

LISTENING TO VOICES:
UNDERSTANDING CHINESE STUDENTS' JOURNEY AT A CANADIAN
UNIVERSITY

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By

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Abstract

This research explored the motivations of Chinese students to study in Canada and analyzed their cultural adaptation process at a Canadian university. This served the Canadian educational administrators and prospective Chinese students who were interested in studying in Canada. The following three research questions provided the direction for this study:

- 1 What are Chinese students' motivations to study in Canada?
- 2 What are Chinese students' experiences at Canadian universities and how do their motivations shape their journey in Canada?
- 3 What challenges and opportunities do Chinese students face in their cultural adaptation, and what strategies do Chinese students think can be applied by Canadian educational administrators to assist Chinese students?

A qualitative approach was the research method utilized in this study. Using semi-structured life-story interviews, data were collected from a purposeful sample of four Chinese graduate students studying at a Canadian university. Utilizing a narrative research method, from an emic perspective, I listened to Chinese students' voices and their life stories and to explore deeply their experiences in Canada.

Three theoretical frameworks were employed to analyze the data. The synthesis model was used to explore the decision making process of participants to come to Canada; the push-pull model was employed to identify the factors attracting people to move to another country; and Self-Determined Theory was used to analyze the connection between

participants' motivations to study abroad and their subsequent cultural adaptation.

Data collected from semi-structured interviews with four participants indicated that Chinese students were easily attracted to study in Canada by its favorable and tolerant environment, positive reputation for diversity, high quality post-secondary institutions and the possibility of securing a visa relatively easily. In their decision making process, Chinese students were influenced by some important factors: student characteristics, parental factors, and other external important factors. Among those factors influencing Chinese students' decisions to move to Canada, family was recognized a very important factor and participants' narratives suggested that having family connections in Canada could be a helpful factor for Chinese students to adapt to a new culture, which was reported as a best case scenario in this research. However, family also acted as a barrier for Chinese students to acquire English proficiency and interact with local people.

Findings from this study supported earlier research that suggested students who were more self-determined to study abroad were more likely to succeed academically and had fewer traumas in navigating cross-cultural adaptations.

Keywords: Chinese students, Canadian university, narrative research, motivations, cultural adaptation

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“All human beings are captives of their culture.”

----Edward Hall, 1969

Origin of Study

I experienced many restless nights while my mind fixated on the college lives of my Chinese peers in Canada. Their experiences are varied and diverse. I could not find appropriate words to characterize their journey in Canada, as it is not a simple story of “good” or “bad”, of “triumph” or “tragedy”. Their stories are sophisticated, dynamic, flexible, and unpredictable. Some enjoy the ease of life in Canada; some complain a lot as they drift along struggling in a new environment, and others find it difficult to tell the haunting journey, which brings strong emotional experiences. I would toss and turn, and ponder their stories frequently. That whirling mind then triggers me to explore what happened to them in their journey to Canada. Why did they come to Canada? What positive or negative experiences do they have in Canada? What strategies can they think of to enhance their success in their journey?

Sometimes, after hearing their stories, I sense a similarity between their lives and mine. When we make the life-changing decision to come to Canada, it is destined to be a combination of positive and negative experiences. Everything here is new and challenging to

us, including language, food, housing, health care, and academic culture. Meanwhile we might face the challenges of racism, loneliness, and social isolation. When East meets West, all the conflicts are about culture. “Culture is the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another” (Hofstede, 2001, p. 9). Having seen and experienced the obstacles and challenges encountered in Chinese students’ journeys in Canada, I have often wondered what factors may affect Chinese students to Canadian culture and attain academic success at this university. I soon realized that in order to understand culture shock and to improve adjustment, it would be of great value to examine Chinese students’ narratives about their journeys in Canada, and to see what would be reported as the important factors in their cultural transition and adaptation.

Problem statement (Background)

Since the policy of reformation began in 1978, China has integrated the international exchange of students with other countries in terms of arts, science, culture and education as a vital part of national policy. This was deemed an effective way to establish China’s own talent pool. The direct result was that a large number of Chinese students began going overseas to study. This reform process turned out to have a significant benefit later, both to the individuals involved and to Chinese society at large. Some of these students brought back the latest theories and developments in the realms of science and technology, which boosted the Chinese economy (Upton, 1987). Some of them acquired desirable jobs with substantial pay after graduation, fulfilling their individual dreams by studying abroad.

Among those Chinese students studying abroad, many were attracted to Canada by its

peaceful environment, its tolerance and excellent education opportunities. Chinese students studying in Canada currently, account for a high percentage of international students, and are an important part of Canadian universities, “playing a key role in contributing to a culturally diverse society by providing a wide variety of different cultures and perspectives” (Kwon, 2009, p. 1020). Meanwhile, Kwon (2009) argued the richness of diversity and talent brought by the international students could be economic drivers for the host country. It was understandable Canadian universities might make more money from international students by raising tuition and other student fees. Also, those universities might enjoy a better reputation throughout the world with richness from diversity and be able to increase student numbers. Moreover, Chinese immigrants might help increase the population of Canada in the near future. This influx of Chinese students was therefore assumed to be a win-win program both for Chinese students and for Canadian universities.

However, as East meets West, many inevitable cultural problems occurred that were regarded as possible factors diminishing the benefits for both Chinese students and host universities. Chinese students had been struggling for a way to ease their cultural adaptation; while Canadian universities endeavored to assist Chinese students in adapting to a new culture as easily and quickly as possible. As newcomers, Chinese students in Canada were bound to face the common problems confronting anybody living and studying in a foreign culture. These problems included academic demands, language barriers, financial problems, accommodation difficulties, dietary restrictions, homesickness, loneliness, and racial discrimination (Sun & Chen, 1997). Collectively, these issues were perceived as “culture

shock” or the feeling of disorientation experienced by a person suddenly subjected to an unfamiliar culture or way of life (Canadian Oxford Dictionary, 2001). The cultural shock also referred to “the anxiety that results from losing all of the familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse” (Oberg, 1960, p. 177). In the process of adjustment and assimilation to Canadian culture, some Chinese students succeeded while some failed. Their failure would have a lasting impression on their future life. In order to assimilate to the host culture and to become more familiar with the host environment, individuals needed to experience culture shock (Sun & Chen, 1997). Since Chinese students comprised a great portion of international students in Canadian universities, assisting Chinese students to adjust to Canadian culture and to achieve academic success was an issue of significant concern for Canadian university administrators.

Context and Purpose

This section explored the factors affecting Chinese students’ (and other international students) acculturation and their academic success in new cultures. Several dimensions of the difficulties were recognized, the most common being: language ability, academic performance, and social adjustment (Hanassba & Tidwel, 2002; Sun, 2005, Zimmermann, 1995). All those difficulties stemmed from culture. With regard to culture’s consequences, Hodge (2000) argued that culture to humans was like water to fish. It was seldom considered by people in normal circumstances; however, “if you take the fish and throw it on a patch of sand, water takes on a whole new meaning” (Hodge, 2000, p. 164). Also, Hofstede (2001) suggested that cultural differences would prevent people from understanding each other well.

Moreover, Neuliep (2006) claimed that:

Most people experience a degree of stress and strain when they enter a culture different from their own. Acculturation is often marked by physical and psychological changes that occur as a result of the adaptation required to function in a new and different cultural context. (p. 417)

Therefore, it is not possible to deny adapting to a new culture is an extremely tough experience. Since adapting to a new culture is not as easy as it sounds, what motivated Chinese students to come to Canada?

Existing research on migration gave some emphasis to the synthesis model, the push-pull model and self-determined (SDT) theory. The synthesis model was used to explore the decision- making process of international students to come to Canada. The push-pull model was employed to identify the factors attracting people to move to another country, which could explain the internationalization of education. SDT theory was used to analyze the connection between the international students' motivations to study abroad and their cultural adaptation.

The synthesis model was developed by Chen (2006), which explored three stages in the process of making the decision to study abroad for international students - the decision to study abroad, the choice of a host country, and the selection of a host institution (Chen, 2007, p. 760). At each stage, Chen suggested that the decisions of international students to study abroad were influenced by three factors: student characteristics, significant others, and external push-pull factors.

The push-pull model was used to explain people's entry into a new culture. This model was originally used to explain the movement of people (Lee, 1966). A socioeconomic approach was also illustrated by Maytin (1993) "migration push factors that push them out of their own countries, and a network of friends and relatives already in industrial societies who serve as anchor communities for newcomers" (p. 4). In addition, Chen (2006) argued that "push factors are factors associated with the home country. Some push factors are positive and some are negative in nature. Pull factors are generally positive that attract international students to the destination" (p. 79).

Besides the Synthesis model and the push-pull model, Deci and Ryan (2000) proposed self-determination theory (SDT) as an approach to human motivation and personality "using traditional empirical methods that employ an organismic meta theory that highlights the importance of evolved inner resources for personality development and behavioral self-regulation". (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 68). Deci and Ryan also claimed "even superficial incidents reveal that people are motivated to act by different types of factors, with highly varied experiences and consequences" (p. 69). Generally speaking, "people can be motivated because they value an activity or because there is strong external coercion. They can be urged into action by an abiding interest or by a bribe" (Deci & Ryan, 2001, p. 78). These were clarified as "intrinsic motivation" and "extrinsic motivation". "Whether people are motivated to act out of their interests and values, or do it for reasons external to the self, is a matter of significance in every culture" (Deci & Ryan, 2001, p. 78). The distinction between *intrinsic motivation* and *extrinsic motivation* was a core part of self-determination theory

(SDT). Self-determination theory (SDT) was a theory of motivation. “It is concerned with supporting our natural or intrinsic tendencies to behave in effective and healthy way” (Deci & Ryan, 1985, p. 23).

Self-determination theory (SDT) represents a broad framework for the study of human motivation and personality. SDT articulates a meta-theory for framing motivational studies, a formal theory that defines intrinsic and varied extrinsic sources of motivation, and a description of the respective roles and types of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in cognitive-social development, including individual differences. (Deci & Ryan, 1985, p. 23)

More importantly, Ryan (2002) noted the more one’s behaviors were self-determined, the higher the quality of the performance in many domains including education, organizations, sport and physical activity, religion, health and medicine, parenting, virtual environments and media, close relationships, and psychotherapy. Ryan’s (2002) assertion was also applied in many domains, including psychology, education, health, and organizations.

Specifically, based on self-determination theory, Chirkov (2007, 2009) explored migration motivation and tried to figure out whether the self-motivation played an important role in their lives as newcomers. Chirkov (2007, 2009) hypothesized that international students with the self-determined motivation to study abroad would experience fewer obstacles in cultural adaptation than non-self-determined motivation. Self-motivated students, therefore, were more likely to achieve academic success at Canadian universities than the non-self-motivated.

Despite the importance of these models for understanding the flow of international students, the connection between the motivations of international students and their success abroad was still not a well-developed research area. Chirkov's (2007, 2009) much quantitative research in terms of the relation between self-determination and cultural adaptation. He argued that in most of the psychological research on this subject. Quantitative research methods were favored in the literature, while little qualitative research was conducted to explore the factors affecting international students' (specifically Chinese students) cultural adaptation in Canada. Quantitative research provided an easy way to explore the relations between two variables; however, it is hard for people to explain "why". In the case of quantitative research about the relation between intrinsic motivation and students' cultural adaptation, some in-depth motivations might not be explored by the objective data generated by this method. On the other hand, qualitative research offers the opportunity to explore the "why", through individual or focus group interviews, participant observation, and review of documents and media, which might contain richer data compared to the statistical data (Gall & Gall, 2010). Generally, qualitative data allows people to tell their stories and allows researchers to explore human motivations. Therefore, a gap existed in this research area.

The purpose of this research was to explore the motivations of Chinese students to study abroad and the difficulties they encountered in Canada. The study further examined whether self-determined motivation contributed to cultural and academic difficulties at Canadian universities. If self-determination played an important part in the cultural

adaptation of Chinese students, more or different strategies could be developed to assist them. By using qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews, it was possible to discover other goals and factors affecting Chinese students' decisions to study abroad. A clearer picture of the Chinese students' experience in Canada would be both helpful and interesting.

Contribution

This research was extremely valuable since little qualitative research has been conducted on Chinese students' motivations or cultural adaptation at Canadian universities. Interviews would add important research value by building on previous data and deepening quantitative research. Not only could this research help Chinese students to get to know themselves better, it could help them to realize their goals to study abroad, and to achieve academic success at Canadian universities. The research may also assist university administrators in developing more effective policies. Some benefits of this research might be to improve the support systems for international students at Canadian universities so they may better adapt to Canadian society and maximize their prospects for academic success.

Research questions

Guided by the theories of cross-cultural adaptation, the following research questions provided the direction for the study:

- 1 What are Chinese students' motivations to study in Canada?
- 2 What are Chinese students' experiences at Canadian universities and how do their motivations shape their journey in Canada?

- 3 What challenges and opportunities do Chinese students face in their cultural adaptation, and what strategies do Chinese students think that can be applied by Canadian educational administrators to assist Chinese students?

Terminology

For the purpose of this research, the term “culture” referred to patterned ways of thinking, feeling and reacting, acquired and transmitted mainly by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts. The essential core of culture consisted of “traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values” (Kluckhohn, 1951, p. 86).

In this study of cultural adaptation, acculturation was defined by Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936) as “those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture pattern of either or both groups”(p. 150).

The term *push-pull* model was academically used to explain the international students’ movement (Agarwal & Winkle, 1985, Lee & Tan, 1984). “Push factors are factors associated with the home country. Some push factors are positive and some are negative in nature. Pull factors are generally positive factors that attract international students to the destination” (Chen, 2006, p. 79).

The term *self-determined theory* referred to human’s motivation and personality. People are often moved by external factors (extrinsic) such as reward systems, grades, evaluations, or the opinions they fear others might have of them. Yet just as frequently,

people are motivated from within (intrinsic), by interests, curiosity, care or abiding values.

These intrinsic motivations are not necessarily externally rewarded or supported, but nonetheless can sustain passions, creativity, and efforts. The interplay between the extrinsic forces acting on persons and the intrinsic motives and needs inherent in human nature is the territory of self-determination theory. (Deci & Ryan, 2002, p. 35)

The following chapter presents a review of the literature in the field of cultural adaptation. The chapter provides an overview of the conceptions of culture and the model of cultural adaptation, describes the *push-pull* model, identifies possible factors affecting individuals to decide to come to Canada, introduces some practical insights to help international students, and concludes with some research on Chinese students' cultural adaptation abroad.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Culture

“You could not step twice into the same river; for other waters are ever flowing on to you.”

---Heraclitus, 540 – 380 BC

This quote by Heraclitus sums up the essence of “change”. Change is inevitable, like the flow of rivers. Rivers cannot flow consistently or in identical ways, for other waters always are flowing. Humans at all times and in all places experience change. Change might not be noticed some of the time. Specifically, it is hard to notice the many changes that happen to people’s hearts and minds. When applied to Heraclitus’ statement we could say that the river will not cease to exist but the molecules may form into new flows that make changes. Kim (2001) applied this philosophy to culture by comparing culture to the river and claiming that people were bound to change when they stepped into a new culture.

This chapter provided an overview of conceptions of culture, described five dimensions of culture and cultural differences, and illustrated the process of cultural adaptation. It also briefly introduced three theoretical frames, the synthesis model, the push-pull model and the self-determined theory, with regard to cross-cultural communication and adaptation. These three concepts are utilized in chapter Five to analyze the relationship

between participants' motivations to study at a Canadian university and the degrees of difficulty they encountered in their journey to Canada. Then, consideration was given to a general picture of difficulties faced by international students in North American universities, with particular emphasis on Chinese students.

In the past few years, millions of people have been crossing cultural boundaries. "All individuals crossing cultures face some common challenges as they pioneer lives of uprootedness and gradually establish relationships with their new milieus" (Kim, 2001, p. 4). Hodge (2000) argued that culture to humans is like water to fish. It is seldom considered by people in normal circumstances; however, "if you take the fish and throw it on a patch of sand, water takes on a whole new meaning" (p. 164).

But, what is culture? Researchers since the 1950's have been very interested in defining culture. An early definition came from Kluckhohn:

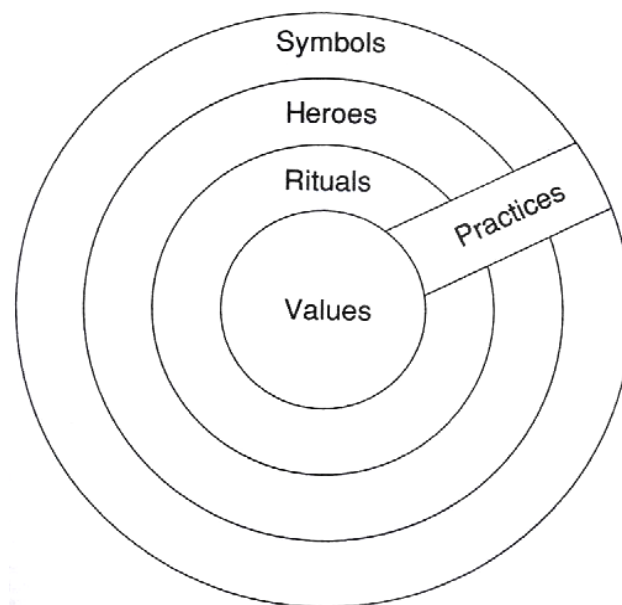
Culture consists in patterned ways of thinking, feeling and reacting, acquired and transmitted mainly by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values. (Kluckhohn, 1951, p. 86)

As Kluckhohn had affirmed, culture in this sense referred to values. Value systems are the core of culture. Kroeber and Parsons (1958) gave another definition of culture which referred to "transmitted and created content and patterns of values, ideas and other symbolic –meaningful systems as factors in the shaping of human behavior and the artifacts produced

through behavior” (p. 153).

The most popular definition was from Hofstede (2001) who clarified culture as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another” (p. 9). Hofstede (2001) established the famous “Onion Diagram” “to illustrate the manifestation of culture at different levels of depth.

Figure 1 “Onion Diagram”: Manifestation of Culture at Different Levels of Depth
(Hofstede, 2001, p. 10).



According to Hofstede (2002), “values are invisible until they become evident in behavior, but culture manifests itself in visible elements too” (p. 10). As shown in Figure1, culture was described as the layers of the onion, and the value systems were the core of the onion. Symbols were “words, gestures, pictures, and objects that carried often complex meanings recognized as such only by those who shared the culture” (p. 10). Heroes were those people who had characteristics that were recognized as a kind of culture, regardless of

whether these were real or imaginary. Rituals were essential activities in a culture. In Figure 1, symbols, heroes, and rituals were visible, under the practices, revealed the core system of values.

