions, their studies leave a number of questions unanswered, such as emotion data collection, the genre of doctoral writing, and student group characteristics (e.g., students from collectivist and individualist cultures). My research aims to build on what has been achieved in this area and develop a more nuanced understanding of students' writing emotions.

2.4.2 Challenges of 'Measuring' Writing Emotions

'Collecting Emotion Data Method' Drawbacks. The majority of researchers exploring writing emotions have collected students' emotion data (i.e., how students feel about their

writing) through their own self-reflections by running discussion groups, such as writing support groups (e.g., Russell-Pinson & Harris, 2019), writing workshops (e.g., Cameron et al., 2009; Carlino, 2012), or 'POWER writing studios' (Huerta et al., 2017). With the authors being present as researchers and also as the teachers running the discussion groups or workshops, students' feelings and perceptions may not be truly captured. Some students might be unwilling to share their genuine emotions due to various reasons: for example, personal characteristics towards talking about emotions in public; cultural practices towards expressing emotions; intention to 'save 'face' in the presence of peers and/or supervisors (Chang & Strauss, 2010); and hierarchical issues or imbalanced power relationships between the teachers and students.

Some scholars have used mixed-methods (e.g., online questionnaires and follow-up interviews/focus groups, see Ross et al., 2011) or a qualitative approach (e.g., interviews, see Cotterall, 2013) to collect students' emotion data. Their research, however, has focused mainly on students' stressors or affective problems, with little attention paid to the positive side of their writing experiences. Although a few autoethnographic studies describe the experiences of students' positive writing emotions, this data is purely subjective and mainly based on the authors' personal stories.

Considering the downside of the data collection methods used in the above studies, in my research, I provided opportunities for students to express their writing emotions in a peer relationship, due to my dual role of being a doctoral student and at the same time a researcher. Furthermore, I collected the emotion data on an individual basis to create a safe space for my doctoral fellows to openly and freely reflect on and talk about their emotions. Finally, to collect 'enough' data representing multiple perspectives surrounding this phenomenon, I invited students across different disciplines to take part in my study, which I will detail in the next chapter of this thesis.

'Researching General Doctoral Writing' Drawbacks. While previous researchers have highlighted some interesting findings in the emotional dimension of doctoral writing, their studies have not specified the genres of the writing. Their studies included various types of writing related to students' research, such as conference papers, journal articles, or reports

(e.g., Cotterall, 2013; Ogolo, 2017; Wang & Li, 2011). Students' emotions about writing a thesis proposal remain under-researched. As explained earlier, in many universities, "the first year of doctoral study is a provisional year" (Bitchener, 2018, p. 9). Within this year, students are required to produce a research proposal, a comprehensive and scholarly document including the problems/issues that students want to investigate, literature contextualisation, methodology justification of the research, and research/experiment design (Chatterjee-Padmanabhan & Nielsen, 2018; Iqbal, 2007). By the end of the provisional year, students are expected to formally present their proposals to the Board of Doctoral Programmes for examination and confirmation of their candidature (Bitchener, 2018). Therefore, the thesis proposal is the first substantial piece of academic writing, as well as a distinct milestone, for most beginning doctoral students. As Kilbourn (2006) notes, "The proposal begins the final long leg of the doctoral journey, and its acceptance is usually met with a well-deserved sense of accomplishment, a sigh of relief, and a tingle of anticipation. It is indeed a personal milestone" (p. 529). Because of the significant importance of writing a proposal in a student's doctoral scholarship and the emotional turmoil that writing creates for novice scholars (Russell-Pinson & Harris, 2019), I decided to focus my research on students' emotions about writing a thesis proposal.

'Viewing Doctoral Students as a Whole Group' Drawbacks. The final and also the biggest drawback of the literature is viewing doctoral students as a whole group, without focusing on specific student groups. The monolithic nature in participants recruitment neither distinguishes differences between international students and home students, nor the students at initial candidature stage from the ones at their late thesis writing stage. Moreover, in most of these studies, student participants' social, cultural, and prior academic characteristics are not provided (e.g., Cameron et al., 2009; Huerta et al., 2017; Ross et al., 2011; Sparkman & Doran, 2019; Wellington, 2010). This piece of missing information, however, is important, because according to emotion researchers, culture plays a significant role in individuals' expressions of emotions, as well as the ways that triggering events are evaluated (e.g., Zembylas, 2004). Therefore, students from different cultures (e.g., collectivist vs individualist) may express their

emotions associated with their writing differently and interpret their writing-related triggers in different ways.

Although some scholars have devoted attention to the writing emotions of international doctoral students (Cotterall, 2013) and EAL doctoral students (Russell-Pinson & Harris, 2019), their focus is either on one particular discipline, such as social/behavioural sciences (e.g., Cameron et al.,2009), hard sciences/STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics; e.g., Lonka, 2003), and humanities/education (e.g., Ogolo, 2017), or on a small sample size of student participants, ranging from one (e.g., Ogolo, 2017), to four (Doody et al., 2017), to eight (Wang & Li, 2011), to eleven (e.g., Carlino, 2012). According to Aitchison et al. (2012), the disciplinary community where students work on their research influences their emotions and writing experiences. For example, science and technology students involved within a big research team are less prone to isolation and loneliness in writing than humanities and social science students, who often work on autonomous projects and mainly interact with supervisors (Aitchison et al., 2012). Consequently, in my research, I drew on a larger sample of doctoral students from diverse departments and faculties to be able to make pedagogical suggestions spanning across disciplines.

2.4.3 Aims of This Study

Given the gaps described in this section and my own writing experiences as an international doctoral student from mainland China, I focused my study on the writing emotions of first-year Chinese doctoral students working on a thesis proposal. I was interested in what emotions are at play and how the emotions are produced and experienced. I was specifically interested in those who are studying in an English-speaking country for the first time. I made this decision based on the following two reasons: (a) my own writing struggles as a research student studying for the first-time in the UK (see my self-reflections in Chapter One) and (b) the distinctive characteristics that these doctoral candidates possess, which I will explain below.

The proposal writing experiences of Chinese doctoral students studying in an English-speaking country for the first time are special and complicated. These students come from a culture different from the one where they are currently undertaking a doctorate, and their writing

emotions are most likely to be blended with their intercultural learning experiences. As many scholars have shown, writing has become a site for collaboration, implying a highly specialised dialogical process, in which students and their discourse community members, especially supervisors, engage throughout their doctoral scholarship (Aitchison et al., 2012; Bosanquet & Cahir, 2016; Maher et al.,2008). As a result, doctoral students not only have to deal with the technical aspects of writing but also with a range of academic transitional issues, such as developing intercultural communication competences and re-constructing identity to navigate interactions with the people involved in their writing journey.

Acculturating into a totally unfamiliar culture and disciplinary community is a challenging process and it takes time for new students to understand and follow the "sets of rules, conventionalised practices" (Casanave, 2005, p.14). A large amount of cross-cultural empirical research has provided strong findings about the major difficulties that international doctoral students from non-English-speaking backgrounds must confront: for example, using the English language to carry out academic tasks (e.g., Paltridge & Starfield, 2007), building new relations/becoming a member of the academic community (e.g., Li, 2016), understanding the game's rules, expectations, and social skills (e.g., Cartwright & Noone, 2001; Li, 2016), transforming from prior learning environments to new academic cultures/re-constructing identity, and negotiating different cultural values and pedagogies (e.g., Bilecen, 2013; Kim, 2010; Phelps, 2016). Scholars focusing on Chinese international students have found some particular difficulties that these candidates experience: for instance, lacking independent ability to undertake research work (e.g., McClure, 2007), passively communicating/interacting with supervisors (e.g., Campbell, 2015), being unwilling to discuss problems with other people (e.g., Zhang, 2016), passively asking for advice, suggestions, or help from faculty and peers (e.g., Ye & Edwards, 2015), and keeping problems to themselves because their shame of expressing emotions (e.g., Mukminin & McMahon, 2013).

In addition, compared to Chinese students who have years of overseas writing experiences, those studying in an English-speaking country for the first time may feel stronger emotions during their writing processes. Through the work of a thesis proposal, students are

expected to “demonstrate an understanding of aspects of the doctoral work and the processes involved in their doctoral studies” (Chatterjee-Padmanabhan & Nielsen, 2018, p. 419). Moreover, similar to domestic students, their proposals need to be aligned with genre conventions of the new discourse community and contribute to the construction of the academic knowledge in the new field (Tusting & Barton, 2016). These expectations require these foreigners to become quickly accustomed to the new environment and play the game with other players. However, with limited academic English writing experience in China, these novice scholars have not fully learnt the technical skills to carry out the writing tasks and have not understood the “recursive” and “messy” nature of writing (Cameron et al., pp. 271-272). Thus, they are challenged by the emotional pitfalls of writing in their doctoral studies.

So far, I have discussed why my research focuses on the emotions of first-year Chinese doctoral students studying in an English-speaking country for the first time working on thesis proposal writing. To shape the specific research questions in my thesis, in the remainder of this chapter, I review the literature on theoretical frameworks for studying emotions in the field of social sciences.

2.5 Concepts and Theories of Emotions in Social Sciences

2.5.1 Terminology: Emotion, Affect, Mood, Feeling

What are the relationships between emotion and other psychological states, such as affect, feeling, and mood? In the early 1990s, Batson et al. (1992) suggested that, in general psychology, affect, mood, emotion, and feeling were used interchangeably (p. 295). However, in the past two decades, psychologists adopted a different attitude towards this notion and drew a line between emotion and other psychological states (e.g., Beedie et al., 2005; Russell, 2003; Russell & Feldman Barrett, 2009).

According to Russell and Feldman Barrett (2009), affect is “a neurophysiological state consciously accessible as a simple primitive non-reflective feeling, most evident in mood and emotion but always available to consciousness” (p. 104), for example, “pleasure”, “tension”, “relaxation”, “energy”, and “tiredness” (Ekkekakis, 2012, p. 322). Within the psychology literature, affect has been thought of as being an umbrella term encompassing emotion and

mood and often used in a broader sense to refer to individuals' appraisals and cognitive feelings (e.g., Batson et al., 1992; Efklides & Petkaki, 2005; Fleckenstein, 1991).

Moods are believed to last longer than emotions and usually are produced without a specific trigger (Beedie et al., 2005). As Frijda (2009) describes, moods are "the appropriate designation for affective states that are about nothing specific or about everything about the world in general" (p. 258). Therefore, the cause of a mood may not be identified.

Feelings are perceived as the experience of physical drive states, as well as the subjective experience of an emotional state (Friedenberg & Silverman, 2011; Thoits, 1989). Wierzbicka (1999) has confirmed this view and additionally pointed out that people from all cultures can use their native languages to label their feelings, such as "a feeling of hunger" or "a feeling of cold" (as cited in Munezero et al., 2014, p. 102).

Emotions are viewed as the expression of affects and/or feelings (Russell & Feldman Barrett, 2009). However, what makes emotion different from the above affective states is its emphasis on an occurrence of an emotional episode which can be triggered by "a person, an event, or a thing, whether past, present, future, real, or imagined" (Ekkekakis, 2012, p. 322). That is to say, emotions often are associated with stimuli that trigger individuals' feelings.

In my thesis, I use emotion, feeling, and affect interchangeably, and I focus on normal or 'everyday' emotions that most academic writers experience in their writing processes. Writing emotion in my research refers to an emotion that students feel about their proposal writing; that emotion is temporary and triggered by a clear writing-related situation. Emotions lasting for a long time or temperament are believed to be strongly influenced by an individual's personality (e.g., Arnold, 1960; Johnson et al., 1997; Pervin & John, 1999; Verduyn et al., 2009), which thus is out of the scope of my research. Nor does my research address clinical depression or clinical anxiety, both of which are defined not in terms of emotional states but as mental disorders or mental problems. Finally, my research excludes moods. As discussed above, moods often are not linked to a clear trigger. In doctoral writing, students can have certain moods about their writing for no reason, just feeling 'good' about it today.

2.5.2 Components of an Emotion

What are emotions? This question has been frequently asked but has rarely generated the same answers, due to the distinctive emotional responses to specific triggering situations, environments, or objects (Scherer, 2005). One of the earliest definitions was given by James (1884), who described emotions as "the bodily changes [that] follow directly the perceptions of the exciting fact and…feeling[s] of the same changes as they occur" (p. 189-190). Since then, more than 90 additional definitions have been proposed (Plutchik, 2001, p. 344).

Despite the debates about the definition, affective scientists generally agree that an emotion consists of five components (see Figure 2.1): subjective feeling, cognitive appraisal, action tendency, motor expression, and physiological arousal (e.g., Frijda, 1986, Plutchik, 2001; Russell, 2003; Scherer, 2009). Of these components, subjective feeling and cognitive appraisal are regarded as central mechanisms to experiencing an emotion (Scherer, 2009; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). Each of the components serves a distinctive function during an individual's emotional episode (Shuman & Scherer, 2014).

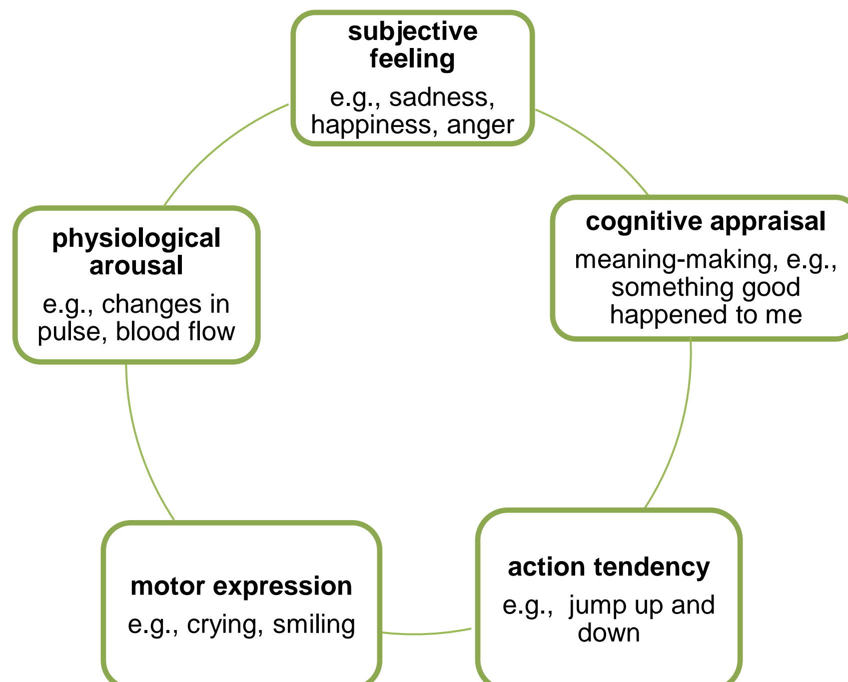

Figure 2.1. Components of an emotion. Examples in each component are selected from Shuman and Scherer (2014, p. 16).

2.5.3 Theoretical Lenses to View Emotions

Affective scientists differ in what they believe causes an emotion to occur in the first place. Researchers taking an evolutionary approach view emotions as biological responses of human beings reacting to specific triggers (e.g., Izard, 2007). Researchers using a cognitive lens believe emotions are elicited by an individual's cognitive process when evaluating specific triggers (e.g., Lazarus & Folkman, 1987; Roseman, 1996). Researchers viewing emotions from a social constructive perspective claim that emotions are produced, experienced, influenced, and expressed within specific social and cultural contexts (e.g., Averill, 1980; Lupton, 1998). The debates eventually developed into three main theories for studying emotions in social sciences: basic emotion theory, cognitive appraisal theory, and social constructionist emotion theory.

In spite of the different views on the cause of an emotion, the affective researchers generally agree that: (a) emotions are stimulated by triggers, (b) an emotion with its multiple components (see Figure 2.1) can be shaped and influenced by the social and cultural contexts where it occurs; and (c) subjective feelings (i.e., emotional feelings) can be expressed differently across individuals (e.g., Ekman, 1992; Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003; Izard, 2007; Russell, 2003; Scherer et al., 2001). In what follows, I provide a brief overview of the three theories to highlight their main differences and justify why cognitive appraisal theory is most appropriate for my research.

Basic Emotion Theory. Based on the view of natural selection to successfully solve adaptive problems (Cosmides & Tooby, 1987), one of the earliest basic emotion theorists was Darwin (as cited in Neidenthal et al., 2006), who proposed that there are a small number of 'basic' or 'primary' emotions "that are triggered by objects or events that are evolutionarily recognisable … to coordinate a number of the body's functions … and physiological reactions in the service of solving the problem" (p. 12).

Modern basic emotion theorists claim that the number of basic emotions ranges from three to ten (e.g., Ekman et al., 1982; Izard, 1977; Plutchik, 1984). Among these theorists, Ekman's (1992) emotion list is a broadly used concept in affective sciences which includes six

emotions: fear, anger, surprise, disgust, sadness, and happiness. Izard's (1977) list is the longest, encompassing ten emotions: interest, joy, surprise, distress, anger, fear, shame, disgust, contempt, and guilt. Plutchik's (1984) list has eight basic emotions: acceptance, anger, anticipation, disgust, joy, fear, sadness, and surprise. Despite the disagreement about the precise number of basic emotions, most of the above theorists consistently include joy (or happiness), sadness, anger, disgust, and fear, and sometimes add surprise (e.g., Izard, 1977; Johnson-Laird & Oatley, 1992; Plutchik, 1984).

Basic emotion theory has been used in affective research literature in at least two ways. First, basic emotions are regarded as the fundamental elements, which can be combined to produce more complex emotions (Ortony & Turner, 1990; Plutchik, 1980). Second, basic emotion theory implies that a small number of emotions has a biological basis being encoded in human genes (e.g., Izard, 2013; Johnson-Laird & Oatley, 1992; Tooby & Cosmides, 1990). This way of using basic emotion theory is closely linked to an evolutionary biology approach, which has been frequently used in the field of scientific affect and psychology of emotion. However, this approach has been criticised, particularly by cognitive appraisal researchers, for positioning a simple linear biological reaction between a trigger and an emotional response (e.g., Ellsworth & Smith, 1988a, 1988b; Frijda et al.,1989; Mauro et al., 1992; Roseman & Smith, 2001).

Because my interest is in exploring a wide range of potential emotions that Chinese doctoral students experience when working on their thesis proposals, rather than a few 'basic' ones, I now move forward to see how cognitive appraisal theorists view emotions.

Cognitive Appraisal Theory. Cognitive appraisal theory (or appraisal theory) is the most widely used theory in social sciences, offering a more in-depth way to explain the subtle nuances of emotions. Appraisal theorists regard an individual's cognitive appraisal both as a causal factor and a component of an emotion (see Figure 2.1), highlighting the importance of appraisals in distinguishing different emotional responses and experiencing an emotion (Arnold, 1960; Ellsworth & Smith, 1988; Ortony et al.,1990; Roseman et al., 1996; Scherer, 2009). The central idea of this theory is that "emotions are elicited and differentiated on the basis of a person's subjective evaluation or appraisal of the personal significance of a situation, object, or

event on a number of dimensions or criteria" (Dalgleish & Power, 2000, p. 637). In other words, appraisal theorists focus on examining an individual's cognitive process, by which emotion is elicited as a result of a subjective interpretation or evaluation of a triggering situation. For instance, students passing and failing their writing exams are likely to have very different interpretations of, and emotional responses to, the same stimulating trigger: taking the exam.

The history of cognitive appraisal theory begins with Arnold (1960), the first contemporary appraisal theorist labelling the term: *appraisal*. As she articulates, "To arouse an emotion, [an] object must be appraised as affecting me in some way, affecting me personally as an individual with my particular experience and my particular aims" (Arnold, 1960, p. 171). Building on Arnold's work, since the 1980s, many scholars have popularised cognitive appraisal theory in social sciences, particularly Lazarus and Folkman (1984, 1987) and Roseman (1984, 1996). These scholars have provided profound insights into the way we view and measure individuals' appraisals, which I will detail in Section 2.5.4.

Social Constructionist Emotion Theory. Social constructive researchers support the view of appraisal theorists that emotions arise from an individual's cognitive assessment of triggering situations (Fisher & Chon, 1989), and they emphasise the impacts of the environmental, social, historical, and cultural contexts in which emotions occur (Averill, 1980). Aligned with the views of appraisal theorists, social constructionist theorists criticise the idea of viewing emotions primarily as individuals' physiological or biological responses. Instead, they regard emotions as learned behaviours, which are produced, experienced, shaped, influenced, and expressed within specific social and cultural contexts (Lupton, 1998). Researchers using this theory focus on exploring the implications of an individual's emotional experiences for their sense of self, as well as interactions with other people and the environment (Dirkx, 2008).

Because my research focuses on the causes or triggers of students' writing emotions, I have opted to use appraisal theory to understand how students evaluate their writing-related triggers when working on their thesis proposals. Despite this decision, I acknowledge the influence of social, cultural, and situational contexts in shaping students' emotions and their appraisal processes, for example, how they express their emotions towards writing, and how

they evaluate the available resources or support that can be used to deal with the emotions.

2.5.4 Conceptualising Cognitive Appraisal Theory

Lazarus and Folkman's (1987) appraisal theory and Roseman's (1996) appraisal theory of emotions have been widely used in social sciences for their emphasised aspects of cognitive appraisal theory. It is important for me to explain what they are, which aspects of cognitive appraisal they focus on, and why I chose to use Roseman's theory to shape my research.

Lazarus and Folkman's Cognitive Appraisal Theory. Lazarus is one of the most influential appraisal theorists using cognitive appraisal theory to address *stress and coping* in emotion and psychology studies. He and his colleague, Folkman, have posited that there are two types of appraisal: primary appraisal and secondary appraisal (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, 1987). According to the authors, primary appraisal refers to an evaluation of the significance of a trigger, which can be: (a) irrelevant: the trigger is appraised as relevant or important to an individual (i.e., whether he or she cares or not); (b) positive: the trigger is evaluated as positive or beneficial with no potential negative/harmful results to an individual's well-being; or (c) stressful: the situation is perceived as negative and detrimental to an individual's well-being. Once the trigger is appraised as stressful or negative, the individual begins secondary appraisal to evaluate whether his/her resources (internal and external) are sufficient to handle the trigger. When the evaluation result is insufficient, an emotional feeling, stress, is then generated, followed by the individual taking actions to cope with the situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The overall concept of Lazarus and Folkman's cognitive appraisal theory is diagrammed in Figure 2.2.

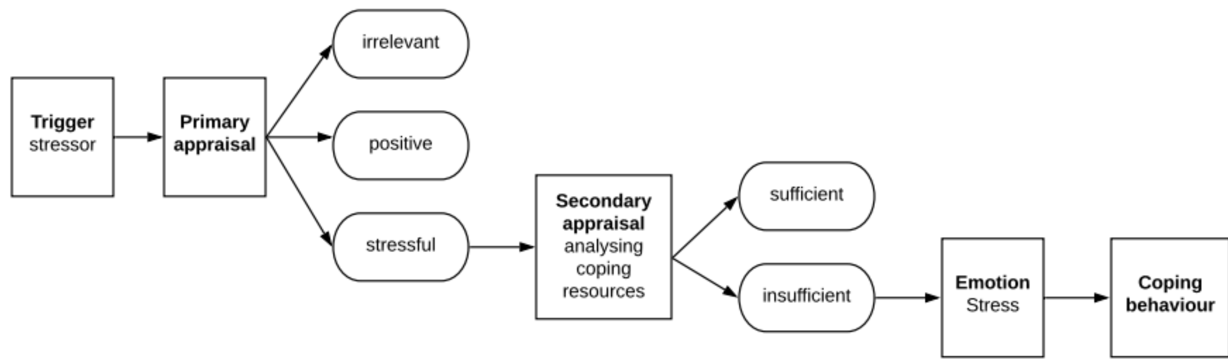

Figure 2.2. A conceptual model of Lazarus and Folkman's cognitive appraisal theory. This figure is drawn based on Lazarus and Folkman (1984).

Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) theory focuses on individuals' appraisals within a stress and coping process, i.e., decreasing negative emotions and handling stressors. As pointed out in Section 2.3.3, academic writing is associated with positive as well as negative emotions (Bosanquet & Cahir, 2016; Dwyer et al., 2012). Given the considerable attention on students' negative emotions in the current climate of researching the emotional dimension of doctoral writing (e.g., Huerta et al., 2017; Ogolo, 2017; Shin et al., 2019), I chose to explore Chinese candidates' emotions in both negative and positive valence (i.e., unpleasant and pleasant quality; Feldman Barrett & Russell, 1998, p. 967). Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) cognitive appraisal theory cannot help me understand the appraisal process that elicits positive emotions and therefore is not an appropriate framework for addressing my research problem. However, his notion of coping behaviour - individuals taking specific actions to handle their stressful situations – has generated my interest in exploring how doctoral students react to and deal with the emotions that proposal writing creates. I will expand on this research interest in Section 2.5.5.

Roseman's Appraisal Theory of Emotions. My research has been greatly shaped by the appraisal theory proposed by Roseman (1996), who claims that *motive consistency* is an important component of an individual's appraisal process (see Figure 2.3). Roseman collected appraisal data from 177 undergraduate students by asking them to recall their emotional experiences, describe them in their own words, and answer a series of questions designed to measure their appraisals. The results showed that, in general, participants' negative emotions

were triggered by negative experiences with negative appraisal descriptions, and their positive emotions were triggered by positive experiences with positive appraisal descriptions.

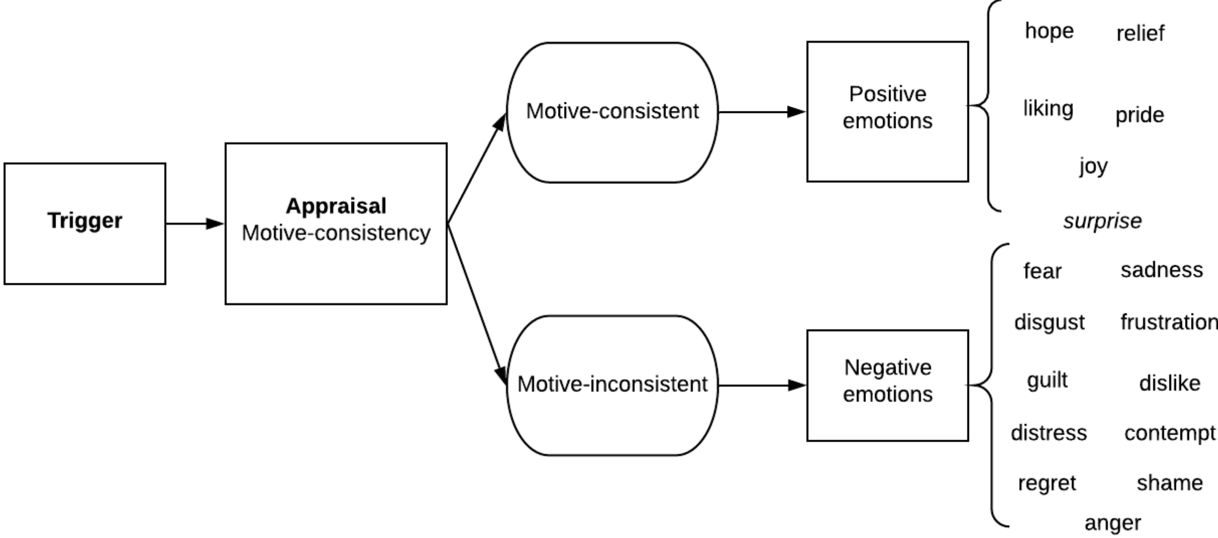

Figure 2.3. Roseman's appraisal theory model. The figure is adapted from Roseman (1996, p. 269).

As shown in Figure 2.3, emotions can be classified into two broad dimensions: positive emotions and negative emotions. According to Roseman (1996), positive emotions (e.g., joy, pride) are triggered by situations appraised as *motive-consistent*, i.e., meeting one's needs or facilitating one to achieve his/her personal goals; whereas negative emotions (e.g., frustration, sadness) are triggered by situations appraised as *motive-inconsistent*. i.e., impeding one's development or making it difficult for one to progress. The emotion of surprise can be classified as either a positive or negative emotion, which aligns with his earlier work (Roseman et al.,1990) claiming that a decision to categorise surprise into positive or negative valence should be made based on participants' specific emotional experiences. If the experience is positive, surprise is a positive emotion; whereas if the experience is negative, surprise then is a negative emotion (Roseman, 1996; Roseman et al.,1990).

Roseman's (1996) appraisal theory has informed my research in two ways. First, emotions are associated with triggers which individuals interpret as relevant. To rephrase, an essential prerequisite for an individual to experience an emotion is that he/she considers the trigger as significant or important. In the context of doctoral writing, students feel emotional

about their proposal writing because they believe certain triggers are important or play a part in their writing processes. Therefore, to better understand the meaning behind the words that students use to express their emotions, it is important to probe into the triggering situations that cause these feelings. Second, emotions are produced as a result of an individual's appraising process. In general, positive emotions are triggered by positive appraisal results, and negative emotions are triggered by negative appraisal results. In doctoral writing, positive writing emotions are most likely to be triggered by students' positive appraisals, i.e., the trigger facilitates the student's proposal writing and helps them to make progress on their work. By contrast, negative writing emotions are most likely to be triggered by students' negative appraisals, i.e., the trigger impedes the student's writing and makes it difficult for them to progress on their work. Informed by Roseman's (1996) appraisal theory, my research focuses on exploring the triggers for students' writing emotions and how they appraised the triggers towards writing facilitation and impediment.

I also acknowledge the influence of social and cultural contexts in shaping individuals' emotional experiences (Zembylas, 2004, 2005). Chinese doctoral students' emotions and their appraisal processes are embedded in an intercultural learning setting, where students socially interact with other people who are involved in their proposal writing journey. Moreover, the ways in which students express emotions and evaluate triggers can be affected by their personal perceptions of emotions, as well as their Chinese traditional culture where they have lived and been educated for a long time. This notion has been evidenced by research showing that Chinese international students are often unwilling to express emotions publicly, because they believe it is shameful to expose emotions to other people and thus prefer to keep them to themselves (e.g., Mukminin & McMahon, 2013). Expanding on Roseman's (1996) appraisal theory, in my research, I took Chinese doctoral students' intercultural learning experiences and their social, cultural, environmental, and personal factors into consideration when interpreting their responses regarding how they appraised the triggers in their writing processes.

As I signalled earlier when presenting Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) cognitive appraisal theory, once an individual's appraising process has ended with a feeling being produced, he/she

starts to take specific actions to handle the stressful situation (see Figure 2.2). Considering my own writing struggles, I have become interested in how Chinese doctoral students react to and cope with the emotions that their proposal writing stirs up. Can they vanquish their negative writing emotions, or do they live with them? To address this question, I now present Lazarus and Folkman's (1984, 1987) coping framework.

2.5.5 Lazarus and Folkman's Coping Framework

Lazarus and Folkman's (1984, 1987) coping framework has been widely used in the fields of social sciences and psychology (e.g., Hirai et al., 2015; Irving et al., 2004; Wollaars et al., 2007). According to Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter et al. (1986), the process of coping is the individual's "constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resource of the person" (p. 933). The researchers claim that coping strategies can be classified into three broad categories: problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and passive coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The first two types are active or positive coping strategies. Problem-focused coping refers to individuals' attempts to directly deal with sources or causes of stress, and it includes a few specific strategies, such as confrontive coping, planful problem-solving, and seeking social support (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Emotion-focused coping involves individuals' emotional and cognitive regulation or management of their stress, for instance, distancing, self-controlling, accepting responsibility, and positive reappraisal (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, 1987). Among these strategies, social support-seeking has been conceptualised as either a problem-focused or emotion-focused coping technique, because individuals can ask for help from others to deal with the sources of their stress or to reduce their feelings of stress (Heaney & Israel, 2008; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, 1987). Passive coping, as Lazarus and Folkman (1984) note, is inactive or negative, and such coping behaviour, according to many emotion scholars, appears to result in negative emotional consequences, for example, avoiding confrontation, withdrawing, denying the problem, behavioural disengagement, venting, or self-blame, (e.g., Carver et al., 1989; Colomba et al., 1999).

Coping strategies have been largely researched in psychological and therapeutic health (e.g., Elliott et al.,1991; Irving et al., 2004; Wollaars et al., 2007), as well as in the field of international students' cross-cultural/psychological adaptation (e.g., Hirai et al., 2015). The empirical findings from the psychology literature suggest that positive coping techniques are associated with efficiently dealing with stressful situations and positive psychological outcomes; whereas negative coping techniques are strongly related to poor mental health or well-being (e.g., Endler & Parker, 1990; Folkman, Lazarus, Gruen et al., 1986; Glasscock et al., 2013; Stern & Zevon, 1990). In educational contexts, Yan and Berliner (2011) claim that positive coping strategies, such as problem-solving, information-seeking, and self-encouragement, provide both guidance and energy to students' learning processes. However, some students cope with their academic difficulties in a negative way, such as becoming frustrated and discouraged in continuing their learning, which leads them to give up their studies (e.g., Hirai et al., 2015). Therefore, positive and constructive coping strategies are significantly important for students to recover from a negative emotional state and to re-engage in their academic tasks.

Reappraisal is a cognitive form of coping strategy that has been extensively studied within the coping literature. Individuals using this strategy re-evaluate triggers to change their emotional responses (Ray et al., 2010). Related experimental studies show that reappraisal leads to decreased levels of negative emotions and increased levels of positive emotions (e.g., Feinberg et al., 2012; Lieberman et al., 2011; Ray et al., 2010; Szasz et al., 2011; Wolgast et al., 2011). Correlational studies on reappraisal strategy suggest that individuals using this strategy tend to express more positive emotions than negative ones, to share their emotions with other people, and to report having closer relationships with other people (e.g., Mauss et al., 2011; Stepper & Strack, 1993; Strack et al.,1988). In educational contexts, research has found that students using reappraisal coping strategies tend to enjoy their learning experiences, have fewer negative thoughts and emotions, have enhanced memory for learning materials, build close connections with teachers, and obtain strong social support from peer groups (e.g., Gustems-Carnicer & Calderón, 2013; Sandover et al., 2015).

Suppression or hiding emotions is a behavioural form of coping strategy that has been frequently researched in the coping literature. Individuals using this strategy decrease their emotion-expressive behaviours or avoid exposing their emotions to other people (Gross & Levenson, 1993, 1997). Related studies suggest that suppression leads to decreased positive emotions and increased negative emotions, such as feelings of inauthenticity and depressive symptoms (e.g., Gross & John, 2003; Moore et al., 2008; Nezlek & Kuppens, 2008). Furthermore, individuals suppressing their emotions appear to avoid close relationships and have fewer positive relations with others (e.g., English et al., 2013; Srivastava et al., 2009). In an academic environment, students concealing or hiding their emotions are found to be associated with decreased positive emotions, having less social support from peers, and poor academic performance (Pekrun & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2014).

Within the literature, social support is regarded as one of the most important resources for individuals coping with their stress, distress, or poor mental health (e.g., Goldsmith & Albrecht, 2011; Heaney & Israel, 2008; Pantelidou & Craig, 2006; Thoits, 2011). Cross-cultural studies have shown that social support-seeking behaviour promotes for students' a feeling of well-being and facilitates their adaptation to a foreign environment, country or culture (Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Liu et al., 2016; Misra et al., 2003; Sümer et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2012). According to Heaney and Israel (2008), support can be given by different types of social networks or social ties. Informally, family members, co-nationals, close friends, work colleagues, or classmates can be helping networks or support providers; formally, health care professionals and special service workers are useful resources (Heaney & Israel, 2008, p. 197). Regarding the most effective sources or providers of social support, different views have been heard within the acculturation literature. Some researchers suggest that co-nationals are the most significant source of emotional support for international students (e.g., Sykes & Eden, 1985). However, other scholars argue that harmonious relationships with the host nationals in a foreign culture are more effective because they help the students to learn the appropriate behavioural patterns in the new environment (Ward, 2005). Despite the disagreement on the sources of effective social support, researchers generally agree that close relation ties, such as

family members and close friends, have unique capabilities to promote students' psychological well-being and positive emotions during their learning journey (Feeney & Collins, 2001, 2003).

Despite the previous work on coping strategies, especially within the psychological literature presented above, little is known about doctoral students' coping behaviours in the context of thesis proposal writing. To provide appropriate pedagogical support for these apprentice scholars' writing, it is important to understand how they react to and cope with their emotions. For instance, which strategies do they use to manage their emotions? Do they seek support from others? If they do, whose support and which types of support do they ask for? Which types of support do they think are useful or effective for managing their emotions? These questions have formed the basis of my research. In the final section of this chapter, I briefly revisit the gaps that I have identified in the literature, which will lead me to present three main research questions underpinning my doctoral project.

2.6 Research Questions

Throughout the literature review, I identified several gaps in the field of doctoral writing, to argue that the emotional dimension of doctoral writing is under-researched yet should be given sufficient consideration. Supervisors need to be informed about how to respond and act upon students' emotions, in order to better support them in writing thesis proposals and becoming competent scholars. Doctoral students need to be advised on how to view the emotionality of their PhD writing and appropriately manage their emotions. To address this dimension, I reviewed the literature on emotions in social sciences and provided the rationale for my decision of using Roseman's (1996) cognitive appraisal theory and Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) coping framework to understand the emotions of Chinese doctoral students writing a thesis proposal. Informed by these frameworks, I have developed the following three research questions:

(a) Which emotions are associated with thesis proposal writing for first-year Chinese doctoral students studying in an English-speaking country for the first time?

(b) What are the triggers for their writing emotions and how do students appraise the triggers towards writing facilitation and impediment?

(c) How do students cope with their writing emotions?

Chapter Three: Methodology

> We see the world, not as it is, but as we are - or, as we are conditioned to see it. We must look at the lens through which we see the world, as well as the world we see, and that the lens itself shapes how we interpret the world.
>
> - Stephen Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, 2017*,* p.36

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) advise that any research process needs to begin with reflections on a researcher's own values and beliefs, as they influence how the researcher conducts the study. I, therefore, would like to reflect on how I became a qualitative researcher, before explaining my methodological approach for this thesis. The first time I encountered the terms *paradigm* and *philosophical assumption* was in the Research Methods module of my master's studies in the UK. I was confused about how to distinguish different types of ontological and epistemological stances, such as nominalism, realism, and positivism. After enrolling in a Quantitative and Qualitative Data Analysis course, I began to understand why some students carried out their research from a measurable or quantitative perspective, and others approached it more qualitatively, underpinned by constructive assumptions and narrative styles of writing. I also noticed that some students assumed a more pragmatist position and combined both quantitative and qualitative research preconceptions to inform practice and policy.

Through the collaborative process of untangling methodology, I recognised that I belonged to the school of qualitative researchers, as I am more interested in the naturalistic view of participants' perceptions and multiple perspectives, rather than limiting their responses due to my pre-determined assumptions. Qualitative researchers, as Denzin and Lincoln (2005) note, "study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 3). I view reality as subjective and personal with emphasis on how individuals construct their social world. Accordingly, my research aims to understand how participants create, modify, and interpret the world in which

they find themselves. Instead of testing a theory or a hypothesis, my approach was to inductively establish themes of meanings to explain a phenomenon. In practice, I initially raised general and exploratory questions, encouraging participants to construct the meanings of their experienced situations, by capturing what doctoral students themselves value as important with regard to their proposal writing experiences.

To address the research questions developed in Chapter Two, I focus this chapter on presenting how my philosophical underpinnings shaped my phenomenological research design, and how I used self-reports to collect emotion data (i.e., emotion expressions) from my participants. I also detail how I conducted the research, from describing the instruments to procedures of data collection, methods of data analysis, and trustworthiness issues in two phases of investigation comprising one online survey and 24 semi-structured interviews. Finally, I close this chapter with some considerations about the research ethics that formed the basis of my inquiry.

3.1 Philosophical Underpinnings

A researcher's choices for examining a research inquiry are underpinned by their philosophical assumptions, which in turn inform the design, conduct, and writing of the study (Creswell & Clark, 2017). According to Creswell (2007), five philosophical assumptions influence how inquirers undertake their research: ontology, epistemology, axiology, rhetoric, and methodology. With this knowledge, in this section, I discuss how my theoretical stance on these five assumptions has framed my research.

3.1.1 Ontology: Subjective and Multi-Faceted Reality

Ontology relates to the nature of being or reality (Arthur, 2012). My belief that reality is subjective and multi-faceted carries practical implications for my research. I believe that evidence of a social reality is reflected in an individual's consciousness, and the essence of reality is captured by the actual words of participating individuals, who have different experiences representing different perspectives of a social phenomenon. In my research, I found evidence of writing emotions through gathering verbatim accounts from Chinese doctoral students working on their thesis proposal writing.

3.1.2 Epistemology: Interpretivist

The epistemological assumption concerns the nature or forms of knowledge and the relationship between the researcher and those being researched (Creswell, 2007). My interpretive view, that the knowledge of social phenomena is subjective and contextually dependent, has led me to value the participants' individual perceptions and experiences, which were analysed collectively to understand this phenomenon. In addition, the subjective and contextualised nature of my research demands that I lessen the "distance" or "objective separateness" between myself and the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1988, p. 94). As a result, participants in my research were encouraged to express their own views, without a preconceived outcome from me.

3.1.3 Axiology: Acknowledging and Setting Biases Aside

The axiological assumption is associated with the values and biases brought by researchers to their studies (Creswell, 2007). I acknowledge that my past knowledge and experiences may influence how I interpret my participants' provided information. Therefore, while I was collecting, analysing, and writing up my findings, I attempted to set aside my personal beliefs, feelings, perceptions, and experiences as much as possible, to be more open and genuine about the interpretation of the meaning of the information (data) provided by the participants.

3.1.4 Rhetoric: Narrative Style of Writing

Rhetoric refers to the writing of a study (Creswell, 2007). Aligned with my ontological and epistemological assumptions, the writing style of my thesis takes a narrative, flexible, and personal form. For example, I included my personal stories of academic writing to show why I became interested in this field; I used first-person pronouns (e.g., I, my) to refer to myself when describing how I conducted the research and analysed the data; and I cited my participants' direct quotes in my writing of Chapters Four, Five and Six to represent their views. Another important feature of narrative style writing is the use of qualitative terminology. While ensuring the trustworthiness of my research, instead of focusing on reliability and generalisability (the hallmarks for ensuring rigour in quantitative research; Shenton, 2004), my narrative writing style

is better aligned with descriptive and explorative studies, to gain a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

3.1.5 Methodology: A Phenomenological Approach

Aligned with my philosophical underpinnings, I used a qualitative inquiry to frame my research. Specifically, I used a phenomenological approach to understand the structure and meaning of writing emotions as experienced by Chinese doctoral students. As Creswell (2007) states, a phenomenological study describes “the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (p. 57). Phenomenologists emphasise descriptions of human experiences that participating individuals have in common about a phenomenon. In my research, I collected data from participants who experienced emotions while working on their proposal writing and could articulate their lived experiences when asked about it in interviews and written self-reports. According to Moustakas (1994), the central inquiry of a phenomenological study is a description of the “essence” or structures of the experiences (p. 13). Accordingly, phenomenological researchers are expected to describe *what* individuals experience and *how* they experience it (Creswell, 2007).

Phenomenological studies typically take one of two main directions: hermeneutic (e.g., van Manen, 2016) or transcendental phenomenology (e.g., Moustakas, 1994). Hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on researchers’ interpretation of participants’ lived experiences, while transcendental phenomenology emphasises the description of participants’ lived experiences more than the interpretations of researchers. Moustakas (1994) claims that researchers using transcendental phenomenology set aside their own experiences as much as possible, to be more open and fresher towards the investigated phenomenon, “as if for the first time” (p.34). However, Creswell (2007) argues that this state seems to be rarely achieved due to the researcher’s subjectivity and the context where researchers and participants closely interact. Therefore, in practice, phenomenological researchers may first describe their own impression of the phenomenon before cancelling out subjective views in the evaluation of participants’ experiences (Creswell, 2007).

In my research, I adopted a transcendental phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2007), because the meanings brought by the participants in my study are better explained through their own interpretations and not through mine, which are influenced by my past knowledge and experiences. As a Chinese international doctoral student, I myself experienced emotions in my thesis writing journey. Over the past five years spent continuously working on my master's and doctoral theses in English-speaking countries (the UK and New Zealand), I developed a deeper understanding of the role of emotions in my path to becoming a strong academic writer. Moreover, I have progressed in Western academic writing practices and conventions and have become more confident about my intercultural learning and communication skills in my field. By setting my writing experiences and perceptions aside before proceeding to study those from other Chinese doctoral candidates, I hope to present their own interpretations of their experienced writing emotions from a more genuine and open perspective.

Creswell (2007, p. 61) recommends that a transcendental phenomenological design should entail: (a) collecting data from a group of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon, (b) analysing the data by highlighting the significant statement sentences that provide an understanding of how participants experience the phenomenon, (c) clustering these statements into themes, (d) developing a textual description (describing what participants have experienced and a structural description (describing how they have experienced the phenomenon), and (e) finally, combining the above two descriptions to convey an overall essence of the phenomenon. Informed by Creswell's views, my research included: (1) selecting a pool of first-year Chinese international doctoral students who have experienced emotions when working on their proposal writing (using purposive sampling and collecting qualitative data), (2) gathering meaningful data via interviews with participants to understand which emotions they had experienced in their writing processes (*what*) and how they were experienced *(structure or meaning*), and (3) identifying themes from participants' accounts to explain the phenomenon. Creswell (2007) suggests including a textual description and a structural description of individuals' experiences and combining these two to explain the

essence of the phenomenon. However, I have structured the writing of my findings in alignment with each respective research question (see Chapter One for thesis structure) rather than according to Creswell's scheme.

