

**A CROSS-CULTURAL LEARNING CASE STUDY:
COMPREHENDING CHINESE INTERNATIONAL
STUDENTS' ADAPTING AND LEARNING
STRATEGIES AT CANADIAN UNIVERSITIES**

**Presented in partial fulfillment of
requirements for the Degree Masters of Arts
in Graduate School of Mount Saint Vincent
University**

by

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at

Mount Saint Vincent University

2007

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all the Chinese international students in Canada including the student-participants in this study, who are brave and determined to study and live in a completely different culture.

I also dedicate this work to all the Canadian educators who appreciate teaching international students and make efforts to improve diversity on campus.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis could not have been completed without the encouragement of my parents in the People's Republic of China, who supported my studies in Canada, the goodwill of all my friends who supported me and participated in this study, and the guidance of my supervisor Dr. Susan Brigham.

Since I came to Canada, I have had many good friends such as Jin, Xin, Liu, Jian and Dr. Della Stanley. They supported both my study and social life, and without them this study could not have been completed so quickly. I particularly want to thank my friends Kate Wilkinson and Amal Bhattacharyya, who provided me accommodation and treated me as a family member. They taught me many things about Canada which I could not have learned from school.

My supervisor, Dr. Susan Brigham, is my strongest supporter once I decided to study in Canada. She shared with me much professional knowledge and motivated me to write this thesis. She also offered me Research Assistantships and the chance to attend many academic activities, such as conferences. I also appreciate the help of Dr. Charles Beaupre, who is on my thesis committee. Without his suggestions this work could not have been completed.

Finally, I wish to thank all the students and professors who kindly participated in this study.

Abstract

The purpose of this study, entitled “A Cross-cultural Learning Case Study: Chinese International Students’ Learning Approaches at Canadian Universities”, is to understand the particular learning strategies that Chinese international students have developed to adjust to Canadian academic culture since arriving in Canada. I examine their beliefs about learning and their perceptions about current teaching and assessment approaches used at Canadian universities. In this thesis, I review the literature, which I build my study on, and describe the research methods I use in my thesis. For this case study, I interviewed Chinese international graduate students who are enrolled in master degree programmes. These student-participants all come from People’s Republic of China (PRChina) and have lived in Canada for the purpose of pursuing their educational goals for more than six months but less than four years. I also interviewed Canadian professors, who have teaching experiences with Chinese international students, in order to collect various perspectives about my research focus. International students on Canadian campuses are very important because they enrich current teaching and research and bring their international experiences and diverse cultures to the Canadian academic setting, I believe the findings of this study can help Canadian educators know more about Chinese international students and improve their own teaching and assessment approaches for Chinese international students in particular and for international students in general. This understanding will also help Chinese educators and students recognize some of the differences between Canadian and Chinese academic cultures so that Chinese international students can be benefited more in their formal international educational experiences.

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Chapter One: Introduction

In September 2005, I came from the People's Republic of China (PRChina) to an eastern Canadian urban university to pursue a Master's degree in Lifelong Learning. As a Chinese international student, I encountered challenges all the time in my everyday life; as a master student in an educational programme, I had to deal with many cross-cultural conflicts to adjust to the Canadian academic environment and understand Canadian learning approaches, which differ from my experience in PRChina; as a native Chinese speaker, I had many English communication problems which affected both my personal life and my studies. Later on, I met some Chinese international students whose experiences were similar to mine. Also I talked with many other international students from Asia, the Middle East and Africa. We discussed both the frustrations and excitement of living and learning in Canada, mainly with respect to language problems, food and jobs. Some of our experiences were quite similar. But because it seemed we had common experiences related to factors such as nationality and cultural background, I recognized that Chinese international students have special challenges. This attracted my interest as an education researcher in this thesis topic.

Doing cross-cultural research in adult education is difficult because of the complexity of racial, ethnical and cultural differences of the population engaged in the research (Sparks, 2002). A cross-cultural researcher "necessitates a need to understand varying and contingent standpoints of the subjects in order to construct relevant findings, improve practice and increase effectiveness and relevancy" (Sparks, 2002, p. 115). Therefore, as an adult educator I realize that it is necessary to share Chinese international students' personal

experience with Canadian and Chinese educators. The purpose of this study is to promote a better understanding of Chinese international students' learning experiences. An additional purpose is to discuss strategies for improvements at Canadian universities in order to create a better multicultural educational environment for people from various cultures.

Ostry (1999) assumes that globalization is "an ongoing process with deeper integration" among countries (p. 1), and Bonvair & Griffith (2003) also agree that all human beings will live in the global village and share all the cultures and material resources in the future. In my view, globalization is a process to balance various universal elements, which lead all the nations and races to live in a peaceful and multicultural world. Canada has always been an immigrant country, and Canadian higher education relates to globalization in very specific ways (Stromquist, 2002). For instance, Knight (1997) writes extensively on the internationalization of Canadian universities and agrees that the most important rationale for internationalization is "to prepare graduates who are internationally knowledgeable and interculturally competent" (p. 30).