Moreover, Hofstede (2005) compared culture to the software of the mind, or a mental programming.

Figure 2 Metal Programming (Hofstede, 2005, p. 4).

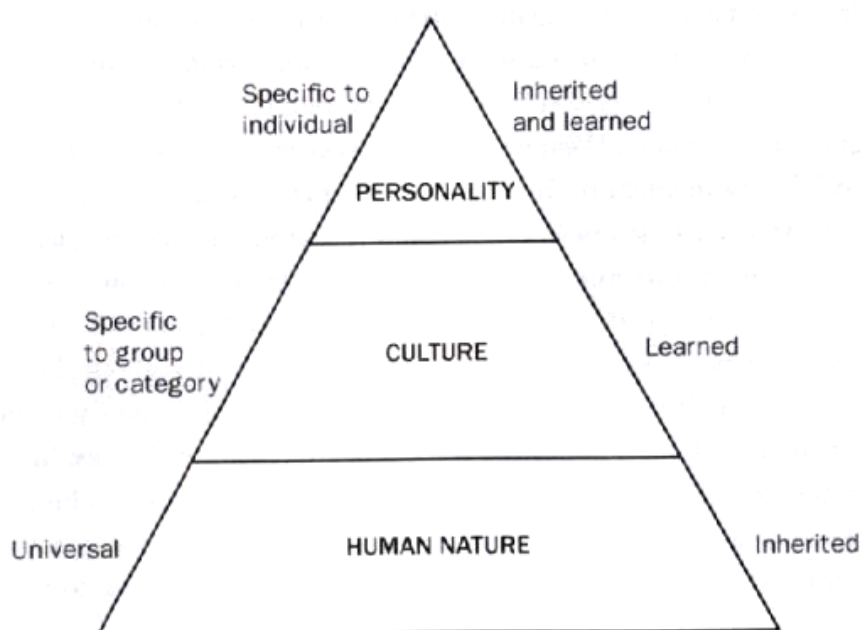


Figure 2 suggested that culture was learned, not inherited. Culture was relatively stable; however, the process of learning a specific culture played an important role in the forming of personality.

Five Dimensions of Culture and Cultural Differences

In order to compare the cultural differences between East and West, it is helpful to comprehend the dimensions of culture first. In the pioneering theories of *culture's consequences*, Hofstede (2001) mentioned five dimensions of culture in his well-known book

Culture's Consequences: Comparing, Values, Behaviors, Institutes, and Organizations Across Nations. The studies in the book focused on 72 countries and 116,000 questionnaires were distributed in 20 languages on employees' values. Hofstede (2001) conducted a country-level of analysis to get all the data, and then concluded the four dimensions of culture in 1972. In 1980, another CHINESE VALUE SURVEY was conducted to examine the culture, forming the fifth dimension of culture in Hofstede's theories. Therefore, Hofstede (2001) summed up five dimensions of culture in his book. They were (a) power distance (b) uncertainty avoidance (c) individualism and collectivism (d) masculinity and femininity (e) long-versus short-term orientation. Each dimension will be discussed separately in the following section.

Power Distance

Power distance referred to “the relationship between a boss and subordinate” (Hofstede, 2001, p. 83). In the study of international students, this could refer to the relationship between international students and their professors or other educational administrators.

China had its own traditional culture, which featured specific value systems that were much different from value systems originating in Western philosophy (Wan, 1999). Power distance, in the sense of hierarchy, was very rigid in China. In this hierarchical value system, individuals deemed themselves as an integral part of the group (Neuliep, 2003). In China's education system, for instance, teachers enjoy hierarchical power over their students leading to considerable obedience to teachers' authority. Therefore, it is common to observe that in

Chinese classrooms, students tend to be silent rather than expressing their ideas out loud.

However, in Canadian classrooms, where power distance is less rigid, questions are always welcomed in classrooms. In brief, the power distance – the relationship between the students and their teachers in Canada - is more relaxed than in China, thus Chinese students may spend some time understanding the differences.

Uncertainty Avoidance

The second dimension of culture proposed by Hofstede (2001) was “uncertainty avoidance”. It referred to the uncertainty about the future (p. 145). “Uncertainty about the future was a basic fact of human life with which we tried to cope through the domains of technology, law and religion. In organizations these took the form of technology, rules and rituals” (p. 145). As for the rules and rituals, Perrow (1972) mentioned that “rules stem from past adjustments and seek to stabilize the present and future” (p. 29); “A multitude of rules and regulations appears to be the very essence of a bureaucracy” (p. 147). Uncertainty avoidance in organizations could be understood as staying away from the uncertainty of rules and regulations. Hofstede also noted his understanding about uncertainty avoidance.

A basic fact of life is that time goes only one way. We are caught in a present that is just an infinitesimal borderline between past and future. We have to live with a future that moves away as fast as we try to approach it, but onto which we project our present hopes and fears. In other words, we are living with an uncertainty of which we are conscious. (Hofstede, 2005, p. 146)

The anxiety about uncertainty does not equal risk avoidance in Hofstede's (2005) conception of uncertainty avoidance. "As soon as uncertainty is expressed as risk, it ceases to be a source of anxiety. "It may become a source of fear" (Hofstede, 2005, p. 148).

Uncertainty avoidance influenced schools with regard to the teaching process. In Hofstede's IBM survey, he mainly argued for the tolerance of uncertainty throughout the world. Hofstede (2005) found in countries such as France and Germany, which rated high in uncertainty avoidance, that students and teachers preferred precise teaching goals and strict outlines. Low uncertainty avoidance countries (most Asian and African countries) were more likely to welcome relaxed situations with open-ended discussions. China has a stronger culture of uncertainty avoidance than most Western countries; specifically it can be discovered in the educational system. Most Chinese students have to face numerous examinations when they enter schools. Examinations are recognized as one of the most effective ways to select the most excellent students among all. The most representative exam in China is the college/university entrance exam, which encourages many Chinese high school students to work harder. In a way, the college/university entrance exam determines the way high school teachers teach. Teachers and schools compete for high quality teaching outcomes and the high enrollment rate of universities. They devote themselves to evaluate what students have learned in classrooms. For students, in order to orient themselves to be successful in examinations, they expect to know what they learned definitely in the classrooms. It is less likely to be accepted if the teacher says "I do not know" in Chinese classrooms (Hofstede, 2001). Therefore, it was predictable that Chinese students might face

many challenges in Canadian universities, where teachers opt to teach in a relaxed way.

Consequently, uncertainty avoidance could be an important factor affecting Chinese students studying at Canadian universities.

Individualism and Collectivism

The third dimension of culture described the relationship between individuals and the collectivity within different cultural contexts. In collectivist countries, people regarded the interests of the group as a greater priority than the interests of individuals and were more likely to subordinate individual interests to those of the group. This was completely opposite to what had happened in individualistic societies. For instance, “many Americans see the individualism in their culture as a major reason for the greatness of the United States” (Hofstede, 2005, p. 210). According to Hofstede’s (2005) research findings, China was a strong collective-oriented country. This difference was Western teachers could not understand the phenomenon why Chinese students did not speak up in the classrooms. Simply put, Chinese people regarded themselves as an integral part in a group. Keeping silent was a means of keeping a balance in the classroom and not offending others. This phenomenon could be understood as avoiding “losing face” to some degree. Brown and Levinson (1978) defined “face” as “the public self-image that everybody wants to claim for himself” (p. 66). They divided face into two separate aspects “negative face” and “positive face” (p. 70). Furthermore, Brown and Levinson (1978) noted the “face-threatening act” (FTA). Tracy (1990) stated “positive face concerned the desire to be appreciated and

approved of by selected others. Negative face concerns a person's want to be unimpeded and free from imposition" (p. 210). In most Chinese classrooms, students are usually afraid of expressing themselves, for they may worry if they hold the strong views about the topic or answer the questions well. If not, their positive face is likely to be threatened. Therefore, in most Chinese classrooms where a strongly collectivist-oriented environment exists, many students chose to remain silent. Students recognized this silence as a kind of balance and saving face. This silence also helped protect the group's identity (Belle & Ward, 1990; Marx, 2001) in the cultural dimension of collectivism. Hence, it was assumed that Chinese students might face great challenges in a Canadian university where students were encouraged to discuss and even debate.

Masculinity and Femininity

The terms masculinity and femininity contained different implications in societies across the world. For countries belonging to cultures characterized by "femininity" (feminine cultures), people ascribed more values on the social goals such as relationships, helping others, and the physical environments. The other, so-called 'masculinity' cultures (masculine cultures), attached an important value on career and goals" (Hofstede, 2005, p. 279). Simply put, in the feminine-culture archetype people valued process rather than direct results, whereas in the masculine-culture archetype people regarded the result as more important than process. Moreover, the masculine-culture archetype societies value results obtained through different, individual ways when compared to feminine-culture archetype societies.

The big difference of the masculine cultures and feminine cultures was also indicated in educational area. In the masculine cultures, “failing in school is a disaster” (Hofstede, 2005, p. 303), and schools always stress the academic reputation and students’ academic performance. Even in campus recreation, schools in masculine culture emphasize results. George Allen, a coach of a sports team in North America, once said “winning isn’t the most import thing it’s the only thing” (Lasch, 1980, p. 117). It was not difficult to find that in masculine culture, (North American countries are scored high in masculinity according to Hofstede’s survey) people were result-oriented and they always strived for the most desirable results.

In contrast to teachers in masculine cultures, teachers in feminine cultures would encourage weaker students instead of praising good students. The main goal of schools, in most feminine cultures, is helping students and establishing a good relationship between students and teachers. Hofstede’s (2005) research findings revealed China was a country that was characterized as having a feminine culture. In China, failing in school or sports was a minor incident. Students might have opportunities to make up the exam. In some schools, students might have several chances to make up the exam. Accordingly, it could be imagined that Chinese students might face greater challenges in Canadian universities, since most Canadian universities have higher requirements in academics than those of China.

Long-Versus Short –Term Orientation

Bond (1985) developed the CHINESE VALUE SURVEY that was applied to student

samples across 23 countries. His research showed East Asian countries scored highest while Western countries scored lowest on this survey. The East Asian countries tended to opt for establishing long-term relationships while Western countries were inclined to build short-term relationships. Or rather, short-term oriented countries were more result-oriented rather than focused on long-term relationships. In the educational realm, students in East Asian countries preferred to keep a good relationship with teachers. The students usually chose to take many courses that were instructed by the teachers they liked. Conversely, students in Western countries probably chose to strive for their academic future rather than working towards building long-term relationships with individual instructors. Consequently, Chinese students in Canada may experience a challenging time becoming accustomed to the short-term, results-oriented Western culture present in universities.

Collectively, China is a country with high power distance, high uncertainty avoidance, collectivistic, with feminine and long-term relation orientated culture, which is completely different to North American cultures. North American countries enjoy low power distance, low uncertainty avoidance, individualism, with masculine and short-term relation oriented cultures. Therefore, Chinese students may have a challenging journey navigating the cultural differences found in Canadian universities.

Cultural Adaptation

No matter how difficult Chinese students found adapting to the new culture abroad, they may experience varying rates of acculturation. Neuliep (2006) defined acculturation as the “process whereby you adapt to a new culture by adopting its values, attitudes, and

practices” (p. 416). Culture shock was a “multifaceted experience resulting from the stress associated with entering a new culture” (Neuliep, 2006, p. 416).

Ruesch and BATESON (1951/1968) explained cross-cultural adaptation as follows:

When persons convene, things happen. People have their feelings and thoughts and both, while they are together and afterwards, act and react to one another. They themselves perceive their own actions, and others who are present can likewise observe what takes place...as a result of such experiences people's views of themselves and of each other may be confirmed, altered, or modified. (Ruesch & BATESON, 1951/1968, pp. 5-6)

In the process of cross-cultural adaptation, stresses and anxieties were inevitable for newcomers. Kim (2001) thought “stress, adaptation, and growth thus highlight the core of the strangers' cross-cultural experiences in a new environment” (p. 56). However, stress-adaptation-growth might not be a process of smooth progression, “but in a cyclic and continual ‘draw-back-to leap’ representation” (Kim, 2001, p. 56).

Three theoretical frameworks and self-determined motivation enables cultural adaptation

In order to understand better the motivations of international students to study abroad and their experiences of cultural adaptation abroad, three theoretical frameworks are presented. These frameworks include the synthesis model, the push-pull model and the self-determined motivation theory.

The synthesis model is used to explore the decision-making process of international

students who come to Canada. The push-pull model is employed to identify the factors attracting people to move to another country, which can explain the internationalization of education. SDT is used to analyze the connection between the international students' motivations to study abroad and their subsequent cultural adaptation.

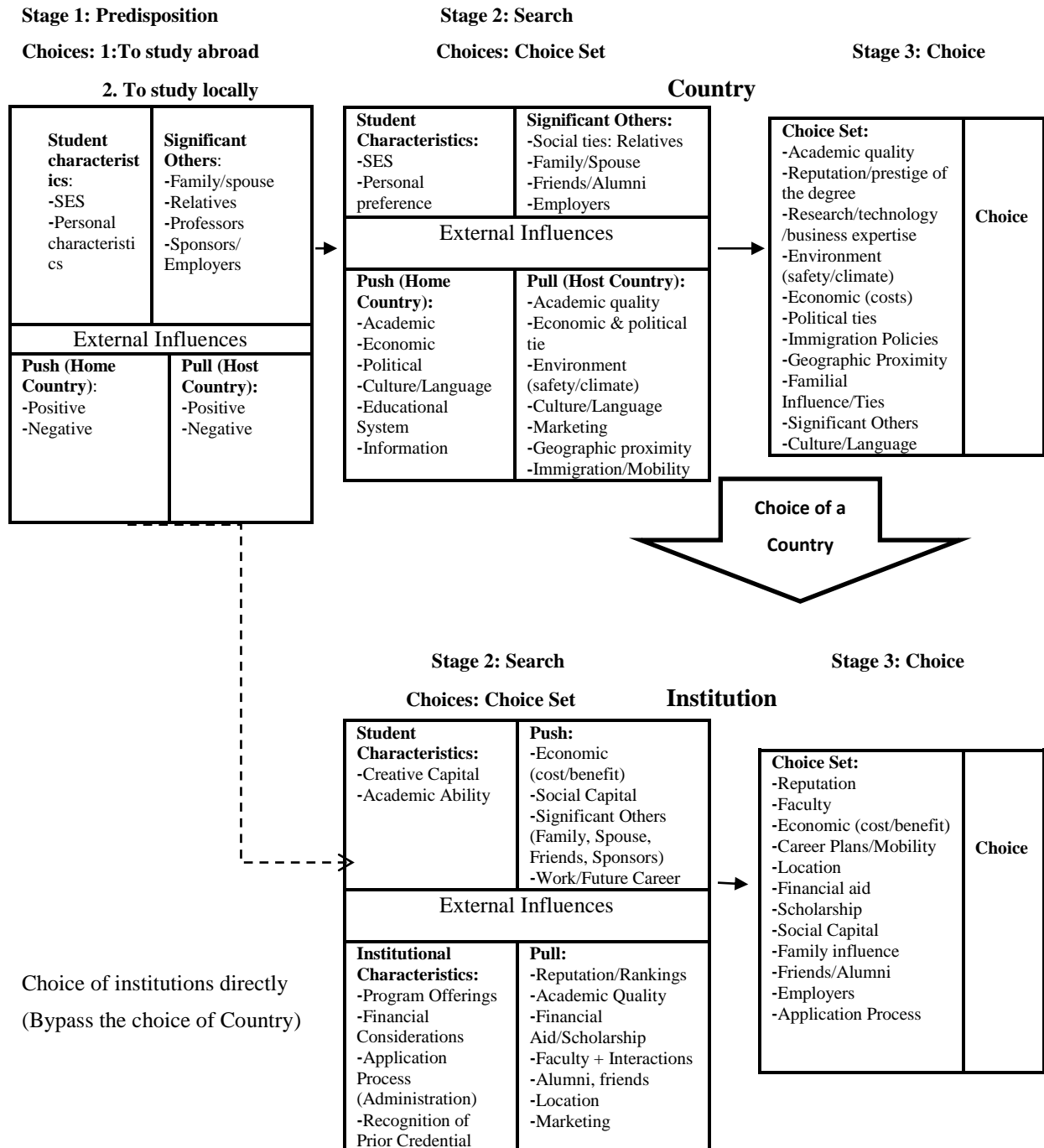
The synthesis model

The synthesis model was developed by Chen (2007, p. 761), to explain international students' decision regarding the choice to study abroad. It was based on the Hossler, Braxton, Coopersmith (1989), Neice and Braun's (1977) three-phase model (See Figure 3).

According to the synthesis model by Chen (2007), there are three stages in the process of making the decision to study abroad for international students - the decision to study abroad, the choice of a host country, and the selection of a host institution (Chen, 2007, p. 760). Chen (2007) further suggested that at each stage, the decisions of international students to study abroad are influenced by three factors: student characteristics, significant others, and external push-pull factors, as illustrated by Figure 3. Among these factors, Chen argued that "student characteristics" showed the strongest influences.

Chen's (2006) study focused primarily on East-Asian students' choices of Canadian graduate schools through the lens of the synthesis model. However, he did not categorize Chinese students in Canada as a specific group in terms of cultural adaptation. Little research focusing specifically on Chinese students- at Canadian universities has been conducted. It is this gap in the research the current study seeks to address in an original way.

Figure 3: The (Original) Synthesis Model (Chen, 2007, p. 761)



The “Push –Pull” Model

A push-pull model was first used to explain people’s motivations for moving across boundaries (Lee, 1966). “Push” referred to people who decided to leave home in order to avoid the disadvantageous conditions in the home country or who were forced to move. “Pull” meant the goal of pursuing better opportunities abroad (Chirkov, 2007). Among studies about international students, this model has been used frequently to explore why international students move (Lee & Tan, 1984; Sirowy & Inkeles, 1984). “Push factors are factors that are associated with the home country. Some push factors are positive and some are negative in nature.

Also, Kainth (2009) defined “push “and “pull” factors as follows:

The push factors are those that compel a person, due to different reasons, to leave that place and go to some other place. For instance, low productivity, unemployment and underdevelopment, poor economic conditions, lack of opportunities for advancement, exhaustion of natural resources and natural calamities may compel people to leave their native place in search of better economic opportunities. (Kainth, 2009, p. 84)

“Pull factors” refers to those factors that encourage the migrants to move with prospects of better economic opportunities, such as better employment, better welfare system and less working hours (Kainth, 2009).