3.2 'Measuring' Emotions

There is no one-size-fits-all method to measure an emotion or feeling. According to previous scholars, the ideal measurement of an emotion should include: (a) the appraisal processes at all levels of the central nervous system, (b) the response patterns generated in the central nervous system, (c) the motivational changes produced by the appraisal results, (d) the physical magnifications, and (e) the emotional states that reflect all of these components (e.g., Frijda, 1986; Keltner & Haidt, 1999). Such a complex measurement, as Scherer (2009) states, has never been conducted before and is considered unlikely to become a standard measurement in the near future. Although there are several advanced methods for measuring a person's cognitive appraisal (e.g., Scherer et al., 2001), brain mechanisms (e.g., Davidson, 2003), psychological response patterns (e.g., Wacker et al., 2003), and bodily changes (e.g., Harrigan, 2008), there is still no objective way of measuring the subjective feelings of an individual (Scherer, 2005). As I am interested in examining writing emotions as lived experiences by students, psychological and neuronal measurements are inappropriate for my study. The main ways of 'measuring' emotions in my study are from self-reports in online survey and interviews, as outlined below.

3.2.1 Fixed-Option and Free-Response Formats

Emotions are mentally present in people's conscious mind and communicated through language (Lindquist et al., 2015). This may be the reason for self-report, to date, being the only method for measuring an individual's subjective feelings (Scherer, 2005). There are two main ways to capture individuals' subjective feelings or emotions: researchers either use (a) fixed-options whereby participants are provided with a list of emotional labels or words to choose from, or (b) free-response formats whereby participants express their own emotion expressions to describe their emotional states (Scherer, 2005).

Both methods have drawbacks and benefits. Fixed-options methods ensure efficiency and standardisation in data collection, which are the most suitable for deductive research approaches. But this method may compel participants to select the closest alternatives as a result of no applicable emotions being provided. By adopting a free response-format, researchers can obtain more specificity and accuracy regarding participants' emotion expressions. However, analysing free responses can be a challenging task because the same type of emotions can be described differently across participants and one emotion description can be interpreted in different ways by different researchers.

In my research, I used both fixed-option and free-response formats in order to capture the beneficial aspects of both methods. Through a fixed-option format, in the online survey, I provided 12 emotion words for participants to choose from (see Section 3.4.1 for survey development). The fixed-option format enabled me to statistically describe each provided emotion as a group to find out the most and least reported writing emotions in my research cohort. Through a free-response format, I added an open-ended text box in the online survey and conducted a series of in-depth interviews, asking participants to respond freely using their own emotion expressions (see Section 3.4.2 for interview procedures). The free responses allowed me to explore the richness of the language that participants used to express their emotions in the context of doctoral writing.

3.2.2 Written and Oral Formats

Self-reports may adopt oral or written formats (Pekrun et al., 2002) or digital formats (e.g., using mobile phone apps, see Rickard et al., 2016) which I will not explore in my thesis. Both oral and written formats have advantages and disadvantages. The oral format (typically data collected in interviews) is timesaving for both researchers and participants but has the drawback of social desirability, i.e., participants may provide the answer that sounds good or that researchers want to hear. The written format, according to Pekrun and Bühner (2014), has the distinct advantage of measuring emotions in a "depersonalized way, thus helping respondents openly report their emotions" (p. 563). However, such a format is more time-consuming.

In my research, I used both written and oral formats for their advantageous aspects. Doctoral students are usually busy with their own projects and may be unwilling to spend extra time writing an essay unrelated to their research. In order to motivate them to participate in my research, in the online survey, I asked the participants to respond to just two questions with respect to their writing emotions; together, they took no more than 15 minutes to complete. In the follow-up individual interviews, I asked the participants to freely talk about their emotions, and each interviewee was offered a shopping voucher as a thank-you for their participation time. Moreover, to help the interviewees produce genuine responses, I added a few narrative-oriented questions rather than going straight to my pre-determined semi-structured scheme.

Having now described my philosophical underpinnings and how I used self-reports to collect emotion data, in the following section, I detail the research site where I conducted my study and the research population that I selected for addressing my research questions.

3.3 Research Site and Target Population

As a student researcher at the University of Auckland, I was more likely to gain access there to a large cohort of Chinese international doctoral students for my study than at other tertiary organisations in New Zealand. My host university is the largest research-led tertiary institution in the country and a noted university worldwide (The University of Auckland, 2019). Located in the cosmopolitan, populous, and multicultural city of Auckland, the university is one of the largest exporters of international higher education in the country, with the highest number of international graduates since 2008 (Education Counts, 2019). At the time of extracting the data, there are over 42,000 enrolled students, of whom 8,020 are international (The University of Auckland, 2019). Since 2015, Chinese students have remained the biggest student group of all international students (The University of Auckland, 2019).

My proximity to a large Asian international doctoral student cohort at the University of Auckland (46% of all international doctoral candidates, see Figure 3.1) allowed me to purposively recruit a large number of Chinese students from mainland China for my study (see Figure 3.2). In common with trends at other Western universities in prominent English-speaking countries such as the USA and UK, this group of students comprised the biggest overseas

doctoral group (28% or n = 95) at the University of Auckland in 2017, across all main disciplines except for Law (see Figure 3.3).

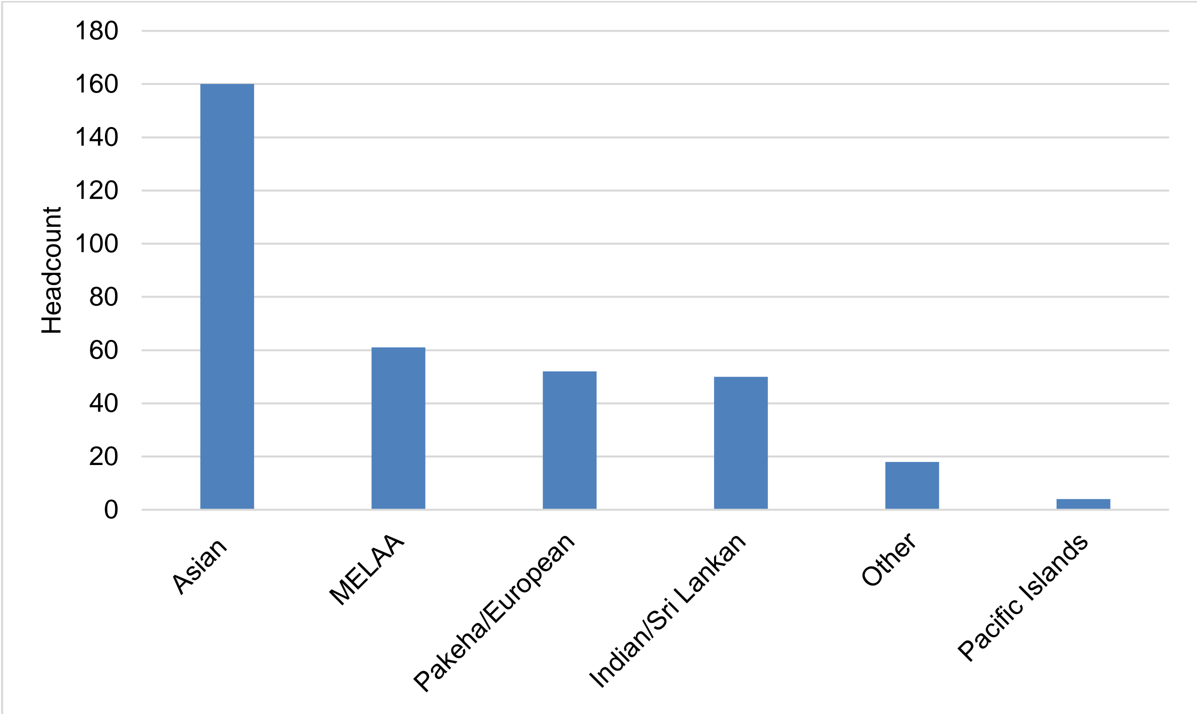

Figure 3.1. Ethnic groups of new international doctoral students enrolled at the University of Auckland in 2017. MELAA = African, Latin American/Hispanic and Middle Eastern; Other = No Response; Pacific Islands = Fijian and Other Pacific Islands. Total n = 345.

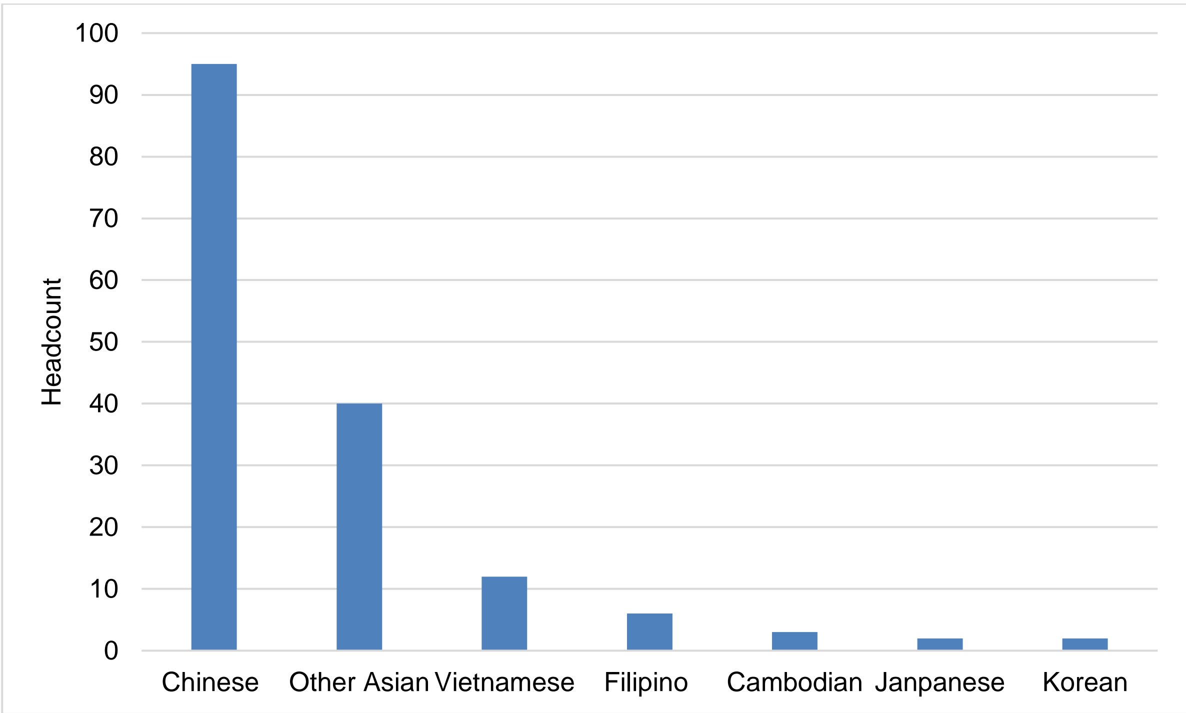

Figure 3.2. New Asian international doctoral students enrolled at the University of Auckland in 2017. Chinese = mainland Chinese only; students under 'Other Asian' were not detailed in the enrolment report. Total n = 160.

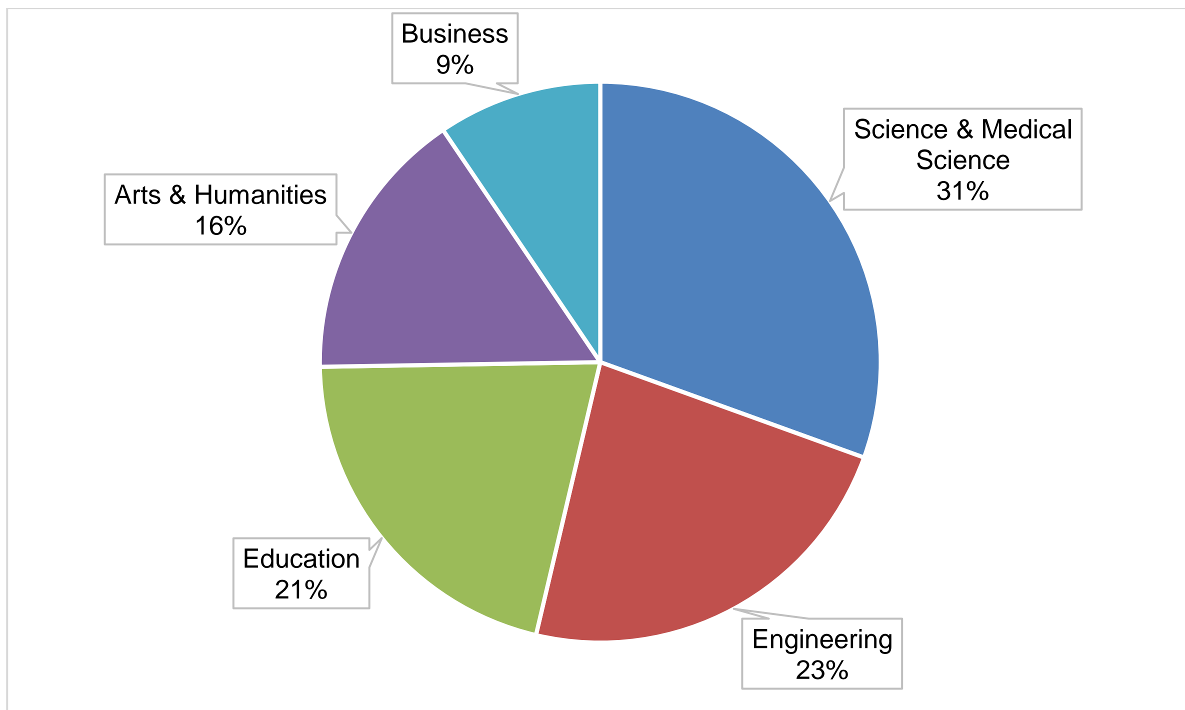

Figure 3.3. Chinese international doctoral students according to disciplines at the University of Auckland in 2017. Total n = 95.

3.4 Methods: Two Phases of Investigation

To address my research questions, I collected my data through one online survey (phase one) and 24 follow-up in-depth interviews (phase two). In phase one, I used a qualitative-oriented survey to scope students' writing emotions and general triggering situations, and to select a pool of eligible participants for the second phase of data collection. Based on the survey data analysis results, in the second phase of my research I conducted 24 individual semi-structured interviews, asking participants to elaborate on their (a) emotions towards proposal writing, (b) triggers for their emotions, (c) appraisals of the triggers (i.e., how the triggers facilitated and/or impeded writing), and (d) coping strategies for their emotions. The triangulation of two phases of data collection contributed to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the emotional dimension of students' thesis proposal writing. In this section, I describe how I undertook my research in these two phases of investigation.

3.4.1 Phase One: Online Survey

Survey Development. The survey that I used to collect my data was developed in the following four steps.

Step One: Searching for Emotion Items from the Literature. I started my survey development with a search for emotion labels. I chose Powell and Brand's (1987) Brand Emotion Scale for Writers (BESW) for its emotion items, because the BESW was the only scale that specifically measured students' emotions associated with academic writing. The BESW is a 20-item (20 emotion words) scale measuring students' writing emotions in three stages: before-writing, during-writing, and after-writing. The purpose of measuring emotions in three different writing stages in Powell and Brand's research was to compare and investigate students' emotional changes associated with their writing processes. Each emotion is measured on a five-point unidirectional scale in the above three writing stages (i.e., how strong and often participants feel an emotion).

Powell and Brand (1987) used three criteria when developing the BESW. First, they assessed both positive and negative writing emotions. Second, they kept the scale short to prevent students from experiencing negative feelings, such as impatience, when filling out the survey itself. Last, they measured students' emotional states and emotional traits. Emotional traits, in their article, are defined as "long standing [emotions] that may be likened to features of personality" (Powell & Brand, 1987, p. 331). Their purpose in assessing emotional traits was to understand the associations between students' personality characteristics and their emotions in writing.

I applied the first two criteria from the BESW to my online survey: that is, I measured both positive and negative writing emotions because students' proposal writing experiences are more likely to be associated with both dimensions, and I chose to keep the survey short because a longer one might produce its own negative emotions if students are discouraged or interfered with it. I adapted the last criterion of the BESW only to measure students' emotional states, i.e., their subjective feelings or emotions associated with their proposal writing. I excluded emotional trait measurement from my research because emotional traits are viewed

as being strongly related to students' personal characteristics. For example, some students may feel sad about their writing because they feel sad about most things. This type of long-lasting emotion often does not have clear triggering stimuli (Pekrun & Bühner, 2014), and thus may be more suitable for study by researchers who focus on the impact of students' personalities on their emotions and writing performance. I also excluded measurements of activation and frequency of emotions, as they were not relevant to my research questions.

Table 3.1 presents the emotion labels based on their factor loading results in the after-writing stage from Powell and Brand's (1987, p. 333) research. The factor loading represents the strength of correlation between variables and factors; the higher the loading, the stronger the relationship (Yong & Pearce, 2013). In Powell and Brand's research, factor loading indicates the correlations between valence (i.e., positive and negative emotion dimensions) and emotions (e.g., inspired or confused). I used the loading results from the stage of after-writing, because the emotions were reported by the students after finishing their writing tasks. In my research, I asked my participants to recall writing emotions already experienced before taking part in my study.

Table 3.1

Emotions in Positive and Negative Dimensions from Powell and Brand (1987)

Positive emotion	Factors loading	Negative emotion	Factors loading
Inspired	.83	Confused	.78
Interested	.74	Disgusted	.78
Happy	.72	Frustrated	.75
Excited	.67	Depressed	.75
Adventurous	.64	Angry	.75
Satisfied	.53	Anxious	.60
Surprised	.40	Ashamed	.59
Affectionate	.39	Afraid	.56
Relieved	.36	Lonely	.55
		Shy	.38
		Bored	.26

Step Two: Seeking Feedback from Doctoral Students. In order to examine whether the emotion words in Table 3.1 would be mentioned by my research cohort, in February 2017, I carried out exploratory conversations with three Chinese doctoral students at the University of Auckland studying in an English-speaking country for the first time. Two of them were halfway through their first year and the third one had just submitted her research proposal for the departmental committee review. During the conversations, I asked them to reflect on their emotions when working on their proposals and recorded the expressions that they used when talking about these emotions. One of the students described predominantly positive emotions, while the other two experienced more negative emotions.

I compared the emotion words listed in Table 3.1 to the ones described by the students. The findings paved the way for the completion of my survey development. In negative valence, all three students frequently used the same emotion words as listed in Table 3.1 with a loading greater than .55 ("confused", "disgusted", "frustrated", "depressed", "anxious", and "lonely"), except for "angry", "ashamed", and "afraid". No students expressed "shy". In positive valence, all three students used the emotion words that were reported in Table 3.1 with a loading greater than .50 ("inspired", "interested", "happy", "excited", and "satisfied"), apart from "adventurous". No students expressed "surprised", "affectionate", and "relieved". Students also provided additional emotion words that were not included in the BESW (and Table 3.1), such as "confident" and its variants (e.g., "confidence", "belief", or "self-assurance"). Based on these results, I included just 12 emotion labels in the online survey as multi-option choices, with six emotions in positive valence and six in negative valence (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2

Pre-determined Emotion Labels in the Online Survey

Positive Emotions	Negative Emotions
Inspired	Confused
Interested	Disgusted
Happy	Frustrated
Satisfied	Depressed*
Excited	Anxious
Confident	Lonely

Note. Depressed was changed to *sad*, see Step Three.

Step Three: Seeking Feedback on the Survey Wording. Once I completed the first draft of the survey, I asked for feedback on its phrasing to ensure that participants would understand the meanings of the emotions I provided. An academic from the School of Psychology at my university advised on the wording of the emotion items. Based on her suggestions, I amended the survey in two ways. First, I provided a Chinese translation of each emotion label, to account for students' varying levels of understanding of the English language. Second, "depressed" was replaced by "sad", because sadness is an "everyday" feeling, while depression is commonly defined in a clinical setting.

Step Four: Piloting the Online Survey. In the final step of my survey development, I invited five Chinese doctoral students from the Faculty of Education at my university to test the online survey I designed in Qualtrics (https://www.qualtrics.com/au/). An anonymous link to the survey was emailed to the students. After completion, I conducted a face-to-face group discussion to gain their opinion on the survey as well as suggestions for improvement. The students were satisfied with the length and format but suggested the following changes. First, the entire survey was translated into Chinese because they felt it was easier to respond to questions regarding emotions in Chinese than English. Second, to capture emotions not only during writing itself but regarding the proposal writing as a process, the statement "Describe the

emotions you have experienced while you were writing your thesis proposal" was rephrased as "Describe the emotions you have experienced while working on your thesis proposal". The final version of the online survey as described below was then used to collect my data.

The Layout of the Online Survey. There were three parts in the online survey. The first part included information pertaining to ethical consent, including the Participant Information Sheet (PIS, see Appendix B), Consent Form (CF, see Appendix C), and Eligibility Assessment (EA, see Appendix D). Participants could access the survey via a link in their email or by scanning the QR code on the Research Advertisement (see Appendix A). For responses to be collected, participants were required to give ethics consent by completing the CF. Consenting respondents then were automatically redirected to the EA, and only those who fulfil the criteria (e.g., participants must be first-year Chinese international doctoral students, see Survey Data Collection Procedures for a full description) were invited for the second part of the online survey.

The second part included (a) a multiple-choice closed-ended question, (b) an open-ended text box, and (c) two open-ended questions. The close-ended question asked participants to select the emotions that they associated with their proposal writing. Twelve emotions with Chinese translations were provided (see Appendix E). The open-ended text box represented an 'other' option, asking participants to respond freely with their own expressions describing the emotions they felt towards their writing. The two open-ended questions probed into the triggering situations of the participants' writing emotions. Participants were asked to describe two situations in which they felt positive and negative about their proposal writing, for example, describing what the emotions were and how they experienced them.

The third part of the online survey gathered respondents' demographic information. Their information helped me understand my participants' backgrounds, including their gender, discipline, age, prior academic English writing and research experiences, self-rated academic English writing ability, and their email addresses if they were interested in being interviewed by me. Once participants completed the survey, they were able to read the information about mental health counselling services. If they felt overwhelmed as a result of responding to the

survey or wanted to talk to someone else about the emotions they experienced as part of their doctoral candidature, they could go to the listed agencies for free and confidential services. Last of all, once participants clicked the ‘submit’ button on the last webpage, their responses were received in Qualtrics for my data analysis purposes.

Survey Data Collection Procedures.

Sampling Strategies. Because it was essential for me to recruit eligible respondents for the online survey, at first, I used a criterion sampling strategy (Patton, 1990) to identify a pool of participants satisfying the following requirements (EA):

(a) Participants must be Chinese nationals from mainland China;

(b) Participants were enrolled in full-time doctoral programs and currently within their provisional year at the University;

(c) Participants are studying in an English-speaking country for the first time.

The last requirement was further assessed through the following three questions. Students who responded with ‘no’ to each of the questions below were eligible to take part in my research.

(a) Have you gained a doctoral degree, and/or a master’s degree, and/or a bachelor's degree, and/or a diploma in an English-speaking country before studying at the University of Auckland as a doctoral student?

(b) Have you studied as an international exchange student in an English-speaking country for more than one year, before studying at the University of Auckland as a doctoral student?

(c) Have you taken any English language course in an English-speaking country for more than one year, before studying at the University of Auckland as a doctoral student?

Regarding the last two questions, I asked whether the participant had studied as an international exchange student or had taken any English language courses in an English-speaking country for more than one year before undertaking their doctorate at the University of Auckland. This was to exclude students who had opportunities during their studies at a Chinese

university to exchange to a different country for subject learning or English language training.

Then, I used a purposive stratified sampling strategy (Cohen et al., 2002) in the participant selection process to ensure that the proportions of Chinese doctoral students from the five main disciplines at the university (see Figure 3.3) were reflected in my survey sample. By mid-February 2018, there were more participants from education and engineering responding to the survey than from science and medical sciences. I therefore employed a snowball sampling technique (Etikan et al., 2016) to invite potential respondents from the science and medical science departments in order to achieve proper representation of students across the main disciplines. The detailed participant selection processes are presented below.

Survey Distribution Procedures. Survey data were collected between November 2017 and February 2018. I contacted the International Student Office (ISO) and the School of Graduate Studies (SGS) at the University of Auckland to request their permission to advertise my research on their public platforms. They agreed to put my research advertisement in their e-news sections - International Student Support Team iNews and Postgrad News - which most doctoral students enrolled at this university are automatically subscribed to. I also contacted the Post Graduate Students' Association (PGSA) to advertise my research, and the staff members agreed to post my research advertisement on their Postgraduate Student Forum and Facebook webpage.

Finally, I sent my research advertisement via WeChat (https://web.wechat.com/), a social media application which can be downloaded onto personal mobile phones and a popular communication tool used by Chinese nationals. On this tool, there are two private e-groups, which helped me to access a large cohort of Chinese international doctoral students studying at the University of Auckland. One group entitled "Chinese Doctoral students in the Education Faculty at the University of Auckland" contains more than 100 Chinese doctoral students from the education discipline. The other group, named "Chinese Postgraduates studying at universities in Auckland", includes more than 500 Chinese international students who are doing their master's or doctoral degrees at the universities in the city of Auckland. As a member of both groups, this allowed me to send messages with my research invitation to all group

members. Students receiving notifications of my text messages could click directly on the survey link to undertake the survey.

I collected my survey data in four rounds. The survey was first distributed in December 2017 via the ISO and SGS email distribution lists. The first wave received 17 valid responses, which was followed up by a second round of data collection in January 2018, resulting in 62 valid responses. After a third and fourth round of data collection in February 2018, I received a total of 79 responses of which 73 met the criteria outlined above. Table 3.3 presents the demographic information of the 73 survey participants included in my research. The proportion of males (40%) and females (60%) in the survey sample was equal to the proportion of the whole population of Chinese international doctoral students at the university in 2017 (binomial test conducted in SPSS 24, $p = .49$).

Table 3.3

Demographic Information of Survey Participants

Demographic Category	Details	Frequency	Percentage
Discipline	Science & Medical Science	24	33%
	Engineering	17	23%
	Education	16	22%
	Arts & Humanities	9	12%
	Business	7	10%
Gender	Female	44	60%
	Male	29	40%
Age group	20-29	51	70%
	30-39	20	27%
	40-49	2	3%
Thesis or publication written in English during studies in China?	Yes	54	74%
	No	19	26%
Research conducted in China?	Yes	61	84%
	No	12	16%
Self-rated academic English writing ability	Poor	0	0%
	Okay	22	30%
	Medium	29	40%
	Good	17	23%
	Excellent	5	7%

Survey Data Analysis. Data from the closed-ended question was imported to SPSS 24 (IBM) for descriptive statistical tests. Multiple response data was entered into the data editor in a dichotomy format. Data for each of the provided emotions (n=12) was coded as '1=yes' (i.e., participants selected this emotion) and '2=no' (i.e., participants did not select this emotion). I defined a multiple response set and carried out frequency and crosstab analysis. The frequency

procedure generated a table displaying the responses (frequencies and percentages) for my 12 provided emotions (see Table 4.1 in Chapter Four). This procedure helped me to find the most and least reported writing emotions in my research cohort. The crosstab procedure explored the associations between participants' demographics and their responses to the 12 provided emotions. Specifically, I used a Chi-Square test of independence to examine whether emotion valence was related to the participants' discipline, gender, and age. To investigate bivariate associations between the demographic variables and emotion valence, I checked that my data met the assumptions of the Spearman Rank test and calculated the correlation coefficients in SPSS 24. To interpret the results, a p-value below .05 was considered statistically significant (Cronk, 2019).

The emotion words and expressions provided by participants in the open-ended textbox in the survey were exported to Microsoft Excel 2016, for coding and analysis according to valence (i.e., positive and negative emotions). Here, I used the literature on emotion classification by Feldman Barrett and Russell (1998, p. 967) and Pekrun and Stephens (2012, p. 4) to decide the valence of the emotion.

Finally, I imported the data from the two textboxes, in which the participants described the situations regarding how they experienced their writing emotions, to NVivo Pro 12 (QSR International). Content analysis was applied to reduce the data in a process by which "many words of texts are classified into much fewer categories" (Weber, 1990, p. 15). According to Anderson and Arsenault (1998), one particular feature of content analysis is "counting concepts, words or occurrences in documents" (p. 109). I used the Word Frequency function in NVivo Pro 12 to identify the most often mentioned words (including similar words) from participants' descriptions. The top five words then emerged: 'writing' (n=108), 'supervisor' (n= 67), 'research' (n=45), 'feel' (n=42), and 'proposal' (n=34). After this, I used the approach described by Cohen et al. (2007, pp.483-487) to carry out the content analysis (see Table 3.4). Based on the analysis results, I finally identified four main triggering situations in which Chinese doctoral students experienced emotions in their proposal writing processes: Writing Process, Supervision, Research, and Collegial Community.

Table 3.4

Stages of Content Analysis

Stage	Description
1. Extracting of interpretive comments that have been written on the data.	Selecting meaningful data from the text boxes in the online survey and gathering it together on an Excel sheet.
2. Sorting data into key headings and areas.	Coding and grouping of data into key headings, noting initial thoughts on the rationale and defining the meaning of the headings.
3. Listing topics within each key area and heading including frequencies of items.	Under each key heading, presenting its relevant sub-headings, along with their codes and data.
4. Evaluating the list generated in Stage 3 and categorising codes into themes or issues.	Reanalysing, re-presenting, and finalising the codes into four groups, representing four types of triggering situations: (a) Writing Process, (b) Supervision, (c) Research, and (d) Collegial Community. Turning on 'aggregation' in NVivo Pro12 to count the frequencies of each triggering situation.
5. Commenting on the groups or results in Stage 4 and reviewing their messages.	Looking within and across groupings with their frequencies for emergent patterns, as well as exceptions and unusual findings. Recoding the overlapped categories and producing a list of interesting findings that needed to be further clarified and elaborated in the next phase of data collection.

Note. This table is adapted from Cohen et al. (2007, pp.483-487).

Trustworthiness. I designed my online survey under the guidance of my supervisors who both are specialists in this research field. I also received feedback from ethics advisors and doctoral students from my faculty. The survey was revised several times and piloted among five students before reaching the final version. In addition, I translated the survey into the Chinese language to provide a forum which my research cohort was familiar with, to help them with understanding and encouraging expressions in their native language. Five Chinese students,

who volunteered to test my online survey, also helped me with the translation process to ensure linguistic and conceptual equivalence (Harkness, 2003).

To ensure coding credibility, I invited an external coder to code the text-based data from the online surveys after I completed the content analysis. The coder is one of the above Chinese doctoral students studying higher education at my university. As Weber (1990) notes, "Different people should code the same text in the same way…reliability problems usually grow out of the ambiguity of word meanings, category definitions, or other coding rules" (pp. 12-15). To avoid these problems, I asked the external coder to independently code the text data into four groups (i.e., Writing Process, Supervision, Research, and Collegial Community). I then used kappa statistics in SPSS 24 to calculate the pairwise agreement between her results and mine. The kappa coefficient (k) of agreement is a standard measurement of data reliability in qualitative data coding process (Burla et al., 2008). In my research, the coefficient of agreement was 0.85, suggesting a high level of data credibility (Landis & Koch, 1977, p.165).

3.4.2 Phase Two: Interviews

Semi-Structured Individual Interviews. In the second phase of my data collection, I conducted interviews in a semi-structured manner in which the participants were asked to answer a series of predetermined open-ended questions (Benaquisto & Given, 2008). The semi-structured interview was an appropriate instrument for my research because it helped me obtain in-depth, detailed, flexible, and open-ended responses to my research questions. To avoid participants being constrained by my interview questions, I added some narrative-oriented questions for participants to "best voice their experiences" (Creswell, 2002, p. 216). I also used a few key interview techniques, such as prompting and probing, to gain a deep understanding of the answers provided by the participants. Specifically, I used prompts such as "Why?" or "What do you mean?", and probes such as "What happened to you?" or "Why did you feel this way?" to ensure that my participants were able to explain and justify their responses, as well as to expand on them. In addition, I collected my interview data on an individual basis (Creswell, 2002). Only one participant was interviewed by me at a time, to decrease the possibility of participants feeling embarrassed or uncomfortable when recalling their writing experiences,

especially the unpleasant ones. I followed the procedure described by Asmussen and Creswell (1995) in designing my interview protocol (see Appendix H). This protocol provides a set of instructions for the interview process and the questions I would ask, as well as space for me to take notes of the participant's responses (e.g., my observations and comments).

Interview Data Collection Procedures.

Purposive Sampling Strategy. I employed a purposive sampling strategy (Suri, 2011) when selecting the participants for my interview data collection to acquire rich information, rather than generalising results to another population (Patton, 1990). According to Cohen et al. (2007), researchers using purposive sampling in qualitative research "handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgement…or the particular characteristics being sought. In this way, they build up a sample that is satisfactory to their specific needs" (pp. 114-115). The authors also note that researchers using purpose sampling aim to select "knowledgeable people", who can provide in-depth knowledge or rich information about particular issues (Cohen et al., 2007, p.115). The aim of my research was to explore the complexity of the emotional dimension of doctoral students' proposal writing and to provide rich information representing different perspectives of students' writing experiences. Therefore, purposive sampling was an appropriate strategy for my research, as it allowed me to select participants who could provide rich data in response to my research questions.

I started my interviewee-selection process with 35 survey participants who had provided their contact information in the online survey showing their willingness to be interviewed. To select a pool of knowledgeable participants, I reviewed these 35 participants' responses to the following questions: (a) Which emotion did they select from the 12 provided emotions? (b) What additional emotion words or expressions did they provide in the open-ended textbox? (c) What writing-related triggers did they describe in the two textboxes? I gathered their responses to the above three questions, along with their demographic information, on an Excel sheet, to look for the participants who met the following requirements:

(a) Have selected both positive and negative emotions from the 12 provided emotions.

(b) Have provided both positive and negative emotion words and/or expressions in the

open-ended textbox.

(c) Have described at least two types of triggering situations from: Writing Process, Supervision, Research, and Collegial Community.

Next, I considered participants' demographic backgrounds, including their discipline, age, and gender, to maintain the diversity of my interviewing sample. I also sought and included a few 'outliers', i.e., participants selecting and/or providing purely positive (pleasant) emotions or purely negative (unpleasant) emotions in their survey responses. Finally, I purposively selected 24 participants for my interview data collection, with 67% being female and 75% being aged between 20 and 29. Table 3.5 presents their demographic information, along with their pseudonyms used in my thesis to maintain the anonymity of the interviewees.

Table 3.5

Demographic Information of Interview Participants

Pseudonym	Discipline	Gender	Age
Addison	Science & Medical Science	Male	30-39
Charlotte	Science & Medical Science	Female	20-29
Ethan	Science & Medical Science	Male	20-29
Isabella	Science & Medical Science	Female	20-29
Lucas	Science & Medical Science	Male	20-29
Hannah	Science & Medical Science	Female	20-29
Harper	Science & Medical Science	Male	30-39
Natalie	Science & Medical Science	Female	20-29
Oliver	Science & Medical Science	Male	20-29
Eric	Engineering	Male	20-29
Justin	Engineering	Male	20-29
Jacob	Engineering	Male	20-29
Sophia	Engineering	Female	20-29
William	Engineering	Male	20-29
Ella	Education	Female	30-39
Mia	Education	Female	30-39
Grace	Education	Female	20-29
Zoe	Education	Female	30-39
Ava	Arts & Humanities	Female	40-49
Emma	Arts & Humanities	Female	20-29
Daniel	Arts & Humanities	Male	30-39
Luna	Arts & Humanities	Female	20-29
Ellie	Business	Female	20-29
Victoria	Business	Female	20-29

Interview Procedures. Twenty-four interviews were conducted from March 2018 to May 2018 after I completed my survey data analysis. Before the interviews, I sent the participants an email invitation, along with the PIS (see Appendix F), containing a brief account of my research aims, interview duration, and participants' rights. Participants were invited to choose their preferred place and time to meet; for example, we met in library meeting rooms, parks, cafés, student's common rooms, waterfront areas, and restaurants. Before starting each interview, I explained my interview procedures and confidentiality considerations, and then the participant was required to give ethics consent by completing the CF (see Appendix G), indicating their agreement to be interviewed and acknowledging that our conversations being audio-recorded. Interviews were conducted individually, and each interview took around one hour. Participants were asked to speak the languages which they felt most comfortable with. Although I pre-determined a few key questions (see Appendix H), I modified them according to our specific conversation contexts.

Interview Data Analysis. The following data analysis procedures do not include the analysis of the emotion data from interviews, which required a different approach because of language differences between Chinese and English emotion expressions. In Chapter Four, I describe the development of a novel lexicon corpus to interpret the emotion data from interview responses. This approach was necessary to understand and categorise free-format emotion expressions, in particular Chinese idioms and English metaphors, as there was no existing method available for this type of analysis.

In the following section, I focus on the data analysis of participants' responses regarding: (a) writing-related triggers, (b) appraisals, and (c) coping strategies. I followed a simultaneous and iterative process described by Creswell, (2002, see Figure 3.4): the simultaneous phase involves researchers analysing data during the collection process; the iterative procedure allows researchers to cycle back and forth between their data collection and analysis (p. 236). Aligned with Creswell's recommendations, I conducted my interview data collection and data analysis simultaneously throughout my research, i.e., before, during and after my data collection. I consistently reflected on my data, paid attention to what the data said, and identified emerging

patterns that I would further clarify and elaborate in the following interviews (Glesne, 2016). Specifically, I used a six step-approach proposed by Creswell (2002) to interpret and code my interview data (Figure 3.4).

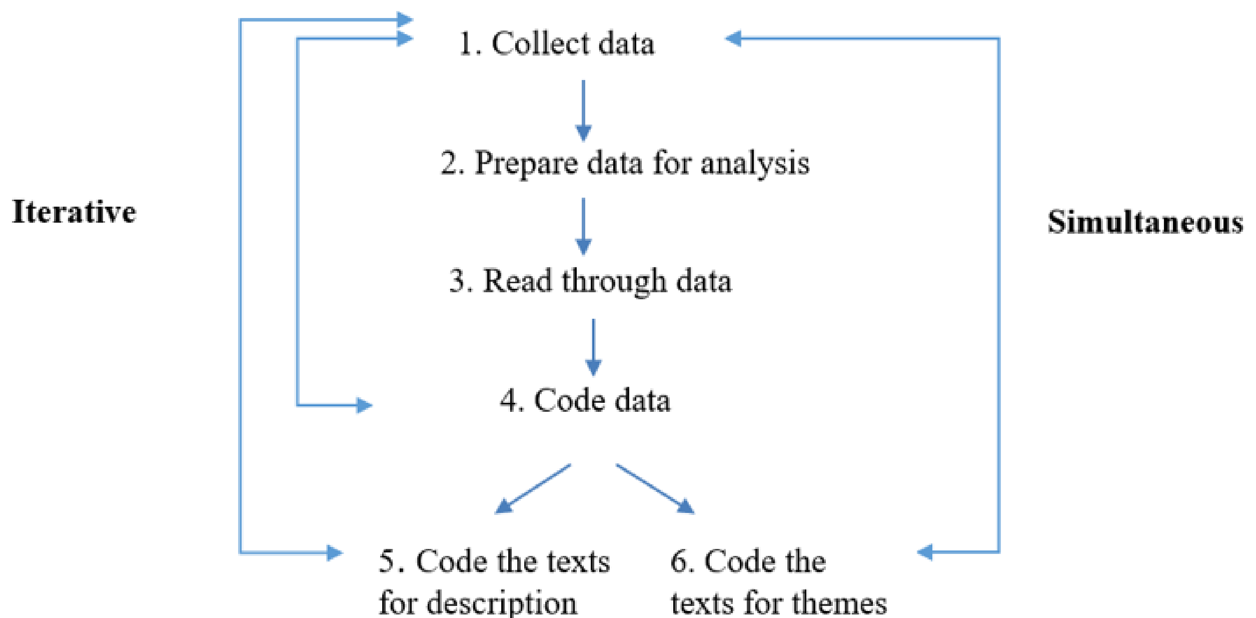

Figure 3.4. Steps of qualitative data analysis. This figure is adapted from Creswell (2002, p. 236).

Interviews. During the interviews, participants were invited to talk about their emotions and proposal writing experiences (see Appendix H for interview schedule). Interesting and surprising patterns captured from initial interviews were further explored, examined, and elaborated in subsequent interviews. While conducting the interviews, I also took some fieldnotes about participants when they were describing their emotions, for example, (a) their facial expressions (e.g., big smile, frowning, or wide opening mouth), (b) physical movements (e.g., crossing arms, covering their mouths, sitting back on the chair, or hitting the table in the interview room), and (c) verbal expressions (e.g., wow, huh, oops, ay, ugh, alas). I used these notes and comments as my secondary data to compare to the original data provided by the participants. This comparison procedure helped me to further interpret my participants' responses, especially their provided emotion expressions (see Chapter Four). After the interviews, I emailed the subsections of the transcripts to the respective interviewees to clarify comments made and also to check my translation into the English language. New data

emerging at this stage was included in my data interpretation and analysis, as presented below.

Prepare Data for Analysis. Twenty-four interview recordings were saved on a Smart Pen, a recorder linking the audio-recordings to my written notes and were backed up onto my computer in my workstation at the university, with password protection. I uploaded the recordings to an online transcribing tool (https://transcribe.wreally.com/) and exported the written transcripts to a word document file for data coding purposes. I began transcribing immediately after each interview was completed. To retain the features of the participants' speech in my thesis writing, I transcribed the interviews verbatim (Bucholtz, 2000). Ten interviews were conducted in English, and the remaining fourteen were in a mixture of Chinese and English. This mix of languages occurred because some participants were more confident using English to describe their emotions, while some preferred speaking in Chinese which is also my native language. For this reason, I transcribed the interviews conducted in English into English and the ones in Chinese into Chinese; only the themes and the quotations cited in my thesis were translated from Chinese into English. Such a transcription approach was important to my research because literal word-by-word translation often cannot convey the genuine meaning of the comments provided by the participants, particularly the figurative meaning of complex Chinese idioms (i.e., popular sayings in the Chinese language and culture; see Chapter Four for further discussion of what Chinese idioms are and how my participants used them to describe their emotions). As Sechrest et al. (1972) state, language differences often cause a loss of information during translations due to difficulties in finding equivalent vocabulary, syntax, idioms, or concepts in the target language. To ensure correct interpretation of the interview data and to truthfully express what has been said, I therefore drew conclusions based on thematic analysis of the data (see below), not my translated transcripts alone.

Read Through Data. Before coding the data, I listened to each audio-recording multiple times, back and forth, to get familiar with the data. I also read the transcripts, my field notes, and interview comments and compared them to the audio-recordings to obtain a general sense of the participants' perspectives.

Code Data (Code the Texts for Descriptions and Themes). I imported 24 interview transcripts to NVivo Pro 12 for coding and analysis. Aligned with my phenomenological research design, I began the first round of coding by focusing on individual cases to identify the significant statements from each interview transcript. Specifically, I segmented and deductively coded the data into three main headings by using the coding schemes illustrated in Figure 3.5: “triggering situations”, “appraisals”, and “coping strategies”.

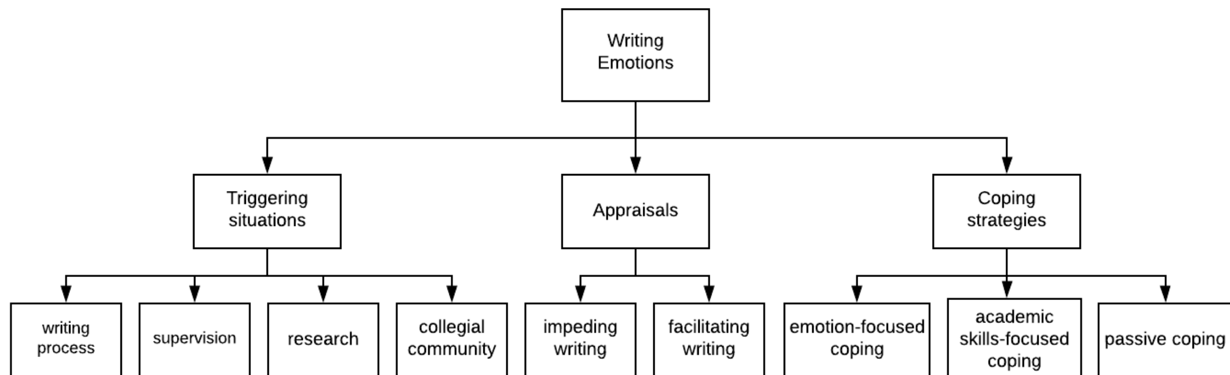

Figure 3.5. Coding schemes for interview data.

As shown in the figure, each main heading is composed of a few sub-headings. For example, under the heading of “appraisals”, I coded the data into two sub-headings by using Roseman’s (1996) appraisal theory (see Chapter Two): “impeding writing” and “facilitating writing”. Under the heading of “coping strategies”, I coded the data into three sub-headings by using Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) coping framework (see Chapter Two): “emotion-focused coping”, “academic skills-focused coping”, and “passive coping”.

Under each sub-heading, I used Braun and Clark’s (2006) thematic analytic approach to identify a range of themes from the data (significant statements). This approach was used for its accessibility and flexibility to group or compartmentalise the rich qualitative data into meaningful themes in relation to my research questions. Table 3.6 presents the six phases of performing thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87), as well as how they were adapted to my research.

Table 3.6

Phases of Thematic Analysis

Phase	Description
1. Familiarising myself with the data	Transcribing, reading, and re-reading the transcripts, and noting my initial ideas about the data.
2. Generating initial codes	Coding the data based on its interesting or core features.
3. Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes and gathering all the data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes	Checking whether the theme worked in relation to its coded data and the entire data set and generating a theme map.
5. Defining and naming themes	Carrying out the ongoing analysis to refine each theme and the overall story that the analysis tells, and generating clear definitions, names and meanings for each theme.
6. Producing the report	Selecting vivid and compelling quotations for each theme and relating them back to my research questions and previous literature.