Chen (2006) developed a diagram to illustrate the influence of push-pull considerations on the decision to choose a Canadian grad school (See figure 4, from Chen, 2006, p. 93).

Figure 4 Strength of the Factors in Choosing a Canadian Graduate School (Chen, 2006, p. 93)

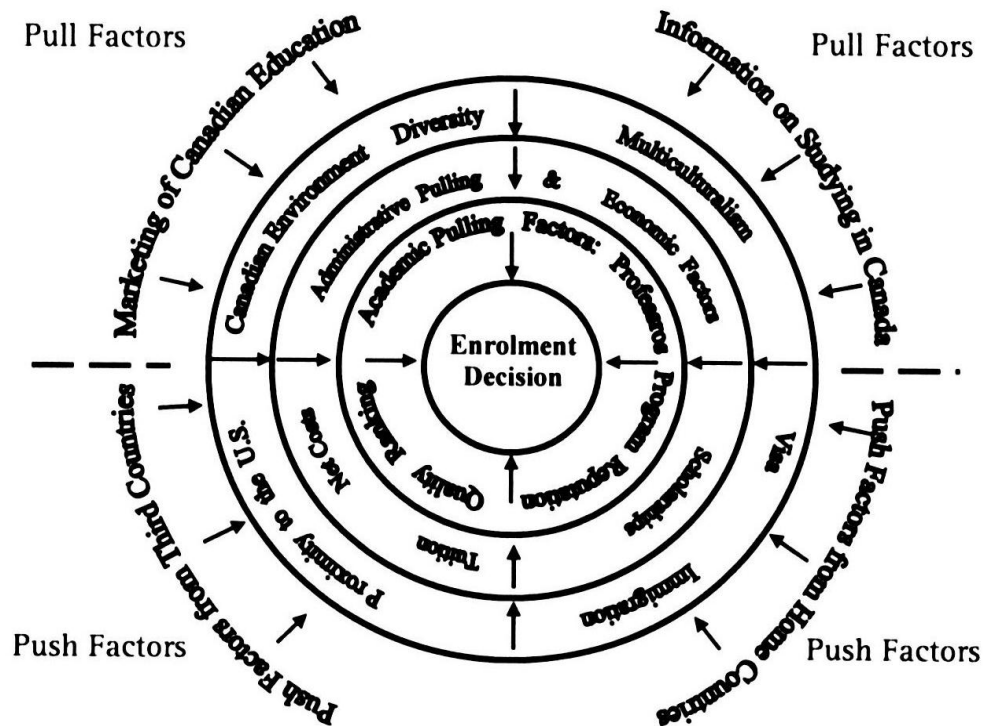


Figure 4 showed Chen’s analysis of the positive influence of the pull factors in Chinese students’ enrolment decision. From the core to the outmost circlet, the model has four layers: Enrolment Decision- Academic Pulling Factors- Canadian Environment Diversity- Marketing of Canadian education. Chen (2006) explained in the figure “the top half of the periphery represents the pulling factors, while the bottom half of the periphery represents the pushing factors”.

Interestingly, Chen (2006) found that even though people are “pushed” to move abroad, the core factors affecting their decision are “pull” factors. Moreover, it was estimated for international students, the “push” and “pull” factors could be the predictors of their cultural adaptation. Chickov (2007, 2009) hypothesized those students who were pulled to

study abroad experience cultural adaptation with less difficulty than those who were pushed. Therefore, they would be more likely to achieve academic success in Canadian universities. These findings are consistent with conclusions drawn from SDT.

The self-determined theory - SDT

Self-determined theory is the theory of motivation. Deci and Ryan (1997) argued that the SDT supported our intrinsic tendencies to behave or reflect in a healthy way.

Deci and Ryan (1971) defined the concepts of self-determined theory. In SDT people are often moved by external (extrinsic) factors such as reward systems, grades, evaluations, or the opinions they fear others might have of them. Yet just as frequently, people are motivated from within, by interests, curiosity, care or abiding values (intrinsic). These intrinsic motivations are not necessarily externally rewarded or supported, but nonetheless they can sustain passions, creativity, and sustained efforts. The interplay between the extrinsic forces on a person and the intrinsic motives and needs inherent in human nature is the territory of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1971, from <http://www.psych.rochester.edu/SDT/theory.php>).

Deci and Ryan first proposed self-determined theory (SDT) as an approach to human motivation and personality. “People can be motivated because they value an activity or because there is strong external coercion. They can be urged into action by an abiding interest or by a bribe” (Deci & Ryan, 2001, p.78). “Abiding by interest or by a bribe” is clarified as either intrinsic motivation, *abiding by interest*, or extrinsic motivation, *bribe*.

Deci and Ryan (2002) also claimed the more self-determined one's behavior, the higher the quality of one's performance in many domains including education, organizations, sport and physical activity, religion, health and medicine, parenting, virtual environments and media, close relationships, and psychotherapy.

Chirkov (2007, 2009) used SDT to explore migration motivation. He hypothesized that international students with the self-determined motivation to study abroad would experience fewer obstacles in cultural adaptation than those with non-self-determined motivation. Self-motivated international students at their host university, therefore, were more likely to achieve academic success at universities than the non-self-motivated. Chirkov, Safdar and Guzman (2008) further examined the role that motivation played in the adaptation of international students in Canada. Chirkov et al. (2008) collected data from the international students at three Canadian universities. They found that the "motivation of international college students who go to a foreign country for studying is an important factor in predicting their adjustment" (Chirkov et al., 2008). Thus, based on self-determined theory, it is plausible that Chinese students studying in Canadian universities who maintain a higher degree of self-determined motivation are more likely to experience easier cultural adaptation than those who do not.

Practical insights from research for helping cultural adaptation

The most important aspect of a problem was not the solution but the ways people obtained the solutions. Since cultural adaptation is likely to be accompanied by anxiety and stress, helping newcomers deal with cultural conflicts constitutes an important concern. Kim

(2001) proposed four methods to assist immigrants or international students to adapt to a new culture, which include (a) willingness to be changed (b) managing stress (c) focusing on communicative engagement and (d) cultivating an adaptive personality. Kim noted “as we regard the host environment as a partner and engage ourselves in that environment, we need to be prepared to accept the likelihood that a part of who we are and what we are may be changed by our new experiences, at least temporarily” (Kim, 2001, p. 225). People who are willing to be changed are more likely to adapt to the new culture easily. However, “no matter how willing and prepared we are to be changed by our new cultural experience, the cross-cultural journey is seldom smooth” (p. 227). Kim (2001) found that the best way to manage stress was to “accept stress and stop fighting it” (p. 228).

Managing stress is like what happens when we try to learn to swim for the first time.

If you try to stay on the surface of the water, you sink; but when you try to sink you float. When you hold your breath, you lose it. (Watts, 1951, p. 9)

As for communicative engagement, it was not difficult to understand that the use of the host language is of central importance. “Language competence serves us as the primary instrument in promoting our social power and credibility, whereas its lack becomes a salient deprivation” (Kim, 2001, p. 230). And finally, newcomers should learn to cultivate their adaptive personality, for instance, openness.

Neuliep (2006) mentioned several strategies for managing culture shock. These strategies include (a) studying the host culture (b) studying the local environment (c) learning basic verbal and nonverbal language skills (d) developing intercultural relationships (e)

maintaining an intimate social network and (f) anticipating failure events. He also argued that “successful management of culture shock depends on an awareness of its symptoms and the degree of its severity” (p. 433). He suggested people keep in mind that culture was learned anytime and anywhere. Similar to Kim’s (2001) research findings, Neuliep (2006) regarded language proficiency as a very important factor to help one adapt culture. Also, social activity with the host culture was highly valuable to the international students.

Furthermore, Huntley (1993) argued that in order to help students’ academic performance improve at schools, schools should consider having orientation, peer support programs and counseling services.

In brief, adapting to a new culture was seen as a challenging and difficult endeavor for newcomers. The variety of cultural backgrounds of newcomers meant they encountered unique difficulties as various cultures met and mixed. The following section discussed practical cultural conflicts for international students in real cultural contexts.

Difficulties for International Students in North American Universities

Stepping into a new culture is not an easy thing. Wagner and Magistral (1997) described the process of “knowing a new culture” was “one step forward, two steps back” (p. 4). People usually struggled with the common difficulties they were bound to face in a new environment, and international students were no exception.

As a specific group of newcomers to North America, the number of international students is increasing rapidly. Yi and Li (1997) provided an overview of socio-demographic characteristics of international students. “According to the Institute of International

Education (IIE), there are more than 450,000 international students in the U.S during the 1994-1995 academic year” (p. 475). However, the latest open door reported by the Institute of International Education (IIE) revealed that the number of international students at the colleges and universities in the United States had increased by 3% to 690,923 during the 2009-2010 academic years. Similarly, according to the office of Citizenship and Immigration of Canada (2008), more than 130,000 students came to study in Canada every year. Since the number of international students has been increasing year by year, it was important to understand their experience in North American universities. Yu and Li (2007) claimed that many international students, specifically Asian international students, experienced culture shock and found it hard to develop a balance between the two different cultures. The difficulties were mainly concerned with the following areas: “pressure from academic demands, language barriers, financial concerns, performance anxiety, depression, loneliness, homesickness, relationship problems, non-assertiveness, individualism and bicultural conflicts, stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination and paranoia” (p. 477). Moreover, some researchers also argued that language barriers were the greatest difficulty for international students studying abroad and was the most likely to affect international students’ academic performance (Jochems, Snippe, Smid, & Verweij, 2010).

Furthermore, the office of Vice Chancellor of Students Affairs at Maryland University College Park (1989) conducted research about international students’ difficulties. They found that international students were generally reluctant to seek and receive the help with adjustment problems because of language barriers. Few international students obtained

constructive psychological help in North American universities.

Also, Haydon and Lisa (2003) stated that language barriers in daily life and academic life commonly included understanding lectures and writing essays. Other challenges for international students were “breaks with family and peer support systems, differences in cultural values and assumptions and communication, and learning styles, as well as differences in psychological self-constructs” (p. 10).

Consequently, the common difficulties encountered by international students in North America were mainly language problems, financial issues, and some psychological problems such as loneliness and homesickness.

Difficulties for Chinese Students in North America

Among the rapidly increasing cohort of international students, Chinese students accounted for a high percentage. According to the Institute of International Education, international student’s enrollments rose modestly in 2009-2010, led by strong increase in students from China, the number of Chinese students rose by 30%. As the latest growing the cohort of international students, clearly there was a need for more research focused specifically on the experiences of Chinese students.

The reality was that much research had been done to analyze the common difficulties encountered by international students but little research has focused on what difficulties were particular to Chinese students studying abroad. Additionally, little research examining the context of Chinese students studying at Canadian universities has been conducted. One of the studies on Chinese students’ adaptation abroad was from Feng (1991). He identified the

following difficulties for Chinese students' adaptation in the U.S: financial difficulty, cultural difference, academic concerns, and language ability. In Feng's study (1991), participation observation, instructed interviews, and semi-structured interviews were used to examine 52 students from the People's Republic of China. Some were government-sponsored and some self-or family supported. The research findings revealed financial problems were always a headache for cohort of Chinese students. It was the major concern for Chinese students to study abroad.

In Wang's (1996) study, two Chinese graduate students were selected to be participants for a case study on the cross-cultural experience in American universities. Wang (1996) found that the challenges that confronted Chinese students studying abroad included difficulties in culture, language, and contrasts in social and political systems between China and United States.

Huntley (1993) also did research about the problems of adjustment of adult international students, including some Chinese students. He suggested the first hurdle that was faced by Chinese students was language.

Some of us can speak English well, but most of us could not speak fluently when we first arrived. You felt embarrassed if somebody asks you "Pardon me?", "Could you say it again?" After a couple of experiences, you would rather close your mouth than speak. If you have only a limited vocabulary, you do not have a large range of topics that you can talk about with others. You may know what you want to say, but you cannot express yourself (Feng, 1991, p. 14).

The second difficulty was the academic performance. Huntley (1993) mentioned both age and the field of study (major) chosen by Chinese students may be a determining factor in the academic performance. Gaither and Griffin (1971) found that the younger the foreign students, the fewer the adjustment problems, compared to older students. As to the majors, students studying engineering and sciences were more likely to achieve academic success than students who studied social sciences. The third difficulty for Chinese students was social adjustment. Huntley (1993) talked about social problems with housing. Most of the time Chinese students would like to live with Chinese peers; however, this limited opportunities to socialize with local people.

Collectively, for Chinese students, the most common difficulties they encountered in North American culture were language ability, academic performance and social adjustment (Wang, 2001; Huntley, 1993; Wan, 1995). Meanwhile, Feng (1991) mentioned that financial difficulty and discrimination could be challenges for Chinese students as well.

Summary

The literature reviewed within this chapter included the conception of culture, five dimensions of culture and cultural differences, cultural adaptation, three theoretical frameworks, some practical insights from research to help international students adapt to a new culture, and difficulties experienced by Chinese students in North America.

However, this literature review was still limited to studies that described some superficial difficulties that international students encountered abroad and some strategies for coping. Little research went deeply enough to explain this phenomenon with the essential

theories of culture and cultural adaptation. Also, the research particular to Chinese students was scarce. This study's utilization of first hand descriptive narratives from Chinese students who told their own stories and journey in Canada could provide a valuable resource for Chinese students who just entered here by filling a void in existing research. This study may also help educational administrators make appropriate policy to assist them in managing issues related to international students, in particular Chinese students. And generally this descriptive narrative research would contribute to assisting all newcomers who seek to learn in Canada.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

How can we know the dancer from the dance?

--- William Butler Yeats, “Among School Children”, 1923

Yeats articulated very clearly how to distinguish objects from their makers. Dancing is art, while dancers are art-makers. It is obvious that the approach to identify the art is the “the third party” – observers. Comparing research to dancing, the “art makers” would be the Chinese students at Canadian universities, and the art could be their specific journey in Canada. Until the appropriate research is conducted to explore the art makers, the art cannot be fully understood. Seen from Chinese students’ daily lives on campus, it is hard to understand how they struggle and hope, in their journey to adapt to a new culture and realize their initial dreams in Canada. Therefore, an effective approach for the research is needed.

We come to the question of “voice”, the word emphasized in the title. Whose voice? Whose voice will speak in the research? Bob’s? How can Dan’s life be presented? Once we begin to understand Bob’s words, we begin to understand Jenny’s, Peter’s, and Maire’s. Therefore, listening to Chinese students’ voices is assumed as an optimal approach to “know the dancer from the dance”. It will be, I hope, a story that consists of many stories. As a result, I may hear many inspiring narratives that may contribute to define the art of “Chinese students’ journey in Canada”.

This chapter focused on the methodology planned to conduct this study, including the research design, participant selection, method of data collection, analysis of the data and ethical considerations.

Research Design

What methodology would be appropriate for research would depend on the research questions which framed the exploration (McNeill & Chapman, 2005).

Research questions decide

The research examined Chinese students' journey at Canadian universities. As a researcher, I explored deeply the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for these Chinese students to come to Canada and the difficulties they encountered in Canada. I also explored whether their self-determined motivations or non-self-determined motivations influence their cultural adaptation in Canada. In order to achieve these research goals, the open-ended research questions in this study were:

- 1 What are Chinese students' motivations to study in Canada?
- 2 What are Chinese students' experiences at Canadian universities and how do their motivations shape their journey in Canada?
- 3 What challenges and opportunities do Chinese students face in their cultural adaptation, and what strategies do Chinese students think that can be applied by educational administrators to assist them?

Subjectivity. These research questions might lead to different answers from the

potential participants, for different people have different experiences. People cannot predict their lives; people cannot determine when and where they may get sick nor when and where they may have good fortune. Everyone will have their own life journeys. Thus it was hard to gather data from the participants based on an exclusive reality or to measure participants' experiences through objective methods, specifically in the realm of understanding people's experiences. Moreover, each individual constructed their knowledge and their life journey through unique social interactions beforehand. Given (2008) put forth that "everything we know has been determined by the intersection of politics, values, ideologies, religious beliefs, language and so on" (p. 118). Therefore, participants' views on their life journey in Canada were expected to be subjective. These stories might not be fully described, for everything that participants know would be determined by their experience, which was the subjectivity we were talking about. Furthermore, Lincoln and Guba (1989) mentioned that "things go on in that real world, and which they go on is determined entirely by certain natural laws. It is because of the existence of such driving laws that science can hope to fulfill its prime directive - to predict and to control" (p. 85). The participants' experiences might not be the same, though their experiences should follow some natural laws that my research explored here – participants' mainstream of motivations of *participants* to come to Canada, the common difficulties of cultural adaptation, and whether their motivations influence their process of cultural adaptation in Canada.

As for subjectivity, not only did the participants have subjective views about their life journey in Canada but also I, a researcher in this study, entailed some subjectivity to this

research. Determined by my knowledge and my life journey, my choice in designing the research questions and interpreting the data were likely to embody my own perspectives. Comparing this study to the art of dancing again, being an observer to this “dancing” in this research, my awareness of dancing might be different from those experienced retired dancers or audiences who are new to dancing. This was subjectivity. This is unclear. You may consider: Since the views of the researcher and of potential participants in this study are subjective and representative of multiple perspectives of their own journeys; the knowledge contained and shared in their stories and expressed in this research is mutually constructed. This mutual, co-creation of the knowledge of our experienced reality is at the core of naturalism and social construction methodologies. Guba and Lincoln (1985) illustrated in their key work on the research and evaluation methodology about collecting subjective data- “the key process is explaining: making clear the cause or reason for something” (p. 89). Schwandt (2000) mentioned the knowledge socially constructed by people in the process of research, and the researchers should endeavor to understand the complicated world based on participants’ varied views in this research. To understand the knowledge of reality constructed by both participants and researchers, we would go to constructivist paradigm that was explained as follows.

The assumption in this study – Constructivist paradigm

A constructivist paradigm emphasizes the notion that there is not an exclusive reality that can be known. The researchers’ goal is to explore the multiple realities in the world

constructed by the people involved in the research. The researcher endeavors to balance the representation of views and raise participants' awareness, and then construct the knowledge of reality. Schwandt (2000) stated the basic assumptions guiding the constructivist paradigm were that the researchers should attempt to understand the real world of the participants through the consistent interaction between the researchers and participants. Also, Mertens (2009) argued that "the constructivist paradigms emphasizes that research is a product of the values of researchers and cannot be independent of them" (p. 16). Furthermore, Eichelberger (1989) described the constructivist researcher in this way:

They want to know what meaning people attribute to activities...and how that relates to their behavior. These researchers are much clearer about the fact that they are constructing the "reality" on the basis of interpretations of the data in the study with the help of the participants who provided the data in the study. They often carry out their research, much as anthropologists do in their studies of culture. They do a great deal of observation, read documents produced by members of the groups being studied, do extensive formal and informal interviewing, and develop classifications and descriptions that represent the beliefs of the various groups. (p. 9)

Guba and Lincoln (2000) agreed that the research can be conducted in the interaction between the researchers and participants. Through this interaction, the researchers are likely to obtain multiple perspectives that yield "better interpretations of meanings" (p. 19).

Following a constructivist paradigm, the knowledge of reality to be constructed in this study was culture conflicts. Furthermore, as a researcher and a Chinese student studying in

Canada, I was part of the topic being studied. This meant that when I was trying to construct the reality, my research lens would be different from other researchers who have no similar experiences. According to Given's (2008) definition of the researchers as an integral part of the research, I am an insider- researcher which made the research relatively easy.

Insider or emic perspective

The term insider researcher refers to “a situation where the researcher is a part of the topic being investigated” (Given, 2008, p. 433). In this study, having similar experiences compared to the participants, I could be defined as an insider-researcher. A researcher who was not a Chinese student and who had no experiences studying in Canada studying the same topic might be considered an outsider- researcher.

Sherry (2006) described the advantages enjoyed by insider researchers:

When a researcher already has established relationships with the research participants (as some insider researchers do), the nature of the investigation is quite different situations where the researcher must enter the field without previous connections. Some insiders report that when they conduct field work, it is relatively easy to gain access to people and resources. Likewise, these insider researchers frequently report research participants tend to indicate they trust them far more than they might trust researchers who are perceived as outsiders. (Sherry, 2008, p. 433)

Aligned with Sherry's assertion, in this study, it was relatively easy for me to identify and select the participants who were likely to be my Chinese peers. The participants'

selection procedure contributed to establishing the trust between my Chinese peers and I.

Participants might also be more comfortable speaking about their experiences in front of me rather than other outsider researchers.

An additional advantage of being an insider-researcher in my study was being in a position to better understand the participants. My view about their experiences played a very important part in the research. According to David (2008), “an emic perspective is the insider’s view of reality” (David, 2008, p. 249).

Adopting an emic perspective allows for multiple realities depending on the role and/or perspective of the individual in the community. An individual’s view of the world might not conform to an “objective reality”. However, there are real-world consequences for people’s perceptions of reality, shaping how they behave in social situations ranging from their realities to communities at large. Emic perceptions are shared views of cultural knowledge from the insider’s “normative” perspective.

(David, 2008, p. 249)

An emic perspective is usually used in a phenomenological view of the world on the basis of assumptions about “what people think and why they act the way they do” (David, 2008, p. 249). Then, all the multiple perspectives of insiders gathered to construct the knowledge of reality. Furthermore, Morris, Leung, Ames and Lickel (1999) stated that “emic accounts describe thoughts and actions primarily in terms of the actor’s self-understanding – terms that are often culturally and historically bound” (p. 782). Consequently, with regard to participants’ self-understanding about their life journey, emic accounts have great strengths

and are very appropriate for this study.

Since this study followed a constructivist paradigm, qualitative research methods are best suited. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that the methodology of constructivist paradigm is qualitative (primarily). “Researchers choose to use qualitative methods so that they can gain an understanding of the constructions held by people in the context” (Donna, 2008, p. 226).

Qualitative research

In order to better understand why qualitative research is the most appropriate method in this study, researchers should clarify what qualitative research exactly is.

What is qualitative research? Researchers have defined qualitative research in different ways. Mertens (2010) argued that “qualitative researchers collect words, pictures, and artifacts” (p. 225) and defined the approach in a very clear way as follows:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (Mertens, 2010, p. 225)

Another definition by Gall and Gall (2010) focused on the empirical methods of qualitative research, including case study, narrative research, ethnography and critical research and historical research. A case study described “a series of related events in an interesting manner, but it is not intended to provide evidence for judging the validity of the events described or their applicability in other context” (Gall & Gall, 2010, p. 338). Also, Gall and Gall (2010) stated that narrative research was the “systematic study and interpretation of stories of life experiences and reporting of such research” (p. 373). Then, they described critical ethnography was the “firsthand, intensive study of the features of a specific culture and the patterns in those features” (Gall & Gall, 2010, p. 401). As to historical research, Gall and Gall (2010) stated “historical research is the process of systematically searching for and organizing data to better understand past phenomena and their likely causes and consequences”(p. 433).

Furthermore, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) noted that qualitative research usually used a small, non-representative, purposeful sample to explore the understanding of the experiences of people, while quantitative research often had a large sample with the purpose of collecting numerical data, to figure out the relationships between the variables or testing the theory.

Consequently, qualitative research was a better way to understand people’s lived experience. Since the purpose of this study was to understand the Chinese students’ journey at Canadian universities, qualitative methods were appropriate for conducting this research. In this study, I used narrative inquiry, which was explained next.

What is a narrative research? Gall and Gall (2010) defined narrative research as “a

systematic study of stories that enables readers to apply the findings to wider issues and solve problems of practice” (p. 372). Brodke (1987) explained narrative research was “one way to study how people imagine life to be, for themselves and for others, and the stories people tell about themselves and one another twice encode culture, in that stories are at once practices and artifacts of culture” (p. 256). Moreover, Webster’s (1996) defined narrative as a “discourse, or an example of it, designed to represent a connected succession of happenings” (p. 1503). The data of narrative research could be collected “as a story (a life story provided in an interview or a literal work) or in a different manner (field notes of an anthropologist who wrote up his or her observations as a narrative or in personal letters)” (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998, p. 2). In essence, “narrative inquiry involved the reconstruction of a person’s experience in relationship both to the other and to a social milieu” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 8). Narrative inquiry was a process of the recounting and reporting of the story.

However, *“Narrative research is not just telling stories”*.

---John Schostak , 1993

Differences between the narrative and a story. According to Gall and Gall (2010), a narrative was a later account that collects individual stories, for re-telling the stories and coding for themes by the researchers. Conversely, story was an original account with place, plot and scene. The story should happen in the past, at a specific time involving a conflict and some characters. Whereas, narrative was the sense of the meaning that researchers derive from these stories.

Interviewing in Narrative research. Riessman (2008) argued that “most narrative projects in the human sciences today are based on interviews of some kind” (p.23). Narrative researchers usually “implicitly apply a stimulus/ response model during interviews. The goal in narrative interviewing was to generate detailed accounts rather than brief answers or general statements” (Riessman, 2008, p. 23).

The question here is how it is possible to fully respect the voices of participants in research? Discourse analysis played an important role in narrative research. “Discourse analysis offered a range of methods for identifying patterns of meanings embedded in larger speech genres and patterns of communication that serve various social, ideological, and political interests” (Annie, 1985, as cited in Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 45).

Why use narrative research in this study? I used narrative research as my research design, because this method had multiple benefits. First, people are story tellers by nature. Telling stories was a common form of daily communication. When people communicate, they are actually telling stories most of the time. Second, narrative provided us with access to people’s identity and personality, specifically their inner world, which could not be obtained from other measures. Third, narrative research resulted in a unique and rich body of data that could not be acquired from experiments, questionnaires, or observations (Lieblich, et al., 1998). Furthermore, experience differed from person to person. “Each undergoes and acts and reacts differently. Each has a different ‘angle of vision’ that touches on a common world. There are no static categories of understanding or static forms of perception – one perception leads to another perception” (Clandinn, 2007, p. 13).

Looking back, looking forward. In everyday oral storytelling, a speaker followed some sequence to present the story. It was of great significance. In telling stories, when people looked back, they might learn a lesson or accumulate some positive experience. Then, they judged the past with a present view, which might contribute to looking forward. Case in point, I would never forget the first day when I stepped into university, we were required to write down our childhood dreams in the form of personal narrative. Some people suddenly realized that they did not even have a dream in childhood and they felt ashamed. Some people found that they were far away from their childhood dreams and others sensed that they were pursuing their childhood dream at that time. Then, the professor concluded from students' personal narratives "hold on to your childhood dream and realize it". How inspired we were at that time! Now I realized narratives held unbelievable power to make people think about their past and the future. The power to make people consider was the reason I decided to choose narrative research as a data collection method in this study.

Reflecting inner thoughts. Bickman and Rog (1998) stated narrative methods could be considered real-world measures that are appropriate when real-life problems are investigated, for stories are an effective way to reflect people's inner thoughts and feelings. In my study, the Chinese students definitely encountered some difficulties in their process of cultural adaptation to a Canadian university. To understand the real world problems of Chinese students, narrative research was considered the most appropriate way to conduct the research. Furthermore, the study was concerned with the motivations of Chinese student to come to Canada. Narrative was also the best way for these students to explain what their real

motivations for studying abroad were. Their narratives provided rich data with regard to their motivations. As a researcher in this study, I was a Chinese student studying in one Canadian university as well and have experienced my own journey here. Thus I think I was very qualified to do the research and conduct a narrative inquiry.

Participants

Qualitative research has specific procedures to select samples and participants. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that, “qualitative research is based on informational, not statistical, considerations” (p. 202). In this study, I used purposeful sampling to select the participants in my study. Four participants (2 male, 2 female) staying in Canada for 1-2 years, were selected. Participants were selected based on the following criteria.

All of them are graduate students

Because most graduate students were adult students, they were able to manage their behaviors somewhat better than adolescents and were more likely to be able to evaluate what they had been experiencing and identify the solution to the problems they encountered. Thus, graduate students were ideal participants in this study.

All the participants have been here for at least one year, usually one or two years

Based on my own experience, the initial stage of coming to Canada was not easy. The greatest hurdle for the Chinese students was the language barrier. In the process of adjusting to the new culture, they picked up the language step by step. Because language was a very explicit form of culture, this was a learning procedure for newcomers to adapt a different

culture. I asked how long the Chinese students think was appropriate to pick up a second language in some informal conversations with them (all the graduate students have taken the TOFEL exam, though initially they still have a difficult time communicating in a real situation). Most Chinese students said it was probably one year or so. Thus, I assumed that the span of understanding and using English for the Chinese students was about one year.

Two of the participants have financial aid while the other two do not

Among the four participants in this study, two participants had financial aid, either scholarship or bursary, while the other two did not have any financial assistance. Feng (1991) defined Chinese students' adaptation in the U.S as the following: financial difficulty, cultural difference, academic concerns, and language ability. It was predicted that students who had financial problems would be more likely to experience greater difficulty in cultural adaptation. They might be worried about the living expenses and have more anxieties in a new culture.

Collecting the data: Interviewing

In this study, I used interview as a method of data collection. "The purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in or on someone else's mind" (Patton, 1990, p. 278). Also, Silverman (2004) stated interviewing "provides a way of generating empirical data about the social world by asking people to talk about their lives. In this respect, interviews are special forms of conversation" (p. 140). In this study, I conducted four separate interviews with four individuals. Each interview lasted 60 minutes in length and consisted of

depth, semi-structured interviews. It was not necessary to conduct a second interview to obtain clarifications and explanations, for “no two interviews are alike, and the uniqueness of narratives is manifested in extremely rich data” (Lieblich, et al., 1998). Moreover, the second interview for narrative research might change its original uniqueness. However, I conducted two interviews in this research, to strengthen the credibility of data analysis.

In-depth semi-structured interviews

In-depth interviews. Johnson (2002) argued that in depth interviews are usually conducted in this way:

“Deep” information and knowledge –usually deeper information and knowledge than is sought in surveys, informal interviewing, or focus groups for example. This information usually concerns very personal matters, such as an individual’s self-lived experience, values and decisions, occupational ideology, cultural knowledge, or perspective. (Johnson, 2002, p. 104)

Semi-structured interviews. As for semi-structured interview, Kvale (1996) has stated that:

Semi-structured interview is neither an open conversation nor a highly structured questionnaire. It is conducted according to an interview guide that focuses on certain themes and may include suggested questions. The interview is usually transcribed and the written text together with the tape recording as the material for the subsequent interpretation of meaning. (p. 27)

Thus, when conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews with individuals, researchers usually conduct either formal or informal ones, with varying degrees of structure (Hesse-Bibler, 2007). Also, Merterns (2010) stated that:

Researchers sometimes start with more informal interviewing strategies to establish a relationship with the participant. Using a very general open-ended question will allow the respondents' concerns and interests to surface, providing a broader lens for the researcher's gaze. (Merterns, 2010, p. 371)

I started with more relaxed questions to establish "trust" with the participants and then, through the open-ended questions, collected their narratives as rich data for this study.

Life story interviewing

One way of conducting an in-depth study of individual lives and looking at life as a whole, was through the life story interviewing (Atkinson, 2002, p. 125).

A life story is the story a person chooses to tell about the life he or she has lived, told as completely and honestly as possible, what the person remembers of it and what he or she wants others to know of it, usually as a result of a guided interview by another.

The resulting life story is the narrative essence of what has happened to the person. It can cover the time from birth to the present before and beyond. It includes the important events, experiences, and feelings of a lifetime. (Atkinson, 2002, p. 125)

Furthermore, Scarf (1981) and McAdams (1985, 1993) defined life story interviewing in a very vivid way as follows:

Every person's life can be written as a book. I would like you to think about your life now as if you were writing a book. First, think about the chapters of this book. I have here a page to help you in this task. Write down the years on the first column- from zero, from the day you were born. When did the first stage end? Write it here. Then go on to the next chapters, and put down the age that each one begins and ends for you. Go on till you reach your present age. You can use any number of chapters or stages that you find suitable to your own life. (Scarf & McAdams, 1981, 1985/1993, p. 25)

Procedures

Based on the information from the literature review, I opened the conversation with some non-leading, and very relaxed questions, which helped establish "trust" between participants and I. Meanwhile, the informal interactive conversation helped put participants at ease for the following questions.

Then, I used a *participants model* to conduct the interview process. Riessman (2008) stated that "the model of a 'facilitating' interviewer who asks questions, and a vessel-like 'respondent' who gives answers, is replaced by two active *participants* who jointly construct narrative and meaning" (p. 23). With the *participants model*, it is relatively easy for researchers to "generate detailed accounts rather than brief answers or general statements" (p. 23). Or rather, I give up the control in the interview, in order to facilitate better data collection. It is predictable that participants might extend their story at some unexpected

times, even in the answers to the research questions that I plan to ask in the study.

Before conducting the interview, I personally phoned the prospective participants to confirm their consent to participate in the interview. Since the participants were selected from my Chinese peers, it is not difficult for me to obtain their help in this study. Interviews were conducted in a specific place to ensure participants' privacy. Meanwhile, interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed.

Interview procedures. Participants in this study consisted of four Chinese graduate students who had been studying in Canada for one or two years. This small and purposeful sample provided an opportunity to explore deeply in the collection of the various dimensions of the internationalization of education. During my initial communication with the participants, I introduced myself, explained the purpose of the research, and provided a general description of the study. After deliberating on which language to use, the interviews for this research were conducted in Chinese, which had many benefits. One of the most obvious advantages was that participants were more expressive and able to communicate deeply, which proved to be a very valuable asset for this study. Also, participants had a preference for their interview language and they felt more comfortable telling their stories in Chinese.

The interviews were then conducted at a time of convenience for the interview participants. All interviews began with the basic introduction of the synthesis model, the push-pull and the self-determined theory. Next, in conducting the semi-structured life-story interviews, I introduced the task of "stage outline" as follows:

Every person's life can be written as a book. I would like you to think about your life now as if you were writing a book. First, think about the chapters of this book. I have here a page to help you in this task. Write down the years on the first column – from zero, from the day you were born. When did the first stage end? Write it here. Then go on to the next chapters, and write down the age that each one begins and ends for you. Go on till you reach your present age. You can use any number of chapters or stages that you find suitable to your own life. (Lieblichm, Tuval- Mashiach & Zilber, 1998, p. 25)

The one-page form that was handed to the interviewee included two columns – the left for the delineation of the stage by age, and the right for providing headings for each other (Lieblichm et al., 1998). When interviewees completed the stage outline, I placed it where it would be visible to both of us and said, "I will be asking you several questions about your motivations and your life experience in Canada that may be related to some of the stages you proposed." These instructions assisted the participants in bringing into focus their motivations and life experience in Canada.

To my satisfaction all the participants were extremely supportive of my research and thus enabled me to achieve very intimate and in-depth communication with them. As a result I was able to obtain rich and unique data that could never be acquired from surveys, questionnaires or any other forms of quantitative research. At the same time, from the interviews, the participants made me look back at my life journey to this point and appreciate that my life was still unfolding.

The choice of these four participants was determined by a variety of factors. First, all the participants had been here for one or two years and it was assumed that Chinese students required about one year of regular use of English in order to gain fluency. In addition, two of the participants had financial aid while the other two did not. Feng (1991) argued that students who had financial problems were more likely to experience more difficulty in the process of cultural adaptation so it was deemed necessary to choose participants with a variety of financial circumstances.

In response to semi-structured interview questions each participant provided a narrative of their life journey to this point. Highlights of these narratives included a brief description of their Chinese backgrounds and family situations, an explanation of their motivations to study abroad and specifically in Canada, and a description of their experiences to date at a Canadian university. In the latter category participants concentrated on the following areas: housing, food, language, entertainment, academic adjustment and future plans. Finally, each of the participants provided their insights on the relationship between their motivations to study abroad and their experiences and success to date in Canada.

Data analysis

This section explains how data analysis is managed in this study. In terms of narrative research, Polkinghorne (1994) argued that,

In this type of analysis the researcher's task is to configure the data elements into a story that unites and gives meaning to the elements as contributors to a goal or purpose. The analytic task requires the researcher to develop or discover a plot that

displays the linkage among the data elements as part of an unfolding temporal development culminating in a denouement. (Polkinghorne, 1994, p. 15)

I recorded the interview process and created narratives for each participant, keeping as close as possible to the real event. After each interview, I made notes on what transpired during the conversations. Wengraf (2001) stated that the subjective perceptions of the researcher were important pieces of data. Specifically in this case, I was an insider researcher in this study. Then, I analyzed the transcript and coded it for the themes.

Content analysis

Lieblich, et al. (1998) defined content analysis as follows:

The narrative materials of life stories will be processed analytically, namely, by breaking the text into relatively small units of content and submitting them to either descriptive or statistical treatment. This is normally called “content analysis”.

(Lieblich, et al, 1998, p. 112)

In this study, I examined the data carefully and choose a suitable category for each theme.