After completing the thematic analysis, I used NVivo Pro 12 to create a codebook containing all the codes from the interview transcripts. I then exported the codebook into an Excel spreadsheet, where the codes with the frequency of occurrences were grouped under their primary themes and subthemes that I identified for each respective research question.

Trustworthiness. In qualitative research, validity and reliability are generally referred to trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1990), which corresponds to four criteria of truthfulness of a study: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) conformability. What follows is an account of how I established trustworthiness in my research with respect to these four criteria.

Credibility. In naturalistic inquiry, qualitative researchers seek to demonstrate their data representing the complexity of the investigated phenomenon to establish the credibility of their research (Lincoln & Guba, 1990). To address the credibility issues in my research, I closely engaged with the participants before, during, and after my data collection, and made a conscious effort to build up a rapport and trust with them. For instance, interviewees were encouraged to choose the location and time of their interviews and used the languages which they felt the most comfortable with. Despite my close engagement with the participants, throughout my data collection procedures, I remained non-judgmental and refrained from revealing my personal views, which might have influenced the participants' responses and their own interpretations.

To enhance the credibility of my research findings and interpretations, I collected the data by using multiple sources including two instruments, two phases of data collection, as well as two participant groups. I also included and analysed the notes and comments made for each interview as additional data sources to help me understand what the original data meant.

To minimise the amount of bias that I might have brought to my transcribing and translating processes, I emailed the interview transcripts and translated quotations to the participants for them to check. Almost all the interviewees revised a few parts of their transcripts; some clarified the meaning of their emotion expressions; and a few made small changes to their translations. After completing the finding reports, I sent a brief summary of the findings to all interested participants, with data presented as group findings and identifying information excluded.

Finally, I sent my results to an external coder to check the accuracy of the coding and themes to ensure the credibility of my findings. The coder is a doctoral candidate studying higher education at my university. She is one of the five Chinese doctoral students who volunteered to test my online survey before I officially collected the data. She also helped me check the coding and content analysis of the text data from the surveys. I invited her to independently code the interview data using the coding schemes diagrammed in Figure 3.5. Using Cohen's kappa statistic, I measured the pairwise agreements between her results and

mine in SPSS 24. The coefficient of agreement was 0.81, suggesting a high-level data credibility (Landis & Koch, 1977, p.165).

Transferability. In qualitative research, this criterion refers to the applicability of findings gained from one setting to another setting, such as to a wider population and different cases or situations (Eisenhart & Howe, 1992). Qualitative researchers are expected to provide a clear, detailed, and in-depth description, indicating the extent to which findings from their research contexts are generalisable to other contexts. To facilitate the transferability of my findings, I have provided sufficiently rich data and thick descriptions of my investigated phenomenon, as well as the research contexts of my doctoral project for my readers to determine whether such a transfer is suitable.

Dependability. This criterion in naturalistic research refers to the extent to which the instruments, data, and interpretation are reliable and consistent (Lincoln & Guba, 1990). The authors note that "inquiry audit" is an important measure enhancing the dependability of a qualitative study, and this procedure involves "auditors" examining the consistency of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1990, p. 317). Three auditors were involved in my project. The first two auditors were my supervisors. They both were engaged in the process when I designed the research, collected the data, analysed the data, reported the findings, and produced the thesis. The final auditor was the external coder. She helped me check the coding and analysis results that I present in Chapters Five and Six. Before asking the coder to independently code the data, I clearly explained to her about my instrument designs, data collection procedures, coding schemes, and pertinent approaches that I used for data analysis. I also presented the reports of my findings and the writing of my thesis to my supervisors and the external coder for their critical feedback.

Confirmability. Confirmability is the last criterion of trustworthiness that a qualitative researcher must achieve in their research (Lincoln & Guba, 1990). This criterion refers to the extent to which findings are based on the participants' narratives rather than the researcher's biases (Jensen, 2008). According to Lincoln and Guba (1990), an audit trail is one of the major techniques for achieving confirmability. When I was writing up this chapter, I detailed the

relevant processes of my data collection and analysis. I recorded unique and interesting patterns, wrote down my initial thoughts about the codes, and provided the rationale for why I merged certain codes together and what the themes mean. The second major technique for achieving confirmability in naturalistic inquiry, particularly in phenomenological research design, is reflexivity, i.e., my research attitudes when collecting and analysing the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1990). The authors suggest that qualitative researchers should reflect on how their own backgrounds influence their research process. To achieve reflexivity in my research, I kept a research diary as my project proceeded to reflect on how my own views and experiences might influence my research process and the writing of my thesis. Finally, I strengthened the confirmability of my research by providing justification for the decisions I made during my research process, by giving examples of my data coding and analysis, by including exhaustive quotations and descriptions to undergird my interpretations of the research findings, and by linking my findings back to the previous literature.

Having discussed how I conducted the research through two phases of investigation, the final section of this chapter addresses how I ensured ethical conduct of my research.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

My research was approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants' Ethics Committee (Reference No. 019578) and followed the core principles of ethical research conduct by Hammersley and Traianou (2012). The data was securely saved on my password-protected computer at my university and backed up by the university server. CFs were stored in a locked cabinet separate from the data. The notes derived from the online surveys and audio recordings were locked in the cabinet in my office.

I made every effort to provide as much information as possible to ensure that participants were well informed of my research purposes and their involvement in my doctoral project and had their questions answered. The voluntary nature of participation was clearly explained in the PIS and CF in both phases of data collection, to avoid participants feeling pressured to take part in my research. Participants also were reassured that their decisions of either taking part in my research or declining would not influence their academic life at this

university. To protect participants' anonymity, their participation (or non-participation) and responses were kept strictly confidential. No identifying information was disclosed to a third party, in my thesis, or anywhere else, for example conferences, presentations or publications.

With regard to the data collection, participants were fully informed that their individual interviews would be audio-recorded and they had the right to stop the recording at any time and that they could choose to not answer any questions and/or to speak about any subject they might find uncomfortable talking about, without giving a reason. Their responses were coded by using a pseudonym, to prevent anyone other than me from knowing about their identity and the information they provided. Any identifiable responses (e.g., their research projects and supervisors' names or academic positions) were excluded from my findings. Although some of the direct quotes were reported in this thesis, participants were invited to review and/or edit their own transcripts and translated quotations before I conducted the analysis and the writing of my research. Out of respect to the participants' cultural differences, I encouraged them to communicate in the language they felt most comfortable with. In case participants felt overwhelmed as a result of speaking about their PhD experiences as part of my research, I provided several contact details of student support providers at the university (e.g., helplines, student counselling services) within my project information sheets. Finally, I offered a gift voucher to each participant as a thank-you for their time and potentially extra (local) travel to participate in my interviews.

This chapter has described my methodological orientation and the methods of data generation and analysis I employed in my research. The next chapter will report my findings with regard to which emotions are associated with Chinese doctoral students' thesis proposal writing.

Chapter Four: Students' Emotions Towards Writing

> The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched - they must be felt with the heart.
>
> - Helen Keller, *The story of my life,* 1905, p. 203

"Everyone knows what an emotion is, until asked to give a definition" (Fehr & Russell, 1984, p. 464). Since the 1970s, scientists have expressed great interest in researching emotions in the disciplines of economics, the neurosciences, the humanities and anthropology (Linnenbrink-Garcia & Pekrun, 2014, p. 2). Not until the 1990s, however, did researchers in educational settings start to recognise the importance of emotion in teaching and learning (Pekrun & Frese, 1992; Schutz & Lanehart, 2002). In the past two decades, there have been calls for students' emotions to be researched more widely, because emotion is now seen to play an integral role in students' academic achievement and personal development (e.g., Pekrun et al., 2002; Schutz & Pekrun, 2007). In response to these calls, contemporary educators have explored four primary aspects of emotion in educational contexts: (1) basic concepts and theories of emotion in academic settings (e.g., Linnenbrink-Garcia & Barger, 2014; Pekrun, 2006), (2) distinctive types of emotions and their effects on students' learning (e.g., Ainley & Hidi, 2014; Markey & Loewenstein, 2014), (3) emotions in specific academic domains and social-cultural learning environments (e.g., Zan et al., 2006; Zembylas, 2005), and (4) emotion regulation and intervention in classroom contexts (e.g., Petrides et al., 2004; Skinner et al., 2013).

However, little attention has been given to students' emotions associated with academic writing, particularly the emotions of beginning doctoral candidates. A few exceptions include research into postgraduates' affective writing problems (Wellington, 2010) and doctoral students' emotions in learning writing in science disciplines (Catterall et al., 2011). The findings highlight the importance of acknowledging the emotional dimension of doctoral writing and viewing it from a pedagogical perspective (see Chapter Two). My research contributes to this

growing body of research by focusing on emotions of first-year Chinese doctoral students studying in an English-speaking country for the first time writing a thesis proposal. This group of students' writing emotions are complicated, as their writing practices are influenced not only by their technical writing skills and disciplinary knowledge but also by their transitional and intercultural learning experiences, such as developing intercultural communication competences and re-constructing identity to navigate interactions with the people involved in their doctoral journey.

Although a number of researchers have proposed different schemes for classifying emotions (e.g., Ekman, 1992; Feldman Barrett & Russell, 1998; Pekrun & Stephens, 2012), none of these methods proved adequate for understanding and categorising free-format emotion expressions from Chinese doctoral students in the context of thesis proposal writing. I therefore constructed a lexicon corpus containing four forms of expressions in English and Chinese descriptors such as words, metaphors, and idioms (Chinese), carried out two rounds of data reduction, and classified almost 500 expressions from my interview responses into eight emotion categories. My method development makes a significant and novel contribution to the field of academic emotion analysis. The findings from this chapter cast new light on the rich language that doctoral students use to describe their writing-related emotions, which may help them to develop a better understanding of emotions in their writing processes.

This chapter starts with a report of the emotion data from the survey responses, which were analysed according to positive and negative valence, and participants' demographics in relation to writing emotions. I then present the corpus development and the four forms of expression in the corpus that interviewees used to describe their feelings of proposal writing. Next, I link my findings to previous literature on emotion measurement and classifications and discuss the significant insights into the emotion lexicon of doctoral writing. Finally, I present the limitations of the research presented in this chapter and the implications for future research.

4.1 Survey Data: Writing Emotions in Positive and Negative Valence

A general categorisation of writing emotions according to valence (i.e., positive and negative emotions) is presented in Table 4.1. Altogether there were 473 expressions obtained

from the closed- and open-ended responses in the online survey. Emotion data fell into two broad dimensions: positive writing emotions and negative writing emotions. More than 60% of the survey participants' responses were associated with their negative writing emotions. In the positive dimension, apart from the six emotions that I provided on the survey as response options, "calm" was the only additional emotion reported by the respondents.

Table 4.1

A General Categorisation of Writing Emotions in Positive and Negative Valence

Valence	Response frequency		Percentage
	12 pre-determined emotions	Additional emotions from respondents	
Positive	179	2	38.3%
Negative	205	87	61.7%

4.1.1 Closed-Ended Responses

The frequencies and percentages of the 12 provided writing emotions (multiple response option) are presented in Table 4.2. The majority of the survey respondents (87%) communicated their vexed relationship to proposal writing by expressing a mix of positive and negative writing emotions, with only 5% choosing purely positive emotions and 8% purely negative emotions. These findings indicate that mixed writing emotions are virtually ubiquitous amongst first-year Chinese doctoral students studying in an English-speaking country for the first time and working on their thesis proposal writing. Confusion, frustration, and anxiety were the top three emotions, all within negative valence, followed by the top two positive emotions, interest and inspiration; each of these emotion words was chosen by over half of all respondents. Disgust was the least reported emotion, with only 15% of the respondents choosing it in relation to their proposal writing.

Table 4.2

Students' Writing Emotions from Close-ended Survey Responses

	Responses		
Writing emotion	Frequency	Per cent	Percent of cases
Confused	49	12.8%	67.1%
Frustrated	46	12.0%	63.0%
Anxious	46	12.0%	63.0%
Interested	45	11.7%	61.6%
Inspired	37	9.6%	50.7%
Excited	29	7.6%	39.7%
Sad	27	7.0%	37.0%
Confident	27	7.0%	37.0%
Lonely	26	6.8%	35.6%
Satisfied	22	5.7%	30.1%
Happy	19	4.9%	26.0%
Disgusted	11	2.9%	15.1%
Total	384	100.0%	526.0%

Note. Emotions are ordered based on their frequencies and percentages. The top five reported emotions are highlighted (three in negative valence and two in positive valence).

4.1.2 Open-Ended Responses

Apart from the emotion words provided in the survey as response options, participants reported 89 additional expressions in the open-ended textbox to describe their feelings towards proposal writing. Among these, 57 expressions were conceptually different from the provided emotions (see Table 4.3), and the remainder were either variants or synonyms of the 12 provided emotions (e.g., confused, confusing, puzzled). Surprisingly, all these additional expressions were associated with survey respondents' negative or unpleasant feelings, excluding "calm", which was mentioned only twice.

Table 4.3

Additional Writing Emotions Provided by Survey Participants from Open-ended Responses

Writing emotion	Participants' own expressions	N
Stressed	stressed, stressful, pressured	11
Angry	angry, mad, anger	8
Disappointed	disappointing, disappointment	8
Hopeless	hopeless, no hope, don't see hope	7
Dislike	dislike, not like	6
Discontent	unsatisfied, discontent, not satisfying	4
Uncertain	uncertain, not sure, uncertainty	4
Bored	bored, boring	2
Panic	panic, fear	2
Calm	calm	2
Depressed	depressed	1
Reluctant	reluctant	1
Uncomfortable	uncomfortable	1
Total		57

Note. This table presents additional emotions provided by the survey participants that were conceptually different from the pre-determined emotions. Emotions were coded and classified using the participants' own expressions/words.

4.1.3 Writing Emotions in Relation to Survey Respondents' Demographics

Chi-Square test of independence conducted in SPSS 24 was used to see whether survey participants' demographics (i.e., discipline, gender, and age) impact students' emotions about writing a thesis proposal. To explore the associations between participants' disciplines and their emotions, I re-coded the disciplines into two main groups: the Social Science & Humanities Group (i.e., education, arts, humanities, and business) and the Hard Science Group (i.e., engineering, science, and medical sciences).

Three associations emerged from the statistical test results. Table 4.4 shows that there were statistically significant correlations between discipline and the emotions of interest (p

< .05) and confusion ($p < .05$), indicating that participants in the Hard Science Group felt more interested but also more confused about their proposal writing than those from the Social Science & Humanities Group. No statistically significant relationship between gender and writing emotions was found. With regard to participants' age and negative emotions, participants under 29 year old were found to feel more confused about their proposal writing than those who were older than 30 ($p < .05$, see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4

Survey Respondents' Demographics and Writing Emotions

	Interested*	Excited	Satisfied	Happy	Confident	Inspired	Frustrated	Anxious	Sad	Disgusted	Confused*	Lonely
Discipline												
SS & H PE, n=83 NE, n=90	20.5%	14.5%	14.5%	12%	16.9%	21.7%	26.7%	21.1%	12.2%	6.7%	20%	13.3%
HS PE, n=96 NE, n=115	29.2%	17.7%	10.4%	9.4%	13.5%	19.8%	19.1%	23.5%	13.9%	4.3%	27%	12.2%
Gender												
Male PE, n=71 NE, n=91	16.9%	26.8%	9.9%	11.3%	16.9%	18.3%	19.8%	22%	14.3%	5.5%	24.2%	14.3%
Female PE, n=108 NE, n=114	15.7%	24.1%	13.9%	10.2%	13.9%	22.2%	24.6%	22.8%	12.3%	5.3%	23.7%	11.4%
Age												
>29 PE, n=128 NE, n=149	18.8%	22.7%	12.5%	10.2%	15.6%	20.3%	21.5%	22.1%	13.4%	4.7%	25.5%	12.8%
30< PE, n=51 NE, n=56	9.8%	31.4%	11.8%	11.8%	13.7%	21.6%	9.8%	31.4%	11.8%	11.8%	13.7%	21.6%

Note. SS & H = Social Science & Humanities; HS= Hard Science; PE = Positive Emotion; NE = Negative Emotion; n = response frequency. Percentages are based on the total responses within the demographic group. **Interest* is statistically significant at p = .027 (discipline); *confusion* is statistically significant at p = .006 (discipline) and p = .006 (age).

4.2 Interview Data: Four Forms of Emotion Expressions

Given the richness of natural languages referring to emotions, unsurprisingly, I obtained large numbers of expressions representing the interviewees' emotions associated with their proposal writing. The variety of free-format responses made it challenging for me to explore their patterns. Moreover, the different expressions represented in the English and Chinese languages led to a problem with the consistency in emotion data interpretation, which thus required a customised approach to coding the data. Therefore, to analyse the emotion expressions in a systematic way, I constructed a lexicon corpus to gather together all the expressions represented in English (English writing emotion lexicon) and Chinese (Chinese writing emotion lexicon). In this section, I present my corpus development, two rounds of data reduction, four forms of expressions in the corpus, and a description of eight writing emotion categories in my research.

4.2.1 Development of a Lexicon Corpus Towards Data Reduction

The tool I used to build the lexicon corpus is AntConc 3.4.4 (Anthony, 2014, https://www.laurenceanthony.net/software). To trim 500 free-format responses down to a limited number of meaningful emotion categories, I conducted two rounds of data reduction. In the first round, I used both the Geneva Affect Label Coder (GALC) developed by Scherer (2005) and the Chinese Affective Lexicon Ontology (CALO) developed by Xu et al. (2008) to interpret the core nature of the expressions from the corpus. In the second round of data reduction, I employed Shaver et al.'s (1987) approach to establish a consistent set of emotion categories in my corpus. Their approach distinguishes popular emotion expressions at three category levels: superordinate (i.e., positive and negative emotions), basic (e.g., joy, anger, sadness), and subordinate (e.g., irritation and rage as sub-categories of anger). A few expressions, which were not identified by GALC, CALO, and Shaver et al.'s approach as emotions, were analysed and classified into additional emotion categories in my research. The overall procedure of emotion data reduction is diagrammed in Figure 4.1.

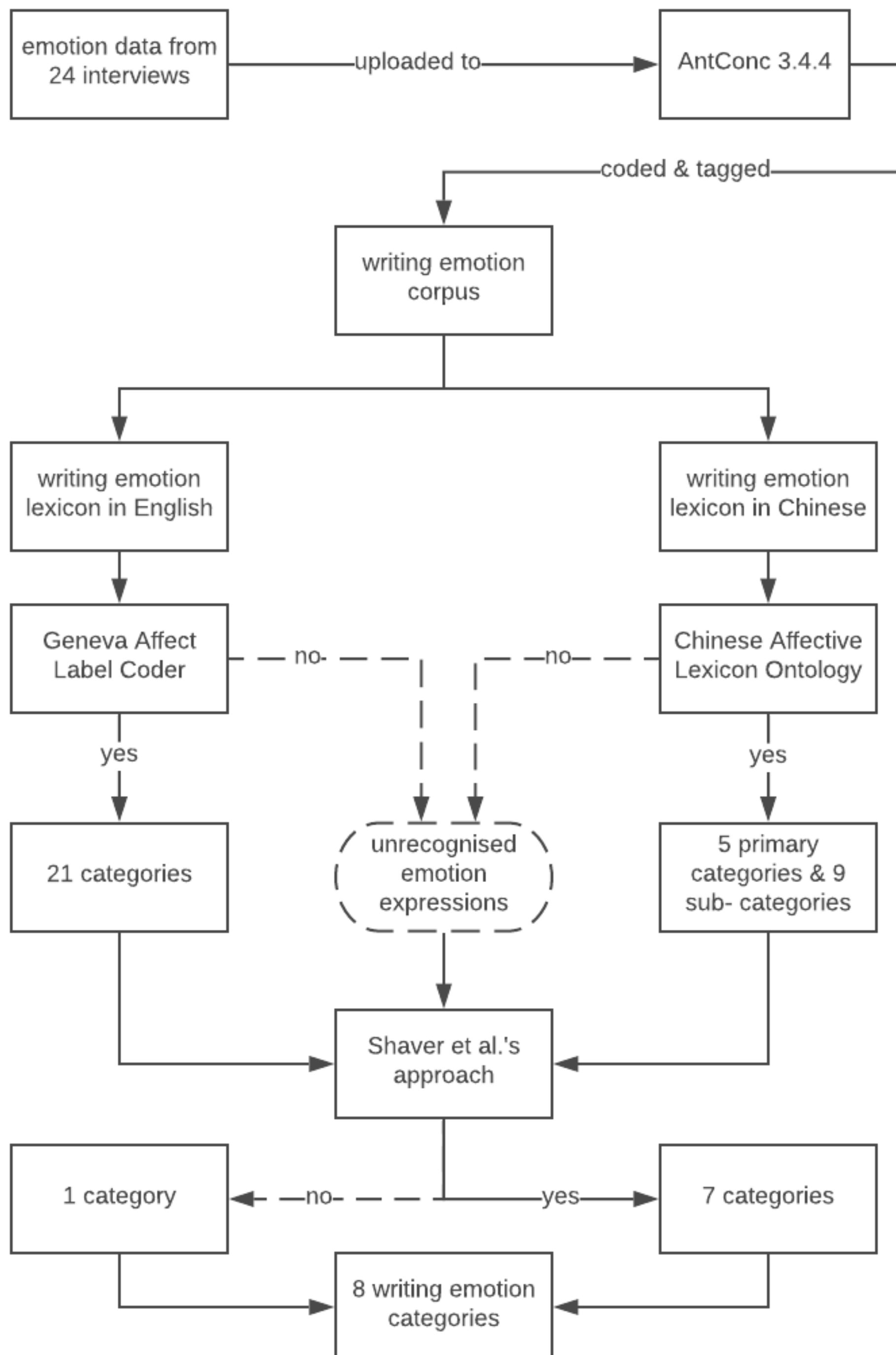

Figure 4.1. Procedures for reducing emotion data in my research.

AntConc 3.4.4 and Corpus Tagging Schemes. I used the computer software AntConc 3.4.4 (Anthony, 2014), a corpus analysis toolkit offering several practical functions for contextual text analysis. For example, AntConc's Concordance Tool allowed me to produce a list of emotion expressions from my corpus. The Collocates Tool enabled me to search for specific emotion expressions and where they appeared in the corpus. The Word List Tool helped me to

quickly spot the words representing subjective feelings, gather all the words referring to students' writing emotions, and find which emotions frequently occurred in the corpus.

Regarding the corpus coding schemes, a range of tags were included in my corpus. I tagged all the emotion expressions as either PO (Positive writing emotion) or NE (Negative writing emotion). In addition to valence tagging, I further tagged the expressions as WEKE (Writing Emotion Keyword Expression), WNEKE (Writing Non-Emotion Keyword Expression), WEME (Writing Emotion Metaphor Expression), and WEIE (Writing Emotion Idiom Expression). In my corpus, most expressions contained emotion keywords (e.g., upset, happy) or lexical words indicating an emotional state (e.g., smiling, crying). However, some expressions (i.e., WNEKEs) neither included an emotion keyword nor showed a clear emotional state; for example, "I wasn't feeling positive at all" or "I don't want to hear this. This is not what I want!" For analysing the WNEKEs, I referred to the fieldnotes that I made while conducting the interviews (e.g., interviewees' facial expressions, intonations, and physical gestures, see Chapter Three). I also sent this form of expressions to participants for their clarification and interpretation, to ensure the credibility of my findings.

I was interested to note that my participants often used metaphorical (i.e., WEMEs) and Chinese idiomatic expressions (i.e., WEIEs) to describe their feelings of writing a thesis proposal. These expressions were tagged by using the interviewees' own words. Although some of the idioms contained a visual image (e.g., "a flying butterfly") similar to a metaphor, I tagged and analysed these two forms of expressions separately. I made this decision because only a small number of the idioms in my corpus linked to a metaphorical message and most of them were just common 'sayings' in the Chinese language and culture.

Chinese idioms, also known as Chengyu (成语), are highly compact and synthetic. Most Chinese idioms are derived from Chinese ancient literature and culture, and some of them entail two levels of meaning: literal meaning and figurative meaning. The literal expression often entails concrete words, such as animals, objects, sounds, colours, as well as actions. The figurative meaning is deeper and often linked with story, myth, or historical fact. For example,

the literal meaning of 井底之蛙 is a frog in the bottom of the well believing the well was its whole world and that the speck of the light above it was the sun. The figurative meaning of this idiom refers to people who are narrow-minded or discount things outside of their own experiences.

Chinese people often use idioms to communicate complex feelings more effectively, quickly and succinctly. For instance, 手舞足蹈 can be literally translated as 'gesticulating with hands and feet excitedly', and this idiom describes a person who is excited and dancing with joy. In my research, instead of describing emotions through a single lexical item (e.g., happy, confident), some participants chose to use Chinese idioms to express their feelings about writing; as one interviewee explained: "a single emotion item cannot capture my true feelings, as it is small, thin, dry, superficial, meaningless, and powerless".

Based on my preliminary analysis of the interview transcripts through reading and re-reading, I tagged all the interviewees' emotion expressions associated with their proposal writing in AntConc 3.4.4, using the coding schemes detailed in Table 4.5. To illustrate how I tagged the emotion expressions in my corpus, I extracted a short paragraph containing more than one emotional state: "Then I started to feel sad, or say confused, frustrated…" (see Figure 4.2). In this instance, I coded each emotion keyword as one unit; for example, "sad", "confused", and "frustrated" were tagged as three separate entities in my corpus.

Table 4.5

Coding Schemes for Analysing Emotion Data from Interview Responses

Tag	Meaning	Example
< >	Start tag	< >I was passionate about my proposal writing
</ >	End tag	</ >.
PO	Positive writing emotion	I felt much better _PO
NE	Negative writing emotion	I did not enjoy writing at all_NE
WEKE	Writing Emotion Keyword Expression	<WEKE> I was quite satisfied with my last draft which I sent to my supervisor last week _PO </WEKE>
WNEKE	Writing Non-Emotion Keyword Expression	<WNEKE> It took me a lot of working on the same piece of writing, but I finally got there _PO </WNEKE>
WEME	Writing Emotion Metaphor Expression	<WEME> It was like walking in darkness hitting walls and my whole body is covered by wounds _NE </WEME>
WEIE	Writing Emotion Idiom Expression	<WEIE> I was <哀莫大于心死 (sad)_NE> about my writing during the first several weeks </WEIE>

<WEKE> When I was in the first three months, I was very happy _PO about my proposal writing </WEKE> < WNEKE> I read every day and wrote every day, even on weekends _PO </ WNEKE> <WEKE> I enjoyed _PO my writing during that time period </WEKE> <WEKE> Then I started to feel sad_ NE </WEKE > or say <WEKE> confused_ NE </WEKE > and <WEKE> frustrated_ NE </WEKE > because all the problems just appeared at the same time, like research design, grammars, critical writing <WEKE> Especially my supervisors' "re-write-this part" feedback made me so disappointed_ NE about my writing </WEKE> <WEIE> In those days, I was like Lin Daiyu*, crying every day and revising my proposal every day_ NE </WEIE>

Figure 4.2. An extract of tagged emotion expressions from my corpus. *Lin Daiyu (also known as Lin Tai-yu in Chinese: 林黛玉) is one of the principal characters of Cao Xueqin's classic Chinese novel *Dream of the Red Chamber (红楼梦)*. She is portrayed as a well-educated, intelligent and beautiful young woman of physical frailness, who is emotional and prone to extreme mood swings and tears.

First Round of Emotion Data Reduction. After tagging all the emotion expressions associated with the participants' proposal writing in AntConc 3.4.4, I went beyond the broad distinction of positive and negative emotions and moved on to classify the expressions into more meaningful categories. This decision was made because analysing emotions according to valence was insufficient to understand the complexity of Chinese doctoral students' writing emotions. As Linnenbrink-Garcia and Pekrun (2014) note, in academic settings, students often experience enjoyment and encouragement alongside confusion, instead of feeling just "good" or "bad" (p. 45).

Scherer (2005) suggests that emotion data reduction should involve a procedure of "determining a list of emotion categories in an eclectic fashion or based on a particular theory and then ask[ing] coders to classify free responses with more or less explicit coding instructions and more or less concern for reliability" (p. 713). Following Scherer's advice, I searched for lexicon tools or corpora for classifying emotions within the literature on affect/emotion/sentiment classification or analysis. Although a number of tools were found, none of them was suitable for parsing emotions represented in both English and Chinese languages (including Chinese idioms). Moreover, the annotation schemes of these corpora were rather different, which could lead to a problem with the uniformity of emotion classification for my research. For example, some tools classify emotions into positive dimensions and negative dimensions (e.g., Natural Language Processing, https://hlt-nlp.fbk.eu/technologies/sentiwords); and some tools categorise emotions into multiple dimensions, including Objectivity (e.g., SentiWordNet, https://sentiwordnet.isti.cnr.it/), Activation and Imagery (e.g., The Whissell Dictionary of Affect in Language, https://www.god-helmet.com/wp/whissel-dictionary-of-affect/index.htm), and Arousal and Dominance (e.g., ANEW, https://csea.phhp.ufl.edu/media/anewmessage.html).

In order to establish a consistent set of emotion categories for both English and Chinese emotion lexicons in my research, I used the GALC and CALO to interpret the core nature of the emotion expressions in the corpus and reduce them down to a number of emotion categories. First, I tagged the 24 interview transcripts in AntConc 3.4.4 (Anthony, 2016) by using the coding schemes described in Table 4.5. Then, I used its Concordance Tool and the Word List Tool to

produce a list of the writing emotion expressions tagged in the entire corpus. Next, I uploaded the emotion expressions in English to the GALC and the emotion expressions in Chinese to the CALO. What follows is an outline of how the GALC and CALO programmes helped my research with emotion data reduction and classification.

The Geneva Affect Label Coder (GALC). The GALC is an Excel macro parser program distinguishing natural language words in English (also in German and French) and sorting common emotion words or popular expressions including metaphors into 36 emotion categories (Scherer, 2005). Figure 4.3 below is a snapshot of the GALC programme. The first label in each row represents an emotion category. Each emotion category encompasses a set of word-stems in adjective or noun form implying pertinent emotional states. For example, in the fourth row, the emotion category of angr* is constituted by a number of word-roots and synonyms represented by terms, including cross*, enrag*, furious, fury, incens*, infuriat*, irate, ire*, mad*, rag*, resent*, temper, wrath*, and wrought* (see Figure 4.3).

	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q
1	Missing														
2	ador*	awe*	dazed	dazzl*	enrapt*	enthrall*	fascina*	marveli*	rapt*	reveren*	spellbound	wonder*	worship*		
3	fun*	humor*	laugh*	play*	rollick*	smil*									
4	angr*	cross*	enrag*	furious	fury	incens*	infuriat*	irate	ire*	mad*	rag*	resent*	temper	wrath*	wrought*
5	anxi*	apprehens	diffiden*	jitter*	nervous*	trepida*	wari*	wary	worried*	worry*					
6	mov*	touch*													
7	ennui	indifferen*	languor*	tedi*	wear*										
8	compass*	empath*	pit*												
9	denigr*	deprec*	deris*	despi*	disdain*	scorn*									
10	content*	satisf*													

Figure 4.3. A snapshot of the Geneva Affect Label Coder. This figure only shows the first nine emotion categories from the GALC (Scherer, 2005).

Although the GALC enabled me to trim an extensive list of emotion expressions down to a smaller number of emotion categories, it is important to note that its creator, Scherer (2005), manually selected and subjectively judged the categorisation of the emotions based on his extensive comparison of dictionary and thesaurus entries (p. 716). However, some emotion scientists, such as Shaver et al. (1987), have preferred to use a quantitative statistical approach, for example, cluster analysis or multi-dimensional scaling, to perform reliable and objective classification of free-response emotion expressions. Because the goal of my research was to categorise the expressions for data reduction purposes rather than determine the

standards of emotion groupings, I used the GALC merely to aid my data interpretation and classification and not for quantitative analysis.

The Chinese Affective Lexicon Ontology (CALO). Similar to the GALC, the CALO is an Excel programme that determines categories, polarities (valence) and intensities of emotion expressions. The CALO contains 27,466 Chinese affective lexicons in total (Xu, et al., 2008). In contrast to the GALC by Scherer (2005), who subjectively determined which emotion categories to use, the CALO is based on Ekman's (1992) six basic emotions: joy, sadness, anger, fear, disgust, and surprise (see Chapter Two for basic emotion theory). In addition to the above six emotions, Xu et al. (2008) added an additional category, good/positive, which is further classified into four sub-categories: respect, praise, trust, and love.

The CALO programme contains altogether seven primary emotion categories along with 21 sub-categories (see Appendix I). For example, sadness comprises the sub-categories of sadness, disappointment, guilty, and longing. The CALO annotates and classifies emotion expressions in varied forms including nouns, verbs, idioms, adjectives, and adverbs. For instance, the verb 责备 (blame) is categorised into the primary category of disgust and its sub-category of blame; the adjective 令人鼓舞 (encouraging) is classified into the primary category of good/positive and its sub-category of praise. Although the CALO can classify most expressions into one primary emotion category, some expressions are classified into two different categories. For example, the expression 悲愤 (grief) in Figure 4.4 is grouped into the primary emotion category of "NA" (i.e., anger, see Appendix I) as well as into an additional emotion category, "NB" (i.e., sadness, see Appendix I). In my research, I categorised such cases into their most relevant emotion category based on my participants' specific descriptions of their writing experiences.

As there is no unified model or agreement on the number of emotion categories, in the first round of data reduction, the GALC classified 21 emotion categories, while CALO identified just five emotion categories along with nine sub-categories

	Expression	Part of Speech	Word Meaning No.		Primary Emotion Category	Intensity	Valence	Additional Emotion category	Intensity	Valence
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
1	词语	词性种类	词义数	词义序号	情感分类	强度	极性	辅助情感分类	强度	极性
557	钢铁长城	noun	1	1	PH	5	1			
558	帮扶	verb	1	1	PH	3	1			
559	宝地	noun	1	1	PH	7	1			
560	报答	verb	1	1	PH	5	1			
561	辈出	verb	1	1	PH	3	1			
562	愤懑	adj	1	1	NA	5	2	NE	5	2
563	悲愤	adj	1	1	NA	7	0	NB	7	2
564	勃然大怒	adj	1	1	NA	9	0			

Figure 4.4. A snapshot of the Chinese Affective Lexicon Ontology (CALO). This figure only shows eight Chinese emotion expressions from the CALO (Xu et al., 2008).

Second Round of Emotion Data Reduction. I excluded the expressions annotated as positive and negative but not referring to a clear emotional state from the second round of emotion data reduction and classification. I adopted Shaver et al.'s (1987) prototype approach to establish a consistent set of emotion categories in my corpus. Shaver et al.'s classification structure contains the emotion categories produced both by the GALC and CALO, as well as a few expressions not classified as an emotion by the above two programmes. Using hierarchical cluster analysis, Shaver et al. sorted 135 emotion expressions occurring in everyday conversation into six primary emotion categories: love, joy, surprise, anger, sadness, and fear (pp. 1067-1070). Under each primary category, several secondary emotions along with a collection of tertiary emotions are differentiated. These three levels of categorisations are structured in the shape of a tree. In my research, any emotion expressions that were not parsed through the GALC and CALO and not identified by Shaver et al.'s prototype approach were set aside to be analysed and classified as additional emotion categories.

Following the schemes of Shaver et al.'s (1987) approach, I finally classified the four forms of expressions tagged in my corpus (i.e., WEKE, WNEKE, WEIE, and WEME) into eight emotion categories: sadness, anger, confusion, fear, inspiration, happiness, tension, and surprise. In my thesis, I termed the expressions describing happy feelings as happiness instead of joy (although joy is used both in Shaver et al.'s approach and Ekman's (1992) six basic emotions) because my participants appeared to use happiness rather than joy to describe this

type of emotion regarding their thesis proposal writing.

Emotion Classification Credibility.

Classifying emotions is a challenging task because of their complex nature and the ambiguous natural languages used to describe them. Often, an emotion can be described in various ways. At the same time, one description can be interpreted as different types of emotions. To simplify the task, I drew up a set of guidelines for two external coders to help them grasp the conceptual schemes and check the accuracy of my emotion classification results. The coders were postgraduate students from my university. One coder is a doctoral candidate studying higher education, who has also helped me with the interview data coding and analysis that I presented in Chapter Three. The other is a graduated master's student in mental health and counselling; she is a licensed counsellor working in a counselling practice in the city of Auckland.

I spent about eight hours training the two coders by explaining my research purposes, presenting four forms of emotion expressions tagged in my corpus and introducing the tagging schemes, emotion classification programmes (i.e., the GALC and CALO) and Shaver et al.'s approach. After the training, I asked the coders to randomly select and check ten emotion expressions in each of the eight writing emotion categories in my corpus (i.e., sadness, anger, confusion, fear, inspiration, happiness, tension, and surprise), and then compared their results to mine.

After the two coders' three weeks of coding and checking, they agreed that the eight emotion categories contained the most frequently described writing emotions in my research. We eliminated some general positive and negative expressions, as they did not refer to a specific emotional state and thus could not be classified into any of the above eight emotion categories. By using the kappa statistics in SPSS 24, I calculated the pairwise agreement between each coder and me. The average coefficient of agreement for coder one and me was 0.895, and for coder two and me, it was 0.873, suggesting a high level of credibility (Landis & Koch, 1977, p.165).

Having described my corpus development, procedures of two rounds of data reduction, and credibility issues of my emotion classification, in the remainder of this section I focus on presenting the four forms of expressions in my corpus (i.e., WEKE, WNEKE, WEME, WEIE), followed by a description of the eight writing emotion categories in my research.

4.2.2 Forms of Emotion Expressions

A total of 478 expressions associated with interviewees' proposal writing-related emotions were tagged and analysed in my corpus. As Table 4.6 shows, the majority of the expressions contained emotion keywords (i.e., WEKE, 72%), and the smallest percentage were described through Chinese idioms (i.e., WEIE, 5.7%). Approximately 7% of the expressions were represented in metaphors (i.e., WEME), and around 16% had no emotion keyword (i.e., WNEKE). Overall, almost 60% of the expressions from the interviewees' accounts were associated with negative valence. This finding shows a trend similar to the results from the online survey (62% negative writing emotions), indicating that first-year Chinese doctoral students studying in an English-speaking country for the first time appear to feel more negative than positive about their thesis proposal writing.

Table 4.6

Forms of Writing Emotion Expressions in My Corpus

Form of writing emotion expression	Tag	Writing emotions		
		Positive	Negative	Percentage
Writing Emotion Keyword Expression	WEKE	30.8%	41.2%	72%
Writing Non-Emotion Keyword Expression	WNEKE	4.5%	11.2%	15.7%
Writing Emotion Metaphor Expression	WEME	2.9%	3.7%	6.6%
Writing Emotion Idiom Expression	WEIE	3.4%	2.3%	5.7%
Total		41.6%	58.4%	100%

WEKE: Writing Emotion Keyword Expression. The GALC identified 21 discrete emotion categories in the English writing emotion lexicon (i.e., writing emotions expressed in the English language). The CALO classified five primary emotion categories including nine sub-categories in the Chinese writing emotion lexicon (i.e., writing emotions expressed in the Chinese language). Table 4.7 and Table 4.8 present the emotion categories, along with the interviewees' own words to illustrate the meanings of the categorical labels in my research.

Overall, emotion keywords classified in my corpus ranged from positive valence (e.g., happiness, relaxation) to negative valence (e.g., fear, sadness). Some emotion categories were conceptually similar (e.g., joy, pleasure, enjoyment); some were distinctively different (e.g., contentment, disappointment). Some categories were conceptually similar but indicated different levels of activation (e.g., anger, hatred) or deactivation (e.g., boredom, sadness). Some categories were intrinsic-oriented (e.g., guilt, shame); others were extrinsic-oriented (e.g., irritation, surprise). Some emotions were high power-oriented (e.g., enthusiastic); others were or low power-oriented (e.g., worried).

A few interesting findings emerged. First, surprise was a 'rarely' experienced emotion in my research, as it was mentioned only five times. Second, some frequently expressed emotion keywords were not identified as emotions by the GALC (e.g., "excited", "feeling lost", "lonely", "discouraged", "helpless", "confused") but were classified as emotions in the CALO. Last, both the GALC and CALO did not categorise "encouraged", "motivated", and "inspired" as emotions; however, these cognitive-oriented emotion expressions were used by many of my participants to describe their feelings about proposal writing. Consequently, I classified "encouraged", "motivated" and "inspired" into the category of inspiration.

Table 4.7

Emotion Categories Classified by the Geneva Affect Label Coder

Emotion category	Interviewees' own words
Happiness	cheerful, enjoy, happy, delighted
Contentment	satisfied (satisfaction), content, comfortable
Pleasure/Enjoyment	pleased, enjoyable, pleasure,
Interest/Enthusiasm	curious, interested, enthusiastic
Joy	joy
Relaxation/Serenity	calm
Relief	relieved
Sadness	crying, depressed, sad, hopeless, moaning
Disappointment	disappointed, discontent, let down, frustrated
Guilt	guilty, blame
Anxiety	worried, anxious, nervous,
Fear	scared, panic, fear, terror,
Tension/Stress	discomfort, distressed, stress, tense
Anger	anger (angry), mad
Irritation	annoying, irritated
Disgust	disgusting, dislike
Hatred	hate
Surprise	surprised (surprising), astonished
Desperation	hopeless
Boredom	bored, boring
Shame	embarrassing, shame

Table 4.8

Emotion Categories Classified by the Chinese Affective Lexicon Ontology

Emotion category	Interviewees' own words	English translations
Happiness/Joy	享受	enjoying
	开心	happy
	兴奋	excited
	满意	satisfied
	热情	enthusiastic/passionate
Sadness	痛苦	sad
	失望	disappointed
	委屈	wronged
	无望	hopeless
	迷茫	lost
	内疚	guilty/shamed
	孤独	lonely
	泄气	discouraged
Anger/Disgust	挫败	frustrated
	反感	hate
	烦躁	irritated
	讨厌	dislike
	可气	angry
Fear	慌张	anxious
	担忧	worried
	无助	helpless
	紧张	nervous
	害怕	scared/fearful
Surprise	惊讶	surprised
	震惊	shocked

WNEKE: Writing Non-Emotion Keyword Expression. Writing non-emotion keyword expressions in my research refer to those responses containing no emotion keywords that were used by the participants to describe their writing emotions in an indirect fashion. This form of expression is open to interpretation because of the ambiguity of the natural languages referring to emotions. I interpreted these expressions based on the audio-recordings of the interview transcripts and the fieldnotes I made while conducting the interviews. To check my

interpretations, I emailed the results to the interviewees for their critical review to ensure the truthfulness of the resulting emotion categories. Based on the interviewees' review results, 75 WNEKEs referring to specific types of emotional states were analysed and categorised in my corpus. Table 4.9 presents several examples of such expressions along with their emotion category groupings.

Table 4.9

The Categorisation of Writing Non-Emotion Keyword Expressions in My Corpus

Writing emotion category	Interviewees' own words
Satisfaction	It took me a lot of working on the same piece of writing, but I finally got there.
Confidence	I can write a lot with her help.
Inspiration	I always want to work on my writing.
Disappointment	At that time, I had no idea (heavy intonation) how to revise my proposal.
Frustration	I just cannot express precisely about what I wanted to say in my research proposal.
Confusion	I told my supervisors that I really did not know what to do about my proposal.
Sadness	On that day when I looked at the red computer screens, I had no positive feelings at all.
Anxiety	Sometimes when I think about my writing issues, I could not fall asleep and even felt sick on the following day.
Happiness	Sometimes when I finished my writing tasks by the end of a day, I rode my bike while singing songs to go home.
Anger	Why can't he understand me? Can't he see I am a second language learner?
Fear	I lost sleep at night whenever I think about my submission deadline.

WEME: Writing Emotion Metaphor Expression. In my corpus, 32 metaphorical expressions describing the interviewee's feelings of writing a thesis proposal were tagged and categorised. As metaphors are open to interpretation, I contacted the interviewees and asked them to clarify the meanings of their expressions. This type of expression helped me understand the different aspects of an emotional experience and the complexity of emotions in different writing contexts. For example, an emotion can be elicited by a cause such as "winning one million dollars in a lottery". In addition, emotions can be cognitive-focused ("I lost navigation direction and didn't know where to fly), behavioural-focused ("cooking my favourite meals"), and affective-focused ("beautiful flowers are growing inside of my heart"). Emotions can also be a combination of cognitive and behavioural aspects ("My supervisor throws a life-line for me, and all I want to do is to climb up to the top and stand on my own"), a combination of cognitive and affective aspects ("I imagined myself as a seabird whistling my favourite tunes"), or a combination of behavioural and affective aspects ("I was like a rainbow-coloured butterfly, finally I could fly over the field to see another side of the world").

The figurative meanings of the metaphors enabled me to identify the characteristics of different types of writing emotions. Anger can be fierce and powerful, like "fire", "poison", "storm", and "explosion". Helplessness in writing are feelings of being disempowered and obstructive, such as "a headless fly" and "walking in darkness always hitting walls". Fear is threatening and uncontrollable, resembling "a homeless child, who lost her parents and had nowhere to sleep overnight, wandering on the street and nobody cares". Happiness is light and uplifting: "my feet were off the ground, and I was flying towards the heaven". Stress or tension is heavy and burdensome, like "walking with tons of rock on my back" or "using a wooden stick to support a huge shipping container". Sadness can be down and physically painful: "my heart was bleeding, feeling like someone using a knife stabbing it". Inspiration in writing is driven and forward, like "a lifeline", "a compass", or "an engine in a sports car". Finally, confusion is unmatched and cloudy, such as "wearing a short skirt in Alaska" or "driving in a foggy day".