Selection of the subcontext. According to Lieblich, et al. (1998), “on the basis of the research question or hypothesis, all the relevant sections of a text are marked and assembled to form a new file or subtext, which may be seen as the content universe of the area studied” (p. 112). In this study, I explored the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for Chinese students to come to Canada. Next I set apart all sections of the story that deal with the motivations,

which is the sub-context. Then the section on motivation was taken out of the entire story and was analyzed independently.

Definition of the content categories. Categories could be defined as different themes, conceptions, models, and theories. For instance, after withdrawing data on section of motivations from the entire story, I categorized the motivations according to those who demonstrated self-determined motivation and those who demonstrated non-self-determined motivation.

Sorting the material into the categories. “At this stage, separate sentences or utterances are assigned to relevant categories. While the utterances may all be from a single story, categories may also include utterances by several different individuals” (Lieblich, et al., 1998, p. 113). In this study, relative utterances were put into the same category, which may help future studies.

Drawing conclusions from the results. “The contents collected in each category can be used descriptively to formulate a picture of the content universe in certain groups of people or cultures” (Lieblich, et al., 1998, p. 114). The sorting of data into catalogs was particularly helpful for using the three models to understand the experiences of the participants.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested trustworthiness includes: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) conformability. In this section I explored the trustworthiness in this study.

Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed criteria for quality in qualitative research that included the deep and persistent engagement of researchers. They argued that peer debriefing and member checks are two strategies to guarantee the accuracy. “Member checks involve the researcher seeking verification with the respondent groups about the constructions that are developing as a result of data collected and analyzed” (Mertens, 2008, p. 257). In this study, I conducted two interviews, one of which worked as a member check to confirm the accuracy for this research. Participants were provided with a transcript of their interview to review and agree to the transcribed data.

Transferability

Lincoln and Guba (1989) defined transferability as the applicable of research findings to other similar contexts. This research mainly focused on Chinese students’ journey at one Canadian university but the findings generally would be applicable to any similar group of Chinese students in other North American universities.

Dependability

Lincoln and Guba (1989) defined dependability as a parallel to reliability. Reliability means stability over time. In constructivist paradigms, realities were varied and inevitably changeable. Therefore, it was important to have reliability in the research. I examined the research during the process and after its completion with the help from one peer debriefer.

Confirmability

Confirmability was defined by Lincoln and Guba (1989) as parallel to objectivity. Objectivity meant that the influence of the researcher's judgment was minimized (Merterns, 2008). Since I was an insider researcher in this study, I utilized a colleague, (who was also the peer debriefer) to help complete a confirmability audit.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations in this study referred to confidentiality of the data. First, permission to conduct the research was granted from the University of Saskatchewan Behavioral Research Ethics Board. All interview data was kept confidential. Then, participants' identities were protected. Participants' real names would not be revealed in the research. To protect participants' real identity, they had a pseudonym in their stories. Also, the consent letter was agreed to by the participants, which committed to destroying all the interview data after its use. Furthermore, all the participants were allowed to withdraw from the research without any reasons.

Summary

This chapter focused on the methodology that will be used to conduct this study. Determined by the open-ended research questions, this study will use narrative research with semi-structured interviews as the method of data collection. Employing semi-structured interviews and narrative research will allow the participants and the researcher to construct the reality of the Chinese students' experiences studying in Canada together. This method will provide rich data for the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

PARTICIPANTS' NARRATIVES

“One of the clearest channels for learning about the inner world is through verbal account and stories presented by individual narrators about their lives and their experienced reality. Or rather, narratives provide us with access to people’s identity and personality.”

--- *Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber, 1998*

Introduction

In this chapter, the narratives of the four Chinese students’ journeys in Canada are presented. With the purpose of protecting the participants’ identity, pseudonyms are utilized for all of the participants, so they are referred to as Bob, Jenny, Peter and Marie. Though identical life-story semi-structured interviews were conducted with all the participants, the ways they told their stories differed significantly, according to their experiences and their personalities.

To my satisfaction all the participants were extremely supportive of my research and enabling me to achieve very intimate and in-depth communication with them. Once I began to understand the four participants’ words, I began to tell their stories. I hope, these four stories are about the four participants, but not just the four participants, because it is meant to serve others. It is, I hope, also four stories for Chinese students, and the other international

students who are considering studying in Canada or have been studying in Canadian universities.

BOB

Researcher's introduction

Bob is a 26-year-old student who is currently enrolled in a doctoral program of Mechanical Engineering in a Canadian university. Born in a poor family and always struggling for basic life needs in China, Bob never believed that he would have the chance to study abroad until he got a sponsorship from the Chinese Scholarship Council (CSC). The CSC is a non-profit institution in collaboration with the Ministry of Education in China, whose objective is to assist Chinese citizens wishing to study abroad and foreigners wishing to study in China. Each year CSC invests a great deal of money to top students in key Chinese universities to pursue their doctoral degrees abroad on the condition that these students are committed to coming back to serve in either home universities or any other research units for at least two years. Bob's hardships and struggles were what kept him motivated to try even harder to achieve his goals.

Bob's story: family pressure and the hardships created the journey

Bob struggled for success most of his life. Struggling against poverty in his early life, Bob insisted that education and hard work would change his life. In Bob's family, both mother and father work for survival. His dad served in the Chinese navy and worked at a spinning mill. His mom worked as an electrician at the same factory and then was out of

work due to the bankruptcy of the spinning mill. Life was not easy for them at that time and there wasn't sufficient income for the whole family. Making ends meet every day resulted in high expectations from Bob's parents. They projected their hopes onto Bob and articulated a desire that he could save the family by becoming well educated. They also made it clear to Bob that without an education he could not aspire to a well-paying position. Since Bob had no desire to continue to live in poverty all his life, he worked extremely hard at school. The return on his dedication was that he passed the university entrance examination with a high mark, and was admitted into a prestigious university in China. The dedication to hard work due to family's expectation continued to motivate Bob in Canada. Bob reflected:

I cannot completely control my life; I cannot determine who I am going to be; and I cannot decide precisely how I could get better. But I must do my part with hope and hard work. Hope is a really good thing that makes my life meaningful and real. So, I keep trying. I am doing it because of my parents' high expectation on me and the most important thing is that I want to change, and provide a happy life for my family.

Bob's hard work in university resulted in high academic achievement and his exceptional GPA brought him into grad school without having to undergo an entrance examination. Because of Bob's excellent performance in academics, the grad school provided him with tuition scholarship and also provided RMB 300/month (Chinese money unit, almost \$ 50/month) as living expenses bursary. Apart from this financial aid from school, Bob made money from his internship and assistance from his supervisor. That was the time when Bob was overwhelmed with the very idea that he might have the talent to do

research, and explore the world outside of China. Thus, he began to consider whether he would apply for doctoral programs. Bob reflected:

I don't know if the decision to do a PhD is correct or not, but I would like to try, in order to have the possibility of a successful life. You know, the job market is very competitive in China and the university degree matters. You may probably get a high salary with a doctoral degree. I am not a person who stops learning. I am searching, exploring and willing to be strong.

Bob's ambition and hard work was rewarded with a great opportunity to pursue doctoral studies. He received a grant from CSC (Chinese Scholarship Council) that would pay for his living expenses to study abroad for four years to pursue his doctoral programs while the tuition would be paid by the partner university. Bob reflected:

I made the decision to study abroad. First, I was worried by the pressure of competing for a job after my graduation at home. In the meantime, I sensed I would be capable of doing research. Second, doing a doctoral program seemed to be a good opportunity to promote myself in the field of academics, and the overseas degree might be an asset for getting a decent job in the future. Also, I am single now and have no responsibility for as wife and kids. So, why not chase my dream when I am young and just do it? Third, the greatest impetus for me to do PhD was that I got the scholarship from CSC which guaranteed my living expenses abroad. No worries about financial problems anymore. I was extremely happy and was eager to grab this chance to expand my horizon!

Bob's decision to come to Canada

Why was Bob's decision to come to Canada a coincidence? Bob had tried to apply to several universities in North America. However, the supervisor who Bob ended up working with was the first one to reply to Bob's email with a formal offer of acceptance. This helped Bob get the documents to apply for the scholarship from CSC on time. In addition, Bob sensed that the supervisor was an efficient and responsible person by intuition so he decided to come to Canada and work with him. Bob mentioned:

I had actually applied for several Canadian universities. However, my English was not quite good at that time (probably 2 years ago), and it has limited my choices to choose what university I could go to. Well, this university is good anyway. On the other hand, to get a PhD degree in Canadian universities is likely easier than other European universities. I had even heard that a doctoral program in Germany may last for 8 years! You know what? CSC just supports us to do our doctoral program for 4 years overseas. In the case of more than 4 years of doctoral program, we have to be self-funded, which I can't afford.

Bob realized that besides his dream of personal development, there were other factors that influenced his decision to come to Canada.

Well, media probably played an important role in it. I still remembered that CSC program made a lot of announcements about their financial support for Chinese students to study abroad. Also, our departmental secretary would email us often and encouraged us to seize the opportunity. Moreover, my friends who have gone to other

countries would describe to us how exciting a life they have there with CSC support.

I admired them and their experience. Furthermore, I think it could be a good time to travel around the world, which is one of my childhood dreams. These factors likely influenced my decisions to go to Canada.

Bob described his motivation and stated, “I would like to develop myself in terms of academics in the field of engineering by absorbing advanced theory and practice from Western countries. Also, I am really attracted by what I may get from this experience of studying abroad, such as a degree and a possible job in the future. ”

Bob’s journey in Canada

Bob’s dedication to having a better life, his persistent hard work, and his willingness to receive financial aid from CSC and the Canadian university, enabled him to study in Canada. With the financial support from CSC (\$1600/month) and some Teaching Assistant income each term (\$400), Bob feels very optimistic about his life journey so far. In the interview, he spoke very positively of his Canadian experience in areas such as housing, food, language, entertainment and academics.

With a renewable income of \$2000/month, the rent for housing is not a big problem for Bob. When he first arrived in Canada, he rented a room in an old and unclean house and he was charged \$320 each month, excluding the utilities. Then, he moved to University Residence and rented a two bedroom apartment with his friend, which is more expensive than where he lived before with \$450 charged each month. However, Bob thought it was

worthwhile:

I moved out of the old house because another tenant died of illnesses next door and I was really scared then. Living in University Residence, I felt safer. Though I am charged more than before, I am fine with that. I hope the rent of University Residence won't increase anymore because it seems that the rent increases bit by bit each term. Another reason for me to move in University Residence is I have a crush on a girl who lives in residence.

Bob did not have any difficulty with food during his journey in Canada, because he cooked for himself almost every day at home, with the purpose of saving money. The money Bob saved was sent to his parents and he was happy to support his family financially. Cooking at home costs Bob approximately \$300/month and he saves \$700 each month from his income of \$2000/month. Bob reflected, "\$2000 is nothing, however, with the exchange rate of 1: 6.7 of CAD: RMB, it could be converted RMB 4,500/month, which equals what my Dad earned for probably 4 months."

Studying English was a positive experience and learning the language was part of his journey in Canada. He attended many get-togethers with his Canadian friends during weekends. He also joined the Huskie Motor Sports team and this allowed him to practice his communication in English. The only challenge for Bob to improve his English was that as time went by, he had more and more Chinese friends in his community. The more Bob socialized with his Chinese friends, the less likely he practiced his English.

Although Bob has a Chinese community here, loneliness and homesickness were the

biggest challenges for him. Being far away from his family and experiencing culture shock, Bob was very lonely at times. To diminish the homesickness, Bob has been working really hard on his research and trying to distract himself. Meanwhile, Bob made many friends through the get-togethers organized by a non-profit organization who hold a lot of voluntary activities to help international students deal with the difficulties of cultural adaptation.

Working hard also helped Bob lessen his homesickness. Bob was able to continue his high academic performance in Canada and earned marks of 90% or better in 5 of his 6 classes. Bob said, “My supervisor is very satisfied with my academic performance. Well, I am really happy with that.”

Bob decided on his own that he would pursue his goal of achieving a doctorate, so he paid more attention to the cultural differences in the educational systems.

The biggest difference Bob found was that Canadian students are always encouraged to ask questions, while in China students will not interrupt the teacher in the classroom often. Bob reflected:

I will preview what I’m going to learn before class and pay careful attention if the professor talks about where I am in the dark. If I still don’t understand the question after class, I prefer to stop by the professor’s office after the class.

In the meantime, Bob really enjoyed the relationship between professors and students in Canada. Bob mentioned, “Students won’t speak out what they really think of directly if they have different ideas from the professors in China. However, questions and different ideas are very encouraged in Canada.”

Another difference in the educational system Bob realized is that Canadian professors were comfortable admitting that they did not know the answer when students asked questions. Whereas in China “It is very unlikely that a professor would say “I don’t know” in the classroom, especially in high schools.

Future plans after graduation. Bob plans to go home to work for at least two years based on the contract that he signed with CSC. He was very willing to do that, “For me, filial piety is the most important thing in my life. I will try my best to do whatever I can to treat my parents well when they are alive. They gave me the life and it is time that I support them. Well, I think our Chinese culture has rooted in my mind deeply.”

Bob’s thoughts on motivation and cultural adaptation

Bob thought his decision to come to Canada was a correct one because he learned a lot about different cultures. More importantly, the decision allowed him to pursue doctoral studies and position himself for a well-paying career in the future. Additionally, he could save some money and then send it home.

The positive experience for Bob studying in Canada was that his English improved a lot and he gained a host of important insights into the world outside of China. However, the negative experiences in Bob’s mind was that he thought he had always been isolated from Canadian people in the group discussion in class as well as the challenging homesickness! The best case scenario, according to Bob, should be getting along well with Canadian people and understanding their culture, but also enjoying the get-togethers with Chinese people in

his community.

Bob seldom considered the connection between his motivation and cultural adaptation. However, he realized that Chinese students supported by either CSC or this Canadian university experienced less stress than other international students without financial aid. Moreover, Bob was very appreciative of the non-profit organization which organized frequent get-togethers with international students. Those activities made him feel welcomed and comfortable and helped ease his adjustment in Canada.

JENNY

Researchers' introduction

Jenny is a 25-year-old student who currently holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from a British University and is studying engineering in a Canadian University. Jenny's parents have always been determining her future. Since her parents work in a university in China, they enjoy a substantial income and a high quality of life. They have been striving to ensure that Jenny follows in their footsteps. According to Jenny's narrative, she does not have much opportunity to make her own decisions in life. This can be easily observed by the way she grew up and her parents' eagerness to make choices for her. There is nothing else more important than Jenny's desire to have more freedom and independence from her parents.

Jenny's motivation and her need for freedom

Although Jenny's parents did everything for her from birth, Jenny felt that her own life hasn't even begun. For years, Jenny has always been puzzled about her independence.

Like a caged bird accepting its owner, all it really wants is to be able to fly. The question is, is she living her life or her parents' life? Jenny reflected:

My parents made all the decisions for me so I didn't know who I was, as if I did not have my own voice in life. They are working at a university, and insisted that I was too young to determine who I could be in the future. For instance, they arranged a very high quality primary school and high school without asking my preference. My childhood, or rather my life, is a story of my parents' dream. The only thing I could do is to listen to their demands and do the best I can to make their dreams come true.

Jenny's parents were well-educated. They were lucky enough to have the chance to attend university when the college entrance examination was renewed after the Chinese Cultural Revolution. It was a time when the younger generation was inspired to study abroad, and Jenny's parents shared the same desire. Unfortunately, Jenny's mum was not in good health, so she gave up the opportunity to study abroad. That was why she strongly encouraged Jenny to have an adventure abroad to broaden her horizon when given the opportunity. When the time came for Jenny to enroll in a university, her parents decided the most suitable one for her. The school had a cooperative program with some universities in the United Kingdom which required students to do their first three years in China and the last year in the UK. Since Jenny's parents put in a lot of effort and time to her education, she couldn't think of any good reasons to disagree with them.

Jenny's life in the UK was memorable, and full of freedom. That was the first time she was far away from her parents and able to live her life independently. It was wonderful

and exciting to be out of her parents' control. Even though Jenny wished she could make her own decision, she couldn't agree more with her parents. However, like most international students in the United Kingdom, Jenny experienced significant cultural shock. This included the language barrier, cultural differences, and discrimination. There was supposed to be some job opportunities in the United Kingdom after her graduation, but Jenny chose to go back home without hesitation because she had the hope that her parents would treat her as a grown adult who can make her own choices.

Jenny's return home was not as happy as what she expected, unfortunately. Again, her parents tried to influence her with their ideas. She got married and her husband also became a big influence on her. Jenny's parents strongly believed that working in a university would be the best way for Jenny to have a successful career life. Jenny said, "In order to have a high salary and a decent job in the same university as my parents, they suggested I to go to graduate school abroad." At home, Jenny felt the need to be obedient. She was inclined to obey her parents, yet once again. Jenny said:

My parents spent many hours applying for graduate schools abroad for me. Finally, my mum took advantage of her personal income to settle it. She contacted one of her friends currently working at a Canadian university and I was given the chance to attend the university. Then, it was unbelievable that they also helped my husband get the offer here as well. It was really unbelievable! Things got different once my husband wanted to go abroad with me, which influenced my decision to come to Canada.

Jenny had a difficult time talking about her motivation to come to Canada. She did not think that her motivation was truly genuine. Jenny reflected:

Speaking of my motivation to come to Canada...I don't think I have the real motivation here, and was more like my parents' motivation... They were very eager to persuade me to go abroad. I thought I couldn't put up with it so I agreed to come here. You know what? What they did was to persuade my husband to study abroad and then my husband came over to talk to me... Finally, I agreed.

In addition, Jenny and her family agreed with the fact that Canada is more tolerant with newcomers than most countries in the world. Also, it was easier to become a permanent residence in Canada than other countries in North America (A permanent resident is someone who has acquired permanent resident status by immigrating to Canada, but is not yet a Canadian citizen. Permanent residents have rights and privileges in Canada even though they remain citizens of their home country). Another important reason for Jenny to come to Canada was that the university that she is currently studying at was the only one that gave her the offer. Her mum strongly believed that Jenny would benefit from her friend there and would experience an easier cultural adaption as well.

It was frustrating for Jenny when she talked about her motivation. "I am from a relatively affluent family, so I took everything for granted unlike other young people who were born in a poor family. So far, I have yet to experience any financial difficulty." Jenny reflected:

Most of the time, I am willing to believe that my parents' encouragement may be

better for my personal development. In the future, I do not want to have regrets about my job and social status. I am not an aggressive person who has the desire to only win or succeed. I'm satisfied with what I have now.

Jenny was clearly not self-determined with her own life. She grew up being shaped by her parents' hopes and this made Jenny very obedient. Jenny reflected:

I feel sorry for my own life. When I grow up, I may not be able to make my own decision. Like a bird without wings, I am not able to fly...On the other hand, no matter how hard I tried to discuss about my future, my parents refused to listen to me. What I could do at that time was probably leave home as far as I could so that I could feel some freedom. The more I tried, the more disappointed I was.

In brief, Jenny's motivation to come to Canada was almost exclusively the result of her parents' aspirations and her husband's willingness to go with her. Consequently, her journey in Canada was different from other students who were studying abroad because of their own desire or determination.

Jenny's life in Canada

Jenny's background made her life in Canada easier than other newly arrived international students. Having the one year experience in the United Kingdom, it was not so difficult for Jenny to adjust to Canadian culture. Moreover, because she was accompanied by her husband, Jenny did not confront the challenges of loneliness or homesickness that made the adjustment to Canada difficult for other international students. In the following narrative,

Jenny talks about her life in Canada in terms of housing, food, language and her academic performance.

Jenny's experience of housing in Canada is worth telling and she hoped her knowledge would be helpful to other newcomers. Jenny reflected:

When my husband and I first came here, we rented a room in a house, and we paid \$600 for a big room in the main floor. The problem was that the landlord was very mean. In the evenings during winter, he would go upstairs to turn off the heating and lights and then, the next day, he turned them on again. I am a light sleeper. Each time he went upstairs, I was bothered by his footsteps. It was horrible to live there. We wanted to move out on the condition of losing our deposit and ending the contract earlier. The landlord became very angry and threatened us that if we moved out, he would make trouble for us. We were so scared and asked for help from the Chinese Students Union in the university.

Fortunately, with the help from the Chinese Students Union in the university, Jenny and her husband found a new place to live. They got a one-bedroom in the University Residence which was \$700 a month. Jenny was very satisfied, "We really appreciate the living situation now. It is clean and inexpensive, especially for a couple. The most important thing is that we feel safe and are not living in fear anymore." It was a good learning experience for Jenny because she was able to solve difficult problems herself, and this made her feel more independent. Jenny suggested that if international students encountered any problem with housing, they should go to the Student Union in the university or Help Center

on campus.

As for food, none of the restaurants in Canada could attract Jenny's attention. She and her husband usually cook at home by themselves rather than eat out. Eating at home shows that some Chinese students are accustomed to the way they eat, and prefer maintaining their preference for food and meals. Also, cooking at home saves money and it was a great way for Jenny to control her own expenses. Jenny reflected:

Eating at home does not mean that I am short of money. My family supports me 100% financially to study abroad without any burden. My mum is a faculty in the university and my dad is working as a director of school services on campus. When I did my 4th year in the UK, they prepared RMB \$500,000 for me (probably \$73,000 just for a year). So, I do not really care about the expenses in Canada.

Never having the financial concerns, Jenny felt more freedom in finding a job in Canada, "If I go out to work part-time, what I want is just experience rather than the money. Well, probably extra money means more freedom to me."

Language as an issue. During Jenny's time in Canada, she spent many hours with her husband such as watching TV, cooking, and talking. That was their normal lifestyle. Jenny commented, "It is hard to get close to the local people and talk to them. Anyway, my English improved a little, but not so much as I expected."

In contrast to most of her Chinese peers, Jenny did not suffer significantly from homesickness and loneliness. Rather, she wanted the freedom that she enjoyed in Canada, instead of being under her parents' surveillance at home. Jenny also realized having her

husband with her and having her parents' friends supporting her made the adjustment a lot easier.

As for social interactions, Jenny was not actively networking with other Canadian students or other international students. She attributed the lack of networking to her marriage. Jenny reflected, "The other reason why I am not actively social is because I'm already married, which changed me a lot. I would spend many hours with my husband and attach an important value on family." Overall, Jenny's transition in Canada made her more mature as she was able to make opinions and live her life the way she wants.

Jenny felt terrible talking about her academic performance so far, because she changed her major. Jenny reflected:

I studied business in China and the United Kingdom; however, in order to be admitted into the Canadian university where my mum's friend is working at, I changed my major into engineering. Many people are curious about why I changed my major here, and these are two totally different majors. What made me finally change? None of these questions can be answered simply – there is no single solution. That may be the only way that I could do at that time, in other words, the only way to get the offer. Then, I may consider doing my major in business again after one-year study in engineering.

Having the experience of studying in the United Kingdom, Jenny did not feel much pressure studying in Canada. However, she realized many cultural differences in educational systems in different countries. For example, Jenny realized that Chinese students rarely asked

questions in class. The reason was because of the deeply rooted Chinese culture. Jenny reflected:

Being silent in class, personally speaking is a cultural difference. It is understandable that most Chinese students are so worried about how people think about the questions they asked in class. Are these quality questions? Will people laugh at me if I asked stupid questions? Shall I lose face in front of so many people? All these may be the obstacles for Chinese students to ask questions in class.

Moreover, Jenny understands that professors do not know the answers to questions all the time, even in their own field of research. “No human beings can be perfect. That is also how science and civilization progressed...people keep asking and learning.” Failing subjects in Canadian schools is horrible in Jenny’s opinion. Interestingly, Jenny reflected:

It was horrible and very stressful... so when I registered for new courses, I became more careful. I would ask more information about the course, such as the amount of course assignments and specific course requirements. Sometimes, we will ask about the professor. Is s/he nice or if it is possible to get a high mark from him/her?

Students who are studying in China would not feel as much pressure as those studying abroad with respect to academic failure. The biggest reason is that in many Chinese schools, students have the chance to make up the exam again.

Jenny’s future plans

With regard to future plans, Jenny said:

We plan to stay here. We insist on our life, creating our own life. We've spent so much money studying abroad, what shall we get from these? The return of educational investment that I can think so far is getting the identity of permanent residence after our graduation, and then work. Hopefully we could make our money to return all the investments from our parents.

Jenny's opinions on motivation and cultural adaptation

Jenny has never considered her motivation to study abroad. She thought her life had never really begun. "I do not have motivation in terms of studying abroad. It was my parents' decision. I'm uncertain whether it is the correct decision. The only advantage for me to study abroad is that I have more freedom compared to back home and I really enjoy the simple life with my husband." Jenny emphasized that, "The best case scenario about cultural adaptation is that the earlier the students go abroad, the easier it is to adapt to the culture, if they decided to have an adventure abroad. They are more likely to pick up the second language, and absorb the positive side of Western culture."

Observing the journey of other Chinese students in Canada, Jenny appreciated that she was from an affluent family. Jenny commented:

I would like to say that money plays a very important role in people's cultural adaptation. The more money you have, the more possibilities to do what you would like to do, so the faster one can integrate into a new culture.

Jenny did not think she had a genuine motivation to come to Canada, rather she

claimed the solution to cultural adaptation depends on people's determination to have a happy life in a new environment. Although it was not Jenny's choice to study abroad at first, she is content with what she has experienced thus far, which is being in control of her own life without restrictions.

PETER

Researcher's introduction

Peter is a 26-year-old student who is studying engineering in a Canadian university. Born in an affluent family, Peter insisted that money played an extremely important role in his decisions in life. His parents could afford whatever he wanted, including studying abroad and traveling around the world. Peter does not have restrictions from his parents so he can make his own choices and take control of his own life. Therefore, studying abroad for Peter is primarily an adventure and an interesting experience.

Peter's story: the yearn for adventure

Raised in a big city in China, Peter is the child of a government official. His father works for the Chinese government and has a good income. Peter had little contact with his parents during childhood, because his dad was working hard in another city. His dad left him to his grandparents who brought him up till the age of four. Separated from his parents, Peter's life was always marked by moments of loneliness and isolation. Although his grandparents treated him as best as they could, he wanted to be with his parents. When Peter was four, his parents took him to the city where they were working. "They were

workaholics... Well, that is also why they are wealthy now". Peter reflected: "I seldom saw them at home. Because of money, my parents were too busy to take good care of me so that they locked me at home during summer vacation. I had nowhere to go and I felt extremely lonely."

Peter's childhood was boring. He did not know whether his parents had high expectations of him or what their expectations would be. He was trying to find the answer; however, what he gained was always "Whatever you wanted, just let us know." Peter had the freedom to decide what he wanted but he was unsure of his ambitions. When he was in primary school, Peter reflected:

My parents asked my uncle to come over and teach me some basic math in his spare time. That was a really horrible time for me. Personally speaking, my uncle is not a considerate person. He would beat me when I was slow in math calculations. I was really tired of him and didn't like the way he taught me.

Things changed when Peter got into high school. He encountered a very outstanding teacher who became Peter's hero. The way he taught was very funny and impressive, and he stimulated Peter's interests in his studies, especially in math. From then on, Peter gained confidence and got started to think about how to make use of every day to make his life meaningful. Because of Peter's excellent academic performance, he was admitted into a prestigious university in China.

Peter was a child from a really affluent family and also a student studying in a respected university. Like most Chinese university graduates, Peter faced the pressure of

getting a desirable job in the fourth year of study. It was at this time that Peter began to consider what he would like to do for his future. He had the power to make his own choices, but was unable to make up his mind at that time. Peter reflected:

University life was very simple; I drifted along in the first three years. When time went by till several months before my graduation, I realized the stress of getting a job.

I started to think about what I would like to do in the future and who I was going to be. At that time, my dad told me he had enough money for support to do whatever I would like to do in the future, or rather; he could choose the best route for me.

However, he expected me to be an independent person and take control of my life.

Then, the idea of studying abroad came to me. Maybe it was a good way to avoid working right away after graduation. On the other hand, I expect a different life journey and adventure. I want to see the other side of the world.

Peter clearly realized that his decision to come to Canada was determined mainly by two factors: family support and his personal preference. Peter's aunt immigrated to Canada many years ago so Peter's parents suggested him to go to study in Canada. They felt that his adjustment would be easier with his aunt's assistance, though Peter did not think it was necessary. Peter reflected, "I am 25 now, and I do believe I can manage the cultural adaptation and academic pressures in a new country, even without my aunt's presence." Peter strongly agreed that family and wealth would influence a person's journey significantly. Without his dad's high income, he would still have decided to study abroad. He added, "I would like to have an adventure in my life. Even if my family can't support me financially, I

may still choose to study abroad and broaden my horizon.” To date, Peter enjoys his time in Canada and is extremely impressed with the country.

Canada is the most wonderful country in my opinion. It is very peaceful, tolerant, and friendly. People in Canada are more likely to be open towards immigrants and newcomers. This is not like America, aggressive and dominating... I don't mean to say any bad things about America, but I just like to express how I feel about Canada.

Peter elaborated more on his choice to come to Canada. Before he chose to study in Canada, he did some research about Canadian universities. He found that the university where he is studying has a very attractive campus. Peter said: “So many beautiful pictures on the website of this Canadian university attracted me so I looked forward to see it.” In addition, Peter found the college of engineering in this university has a good reputation in Canada and he assumed the university would be a good place to do research.

In summation, Peter's motivation to come to Canada was because he would like to have an adventure, to experience life in a different culture, and to broaden his horizon. He used his freedom wisely and took the opportunity to go abroad.

Peter's life in Canada

Before Peter arrived in Canada, he had some expectations of the life here. Peter reflected:

Before I came here, what I knew about North American countries were mainly from movies and entertainment, so I assumed that life in Canada would be very simple and

relaxed. However, the reality is that the students in college of engineering are extremely busy. They spend lots of time in the library and labs, working really hard. This is the first difference. The second difference is that I never imagined that there are so many Chinese students in the college of Engineering. In my research group, we have seven Chinese students. We speak Mandarin in the office and have few opportunities to get to know the local people. The third difference is that I have never expected I would have a girlfriend here. Before I came here, I thought it might be a journey of my own, but unexpectedly I met my girlfriend here just several months after I arrived. After a year, the relationship ended so it was hard to adjust to the new lifestyle. There were lots of struggles, but that's what makes a dynamic and interesting adventure.

In the following narrative, Peter described his life with regards to housing, food, language, and his academic performance.

Housing was not a big issue for Peter. Shortly after coming to Canada, Peter found a room in a house which was just two blocks from the university. The location of the house was perfect and the rent was inexpensive - \$400/month including utilities. Peter reflected: "The only thing that may bother me is that the house is quite old and not very clean."

As for food, Peter ate in restaurants for the first few days when he arrived in Canada; however, he found that he may have a better appetite if he cooks himself. Peter said, "I got used to the way I cooked. In the meantime, I don't think it is worthy of paying so much on eating out, although I can afford it."

Like most international students, learning English was an unpleasant experience.

Peter tried to improve his English, especially in vocabulary and slang. The reality was, as Peter commented: “There are too many Chinese students in my research group, and we speak Mandarin most of the time. This doesn’t help with my improvement in English. Most of the time, I would like to stay home and play video games so I lost many opportunities to talk to people and practice my English.” In addition, Peter did not interact with many Canadian students, and most of his time spent was with his girlfriend and research group. It is also interesting to note that Peter absorbed a lot of English vocabularies from video games rather than through social interactions.

As for entertainment, Peter emphasized that having a family or community in Canada would help him adjust to the new culture. Peter reflected:

I usually stay at home and play PC games or hang out with my girlfriend. Also, my aunt and uncle are here, so there was no real homesickness and loneliness for me.

Unlike many international students, Peter did not feel any homesickness and loneliness in Canada. In order to adapt to the culture here, family support is very important. Peter commented, “Getting together with my aunt and her family, I felt I found some connections in learning Canadian culture. The process of learning Canadian culture is smooth rather than abrupt with my aunt’s support.”

Academically speaking, Peter insisted he was very lazy, “I am lazy so my academic performance is just ok... the average score is above 80. Hah...I am fine with that.” Peter gave his opinion on the cultural differences in the two educational systems between China

and Canada. He attached an important value to the relationship between professors and students. The relationship between professors and students in Canada, according to Peter, is closer than what exists in China. Peter said: “In China, I sense professors enjoy more power over students.” Additionally, Peter agreed with the fact that professors did not necessarily know all the answers to students’ questions.

Peter’s future plans

With regard to Peter’s plans, he commented, “I don’t know yet...I don’t know if I will stay in Canada or not. For me, having an adventure here and experiencing a new culture is the most important thing. I will see what happens in the future.”

Peter’s thoughts on motivation and cultural adaptation

Thinking about his motivation and decision to come to Canada, Peter insisted he made the correct decision. Peter reflected: “I think it is a good decision for me. I do what I want to do, for we just have one time to live our lives.” Peter certainly enjoys making his own choices and does not regret the decisions he made.

The positive experience in terms of Peter’s cultural adaptation, is that he learned to be polite and friendly to people. Peter reflected:

I love the people here, and the small animals. I learned how to greet western people.

Sometimes I can’t understand what they are talking about so I will smile with them.

In other words, I learned to be polite to others. Furthermore, I really like the

teamwork here. Teachers here are more likely to encourage people to teamwork and I

benefit a lot from it.

Conversely, with respect to his cultural adaptation, Peter encountered some negative experiences. For instance, he has not been able to make new Canadian friends here yet. :

Peter emphasized, for international students, the more positive attitude they maintain in a new environment the more likely they are to adapt. Additionally, Peter wished that all international students would be treated equally in Canadian universities.

MARIE

Researcher's introduction

Marie is a 23-year-old student who is currently enrolled in a Master's program in a Canadian university. She is neither from an affluent nor poor family. Her father works as an engineer in a foreign company while her mother is a bus ticket seller. Marie refused to live an average life like most ordinary people in China. She felt she had no meaningful journey and she expected her ambition to be worthwhile. Marie would like to go wherever she wants and to experience life as an exciting voyage, rather than living in a mediocre life.

Marie's life journey

Born in a middle-class family, Marie's life was full of dreams and hope. When she was young, starting from kindergarten, she was always ambitious and driven to win. What impressed her most during kindergarten was that she was successful in a competition for a public show, which raised her confidence and stimulated her ambition greatly. Her parents were impressed by her wonderful performance in kindergarten and had high expectations

from her. Marie said, “We need to have hope and competitiveness. And, hope is a good thing that makes me alive.”

Fortunately, Marie’s parents had the resources and were willing to support her struggles and ambitions. Marie reflected:

Though Ma and Pa did not make very much income, they tried to make me happy.

For years, I was studying in schools and they would buy me lots of books rather than snacks. I have a feeling that my parents tried their best to give me the best possible education and a happy life. The expenses upon my educational investment were 60%-70% of the whole family’s income.

Marie’s courage, hope, diligence, and parents’ support also brought her to a prestigious university in China. This began a new chapter in Marie’s story. Marie’s university life was both successful and enjoyable and she met a variety of people who influenced her decision to study abroad. Marie reflected:

One of my peers is from an affluent family. He had many experiences of travelling around the world. He often described what he had seen and how he felt in other countries. I admired the exciting scenes from different countries and dreamed that one day I could also experience it.

Marie decided she was willing to go abroad and see different things. Having an international experience would broaden her horizon. However, it was not as easy as she expected it to be because she had a difficult time accumulating her deposit to get a visa for studying abroad. Determined to pursue her dream and overcoming her struggles, she turned

again to her parents for assistance. Marie reflected:

The support from my parents greatly determined if I could study abroad or not. My parents did not have enough deposit for me to apply for a visa. However, they were willing to help me raise money, by borrowing money from others and asking for a loan from the bank. Each time I think of their dedication to my journey in Canada, I am moved to tears...I always felt inside that my parents got a lot of satisfaction from ensuring I had a better education and happy life.

Marie's motivation to come to Canada

Speaking of motivation to come to Canada, Marie realized that she was very self-determined to come here. Her childhood dream of having an adventure motivated her to keep on striving. Peer influence also played a very important value in her life journey because she wanted to experience what others have already done. Marie reflected:

My friend's experiences made me realize that the world was even more colorful and exciting than what I expected. His experience inspired me to realize my ambition of going abroad.

Moreover, Marie's parents encouraged her to go abroad. Like most Chinese parents, they were dedicated to their children's success. Although their income did not allow them to cover all her expenses to study abroad, they tried their best to get financial aid to assist Marie to achieve her dreams. Marie reflected:

Nobody's youth would be the same as others. I feel so lucky to have such supportive

parents. They gave me so much courage and love, which motivated me to move on.

Marie's decision to study abroad was determined by her intention to have an adventure, strong peer influence and her parents' expectations and support. What led to her decision to choose Canada?