WEIE: Writing Emotion Idiom Expression. As explained earlier, some Chinese idioms are similar to metaphors in that they contain both literal and figurative meanings, but not all idioms are metaphorical. The literal meaning usually is connected to Chinese ancient literature, stories, or historical facts. Most idioms in the Chinese language are highly structured (four characters) and are fixed 'sayings' (i.e., they have to be said in a certain way). Because they are fixed or unchangeable, I used the CALO to classify the 27 idiomatic expressions in my corpus.

The idioms with a literal meaning helped me understand various types of emotions embedded in Chinese language and culture. For instance, sadness could be "a heart stopping beating (哀莫大于心死)", "a lonely old man or women whose partner is died (鳏寡孤独)", or "liver and intestines being cut into pieces (肝肠寸断)". Disappointment may be "a broken bubble (化为泡影)", "a traveller returning home from the treasure mountain with empty hands (宝山空回), or "soldiers who run out of weapons and food while still having to fight a war (弹尽粮绝)". Anger could be "tangled skeins (心乱如麻)", "boiling water (热水沸腾)", or "blown-up hair (怒发冲冠)". Happiness may be "a dancing bird (鹊笑鸠舞)", "rain falling on the parched seedlings (旱苗得雨), or "people singing while drinking (放歌纵酒)". Fear could be "a person skating on a thin ice (如履薄冰)", "hair standing up on one's arm (毛骨悚然)", or "a mouse stealing food in front of a cat (老鼠偷猫饭)".

4.2.3 Writing Emotion Categories

Because it was important to establish a consistent set of emotion categories in my corpus, I adopted Shaver et al.'s (1987) prototype approach to combine and unify the emotions represented in the above four forms of expressions (WEKE, WNEKE, WEME, and WEIE). Based on Shaver et al.'s classification scheme and the patterns in my corpus, I eventually constructed eight categories of writing emotions. Figure 4.5 presents the frequencies of the eight types of emotions that Chinese doctoral students felt about their proposal writing. Sadness (n=141) turned out to be the most frequently reported emotion, followed by inspiration (n=78) and happiness (n=70). Surprise (n=5), on the other hand, was the least described emotion.

Although surprise was not a ‘common’ emotion in my research (only mentioned five times), I classified it as a distinct emotion category. A detailed classification of these eight writing emotion categories along with their sub-categories and examples is provided in Figure 4.6.

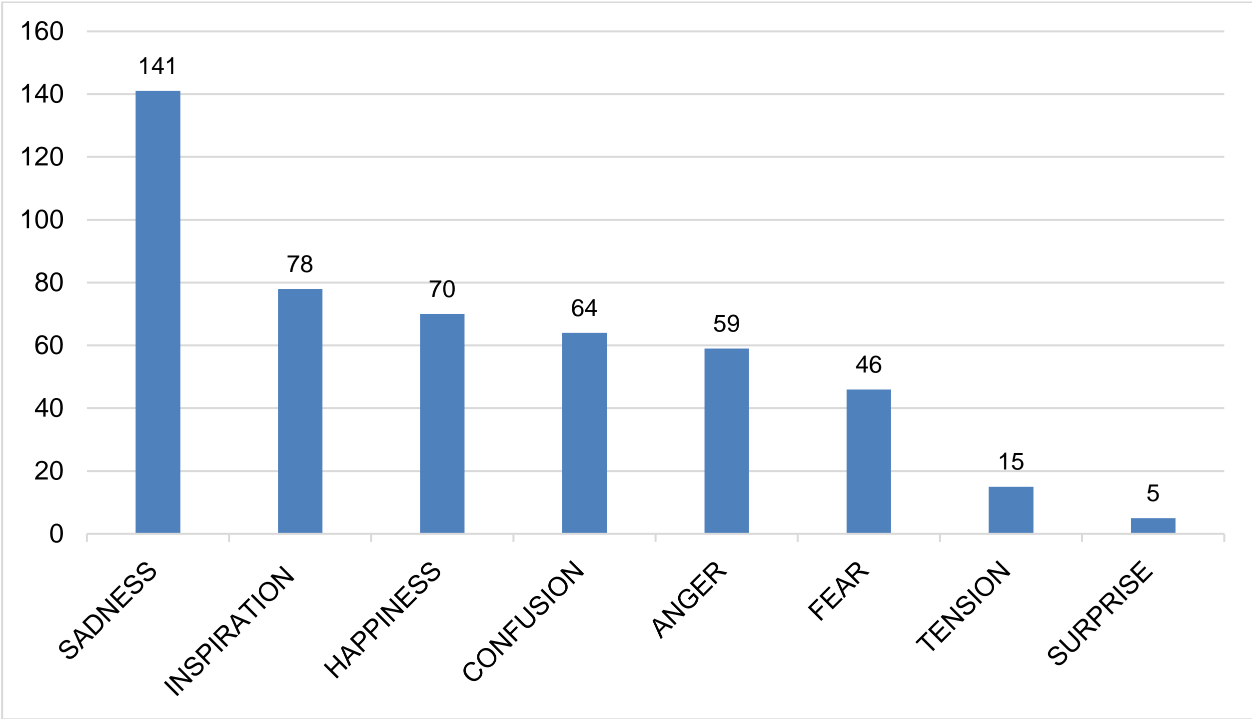

Figure 4.5. Frequencies of eight categories of writing emotions in my corpus.

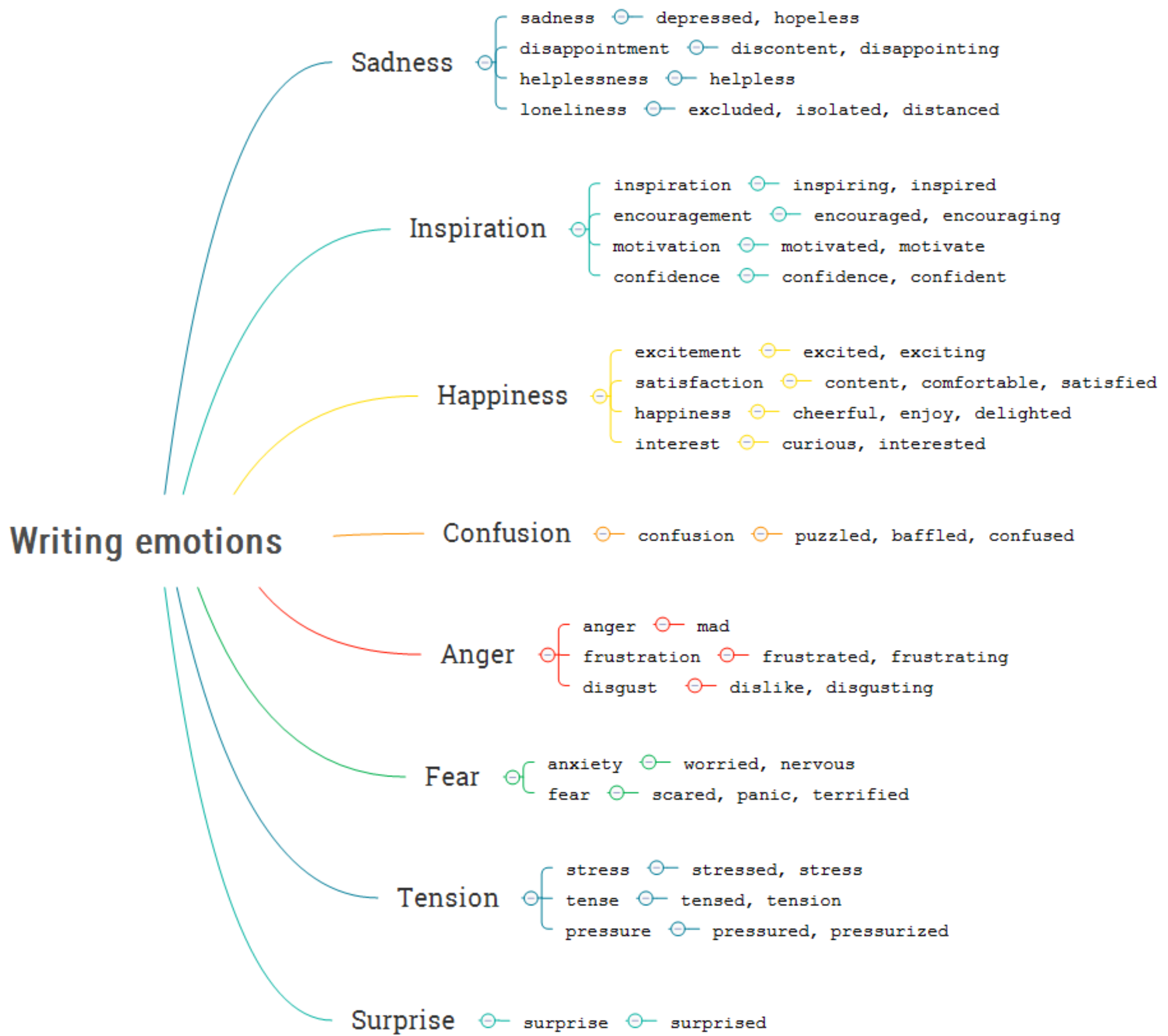

Figure 4.6. The structure of writing emotion categories in my corpus.

So far, I have presented the students' four forms of emotion expressions in my corpus, which were classified into eight emotion categories. In the next section, by linking my findings to previous literature, I discuss how my research contributes to the field of emotion measurement in the context of doctoral writing. A number of unexpected findings during the process of emotion data reduction will be discussed, to give a more nuanced understanding of writing emotion classification.

4.3 Discussion

4.3.1 Writing Emotion Expressions

Forms of Emotion Expressions. Despite the large number of emotion expressions in my corpus, I found that the same types of writing emotions can be described in varied ways, or different emotion words can lead to the same emotions. For instance, “terrified”, “worried”, and “scared” all refer to the emotion of fear, varying in light of how strong or weak the fear is, and whether fear is manifested cognitively or behaviourally.

Likewise, different forms of expressions can describe the same types of emotions. For example, in the open-ended responses from the online survey, participants reported their writing emotions in a formal format or through a single lexical item such as “hopeless” or “helpless”; whereas in the interviews, they used metaphors to describe the same type of feelings, for instance, “I was like walking in darkness hitting walls”. These different expressive styles between the survey and interviews were artefacts of the methods I used to collect the emotion data. In the survey, I pre-determined 12 emotion words before asking the participants to provide their open-ended responses. The close-ended nature of the survey question may have led them to respond in a similar format in the open-ended text box. By contrast, in the natural conversational environment of the interviews, I asked the participants to freely describe their emotions by recalling their proposal writing experiences. Their own stories opened up the conversations and led them to engage more actively, and thus more natural emotion expressions emerged.

The metaphorical and idiomatic expressions used by my research subjects allowed me to understand the complexity of emotions in doctoral writing by setting a three-dimensional scene for me, as a researcher, to experience participants’ emotions. For example, I could picture myself walking in a dark room where I could not see my hands and feet, and this image helped me interpret how helpless or lost that student felt about his or her proposal writing. According to the literature on linguistic emotional expressions, self-reported natural languages including written and verbal formats can be used to measure individuals’ emotion (Sacharin et al., 2012). However, within the literature on the emotional dimension of doctoral writing, most

researchers focus on using single lexical words (e.g., happy, frustrated, stressed) to report students' emotions about writing (e.g., Carlino, 2012; Cotterall, 2013; Huerta et al., 2017; Russell-Pinson & Harris, 2019; Wellington, 2010) but ignore the richness of natural languages referring to emotions (for an exception, see Kamler & Thomson, 2014). In the article *Frustrated academic writers*, Sword et al. (2018) highlight the power of metaphors in expressing writing emotions: "Metaphors…can become a tool not just for describing frustration but for refashioning, rerouting it, and finding a way beyond it" (p. 863). Therefore, as a future direction, it would be interesting for researchers to explore more metaphorical and idiomatic expressions, which may enable us to better understand the complexity of emotion in the context of doctoral writing.

Fixed-Option Format and Free-Response Format. Chinese doctoral students expressed a number of additional writing emotions that were conceptually different from the 12 emotions provided in the online survey as fixed-response options. This finding raises the question of whether researchers' pre-determined emotion labels in their studies, which are typically used for measuring academic emotions (e.g., Pekrun, 2006; Pekrun & Stephens, 2012), can capture individuals' genuine feelings adequately. By providing fixed options, researchers can more easily link their quantitative results to specific theories or previous literature. However, my research findings suggest that the fixed-option format also loses the genuineness of the emotional state and excludes other types of feelings that participants may experience. Scherer (2005) also has questioned the fixed-option format of measuring emotions and argues that this type of inquiry can "prime" participants or suggest "responses that they might not have chosen otherwise" (p. 712). Therefore, future quantitative emotion researchers should carefully consider the emotion labels if they decide to use a fixed-option format to measure participants' emotions.

A fee-response format may alleviate the problems arising from the fixed-option format but can make the analytical process rather complicated. This is because the same emotion can be described in varied ways across individuals, such as the metaphors and non-emotion keyword expressions identified in my research. Similarly, the same description may be interpreted differently across researchers because of the ambiguity of the natural languages

referring to emotions. In addition, some expressions may not indicate emotions, as they express a physiological state (e.g., sleepy) or a general opinion (e.g., good, meaningful). Because such issues may hinder the interpretation of the emotion expressions provided by the participants, I used well-established and validated tools and methods (i.e., the GALC, the CALO, Shaver et al.'s prototype approach) to analyse the free-format responses in my corpus. However, there still is a need to reach an agreement on the criteria of differentiating emotions from other psychological or cognitive states. Therefore, a more comprehensive and advanced system for analysing a free-response emotion lexicon in the context of doctoral writing needs to be developed by future researchers.

Emotion Expressions Across Cultures and Languages. Despite the universal aspects of emotions cross-culturally (i.e., primary human emotions), emotions can be described differently in the English and Chinese languages. One of the Chinese students in my research used an expression of "flying around like a headless fly" to represent his feelings of being lost and panic about his proposal writing. The 'headless fly' in Chinese culture is a common saying referring to people who work hard without having any purpose or direction; they are usually in a state of panic, and their productivity is most likely to be extremely low. The equivalent saying in the English language is 'running around like a headless chicken'. Given that I was brought up in China, I was very familiar with these types of emotion descriptions and was able to interpret and code them based on their true meaning. However, if researchers and participants are not from the same cultural and language backgrounds, there might be a miscommunication between them, which in turn may complicate the process of emotion interpretation. Therefore, future emotion researchers may encourage participants from a different language or cultural background to the researcher to use their native language to describe their emotions if they wish to, in which case, they also need to rely on someone with appropriate adequate knowledge to help them interpret the data.

The emotion categorisation results of the GALC and CALO programmes reinforce the view that emotions represented in the English and Chinese languages need to be analysed by their pertinent lexicon corpus instruments because of their distinctive cultural and linguistic

features. For example, the emotion of 忧伤 characterised by feelings of sadness can be translated into English in varied ways such as ‘unhappy’, ‘sad’, ‘sorrow’, ‘upset’, ‘gloomy’, and ‘depressed’. The GALC classifies ‘unhappy’ as a member of the dissatisfaction category, while the CALO sorts 忧伤 into sadness. Besides, the English translation, ‘upset’, is not identified as an emotion or affect in the GALC. Another example is the expression 奇怪, which can be literally translated as ‘strange’ in the English language. However, ‘strange’ is not recognised as an emotion in the GALC; whereas in Chinese, 奇怪 (strange) is often used to express feelings of unexpectedness, which can be interpreted as surprise. My findings reinforce the view that translation can pose a high risk of misinterpreting emotions across languages and cultures. Therefore, future emotion researchers would need to build an emotion expression system or a lexicon corpus that can be used to interpret and classify emotions across Chinese and English languages and cultures. My doctoral project contributes to this field, marking the beginning of this new challenging journey.

4.3.2 Writing Emotion Classifications

During the process of reducing the emotion data to just eight categories, I encountered some unexpected findings, which I will discuss below.

Confusion. There was a disagreement on the categorisation of confusion between the GALC and CALO. In the GALC, confusion with its variants confused and confusing was not categorised as an emotion or an affect; whereas in the CALO, confusion, represented in Chinese characters 疑惑 or 困惑, was grouped into disgust/anger. I myself was confused about the classification of confusion as previous emotion scientists have been. Clore and Ortony (1988) are the first group of researchers objecting to viewing confusion as an emotion:

> Emotions are psychological states, but not all psychological states are emotional; for example, neither a state of exhaustion nor a state of confusion is an emotion. Emotions are sometimes expressed facially, but not all facial expressions indicate emotions; neither a grimace of pain nor a frown of puzzlement is an emotional expression. (p. 367)

Recent researchers continue this debate about how to define the affect confusion. For instance, Hess (2003) and Keltner and Shiota (2003) claim confusion to be an affective state, not an emotion. Silvia (2010) argues that confusion relates to knowledge and thus is a cognitive emotion. Pekrun and Stephens (2011) support Silvia's view, defining confusion as an epistemic emotion in educational contexts. Rozin and Cohen (2003) believe that confusion is a bona fide emotion, which has inspired Hussain et al. (2011) to categorise confusion as a negative activating emotion.

According to the literature on affect and emotion, the theoretical status of confusion is mixed and unclear. The reason for this may be because of a lack of a clear definition of emotion, multiple aspects of emotions, and a lack of research data supporting the classification of confusion as an emotion (Rozin & Cohen, 2003). To address the issue of a consistent approach to defining emotions, Izard (2010), a noted researcher in affective sciences, has adopted an innovative approach to identify what an emotion is, suggesting that an emotion should possess the following six characteristics: "(a) neural systems dedicated at least in part to emotion processes, (b) feelings or feeling state, (c) antecedent cognitive appraisal, (d) cognitive interpretation of a feeling state, (e) response systems, and (f) expressive behaviour, signalling system" (p. 365). Using Izard's approach, D'Mello and Graesser (2014) believe that confusion presents the first four of the above characteristics (p. 291). Finally, Linnenbrink-Garcia and Pekrun (2014) conclude that confusion can be classified as an important academic emotion in educational settings (p. 292) because confusion is found to be significantly beneficial to students' learning:

> It [confusion] signals that there is something wrong with the current state…[and] jolts the cognitive system out of equilibrium, focuses attention on the anomaly or discrepancy, and motivates learners to effortfully deliberate, problem-solve, and restructure their cognitive system in order to resolve the confusion and return to a state of equilibrium. (p. 303)

Following Linnenbrink-Garcia and Pekrun (2014), D'Mello et al. (2014) note that confusion is a mismatch between a learner's incoming information and his or her existing knowledge, and this

mismatch may promote the learner's deeper inquiry and contribute to their learning behaviours. Consequently, a feeling of confusion itself serves as a moderator in students' learning outcomes (Lee et al., 2011; Lehman et al., 2012; Pekrun & Stephens, 2011).

To understand confusion in a doctoral writing context, I referred to interviewees' concrete descriptions of how they experienced confusion in their thesis proposal writing. Students in my research used confusion to express their feelings of 'not understanding' or 'not knowing what to do with writing'. For instance, while I was collecting emotion data through face-to-face interviews, I found some students reported on their confusion over 'research topic selection' for their proposal writing, and these students tended to solve their problems either through reading research publications or asking their peers for assistance. In such cases, confusion plays a temporarily positive role in students' writing processes. This finding aligns with the claim that confusion can be positive to students' learning in academic settings (Pekrun & Stephens, 2011). However, in addition to the positive role, confusion may have a harmful effect on doctoral students' writing productivity in the long run. According to my interview data, students appeared to perceive confusion as a negative feeling impeding their proposal writing, especially when their supervisors failed to provide sufficient ongoing support. A few students stated that they did self-seek solutions or ask supervisors for help in dealing with the problems that caused their confusion in writing. However, this feeling began to play a negative role if the problems were still unsolved, particularly when the proposal submission clock was ticking.

Considering the above characteristics of confusion in my research, I rejected the categorisation in the CALO, because confusion in my study is not linked to the nature of anger or disgust. Instead, I classified it as a distinctive writing emotion category for three reasons. First, confusion is closely associated with students' cognition and knowledge in proposal writing. Second, confusion is frequently experienced in the academic writing context and can lead to both positive and negative writing experiences. Thirdly, confusion dynamically relates to other types of writing emotions including happiness, sadness, anger, and tension. For instance, once the issues that had made students confused about their proposal writing were resolved, crippling feelings of confusion gave way to a sense of relief and satisfaction; whereas when

students were stuck in a confusing situation for a long time with the problem unsolved, their confusion tended to shift to sadness, anger, stress or even self-blame.

Feeling Lost. The categorisation results of feeling lost from the GALC and CALO programmes were different. The GALC did not categorise feeling lost as an emotion or an affect, while the CALO classified feeling lost, represented as 迷茫 in Chinese, into the emotion category of anger/disgust. I rejected the CALO's classification, because feeling lost in my research related to students feeling sad and unconfident about making decisions about their proposal writing. According to the study by Xu et al. (2010) in the context of the Chinese affective lexicon, feeling lost is displayed as one of the symptoms of sadness: "[Sadness is] an emotion characterised by feelings of disadvantages, lost and helplessness" (p. 1214). Therefore, in my research, I classified feeling lost into the writing emotion category of sadness.

Frustration. There was a disagreement on classifying frustration between the GALC and CALO. The GALC categorised frustration and its variants including frustrating and frustrated into the emotion category of disappointment. However, the CALO classified frustration represented as 憋屈 in Chinese into the category of anger, which is consistent with Shaver et al.'s (1987) prototype approach. As many psychologists show, frustration is a psychological response to an obstacle introduced between an individual and his/her goal (e.g., Coon & Mitterer, 2012; Eysenck, 2000). In the context of academic writing, Sword (2018) notes that writers associate frustration with the obstacles blocking the path to their writing goals and their frustration "[seems] to denote not just a single emotion but a whole slew of feelings, mostly connected to or conflated with anger, disappointment or helpless" (p. 854). In my research, doctoral students used frustration to express their strong feelings of dissatisfaction and anger with certain situations in their writing processes and found it difficult to deal with the situations, because of internal impediment (e.g., a lack of writing competence) and external insufficient support (e.g., a lack of effective writing support). As a result, I classified frustration into the emotion category of anger in my research.

Inspiration, Encouragement, and Motivation. Although negative emotions were prevalent in the students' responses, inspiration with its synonyms encouragement and motivation topped the frequent list in my corpus, being reported as the second most frequently described emotion from the interviewees' accounts. Students frequently used the words, "inspired", "encouraged", and "motivated" to refer to their willingness, motivation, or drive to work on their research proposals. However, according to the literature, inspiration, encouragement, and motivation are not viewed as feelings or emotions, neither in the literature on basic emotions (e.g., Ortony & Turner, 1990; Plutchik, 1980), nor in the research on academic emotions (e.g., Pekrun, et al., 2006; Pekrun, et al., 2011). In my study, students' feelings of inspiration, encouragement, and motivation were experienced as, to use Pekrun and Stephens's terms (2011), "topic emotions", "epistemic emotions", and/or "social emotions", depending on the focus of attention (pp. 5-6). According to the authors, topic emotions in academic environments are the emotions triggered by students' learning materials or contents and can strongly influence students' engagement, interest, and motivation in learning. Epistemic emotions link to students' cognitive qualities of task information and processing of such information. Social emotions occur both in a social context, where a number of emotions related to other people are triggered, and in a self-centred-learning context, where students' goals, contents, and outcomes of learning are socially constructed. In my research, one interviewee found some papers significantly useful for his research and thus he was inspired to work on his proposal writing. In this case, inspiration is a topic emotion, because it links to the content of the student's proposal writing. Another interviewee claimed that he was inspired to write because he knew how to analyse the data for his doctoral project. In this instance, inspiration is an epistemic emotion, as it relates to the student's knowledge-generating process in proposal writing. One interviewee explained that she was inspired to work on her proposal writing when she received useful writing feedback from her peers and supervisors. In such a case, inspiration is a social emotion arising in an academic social setting, where the participant, her peers, and supervisors are involved. In addition, inspiration also occurred within students' self-centred-writing activities. For instance, one student felt inspired to work on her thesis proposal because

she achieved her writing goals before the deadline she set for herself, and this pleasant feeling motivated her to continue writing.

The emotion category of inspiration in my research possesses two distinctive characteristics. First, inspiration shows doctoral students' willingness or driving force to work on their thesis proposal writing. Second, inspiration often links to a causational factor, which either can be people-related (e.g., peers and supervisors) or self-related (e.g., reaching writing targets). Therefore, I categorised inspiration along with its variants (e.g., inspired, inspiring) and synonyms (i.e., encouragement, motivation) as a distinctive emotion category in my research.

4.4 Limitations

The findings in this chapter are subject to two limitations. One is about reducing free-format expressions down to a limited number of emotion categories, as the reduction process may lose the richness and diversity of participants' natural languages referring to their writing emotions. However, by reducing the emotion data, I could analyse the emotions in a systematic way and build the foundation for the next chapter exploring the triggers for students' emotions in their proposal writing. The other limitation is using a relatively small sample and purposive sampling to collect emotion data in my research. Therefore, the relationships between the 12 provided writing emotions and the survey respondents' demographics presented in Section 4.1.3 may not be generalisable and is specific to this cohort of students.

4.5 Implications for Future Research

Instead of classifying expressions into a number of emotion categories (as I have done in my research), future researchers may wish to systematically categorise and study them in accordance to focused aspect of the emotions, such as cognition-focused, behaviour-focused, and affective-focused. This type of categorisation could help us to understand the roles that different components of emotions play in students' doctoral writing. Future researchers may also measure students' emotions in frequency and strength dimensions at different stages of their proposal writing; for example, how frequently and strongly students feel certain emotions across different writing processes in their provisional year. By examining these dimensions, we may

better develop pedagogical strategies to help first-year candidates to manage the ups and downs of their writing over time.

It would also be interesting to see whether Chinese doctoral students studying in a different English-speaking academic environment experience the same types of writing emotions found in my research. Participants in my study are not required to attend lectures in their provisional year, and thus their writing emotions are not associated with classroom settings. Future researchers may explore the emotions of Chinese candidates whose class attendance is compulsory at their proposal writing stage. By doing so, researchers may find out other categories of writing emotions, which my research may not include.

Finally, given the nature of the manual-labelling method, emotion interpretation is a time-consuming, complicated, and subjective process. As Quan and Ren (2010) suggest, interpreters often "follow their first intuition" to interpret emotions (p. 734). However, Scherer (2005) argues that interpreters' intuition is often subjective. Therefore, further research needs to combine manual-labelling methods with rule-based or statistical learning approaches to improve the accuracy of emotion classification in the context of doctoral writing.

4.6 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to explore Chinese doctoral students' emotions towards their thesis proposal writing. More than 60% of the survey responses were associated with students' negative emotions. The interview responses reflected a similar trend to the survey results and revealed four forms of expression that students used to describe their emotions, including metaphors and idioms. By building a lexicon corpus, I classified these expressions into eight writing emotion categories. Sadness was the most frequently described emotion, whereas surprise was the least. Despite the primacy of negative feelings, my findings highlighted the importance of students' positive emotions in their writing processes, such as happiness and inspiration, which have been largely ignored in the literature yet should be given equal attention. A considerable part of this chapter has been dedicated to the methods I developed to systematically analyse students' emotions expressed in the interview responses. The development of the lexicon corpus including both English and Chinese descriptors makes a

significant contribution to the field of academic emotion classification. Moreover, eight emotion categories resulting from the corpus paved the way for my exploration into the triggering situations of students' writing emotions, which I will take up in the next chapter.

Chapter Five: Triggering Situations and Students' Appraisals

> The emotions are all those feelings that so change men as to affect their judgments, and that are also attended by pain or pleasure.
>
> - Aristotle

If emotions are the shiny leaves of a tree, then what does the tree look like and where are its roots? In other words, where do emotions come from? Evolutionary scientists see human emotions as biological responses to specific stimuli (e.g., Darwin & Prodger, 1998; Izard, 1992). Appraisal theorists claim that emotions are driven by the ways individuals interpret stimuli (e.g., Frijda, 1986; Scherer, 2009). Social constructionists propose that emotions are produced, experienced, influenced, and expressed within specific social and cultural contexts (e.g., Averill, 1980; Lutz, 1988). Despite the different opinions on the origin of emotions, researchers generally agree that stimuli are the triggers of emotions in the first place. What they debate about is which aspects of emotion should be emphasised: evolutionary scientists focus on biological responses, appraisal theorists highlight cognitive processes, and social constructionists are concerned with contextual influences.

As explained in Chapter Two, I opted to view Chinese doctoral students' writing emotions through the lens of Roseman's (1996) appraisal theory. The central idea of this theory is focusing on examining individuals' cognitive processes when they appraise (or interpret) stimuli. For example, a student feels inspired about his received critical feedback on his first draft because he evaluates critiques as a constructive way to improve his research writing; whereas another student feels disappointed about her received critical feedback because she interprets it as a sign of her scholarly incapability. In such cases, two students have encountered the same trigger in their writing processes, but because of their different evaluations of the critical feedback, they have experienced opposite emotions (i.e., inspired and disappointed).

Roseman's (1996) appraisal theory has shaped this analysis in three aspects. First, in doctoral writing, students' emotions are associated with specific stimuli or triggering situations.

Second, students evaluate the triggers in accordance with an important appraisal component: *motive-consistency*. Third, students' positive appraisal results lead to positive emotions (*motive-consistent*), whereby students appraise the triggers as facilitating their proposal writing or helpful for making progress on their work; by contrast, students' negative appraisal results tend to produce negative emotions (*motive-inconsistent*), whereby students appraise the triggers as impeding their proposal writing or making it difficult to make progress on their work. As explained in Chapter Two, although Roseman's appraisal theory underpinned my research, I also took account of social and cultural influences that may impact on Chinese students' appraisal processes when interpreting the data.

This chapter presents four types of triggering situations in which students experienced their writing-related emotions: Supervision, Writing Process, Research, and Collegial Community. The findings enhance our understanding of how first-year Chinese doctoral scholars experience their proposal writing emotionally and how these triggers impede and/or facilitate their writing. Moreover, these findings form the basis for a new theoretical framework for conceptualising writing emotions, which can be used to guide institutional practitioners to act upon the emotional dimension of doctoral writing (see Chapter Seven).

This chapter begins by describing the above four types of triggering situations from the online survey and interview responses, and how the eight emotion categories reported in Chapter Four were distributed in these four situations. I then go on to present how doctoral students appraised these triggers towards writing impediment and/or facilitation. Finally, I discuss my findings in respect to the previous literature cited in Chapter Two, ending with a summary of the limitations and implications of the research presented in this chapter.

5.1 Triggering Situations

5.1.1 A Summary of Online Survey Responses

A total of 171 responses were received in the online survey textboxes, with almost 60% describing participants' negative writing situations (see Table 5.1). Writing Process was the most commonly reported triggering situation, whereby negative responses in this category occurred nearly twice as often as positive comments. Although Supervision was the second most

described situation (35%), it was also the situation in which the greatest number of participants experienced positive writing emotions (20%) when working on their proposals (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1

Triggering Situations from Survey Responses

	Triggering situations		
	Negative	Positive	Total
Writing Process	29%	14%	43%
Supervision	15%	20%	35%
Research	9%	5%	14%
Collegial Community	5%	3%	8%
Total	58%	42%	100%

5.1.2 A Summary of Interview Responses

In the interview transcripts, I observed only a 4% difference between responses regarding impeding thesis proposal writing and those for facilitating thesis writing (see Table 5.2). In general, participants taking part in the interviews spoke equally about their positive and negative writing situations, which was a different trend compared to the survey responses. Supervision topped the frequency list in the interview responses, and turned out to be the most influential situation in either impeding or facilitating participants' writing, occurring 19% more often than Writing Process, which made the strongest showing in the survey responses. Based on the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, I would have expected that my participants' writing emotions were primarily triggered by writing-itself, such as finding a voice or developing ideas and arguments (e.g., Cotterall, 2013; Lonka et al., 2019; Russell-Pinson & Harris, 2019). However, my interview data highlighted that students' writing emotions, including both positive and negative emotions, were primarily associated with their supervisory experiences. I will discuss this finding in Section 5.3. Research and Collegial Community seemed to have a relatively minor influence on participants' writing emotions (see Table 5.2), which showed a similar trend to the survey responses. Despite this finding, the collegial community turned out to

be the most important group of people that Chinese doctoral students turned to for help to cope with their emotions, which I will take up in Chapter Six. An overview of the themes regarding these four types of triggering situations is presented in Table 5.3. These themes will be explored in detail along with participants' appraisal descriptions in the following section of this chapter.

Table 5.2

Triggering Situations from Interview Responses

Triggering situations	Appraisals		
	Impeding	Facilitating	Total
Supervision	20%	29%	49%
Writing Process	17%	13%	30%
Research	9%	2%	11%
Collegial Community	6%	4%	10%
Total	52%	48%	100%

Note. A total of 589 responses were received in the interview transcripts. Impeding = Impeding thesis proposal writing. Facilitating = Facilitating thesis proposal writing.

Table 5.3

Thematic Analysis of Students' Triggering Situations from Interview Responses

<table>
<tr><th>Triggering situation</th><th>Impeding writing</th><th>Facilitating writing</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="5">Supervision
(n=289)</td><td colspan="2">Writing feedback</td></tr>
<tr><td>Communication with supervisors</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Supervisors' writing support</td></tr>
<tr><td>Supervisors' lack of research support</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>Supervisors' emotional support</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="5">Writing Process
(n=177)</td><td>Critical thinking and writing</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Time and project management</td></tr>
<tr><td>Writer's block
The craft of writing</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Writing abilities and skills</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>Knowing what to write</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Research
(n=65)</td><td>Research topic selection
Research design/experiment</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>Interest in the research project</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Collegial Community
(n=59)</td><td>Doctoral peer relationships
Institutional communities</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>Supportive peer writing communities</td></tr>
</table>

Note. Themes are ordered based on their corresponding occurrence of frequencies (n). Themes appraised as impeding proposal writing are highlighted in the middle blue column; themes appraised as facilitating proposal writing are highlighted in the right-hand orange column. Themes not highlighted are appraised as both impeding and facilitating proposal writing.

Figure 5.1 shows a distribution of eight categories of writing emotions in four triggering situations identified in the interview responses. Participants' supervisory experiences were associated with all eight writing emotions, with inspiration topping the frequency list, occurring almost twice as often as the combined frequencies of sadness and happiness. Regarding students' self-centred-writing activities, happiness turned out to be the most reported emotion,

closely followed by inspiration, confusion, and sadness. Sadness, confusion, and tension were the three main emotions that participants tended to feel about the research aspect of in their writing processes. Finally, sadness made the strongest showing in relation to the collegial community in which students worked on their thesis proposals.

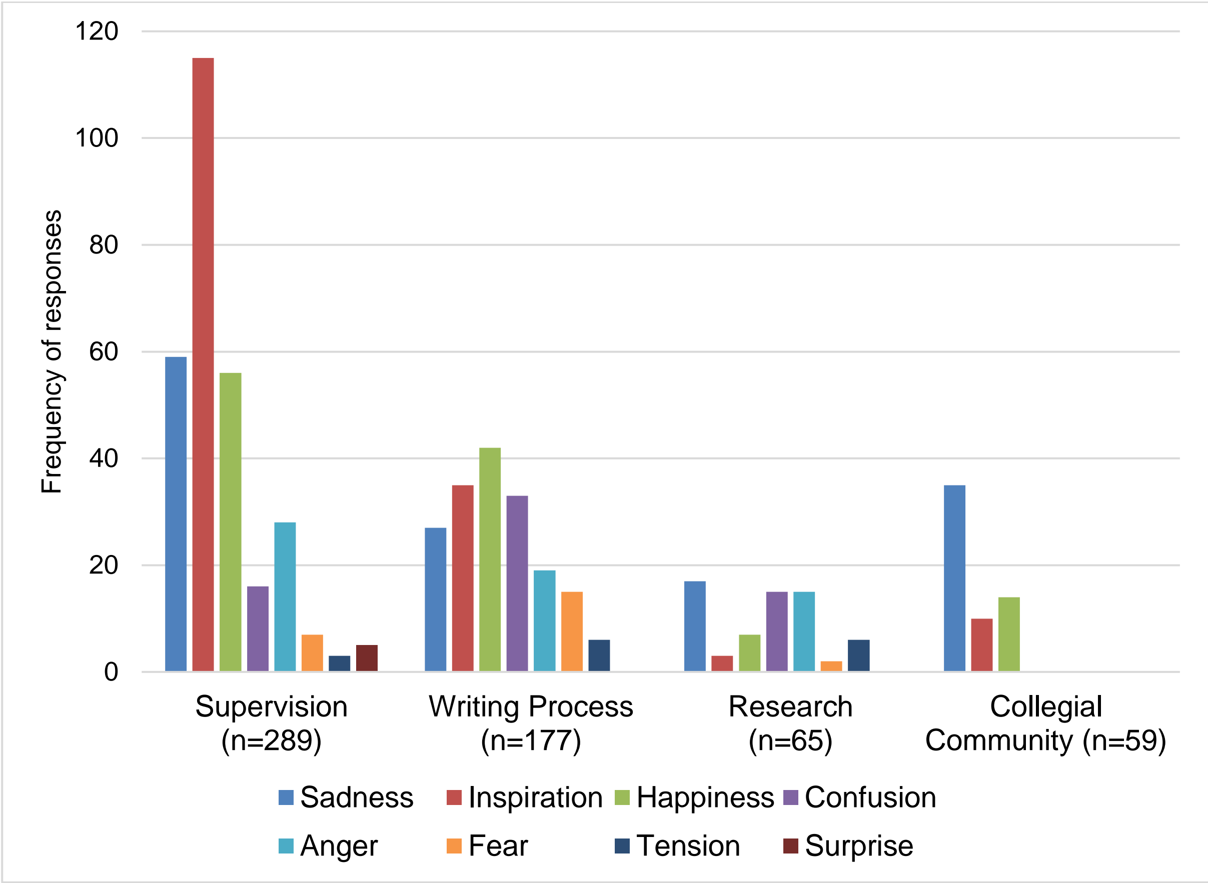

Figure 5.1. Occurrences of eight writing emotion categories in four triggering situations.

When I compared the participants' responses regarding the writing emotions in Figure 5.1 with the ones previously discussed in Chapter Four, a somewhat complex picture emerged. As presented in Chapter Four, sadness (n= 141) was the most reported writing emotion, followed by inspiration (n=78), when interviewees were asked to describe how they felt about their proposal writing. However, when speaking about their triggering situations, participants were significantly more likely to report on their writing situations associated with inspiration (n=163), although sadness (n=138) also made a strong showing. This finding is because 478 responses to writing emotions were received and reported on in Chapter Four, whereas a total of 589 responses to triggering situations were obtained; many of these 100 more additional

responses were mainly about the participants' descriptions of how their supervision experiences had led them to feel inspired about their proposal writing.

Having now provided an overview of the triggering situations that led to students' emotions about their proposal writing, in what follows, I explore the themes presented in Table 5.3 to explain how these triggers impeded and/or facilitated students' writing in their eyes. Informed by the concept of motive-consistency from Roseman's (1996) appraisal theory, I structure the writing of the following section into two parts: impeding thesis proposal writing and facilitating thesis proposal writing.

5.2 Students' Appraisals

5.2.1 Impeding Thesis Proposal Writing

Supervision was the most frequently described situation perceived as impeding Chinese doctoral students' thesis proposal writing; by contrast, collegial community was the least. A striking number of supervision-related responses were oriented towards negative/critical feedback and supervisors not reading students' writing carefully. Contradictory feedback from different supervisors also was emotionally difficult for students.

Supervision.

Writing Feedback. Negative or critical feedback from supervisors was emotionally difficult for first-year Chinese doctoral students and could decrease their motivation for proposal writing. Three-quarters of the interviewees spoke candidly about negative feedback given by their supervisors. Despite this, the majority believed that receiving critical feedback is a "common thing" and even an "essential learning process" for apprentice academic scholars. However, when the negative aspect was over-focused and students' effort on writing was "not appreciated" by their supervisors, students tended to lose confidence in making decisions in their writing processes and felt less motivated to work on their thesis proposals:

> She [supervisor] commented that my writing was too confusing to read without saying anything positive. I've put great effort into my writing, but she still thinks it is a piece of rubbish. She always says my writing is not okay to read. Whenever I see this comment, I'm extremely mad and don't want to do any writing for the rest of the day. (Victoria,

Business)

Negative feedback also could be embarrassing and "face-losing" when it was given in a "very direct" way, especially at a group supervision meeting:

> He (supervisor) criticised my writing when we were having a group meeting. Some of the students were post-doctoral research fellows and some just enrolled in our programme. I was so embarrassed, shocked, and didn't know what to do. I think they will look down upon me. I don't have face anymore! (Jacob, Engineering)

Many of the candidates I interviewed regarded vague or implicit writing feedback as "not helpful" and "dissatisfying", which can pose a risk of students mistrusting their supervisors' professional competencies. For instance, Grace (Education) viewed her supervisor's general feedback as "not specific to my research area; her feedback has been always like: 're-write this paragraph' or 're-structure this section.' I wish she could say a little bit more." A few students were dissatisfied with their received feedback even when it was positive; Emma (Education) muttered when I interviewed her in a public park: "He [supervisor] emailed me one sentence- 'well done, continue your writing.' Is that all? Does he mean my writing is flawless?" Ava, another education student, saw her supervisor's general positive feedback as a sign of irresponsibility and carelessness: "Maybe she [supervisor] didn't read my writing or doesn't care about my research at all."

Contradictory feedback given by different supervisors threw beginning doctoral students into confusion and surprise. Some participants adopted a passive attitude towards their conflicting comments (e.g., by trying to ignore them) to maintain a collective harmonious relationship with their supervisors. Ellie (Business) was typical: "I didn't know whom I should listen to and I didn't want to offend any of them. So, I just deleted those confusing parts." Some students were "scared" to raise the conflicting issues because of the power that their supervisors held in their hands; Emma (Arts & Humanities) commented: "I was so surprised to see this situation, but I'm scared to tell her because she may be unhappy and refuse to supervise me anymore." This is not to say all the contradictory feedback comes from different supervisors. According to my participants' accounts, conflicting feedback also could be given by

the same supervisor in different periods, which tended to raise students' doubts about their supervisors' academic writing competencies:

> This is the third time that he read my entire proposal and I thought he would be very clear about my research. However, some of his latest comments were contradictory with the ones he wrote three months ago. I revised my proposal based on his previous comments, and it turned out to be wrong again! Probably he doesn't know how to deal with my problems. (Oliver, Science & Medical Science)

A large number of responses surrounding writing feedback were associated with participants' dissatisfaction with their supervisors' not reading their writing carefully. Most of the participants noted that they chose to silence their voices to build a peaceful relationship with their supervisors, even if they believed their supervisor's treatment was "unfair". Mia (Education), for example, cited that her supervisor "spent ten minutes reading" her writing before their supervision meetings but she opted to live with it: "I don't want to cause any damage in our relationship, so I just let it go." Oliver (Science & Medical Science) regarded his supervisor's "unfair treatment" as a personal attack but chose to tolerate it: "Maybe she [supervisor] doesn't like me. I don't know what to do so I just put up with her." Despite this finding, I was pleased to note that a few students proactively communicated their dissatisfaction to their supervisors. Natalie (Science & Medical Science) was one of those brave ones:

> One day I went to his office and asked him why he didn't give me any feedback on my recent writing. He said my writing was too raw to read, and he would proofread my writing when my writing is ready to submit or publish; otherwise, he focuses on my research contents and experiments. I then understood that I should have presented my best writing to him.

Communication with Supervisors. Approximately half of the students I interviewed confessed that they encountered communication problems with their supervisors. Because of the communication issues, two of them postponed submitting their research proposals. William (Engineering), for instance, extended his proposal submission for an extra three months: "I haven't let my supervisor read my research proposal since the first draft I sent to him. Because

of that, I had to postpone my official submission time." For Charlotte (Science & Medical Science), communication barriers were like "heavy anxiety bricks" on her back: "I can't fall asleep at night when I think about my proposal. I worry about it all the time. I don't know what to say to my supervisor." When I asked the participants to explain the underlying causes of their communication issues, a few spoke of their supervisors not answering their emails in time; some admitted their shame and guilt from making little writing progress, which stopped them meeting their supervisors; however, the majority pointed to their own reluctance to confront their supervisors:

> I used to think my supervisors should contact me first and let me know what I need to do with my research and thesis proposal. Because of this, in the past six months, I did not contact them proactively. I've always waited for them to email me to ask to schedule an appointment to meet. (William, Engineering)

Supervision styles were found to trigger students' negative emotions in writing. Some participants felt they could not "take a breath" because of their supervisors' dominant role in their supervisor-supervisee relationship; Harper (Science & Medical Science) explained: "He directly changed my writing and even re-wrote some parts of my first draft. He didn't ask what I thought. He didn't give me any chance to express my own opinions." By contrast, almost two-thirds of my interviewees stated that their supervisors gave them too much freedom in their writing; Ellie (Business) expressed her dissatisfaction: "What annoys me is that they always say 'you can try'. I understand that my supervisors want me to think independently. But independence doesn't mean they are not allowed to offer me help!" When the relationships with their supervisors are strained, students' emotional discomforts may endanger their mental health:

> I'm extremely depressed. I hate writing and I hate my studies. As usual, he (supervisor) doesn't know about this as he seldom asks about my writing. I have no one to ask for help and can't do anything but to tolerate this. (Daniel, Arts & Humanities)

Supervisors' Writing Support. In my research, I differentiated between writing feedback and writing support. Writing feedback focuses on supervisors' written and oral comments on a student's completed writing, whereas writing support highlights other forms of support that supervisors give to assist their students in proposal writing (e.g., writing resources or training). This type of support can be provided before the student's writing, during their writing, and after their writing. Three participants from science and engineering backgrounds regarded their supervisors writing support, in addition to their writing feedback, as insufficient. They all spoke of a lack of peer group or meetings organised by their supervisors for their science writing:

> We, science students, often work in a research group. My boss (main supervisor) has more than ten PhD students and several post-doctoral research fellows working for him. This is great and we meet every single Friday for discussion. But it seems that our meetings are only about experimental issues, lab problems, conferences, and funding. We never have had a chance to talk about writing. Maybe he thinks writing is not an issue for his students, but it is to me! (Ethan, Science & Medical science)

Supervisors' Lack of Research Support. With respect to this theme, participants from hard sciences claimed that their supervisors did not offer them practical help with their laboratory experiment designs, which blocked their way to "get ready" for proposal writing. From the conversation I had with Addison (Science & Medical Science), I learned that thesis proposal writing for science students "is not just about typing words onto a computer screen". Instead, it involves "setting up a platform, making experiments, and analysing the data." It seems that supervisors research support at science students' proposal writing stage can be an indirect emotional trigger for their negative emotions, particularly anger:

> I still could not figure out why my supervisors never gave me practical help, for example, where to find the needed substance! Last week, I asked him how to build my experimental platform and run the machine. He didn't tell me what to do or which technician I should contact in my research lab. (Lucas, Science & Medical Science)

Three-quarters of the Chinese candidates from social sciences and humanities in my research were confused, unsatisfied, and angry about their New Zealand supervisors not providing research topics, as would be expected from their Chinese supervisors in China. Ellie (Business) explained:

> When I was working on my master's thesis, my Chinese supervisor had suggested a topic for me. He told me that this topic was new, and no researcher had worked on it by that time. He also told me about the papers and books I need to read and where I should start to build on the prior knowledge. However, my Kiwi supervisors are very different. Whenever I ask them about what or which topic I should work on, they always say: 'This is your doctorate. It is up to you.' I was very upset during the first two months. I didn't know what to write about.

Writing Process.

Critical Thinking and Writing. Doctoral students are expected to engage in a critical conversation with previous research scholars in their thesis writing. As for the Chinese students I interviewed, I found that they were frustrated by being asked to critique or challenge other scholars' ideas or work, and some were challenged by the expectation that they should express their own ideas in their proposal writing.

When I asked them to explain what made it difficult for them to put on a "critical thinking-hat", some responded that there was a lack of training in critical writing when they studied English in China: "As a science student in China, I had only one year of English course and it was in the second year of my master's studies. The course was very general and non-academic" (Jacob, Engineering). Some pointed to the influence of their "only-one-right-answer" thought, which has been provided by their Chinese English teachers and supervisors in China: "When I was studying in China, I was expected to provide a right answer to a question. I got used to this idea and I always think that there is only one right answer" (Mia, Education). Some mentioned the effects of their prior 'teacher-is-authority' learning environment: "I got used to listening to what teachers say and do what they tell me to do without questioning them. I never want to challenge anyone, and I think every single published paper that I read is good" (Ava,

Arts & Humanities). And a few believed that their previous academic English writing and supervision experiences in China negatively affected their critical thinking abilities. For example, Zoe (Education), a previous English major student in China for her master's degree, over-simplified the task of critical thinking at a doctoral level:

> This is what I knew about critical thinking when I was working on my masters' thesis: summarising the previous literature on my research topic, pointing out which parts haven't been done yet, and explaining why they are important; then describing what my research problem is and how I'm going to solve it. But for my doctoral proposal writing, I found critical thinking is much more complicated, and it is very challenging for me.

Isabella (Science & Medical Science) was persuaded by her Chinese supervisors in China to write objectively and emotionlessly, like a scientist:

> When I was doing my master's degree in psychology and working on my thesis in China, my Chinese supervisor asked me to write objectively. Psychology is a subject of science and I was required to write with a passive voice, with objective expressions, and not showing any emotions. As she was my supervisor back in that time and has published lots of research papers, I believed what she had suggested must be right.

Three weeks after Isabella's interview with me, I received an email from her and was pleased to note that Isabella's New Zealand supervisors encourage her to show emotion and her voice in her writing: "My New Zealand supervisors actually suggested me to humanise my writing and make it an interesting story to read."

In my interviews, a common theme was the story of how challenging the participants found their literature review writing to be. They reported a number of challenges such as "searching for the relevant literature", "comprehending other authors' publications", and "categorising and critically evaluating the literature". A few even struggled to understand the meaning of literature review. Lucas (Science & Medical Science) was one of them: "Although I've read a lot of research papers, I still don't know what literature review means. I think I have to go back to read the book 'What is literature review'." Although I heard this story many times from my participants, I was surprised to find that some of them were not aware of the literature

review writing workshops offered by our host university, and the majority of those who have attended the workshops believed they were “too general” and “not useful” to their literature review writing. I will detail my participants’ descriptions of how they sought support outside their supervision for proposal writing in Chapter Six.

Time and Project Management. More than half of the interviewees linked their negative proposal writing experiences to their failure to reach their writing targets. Some of them could not help worrying about whether they could finish their doctoral studies on time, particularly those who were on a Chinese government sponsored-scholarship: “I am on a scholarship and need to finish my thesis before [year]. But sometimes I couldn’t complete the writing tasks before the deadline and this really stresses me out” (Zoe, Education).

When I asked the interviewees who set the targets for their writing, most laid the blame on themselves, but a few pointed fingers to their supervisors: “My supervisor set me a deadline to hand in the writing, but I felt very stressful about the amount of the work that I needed to do. That’s a lot of reading and writing work for a week!” (Lucas, Science & Medical Science). Lucas’s responses highlighted one of the most common aspects of doctoral writing: enormous effort involved in reading. Reading is essential for proposal writing and is especially crucial at the thesis planning stage. However, students found it hard to manage their time spent reading their research literature and putting words on the page. Some spent “too much time” reading and left too little time for writing:

> I set a goal that I would have to finish 2,000 words by the end of the week. I thought I should read papers, get some ideas and then use one or two days for writing. I downloaded a lot of papers, reading every single sentence, highlighting the important ideas and useful expressions, and putting them into different folders. But I spent too much time doing these, and just wrote 500 words! (Sophia, Engineering)

Some were trapped in a “non-stop-reading” cycle because of the reference list at the back end of a research article:

> When I finish reading an article, I often find its referenced literature are important for my research. So, I download the online papers and read them. Then, I find these papers

> include more important references that I must read, so I download those ones and read them all. This process repeats again and again, and I don’t know where to stop. (Luna, Arts & Humanities)

A rare few said that they took a long time honing and polishing their sentences and struggled to make time for reading, especially when the proposal-submission clock started to tick:

> Sitting on a chair, having a cup of tea, and reading books is too much of a luxury for me. I don’t have time for that at this moment. My submission is due in two weeks, and my proposal is still quite messy and incoherent. I have to work on it, bash it into shape, and get it ready for my proposal reviewers to read. (Daniel, Arts & Humanities)

A key theme in the science and engineering Chinese doctoral students’ accounts was the tension between their proposal writing and experimental work. Some participants spent most of their time at the proposal writing stage on experiments and started to work on the writing only at the end of their provisional year:

> 90% of my time is spent making experiments in the lab. I don’t write every day and I will leave it to the end of my provisional year when I have some time. I have to go to the lab every 30 minutes to measure my samples. It is too difficult for me to block a time for writing. The experiment breaks my time into pieces. When I finish one group of experiments, I go to my doctoral room to drink some water and relax a bit. When I am about to write something, it is the time for me to go to the lab to take out some samples. (Addison, Science & Medical Science)

Some chose not to write until they have completed specific parts of their experiments:

> Usually I don’t write until I finish one group of experiments. However, sometimes when my experiments fail, I have to re-do them. I remember one time I spent more than three months working on my second group of experiments because I had to re-do them again and again. During that three months, I didn’t write a single word. (Oliver, Science & Medical Science)

Because they believed “experiments take more time than writing”, a few science participants experienced seriously negative thoughts, such as constantly worrying about failing to submit their research proposal before the deadline or not passing their provisional year review:

> My next group of experiments probably will take more than six months to finish. Because I changed to a different research area last month, and I needed to purchase new substances, contact technicians for a different machine and make the experiments. That’s a lot of work! I have less than six months left in my first year. I’m afraid that I’m going to fail my provisional year. I can’t help but worry about this potential failure all the time. (Ethan, Science & Medical Science)

For the participants who are mothers living with their children, family commitments made them struggle to manage their proposal writing; Ella (Education) stated:

> My son needs to go to kindergarten from Monday to Friday. I have to drive him to the school and pick him up at 3 or 4pm. After 4pm, I must feed, wash, and put him to sleep. After he falls asleep, finally I can write.

Because of family issues, Harper (Science & Medical Science) felt disappointed about making little progress on her work and tended to become passive about meeting her supervisors:

> My daughter was ill, and I didn’t want to do anything but help her recover. I was stuck in a very negative emotional state. My main supervisor suggested to go to see her individually every Wednesday or Friday to report our weekly progress; but the meeting is not compulsory. Because I didn’t do any writing, I was too embarrassed to see her for a while.

Writer’s Block. When I asked the participants to describe the situations in which they felt negative about their proposal writing, many quickly steered the conversations towards writer’s block, where they found it difficult to come up with new ideas for their writing. From their interview transcripts, I identified several causes leading to their blocked moments. Some students were fearful of putting their ideas on the page for supervisors and peers to critique: “They may think that my ideas are not right or even stupid. I am even unable to type one word onto my computer. My brain turns to mush, and I want to throw myself in a towel and hide from

everyone" (Grace, Education). Some wanted their ideas to be perfect before they put pen to paper or touched a keyboard: "I don't touch my computer before I'm satisfied with the idea or what I want to say in a section. I want it to be perfect" (Ava, Arts & Humanities). Some knew what to write but struggled to find a 'right sentence' to start with: "I have so much to say but I am in a dilemma of deciding which sentence I should begin with" (Ella, Education). Most participants believed that they didn't have enough professional knowledge for their research writing:

> My writing block situation is mainly related to my disciplinary knowledge. I'm frustrated when explaining new mechanical models. Because I'm working on an advanced research project and some methods are cutting-edge, I find it difficult to put words on the page, especially when I'm not very familiar with the models. (William, Engineering)

Because of writer's block, Daniel (Arts & Humanities) tended to regard himself as an incapable academic writer and got annoyed "every morning":

> This is almost my daily writing routine: sitting in front of my desk, switching on my computer, opening the word document, and then my head goes empty. When I am staring at the blank screen, I'm so annoyed and pessimistic.

The Craft of Writing. Writing in a non-native language is challenging for most doctoral scholars. This task can be extraordinarily taxing for apprentice scholars who have little academic English writing experience. In my interviews, I heard many stories of the difficulties that my participants had as second language writers. They talked about, for example, vocabulary, grammar, and syntax:

> I have to look up the dictionary to find a right word in my writing. It takes me a long time to write, even just one short paragraph. I also struggle to use right prepositions and articles in my writing. My supervisors said they get distracted by my grammar mistakes when reading my proposal. The problem is that, sometimes, I even don't realise they are mistakes (Jacob, Science & Medical Science)

Despite the above language-related issues, participants seemed to be even more challenged by the concision and clarity of their proposal writing. For instance, Victoria (Business) told me that she found it difficult to express her ideas briefly, which was influenced by her prior writing practices in China:

> I always write a lot, exceeding required word limits. My English teacher in China, who was Chinese, encouraged us to write long sentences and complex expressions. For example, I was required to use different clauses, complicated phrases and big words in my English writing. The more complex sentences I wrote, the higher my assignments would be marked by my lecturers.

The above responses highlight the taxing process that the doctoral students in my study undertook when crafting their thesis proposals. Despite the challenges, interestingly, a few of them told me about their "secret potion" in English writing, i.e., translation, but I believe that they should empty their potion bottles:

> When I'm writing my proposal, I think about the ideas and the sentences in Chinese in my head and translate the Chinese sentences into English. Sometimes, I write one paragraph in Chinese at first, and then use Google translation to translate it into English. (Eric, Engineering)

Academic Writing Abilities/Skills. When participants described crafting their proposal writing, they all stressed the importance of writing skills or abilities in their crafting work. More than half of the interviewees claimed that they were not confident about their writing abilities, especially those who had little academic writing and publishing experience before coming to New Zealand for their doctoral studies. Addison (Science & Medical Science) was typical: "Except for the IELTS (International English Language Testing System), I only wrote twice in English before I started my doctoral studies. They were the abstracts of my bachelor's and master's theses." Although some of my interviewees used to study English and published research articles in English in international journals when they were in China, they all expressed great anxiety about their academic English writing skills, constantly worrying about whether their supervisors like reading their thesis proposals. A few even lost their sleep at night and were

seeing a university counsellor when I interviewed them:

> The negative feelings have been inside my body for a long time. Three weeks ago, I lost sleep. My supervisor suggested me to see university counsellors. They gave me some medication pills to take, but I don't think they work. Every day when I look up at the sky, the sunshine is dark; food is tasteless; and everything is cast onto a shadow. (Emma, Arts & Humanities)

Research.

Research Topic Selection. Proposal writing can be a daunting task for most doctoral scholars; selecting a research topic to work on can be an even more frustrating process. Almost half of the participants claimed that their frustration or anger in proposal writing began with their topic selection. Some students spent more than half of their provisional year choosing a topic and left little time to work on their writing: "This is the seventh month of my provisional year, and I still don't know which aspects of this area I should focus on. I'm afraid that I won't be able to finish my writing on time" (Luna, Arts & Humanities). Some changed to a different research area in the mid-stage of their provisional year:

> I spent about five months selecting my previous research topic. It took me a lot of time, I mean, time in reading, thinking, and writing. But I gave it up two weeks ago, because I really didn't understand some of the key concepts and the research was not interesting to me. (Ellie, Business)

Some expressed high tension about their topic selection because they changed the subject of their master's studies to a different one for their doctoral studies:

> I changed my subject from psychology to early childhood education study. I used to be a psychology student but now I am an education student. Education is a new area for me, and I need to read a lot to know which concepts or theories I will need include in my research proposal. I must start with the basics. (Ella, Education)

And some were confused about the topic they had chosen and were thinking of changing it at the time when I interviewed them:

> The more I read, the more confused I get about the topic. The more confused I am, the more I will have to read. I am thinking about changing to a different research topic. But this is the 7th month of my first year and I'm not sure what to do. Should I keep working on my current topic or shall I change to an easier one? (Jacob, Engineering)

Due to her difficulties in selecting a research topic and the tension of completing a thesis proposal in a timely fashion, Emma (Arts & Humanities) confessed to me in the interview that she was thinking of giving up her doctoral studies:

> It confuses me, putting me into doubts about what my goal of coming to New Zealand is and what my final goal of getting a doctoral degree is. Maybe it is pointless for me to continue my doctoral studies. Maybe I should go back to China.

Research Design/Experiment. Thesis proposal writing is a type of research writing. Most first-year doctoral candidates are expected to include their research designs in their thesis proposals. Science candidates may also need to describe their experiment procedures and report the results. Therefore, I was not surprised to find that research aspects of proposal writing stirred up students' emotions in their writing. Three related themes were identified from my interview transcripts. The most striking one involved failed experiments, which were frequently described by the science and engineering participants: "We science students have a lot of emotional moments associated with our experiments. When the experiments fail, we must stop everything and re-do the experiments until we get the substances we need" (Lucas, Science & Medical Science). A few of them were afraid to tell their supervisors about their failed experiments because, as they said, they didn't want to "disappoint" their supervisors:

> I chose a wrong method and my experiments failed. I was too scared to tell them (supervisors) this, because I don't want to disappoint them. I don't think they have enough research funding for me to buy the substances for my new experiments. (Charlotte, Science & Medical Science)

The second theme surrounding research design and experimentation involved funding issues. When I first heard this story from one of my participants, I thought this issue might be an individual case, as I didn't expect funding could trigger students' emotions in their proposal

writing. Not until I was told the same story a few times did I notice that funding could be a barrier to students designing their desired research for their thesis proposals, especially for those whose research was lab-based:

> When I thought about how to design my experiments for my proposal, I considered my PReSS account balance[1] first. I need to think about which experiments are not too expensive for me to make. I need to buy gloves and chemical substances for my experiments and pay for keeping the lab machines running until I get promising results for my research. All these fees are supposed to be covered by my funding, which I think is far not enough. (Addison, Science & Medical Science)

I identified the third theme from my conversations with the social science participants who described difficulties with ethics applications, which led to their slow writing progress or even re-designing research. Most of these students' projects involve human participants for their research (as with mine). Therefore, in their thesis proposals, they are expected to explain, for instance, who their targeted human participants are and how they will approach the participants and protect the participants' provided information and data. These descriptions must also be included in their ethics applications for the approval of the University Ethics Committee before starting to collect data. However, this process could lock them in a 'discouraging box', because the committee may have different or even the opposite opinions about their research designs:

> My research will need to involve several kids as participants, and I have been working on the ethics issue for a long time. I've submitted my application to the committee, but it was suspended. The committee gave me a long list of points to revise, which means that I will have to re-design my study. (Grace, Education)

Collegial Community.

Doctoral Peer Relationships. Strained collegial relationships could lead to doctoral students physically disengaging from their peers in their institutional writing communities. Most

[1] Postgraduate Research Student Support, a type of research funding provided by the University of Auckland for all its doctoral students.

of the students I interviewed stated that they spent most of their writing time on campus; only a few preferred staying home or sitting in a café near a beach to work on their writing. Because I like the idea of writing in a comfortable environment, I asked the latter group to explain how they came up with the idea of writing off-campus. Although they all mentioned how relaxed they were near the beach or how much they enjoyed the coffee, I also heard some unpleasant stories about their peers whom they tended to avoid in their office at the university. For example, Ellie (Business) admitted to me that a breakdown of the relationship with one of her peers was actually the initial reason why she decided to write off-campus:

> I stopped going to my office two months ago because of a doctoral student. Whenever he was listening to music and the sound was really loud, I couldn't concentrate on my writing. One time I asked him to turn it down, but he ignored me. Then I talked to my doctoral coordinator in my department about this issue, and since then, he hasn't talked to me anymore, even if we were sitting next to each other. Because I felt very uncomfortable about writing in this kind of environment, I have decided to bring my laptop and write somewhere I don't need to see him.

As for the participants who write their thesis proposals in a university office or on a hot desk, I also heard some stories about their unpleasant collegial relationships:

> Whenever she is working near me, I feel unconformable and want to leave. When we have departmental meetings, we doctoral students are supposed to sit together and talk to each other about the meeting topics. She never joins the table where I sit. I don't enjoy writing in this weird environment, and I've applied to move to another office room so I can avoid seeing her. (Emma, Arts & Humanities)

Institutional Communities. Loneliness was the keyword I heard most often when the interviewees spoke of their feelings about their departmental communities. As Zoe (Education) described, "Everyone is working on a small island. I can't reach them because my island is very far away from theirs, although we are floating in the same water." Although most social sciences and humanities students tend to work on an autonomous project, while science and engineering students are more likely to work as members of a research team, in my research both parties

described a few causes of their writing loneliness. Some science participants reported that they could not fit in the research teams in which they work for their doctoral projects, especially Lucas (Science & Medical Science), because he is the only Chinese national in the team: "I am the only Chinese and the rest are either Kiwis or English-native-speaking international students. I feel isolated because I just can't fit in the team." Some mentioned that few of their peers could understand their research writing, which made them feel marginalised in their department/faculty communities: "I've tried to find some doctoral students in other departments to talk about my thesis proposal, but unfortunately, I haven't found any yet. It's hard to find the right ones to talk to" (Victoria, Business). Some pointed to the invisible wall between themselves and their current institutional communities. Interestingly, according to the participants' accounts, I found that Chinese doctoral students were more emotionally attached to their departments/faculties in China than the ones in New Zealand; social practices or cultural customs may be one of the reasons:

> When I was in China, I had a strong sense of belonging and attachment to my faculty, my school mates, and my teachers. I often visited their offices even if I didn't have any academic-related question. However, in New Zealand, I have to write an email if I want to see my supervisors. This kind of communication makes me feel distanced. (Mia, Education)

Writing loneliness was also associated with physical environments where doctoral students conduct their writing. For instance, Grace (Education) was dissatisfied with writing at a hot desk and being separated from her peers: "I have to carry a lot of books and papers with me every time. Sometimes, I spend more than half an hour to find a free hot desk to work on my writing". Sophia (Engineering) wanted to work in a doctoral room but was allocated to a staff room: "I wish I could be in the same room with other PhD students, because some of them are in the same research area with me. Every day I just sit in front of my computer and work alone". Luna (Arts & Humanities) tried to speak to other peers about her writing but was not brave enough to break the 'silence' in the room, where a few year-three students were focusing on writing their theses: "We can't speak in that room! Sometimes when we want to talk about our

research or writing, we have to leave the room to find a place where we can talk." The above responses highlighted the influence of doctoral students' academic community on their proposal writing processes. When students feel lonely or isolated from their community, they tend to limit their writing interactions to their supervisors. As Victoria (Business) described: "Because no one can help me with my writing, my supervisor is my only hope."

Thesis proposal writing is hard, daunting and taxing for Chinese doctoral students who are studying in an English-speaking country for the first time. They not only have to deal with the technical writing, but also the supervision, research, and academic community aspects of their writing. However, although the students spoke candidly about their negative experiences, I was pleased to note that they also looked on the bright side and infused their writing processes with pleasure, inspiration, and motivation. In the following sub-section, I report the situations in which students felt positive about their proposal writing and how the situations helped them to write.

5.2.2 Facilitating Thesis Proposal Writing

An analysis of the interview transcripts revealed that supervision, particularly supervisors' positive feedback and emotional encouragement, was the most facilitating driver for students' positive writing emotions. Although proposal writing itself is challenging and emotionally difficult, participants spoke with a sense of satisfaction about their accomplished writing targets and improved academic writing skills. In addition, emotional support from the peer writing community in which students were involved brought more inspiration and pleasure into their writing processes, especially peers' mutual encouragement and cheerleading.

Supervision.

Writing Feedback. Supervisors' encouraging comments on students' writing made a strong showing in the interview responses. From the accounts of my participants, I learned that when students have spent months reading, thinking, structuring, writing, crafting, revising, and anxiously waiting for feedback on a piece of writing, they expect their supervisors to affirm their hard work and "say at least one thing is good" about their writing. Apart from the technical knowledge, I found a few interesting forms of positive comments that students perceived as inspiring and encouraging. For instance, Luna (Arts & Humanities) mentioned the encouraging

sentences that her supervisors wrote on the second draft of her proposal: “She hand-wrote: ‘You did a good job in your opening paragraph. I like it!’ Although the rest of the pages were full of red circles and question marks, I literarily jumped from my chair and danced a bit.” Eric (Engineering) spoke proudly about his collection of “big thumb” badges: “We are given a badge when we’ve made progress on our work or come up with a good idea for our research. I stick mine on the bottom of my computer so I can see them when writing.” Luna (Arts & Humanities) was simply satisfied with two words, “thank you”, from her supervisor: “Whenever I send her (supervisor) my writing, she always says thank you, either in person or over email. ‘Thank you’ are two powerful words because I feel like she sees me as her colleague, not her student.”

In addition to the above encouraging comments, participants described an array of helpful feedback that facilitated them to put words on the page, such as question format feedback:

> Instead of suggesting me not to do this or that, my supervisor sometimes asks me some questions in his feedback, for example, “Do these methods apply to the same population?” “What results do you expect by using this theory?”, or “What do you think about this research paper you cited here?” This type of feedback motivates me to think and justify the choice I’ve made in my thesis proposal. (Mia, Education)

Or detailed feedback:

> My supervisors pick one or two paragraphs that they think are important and that may be included in my doctoral thesis after my provisional year. They then give me detailed feedback on the chosen paragraphs, on almost every single sentence. (Isabelle, Science & Medical Science)

Or inclusive feedback:

> He commented on almost every single aspect of my proposal writing, including structure, punctuation, spelling, headings, topic sentences, research design, critical thinking, sample size effect, logical writing, even APA referencing format. (Zoe, Education)

Or feedback on the English language:

> She (supervisor) understands that I need language help at this stage, and she is happy to do that in the feedback on my research proposal. Within the past six weeks, I've been gathering my language problems into a notebook, because I don't want to make the same mistake twice. (Victoria, Business)

Or different rounds of feedback on the same piece of writing:

> My supervisor and I have been working on the same piece of writing six times. I find this type of feedback process useful, because I need to work on it several times until my supervisor thinks my revision is good enough. This process also allows me to understand what my writing should look like in my research discipline. (Victoria, Business)

Or feedback on a 'well done section':

> Sometimes I don't know whether what I've written is clear enough, because most of the feedback in the beginning stage relates to the research aspect of my writing, such as the research questions or design. My supervisor highlighted the sections that she thought were well-written and commented why it was good and suggested that I should keep writing in that way. (Mia, Education)

As explained in Section 5.2.1, despite the negative emotions that critical feedback stirred up, most students I interviewed believed that receiving critiques is an essential learning process for their proposal writing. When critical feedback was given in a "comfortable way", it maintained students' confidence in their writing and encouraged them to cultivate a "growth mindset" (Dweck, 2008) about their research:

> He guided me through the problems and suggested me to look at them from a different perspective. I didn't get upset about what he said at all; in fact, the opposite results happened in my experiments. His feedback helped me better understand what I want to do with my project. (Ethan, Science & Medical Science)

Participants told me that they know their supervisors were very busy, and they respected their supervisors' time spent in reading their thesis proposals. Because of their supervisors' 'busy schedules', students interpreted their updates regarding their feedback as a sign of their supervisors' emotional support, encouragement, and respect for their hard work. This emotional reward, in turn, boosted students' confidence and determination in completing their research proposals:

> My co-supervisor emails me how much of my writing she has commented on and which parts she still needs to work on and how long it takes. Sometimes, she even tells me why she takes this long time reading my writing, for example, some important reports to write or to read one of her master's student's thesis which is due soon. She is very supportive. With her help, I'm more confident to pass my provisional year. (Grace, Education)

Supervisors' Writing Support. Supervisors' writing support in my research fostered doctoral students' pleasant feelings in their thesis proposal writing. Throughout the conversations I had with the 24 interviewees, I could not help noticing that they clearly distinguished between their supervisors' writing feedback and writing support. Positive writing feedback, as I described earlier, increased their confidence in proposal writing and motivated them to write. Positive writing support, according to the participants' accounts, brought happiness into their writing processes.

Four types of supervisors' positive writing support emerged from the interview transcripts. Some students told me that their supervisors offered prompt writing support when they were stuck with writer's block: "She sent back her suggestions and some solutions on the same day I sent her the email" (Hannah, Science & Medical Science). A few stated that their supervisors provided regular academic writing guidance or training at their supervision meetings: "He spared 30 minutes from each supervision meeting in the first two months talking about what he expected my writing to be. His training is really helpful for me to understand the writing practices in my research field" (Victoria, Business). I also heard stories of how main supervisors and co-supervisors engaged in the same conversation to support students' proposal

writing: “Three of us share information regularly and get involved in the same conversation via Google Drive. I don’t need to wait for them to reply to my emails and then schedule a meeting to discuss my problems” (Jacob, Engineering). Finally, I heard about supervisors who invited students to collaborate in writing, especially from the accounts of science, engineering, and business participants:

> My supervisors are working on a research report for a conference. Surprisingly, they invited me to co-author that report and suggested that collaboration may help me understand how they write. Throughout the process, I learned that writing is also a hard process for supervisors and crafting a piece of writing may take more than the time spent in composing the writing. (Oliver, Science & Medical Science)

Indeed, collaborative writing with supervisors may help students get to know the frustrating and fulfilling moments in their supervisors’ academic writing processes, understand the ups and downs that writing can have, and more importantly, see the frustrating moments as inevitable but normal stages in their writing journey:

> I thought that my supervisors wouldn’t have to work on their writing for hours and hours bashing it into shape and that they wouldn’t be as frustrated as I am. However, I found that they are frustrated writers as well, and spend even more hours than me when crafting their writing. They are also worried about their deadlines, unhappy about reviewers’ critical comments, and feel guilty about not working on their writing when they are busy with other administrative duties. But they see the frustrating process as one part of their writing journey. As they said: ‘A rainbow occurs after a storm.’ (Justin, Engineering)

Supervisors’ Emotional Support. I developed an impression early on in the interview process and this impression grew stronger as my research progressed: students found their proposal writing enjoyable and inspiring because of their supervisors’ emotional care. When I asked the participants to describe their positive writing experiences, many quickly steered the conversation toward their supervisors’ personal care. For example, I noted that some supervisors actively expressed willingness to help: “My supervisors said they are always there

and willing to help me solve the problems. All I need is to ask" (Ava, Arts & Humanities). Some supervisors supported students' academic transitions at the beginning of their doctoral provisional year: "My supervisor has helped me a lot with the induction; he taught me how to use the library learning resources and introduced me to the staff members in the department, my doctoral adviser, librarian, as well as my co-supervisor" *(*Zoe, Education*).* More than half of the interviewees stated that they were grateful for their supervisors' personal care, especially when the personal care was provided in their deep negative emotional states:

> She took me out to a café and bought me a cappuccino. When we sat down, she didn't go straight to talk about my thesis proposal. She talked about a movie she watched on the weekend and suggested a few places to travel for the coming Easter holiday. Her comforts made me feel much better. I was deeply touched because she cares about my studies and also me, as a human being. (Mia, Education)

Students' grateful feelings for their supervisors' personal care gave them the courage to face the challenges in their proposal writing journey:

> I have two brilliant supervisors who have held my hands throughout my thesis proposal writing journey. They back me up whenever they are needed and help me whenever I hit rock bottom. They have pulled me out of that dark, cold and bottomless well. Because of this power, I'm not afraid of the coming challenges. (William, Engineering)

Writing Process.

Time and Project Management. My participants highlighted a sense of achievement and satisfaction when speaking about their accomplished writing targets. From the interview transcripts, I identified four types of accomplishments where their feelings of inspiration arose. First, some participants were satisfied when completing their daily writing tasks: "I feel satisfied when I reach my targets by the end of a day. I'm motivated to work on my writing on the following day, because I want to keep that driving force for as long as I can" (Grace, Education). Second, some were content to put words on the page on a weekly basis, especially those who were in the process of finding their research topics or directions: "Whenever I finished reading an article or a book chapter, I wrote down what I thought of it, summarising its key findings or

key arguments. What made me satisfied was the words I put on the page every week" (Ellie, Business). Third, some were fulfilled to reach their writing targets on the numbers of the pages that they wrote, especially those in the very beginning stages of their provisional year: "I set a weekly writing goal, 10 pages a week, to write about what I'm interested about. I wanted to write as much as I can" (Natalie, Science & Medical Science). Last, some felt a sense of excitement and achievement upon completing the writing of the first draft of their thesis proposals: "When I clicked on the 'send' button in the email box, I felt a sense of achievement. No matter how hard I worked on that draft, I was excited that I finally did it" (Victoria, Business).

The above responses highlighted students' self-drive to work on their thesis proposals because of their accomplished writing targets. The sense of accomplishment further enhanced their ongoing self-regulation in managing their writing time and research:

> This driving force is full in my mind because I enjoy the feeling of achievement. So, whenever I am distracted by my cell phone or make an excuse for not writing, I remind myself of the wonderful feelings of seeing words on the page, so I can better manage my time and make time to write. (Addison, Science & Medical Science)

Academic Writing Abilities/Skills. In order to pass the thesis proposal examination, it is not enough for first-year candidates merely to master the craft of writing intelligibly. Students also need to be creative enough to develop their original ideas in their writing, persuasive enough to convey the significance of their research, and confident enough to conduct their projects. For EAL doctoral scholars, the above challenges can be complicated by how well they can use the English language to carry out the tasks. Therefore, proposal writing, as an advanced type of academic writing for Chinese doctoral students who have less English writing experience, is very challenging indeed. Despite the difficulties, I was pleased to note that, for many of the students I talked to, an improvement in their writing abilities inspired in them feelings of excitement and happiness; Sophia (Engineering) stated: "Although the language polishing stage took more time than I thought it would take, I'm still so excited to find that my English writing is getting better, and I can free myself from being a grammar prisoner." Areas of improvement included voice, academic vocabulary, structure, clarity, concision, and telling an

interesting story:

> I used to see research writing as a serious and boring task. But I have learned to work hard at writing stories and telling an interesting story about my research. Everyone loves hearing stories, including my examiners. I start to regard my research context as the opening of the story, the previous scholars as the actors or actresses, myself as the main character, and my findings as the climax. (Daniel, Arts & Humanities)

Knowing What to Write. When asked to recall their positive writing experiences, a few interviewees pointed to the moments when they "knew what to write". These participants all regarded their research proposals as a blueprint for their doctoral thesis. Proposal writing, for them, opens the door to their thesis writing in the following years of their doctoral studies. When I asked them to explain why, how, and when they knew what to write, they could not find the words to respond to the question. However, what I found common in their descriptions was that these students never leave their writing behind, and they use different tools at different times to maintain their writing flow. Lucas (Science & Medical Science), for instance, recorded his experiments in his research diary:

> I keep recording as my research proceeds, for example, what I have observed from the experiments, how I am going to analyse the results, and which research papers I can link to. At night, I read papers and write down the differences or similarities between their results and mine. Writing keeps my mind clear.

Ellie (Business) wrote her opinions about the most recent investment news (her research topic) on her personal e-blog:

> I add new information onto my blog every two weeks, mainly about what I think of the latest news regarding venture capital. When I'm not working on my research writing, I like to work on my blog, because I have more than 1,000 followers and I'm quite proud of myself. The blog writing is another way to keep me thinking about my research, and the critical conversations between me and my followers are very helpful for my case study writing.

Research.

Interest in the Research Project. When the students recalled how much they enjoyed or were excited about their proposal writing, I found that some of their responses closely linked to the interests that they showed in their research projects. An interesting or meaningful research topic awakened strong emotions among these writers, and their positive feelings, in turn, drove them to work on their research writing. Some participants were interested in their research because they had worked on a similar project for their master's studies:

> My past experiences help me a lot with my research design for my doctoral thesis proposal. Because I know what I have done in this area and what I should continue; you know, the implications section in your master's thesis is certainly worthwhile at this moment. (Daniel, Arts & Humanities)

Some believed that their research projects contribute to solving a practical problem:

> My hometown in China used to have earthquakes quite often, so I am interested in earthquake science. I hope my research can contribute to an advanced earthquake measurement method, which can be used to monitor day-to-day changes in the crustal movement in my hometown. (William, Engineering)

Some claimed that their research is helpful for their future career development:

> When I was little, I read an article about a researcher who discovered a substance in [the] ocean to help people keep young and healthy skin. Since then, I'm interested in this area, specifically in extracting new substances to solve people's skin problems. If I can work this out, I may put my research results on the market and set up my own cosmetic business. (Oliver, Science & Medical Science)

Some chose to work on a certain research topic because of their personal interests or hobbies:

> I am a wine lover. I drink a glass of wine every night, and I'm interested in improving the taste and quality of wine. I don't know whether this sounds serious to you, but I chose to work on wine science because of my genuine love for wine. (Natalie, Science & Medical Science)

Some were interested in their research because of their past professional experiences in China:

> I have been teaching English in China for more than five years and I've always found it hard to teach my students English writing, especially creative English writing. I've tried different methods but none of them worked. Because of this, I chose to work on my current research project. I hope I can find something innovative, something interesting, and something helpful to improve my language teaching pedagogy. (Zoe, Education)

And a few admired their New Zealand supervisors' expertise in certain research fields and thus opted to work on a similar research project:

> I knew my main supervisor's name before I came to New Zealand. He is quite famous in my research area and I've read a lot of his publications when I was writing my master's thesis. I've always wanted to learn more from him. Therefore, I've chosen my current research topic because he is an expert in this area, and I'm excited to work with him. (Hannah, Science & Medical Science)

Collegial Community.

Supportive Peer Writing Communities. Supervisors and doctoral peers seemed to be the two main sources from whom my participants asked for formative feedback on their thesis proposal writing. At the time when I conducted the interviews with the 24 Chinese doctoral students, none of them had yet presented a paper at a conference, which can be a good opportunity to receive writing feedback from other researchers in the same disciplines. Because my participants were at an early stage of their research journeys, their writing interactions mainly involved their supervisors and peers: "I haven't got any interesting finding to present or publish yet; at this stage, I only show my writing to my supervisors and peers" (Emma, Arts & Humanities). Although my participants talked about how much they appreciated their peers' intelligent and practical support for their writing, this type of support seemed to not be enough to make their writing process enjoyable: "I'm grateful for their work but critical feedback can't make me happy." (Mia, Education). What made their proposal writing enjoyable and inspiring, I found, was the emotional dimension of peer support, particularly the mutual encouragement from the writing communities in which they were involved.

Many of the participants were involved within writing communities of one kind or another, whether as a group or in a pair, whether as an organiser or a participant, and they regularly met with other peers to craft their proposals or to discuss the quality of their writing:

> Making time for writing is hard for me because I have five groups of experiments to make in the first year. Balancing time on both sides is challenging. Therefore, we agree to meet once every two weeks, just to put some words on the page. This writing group has encouraged me to take writing seriously and carve out some time to write. (Charlotte, Science & Medical Science)

A few chose not to meet but to email their writing partners to monitor their writing progress:

> We agree to email each other every Monday morning, reporting what we have done in the past one week and what we will focus on this week. Then on the following Monday, we report whether we have completed our writing and what writing goal is for this week. I can't make excuses to not write because I have someone standing behind me and looking over my shoulder. (Ethan, Science & Medial Science)

Having reported a range of triggers in the four types of situations in which students felt emotional about their thesis proposal writing and how these triggers impeded and/or facilitated students' writing, I will now move on to discuss my findings in respect to previous literature and to explain what significant insights my research has yielded into the field of doctoral writing. The following section is organised in accordance with the four triggering situations presented above, namely, supervision, writing process, research, and collegial community.

5.3 Discussion

5.3.1 Supervision

Engaging in a Critical Dialogue Through Writing Feedback. Supervisors' writing feedback in my research was the most influential trigger for students' both positive and negative writing emotions. Positive feedback, such as detailed and constructive feedback, increased the students' inspiration and motivation in their writing. Question-format feedback encouraged them to engage in a critical dialogue with their supervisors, to take a self-reflective attitude towards their research projects, and to provide a rationale for their proposal writing. My findings are

consistent with those of Wang and Li (2011) who claim that supervisors' constructive feedback promotes doctoral students to seek guidance for their writing, to get involved in critical conversations, and to trigger their inspiring, reflective, confident, and determined emotional responses towards their thesis writing (p. 105).

In my research, when the participants spoke of their negative feedback experiences, the emotions of sadness, anger, fear, and confusion made a strong showing in their interview responses. This finding supports previous research, which suggests that negative/critical feedback from supervisors causes emotional problems for doctoral scholars (e.g., Caffarella & Barnett, 2000; Can & Walker, 2011; Doloriert et al., 2012; Eyres et al., 2001; Wang & Li, 2011; Wellington, 2010). For example, Can and Walker (2011) found that social science doctoral students in their research (n=276) believed critical and/or negative feedback "affects them emotionally (62%)", "makes them embarrassed (38%)" and "scared (25%)", "loses self-confidence' (34%)", 'is a personal attack (26%)", and "loses their motivation to work on their paper further (24%)" (p. 519).

The above emotional problems could be more serious for Chinese students coming from a culture where open criticisms and direct critiques are not encouraged. These novice scholars regarded their supervisors' negative critiques as an indicator that they are incapable academic writers; some blamed themselves for not being hardworking enough, and a few even took it personally, believing their supervisors dislike their writing and them as individuals. These findings suggest that not all first-year Chinese doctoral students studying in an English-speaking country for the first time are able to confront the emotional problems that negative feedback creates, especially when critiques are given in a "very direct way", such as, according to my interview data, in group meetings with other peers being present.

Despite the negative emotions discussed above, most Chinese doctoral students I talked to regarded receiving critiques as an essential learning process, and a few believed that critiques facilitated them to be more growth-minded about their research projects. This finding implies that although critiques can be emotionally difficult, some students hold a positive perception of critical comments but prefer them to be made in a "comfortable" way, such as

focusing on giving advice or say something good about their writing before giving critiques. In accordance with these findings, Wang and Li (2011) claim that some international doctoral students in their research were emotionally positive and cognitively proactive about their received critical comments, because of their long experience of research writing and strong academic competences. Hence, for students with little critical writing experience, ongoing practices of providing and receiving critiques, including direct and open critiques, seem to be important in the path to becoming strong academic writers.

Students' Mistrust of Supervisors' Generic Feedback. My findings suggest that unspecific writing feedback not only causes students' negative feelings but also poses a risk of losing their trust. A few previous researchers also have pointed to the trust issue. For example, Ding and Devine (2018) state that Chinese international doctoral students studying science subjects in New Zealand believed their supervisors lack enough knowledge to guide them through research experiments. Doloriert et al. (2012) note that more than half of the doctoral students in their study were not convinced by their supervisors' expert knowledge in the students' subject areas and research methodology. These findings raise a question: Why are doctoral students, including some Chinese students in my study, not convinced by their supervisors' academic competences in supervising their research projects and writing? Based on my interview data, supervisors' vague feedback on both students' methodology and writing aspects may be one of the reasons for their distrust. Such generic feedback is not helpful for making progress on their work, and students thus interpret it as a sign of supervisors' irresponsibility, carelessness, or lack of academic competences, which may lead them to doubt and mistrust their supervisors.

Difficulties in Dealing with Conflicting Feedback from Joint Supervisors. Students were confused about contradictory feedback from their supervisors and tended to either adopt a passive attitude to deal with it (e.g., by ignoring it) or to feel fearful about raising the issue with their supervisors. As noted by Caffarella and Barnett (2000), conflicting feedback from different supervisors is "the greatest source of dissonance" for doctoral students because they do not know "how to respond" (p. 46). The authors interpret students' uncertainty as a sign of their lack

of self-efficacy and assurance in their writing ability. However, in my research, students who take a passive role in response to their conflicting feedback problems expect to maintain a harmonious relationship with their supervisors. Influenced by Chinese traditional education culture, these students feel uncomfortable with antagonisms or denying requests, because a distinguishing feature of Chinese culture is to maintain harmony and collective peace (Fan, 2000; Hofstede, 2001; Ingleby & Chung, 2009). Therefore, Chinese doctoral students appear to avoid provoking debates among supervisors and opt to stay silent about their received conflicting feedback.

Emotional Care in Supervisory Communication. Relationships, interactions, or communications with supervisors have a profound impact on doctoral students' emotions associated with their thesis proposal writing. Two types of supervisors emerged from my participants' accounts. The first type is the ones who proactively and frequently show their friendliness or closeness to students and provide them with sufficient writing, research, and emotional support. Participants under the supervision of this type of supervisor have shown happiness in their writing processes, inspiration and motivation for their research projects, as well as appreciation of their supervisors' personal care, especially when the care is offered in a situation in which students are in a deeply negative emotional state. These findings corroborate the ideas of Wang and Yang (2012), who claim that supervisors' writing support and encouragement can help EAL doctoral students "gain confidence in their thesis writing development and their continual pursuit of their academic goals" (p. 339).

The second type of supervisors from my research are those who are distanced from students, and those whose writing and research support is viewed as insufficient and not helpful in the students' eyes. Participants under the supervision of this type of supervisor believe that their supervisors are not interested in their research; some are discouraged to work on their proposals because of expected support not being provided; and a few eventually become unwilling to communicate with their supervisors. Students' struggles to interact with their supervisors may be one of the reasons for feeling discouraged about working on their writing or even for stopping writing. Mcclure (2005) has highlighted the anxiety that Chinese doctoral

students experience when interacting with their Western supervisors, particularly within the first six months of their candidature. According to the author, these students are in their early stage of doctoral studies and have not yet understood how to manage the degree of closeness and social interactions with their supervisors; they think they are distanced or 'not treated fairly' by supervisors and tend to be disappointed, sad, or even angry about their supervisors. The strained supervisor-supervisee relationship then may impose constraints on students' proposal writing or even damage their mental health.

Challenging Chinese Cultural Stereotypes. Despite the challenges in maintaining professional relationships with supervisors, a few Chinese students were not silent about their 'unfair treatments' from their supervisors and took proactive actions to resolve the tensions. Because of a breakdown of the supervisory relationship, one student I interviewed had requested a supervision change in the middle phase of her first year. My research challenges the usual stereotype of Chinese international students, who often have been viewed to show deference to authority and conform to standards of prescribed behaviour, even when they are treated unfairly by supervisors (e.g., Fan, 2000; Ingleby & Chung, 2009; Sato & Hodge, 2016).

Although a few students in my study took a proactive attitude towards the tension between their supervisors and themselves, however, the majority chose to tolerate or stay silent about their dissatisfaction. This finding indicates that Chinese doctoral students are not a homogenous group, even if they all are from the same culture and studying in an English-speaking country for the first time. The students keeping silent about the tension with their supervisors may still be influenced by Chinese traditional culture and their prior education environment, where they are expected to respect authority, maintain collectivism, gain knowledge, and conform to what teachers have requested (Ding & Devine, 2018). Only a small number of students have proactively addressed the tension and expressed their dissatisfaction to their supervisors. A possible explanation for these findings is that, in addition to cultural factors, students' personal characteristics or personality traits may affect how they deal with their supervisory relationships. For this reason, I would argue that some studies on Asian international doctoral students overemphasise the influence of the students' cultures of origin in

shaping their cross-cultural supervisory experiences but undervalue the impact of students' individual factors on their interactions with their supervisors (e.g., Hu et al., 2016; Ingleby & Chung, 2009; Manathung et al., 2010; Winchester-Seeto et al., 2014).