Marie reflected:

Canada is a country where people are more likely to apply for the identity of permanent resident. It is a way to change a person's life journey. I mean, some people will strive for the identity to live here, for the purpose of avoiding the stressful job market in China and having a better life. This is one of the reasons for me to come to Canada. What's more important, I want an adventure.

Marie's life in Canada

After the difficulty she experienced in securing a visa to study abroad, Marie greatly appreciated the opportunity of studying in Canada. Each time she recalled her earlier days in Canada, she was shocked by herself. How did she achieve that?

Marie reflected:

The early days for me weren't easy. It was filled with difficulty: financial difficulty and cultural differences. My parents did all they could do to deposit enough money to get the visa, so when I departed home I only had \$5,000. Fortunately, I have a small amount of funding from the college, probably \$ 600/month. So, I knew I would survive...

Her early days in Canada did not go smoothly, and Marie discovered changing herself was the only solution to difficult times in Canada. Getting accustomed to housing, language, entertainment, and academic performance became the main concerns for her.

Housing was the first challenge Marie needed to overcome. Because she was too late to apply for university residence, Marie had to rent a room in a house when she first arrived.

Marie reflected:

The first room I rented was a basement in a house, which cost me \$500/month. It was a horrible place to live in. There was no sunlight but the rent was relatively expensive. In order to save money, I then moved to an apartment where I shared with a student. I was fine with the apartment, because I just needed to spend \$375/month and the environment was much more comfortable.

Marie insisted that she would keep applying for the university residence which she thought would be the best place to live. “Another advantage of living in university residence is that you have people around you. As an international student, I need to see people, and do not want to feel lonely”.

Another challenge for Marie when she first came to Canada was food. Marie reported she was unable to get used to typical western food such as burgers and sandwiches. Marie commented, “The solution to the food difference is that I cooked for myself. Well, most Chinese students would like to cook at home rather than eat Western food. For me, eating out is expensive.”

Like many international students, Marie was not able to adapt to the Canadian

weather either which is extremely dry and cold. She commented, “I never imagined that the winter here could last for even half a year. In my hometown, the winter is pretty warm and the temperature usually stays above 0 degrees. However, it is interesting to experience the -40 temperature in this city.”

Not only is it necessary to accommodate the differences in food and housing, Chinese international students must also overcome the language barriers. Much to Marie’s surprise, she could not understand most of what the professor said in her first class, though she gained a high score in her TOEFL test. “I miss being able to talk to people whenever I want”, Marie complained, “I also miss having people’s attention in class, however, things changed here.”

Marie also reflected:

The language barrier is a big issue for international students here. I often ask myself that if I am learning my major in my mother’s tongue, will I still be one of the top students.

Marie’s first term went by fast. The first three months she came here were spent getting used to the new language environment. Marie figured language would be a very important factor influencing her daily communication, academic performance, and the chance to work here. She was pleased that the university provided some support for her and other international students in this aspect.

Marie reflected: “In the Canadian University where I am studying, the department offered few bursaries each term for international graduate students to register for some language courses in ESL (English as a Second Language).” Marie had benefited from the

bursary, and she commented that the English course on graduate writing really helped.

Academic life was a struggling experience. Marie had to work after school, doing heavy labor and earning minimum wages, which took away time for studying. In addition to being short on time, Marie found language difficulties affected her academic performance.

Marie reflected:

I attended almost all the courses, and tried my best to finish the assignments after school. However, no matter how hard I worked, I could never get a very high score in papers due to language barriers. Most of the time, I would be bothered by the language rather than coming up with a new idea.

However, Marie mentioned with time her English improved significantly resulting in better academic performance.

Marie had a lot of serious problems in understanding lectures, asking questions, doing assignments, and writing papers. “This is a totally different educational system”, Marie commented, “Chinese international students here may have academic success in their home country but they will likely be challenged by the cultural differences in the educational systems.”

Marie felt very uncomfortable asking questions in class and she thought this was the most major significant problem for her. She reflected:

I am always quiet in class. One of the reasons is that I got used to the teaching model at home where students are not encouraged to ask questions in class. Compared to my Canadian buddies, I am not as positive as them for sure. The other reason is that my

English is poor which can cause misunderstandings.

Marie also mentioned as time went by, she was more likely to ask questions in class than before. Moreover, she intended to become more involved in class discussion. Marie reflected:

I have to adapt to the new environment and cannot afford to fail because my family will be disappointed. No matter how stressful I felt in academics, I will try to change myself and adapt to the new environment. I am a determined person and would like to change.

Marie's adjustment helped her succeed in academics. She became more positive and confident enough to ask questions in class, she took every opportunity to communicate with Canadians.

Though there were many difficulties that Marie encountered in her studies, she considered them as good learning experiences and worked extremely hard, never failing any subjects. In fact, she managed to maintain an average of over 80%. Marie reflected:

You know...I cannot fail. I do not want to let my parents down. Each time when I felt I got close to breaking down, I will talk to myself, "Never give up!" You will never know how great you could be unless you persist until you succeed.

Marie's determination and diligence allowed her to do quite well academically. She spent all her time studying and really valued education.

Marie figured her poor English skills influenced not only her academic performance, but also her social interaction with the local people. She made few Canadian friends in the

first few months. Marie reflected:

I tried to join parties and social gatherings, but I felt I did not have a chance of being myself. When I hang out with my Canadian friends, I felt isolated from the group.

They speak slang and joke with each other, while I was silent. The language barrier definitely hindered my social interaction.

Due to her determination to change and adapt to the cultural differences, Marie opened herself to the Canadians at the university. Marie reflected:

From time to time, there are some social activities on campus. Though I do not have as many common interests as Canadians, I tried to participate. The more I understood their culture, the more interest I have to join their social activities.

In the meantime, Marie revealed that she made more Canadian friends as time passed. She also regarded making new friends in Canada as a good way to diminish homesickness and loneliness. Learning new cultures and making new friends made her experience more exciting, which was the main reason she wanted to go abroad.

Marie's thoughts on motivation and cultural adaptation

Marie was determined and strongly motivated to enjoy the experience of a new culture and to succeed academically. She identified her work ethic as her strongest asset.

Marie reflected:

My hard work definitely impressed the Canadians around me. They seemed to like me very much and are very willing to help me. Probably people would like to help

those who help themselves. In addition to my determination, my parents' expectation is also an important factor that motivated me to get better. I cannot find any excuses to disappoint them.

Marie agreed self-determined students were more likely to adapt to a new environment, than those who were not self-determined; and she saw herself as an example of the former.

Summary

As these four participants reflected on their life journey in Canada, their motivations to come to Canada were presented clearly. Guided by a variety of motivations, participants behaved differently from each other in the process of cultural adaptation. Some struggled to cope with feelings of frustration in the new environment; some resisted change and fought for the old days, while others tried their best to integrate into a new culture. Whether or not participants' motivations strongly influence their cultural adaptation in Canada is discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

“Even superficial incidents reveal that people are motivated to act by different types of factors, with highly varied experience and consequences.”

--- Deci and Ryan, 2002, p. 69

Analysis from participants’ narratives

This section includes the analysis of data emerging from participants’ narratives and identifies the major themes of their life stories. From the participants’ narratives, some common themes were identified, which relate to the previous literature. In addition, some new themes were found from the participants’ narratives based on life-story interviews. Three themes are discussed in the following data analysis: the decision making process as related to literature, the cultural adaptation process, and the connection between participants’ motivations and their cultural adaptations.

The decision making process

Why did all the participants choose to study in Canada? Participants claimed they had considered other English-speaking countries when they were doing research on studying abroad. However, in the process of the decision-making, they chose to come to Canada rather than other English-speaking countries because of several common reasons. These common reasons included academic credibility, research environment, family connection,

less discrimination, less requirement of English proficiency, visa availability, potential benefit for the future, and the avoidance of disadvantageous conditions in their home country.

These research findings correspond to the literature reviewed about what exactly encourages Chinese students to make the life-changing decision to study abroad. Niece and Braun (1977) suggested the “decision hierarchy” of a foreign study pathway and Mazzaral and Soutar (2002) addressed the three stage decision processes. When people make decisions, they experience certain processes influenced by some external factors.

Furthermore, Chen (2007) developed the synthesis model to explain that many international students followed the sequence of deciding to study abroad, selecting a home country, and then finding an appropriate program. At each stage, the decisions were influenced by three factors: student characteristics, significant others, and external push-pull factors. Chen (2007) also suggested student characteristics have the strongest influence on students’ decisions to study abroad.

Student characteristics and parental factors. The important role of student characteristics in the decision making process was supported strongly in this research. The research found that the participants who had a stronger personality, like the attitude of dreaming of a challenging life and adventure, were driven to consider studying in Canada more than those who were not as motivated. This occurred at the predisposition stage. The motivated participants had higher level of self-assessment than those who were not motivated. Chirkov (2007) suggested in his study that international students should consider their real motivations to come to Canada and evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of

the decision. He recommended that students should “make the decision accepting full responsibility for the potential consequences” (p. 216). Additionally, some participants also mentioned that as graduate students, their personalities greater influenced their decision making than when they were undergraduates since they had finished their university education and were capable of making decisions by themselves. They believed they were able to consider both costs and possible outcomes in their decision making process.

Chen’s research findings (2006) strongly supported this point - “Undertaking overseas graduate studies is most influenced by personal motivation. In order to satisfy these personal needs, potential international graduate students make inquiries about studying abroad and begin gathering information” (p. 773). Additionally, Kirton (1989) agreed that “The adaptors want to do things better while the innovators want to do things differently” (p. 31).

However, for participants who have been supported and subject to increased parental involvement in decision-making, their personalities, their personalities (and correspondingly, their decisions) were greatly influenced by family factors. For graduate students born in 1980s, most of them were the only child in their families, and were usually indulged by their parents who took care of them in every aspect. Moreover, parents enjoyed a certain power over their children. Usually parents worried if their children could make an appropriate decision, so they felt the need to give suggestions.

Family connections and the best case scenario. A family connection in Canada was reported as one of the dominant factors that influenced the decisions by some participants. In this research half of the participants had family connections in Canada, which was the

dominant factor directing them to decide to study in Canada. It was worth noting that having families abroad was considered an important factor influencing the cultural integration of participants, which served to diminish the initial stress of living in a new environment. These participants mentioned they had a favorable impression of the host country where they had family members or friends. Their family members or relatives in Canada greatly contributed to diminishing the initial stress of arriving in a different country and gave them tremendous support in the cultural adaptation.

In addition, this research also suggested having family connections in Canada could be reported as the “best case scenario” for Chinese students to adapt to the new culture. One of the participants commented that he felt his adaptation to the new environment in Canada was greatly assisted by the support of his aunt who had immigrated to Canada many years ago.

These immigrated families functioned as a small community, providing an affectionate environment for Chinese students to adapt to Canadian culture. Also, the established immigrants had a better understanding about what difficulty Chinese students probably faced in their initial arrival to Canada and they also knew what they could offer to assist the transition of Chinese students in Canada.

This finding was in accordance with the push-pull model (Chen, 2006) in literature. The push-pull model was used to examine the factors motivating international students’ choice of the host country and their selection of a final study destination. From the participants’ narratives, family connection in Canada was regarded as a critical factor this

drove participants to study abroad. The studies by Lee (1966) and McMahon (1992) indicated that people who wanted to move to a new country had easier transitions than those who were pushed to migrate. This conclusion does not seem supported to related to the previous statement. The former is about the participants being pushed or pulled and the latter is about the participants having family relations. Regarding the “best case scenario”, further research was needed.

Other important external factors. Other important external factors were found in this research which influenced the decision making process of Chinese students to study in Canada. Some participants mentioned that a partner accompanying them (e.g. boyfriend/girlfriend, husband/ wife) was a critical pull factor for them to study abroad. In addition, media, peer experiences, and possibility of financial aid were suggested as important external factors that helped them to make the final decision. One participant who was funded by the Chinese government reported that the financial aid from the home country was a very important drive to study in Canada. With the policy of “opening up to the outside world”, the Chinese government sponsored a large number of top students to strengthen their academic skills abroad and reinforce Chinese people’s awareness of globalization and internalization. Because of the increasing number of Chinese students in Canadian universities, there should be more attention and concern in this particular research area.

This research revealed that participants with financial limitations had concerns about scholarship or other financial aids more than those who were from an affluent family. Specifically, participants identified several reasons for choosing their Canadian university.

They included the cost of living and tuition, the quality of research program, the family connection, the visa possibility, and the language concern.

The sequence of decisions. Several new findings were discovered in this research, which differed from the literature. Interestingly, not all participants followed the sequence of deciding to study abroad, then selecting a country, and then an institute. This study revealed that for some graduate students with financial limitations, they considered the professional program and scholarship possibilities first and then decided whether it was worthy of investing so much time and money to study abroad. Some participants mentioned they chose to study in Canada because they perceived that it would be cheaper to live in Canada than other countries such as the U. K .or the U.S.A. Additionally, consideration was given to the size of the city where the universities were located; participants associated smaller cities with cheaper costs of living. Otherwise, Chinese students may have preferred to go to a metropolitan city or perhaps a similar environment in China with a large population.

Motivations regarding SDT. Categorizing the degrees of the participants' self-determined motivation, their narratives contributed to analyzing how the four levels of self-determined motivation shaped their journey in Canada according to literature by Chirkov (2007). Chirkov (2007) argued self-determined motivation played a very important role in international students' cultural adaptation, with students who were more self-determined being more likely to succeed academically and more likely to engage in the cultural adaptation. Cherkov's conclusions about the relations between international students' motivations and their cultural adaptation were confirmed by the findings of this research.

These four levels of self-determined motivations were: intrinsic, identified, introjected, and external. The following discussions reveal clarifications of participants' motivations to come to Canada.

Bob decided to study abroad because he believed it would be challenging and exciting. Also, he was motivated autonomously as he thought studying abroad was personally important for him, which is defined as the identified regulation (Chirkov, 2007).

Jenny felt sorry for her parents if she made an autonomous decision without any considerations for them. Being pushed by her parents' expectations, Jenny attached a very important value on getting the identity of permanent residence, which was an external reward. Consequently, based on her narrative, Jenny's motivation to come to Canada was categorized as external self-determined motivation.

Unlike Bob and Jenny, Peter was motivated to come to Canada by his own personal interests. Due to his affluent family background, he regarded his journey in Canada as an adventure and he performed well in his journey and really enjoyed it. Peter's decision to move to Canada was fully intrinsically motivated. All Peter intended to attain in Canada was the experience of broadening his horizon. Thus, Peter's self-determined motivation was categorized as the fully intrinsic self-determined one.

In the case of Marie, she regarded her journey to Canada as an adventure, and she wanted to experience a totally different life in Canada which she thought was the most important thing. Regarding the conception of intrinsic motivation, Marie was intrinsically motivated by her desire to experience a different adventure.

Since the level of autonomy was regarded as the strongest predictor of adaptation outcomes in previous research, the categorization of the participants' motivations to come to Canada might assist our understanding of their life experience in Canada.

Since the goal of this study was to explore the life journey of Chinese students in Canadian universities, a very important value was attached to the participants' narratives about their social and cultural adaptations in Canada. The high degree of emphasis placed on the participants' voices was designed to obtain rich data – the insider's ideas, rather than imposing a frame on participants' thoughts. According to participants' narratives there were four important factors affecting participants' integration into Canada. These included financial concerns, daily cultural differences, language, and participants' interaction with Canadian people.

Financial concerns. All the participants mentioned their financial situations in their narratives. Some participants who were from affluent families did not need to distract themselves from their studies by having to work after classes. The other participants had financial concerns; however, they finally obtained the financial support from either the Chinese government or the Canadian institutions. It was found that participants' financial situations greatly influenced their cultural adaptation and their journeys. Figure 5 is a clarification of participants' financial situations.

Figure 5 Participants' financial background

Participants	Main funding resources	Funding from institutes	Income from extra work
Bob	Living expenses sponsored by the Chinese Scholarship Council	Tuition is being paid by the Canadian university	Working as TA for the college
Jenny	Self-funded	Parents are both working at a Canadian university and have a comfortable family income	
Peter	From a very affluent family and parents are working for the Chinese government	A monthly scholarship from his supervisor	
Marie	Funded by the Canadian university		

As displayed in Figure 5, Bob had some financial aid from the home country, the Canadian institution and his part-time job as TA. However, according to the previous narratives, it was clear that Bob was from a poor family but fortunately, he was just chosen and sponsored by the Chinese Scholarship Council (CSC) and was motivated to study abroad.

It was disturbing to imagine how hard Bob would have had to struggle to survive in Canada if he did not have the scholarship from CSC and the teaching assistance opportunity. Bob commented he would not have come to Canada if he would not have gotten any financial support. He would have gone wherever he could get money. Many Chinese students born to poor families likely never have the chance to study abroad, confirming what Feng's (1991) research recognized as international students usually selecting universities based on their

financial situation and expenses.

However, not all the participants had financial concerns. Jenny and Peter never worried about their financial difficulty and never had to consider working off campus after school to support their lives. Peter had funding from his supervisor, though he did not think it was necessary. Feng's study (1991) found that the financial situation of international students was closely related to their cultural adaptation, specifically, participation in social activities. All the participants in this research also claimed that if they had to work hard after school to support themselves, they would not have had time to join in other social activities and as a result would have felt isolated. "As a matter of fact, some Chinese students have to work after school, doing heavy labor and earning minimum wages to support a living" (Feng, 1991, p. 8). Fortunately, either their family or institutions supported these four participants financially. This helped them diminish one of the important stresses of cultural adaptation.

Marie also had financial support from her supervisors. Therefore, she did not consider a financial problem as a challenge for her journey in Canada.

Daily cultural differences. All participants in this research mentioned in their narratives that they were not very comfortable with Canadian food when they first arrived in Canada. They would cook by themselves at home rather than going out to restaurants. The two main concerns were eating habits and saving money. In addition, weather was another source of concern for Chinese students in Canada. Many participants were shocked by the winter weather in Canada, which is extremely dry and cold.

Language adaptation. It was found that all participants had experienced a hard time

with language adaptation upon in Canada. It was experienced in both daily communication and the academic environment.

However, it was also interesting to find that the longer Chinese students stayed in Canada, the more they were to rely on their Chinese community and interacted less with local people to avoid embarrassment because of poor English. The language difficulty prevented Chinese students from engaging in social activities and reduced their confidence in speaking in public.

Participants' interaction with Canadian people. The findings from the Chinese students' interaction with Canadian people suggests that family and Chinese friends were a huge asset in helping students adjust to the new Canadian environment. However, this support also impeded the acquisition of English fluency since the participants reported they would rather spend more time with their families and new Chinese acquaintances rather than socializing with Canadian people. This situation limited their acculturation in a new environment.