5.3.2 Writing Process

Critical Engagement with Previous Literature. Many of the doctoral students in my study were confused, frustrated, and sad about writing a literature review for their thesis proposals, especially when evaluating the literature regarding their research topics. My findings accord with those of Chatterjee-Padmanabhan and Nielsen's (2018), who points out that EAL doctoral students face challenges of critically engaging with research literature and developing their own scholarly voice at the thesis proposal writing stage. Taking a stance and developing a voice for these students "cannot be learned mechanistically…[and] must be developed through gaining familiarity with the discourse community in the [students'] disciplinary area" (p. 423). Most students in my study previously read research literature and wrote their master's theses in Chinese, which is their native language. When they are required to write a literature review for their doctoral thesis proposal in academic English which they are not familiar with, students find it difficult to gain a sense of disciplinary conversations. This difficulty, according to Chatterjee-Padmanabhan and Nielsen (2018), is the constraint they face when interacting with the research literature and positioning themselves in relation to the literature in their research fields. Therefore, for these apprentice academic writers, learning to analyse and synthesise disciplinary literature should be viewed as an integral part of research training in their first year of doctoral candidature.

Self-Regulation of Writing and Research Project. Time management and regular writing are necessary for successful doctoral completion (Odena & Burgess, 2017). Students in my study, however, struggled to manage their time spent on proposal writing and research projects, and they felt sad, stressed, and discouraged about failing to reach their writing goals or making slow (or no) progress on their writing. Students from science and engineering backgrounds struggled to manage time their spent in conducting experiments and working on their writing; when their experiments failed, they tended to devote their time, attention, and

energy to re-conducting their experiments and chose to leave their writing until the end of their provisional year, which in turn heightened their tension in completing their proposals on time. Social science and humanities students were challenged to regulate their time for writing a proposal and reading research literature. Despite the importance of extensive reading at the proposal writing stage, some doctoral students were trapped in a non-stop-reading-cycle and believed that they should read 'enough' before being able to write. Once they realised that little time was left for writing, emotions of stress, disappointment, and sadness were tipped onto the table. My findings suggest that beginning doctoral candidates should be encouraged to overcome their fear of 'not reading enough' and helped to understand the reciprocal relationship between reading and writing, as recommended by Bazerman (1980).

Family responsibility was an emotional trigger for female doctoral students feeling stressed and disappointed about making slow writing progress. Two participants from education highlighted their tensions of managing their family commitments and proposal writing. They both are living with their children, and their partners are working in China to provide financial support for their studies and lifestyle in New Zealand. Because of their family commitments, it is challenging for them to find time to work on their thesis proposals, which has triggered their tension and sadness. My findings are in agreement with Aitchison and Mowbray's (2013) findings, which showed that family relationships and responsibility could create extra demands for female doctoral students and influence their time-management for research writing.

English Language and 'Bigger Picture' Traumas. English language difficulties often are one of the EAL doctoral students' biggest writing challenges, which has been confirmed by a large amount of research on international doctoral students' thesis writing development (e.g., Brisk, 2014; Chou, 2011; Cotterall, 2011; Fairbairn & Winch, 2011; Gao, 2012; Granville & Dison, 2005; Kamler & Thomson, 2006; Odena & Burgess, 2017; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007; Paltridge & Woodrow, 2012; Wingate & Tribble, 2012). In accordance with the above studies, my research highlights the taxing process in which first-year Chinese doctoral students are involved when crafting their proposal writing, especially the concision and clarity of their writing. Moreover, my findings suggest that, in addition to the language difficulties, these EAL students

seem to be more frustrated about the big picture issues in their writing, such as following writing practices in their disciplines. Science and engineering students in my study were reluctant to show their writing to their peers who are not in their research fields or who do not have expert knowledge in their disciplines. Throughout the interviews, these students expressed a strong desire to learn research writing from their disciplinary communities. My findings reinforce the view by Odena and Burgess (2017), who argue that learning academic writing "is not a purely linguistic matter that can be fixed outside the discipline, and that reading, reasoning and writing in a specific discipline is difficult for …international students" (p. 573).

Self-Confidence in Thesis Proposal Writing. The doctoral students in my research are novice writers who have not yet built their self-confidence in their proposal writing. Their self-doubt and uncertainty may exacerbate their emotional problems if supervisors do not accord special attention to their interactions with students. The majority of the participants I interviewed believed that they do not possess enough disciplinary knowledge and technical writing competencies to work on their research proposals. They spoke of uncertainty, self-doubt, anxiety, and fear about their writing, especially about the writer's block situations in which they could not come up with ideas for their writing. Their low confidence may come from a lack of academic English writing training and practising in China, the challenges of writing in the English language, and the demands of disciplinary technical writing skills for doctoral thesis proposal. According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy is an individual's perceived level of confidence in performing a given behaviour. In academic writing, self-efficacy could be understood as the belief or confidence in one's ability to write in a given situation. This self-confidence is important for first-year doctoral candidates because proposal writing often tends to be self-centred and self-scheduled and requires students' sustained effort to undergo many revisions to reach the expected standards. This process can be rather challenging if students lack confidence in themselves, which has been evidenced by Huerta et al.'s (2017) study showing that low self-confidence exhibited a significant and large association with writing anxiety among non-English-native-speaking doctoral students and their low writing productivity.

Despite their emotional difficulties in writing, students also highlighted their pleasant emotions, such as a sense of achievement and satisfaction when accomplishing their writing targets and feelings of excitement and happiness when their writing abilities were improved. These findings indicate that, although doctoral writing is challenging and taxing for most candidates, some students do find pleasure and inspiration within their writing processes. Fredrickson (2009) states that positive emotions and thoughts can influence and enhance individuals' creativity, productivity, confidence, and intrinsic motivation. In the same vein, Sword et al. (2018) note that scholars with positive emotions tend to believe they are skilled writers and achieve high writing productivity (p. 14). Similarly, my research has highlighted an important role that positive emotions play in doctoral students' proposal writing processes and dispels the myth that "writing about research isn't fun. Writing is frustrating, complicated and un-fun" (Silvia, 2007, p. 4).

5.3.3 Research

Research Topic Selection. Research topic selection was a key trigger for doctoral students' negative emotions. Half of the participants expressed their confusion and anxiety about selecting a research topic to work on for their proposals. My findings match those of Wang and Li (2011), who claim that, in the initial phase of doctoral candidature, students often feel confused about the direction of their research projects. Consequently, it is essential for supervisors to acknowledge beginning doctoral students' struggles with their research direction. At some point, it may be essential for supervisors to closely assist students with their topic selection, particularly those who still cannot decide a topic to work on in the middle phase of their provisional year. These students may suffer from serious stress, as they have less time to complete their proposals compared to others who started their doctoral scholarship with a pre-determined topic or area.

Some students in my study were dissatisfied or even angry with their New Zealand supervisors for not providing a research topic as would be expected from their Chinese supervisors in China. These students tend to rely on Western supervisors for their research direction, rather than learning to become independent scholars and developing a sense of

responsibility and initiative for their writing and research projects. For example, a few participants assumed their supervisors would have given them a writing title to work on and supervised them as ‘closely’ as their Chinese supervisors. These students compare their Chinese supervisors and Western supervisors (i.e., New Zealand supervisors), and expect their Western supervisors to support them in the way in which their Chinese supervisor would do. Once their Western supervisors ‘fail’ to satisfy their expectations, these students tend to view their interactions with supervisors as limited or weak, which could pose a risk of strained supervisor-supervisee relationship. My findings highlight the mismatched expectations between Chinese doctoral students studying in an English-speaking country for the first time and their New Zealand supervisors, regarding topic selections for proposal writing. These findings also indicate that international students’ prior learning, writing, and research experiences could influence their beliefs, values, and expectations for host academic and supervision cultures.

This is not to say that Chinese students’ prior educational experiences exert a negative influence on their doctoral writing all the time. A few participants in my research were excited and inspired to write their thesis proposals because their research projects were similar to the ones they used to work on for their master’s studies, which laid a solid foundation for their doctorate. Therefore, it is a mistake always to view international students’ prior learning experiences as barriers affecting their acculturation to the Western academic writing environment and supervisory culture. Conclusions of this kind seem to simplify the complexity of international doctoral students’ intercultural learning and writing experiences.

Individual Research Interest. As signalled earlier, Chinese doctoral students should not be seen as a homogeneous group which is purely influenced by Chinese traditional culture or prior educational environments. Instead, individual characteristics sometimes may be more significant in shaping students’ intercultural writing experiences. For instance, some students in my research expressed high interest in their research because of their personal interests or hobbies. These students have shown their great self-drive for their research projects and writing. Sato and Hodge (2016) claim that Chinese international research students have no capability to challenge the research topic assigned by their supervisors because of their

acceptance of the authority of their Western supervisors. This claim, however, is not supported by my findings, because there was no student in my study who was forced to follow the research direction suggested by their New Zealand supervisors. I am pleased to note that, from my participants' accounts, New Zealand supervisors encourage students to independently select their research topics for their thesis proposals, which, as Ding and Devine (2018) state, can lay the groundwork for developing a good supervisor-supervisee relationship in a long run.

5.3.4 Collegial Community

Peer Writing Community. In my study, peer communities played an important emotional supporting role in Chinese doctoral scholars' proposal writing processes. Pleasant peer relationships including writing groups and partners gave them a sense of belonging in their disciplinary community, which motivated them to work on their writing, monitor writing progress, and encourage mutual emotional support. As Bondi (2005) points out, emotions are personal and relational as interaction occurs between people. Emotions in academic writing, as Cameron et al. (2009) state, should be accorded considerable attention because of the "betweenness" of writing relationships (p. 274), implying that students' writing emotions can be influenced by other people. In my research, unpleasant peer relationships constrained students from interacting with their colleagues and formed a barrier in building a genuine supportive peer writing community. Because of the shared writing workstation or space (e.g., office room or shared hot desk room), some students felt uncomfortable about the breakdown of their collegial relationship and thus avoided writing in the 'same room' with their peers. My findings suggest that doctoral students' physical writing space influences their writing experiences and has an emotional impact on their collegial interactions.

Loneliness in the Disciplinary Writing Community. My findings are consistent with the previous studies exploring loneliness in doctoral students' intercultural learning and writing experiences, which showed that students from social sciences and humanities seem to be especially prone to isolation from their disciplinary communities (e.g., Ali & Kohun, 2006; Ali et al., 2007; Chiang, 2003; Deem & Brehony, 2000; Janta et al., 2014). These students appear to feel lonely, distanced, and excluded from their disciplinary or research communities. In my

study, almost all these students work on an autonomous research projects in which only their supervisors and themselves are involved. In such cases, their writing interactions are most likely to be limited within their supervisory experiences. Influenced by their prior learning environment where they have been 'closely' supervised by their Chinese supervisors in China, they may not expect to work independently or receive limited guidance from their New Zealand supervisors. This misalignment of expectations thus may have triggered their loneliness in writing and emotional detachment to their host disciplinary communities.

When speaking of their writing community in the interviews, students expressed a strong desire to participate in the academic community they are connected to, such as peers from the same departments, research fellows in the same research groups, or other colleagues working in the same faculties. According to the participants' accounts, students from humanities, education, and business disciplines rarely have had group meetings or seminars organised by their supervisors or host departments. A lack of introduction to other disciplinary community members, especially at the beginning of students' doctoral candidature, may trigger these newcomers' emotions of loneliness and isolation. Moreover, when students are studying in an unfamiliar linguistic and academic culture for the first time, their language difficulties and communication practices may also impede their engagements within the new disciplinary community, which can affect their sense of belonging and aggregate their feelings of loneliness.

Despite working in a research team, some engineering and science students in my study also spoke of their writing isolation or loneliness. This finding does not support Chiang's (2003) claim that "due to the emphasis of teamwork, close interaction and a sense of collegiality, the overall atmosphere in the [science] department appears to be causal, friendly and lively" (p. 20). Many hard science students in my study felt isolated even though they work as members of a research team. Their isolation, according to my interview data, maybe because cultural differences and language barriers make it difficult for them to 'fit in' the team, and thus their writing interactions with other team members are limited. Overall, my findings indicate that viewing science students as a whole group may over-emphasise disciplinary differences and neglect the influence of students' individual needs and expectations in shaping their doctoral

writing experiences.

5.4 Limitations

The research described in this chapter was limited in several ways. First, I reported the students' appraisals in two broad dimensions: impeding thesis proposal writing and facilitating thesis proposal writing, rather than systematically examining multiple appraising criteria for the prediction of writing emotions, which is a limitation. However, my detailed findings from this chapter have provided a window into the appraisal process of Chinese students working on a thesis proposal, and future researchers may wish to use the themes from my study to develop measurements to assess students' appraising criteria in doctoral writing. Second, given the small sample size in this study as well as my emphasis on the students studying in an English-speaking country for the first time, my participants' appraisals cannot be seen to represent the views of all Chinese international doctoral students writing a research proposal. To embrace a broader view of these students' appraisal domains, future researchers could draw a large and diverse sample from universities in various English-speaking countries.

5.5 Implications

5.5.1 Contributions to Roseman's Appraisal Theory

Drawing on the concept of motive-consistency (Roseman, 1996), I have described in this chapter how Chinese doctoral students appraised four types of triggering situations as impeding and/or facilitating their thesis proposal writing. My findings have revealed four factors that may influence these students' appraisal processes regarding motive-consistency: (1) students' prior learning, writing, research, and supervisory experiences in China; (2) students' institutional disciplinary writing communities at the host university; (3) students' personal interests in their doctoral projects; and (4) students' Chinese traditional cultures. These four factors have been studied neither within the literature on Roseman's (1996) appraisal theory nor in the existing research on cognitive appraisal assessment in social sciences. My research has highlighted the importance of cognitive appraisal process in determining students' writing emotions, as well as the influence of social-cultural-situational contexts in which students carry out their appraisal

evaluations.

Students' prior writing, learning, research, and supervisory experiences in China influence their appraising process with respect to the support provided by their Western supervisors. This statement is evidenced by my interview data, which showed that some participants expected their supervisors to do what their Chinese supervisors in China did, such as "providing a research title to write" and "suggesting a clear research direction or topic to work on". However, supervisors in New Zealand encourage self-directed or independent learning (Evans & Stevenson, 2010) and are less likely to work with their students as closely as their Chinese supervisors did in China. This mismatched expectation tends to make students evaluate their supervisors' support as 'not enough' or 'insufficient' for their proposal writing, which thereby leads to feelings of disappointment, sadness, distance, or even anger about their relationships with their supervisors.

In addition, institutional disciplinary writing communities affect the way in which students appraise triggers in their writing processes, especially how students appraise resources or support that they can use to work on their writing. Students involved in a positive peer-writing-interaction within their communities tend to feel happier and more inspired to work on their writing than those who are unable to find the 'right one' or avoid seeing their peers on campus. A lack of a genuinely supportive collegial community can lead students to evaluate that there is no helpful writing support or resource outside of their supervision. Because of this evaluation result, students are likely to restrict their writing interactions within their supervision and over-emphasise their needs from their supervisors. Once relationships with supervisors are strained, students who are fearful to raise the issues or choose to keep the issues to themselves, tend to face serious emotional or even mental problems, such as great tension and anxiety. Furthermore, a breakdown of the supervisor-supervisee relationship may lead to more interaction or communication problems, which can reduce students' confidence and determination in completing their writing and negatively affect their work progress, academic performance, and writing skill development.

Students' personal interests in their research projects play a part in how they evaluate problems in their writing processes. Because of this individual factor, some participants in my research have shown greater enthusiasm, willpower, perseverance, and responsibility to work on their research and overcome problems to re-engage in their writing than those who did not describe their interest in their projects. An important implication of my findings is to acknowledge the effect of individual factors in students' appraisal processes and the drawbacks of using a quantitative-oriented method to measure individuals' appraisal domains. According to the literature cited in Chapter Two, most of the appraisal researchers have used a quantitative method to examine how individuals appraise the triggers (e.g., Ellsworth & Smith, 1988a; Oatley & Johnson-Laird, 1987; Roseman, 1984; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). By using such a method, researchers may be able to identify a broad range of appraisal dimensions predicting certain emotions (e.g., *attention*, *novelty, certainty*, and *agency*, see Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). However, this approach may overlook the impact of personal influences on individuals' appraisal processes.

Chinese culture has been found to influence how students appraise supervision-related triggers in their proposal writing. Supervisors' feedback, in my research, was the most influential situation for triggering students' writing emotions. Participants tend to appraise critical/negative feedback from supervisors as an indicator of scholarly incapability or a personal attack. In cases where they received conflicting feedback from joint-supervisors, students appeared to take a passive attitude towards this issue, to maintain a harmonious relationship with their supervisors. These appraisal results may be because of students' traditional cultures, where collective harmony is highlighted while open criticisms and direct critiques are not encouraged.

5.5.2 Implications for Doctoral Practice

By understanding Roseman's (1996) appraisal theory, supervisors can assist first-year doctoral students in changing their ways of appraisal evaluation, to maintain a positive writing environment. For example, Chinese students in my research were disappointed about receiving critical/negative feedback and some even blamed it on themselves for not being hardworking enough. In such cases, to prevent students from unnecessary negative emotions, supervisors

can help them to properly appraise the trigger (i.e., critical feedback), by informing them of the importance and function of critical feedback and encouraging them to view being critiqued as a way to join a scholarly discussion and become a member of the disciplinary community. Supervisors can also help students to alter their negative perceptions of writing emotions, overcome their fear that showing writing emotions may be perceived as a sign of “weakness or lack of competence” (Wellington, 2010, p. 146), and regard emotional feelings as a starting point in self-reflecting on writing challenges and improving their research writing (Granville & Dison, 2005).

Supervisors with appraisal knowledge are better equipped to develop pedagogical strategies for their supervision by understanding in what ways doctoral students appraise certain triggers as facilitating and/or impeding their writing. By knowing that students’ prior writing experiences may affect how they evaluate their received support at their host institutions, supervisors could modify their hands-off supervision models at the beginning of students’ candidature and lead them to cross the bridge of supervision differences. Supervisors could, for instance, listen to students’ voices of their past learning experiences, introduce them to the supervision practices followed in the new disciplinary institutions, and emphasise how they will support the students to achieve success.

5.5.3 Implications for Future Research

Throughout my discussion in this chapter, the importance of examining doctoral students’ appraisal processes has been repeatedly highlighted. There is abundant room for further progress in capturing the complexity of this process, and my research is the first step towards reaching this goal. It would be interesting to use the themes from this chapter to inform a questionnaire to measure the appraising criteria that doctoral students use to evaluate triggers in their writing. By understanding these criteria, future researchers may extend our knowledge of which specific appraisal results lead to certain emotions in doctoral writing. The findings could assist supervisors in predicting students’ emotions and taking actions to mediate the emotional impacts on students’ writing processes.

A future study investigating supervisors' appraisal processes associated with their own academic writing would also be very interesting. As Cameron et al. (2009) suggest, "Experienced academic writers know that they create meaning through the messy business of writing and rewriting… and they are familiar with the elusiveness of meaning, and how writing and rewriting bring ideas into being" (p. 271). By exploring supervisors' appraisal dimensions, i.e., how supervisors appraise or evaluate triggers in their scholarly writing journeys, researchers may better provide learning strategies for beginning doctoral students to learn the 'secrets' of their supervisors' writing practices and to improve their ability to deal with the emotional pitfalls of doctoral writing.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, four types of situations for triggering Chinese doctoral students' emotions in their proposal writing were presented. The survey responses showed that the most influential triggering situation was related to students' writing processes (43%), whereas the interview responses suggested that supervision (49%), especially supervisors' writing feedback and emotional encouragement, was the most influential situation that both impeded and facilitated students' writing. My findings highlight the influence of students' supervisory experiences in the emotional dimension of writing, as well as the importance of proposing pedagogical strategies for supervisors to appropriately engage with students' writing emotions. So far, I have presented students' emotions towards their proposal writing (Chapter Four) and how specific triggers impeded and facilitated their work (Chapter Five). The following chapter focuses on the students' strategies for coping with their writing emotions.

Chapter Six: Coping with Writing Emotions

Whenever I feel afraid

I hold my head erect

And whistle a happy tune

So, no one will suspect

I'm afraid

While shivering in my shoes

I strike a careless pose

And whistle a happy tune

And no one ever knows

I'm afraid

- Richard Rodgers, *The King and I*, 1951

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping strategies can be classified into three broad categories: emotion-focused coping, problem-focused coping, and passive coping. Individuals using emotion-focused coping strategies attempt to manage their feelings of stress and/or their cognition associated with stress; individuals adopting problem-focused coping strategies endeavour to reduce the causes of their stress and/or other negative emotions; and individuals exhibiting passive coping behaviours tend to suppress their emotions, or to escape, avoid, or deny their problems (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Informed by Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) coping framework, in this chapter, I present three types of strategies used by Chinese doctoral students to cope with their emotions associated with thesis proposal writing: emotion-focused coping, academic skills-focused coping, and passive coping. The first two are positive strategies that my participants used to actively manage their emotions and develop their academic skills to improve their proposal writing. Passive coping in my research refers to negative behaviours, such as hiding emotions and keeping distance from others, that my participants exhibited when responding to their

emotions. Based on my interview data, I refined the methods of categorising coping in the context of doctoral writing by further differentiating positive coping into *self-facilitation-oriented coping* and *external facilitation-oriented coping*. By expanding on Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) concept of coping, my research highlights that students' coping strategies were not merely limited to their negative writing experiences. Instead, these two themes - reducing negative emotions and accentuating positive ones - were inextricably interwoven in doctoral students' writing processes. Overall, this chapter makes noteworthy contributions to an understanding of Chinese doctoral candidates' writing emotion-coping experiences and offers a set of recommendations to guide institutional practitioners and students through their decision-making processes with respect to how to best cope with writing emotions (see also Chapter Seven).

In the first section of this chapter, I give an overview of three types of coping strategies identified from my interview responses: emotion-focused coping, academic skills-focused coping, and passive coping. The next three sections (i.e., Sections 6.2, 6.3, and 6.4) explore a range of themes regarding each of the above three types of coping strategies, respectively. My findings then will be discussed in respect with the previous literature, to tell a story of how my research provides significant insights into doctoral scholars' writing emotion-coping processes. After this, the limitations of the study are outlined, followed by the implications of my research in this field.

6.1 An Overview of Coping Strategies

I obtained a total of 294 examples from the interview data describing students' strategies for coping with their emotions about writing a thesis proposal. The majority of the responses were oriented towards active or positive coping strategies, with almost half being associated with emotion-focused coping (see Table 6.1). One-fifth of the responses described passive coping, with half of those (9%) emphasising "hiding emotions".

When analysing the positive coping data, I noted that participants in my research clearly distinguished between what *they themselves did* (self-facilitation) and what *other people did to help them* (external facilitation). Overall, around half of the responses related to self-facilitation, and one-third of them were associated with external facilitation (see Table 6.1). Self-regulating

emotions topped the frequency list (35%), occurring nearly three times as often as seeking emotional support from others (12%). With respect to academic skills-focused coping, seeking academic support from others (20%) occurred one and half times as often as self-developing academic writing skills (13%). These findings indicate that Chinese doctoral students studying in an English-speaking country for the first time may seek support for academic writing development, but when it comes to emotions, they tend to deal with those themselves. What follows is a detailed presentation of the interview responses and their themes concerning coping strategies described in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1

Types of Coping Strategies from Interview Responses

Type of coping (% Response)	Strategy	Percentage (Count)
Emotion-focused coping (47%)	• Self-facilitation: Self-regulating emotions	35% (103)
	• External facilitation: Seeking emotional support from others	12% (35)
Academic skills-focused coping (33%)	• External facilitation: Seeking academic support from others	20% (59)
	• Self-facilitation: Self-developing academic writing skills	13% (38)
Passive coping (20%)	• Hiding emotions	9% (26)
	• Keeping distance	6% (18)
	• Lacking emotion management or coping competence	5% (15)
Total		100% (294)

6.2 Emotion-Focused Coping Strategies

The Chinese doctoral students in my research adopted a variety of emotion-focused coping strategies to manage the emotions that their thesis proposal writing stirred up. Many students self-regulated their emotions, by taking actions to reduce their negative feelings and

build on positive ones, a process I have labelled as self-facilitation. Other common strategies classified as external facilitation involved seeking emotional support from other people, such as peers, supervisors, and departmental academic staff.

6.2.1 Self-Facilitation: Self-Regulating Emotions

Students used a range of cognition-related strategies to self-manage their writing emotions. To reduce negative emotions, “shifting attention”, “reappraising triggers”, and “thinking of family or something pleasant” were the top three frequently described emotion-focused coping strategies. Participants also actively developed their emotion competences and created enjoyable environments to infuse their writing processes with resilience, delight, and inspiration.

Shifting Attention. Shifting attention was the most frequently reported emotion-focused coping strategy in my research. To shift emotions away from disappointment and frustration, a large number of students chose to engage in various pleasurable activities that put them in a positive and relaxing frame of mind. For instance, Addison (Science & Medical Science) spent time with his close friends: “When I’m really unable to come up with any idea for my writing, I leave the office to have some tea with my best friends”. Lucas (Science & Medial Science) went on short road trips: “I drove down to beaches, suburbs, waterfront areas, mountains, or parks. With rock music on and my left arm sticking outside of the car window, I can forget anything unpleasant”. Grace (Education) did some pleasant shopping: “I just shut down the computer, put all the research papers away, walked out of the office, and went shopping in my favourite shops”. Mia (Education) carried out her enjoyable domestic tasks: “If I can’t figure it out, I am doing laundry, cooking my kid’s favourite meals or planting flowers in my garden. When I am doing housework, I just focus on it and let everything else go”. Ellie (Business) looked at her cat pictures: “I’ve got two cats in my house and they both are Scottish Fold. When looking at their sleeping and hugging photos on my phone, I can turn my negative mind off for a while”. Different from the above students who temporarily shifted their attentions away from writing, Daniel (Arts & Humanities) took a longer break going on a holiday: “I took five days off to forget about my proposal and research. I packed a small bag and booked a flight ticket to Queenstown. There was no paper, no supervisor, no email, and no meeting”.

From the conversations with the above interviewees, I learned that although they turned their attention to activities unrelated to writing, the pleasant mood arising from their enjoyable activities became a good kick-start for their re-engagement in their proposal writing: “When you feel good, everything is beautiful in your eyes, even your writing” (Addison, Science & Medical Science). However, a few students held a negative perception of physical disengagement from writing and viewed this behaviour as an avoidance. Victoria (Business) was typical of this response: “Problems need to be solved. Doing something else isn’t going to help me resolve the practical problems. That’s escape!”. Instead, to sustain her writing flow, Victoria opted to write the sections that she was confident about: “I move on to write the sections that I can put some words on the page, such as research contexts and my research purposes. I want to get myself involved in this writing flow for as long as I can”. To remove the seeds of confusion and frustration, Luna (Arts & Humanities) preferred to read some research papers or books when she was stuck within a writer’s block: “If I can’t continue to work on one paragraph in my research proposal, I just skip it and read some papers or books to find out the solutions or simply to take my mind off writing before getting myself annoyed”.

Reappraising Triggers. Reappraising or re-evaluating triggers in a positive manner has been perceived as one of the most effective and necessary strategies to decrease stress and fear. Two forms of reappraisal were identified: recommended reappraisal (i.e., students re-evaluated triggers under the influence of other people) and independent reappraisal (i.e., students re-evaluated triggers under no one else’s influence but their own). According to the interview data, participants with close ties to their peers, colleagues, or writing community members tended to adopt the recommended reappraisal format. For example, Grace (Education) appreciated what she had already achieved instead of feeling ‘bad’ about failing to reach her writing targets:

> One of my friends from the writing group comforted me that it is okay not to hit my writing goals sometimes, and I don’t need to feel bad about it; instead, I should be grateful for what I have achieved on the day. I feel much more relieved when I view the problem from a positive perspective.

Natalie (Science & Medical Science) re-interpreted the meaning of ‘taking too much time to select a research topic’ as an important planning stage for conducting her doctoral project successfully:

> One of my peers shared his experiences of working on his thesis proposal. He persuaded me not to be stressed about my topic selection. This is a very important research planning stage, and I would have to work on this topic for the following two or three years. I understood that ‘The course of true love never runs smooth’.[2] It might be a good thing for me to slow down now rather than regret in the middle of my data collection next year.

In comparison, participants using independent reappraisal coping strategies appeared to be more self-driven and self-reliant. Through acknowledging problems in proposal writing, the majority of those students saw signs of improvement. For example, Ethan (Science & Medical Science) used to feel ashamed about his English language problems but learnt to “acknowledge them as a starting point to become a better writer”. Ellie (Business) was worried that she was an incapable doctoral candidate but finally considered the critical feedback she received as a way to “become a competent academic writer”. Zoe (Education) used to feel disappointed about her messy, incoherent writing, but she began to understand that the work of craft is “a process of learning how to write”:

> When I spent hours and hours to bash it to shape but it still did not read well, I thought I was a slow writer. But nowadays, I’ve understood that even experienced writers who already have got their PhDs put enormous effort to shape their words on the page. For me, an apprentice writer, I should view this process as a way to learn how to write.

A few students in my research reappraised the triggers regarding their interactions with their supervisors. For instance, Luna (Arts & Humanities) learnt to view her supervisors as

[2] This saying was first used by William Shakespeare in his play *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595–1596) referring to the fact that there will always be problems in a romantic relationship. My participant used this proverb to express that there will be struggles on the path to producing a thesis proposal.

mentors rather than crutches: “I should be more independent. I should see my supervisors as support-provision sources not my navigation monitors. I should be the one who decides what to do with my research”. Sophia (Engineering) used to perceive her supervisor as not reading her writing carefully: “He just scrawled a few unhelpful comments at the bottom of my work.” Not until her supervisor started to polish her proposal for submission did she realise that: “Some sentences were really odd. No wonder he couldn’t make any detailed comment. I didn’t even understand what I was trying to say in the opening paragraph”.

Thinking of Family or Something Pleasant. A recurrent theme in my interviews was how students appreciated their family in China for supporting their doctoral studies in a foreign country. Family, for them, resembled a bandage tied around their wounds helping them recover from a negative emotional state. Half of the interviewees noted that their family gave them the courage to take on challenges and re-gain confidence in their writing. As William (Engineering) put it: “My parents have given me so much courage to stand on my feet and fight against whatever is thrown towards me. Thesis writing is a long journey. But with their support, I believe in myself”. To a few self-funded students, financial support from their family powered up the battery they needed for their provisional year. Emma (Arts & Humanities) commented:

> As a self-funded doctoral student, I have to complete my writing on time as well as supporting myself living in this expensive city. I have thought about whether I needed a part-time job to make a living, but it would take away some of my time. I am deeply grateful for my parents’ financial support. They are my motivation to finish my first year successfully.

In addition to family, “thinking of something pleasant” was another frequently described coping strategy that students used to take their mind off writing difficulties and focus on the positive side. To reduce negative feelings, some participants recalled a past moment when they were proud of their academic writing:

> I was thinking about my graduation day when my master’s thesis was selected as *Outstanding Graduation Thesis*, and I was the only student who won this award in my faculty. I was so proud of myself on that day, and this has become a strong motivation

for making myself feel better. (Mia, Education)

Some participants discovered the happiness that their doctoral studies brought into their life:

> I have met many international students from different countries at the university. It is interesting to know their cultures, languages, food, and especially, how to do certain things in different cultures. These happy moments sometimes can bring some positive energies into my writing life. (Isabella, Science & Medical Science)

A few students, however, thought of something completely unrelated to their writing and studies that could awaken their positive feelings:

> I think about the places where I want to spend my coming holidays, how I am going to celebrate my birthday, or simply what food I will cook tonight. Sometimes, I imagine how it might be like going on a cruise travelling to the Antarctic, where I may catch a glimpse of wild penguins. (Sophia, Engineering)

Developing Emotional Resilience. Although thesis proposal writing could be taxing for doctoral students, some participants in my research seemed to be able to roll with the punches during their writing processes. These students regarded emotions as necessary challenges that led to improvement and success, rather than focusing on self-pity, self-blame, self-doubt, or giving up. From their interview transcripts, I identified several qualities that resilient students tended to share. For instance, they looked for the reasons why they were disappointed or felt negative about their writing and transformed the negative feelings into positive attitudes; Victoria (Business) explained:

> Someone says that I'm a tough cookie, and I agree with that. I don't deny my emotional problems. Instead, I look for the reasons why I am upset about my writing and acknowledge that I still need to improve myself, maybe a lot.

Others regarded controlling emotions and minimising the emotional impact on their regular writing routines as helpful; Jacob (Engineering) illustrated:

> I didn't want to let my emotions go beyond my control. I told myself that I needed to calm down first. This is my first time studying in an English-speaking country; how can I quickly know everything and play the rules without making mistakes. I needed to stick to

> my writing plan. Nothing should stop me putting words on the page.

Engaging in regular physical and/or mental exercises to relieve tension associated with writing was another way of becoming unstuck, exemplified by Addison (Science & Medical Science):

> The best way for me to ease my tension is to go to the gym or meditate in the morning. When I am exercising, I don't think about anything; I'm just focusing on my breath. When I meditate, I image my unhappiness and pressure as heavy bricks laying on my chest, and then I push them away to tell myself that I am free.

Some students maintained a sense of humour and optimism about their writing challenges; Justin (Engineering) described:

> My emotions about my proposal writing are like the emotions about something else in my life. For example, I am happy because my parents are going to visit me soon; I am satisfied because I have tidied my house before my friends come to see me; I was annoyed because someone stepped in front of me in a queue without asking me. I was sad because I lost my bus card last Friday. I experience emotions every day for different reasons. Writing is just one part of my life. Take it easy.

Others were self-encouraged or self-motivated to do a better job next time, Charlotte (Science & Medical Science) noted:

> I encourage myself to hand in a better piece of writing next time. I have five notebooks and I use them to record some notes or ideas for my thesis proposal. On the first page of each notebook, I wrote a motivational meme for myself, for example, 'Everything I want is on the other side of fear'!

A few students had a "vision board" for their academic success and 'pretended' to write as an experienced scholarly writer; Ave (Arts & Humanities) explained:

> I printed out some pictures of successful academics and writers and stuck them onto a whiteboard in my office. Whenever I'm working on my writing, I imagine myself to be one of them and pretend that I can write well. Forget about everything I'm worried about, just do the writing!

And finally, they understood that it is important to develop emotional resilience, acquire emotional knowledge, and improve their coping abilities to be able to handle the stressful situations in their writing journeys; Isabella (Science & Medical Science) highlighted:

> It is essential to learn how to control our emotions if we want to successfully graduate from the university with a doctoral degree. Otherwise, life will be rather difficult. I've borrowed three books to learn how to properly manage my emotions, for example, Daniel Goleman's *Working with Emotional Intelligence* and Melinda Bauer's *Managing Emotions: How to Stay Calm When Facing Stress, Pressure, or Frustration*. These books suggest some practical tips which I have found very useful.

Creating Pleasant Writing Environments. As pointed out in the introduction to this chapter, students' coping strategies were not only associated with how they dealt with their crippling negative feelings, but also with how they created positive writing environments that would give rise to a sense of inspiration, satisfaction, or enjoyment. Five strategies were repeatedly described by the participants who actively infused their proposal writing processes with pleasure. Writing something fun before writing their research was reported frequently in my research: "I grab a pen to write a literary story, a narrative poem, an interesting title, or an eye-catching headline that I could turn into something useful for my thesis proposal" (Zoe, Education). Another strategy for making writing fun was establishing students' own identities and interweaving themselves into their writing: "I write about myself. Even though this is a scientific project, I include my own stories in my writing. Story-telling has brought me a sense of identity, self-efficacy, and enjoyment" (Ellie, Business*).* Writing or working together with peers for collective brainstorming, mutual encouragement and friendly monitoring, was another way of bringing positive energies into PhD writing life: "Luckily, I've got Lucy, a year-three doctoral student. We talk, write, and laugh together. We report to each other our writing progress weekly" (Isabella, Science & Medical Science). Several students described that rewarding themselves for making steady progress with their work could keep them motivated: "When completing my tasks for the week, I rewarded myself with a short trip at the weekend and a movie at the cinema. I do this to keep myself feeling motivated, so I have something to look

forward to" (Hannah, Science & Medical Science). Finally, a few wrote in comfortable physical environments to build on and extend their happiness in writing:

> I write wherever I feel comfortable. Before coming to see you this morning, I wrote on a train I took to the university. When I was waiting for my experimental results yesterday, I wrote in the library, sitting next to a big window where I could see the water area of Auckland city. While I was waiting for my friends to come to a restaurant last night, I picked a cosy spot and worked on my writing. (Eric, Engineering)

6.2.2 External Facilitation: Seeking Emotional Support from Others

Apart from the above self-facilitation-oriented coping strategies, doctoral students also proactively sought assistance from their peers, supervisors, departmental academic staff, and university counsellors to act upon their emotions. Strikingly, my interview data showed that the participants tended to seek emotional support from their peers in preference to their supervisors. Their responses indicating peer support occurred nearly three times as often as those describing supervisors' support.

Emotional Support from Peers. In the early stages of my interview process, I developed the impression that my participants appeared to deal with their writing emotions with their curtains closed. However, as my research progressed, I could not help but notice that some of them were willing to raise their hands to ask for help from other people, particularly from their peers. A key theme was that they wanted to be understood and reassured when they opened their feelings up to someone; and their peers turned out to be the most suitable candidates, as these writers also went through similar experiences and were likely to show an empathic understanding of the participants' situations. From the interview transcripts, I learned that they were looking for care:

> I texted them (research team members) saying that I was upset because my boss (main supervisor) called me in the morning telling me that he doesn't like my writing and asked me to re-structure it. They texted me back that they would like to help or have a chat. It is good to know that someone cares about me. (Ethan, Science & Medical Science)

And comfort:

> I turned to my best friend for comfort. Although she is not in my research field, she comforted me that I would have to work on a topic for three or four years and I should slow down and carefully think about what I'm passionate about. Whenever I've talked to her, I feel happier, as she understands me. (Addison, Science & Medical Science)

And encouragement:

> My research team has set up an online chat group on Facebook. We are all in our provisional year working on thesis proposal writing. We chat in the group, talk about our recent work, and encourage each other. They are like my family. (Lucas, Science & Medical Science)

And trust:

> Sometimes I question myself about whether I'll be able to complete my proposal writing, or whether I will pass my first year. I can't remember how many times I have doubted myself. But she always trusts that I can do it, as she also has had similar experiences. (Ellie, Business)

And love:

> We are all PhD students and share the same house. They have been my roommates since I moved to New Zealand. The best moments for me are breakfast and dinner time when we eat together. We cook for each other, share what we have, and give each other a hug before we leave the house. Their warm love can melt ice. (Isabella, Science & Medical Science*)*

The provision of care, comfort, encouragement, trust, and love formed a strong emotional bond between the participants and their peers, which could lay the foundations for a genuine supportive peer community. Because of such emotional support, participants restored their confidence in dealing with their writing and tended to seek further academic assistance from their peers, which I will elaborate in Section 6.3.1.

Emotional Support from Supervisors and Doctoral Support Services. In my study, only four students (17%) actively approached their supervisors for emotional support. I was surprised by this finding because I had assumed that supervisors would be the most effective source of help, as they work closely with students and know their projects well. Not until I almost finished my data collection and analysis did I become aware of this finding. In hindsight, I wish I had explicitly probed more into the motives behind these students' support-seeking behaviour, for example, by asking questions such as "Why did you decide to ask for emotional support from your supervisors?" or "What has made you seek emotional support from your supervisors?" But in a way, I noted that these participants already had given me a hint when they described their supervisors' emotional care as the positive triggers that facilitated their proposal writing. After reviewing the interview transcripts, I found that these participants were the ones who claimed that their supervisors actively offered help to support their writing (see Chapter Five Section 5.2.2). Maybe because of the closeness and friendliness shown by their supervisors, these four candidates were open about their writing emotions. Ethan (Science & Medical Science), for instance, recollected a recent visit to his co-supervisor's house for dinner:

> I emailed her that I've been feeling down about my research and writing recently. Surprisingly, she invited me to dinner, with her family on a weekend. That was a lovely night, meeting her and her family, as well as her pets, one dog, one cat. Her family's hospitality made me forget about my stress and loneliness.

In addition to supervisors, a few participants sought emotional support from their departmental academic staff, such as post-doctoral researchers, teaching fellows, and team leaders. According to their descriptions, they seemed to feel comfortable to 'expose' their writing emotions to these staff members, because, as Addison (Science & Medical Science) illustrated, "They understand my feelings". His responses accorded with my earlier observations, reinforcing the view that showing an empathic understanding is a good starting point to encourage these apprentice scholars to properly view the emotional highs and lows in their writing processes. Addison expanded on his statement: "These post-docs understand what I am going through. It is good to know that I'm not the only one to feel this way. Maybe this is a

normal part of the PhD journey". Ella (Education) opted to share her emotions with the teaching fellows in her department: "Sometimes when we were having lunch in kitchen, I talked to them about my struggles. They said that they have had the same feelings when they were working on their doctoral theses". Isabella (Science & Medical Science) opened up about her feelings to the team leaders of her research group: "They have had similar experiences, so I talk to them about my tears and happiness. They listen to me, which makes me think that there is nothing to feel embarrassed about when talking about emotions."

Two students confessed to me that they went to see university counsellors for their heightened tension, but both held a negative attitude towards using such services. Daniel (Arts & Humanities) felt ashamed, as he worried that his peers may look down upon him seeing counsellors: "The tension was becoming unbearable, and I wanted to scream. So, I went to the counsellors, and they did not help me a bit. But I'm worried that other students may find out that I am seeing counsellors". Emma (Arts & Humanities) regarded seeing counsellors as a sign of having psychological problems and thus was unwilling to continue her counselling session: "To me, seeing psychologists means I have mental problems which are quite serious. I don't have any psychological problems. I am just over-stressed about my research proposal, and I don't think I will see them a second time". Their responses highlighted the negative perceptions of using counselling services in the eyes of Chinese students studying in an English-speaking country for the first time. Such beliefs prevented students from seeking professional help with their emotion management and thus limited their support resources to their peers and supervisors.

6.3 Academic Skills-Focused Coping Strategies

From the interviews I had with the 24 doctoral students, I learned that their negative emotions about writing never really go away if they do not roll up their sleeves and 'sharpen the saw' of their academic writing. As a few participants said in Chinese idioms: "Want to destroy your enemy? Why don't you capture the King first?" ("擒敌先擒王"; Ellie, Business); or "Before shooting the knight, one should shoot his horse first" ("射人先射马"; Oliver, Science & Medical

Science). These sayings imply that the key to addressing a problem is to find the cause of the problem and start to work on the most important aspect. Many of my interviewees noted that the fundamental way to reduce their negative writing emotions is to develop their academic/research writing skills.

In this section, I explore the academic skills-focused coping strategies that doctoral students used to improve their proposal writing. Different from the emotion-focused coping strategies, these strategies were more oriented towards *external facilitation*, which occurred one and half times as often as *self-facilitation* in the interview transcripts (see Table 6.1). The findings indicate that Chinese doctoral candidates are more likely to ask for academic assistance from other people than to independently solve their writing problems or/and improve their proposal writing.

6.3.1 External Facilitation: Seeking Academic Support from Others

To facilitate proposal writing, students sought different types of academic support from various sources, including disciplinary peers, colleagues, doctoral support staff, and supervisors. Their responses showed a similar trend to the ones regarding seeking emotional support from others: nineteen students (79%) sought academic assistance from their disciplinary peers and colleagues, whereas only five (21%) proactively asked their supervisors for writing and research support. The findings indicate that students tend to view “asking supervisors for help” as their last available option. Another key finding that emerged from the interview data was that almost all my participants perceived the doctoral writing workshops provided by the university as “too general” and “not helpful” in satisfying their writing needs. As one of the most important support providers, doctoral workshops in my study were below students’ expectations, which could pose a risk of limiting students’ writing interactions within their supervision and departmental communities.

Academic Support from Peers. Seeking academic support from peers and colleagues made a strong showing in the responses in my interview transcripts. Half of the students I talked to claimed that they preferred asking for academic assistance instead of facing the problems on their own; as Charlotte (Science & Medical Science) put it: “Peers’ writing support is one of the

effective resources outside of my supervision; I would rather ask them for help, instead of working on my own". Various reasons were discovered in the interview transcripts. Almost all of these participants reported that because of peers' empathic understanding, they were encouraged to ask them for academic assistance:

> The reason why I tend to approach my colleagues is because of empathy. They have encountered similar writing experiences and emotions, and they understand my situation. They've shared their writing experiences to help me walk away from the trap. For example, I like to hear this from them: "When I was at your stage, I felt exactly the same way…". (Addison, Science & Medical Science)

Following the same or similar writing practices was another reason for seeking academic support from peers, as they can provide both writing-related support and technical expertise for the participant's proposal work:

> I meet them quite often, asking for different types of writing feedback, such as feedback on contents, methodology, data analysis, sentence structures, logics, styles and language. They can comment on almost every single aspect of my proposal writing, which is effective and useful to solve some of my practical problems. (Ellie, Business)

Some students described that their peers share mutual discipline knowledge, academic content, or experiment experiences with them:

> They understand my research project and know what I want to say here or there, or which technical terms I should use in my writing. It is easier for me to ask discipline-related questions to my team member, rather than my doctoral language advisors. (Victoria, Business)

Some told me that they felt comfortable and were willing to accept "honest", "friendly", and "encouraging" critiques from their peers:

> I'm not worried about being told that I may need to change here or there by my doctoral peers. This is maybe because they also are students; we are all inexperienced academic writers and researchers; we are all involved in the same community. I don't feel bad about their friendly critical comments. They are just trying to help. (Sophia, Engineering)

Finally, a few mentioned that their peers are "easy" to approach and flexible to meet to discuss their writing:

> Compared to my supervisors and doctoral advisor, it is much easier for me to ask my peers for help. We started our provisional year in the same year and are working on our thesis proposals. They are either writing in their workstations or working in the lab. When I have some quick questions, I can grab them quickly. (Ethan, Science & Medical Science)

A central focus within the above responses was around sympathetic understanding and shared discipline backgrounds and writing practices, which made peers the most frequently described people whom doctoral students turned to for help.

Academic Support from University Doctoral Services and Supervisors. The university where I conducted my doctoral project provides a broad range of academic services for its doctoral students to support their thesis writing. The services include postgraduate advisor meetings, IT support, a doctoral skills programme hub, postgraduate student research funding, research and data analysis support, doctoral writing workshops, and student learning advice. Participants in my study sought various types of university academic support to facilitate their research work. For example, hard science students tended to seek assistance with their laboratory experiments, such as laboratory health and safety inductions:

> I've asked the faculty staff to do my safety induction once, as this is a compulsory procedure, but I can't remember the rules clearly. It's a new lab for me and I don't want to get myself and other students hurt in the lab. So, I've asked the staff a few times about my lab issues and he has helped me a lot. (Hannah, Science & Medical Science)

Social sciences and humanities students appeared to ask for help mainly with their disciplinary knowledge and ethics applications for data collection, as exemplified by Zoe (Education):

> I met two ethics advisors from the university committee, and they assessed my application and suggested me to amend it based on their comments. I had been struggling with my data collection for a while, and I needed to include this part in my thesis proposal. I'm glad that I made the move to contact my advisors to deal with this

problem.

Regardless of their disciplinary backgrounds, a few common academic supports that my participants described included reference searching and management, as well as academic integrity and plagiarism issues:

> I needed to organise a large amount of literature for my proposal writing, but I didn't know how to do it. So, I emailed my librarian that I wanted to learn how to use a few reference tools. She was very supportive and has agreed to be my private tutor for a few sessions. (Ava, Arts & Humanities)

As mentioned in Chapter Five, I was surprised to find that some students were not aware of the doctoral writing workshops designed by the university to support candidates to work on their research writing. Moreover, almost all the participants who had attended the workshops told me that the workshops were "general" and "not useful" for their proposal writing. When I was interviewing my participants about their writing emotions and triggering situations, I got this initial impression of their negative perceptions about the doctoral workshops. This impression became stronger when our conversations switched to their support-seeking coping behaviours. Only one participant in my research perceived the writing workshops as a helpful resource for her proposal writing:

> I'm not good at organising sentences and using proper tenses when writing different sections of my research proposal, such as reporting previous literature and the data I collected online. So, I went to a few workshops and I've found them quite helpful. (Ava, Arts & Humanities)

Ava's responses highlighted the positive role of the workshops in helping her improve her basic academic writing skills (i.e., sentence structures and verb tenses). However, for the rest of the 23 doctoral candidates, such 'basic' writing workshops could not satisfy their 'greater' needs for their proposal writing. Expressions like "below my expectations" and "they are disappointing" cropped up frequently in my interviews. Some students claimed that the learning content is outdated: "Once I went for a workshop on *Structuring Your Thesis Proposal*. But the tutors just repeated information from the books, nothing new. I wasted two hours and didn't

learn anything that could help my writing" (Ellie, Business). Some believed that the workshops are not practical: "I think the workshops should be more practical to help my writing, not just about some general issues, for example, what a research proposal is" (Grace, Education). Some stated that the workshops are not systematic: "Two-hour workshops to learn how to write a thesis proposal is not long enough. The tutors can't cover all the important content. Moreover, different workshops are taught by different tutors, and it's difficult for me to connect them together" (Isabella, Science & Medical Science). A large number of science and engineering participants confessed to me that they believed the generic writing workshops are "useless" for their proposal writing and they preferred disciplinary-focused writing training; Justin (Engineering) explained:

> These general workshops may suit the students from arts, social science, and humanities disciplines, but not us engineering students. The tutor taught us how to report research results, and I was very confused with the way he described this, because we don't report in that way. I think these writing workshops should be discipline-based, otherwise they are useless to us.

Seeking academic support from supervisors was the least reported writing-focused coping strategy. Many of the interviewees regarded 'asking their supervisors for support' as their last choice on their list of options because they wanted to impress their supervisors by showing only improvements and not troubles: "I don't want to bother my supervisors so often. In fact, I want to make a good impression and let them know that I'm okay to work with" (Jacob, Engineering). Some participants wanted to prove to their supervisors that they are capable of problem-solving: "I prefer to try my best to resolve the problems rather than going straight to my supervisors. As a doctoral student, problem-solving is an essential ability" (Mia, Education). A few of them wanted to convince their supervisors that they are 'good students':

> They have selected me as their doctoral candidate. I'm deeply grateful and appreciate that they are willing to accept me as their student. They are both prestigious scholars working with excellent people in this field. I want to show them that I am good enough to be their student. The last thing I want to do is to let them down. (Sophia, Engineering)

6.3.2 Self-Facilitation: Self-Developing Academic Writing Skills

A range of self-facilitation-oriented coping strategies were used by the students to improve their thesis proposal writing. Half of the related responses were oriented towards "learning from well-written publications" and "making good use of supervision". Among these responses, great emphasis was given to learning how to follow disciplinary writing practices and using supervisors' feedback to develop writing skills.

Learning from Well-Written Publications. Learning from well-written books and articles was the most frequently described coping strategy for developing academic writing skills. Most of the responses were associated with learning disciplinary writing practices. Jacob (Engineering), for instance, noted that reading other scholars' articles is the most effective strategy to understand the writing conventions in his research field: "It is the most useful way to understand how these big players play the rules, and how I can join their games." Despite great emphasis being placed on writing practices, participants also learnt how to increase their disciplinary knowledge on their research topics; Mia (Education) commented: "Through reading, I know more about cognition assessment. These publications help me understand the background information of my research area". In addition, some students learnt how to understand the central theories, concepts, models, methods, or technologies regarding their research and experimental designs; Eric (Engineering) described: "I focus on reading the experiment or method section of the articles. Because I want to find out the most advanced methods and technologies to build my experimental platform."

Apart from discipline-based writing norms and technical knowledge about the research projects, a few participants sought models for improving their English language skills. They focused on a range of aspects of the language, particularly on articles, which to Charlotte (Science & Medical Science), was the biggest, as well as the most 'annoying' problem in her proposal writing: "Whenever I finish reading a research paper, I record in my notebook how the authors used the definite article. It is a small problem, but also my biggest problem with my writing and has frustrated me a lot". In addition, two participants stated that they wanted their English writing to be 'natural' and stylish, so they opted to read some well-written non-academic

books. For example, Luna (Arts & Humanities) is a novel-lover:

> Playing around with different writing styles is challenging, and I want my writing to be interesting to read, not just about my academic work. I've read some classic novels, such as *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte, *The Woman in White* by Wilkie Collins, and *Middlemarch* by George Eliot. These prolific writers have done an amazing job structuring their writing; for example, Collins puts the most exciting climax at the beginning and then tells the story through a few key characters.

Making Good Use of Supervision. Good research and thesis production under the auspices of the discipline-specific supervisors are the keys to doctoral success. For first-year doctoral students, supervision, they told me, was an integral part of their proposal writing processes. Although they tended to avoid seeking emotional support from their supervisors in order to make a good impression, almost half of the interviewees expressed a strong preference for using their supervisors' feedback on their earlier proposal drafts to develop their writing skills. For instance, to avoid making the same mistakes in her writing, Harper (Science & Medical Science) kept her feedback in different file folders based on their focus:

> I printed out all my received feedback and put the pages into different folders based on the types of the feedback. For example, all the feedback on vocabulary, sentences, or grammar is in folder A; feedback on experiment design is in folder B; feedback on data analysis is in folder C, so on and so forth. This method helps me remember what mistakes I have made and how I can avoid them in my future writing.

To strengthen her arguments in her writing, Ava (Arts & Humanities) gathered her supervisors' feedback in a notebook and wrote her opinions on each of her received comments:

> I read every single piece of my received feedback more than five times and wrote down how I thought of the comments; for example, whether I would follow this suggestion; if yes, what's the reason; if not, what rationale I need to explain for my decision.

For future improvement and exemplification, Ella (Education) used Track Changes in her word documents to compare her original writing and the subsequent drafts revised based on her supervisors' feedback, to find out the most changed and the least changed parts in her writing:

> Supervisors' feedback to me is the most valuable resource to tackle my writing problems. I often revise one piece of writing more than three times, and there always is a big change between the original version and the final version. Yesterday, I opened six windows to see how I had changed a paragraph from version one to version six.

In addition to making good use of supervisors' feedback, a few participants reported how they took steps to improve supervision efficiency to better work on their research proposals. For example, Victoria (Business) preferred to prepare a list of questions for her supervision meetings: "I think of all the questions that I want to ask my supervisor in the meeting. I always try to do more in preparation for our meetings". Sophia (Engineering) chose to summarise a few key points after her supervision meetings to make her future writing direction clearer: "After our meetings, I usually review what we have discussed and list the key points that I would like to write about or what I'm expected to focus on before the next meeting."

Setting Practical Targets and Monitoring Writing Progress. Improving proposal writing was more than learning the writing and language skills to carry out academic tasks. It was also concerned with learning how to improve work efficiency and writing productivity, which would give these writers a sense of self-efficacy and satisfaction. To achieve this aim, setting practical targets and monitoring writing progress turned out to be a frequently described coping strategy. While conducting the interviews, I was trying to discover their secrets or the 'golden standards' of how to set a practical target, a target that leads to positive writing outcomes. However, based on the participants' accounts, I became aware that there may be no one-size-fits-all method because they each took an individualistic approach to adhere to their writing routines. No matter which approach they adopted, the key was staying committed to the 'to-do-list' and keeping records of their work progress. For example, some students aspired to lay down specific writing targets in the early morning period and checked their progress at the end of each day:

> Instead of being anxious about the time left for my writing, I've decided to set a target every morning, just like a cup of morning coffee to wake me up and start my day. No matter how many other things I need to do during the day, the goal reminds me that I

must work on the writing, and I have to stick to my writing schedules. I review my daily progress before going to bed. (Harper, Science & Medical Science)

Some preferred to write down their targets for the following day at the end of the day:

It is more effective for me to write down my targets at the end of a day than at any other time. This is because I know what I have done for the day and I know what I need to continue to work on the following day. It is easier for me to track my work efficiently. (Daniel, Arts & humanities)

Some set writing targets according to their research progress:

Building an experimental platform requires an enormous amount of concentration and time. I can't write before I complete this task. But once it's done, I can focus on writing this part. Then I will do my next experiment, and after that, I will work on my writing again. So, I don't set my target in a fixed time such as every week or every day; it really depends on my lab progress. (Jacob, engineering)

Some set writing targets according to their reading progress, particularly those who are in the early stage of their research topic selection:

I set my targets based on the research literature I read. When I finish reading a book chapter or an article, I write a summary of the literature, which I may include in my thesis proposal. So, my targets are based on how many and which papers I am going to read and summarise. (Mia, Education)

Two interviewees quoted that they do not follow a strict approach; instead, they frequently change and adapt their approaches based on the types of writing they are working on:

I always change how I set the targets, because different types of writing tasks need different amounts of time and effort. When I was working on my data analysis, I could write one paragraph or a maximum of one page a day. Currently, I'm revising my proposal draft, and I can finish five pages a day. So, based on different types of writing, I set myself different targets and track the progress accordingly. (Emma, Arts & Humanities)

Having presented a range of emotion-focused and academic skills-focused coping strategies that students used to actively deal with their emotions and to improve their proposal writing, I now move on to present the themes regarding the students' passive coping behaviours when responding to their emotions that writing stirred up.

6.4 Passive Coping Strategies

Despite the positive coping strategies presented above, this is not to say that all my participants wear a smiling face when dealing with their negative emotions or that they act upon their emotions positively all the time. As Natalie (Science & Medical Science) said: "The sky is not always blue; you sometimes have rainy or cloudy days". One-fifth of the interview responses were oriented towards passive coping, with great emphasis on hiding emotions from supervisors and peers (see Table 6.1). Through the analysis of the interview transcripts, I identified three main areas of behaviour impacting negatively on developing adequate coping strategies towards more successful and enjoyable proposal writing: hiding emotions, keeping distance, and lacking emotion management and coping competence.

6.4.1 Hiding Emotions

When the interviewees were asked to describe whom they sought support from to deal with their emotions associated with their proposal writing, some were lost for words, confessing to me that they preferred to keep emotions to themselves, instead of opening up to other people. Keeping emotions to themselves could be a normal personal preference; however, nine out of 24 students in my research chose to hide their feelings because of their negative perceptions and beliefs about emotion. Emma (Arts & Humanities), for example, believed emotions are unhealthy for her successful academic writing: "Emotions shouldn't be involved in my studies, especially not in my writing. These bad emotions are not healthy, and I don't want to show them to anyone". Eric (Engineering) noted that showing emotions to his supervisors is disrespectful: "They are my supervisors, my teachers. Sharing my emotions with them is disrespectful". Luna (Arts & Humanities) stated that it is not her supervisor's responsibility to take care of her emotional issues: "We are not friends. He shouldn't be worried about my emotional issues. He just needs to help me with my proposal and research, not my emotions;

that's not what supervisors do". Daniel (Arts & Humanities) perceived showing emotions as embarrassing or 'naïve' behaviour: "It is embarrassing to bother my supervisor with my emotional issues. Crying in front of him and complaining about how I am struggling with my proposal writing is immature". These participants tended to avoid exposing their emotions to their supervisors, which could potentially make it difficult for the supervisors to recognise their emotional problems in their writing.

6.4.2 Keeping Distance

As reported in Chapter Five, supervision was the most frequently described triggering situation that students appraised as impeding their proposal writing. In such cases, to confront their supervisory problems, ideally, students should understand what the problems are, self-reflect in what ways the problems impede their writing, and then take a positive and proactive attitude, so they can communicate their concerns to their supervisors. However, a few participants admitted to me that they preferred to remain silent about the emotional difficulties related to their supervisors and keep their distance from them to minimise future interpersonal conflict. For example, to prevent himself from feeling upset by his supervisors' criticisms, William (Engineering) chose to stop meeting his supervisor:

> Since then, I have never visited her. I don't want to feel that way in front of her again. Whenever she asks how my writing is going, I lie to her that I am working on my experiments at the moment and that I haven't done any writing. In fact, I am working on my writing; I just don't want to show it to her, as she would criticise my writing like what she did last time.

Because of the strained relationship, Daniel (Arts & Humanities) was unwilling to seek emotional and academic assistance from his supervisor and felt he had 'no choice' but to live with the unpleasant feelings caused by his supervisor: "I don't know what I can do to deal with our relationship problems. I'm just a student, but he holds a high administrative position in my department. I don't know what to do; I'm just living with it". Jacob (Engineering) had an impression that his supervisor seems to be unwilling to build a close relationship with him and thereby decided to distance himself from him: "There seems to be a huge gap between us. I

think that he is not interested in my personal feelings, as he didn't continue the conversation last time and quickly changed it to a different topic." Because of the unpleasant relationship with his co-supervisor, as well as the restricted peer support he was available to receive, Oliver (Science & Medical Science) regarded emotions as his "enemy" during his writing process:

> Apart from my main supervisor, I don't have any people who are able to help me. I have to continue my writing no matter how bad I feel because I can't get away from it. I have to put up with or bear these feelings. I feel terrible about this because I think I have an enemy watching over my shoulder all the time.

In my research, peer support was viewed as an effective resource by most of the participants who sought emotional and academic support to handle their negative writing situations. However, according to the interview transcripts, three students had a negative perception of their peers' support. Jacob (engineering) claimed that "it is useless to talk to peers" because his peers are non-English-native speakers who also "make basic English grammar mistakes":

> They may give me some advice on research but not on the writing aspect. None of my colleagues are from English-speaking countries. They are from China, Africa, Chile, and Mexico. They also have problems in their academic English writing, just like me. I usually don't talk to them much. To be honest, I even don't know what their projects are.

Justin, another engineering student, told me that pressure from his peers made him avoid being connected with them:

> In my research team, everyone seems to be so happy and optimistic about their research and writing. Whenever we are in the lab, they talk about how much writing they have done or how excited they are about their work progress or their positive experimental results. Their success makes me feel pressured. I tend to avoid engaging in their conversations. Sometimes, I don't attend our group meetings.

Daniel (Arts & Humanities) stated that he did not want his peers to find out about his strained relationship with his supervisor, which was the reason why he built a wall to separate himself from other PhD students:

> It is embarrassing to let them know that I have a bad relationship with my supervisor because we are working in the same department. People talk to each other. When I hear how grateful they are for their supervisors' help, I feel terrible about my situation.

6.4.3 Lacking Emotion Management and Coping Competence

In almost every interview, I had with the 24 doctoral students, our conversations ended with emotion management and coping competence; as Victoria (Business) described, "It's important to know how you feel about your writing or why you feel this way, but at the end of the day you will have to deal with it!". As presented earlier in this chapter, some participants believed that it is essential to become emotionally resilient with their writing difficulties and develop coping competence to handle whatever is thrown at them during their writing journeys (see Section 6.2.1). As Zoe (Education) described in a metaphor: "Basic emotion management knowledge is like a life jacket. If I bring it with me, then I feel safe and confident about swimming across the lake, as it may save my life at some point."

However, this process can be challenging or even daunting for the students who claimed themselves as 'emotional people'; Emma (Arts & Humanities) explained: "I get upset or angry easily. I just can't control myself. I understand that I should calm down, but I just can't do it". A few students admitted that they lacked the coping knowledge to manage their negative emotions. For instance, Harper (Science & Medical Science) tended to develop a giving-up mindset once he failed his writing tasks: "I always questioned myself whether I should continue my studies when I can't resolve the problems or miss the submission deadlines". Eric (Engineering) told me that whenever he faced a stressful writing situation, he often felt overwhelmed with the difficulty of the obstacles: "Whenever I am stuck in a negative emotional situation, I tend to think that the problem is too much or too difficult for me to deal with". William (Engineering) stated that whenever he was not satisfied with his writing progress, he started to self-doubt his academic abilities, although he knew that he was 'over-reacting': "I know this is not right, but I can't control myself. When I don't complete the tasks, I am extremely disappointed with myself." Because of a lack of emotion-coping knowledge, Natalie (Science & Medical Science) tried to seek psychological assistance but wasn't aware of the counselling

services offered by the university at the time we had the interview:

> What can I do? I don't have any knowledge regarding emotions and coping strategies. What are they? Some friends have suggested that I visit a counselling centre if I need professional help. But I don't know where I can get free psychological services.

The above three sections have demonstrated how Chinese doctoral students dealt with and reacted to their emotions associated with their proposal writing. It is now necessary to link my findings to previous studies, to discuss what significant insights my research has yielded into this field.

6.5 Discussion

6.5.1 Coping with Emotions and Proposal Writing

Conflicting Opinions on the Classification of 'Shifting Attention'. In my study, shifting attention was the most frequently described positive coping strategy that students used to successfully regulate their negative writing emotions. However, this finding seems to conflict with the literature that classifies shifting attention from the situations that cause negative feelings as passive or negative coping strategies (e.g., Crockett et al., 2007; Wong et al., 2010). Other researchers regard disengagement from negative situations as avoidance or escape that may reduce immediate stress, but result in poor mental health, reduced stress management, defective decision making, and exacerbated negative effects of acculturative stress on students' intercultural learning and academic development (e.g., Folkman, et al., 1986; Seiffge-Krenke, 1993; Stern & Zevon, 1990). In my research, by temporarily escaping from the negative writing situations, students diverted their attention to other pleasurable activities that put them in a positive and relaxing mindset. This type of coping strategy has been perceived by my participants as helpful for overcoming their writer's block and re-engaging in their writing processes with a pleasant mood. Therefore, based on my findings, I would argue that whether classifying shifting attention into positive or negative coping strategy should depend on the underlying purpose involved. For example, if a student's purpose is to lessen the impact of his/her negative emotions on his/her proposal writing, temporarily disengaging from writing could be a positive technique; however, if the purpose is to eliminate the technical writing

problems, disengaging from writing in a long run is most likely to lead to negative consequences, such as slow work progress and low writing productivity.

Reappraisal: One of the Most Effective Forms of Coping. In my research, reappraising or re-evaluating the triggers that caused the negative emotions has been viewed as one of the most effective coping strategies to decrease stress and fear in students' writing processes. As discussed in Chapter Two, reappraising has been largely studied in the field of clinical psychological well-being and individuals' coping behaviours. Research suggests that this strategy leads to decreased levels of negative emotional experiences and increased positive emotional experiences (e.g., Lieberman et al., 2011; Ray et al., 2010; Szasz et al., 2011). Based on my interview transcripts, I have refined the previous scholars' findings by highlighting two forms of reappraisal coping strategies in doctoral writing: recommended reappraisal and independent reappraisal. In my study, recommended reappraisal occurred when students re-evaluated their triggers under the influence of other people, such as doctoral peers or colleagues; independent reappraisal was used when students re-evaluated their triggers independently. Both recommended and independent reappraisal coping strategies have been found to help doctoral scholars to re-interpret the meaning of the problems that cause their negative writing emotions. In addition, students who have stronger interactions or ties with their peers and colleagues tend to use recommended reappraisal coping. My findings imply that collegial linkages between doctoral students and their peers may influence the motives for their reappraisal coping behaviour.

Thinking of Family: A Strong Motivational Drive. Thinking of family is a common theme in my research, which however has not been studied within the literature on coping strategies, although Yeh and Wang (2000) note that family plays a vital, supportive, and caring role in helping a person from a collectivist culture to construct his/her identity in an individualist culture. From my interviews with the 24 Chinese students, I have seen that family can be a strong motivational power, which can recharge their batteries at times of stress so they can continue their writing journeys. My findings suggest that, for Chinese doctoral students, a supportive family makes them more determined and persistent, which can drive them to

complete their proposal writing successfully.

6.5.2 Support-Seeking Behaviours

Support and Agency. My participants tended to ask for academic assistance from others, such as peers and university doctoral support staff, rather than to independently solve their writing problems or improve their proposal writing. This finding confirms that cultures of origin may affect international students' coping behaviours, which has been evidenced by a large amount of research (e.g., Triandis & Brislin, 1984; Triandis et al.,1985; Triandis et al., 1990). According to many scholars, students from individualist cultures value independence and self-resilience and take direct actions, such as confronting others to defend themselves when dealing with their problems, whereas students from collectivist cultures emphasise social support, cooperation, interdependence, and conforming, as they see themselves as a part of a social group and place the group welfare above their own individual benefits (e.g., Bailey & Dua, 1999; Lam & Zane, 2004; Leung & Bond, 1984; Marsella & Dash-Scheuer, 1988; Wheeler et al., 1989).

However, students' original cultures are not the only factor that leads to their academic support seeking behaviours. As other researchers show, thesis proposal writing at a doctoral level not only relates to students' general academic writing skills but more importantly, to their disciplinary writing practices and how they contribute expert knowledge to a research field (e.g., Wisker et al., 2006). Within a thesis proposal, students are expected to demonstrate their readiness to cross the threshold from "not knowing to knowing", and from being Master's students to being doctoral scholars (Chatterjee-Padmanabhan & Nielsen, 2018, p. 422), as well as preparing to make original contributions to their chosen fields (Cotterall, 2011; Kamler & Thomson, 2006). However, this transformation process is intellectually and emotionally demanding. In such cases, peers, university academic staff and supervisors turn out to be effective and useful individuals, because they share mutual professional knowledge and can offer both discipline-based writing support and technical expertise.

Students sought both emotional and academic support to deal with their emotions that proposal writing created. My findings are consistent with those of Heaney and Israel (2008) who

claim that individuals seek different types of support to cope with their stressors or emotional problems. My research also shows that different types of support can be provided by the same agencies. For example, both emotional support and writing support have been provided by peers, colleagues, university doctoral service staff, and supervisors. The findings support the view that more than one type of support can be provided by the same group of people (e.g., Barrera, 2000; Cohen et al., 2000). Moreover, the same support can be provided by different types of agencies, including students' formal and direct academic network members (i.e., supervisors, peers, and colleagues), formal and indirect academic network members (i.e., doctoral language advisors and librarians), formal professional services (i.e., counselling staff), and informal helping network members (i.e., close friends and roommates). Agneessens et al. (2006) suggest that different types of agencies are likely to provide different amounts and types of support, and the effectiveness of the support may depend on the source of the support. In my research, Chinese doctoral students tended to ask for emotional and academic support from their formal direct and indirect academic network members, especially from their peers.

Peer Support. Peers from the same disciplines were the most frequently described individuals whom students turned to for help with their emotions and proposal writing. My findings highlight a need to assess the effectiveness of support from peers and other network members within students' academic communities. Hatteberg (2014) claims that effective provision of support is likely to stem from people who are socially similar to the support recipients and who have experienced similar stressors or situations. This view is supported by Heaney and Israel (2008) who write that these characteristics "enhance the empathic understanding of the support provider, making it more likely that the support offered is in concern with the needs and values of the recipient" (p. 197). In doctoral writing, students are looking for care, encouragement, comfort, trust, and love from their peers who have similar experiences and often show an empathic understanding to their situations. Because of this strong emotional bond, students also tend to ask for their peers' academic support and perceive it as an effective resource outside of their supervision that facilitates them to engage in a disciplinary writing practice conversation. This type of genuine supportive community becomes

an important coping source, where these novice scholars regain their confidence to re-engage in their writing processes.

In addition, the students, who sought emotional and academic support from their peers continuously exhibited support-seeking behaviours through actively asking for assistance from other people, such as university doctoral support staff and their supervisors. Heaney and Israel (2008) note that social support can enhance an individual's ability to access new information to identify and solve his/her problems. Aligned with the authors' claim, my findings suggest that peer support can increase a student's sense of coping control over their emotions, which in turn motivates them to seek assistance from other agencies to facilitate their writing. As many scholars have pointed out, if the support helps to produce an individual's desired outcomes, a sense of personal control over specific situations can be enhanced, as well as promoted feelings of self-esteem and self-confidence (e.g., Carpenter & Scott, 1992; Heller et al., 1986; King et al., 1993).

Supervisor Support. In comparison to peers and colleagues, supervisors seemed to be Chinese doctoral students last available option. Only a small number of students in my study proactively approached their supervisors for encouragement, affirmation, or emotional support during their proposal writing. Most of the participants were unwilling to communicate their emotional issues to their supervisors, particularly the issues related to their supervision experiences. A few students were thinking of changing their supervisors, but only one of them acted upon it and was transferred to a new supervisor in the late stage of her provisional year. The rest tended to keep silent about their dissatisfaction and 'put up with' the 'unfair treatment' from their supervisors. Yan and Berliner (2011) report in their article that Chinese international students are "powerless to change [their] entire culture or external environment" because they "have limited resources for changing troublesome features of the stress-provoking environment" (p. 534). As one of their student participants said, "In many cases, there is nothing we can do about the stressful environment…[what] we can do is to change our perceptions and regulate our emotions to suit the environment" (Yan & Berliner, 2011, p. 534). Similarly, Chinese students in my research just arrived in a foreign country and they are unfamiliar with the

Western educational environment and doctoral management system. Consequently, they appear to view themselves as disempowered or as having less power to challenge their supervisors, who most likely hold a stable academic position at the university.

6.5.3 Passive Coping Strategies

Chinese Cultural Perspectives. In my study, hiding emotions from supervisors and peers and remaining silent about their emotional difficulties were the common stories I heard when I was interviewing the Chinese doctoral students about their coping strategies. According to a few cultural scholars, in certain Asian cultures, disclosing personal problems to others outside of the family is believed to bring shame and guilt to the entire family (e.g., Sue, 1994). This idea is supported by Mukminin and McMahon (2013), who found that the Chinese international students in their study preferred to keep problems to themselves because they felt ashamed about expressing emotions to others. Because of the cultural influence, the students in my research regarded showing emotions or talking about their emotions with their supervisors as embarrassing, disrespectful, and immature, and thus opted to conceal them. A few students chose to hide their emotions to maintain a pleasant professional relationship with their supervisors by showing only the 'good side' of themselves. My findings agree with the findings of previous research on forbearance coping strategies, which shows that individuals from collectivistic cultures tend to avoid directly speaking about or formally reporting their problems, as this behaviour is seen as burdening others in public (Yeh et al., 2006). As Yue (2001) states, concealing emotions in Chinese cultures is a common way to minimise or avoid interpersonal conflict. Therefore, to maintain social harmony with their supervisors, Chinese doctoral students prefer to keep their emotions to themselves.

Chinese doctoral students also are concerned about their 'face' in front of their peers. The concept of 'face' in Chinese cultures is understood as 'losing face', referring to a situation in which an individual causes embarrassment by his or her own behaviour in public (Ingleby & Chung, 2009). My finding confirms that Chinese students value their face in relation to other people and are anxious to maintain their own sense of positive self-approval, as they believe maintaining their face is a form of self-respect (Tse et al., 1988).

Individual Perceptions. Doctoral students' individual perceptions or beliefs can influence how they evaluate their external support resources (e.g., support from supervisors, peers or other academic members), when dealing with their writing problems. If the provided support is perceived as helpful in resolving their problems, students may consider it as a coping resource. By contrast, if the support is viewed as not helpful in addressing their problems, students may not see it as a coping resource, despite the support being objective, accessible and available. Wethington and Kessler (1986) claim that support recipients' perceptions are strongly related to their mental health and well-being, rather than the objective behaviour involved in their interactions to the support providers. Other researchers suggest that factors influencing support recipients' perceptions of their coping resources may include: (a) support recipients' previous experiences with the support providers, (b) the social context of the relationship between support recipients and support providers, and (c) role expectations and individual preferences for types and amount of support (e.g., Haber et al., 2007; Heaney & Israel, 2008). Considering the above factors, I raise a question about what factors influence students' perceptions of their supervisors, peers, and university doctoral support staff support when coping with their emotions and developing their doctoral writing. This question could be addressed by future researchers using an intervention research design.

6.6 Limitations

The readers should bear in mind that this chapter was based on my interview data collection. Although I carried out the coding procedures carefully to ensure the credibility of the themes from the interview responses, the findings may not be applicable to a larger population or a different academic environment. My qualitative inquiry focused on exploring different perspectives that constitute students' emotion-coping experiences, rather than examining the external validity or generalisability of the findings. This limitation could be addressed by future researchers using other sources of data, such as focus groups or written archives, to examine the themes stemming from this chapter. I also acknowledge the limitation of classifying the coping strategies based on the participants' perceptions, instead of objective coping measures. This chapter aimed to present what actions students took to deal with their emotions associated

with their proposal writing, rather than to examine the criteria in categorising positive and negative coping strategies. Moreover, as discussed in Section 6.5.1, the same type of coping strategies may produce different or opposite outcomes in different situations. Therefore, my findings have only provided a window into doctoral candidates' emotion-coping experiences.

6.7 Implications

6.7.1 Contributions to Lazarus and Folkman's Coping Framework

My research contributes to Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) coping framework in the context of Chinese international doctoral students' thesis proposal writing. In doctoral writing, the general meaning of coping can be broadened to include dealing with negative emotions and accentuating positive ones. As my interview data has shown, students have used a range of active coping strategies to infuse their writing processes with a sense of happiness, inspiration, or satisfaction. For example, they engaged in enjoyable activities, wrote with their peers for mutual cheerleading, or worked in comfortable physical environments to extend pleasure in their writing. These approaches, according to my participants' accounts, are successful strategies that increase their positive feelings, improve their motivation, and promote their writing productivity and work efficiency. However, according to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping is conceptualised as a process that is limited to individuals' negative experiences, i.e., dealing with stress and the causes of stress. Their coping framework seems to overlook the positive experiences that individuals draw on as part of their coping processes, which is evidenced by my interview data.

In addition, I refined Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) coping framework to fit in my research, which placed emphasis on Chinese students. As previous scholars note, Lazarus and Folkman's coping theory was developed in a Western context (Bjorck, et al., 2001), where independence and self-reliance are valued (Triandis, et al., 1990). Therefore, their theory focuses on individualistic coping norms, such as independent problem-solving and confrontational action-oriented behaviours. However, a number of studies have found that first-year Chinese international students prefer asking their co-nationals (i.e., Chinese) for help, as opposed to being self-reliant, when facing difficulties adapting to Western learning environments

(e.g., Cemalcilar & Falbo, 2008; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). In my research, around 40% of the active coping strategies (emotion and academic skills-focused coping) were associated with external facilitation, suggesting that seeking support, especially academic support, plays an important part in Chinese doctoral students' coping experiences. My findings reinforce the view that students from collectivistic cultures have a tendency towards interdependence and social support-seeking (e.g., Bailey & Dua, 1999; Hofsteds, 1980; Lam & Zane, 2004; Leung & Bond, 1984; Marsella & Dash-Scheuer, 1988; Wheeler et al., 1989). Therefore, my method of differentiating self-facilitation-oriented coping from external facilitation-oriented coping strategies can highlight what Chinese students focus on when dealing with their writing emotions.

6.7.2 Implications for Doctoral Practice

My refined method for classifying coping has important implications for supervisors and doctoral support staff, as it can provide valuable information regarding the types of support students ask for, whose support they seek, as well as how the support is perceived in the eyes of the students. My findings have shown that the Chinese students in my study sought both emotional and academic support to act upon their emotions; however, there was a greater tendency towards seeking support from peers and colleagues, rather than supervisors and university doctoral support services. Therefore, my method raises awareness about the coping resources that Chinese students typically turn to in order to deal with their writing emotions. With this knowledge, supervisors may better inform their supervision practices by considering whether these novice scholars have available emotional support and academic resources to manage their feelings and address their writing problems.

My refined method also emphasises the need for providing discipline-focused writing assistance for doctoral students to cope with their emotions. According to many researchers, timely, sufficient, and effective academic support should be provided by the people who are involved in candidates' writing development, including the staff from writing centres and university academic support programmes (e.g., Doody et al., 2017; Huerta et al., 2017; Ogolo, 2017; Ross et al., 2011; Russell-Pinson & Harris, 2019; Shin et al., 2019; Sparkman & Doran, 2019). However, doctoral writing workshops in my research seem to fail to meet students'

writing needs. Studying at the same university from where the sample was drawn, I have attended several workshops on proposal writing. Based on my own experiences, the generic nature of these writing workshops designed for first-year doctoral candidates coming from different faculties often do not meet disciplinary needs. This notion is also evident from my findings whereby students preferred writing support from their peers, as they share mutual disciplinary knowledge and writing practices.

6.7.3 Implications for Future Research

This chapter has raised a few questions in need of further investigation. Future researchers may wish to further assess the effectiveness of specific emotion-focused and academic skills-focused coping strategies in doctoral students' writing processes. As Stephenson et al. (2016) show, the effectiveness of a particular coping strategy depends on the context in which it occurs. This notion is confirmed by DeLongis and Holtzman (2005), who suggest that the nature of the emotion-eliciting situations and the social contexts influences how effective a coping strategy is. It would be interesting to investigate what constitutes an effective coping strategy in doctoral writing. The themes stemming from this chapter could be the beginning steps to achieve this aim.

Because my research focuses on students' coping behaviours as a whole group, the influence of individual factors is not fully examined. According to previous scholars, personality traits can affect individuals' coping styles (e.g., Roesch et al., 2006), and assistance-seeking behaviours (e.g., Nadler, 1997), as well as their perceptions about the provided support (e.g., Collins & Di Paula, 1997). A further study could examine the associations between students' personal factors and their coping behaviours. The findings may help institutional practitioners to understand the individual differences in doctoral candidates' coping processes and to predict their coping responses to their writing emotions.

Finally, further research needs to explore how Chinese doctoral students, who have prior intercultural learning and writing experiences, cope with their emotions in their writing processes. Many scholars have found that international doctoral students who have previous overseas experience suffer less acculturative stress than those with little or no overseas

learning experience because they have developed intercultural and interpersonal communication skills to resolve their tensions (e.g., Campbell, 2015; Mukminin & McMahon, 2013; Zhang, 2016). Identifying the coping differences between these two student groups would be worthy of exploration, as the findings may better inform students studying in an English-speaking country for the first time about the importance of extending intercultural competence in their emotion-coping processes.

6.8 Conclusion

This chapter explored three common types of strategies that Chinese doctoral students employed to cope with their writing emotions. Students tended to self-regulate their emotions and sought academic support to deal with their proposal writing. Strikingly, peers from the same disciplines turned out to be the most frequently described coping resource, whereby students asked for emotional and academic support. My findings highlight the significance of creating and conserving a genuine supportive peer community for beginning doctoral students, as well as raising awareness about more effective academic assistance from university doctoral support staff and supervisors.

Throughout Chapters Four to Six, I have suggested that there is a need to inform institutional practitioners about the pedagogies that they could use to engage with students' writing emotions. At the same time, it is important to promote students' understanding of the emotionality of their writing and to advise them on how to best cope with the highs and lows of their PhD writing. Therefore, the next and final chapter of my thesis presents a novel framework for conceptualising the complexity of doctoral writing emotions, as well as suggesting recommendations for supervisors, doctoral support staff, and students.

Chapter Seven: Contributions to Theory and Practice

> Success is making a positive difference to other people, especially seeing others grow, succeed and thrive as a result of your own small contribution.
>
> - Azran Osman Rani

I began this thesis by reflecting on my own emotions when working on my proposal writing. As described in Chapter One, in the first few months of my provisional year, I was lost in finding my research direction. In order to generate new ideas for my writing, I went on a short trip to Rotoroa Island, where I shut myself away to let my mind shift into a deep-thinking mode. During one hour of freewriting on a beach, I recalled my story of writing my first essay in the UK as a master's student. My reflective accounts highlighted the emotionality of my academic writing experiences and led to my interest in researching the emotional dimension of doctoral writing. Building and expanding on previous scholars' work in this field (see Chapter Two), I used a qualitative approach with a phenomenological research design (see Chapter Three) to explore the emotions of first-year Chinese doctoral students writing a thesis proposal. Specifically, I reported how the students expressed their feelings towards their writing (see Chapter Four), what triggered their emotions and how they were appraised towards writing facilitation and impediment (see Chapter Five), as well as what coping strategies students employed in response to their writing emotions (see Chapter Six). In line with previous scholars, my findings suggest that emotion is an indispensable part of a student's PhD writing journey (e.g., Burford, 2017; Cotterall, 2013; Herman, 2010). Being emotional about writing is a normal and often a necessary part of the process of learning how to develop a confident scholarly identity.

While writing this chapter, the final chapter of my thesis, I did not experience intense emotions as I did during my provisional year and master's studies. However, I did go through many weeks of drafting, re-structuring, honing, and polishing my sentences before getting to the text that you are now reading. Although I am not yet an experienced academic writer, I have

come to see my negative emotions as inevitable rocks blocking the river that runs into the ocean of successful thesis writing. In this chapter, instead of advising how to banish emotions or avoid being emotional, I stay true to the spirit of my inquiry and ask: How can we better understand and act upon the emotionality of doctoral writing?

My research makes significant contributions to a broader field of doctoral writing. Based on my findings from Chapters Four to Six, I have developed a new conceptual framework for understanding emotional triggers and coping responses. In addition, I suggest a set of practical recommendations for supervisors, doctoral support staff, and students regarding how to bring more positive feelings and energies into the writing process. This thesis closes with the limitations of my overall research project and a positive outlook on this topic.

7.1 Doctoral Writing Emotions: A Novel Framework

Although a growing number of scholars have proposed that the emotional dimension of doctoral writing needs to be viewed from a pedagogical perspective (Aitchison et al., 2012; Cameron et al., 2009; Wellington, 2010), few of them have conceptualised this dimension theoretically. It seems that our current understanding of writing emotions is primarily concerned with individual matters, i.e., students' subjective feelings towards writing, such as feeling anxious, frustrated, excited, or satisfied (Herman, 2010). However, in accordance with my findings, I argue that the meaning of writing emotions should be understood in a broader context. As my framework (Figure 7.1) shows, the emotional nature of writing consists of more than just a student experiencing a feeling; instead, it is a multifaceted, dynamic, and iterative process shaped by individual, institutional, and cultural factors.

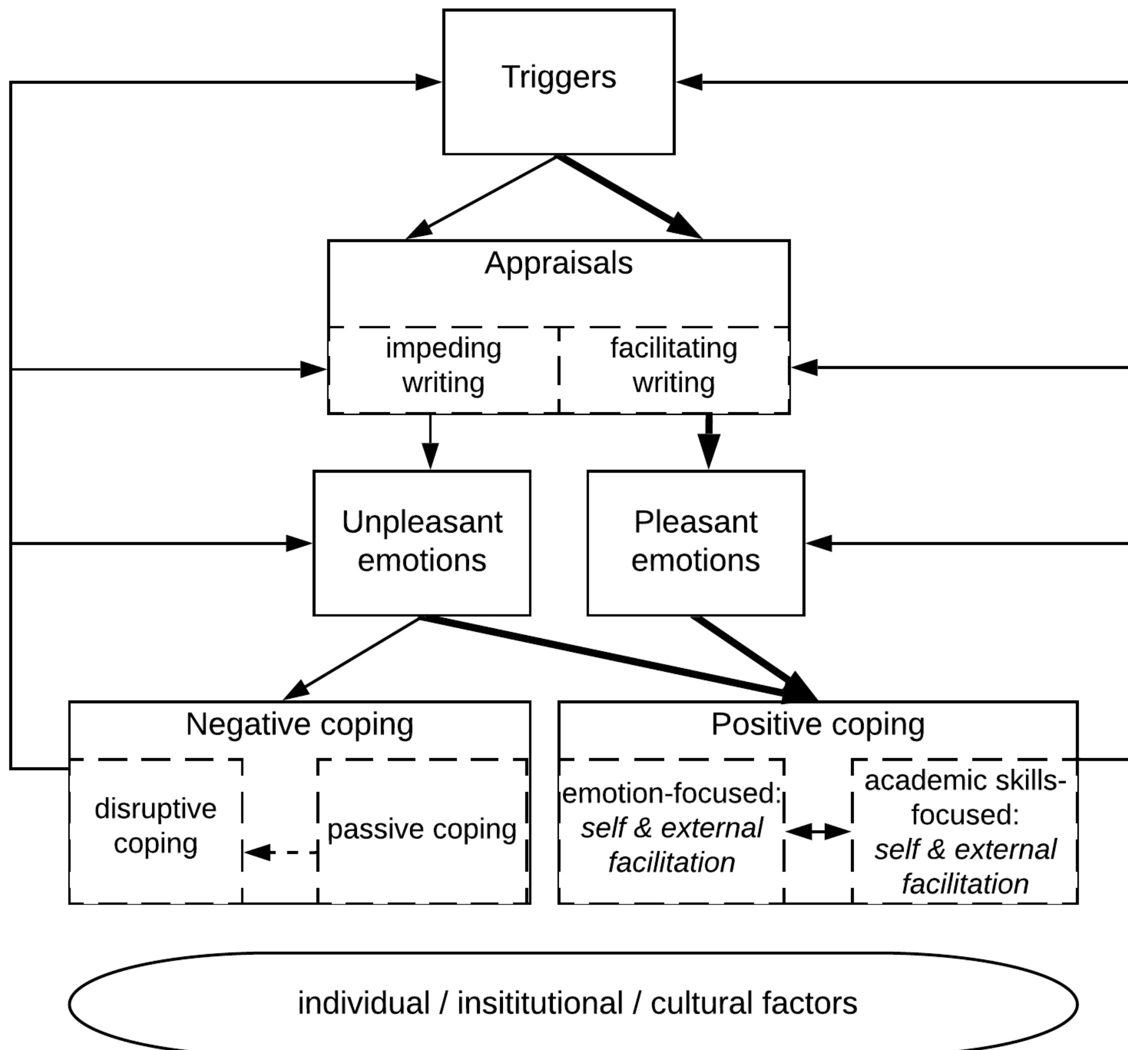

Figure 7.1. A framework for conceptualising doctoral writing emotions

As indicated in Figure 7.1, students' experience of writing emotions involves four essential components that are formed in a sequential and iterative process. The sequence begins with triggers that relate to students' writing activities, followed by their appraisals of the triggers. Aligned with Roseman (1996), the impeding appraisals lead to unpleasant writing emotions, whereas the facilitating appraisals lead to pleasant writing emotions. These emotions in turn influence students' coping responses. Students who employ positive coping strategies, including both emotion-focused and academic skills-focused strategies, are able to reduce unpleasant emotions, build on pleasant ones, develop skills for writing; thus they are likely to reappraise the triggers from a positive (facilitating) perspective, which in turn informs what they view as triggers. By contrast, students who adopt negative coping strategies either respond to

their emotions passively (e.g., by hiding them) or exhibit disruptive behaviours such as withdrawing, denying problems, or giving up studies (e.g., Carver et al., 1989; Colomba et al., 1999; Hirai et al., 2015). Although evidence of disruptive behaviour is not shown in my research, one of the participants developed the idea of giving up her doctoral studies, and a few used passive coping strategies that produced increased unpleasant emotions and negative appraisals of their problems. These negative appraisals in turn led to more negative triggers, such as disengagement from interacting with other people, slow writing progress, and low writing productivity.

By acknowledging the multifaceted and dynamic nature of the appraisal and coping process, we may better understand what constitutes the emotional dimension of students' writing processes and how its components influence each other. Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that individual, institutional, and cultural factors also play a crucial part within this process. They influence what students see as triggers in the very first place, whether the triggers are appraised as impeding or facilitating writing, how emotions are expressed, and how students cope with the emotions. Individual factors, such as students' prior learning and writing experiences in China, may affect how they evaluate their writing interactions with their Western supervisors. Institutional factors, such as peer communities and university writing support services, may impact on how students use the resources outside of their supervision to facilitate their writing. And finally, cultural norms may influence how students perceive, express, and respond to their emotions, for example, by hiding emotions to maintain a pleasant relationship with supervisors or to "save face" with their peers (Ingleby & Chung, 2009; Mukminin & McMahon, 2013). Actions responding to these three factors can be taken to bring more pleasant emotions and facilitators into students' writing processes (see four highlighted arrows in Figure 7.1).