This finding is consistent with the previous literature. Kim and Hirsch (2001) mentioned in their theory of cultural adaptation, "Most people, who experience a new culture, must begin to form a new set of relationships." (p.226) As a result, they found themselves without an adequate support system when they were confronted with highly uncertain and stressful situations. Most of the participants expressed that they were trying to interact with local people so that they could obtain material and emotional support from the local community.

Academic adjustments of the Chinese students in Canadian universities

Feng (1991) mentioned most of the Chinese students work very hard abroad since they appreciate their opportunity to study overseas. What did the Chinese students in this study comment about their academic experiences in Canada? What were the main cultural differences they encountered between the Chinese and Canadian educational systems? The section discusses the academic cultural adaptation of the Chinese students.

Relaxed atmosphere in classrooms. The research found that all the participants were impressed by the relaxed atmosphere in Canadian classrooms where power distance (Hofstede, 2001) was less rigid than in China and questions from students were always welcome. Most participants sensed professors in Canada enjoyed less power over students than in China. The relationship between professors and students in Canada was much closer than in China. This finding agreed with Hofstede's (2001) conception of power distance in classrooms.

Some participants also mentioned the differences in asking questions in class. It was found that Chinese students were usually quiet in class as they were most influenced by these three factors: deeply-rooted cultural differences, students' introverted personalities, and their limited language ability. Their shyness about asking questions in class might be a challenge for their academic life in Canada. However, whether it influences the Chinese students' academic success in Canada remains uncertain.

Interestingly, most of the participants mentioned it was less likely that a professor would say "I do not know" in China when students asked questions in class. In particular, one

participant even emphasized that being honest to whatever we did not know was a process of scientific development, experienced here in Canada.

Future plans. Most of the participants mentioned their future plans and they believed that the collectivist Chinese culture had influenced their decisions about the future. Most participants initially dreamed of going home one day with a decent Canadian degree, to work hard and support their family at home based on the collectivist cultural influences. However, things changed since they arrived in Canada. It seemed that the longer they stayed in Canada, the more likely they desired to achieve personal results from their experience, including their investment of time and money. Consequently, it was regarded as a sign of integration into Canadian culture.

Failing in school. Participants were more worried about failing in school than in China and always tried to avoid it because of the concerns of tuition, and the disappointment from family and friends. They felt that not failing in academics would alleviate Chinese students from the burden of spending more money on retaking courses in Canadian universities.

Long- term-versus short- term relationships. This research revealed that Chinese students intended to establish a long-term relationship with their professors and their classmates based on their narratives of their academic journey. Conversely, participants found the local students in Western countries probably chose to focus on their academic future rather than building long-term relationships with individual instructors. This agreed with Hofstede's (2001) fifth cultural dimension in terms of long – versus short term

relationships (2001).

Summary and implications

The goal of the research was to listen to Chinese students' voices, to explore their life journey in Canada and to examine the relationship between their motivations to come to Canada and their cultural adaptation. All participants recounted about why they chose to study in Canada and expanded more on their cultural adaptations here, which provided abundant data for this research. This discussion will summarize the research findings based on the data analysis from participants' narratives and then related implications are presented.

Decision-making process

According to the concepts of decision-making process, push-pull model and SDT, the decisions of Chinese students to come to Canada were influenced by these three factors: personalities, significant others and the external push-pull factors. Assertive and ambitious participants who were more self-determined felt they needed to study abroad for their own desire. They made the decisions to study in Canada because of their aggressive personalities and their strong desire to be successful in the future. Most of the participants believed they would have a bright future with an overseas educational degree. When they made the decision to study abroad, they became prepared for the upcoming difficulties they were likely to experience abroad, so this decision guided their entire process abroad. Almost all the participants held the idea that whatever they go through in Canada; they have to carry on till

they succeed. The strong belief assisted participants to move on with their life journey in Canada. Consequently, the self-determined participants were more likely to be successful in their cultural adaptation to the new environment.

After making the decision to study abroad, participants began to search for information about their country of choice and its educational institutions. At these two stages, the more self-determined participants were drawn to the countries and universities, which served to maximize their benefits. This included the cost of living and tuition, the quality of research program, the family connection, the visa possibility, and the language concern. Knowing what they really needed from the experience of studying abroad, participants intended to stay away from any possible harmful influences at abroad compared to those who were pushed by others to come to Canada.

Cultural adaptation

This research utilized life-story interviewing to secure narrative data, which helped gain participants' insights about their cultural adaptation and their life journey in Canada. All of the participants mentioned that during their initial arrival in Canada, they had a very difficult time with language, food, interaction with local people, and the cultural differences between the two educational systems.

The narratives of the participants suggested the potential to easily adapt to the new culture was greatest for those who were more self-determined, like Bob, Peter, and Marie. Though these three participants might have had different degrees of self-determined

motivations, they stated that they were trying their best to adapt to the new environment in Canada and many changes of beliefs and behaviors had occurred during their stay in their new environment. The processes of cultural adaptation in their minds were dynamic and ongoing. It was clear from their narratives that a Chinese family connection and community in Canada played a contradictory role in participants' cultural adaptation. These could be assets for easing adjustment but also barriers or impediments to easier English acquisition and the establishment of social relationships with Canadian peers.

Implications for Canadian graduate schools

This section reports the findings from participants' narratives and the implications of their individual and collective experiences for Canadian graduate schools. Key issues include the marketing of the Canadian graduate schools, the language requirements and following-up support for Chinese students, the financial support, and the school buddy program.

Marketing of Canadian graduate schools. Most of the participants in this study mentioned when they decided to study abroad, they spent a lot of time researching on Canadian graduate schools. Therefore, better marketing of Canadian graduate schools is regarded as an approach to attract excellent Chinese students to study abroad. This would also be in "Canada's favor to attract the highly talented workers from around the world" (Chen, 2006, p. 98).

Language requirements and follow-up support for Chinese students. Appropriate language requirements and better follow-up support would help attract Chinese students to

Canadian universities and would also contribute to improved performance among those students once they enrolled in Canadian graduate schools. All of the participants mentioned that meeting the language requirements is the greatest challenge in securing acceptance to a Canadian university and is the greatest barrier to their academic success in Canadian graduate schools. All participants agreed that additional support in this area, preferably through on campus language tutorials, would be the most valuable support that Canadian universities could provide to international students.

Financial support. All participants stated that finances were one of the biggest factors to influence their decision to study abroad and also constituted a significant determinant to both their subsequent cultural adaptation and their academic success. At the graduate level, financial support is a direct impetus for Chinese students to choose to enroll in Canadian universities. Adequate financial support also frees students from the necessity of securing additional work, allowing them to concentrate on their studies and enhancing prospects of academic success.

School buddy program. Some of the participants reported they had difficulty in establishing relationships with Canadian students and gaining access to the Canadian community. They suggested they would benefit from a school buddy program as an effective way to foster relationships with Canadian students and families, to develop friendships, to gain an appreciation for Canadian culture and to better integrate into the new environment.

Conclusion

This study utilized narrative research methods to explore one aspect of the

internalization of post-secondary education based on participants' life stories. Specifically, this research explored how the internationalization of graduate education influenced Chinese students' decision-making process to study abroad and their subsequent academic experience and cultural adaptation in Canada. Data collected through life-story interviews revealed Chinese students are easily attracted to study in Canada by its favorable and tolerant environment, positive reputation for diversity, high quality post-secondary institutions and the possibility of securing a visa relatively easily. Some Chinese students reported they chose Canada because of the difficulty in getting a visa to other countries, such as the U.S.A., and the possibility of obtaining the permanent residences status in Canada after their graduation. In addition, participants were keen to secure access to high quality educational programs in Canada at a competitive cost – in comparison to the high cost of studying in the United States. In considering the valuable educational and economic contributions of the internationalization of post-secondary education, the universities in host countries must become more knowledgeable about the issues of cultural adaptation and other challenges faced by international students. Adequate financial support, assistance with the development of language skills, and the development of a school buddy system were the areas identified by participants as having the greatest potential to positively affect their transition in Canadian universities.

This research also provided guidance to prospective Chinese students interested in studying in Canada. Based on Chinese students' narratives, making the life-changing decision to study in Canada and pursue graduate studies in a completely different culture and

academic environment was an extremely challenging and potentially traumatic undertaking. Before making the decision to study abroad, this research suggested Chinese students should engage in serious self-evaluation regarding the degree of their self-determination to study abroad. Guided by the appropriate and positive motivations, Chinese students may have more concerns about the cultural differences they may face abroad and prepare themselves for the challenges of a new culture.

Moreover, in relation to one of the research goals, I can report the “best case scenario” for Chinese students to adapt to the new culture and academic environment in Canada. Data provided by the participants’ narratives suggested having family connections in Canada could be a helpful factor for Chinese students to adapt to a new culture. It was reported as the “best case scenario” in this research. Ironically, this can also be a barrier for Chinese students to acquire English proficiency and to develop interaction with local people. Further research needs to be done in this area regarding the ambivalent influences and implications of family connection and community for Chinese students in Canada.

Significant Contributions and Suggestions for Future Research

An important contribution of this research was the utilization of narrative research methods, which allowed the researcher to listen to the voices of the participants and obtain rich data regarding their life journey in Canada. By adding this qualitative data to the existing quantitative research, the study provided a richer, deeper and more nuanced portrait of international students’ experiences at a Canadian university and contributed to some interesting findings, for instance, the best case scenario and its contradictory role mentioned

above. Again, as what Lieblich et al. (1998) argued, “One of the clearest channels for learning about the inner world is through verbal account and stories presented by individual narrators about their lives and their experienced reality. Or rather, narratives provide us with access to people’s identity and personality.” (p. 69). This research, using narrative method, provided incredibly valuable data to look into Chinese students’ experience of reality in Canada, which contributed to understanding their inner world and may come up with appropriate strategy in the future to assist international students in cultural adaptation.

In addition, participants benefitted from the research process as the life-story interviews helped them to better understand their life journey and appreciate the complexities of their cultural adaptation in Canada, their motivations and their prospects for success.

In summary, owing to the profound differences between Chinese and Canadian societies, many Chinese students are likely to experience significant culture shock upon their initial arrival in Canada. This research suggests a very close relationship between students’ motivations to study abroad and the degree to which they would be able to adapt successfully to Canadian society and culture and to the Canadian academic environment. People who made the decisions to come to Canada by themselves, based on their own intrinsic motivations, would be more likely prepared to deal with the challenging cultural difficulties compared to those who came to Canada driven by other external factors.

Last but not least, this research also advances knowledge in the area of cross-cultural communication and international students’ cultural adaptation abroad. Further qualitative research is required to illustrate other aspects of the best case scenario of Chinese students’

life journey in Canada. It is also hoped that the Canadian educational institutions will benefit from the research and give serious attention to the development of strategies to assist Chinese students in making the transition to Canadian society and the Canadian academic environment. Given the growing demand in China for a North American university education and increasing competition among North American universities for Chinese graduate students, it is likely that many more Chinese students will be following in the footsteps of those who participated in this study.

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APPENDIX A

INVITATION TO PARTICIPANTS

Yanfang Zhou

Department of Educational Administration

College of Education

University of Saskatchewan

Email: yaz973@mail.sask.ca

May 20, 2011

Dear (Name of Participants)

Re: Intent to conduct research study

My name is Yanfang Zhou. I am an M.Ed student in the Department of Educational Administration in the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan. Through this letter I invite you to be a part of my Master's research, which will enable me to complete the requirements for a Master's degree in Educational Administration.

The title of my research is: "Listening to Voices: Understanding Chinese Students' Journey at a Canadian University." The purpose of this research is to explore the Chinese students' motivations to study in Canada and whether the self-determined motivations will influence their life experiences in Canada. For this study, I will conduct two interviews with each participant. Each interview will last approximately one hour. Interview data will be augmented by observational field notes collected during the interview and through a personal reflective journal written during the data collection process.

Following your written consent, I will find the contact list for participants. I will first contact by Email and then telephone each participant, explain the purpose of this study, and ask if he/she would be interested in participating in the study. If the participants convey a general interest in the study, I will provide a written description of the study, a copy of the individual semi-structured interview questions, and a consent/assent form indicating the participant's rights (see Appendixes).

This study will not pose any foreseeable risk to participants. In compliance with the Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB) at the University of Saskatchewan, the (Name of School Division) and selected participants have the right: (a) not to participate in the study, (b) to withdraw from the study at any time without being penalized in any form, (c) to withdraw from the study and thus have any collected data pertaining to him/her destroyed and not included in the study, and (d) of privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality. Participants will be assured of these rights in their invitation letter and through a signed consent form. In keeping with the University of Saskatchewan guidelines, at the completion of the study, all documents, transcript, taped recordings, and notes will be secured at the University of Saskatchewan, in Dr. Michael Cottrell, my supervisor's office for five years.

Enclosed are two copies of a written consent form for your consideration. If you decide to agree to participate in this study, please sign and date both consent forms. Return one consent form to me in the self-addressed stamped envelope or through a fax or email. Please maintain one copy of the consent form for your records.

The protocol of this research has been reviewed and has been submitted to the Behavioural Research Ethics Board at the University of Saskatchewan and has been approved on (insert date). For questions pertaining to the participant's rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the University of Saskatchewan's Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-

REB) at (306) 966-2084.

I thank you for considering participation within this study. If you have any questions pertaining to any aspect of this research, feel free to contact me through the following means:

Yours sincerely,

Yanfang Zhou

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS

- 1 To start with, please introduce yourself and identify your experience in Canada.
- 2 Housing: Where do you live, a house or an apartment? Are you satisfied with the living conditions?
- 3 Food: Do you often eat outs or cook for yourself at home?
- 4 Language: Have you watched movies here with some Canadian friends? If so, can you make sense of the movie? (Then, they may talk about the language problem. Participants may talk about their improvement in language acquisition or language difficulties in their studies.)
- 5 Do you have some fun here? (homesickness? Loneliness?)
- 6 How are you doing in your studies? (Academic performance...)
- 7 Scholarship: Have you tried to apply for some scholarships or bursaries here? Do you have any difficulties doing that because of you are international students?
- 8 “Your life here looks good/ not bad/ undesirable... So why did you choose to come here?” (pushed or pulled?)
- 9 What do you think your decision to come here now?
- 10 Compared to your Chinese peers who do not go abroad, how do you describe the differences? Or do you think the experience of studying abroad will benefit you in your future?
- 11 Since you are here, in what areas do you have positive experience in your cultural adaptation in Canada? What about negative experience?
- 12 What is “best case scenario” of cultural adaptation is in your mind?

APPENDIX C

DATA/TRANSCRIPT RELEASE FORM

In relation to the research study entitled, “Listening to Voices: Understanding Chinese Students’ Journey at a Canadian University”, I have reviewed the complete transcripts of the interview(s) with Yanfang Zhou. I have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from the transcript(s) as appropriate. I acknowledge that the summary accurately reflects what I said in the individual interview with Yanfang Zhou. I hereby authorize the release of this data to Yanfang Zhou to be used in the manner described in the consent form. I have received a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.

(Name of Participant)

(Date)

(Signature of Participant)

(Signature of Researcher)

APPENDIX D
CONSENT FORM

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in a study entitled “Listening to Voices: Understanding Chinese Students’ Journey at a Canadian University”. Please read this form carefully and feel free to ask any questions you might have.

Researcher

Yanfang Zhou, a M.Ed student, Department of Educational Administration, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, (306) 966-7711: yaz973@mail.usask.ca

Purpose and Procedure

The title of my research is: “Listening to Voices: Understanding Chinese Students’ Journey at a Canadian University”. The purpose of this research is to explore Chinese students’ motivations to study in Canada and whether the self-determined motivations influence their life experiences in Canada.

I will conduct semi-structured individual interviews with selected Chinese students. Semi-structured interviews will last approximately one hour each. Interview data will be augmented by observational field notes collected during interviews and through the maintenance of a personal reflective journal during the data collection process.

Semi-structured individual interview questions are attached for your review. After receiving written consent, I will contact you and arrange a convenient time and location for interviews. With your permission, I will tape the interview and later transcribe the interview. You will then be asked to review the transcripts to ensure that they adequately reflect what you said or meant to say. Depending upon the length of the transcript, the transcript review

process will take anywhere from about 15 minutes to one hour.

Potential Risks

The study poses minimal risk to participants. Participants may answer only those questions with which they are comfortable. As a participant, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. If you wish to withdraw from the study, any data which you had provided would be destroyed and will not be used in the study. Every effort will be made to ensure the confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity of participants. **There is, however, the risk that you may be identifiable based on what you say in the interview.**

Storage of Data

Throughout the study period, all data and documents, **with the exception of the signed consent forms and master list**, will be kept in a safe and secure place, locked in my office at the University of Saskatchewan. The signed consent forms and master list will be stored separately, locked in the office of Dr. Michael Cottrell, Faculty of the Department of Educational Administration. At the completion of this study and in accordance with the University of Saskatchewan guidelines, research materials including transcripts/notes, taped recordings, field notes, and my reflective journal will be safeguarded for a period of five years at the University of Saskatchewan. After five years, all research materials pertaining to this study will be destroyed.

Confidentiality

The data from this study may be published and presented at professional conferences and within academic journals; however, your identity will be kept confidential. Although the researcher will use direct quotations from interviews, each participant will be given a pseudonym. Participants are welcome to choose their pseudonym. Identifying information about the participant, school, community location, or school division will be removed. Because participants are being drawn from a relatively large population, it is highly unlikely

that any participants may be identifiable based on what they have said.

Right to Withdrawal

Participation within this study is voluntary. A participant may withdraw from the study for any reason, at any time, without any penalty of a sort. If a participant withdraws from the study, all data he/she has contributed will be destroyed upon request and not used for the purpose of the study.

Questions

If you have any questions concerning the study, feel free to ask me at any time. I can be reached at the following:

Yanfang Zhou
Educational Administration
College of Education, U of S
28 Campus Drive
Saskatoon, SK, S7N 0X1
(306) 966-7711 (office)
yaz973@mail.usask.ca

This study has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board on (insert date). Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may also be addressed to the Ethics Committee through the Ethics Office (966-2084). Out of town participants may call collect. Also note, at the completion of the study, you will be provided with copies of presentations and published material to emerge from the study.

Consent to Participate

I have read and understood the description above. I have been provided with an opportunity to ask questions, and my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I consent to participate in this study, understanding that I may withdraw this consent at any time. A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.

(Name of Participant)

(Date)

(Signature of Participant)

(Signature of Researcher)