7.2 Recommendations

One of the true values of any educational research project lies within the researcher's ability to reach out and communicate with multiple audiences regarding the significance of their work, and how it makes a difference to teaching and learning. In this section, I focus on

presenting the practical strategies and approaches that can be used by supervisors, institutional practitioners, and students to facilitate doctoral writing. Although my recommendations emphasise the experiences of first-year Chinese doctoral candidates studying in an English-speaking country for the first time, the core principles of the implications may apply to other international doctoral students working on their thesis writing.

7.2.1 Supervisors

Create an Open and Encouraging Feedback Platform. In my study, supervisors' writing feedback is the most frequently reported trigger causing students' negative emotions. To help students view this trigger from a facilitating perspective (see Figure 7.1), it is important for supervisors to stress the importance of receiving critiques in becoming a successful academic writer. Although a large amount of research has been conducted regarding how to provide effective feedback (e.g., Can & Walker, 2014; Carter & Kumar, 2017; Xu, 2017), the emotional aspects of doctoral feedback practice have mostly been neglected. Critical feedback is seen by many supervisors as a way "to facilitate the process of induction into the academic discourse community" (Wellington, 2010, p. 148). However, beginning doctoral students, especially those from cultures where open criticisms and direct critiques are not encouraged, tend to view negative and/or critical feedback as a sign of incapability. As novice writers, they have yet to develop a proper understanding of the role that critical feedback plays in the production of a sound thesis. To help such students understand the function of a strong and sustained critique-process, which will be an ongoing aspect of their academic life, supervisors can encourage students to provide and receive peer feedback, thereby creating a safe space where emotions and academic writing can be more easily navigated.

In addition, supervisors should be aware of the phrasing of their given critiques and offer additional help to aid students in managing the emotions that feedback may stir up. For example, Li and Seale (2007) recommend praising students' work using humorous language and avoiding sensitive comments. My research shows that positive and encouraging comments promote students' self-confidence. Moreover, supervisors updating their feedback progress, for instance, by informing students about how much writing they have read and how much time

they need before sending back the feedback, can help develop students' appreciation of their supervisory work and effort.

Lastly, to lessen the emotional impact of conflicting feedback from joint supervision, it may be useful for supervisors to create a transparent feedback platform, where students, main supervisors, co-supervisors, and learning advisors can all engage in the same conversation, share information, respect disagreement, and encourage growth. One possible solution is to use web-based tools (e.g., Google Docs, Microsoft Office 365). This allows students to make a choice about which suggestions to follow and/or refuse and renders this choice visible to supervisors and doctoral advisors. The advantage of online platforms is that face-to-face embarrassment can be minimised, and a culture of transparent and respectful feedback processes is fostered.

Encourage Students to Express Their Emotions. To acknowledge and recognise the emotional dimension of doctoral writing, supervisors should encourage students to openly and freely talk about both their pleasant and unpleasant emotions towards their writing. As previous scholars have suggested, emotions serve a crucial function in influencing individuals' cognition and behaviour, such as decision-making and interaction with social members (Shuman & Scherer, 2014). As a result, denying, suppressing, or concealing emotions is potentially "dysfunctional" behaviour which can lead to negative emotion management results (Ingram, 2013, p. 9).

As shown in my framework (Figure 7.1), there is a need for students to re-position their writing-related emotions from seeing them as problems (Aitchison et al., 2012; Cameron et al., 2009; Huerta et al., 2017) to seeing them as natural human feelings arising from writing. Previous studies, as well as my findings, have shown that some Chinese students feel embarrassed or 'face-losing' when exposing their emotions to others (e.g., Mukminin & McMahon, 2013). Therefore, it might be helpful for supervisors to organise casual get-togethers, to ask students to self-reflect on: (a) What are their pleasant and unpleasant writing emotions? (b) What has made them feel positive and negative about their writing? (c) Which strategies do they use to manage their unpleasant feelings and build on pleasant ones? Students could

describe their emotions through various forms of expression that they feel comfortable with, for example, through words, phrases, metaphors, idioms, quotations, pictures, diagrams, or drawings. By answering the above questions, students may learn to regard emotions as a starting point for improving their writing, rather than as an “enemy of progress” (Aitchison et al., 2012, p. 439). Furthermore, by encouraging students to share their emotions with peers, supervisors may create a culture of transparency, in which conversations about emotions become a normal part of doctoral life, rather than “an admission of fundamental incompetence” (Torrance et al., 1994, p. 106).

Show Empathy for Students’ Emotional Pitfalls. Supervisors showing an empathic understanding of students’ writing struggles may inspire them to be more honest about their genuine feelings associated with their writing. Such an approach could lay the groundwork for students’ positive support-seeking behaviour and lead to more pleasant emotions bringing more driving energies into their writing life. According to my findings from Chapter Six, students tend to seek care, encouragement, comfort, trust, and love from peers who also experience similar problems in their writing processes. However, they appear to be unwilling to open up in the same way to their supervisors, whom they believe are not to be challenged (Ding & Devine, 2018), are not interested in their personal feelings, or regard their emotions as an indicator of lacking academic competence. Mayer et al. (1990) claim that recognising one’s own feelings is an important ability for developing an emphatic understanding and better communication skills. This idea is developed further by Strandler et al. (2014), who suggest that supervision, nowadays to some degree, “involves students’ private and individual conditions”, and the supervisor, to some extent, “becomes a counsellor, giving personal advice to the PhD student” (p. 79). Therefore, when interacting with beginning Chinese doctoral students, either through emails, informal face-to-face talks, or formal meetings, supervisors could share their own and/or other students’ writing experiences. For example, supervisors could show their own messy writing drafts to students, describing how they felt about their work-in-progress, how they successfully managed their negative emotions, and how long it took drafting and crafting the writing. Through sharing experiences, students are assured that emotions are a necessary part

of the writing process and that various strategies can be learnt and applied to successfully manage these feelings.

Develop 'Buddy' Systems for Beginning Candidates. Peers in my research are perceived as the most important emotional and academic support providers. To strengthen such coping facilitation (see Figure 7.1), supervisors could assist beginning doctoral students in finding self-help or mutual help writing groups and introduce them to 'buddies', i.e., other students who have experienced similar writing and intercultural learning experiences and have already coped with their own situations. According to Heaney and Israel (2008), people often come together in mutual-aid groups because they are facing a common problem, or they want to bring about similar changes. Building on this claim, Rhodes (2004) suggests that within a self-help or mutual aid group, roles of support-provider and support-recipient are mutually shared among the group members, and the ties between them often entail high levels of reciprocity. My research and previous literature show that Chinese students tend to see themselves as a part of a social group and emphasise social support, cooperation, and interdependence (e.g., Bailey & Dua, 1999; Hofsteds, 1980; Lam & Zane, 2004; Leung & Bond, 1984). Therefore, such 'buddy' systems for Chinese students, especially those working on autonomous research projects, could be useful resources, whereby they can mobilise emotional and academic support for their writing. Such systems may also help students to adapt to the new learning environment by encouraging them in problem-solving and scholarly identity construction within their discipline writing communities.

7.2.2 Doctoral Support Staff

Enhance Disciplinary Networks. Various examples in my thesis, as well as my framework (Figure 7.1), have illustrated that a genuinely supportive community at a host university is important for students coming from very different cultural and educational environments. I suggest that departmental doctoral support staff or programme coordinators could assist beginning students to gain access to their disciplinary communities and strengthen their ties with their network members. My findings confirm a large body of research showing that a community of disciplinary practice contributes to instrumental and emotional support for the

development of writing skills and provides a space for intercultural learning experiences (e.g. Hadjioannou et al., 2007; Walsh, 2010). Such types of support structures increase students' sense of belonging and provide a foundation for good collegial relationships. Doctoral support staff could arrange formal and/or informal meetings and gatherings to create networking opportunities with peers, post-doctoral fellows, other teachers, and researchers. Through engaging in discipline-focused activities, students may enhance their existing network ties with other first-year candidates and develop new relationships with the colleagues who have successfully completed their proposals. These gatherings may also facilitate beginning candidates to find their writing 'buddies', so as they can turn to each other for on-going information, advice, writing, and emotional support.

Raise Awareness of Physical Settings for Students' Writing. Doctoral programme administrators should be aware of the influence of physical settings on students' emotional well-being and writing productivity. The physical space, where students work on their writing, can shape their writing experiences and produce both positive and negative effects on students' academic work. In my study, some students opted to write in a comfortable place (e.g., staying at home or sitting in a café near a beach) to build on and extend their pleasure in writing; whereas some students wrote off campus to avoid interacting with peers due to the breakdown of their relationships. In addition, some students found it difficult to speak to other candidates in their shared workplace (e.g., doctoral room or office), because some of the students were in a deep-writing mode. These examples highlight that there is a need to consider how to structure doctoral students common learning places to facilitate them to write. For instance, students could be assigned into different office rooms based on their personal choices (e.g., whether they want to work in a quiet room or work with other peers), stages of thesis writing, or years of doctoral studies. Host universities could set up writing lounges, cafés, or centres, where students find it comfortable to work on their writing independently whilst at the same time, they are not separated from their peers. Furthermore, faculty and department administrators could organise writing retreats or other types of activities that nudge beginning candidates to get involved in their academic communities, to engage in the disciplinary conversations, and to form

writing circles (e.g., Murray, 2014) or peer writing groups (e.g., Doody et al., 2017).

Work Closely with Students' Supervisors. Departmental doctoral learning and language advisors should work closely with supervisors to provide discipline-oriented support for students' writing. As my research shows, students tend to improve their writing skills through learning from academic publications and asking for feedback from their peers from the same disciplines. However, for those who do not have a supportive peer community, the challenge of learning how to write for one's disciplines may create more work for supervisors. Although supervisors are students' "writing teachers" (Paré, 2011, p. 59), my own writing experiences, as well as those of my participants, suggest that it is impractical for supervisors to provide detailed feedback on every single piece of their students' writing because of their other academic duties. Disciplinary writing advisors could fill in such gaps by introducing novice scholars to their discipline discourse practices and providing on-going writing support, for example, by offering detailed feedback on language, knowledge, research, and writing conventions. Such support can complement sound supervision (Aitchison & Guerin, 2014) and help students understand that they always have a place to ask for assistance if their relationships with supervisors are strained.

Provide Cross-Academic Cultural Orientation. As illustrated in Figure 7.1, cultural factors impact on the process of how students experience their writing emotions. Paltridge and Harbon (2008) state that individuals moving to a new culture often experience a kind of transformation as they are exposed to "a point of view that is often in conflict with their current values and beliefs" (p. 55). As a result, it is essential for international students, especially those studying in unfamiliar educational settings for the first time, to develop intercultural learning competencies and prepare for major academic transitions. Going through this process, according to Mezirow (1991), takes time and involves a few stages, starting with individuals struggling with their new experiences and ending with a stage when they integrate the experiences into their worldview. My research has shown that first-year Chinese doctoral students experience difficulty in dealing with their new writing communities, such as keeping silent about conflicting feedback and putting up with perceived 'unfair treatment' from their

supervisors. These difficulties can have a detrimental effect on students' emotional well-being, writing interactions with supervisors, and academic achievement.

Therefore, I argue that doctoral support staff should not assume students can automatically integrate into the new learning situation and make themselves part of the group. Cross-cultural academic orientation should be provided for beginning international candidates, especially those studying in an English-speaking country for the first time, to help them be able to 'get into' their new disciplinary communities. The orientation may include examining what types of support students can expect to receive and informing them of academic and writing support services provided by the university and departments/faculties. It also may be useful to provide a few workshops or some training, which would allow them to reflect on the influence of their beliefs and behaviours on their new communities. For example, a cross-cultural card game created by Abdullah and Shephard (2000) may help students to learn the differences between Asian and Western cultural values. The central idea of such orientation is to provide a safe and non-judgmental space to aid students in raising intercultural awareness, so that they can benefit from their intercultural learning to construct a strong scholarly identity in their chosen fields.

7.2.3 Students

Reflect on Academic Writing Practices. New doctoral students must understand that academic writing at a doctoral level is more than "getting ideas down on paper" and making sure they are written in "good English" (Atkinson & Curtis, 1998, p. 17). Various examples in my study have shown that the process of constructing a thesis proposal involves a set of skills that requires students to reflect on the writing practices they learned as a master's student. For instance, students need to be able to balance their time spent on writing, reading, experiments/research, and personal matters; to set practical goals for writing and research work; to adhere to regular writing routines; and to be prepared for frustration when crafting their writing. Students also need to be aware that positive working relationships with supervisors are crucial to the success of doctoral writing (Morrison Saunders et al., 2010), and undoubtedly this relationship can be an emotional trigger for their writing. Previous scholars argue that supervisors need to provide intellectual support for students and at the same time "connect to"

them (Strandler et al., 2014, p. 80). My research suggests that a critical precursor to this supervision practice is that students must be willing to share their emotions with their supervisors. Therefore, beginning candidates need to learn how to recognise and reflect on the emotional dimension of their writing relationships and proactively communicate their concerns to the supervisors.

Extend Emotion-Coping Competence. As "emotional ups and downs are a normal aspect of the doctoral process" (Morrison Saunders et al., 2010, p. 22), new candidates are recommended to increase their knowledge about how to manage the emotions that writing stirs up and how to cope with the causes of the emotions. Many examples in Chapter Six have illustrated what types of self- and external facilitation coping strategies can be used to minimize students' emotional impact on their writing progress. Several frequently described approaches include engaging in pleasurable activities, re-evaluating triggers from a positive perspective, and working with peers for mutual encouragement.

Despite the use of such strategies, it is important to note that negative emotions will probably never go away entirely if students do not improve their academic writing skills (see Figure 7.1). A large amount of literature cited in Chapter Two addresses topics such as how to follow disciplinary writing conventions (Barnard, 2012), how to avoid plagiarism (Marcovici, 2019), how to achieve clarity/consistency (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008), and how to develop an authorial voice (Bowden & Green, 2019). Learning how to write, for many doctoral candidates, is a challenging process (Aitchison et al., 2012; Cameron et al., 2009), which takes time and requires students' perseverance and determination.

Develop a Growth Mindset. In my research, a few candidates whose writing processes were generally positive tended to share a distinctive characteristic: acknowledging problems in writing as a sign of improvement leading to success, rather than of incapability leading to self-doubt. Despite the unpleasant emotions that may occur from time to time, they actively used positive strategies to cope with their emotions and develop academic skills, to increase their positive feelings, and to create more facilitators for their writing (see Figure 7.1). These students have a "growth mindset", which allows them to see failure or difficulties as a development of

their existing abilities, instead of evidence of lack of intelligence (Hochanadel & Finamore, 2015, p. 48). According to previous studies, students' mindsets influence what they strive for, what they see as success, and how they feel about failure (e.g., Dweck, 2016; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). With a growth mindset, students are keen to look for the information that could help them expand their knowledge and skills and feel positive about the rewarding effort they put into their work. Thus, students need to develop a growth mindset for their PhD journey, by viewing the challenges and problems in their writing processes as great opportunities for personal development to become competent scholarly writers, so that they can transform negative feelings into positive coping responses that in turn will lead to higher academic achievement.

Seek Happiness and Inspiration in Writing. Emotion is an integral part of a student's doctoral research. Despite the above recommendation and strategies, negative emotions may remain in most candidates' writing processes. In the short run, the coping techniques described here may be useful for reducing crippling negative feelings. In the long run, however, what motivates students to cross the finishing line of their doctoral marathon is the true happiness and inspiration that writing brings to their PhD journey. Rather than focusing solely on emotional problems, my study has highlighted students' positive writing experiences, such as expressing positive feelings towards writing, identifying facilitating triggers for their writing, creating positive writing environments, and developing academic skills. My thesis suggests that doctoral writing can be enjoyable and inspiring; the key is to focus on the positive aspects of the writing process and find a way to infuse it with inspiration and pleasure.

7.3 Limitations

A main limitation of my doctoral project lies in the fact that only students' voices (i.e., data from students) have been included. Although I triangulated my findings with the previous literature on supervision and doctoral support practices when interpreting my data and drawing the conclusions, the lack of institutional practitioner views as a comparison measure can be seen as a limitation. This is because students may misinterpret their received support from supervisors, peers, and university services, based on their personal bias, knowledge, and prior learning experiences. This limitation could be addressed with a follow-up interview design,

where voices from the above individuals are included, to capture the other side of the story. It would be interesting to see whether they are aware of students' writing emotions, what their opinions on students' emotions are, and how they respond to them pedagogically or strategically.

7.4 Closing Remarks

With a focus on Chinese doctoral students studying in an English-speaking country for the first time, my research makes a significant contribution to the field of doctoral writing by revealing insights into the students' emotions, triggers, appraisals, and coping strategies with respect to their thesis proposal writing. Overall, the evidence from my thesis suggests that emotions impact on students' writing progress, as well as their motivation and confidence in completing their writing tasks, and thereby should be accorded special attention. My thesis also provides fresh insights into the conceptualisation of writing emotion by highlighting its multifaceted, dynamic, and iterative nature. These insights have led to a set of practical recommendations that can better inform intercultural supervision and doctoral writing support practice, as well as inspiring students to appropriately view and manage their own emotions during their writing processes.

Aware that I am now coming to the end, I take a moment to encourage supervisors and higher education scholars to think about what could be done in future studies to continue exploring this topic. Numerous specific suggestions for future research have been made as part of the implication sections in Chapters Four, Five and Six. Throughout the discussion, the importance of exploring the emotional dimension of doctoral writing has been demonstrated repeatedly. Although I attempted to generate an overall picture of how to effectively act upon this dimension, the work is not yet complete. More research could be conducted to investigate institutional practitioners' perspectives, to examine whether the specific themes and approaches from my thesis can be used to inform future supervision and doctoral writing support practice, to build a positive environment where students are able to transform challenges into positive energies and seek more happiness and inspiration in their PhD writing.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Research Advertisement

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet (Online Survey)

Appendix C: Consent Form (Online Survey)

Appendix D: Eligibility Assessment

Appendix E: Online Survey

Appendix F: Participant Information Sheet (Interview)

Appendix G: Consent Form (Interview)

Appendix H: Interview Protocol

Appendix I: Emotion Primary Categories and Sub-Categories in the Chinese Affective Lexicon Ontology

Appendix A

CENTRE FOR
LEARNING AND RESEARCH
IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Faculty of Education and Social Work
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The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland,1142, New Zealand

Research Advertisement

- Are you a Chinese international PhD student in your provisional year at the University of Auckland?
- Studying in an English-speaking country for the first time?
- Frustrated about writing your proposal, or on the contrary, finding writing is a pleasure? …then I would love to hear from you!

When you come in and study at the University of Auckland in New Zealand, which is very different from your country of origin, you may be satisfied and enjoy your doctoral writing, or you may feel writing is difficult, or you may even be struggling with it. You are invited to participate in my study exploring doctoral students' emotions about thesis proposal writing.

Your participation in my research will involve:

- Filling out an online survey about your writing emotions (which will take you no longer than 15 minutes to complete).
- If you are willing to be interviewed by me then you will have the opportunity to take part in an individual interview (around one hour). Participants for the interviews will be selected based on gender, age, discipline, stage of candidature, and their responses to the survey questions. If you are interested in the interview, please leave your contact information at the end of the survey.

I am Linda (Qian) Yu, a doctoral student at the Centre for Learning and Research for Higher Education (CLeaR), the University of Auckland. I am conducting this research for my PhD thesis in Education, supervised by Professor Helen Sword and Dr Marion Blumenstein. If you have any inquiries or questions, please feel free to contact me at linda.yu@auckland.ac.nz or call + 64 9 373 7999 ext. 87748.

Please follow this link to the survey: https://online questionnaire: Chinese international PhD students' writing emotions in NZ.

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON NOVEMBER 21, 2017 FOR THREE YEARS. REFERENCE NUMBER 019578.

Appendix B

Faculty of Education and Social Work
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Participant Information Sheet (Online Survey)

Chinese International Doctoral Students' Writing Emotions

Student Researcher: Linda (Qian) Yu
Main Supervisor: Professor Helen Sword
Co-Supervisor: Dr Marion Blumenstein

Research Project
My research focuses on first-year Chinese international doctoral students studying in an English-speaking country for the first time and their emotions when working on their thesis proposal writing. The aim of my study is to explore: (a) which emotions students feel about their writing, (b) what factors trigger their emotions and how students appraise those triggers as impeding and/or facilitating writing, and (c) what coping strategies students use to deal with their writing emotions. My research findings may inform institutional practitioners about the pedagogies that they may use to respond to and act upon students' writing emotions. My findings may also promote doctoral students' understanding of the emotionality of their writing and help them cope with the pitfalls of their PhD writing and become competent scholars in their chosen fields.

Project Procedures and Participants' Rights
Phase One: If you choose to participate in my research, you will be asked to complete an online survey which takes less than 15 minutes. The main purpose of the survey is to obtain general information about your emotions associated with your proposal writing experiences and to select eligible participants for a follow-up interview. The survey is in English and Chinese, consisting of three parts. The first part assesses your eligibility to participate in this study. The second part contains three questions about how you feel while working on your thesis proposal. The third part gathers your basic demographic information and your email address if you want to be interviewed by me. Please keep in mind that it is voluntary to take part in my interview.

Phase Two: After you submit the survey and agree to be interviewed, you may receive an email invitation for an individual interview, which lasts no more than one hour. The purpose of the interview is to gain a deeper understanding of the emotional dimensional of students' proposal writing experiences and to provide rich information about their emotions, triggers, appraisals, and coping strategies with respect to their proposal writing. Participants for the interview will be selected based on gender, age, discipline, stage of candidature, and responses to the survey questions, to draw a representative sample for my research. For these reasons, some prospective participants may not be included in my interview session and will be notified of this by me. If you have been selected and interviewed, you will receive a shopping voucher valued at $20 as a thank-you for your time.

Participation in my study is entirely voluntary. Your decision to either participate or not participate will not influence your doctoral education or academic relationships with the department or members of staff at the University of Auckland. If you are a student of Professor Helen Sword or/and Dr Marion Blumenstein, assurance is given that your participation or non-participation in this study will have no effect on your academic progress or relationship with the university. You may contact your Head of Department (HoD) should you feel that this assurance has not been met. As a participant, you have the right to withdraw yourself and your data from this research at any time within two weeks after submitting the survey without giving a reason. If you decide to withdraw, please contact me no later than two weeks after submitting your survey responses, and I will then delete all your data and information from my computer and the university server.

Data Storage, Retention, Destruction, and Future Use
Survey data will be securely saved on my password protected computer at CLeaR, the University of Auckland and backed up by the university server. My supervisors and I will be the only people having access to this file. Any produced hard copies will be stored in a locked cabinet in my office. The data will be destroyed after a period of six years. Any data stored electronically on my computer and the university server will be permanently deleted after that time. Any paper copies will be destroyed using a safety document shredder. Data and your provided information will be used for my doctoral thesis and also for potential academic publications and conference presentations. Survey data will be reported in summaries of research findings as group frequencies and percentages. If you would like to have a copy of the survey findings, please indicate this with your contact information on the consent form. I will email a summary to you when the data analysis is complete.

Confidentiality
To protect your anonymity, your participation (or non-participation) and survey responses will be kept strictly confidential. No identifying information will be disclosed to a third party or any future publications or my thesis.

Thank you very much for your time and effort in making this study possible. If you have any queries or want to know more about the study, please feel free to contact me or my supervisors.

CONTACT DETAILS AND APPROVAL

Student Researcher	**Director of CLeaR and Main Supervisor**	**Co-Supervisor**
Linda (Qian) Yu linda.yu@auckland.ac.nz +64 9 373 7999 ext. 87748 CLeaR The University of Auckland	Professor Helen Sword h.sword@auckland.ac.nz DDI: +64 9 923 6686 CLeaR The University of Auckland	Dr Marion Blumenstein m.blumenstein@auckland.ac.nz DDI: +64 9 923 2479 CLeaR The University of Auckland

You may also contact the Deputy Director of CLeaR, Dr Sean Sturm, by email: s.sturm@auckland.ac.nz or phone: +64 9 923 3145. For any queries regarding ethical concerns, you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone: 09 373-7599 ext. 83711. Email: ro-ethics@auckland.ac.nz.

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON NOVEMBER 21, 2017 FOR THREE YEARS. REFERENCE NUMBER 019578.

Counselling Services and International Student Support

Some Chinese international doctoral students may suffer extreme negative emotions about their writing. Some of the survey questions might leave certain people feeling unsettled or churned up. If this happens to you, although unlikely, you may like to contact a health professional at the University of Auckland counselling services or other service providers, which are free and confidential. Contact details are provided below.

Counselling Services:

- City Campus Clinic

University Health and Counselling
Level 3, Kate Edge Information Commons
2 Alfred Street, Auckland, City Campus
Hours: Monday to Thursday 8.30am – 6pm
Friday 8.30am – 5pm
Phone: +64 9 923 7681

- Epsom Campus Clinic

Building 6ERGate4
60 Epsom Ave, Epsom, Auckland 1023
Hours (semester time only):
Monday and Thursday 9am-1pm (Health staff available)
Monday, Tuesday afternoon, Wednesday and Thursday 9am-5pm (Counsellor available)
Phone: +64 9 923 7681

- Grafton Campus Clinic

Building 505Rm 325, Level 3
85 Park Road, Grafton, Auckland, 1023
Hours (semester time only):
Monday to Friday 8.30am – 4.30pm
Phone: +64 9 923 76811
Below is a list of counselling and support services which available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week:

- Lifeline Aotearoa

Phone: (09) 5222 999 within Auckland or 0800 543 354 outside Auckland

- Youthline

Phone: 0800 37 66 33 or Free TXT 234

- Healthline

Phone: 0800 611 116

- Depression Helpline

Phone: 0800 111 757 or Free TXT 4204
For all medical emergencies requiring an ambulance – dial 111

Please remember that the University of Auckland provides wide academic and learning support for international students. Please contact the International Student Information Centre for further details.

International Student Information Centre
The University of Auckland
Room G23, 7 Symonds Street, Auckland.
Phone: +64 9 373 7513
E: int-questions@auckland.ac.nz

Appendix C

CENTRE FOR
LEARNING AND RESEARCH
IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Faculty of Education and Social Work
Level 3, Fisher International Building
18 Waterloo Quadrant
P: 09 923 814 ext. 88140
E: clear@auckland.ac.nz
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland,1142, New Zealand

Consent Form (Online Survey)

THIS FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF 6 YEARS

Research title: Chinese International Doctoral Students' Writing Emotions
Student Researcher: Linda (Qian) Yu
Main Supervisor: Professor Helen Sword
Co-Supervisor: Dr Marion Blumenstein

I have read the Participant Information Sheet and have understood the voluntary nature of the research and why I have been selected. I have the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction. I understand that:

- My participation in this research project is voluntary.
- I am invited to complete an online survey.
- I may be invited for a follow-up individual interview. If I choose to do so I will be asked to give my email address at the end of the survey. To provide my email address on the survey is completely voluntary.
- I have the right to withdraw myself and the data I have provided at any time within two weeks after submitting the survey without giving a reason.
- My data will be securely saved on a password protected computer at CLeaR at the University of Auckland and backed up by the university server for six years, after which time the data will be destroyed.
- My participation or non-participation in this research is kept confidential. No identifying information will be disclosed to a third party or any future publications or the student researcher's thesis.
- My survey data will be used for the student researcher's doctoral thesis at the University of Auckland and also for potential academic publications or conference presentations.
- I wish to receive a summary of survey findings, which can be sent to this email address_______________________________

□ I agree to participate in this research and am ready to start the survey.

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON NOVEMBER 21, 2017 FOR THREE YEARS. REFERENCE NUMBER 019578.

Appendix D

CENTRE FOR
LEARNING AND RESEARCH
IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Faculty of Education and Social Work
Level 3, Fisher International Building
18 Waterloo Quadrant
P: 09 923 814 ext. 88140
E: clear@auckland.ac.nz
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland,1142, New Zealand

Eligibility Assessment

Before taking you to the main part of the survey, first I need to check your eligibility for my study. This is because my research focuses on the Chinese doctoral students who are studying in an English-speaking country for the first time.

Please answer each of the following questions by ticking either 'Yes' or 'No'.

1. Are you a Chinese national from mainland China? Y/N
2. Are you an international PhD student enrolled in a full-time doctoral programme and currently within your provisional year at the University of Auckland? Y/N
3. Have you gained a doctoral degree, and/or a master's degree, and/or a bachelor's degree, and/or a diploma in an English-speaking country before studying at the University of Auckland as a doctoral student? Y/N
4. Have you studied as an international exchange student in an English-speaking country for more than one year, before studying at the University of Auckland as a doctoral student? Y/N
5. Have you taken any English language course in an English-speaking country for more than one year, before studying at the University of Auckland as a doctoral student? Y/N

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Appendix E

CENTRE FOR
LEARNING AND RESEARCH
IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Faculty of Education and Social Work
Level 3, Fisher International Building
18 Waterloo Quadrant
P: 09 923 814 ext. 88140
E: clear@auckland.ac.nz
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland,1142, New Zealand

Online Survey

Chinese International Doctoral Students' Writing Emotions

Thanks for participating in this study. The following questions ask you to describe the emotions you have experienced while working on your thesis proposal during your provisional year at the University of Auckland. Please remember that all your responses are confidential and there are no right or wrong answers to any of the following questions.
感谢您参与这项研究。以下这些问题是让您描述你在奥克兰大学博士预备期写研究计划 (Research/Thesis Proposal) 时经历的情绪问题。我们会严格保密您提供的信息。请记住您的答案没有对与错之分。

1. Please tick all of the emotions that you have experienced while working on your thesis proposal writing.
请勾选你在奥克兰大学博士预备期中写研究计划 时经历的情绪:

- Interested 感兴趣
- Frustrated 受挫
- Excited 兴奋
- Anxious 焦虑
- Satisfied 满意
- Depressed 沮丧
- Happy 高兴
- Disgusted 厌恶
- Confident 自信
- Confused 疑惑
- Inspired 鼓舞
- Lonely 孤独
- Other (If you have experienced other emotions, which are not listed above, please specify in the space given below.)
  其它 (如果以上提供的词语没有包含您所经历的情绪，请您补充在下面空白处)

  ____

2. Please briefly describe a recent situation, in which you have felt negative about working on your thesis proposal writing (e.g., what the emotion was and how you experienced it).
请您简单描述一个您最近在博士预备期写研究计划时感到消极的情景（例如什么情绪，如何经的）。

3. Please briefly describe a recent situation, in which you have felt positive about working on your thesis proposal writing (e.g., what the emotion is and how you experienced it).
请您简单描述一个您最近在博士预备期写研究计划时感到积极的情景（例如什么情绪，如何经的）。

Demographic Information:

We are interested in your academic backgrounds. Please keep in mind that your provided information will be kept strictly confidential.
我们对的学术背景非常感兴趣。请记住我们会严格保密您提供的所有信息。

1. Your Age: 您的年龄?
- 20-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50 or older

2. Gender 性别: □Female 女 / □Male 男 / □Gender Diverse 性别多元
3. Have you written any dissertation or thesis in English for your bachelor's degree and/or master's degree, if you were an English major in the Chinese university?
如果您原来在中国读的是英语专业， 您是否用英文写过本科和/或者研究生毕业论文?
□ Yes / □ No
4. Have you written any research papers or reports in academic English before starting your doctoral study at the University of Auckland, if you were not an English major in the Chinese university?
如果您原来在中国读的不是英语专业，您是否用英文写过学术文章或者报?
□ Yes / □ No
5. Have you been involved in any research projects prior to your doctoral study at the University of Auckland? (e.g. collecting research data, designing questionnaires, performed laboratory experiments, or coding interview transcripts)
在奥克兰大学读博士之前，您是否参与过任何科研项目？比如收集实验数据， 设计问卷，在实验室做实验 或者标记采访文字内容？□Yes / □ No
6. How would you rate your academic English writing skills?
您认为您的英文学术写作水平是？

Poor 差		Medium 中等		Excellent 优
1	2	3	4	5

7. When did you start your doctoral studies at the University of Auckland? (Year/Month)
你什么时候开始在奥克兰大学读博士预期？(年/月) ________________________________

8. What is your PhD subject area (doctoral programme) at the University of Auckland? (e.g. Education, Engineering)
您在奥克兰大学学习的博士专业是什么？（比如教育，工程）

If you would like to participate in a follow-up individual interview (around one hour), please provide your email address below. The participation in the interview is voluntary and confidential. The selection of the interview participants will be based on gender, age, discipline, stage of candidature, and their responses to the survey questions.
如果您对接下来的个人采访感性兴趣（时长一个小时左右）请在下面的空白处留下您的电子邮箱。访谈的参与完全是自愿和保密。在选择采访对象时，我会综合考虑以下因素：性别，年龄，专业，博士预期的学习阶段，以及您问卷的回答内容。

Are you interested in a follow-up individual interview?
您对后续的个人访谈感兴趣吗？ □ Yes / □ No

If YES, please provide your email address below, so I can contact you:
如果您对访谈感兴趣， 请填写您的邮箱，以便我稍后联系您。

You have reached the end of the questionnaire. Please click the Next button to submit your response. Thank you very much for the time and effort you have put in this study. I really do appreciate it!
您已经回答了所有问题。请单击‘next’提交您的问卷。非常感谢您的参与。

Some Chinese doctoral students may suffer extreme negative emotions about their writing. Some of the above questions might leave certain people feeling unsettled or churned up. If this happens to you, although unlikely, you may like to contact a health professional at the University of Auckland counselling services or other service providers, which are free and confidential. Please see the Participant Information Sheet for contact details. Please remember that the University of Auckland provides wide academic and learning support for international students. Please contact International Student Information Centre for further details.

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON NOVEMBER 21, 2017 FOR THREE YEARS. REFERENCE NUMBER 019578.

Appendix F

Faculty of Education and Social Work
Level 3, Fisher International Building
18 Waterloo Quadrant
P: 09 923 814 ext. 88140
E: clear@auckland.ac.nz
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland,1142, New Zealand

Participant Information Sheet (Interview)

Chinese International Doctoral Students' Writing Emotions

Student Researcher: Linda (Qian) Yu
Main Supervisor: Professor Helen Sword
Co-Supervisor: Dr Marion Blumenstein

Research Project
My research focuses on first-year Chinese international doctoral students studying in an English-speaking country for the first time and their emotions when working on their thesis proposal writing. The aim of my study is to explore: (a) which emotions students feel about their writing, (b) what factors trigger their emotions and how students appraise those triggers as impeding and/or facilitating writing, and (c) what coping strategies students use to deal with their writing emotions. My research findings may inform institutional practitioners about the pedagogies that they may use to respond to and act upon students' writing emotions. My study also promotes doctoral students' understanding of the emotionality of their writing and help them cope with the pitfalls of their PhD writing and become competent scholars in their chosen fields.

Interview Invitation
I am pleased to invite you to this interview, exploring your emotions about your proposal writing. You are invited for the interview because (1) you have shown the willingness to be interviewed and left your contact information at the end of the survey and (2) you are eligible for this follow-up interview.

Participants' Rights
Participation in this interview is voluntary. Your decision to either participate or not participate will not influence your doctoral education or academic relationships with the department or members of staff at the University of Auckland. If you are a student of Professor Helen Sword or/and Dr Marion Blumenstein, assurance is given that your participation or non-participation in this study will have no effect on your academic progress or relationship with the university. You may contact your Head of Department (HoD) should you feel that this assurance has not been met. As a participant, you have the right to withdraw from this study at any time within two weeks after your interview without giving a reason. If you decide to do so, please contact me and I will delete your interview responses and provided information from my computer and the university server.

Interview Procedure
This is an individual interview. You will be interviewed only once, and the interview lasts around one hour. You are welcome to speak Mandarin or English or both during this interview. I will ask

a set of questions to guide the interview (see my interview schedule). However, these are only a guide and may change during the interview conversation and you are welcome to express yourself. If you agree to be interviewed, I will book a study room in the General Library at The University of Auckland (City Campus). If you are based on the Epsom Campus or other campuses, I will book the study room in the library closest to you. If you want to be interviewed in other places other than libraries, please email me and I will organize the interview place to your satisfaction. Your interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed by me for translation and analysis purposes. You are offered the opportunity to review and/or edit your interview transcripts and translation for accuracy. I will email you the transcripts of your interview, and if I do not hear from you after two weeks from the date of it being sent, I assume that you have no objections and your responses will be used for my data analysis.

Data Storage, Retention, Destruction and Future Use
Interview audio recordings will be securely saved on my password protected computer at CLeaR, the University of Auckland and backed up by the university server. My supervisors and I will be the only people having access to this file. Any produced hard copies such as my notes will be stored in a locked cabinet in my office. The data will be destroyed after a period of six years. Any data stored electronically on my computer and the university server will be permanently deleted after that time. Any paper copies will be destroyed using a safety document shredder. Interview data will be used for my doctoral thesis and potential academic publications and conference presentations. If you are interested in receiving a summary of the interview findings, please indicate this on the consent form.

Confidentiality
Your participation (or non-participation) will be kept strictly confidential. Your responses will be coded by using a pseudonym, to prevent anyone other than me from knowing about your identity and provided information. Your identifying information, such as your research project and supervisors' names will not be disclosed to a third party or any future publications or my thesis. Only your discipline will be reported. Although some of your quotes may be used directly, they will be kept confidential and you are given the opportunity to review and/edit your own transcripts and translated quotes, before I conduct my writing.

Thank you very much for your time and effort in making this study possible. If you have any queries or want to know more about the study, please feel free to contact me or my supervisors.

CONTACT DETAILS AND APPROVAL

Student Researcher	**Director of CLeaR and Main Supervisor**	**Co-Supervisor**
Linda (Qian) Yu linda.yu@auckland.ac.nz +64 9 373 7999 ext. 87748 CLeaR The University of Auckland	Professor Helen Sword h.sword@auckland.ac.nz DDI: +64 9 923 6686 CLeaR The University of Auckland	Dr Marion Blumenstein m.blumenstein@auckland.ac.nz DDI: +64 9 923 2479 CLeaR The University of Auckland

You may also contact the Deputy Director of CLeaR, Dr Sean Sturm, by email: s.sturm@auckland.ac.nz or phone: +64 9 923 3145. For any queries regarding ethical concerns, you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone: 09 373-7599 ext. 83711. Email: ro-ethics@auckland.ac.nz.

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Counselling Services and International Student Support

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- City Campus Clinic

University Health and Counselling
Level 3, Kate Edge Information Commons
2 Alfred Street, Auckland, City Campus
Hours: Monday to Thursday 8.30am – 6pm
Friday 8.30am – 5pm
Phone: +64 9 923 7681

- Epsom Campus Clinic

Building 6ERGate4
60 Epsom Ave, Epsom, Auckland 1023
Hours (semester time only):
Monday and Thursday 9am-1pm (Health staff available)
Monday, Tuesday afternoon, Wednesday and Thursday 9am-5pm (Counsellor available)
Phone: +64 9 923 7681

- Grafton Campus Clinic

Building 505Rm 325, Level 3
85 Park Road, Grafton, Auckland, 1023
Hours (semester time only):
Monday to Friday 8.30am – 4.30pm
Phone: +64 9 923 76811

Below is a list of counselling and support services which available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week:

- Lifeline Aotearoa

Phone: (09) 5222 999 within Auckland or 0800 543 354 outside Auckland

- Youthline

Phone: 0800 37 66 33 or Free TXT 234

- Healthline

Phone: 0800 611 116

- Depression Helpline

Phone: 0800 111 757 or Free TXT 4204

For all medical emergencies requiring an ambulance – dial 111

Please remember that the University of Auckland provides wide academic and learning support for international students. Please contact the International Student Information Centre for further details.

International Student Information Centre
The University of Auckland
Room G23, 7 Symonds Street, Auckland.
Phone: +64 9 373 7513
E: int-questions@auckland.ac.nz

Appendix G

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P: 09 923 814 ext. 88140
E: clear@auckland.ac.nz
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland,1142, New Zealand

Consent Form (Interview)

THIS FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF 6 YEARS

Research title: Chinese International Doctoral Students' Writing Emotions
Student Researcher: Linda (Qian) Yu
Main Supervisor: Professor Helen Sword
Co-Supervisor: Dr Marion Blumenstein

I have read the Participant Information Sheet and have understood the voluntary nature of the research and why I have been selected. I have the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction. I understand that:

- My participation in this research project is voluntary.
- I am invited to take part in an individual interview.
- My interview will be audio-recorded and backed up electronically.
- During the interview, I have the right to ask to stop the recording and refuse to answer any questions without giving a reason.
- My audio recording will be transcribed and translated into a written form by the student researcher. I have the right to review and/or edit my own interview transcripts and translation, and I will have two weeks to complete this process unless otherwise arranged.
- My interview data will be securely saved on a password protected computer at CLeaR at the University of Auckland and backed up by the university server, after which time the data will be destroyed.
- My interview responses will be used for the student researcher's doctoral thesis at the University of Auckland and also for potential academic publications and conference presentations.
- My participation or non-participation in this research is kept confidential. No identifying information will be disclosed to a third party or any future publications or the researcher's thesis.
- I wish to receive a summary of the interview findings, which can be sent to this email address_______________________________

  Name: __________________Signature: _______________Date: _______________

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Appendix H

CENTRE FOR
LEARNING AND RESEARCH
IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Faculty of Education and Social Work
Level 3, Fisher International Building
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P: 09 923 814 ext. 88140
E: clear@auckland.ac.nz
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland,1142, New Zealand

Interview Protocol

Project: Chinese International Doctoral Students' Writing Emotions

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewee's name:

Hello! Thanks for joining me today. You have been selected to speak with me today because you wished to share your thesis proposal writing experiences.

1. Describe my research project and tell the interviewee about:
(1) the purpose of the interview;
(2) what will be done to protect the participant's confidentiality;
(3) how long the interview will take;
(4) the free and confidential counselling services provided in the Participation Information Sheet.
2. Reassure the participant that the interview will be audio-recorded and that he/she has the right to ask to stop recording and refuse to answer any questions without giving a reason.
3. Ask the interviewee to sign the Consent Form, if he/she has not already done so.
3. Turn on the Smart Pen (audio-recorder) and test it.
4. Ask the following questions:
(1) Emotional feelings about thesis proposal writing
a. Please describe your positive emotion(s) that you feel about your thesis proposal writing.
b. Please describe your negative emotion(s) that you feel about your thesis proposal writing.
c. Please describe other emotion(s) that you feel about your thesis proposal writing if you think they are neither positive nor negative.

(2) writing-related triggers and students' appraisals

a. Positive writing experiences

- Please tell me a story about the best feeling you have had recently about your proposal writing. (Narrative-oriented question)

- How did you feel about your writing in this situation? (Subjective feeling)

- What happened in this situation to make you feel [USED EMOTION EXPRESSION] about your writing? (Situation description)

- What do you think of this situation? Do you think this situation facilitates your thesis proposal writing or helps you make progress on your work? If it does, can you explain how it facilitated you to work on your writing? (Cognitive appraisal of the trigger)

- (Ask participant to describe their other positive writing experiences if he/she likes)

b. Negative writing experiences

- Please tell me a story about the worst feeling you have had recently about your proposal writing. (Narrative-oriented question)

- What happened in this situation to make you feel [USED EMOTION EXPRESSION] about your writing? (Situation description)

- What do you think of this situation? Do you think this situation impedes your thesis proposal writing or makes it difficult for you to make progress on your work? If it does, can you explain how it impedes your writing? (Cognitive appraisal of the trigger)

- (Ask participant to describe their other negative writing experiences if he/she likes)

(3) Coping strategies

- How do you react to your emotions associated with your thesis proposal writing?
- What have you done to deal with or manage your emotions?
- What types of support have you asked for to manage your emotions? Can you explain what you think of the support you just described?

5. Welcome the interviewee to add comments and ask questions about my research.

6. Thanks the interviewee for participating in my research with a shopping voucher. Assure he/she of the confidentiality of the responses and potential future contact.

7. Observations and/or post interview comments and/or summaries:

8. Potential future contact for?

(1) reviewing/revising interview transcripts and translations

(2) clarifying emotion expressions/concepts/wording

(4) sending a summary of interview findings

(5) Others ________________

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Appendix I

Emotion Primary Categories and Sub-Categories in the Chinese Affective Lexicon Ontology

编号 (No.)	情感大类 (Emotion primary category)	情感类 (Emotion sub-category)	例词 (Emotion expression) example)
1	乐(happy)	快乐(PA)	喜悦，欢天喜地
2		安心(PE)	踏实，问心无愧
3	好(good/positive)	尊敬(PD)	恭敬，肃然起敬
4		赞扬(PH)	英俊，实事求是
5		相信(PG)	信任，毋庸置疑
6		喜爱(PB)	倾慕，爱不释手
7		祝愿(PK)	渴望 万寿无疆
8	怒(angry)	愤怒(NA) (angry)	气愤，大发雷霆、
9	哀(sad)	悲伤(NB) (sad)	忧伤，悲痛欲绝
10		失望(NJ)	绝望，心灰意冷
11		疚(NH)	内疚，问心有愧
12		思(PF)	思念，朝思暮想
13	惧(fear)	慌(NI)	慌张，手忙脚乱
14		恐惧(NC)	胆怯，胆颤心惊
15		羞(NG)	害羞，无地自容
16	恶(disgust)	烦闷(NE)	憋闷，自寻烦恼
17		憎恶(ND)	反感，深恶痛绝
18		贬责(NN)	呆板，心狠手辣
19		妒忌(NK)	眼红，嫉贤妒能
20		怀疑(NL)	多心，疑神疑鬼
21	惊(surprise)	惊奇(PC)	奇怪，瞠目结舌

Notes. This table is adapted from the using instruction of the Chinese Affective Lexicon Ontology (Xu et al., 2008)