With the rapidly increasing number of international students, especially Chinese students, Canadian universities have become increasingly multicultural. For instance, according to Facts and Figures 2005 Immigration Overview: Permanent and Temporary Residents (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2006), PRChina is now the country that sends the greatest number of students to Canada, amounting to 35,580 Chinese international students for 2005. In fact, more and more university administrators and educators are aware of this fact. Dan Rowe, a marketing officer of Alberta Center for International Students, confirmed, "Mainland China continues to be a major source for international student

recruitment” (Canada’s promise, 2000, para. 4). Consequently, the differences in learning between Canadian and Chinese university students have recently received increased attention by educators and researchers.

In this study I analyze the particular learning strategies that Chinese international students have developed to adjust to Canadian academic culture since their arrival in Canada. I also examine students’ beliefs about learning and their perceptions about current teaching and assessment approaches used at Canadian universities. Accordingly, for this study, I interviewed Chinese international graduate students who are enrolled in master degree programmes. These students all come from PRChina and have lived in Canada for more than six months but less than three years for the purpose of pursuing their educational goals. The reason I chose to focus on masters students is because generally speaking, Chinese international students enrolled in master degree programmes have a shorter time, around 2-3 years, to complete their degrees. Because of the relatively short study period, they also have heavier study tasks compared to other students in undergraduate and PhD programmes. They have to face more challenges in both their ordinary lives and academic studies (Fumham & Bochner, 1982; Kim, 1991; Yang & Clum, 1994). I also interviewed Canadian professors, who had taught Chinese international students, in order to collect various perspectives to better understand Chinese international students’ learning experiences.

The reason why I am interested in examining Chinese international students at Canadian universities is because there are significant cultural differences between PRChina and Canada. Chinese international students, who are influenced mostly by Chinese culture, find mainstream Western society in North America surprisingly foreign (Lin, 2002; Yeh &

Inose, 2003; Ye, 2006). The process of their acculturation is extremely difficult and it takes much longer for them than other groups of international students. For instance, Lustig & Koester (2003) stated that Western culture is at the extreme of individualism, but Eastern cultures including Chinese culture show a very strong collectivist orientation. Harmon et al. (1997) and Kwok & Lytton (1996) all mention that Chinese students usually attain better academic achievement than their Western peers, especially in math, science and engineering. Stevenson & Lee (1990), Dweck (1999) and Tweed & Lehman (2002) believe that Asian children possess higher achievement motivation because they hold a more adaptive view of ability than their Western peers, believing in learning through effort rather than fixed ability. For example, there is a Chinese expression - “勤能补拙” (Qin² Neng² Bu³ Zhuo²), which means by working hard we can fix any weakness. Some other researchers even state that there are some significant reasons for these learning differences such as Asian children possess a higher level of intelligence, as measured by Intelligence Quotient scores (e.g. Hernstein & Murray, 1994) and have different cultural beliefs about learning (e.g. Dweck, 1999). In addition, some researchers mention that Chinese parenthood is very different than in Western countries. The relationship between Chinese parents and children is close because in Chinese culture, children should show great respect to their parents –“孝” (Xiao⁴). Chinese parents usually arrange most daily things for their children, both financially and emotionally, and continue to support children until marriage (Au & Harackiewicz, 1986). Therefore, Asian parents normally have higher expectations and are involved with their children’s learning (Au & Harackiewicz, 1986; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992; Yao, 1985). Additionally, some researchers claim that Asian countries have better school practice and

pedagogy (Kobayashi, 1994; Lewis, 1995; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). For instance, Chinese basic education is concentrated on getting knowledge from all kinds of resources - teachers, books and parents.

My hope is that this study, by promoting a better understanding of the learning behaviors of international students, will be helpful to policy-makers and educators of Canadian universities to improve their teaching and assessment approaches for Chinese international students in particular and for cross-culture learners in general. This understanding will also help Chinese international students recognize some of the differences between Canadian and Chinese academic cultures so that they can be benefited more in their formal education in this era of globalization.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In this chapter I review the literature on which this study is based. There are four sections: general review of the literature on international students, literature review on Asian students, literature review that focuses on Chinese students and literature on Chinese universities.

I. International Students

It is a common understanding that international students are a group of people who live and study for a short period of time in other countries in order to achieve their educational goals. Because of their special identity circumstance and legal status, they face different and normally more difficult problems compared to local students. Sometimes they face certain disadvantages, which, unless properly addressed, often end up being ignored by teaching and service personnel at some universities. With international education burgeoning over the past two decades and more and more students coming to North American universities (Cudmore, 2005), it is important to consider how their needs and concerns are addressed by educators and researchers.

Mezirow (1990) introduces the theory of transformative learning and suggests that individuals can be transformed through a process of critical reflection. Lyon (2002) connects transformative learning with cross-cultural adaptation. In this study all student-participants experienced the transformative process upon arriving in Canada.

As an adult educator, I am interested in adult international students rather than their younger counterparts because adults tend to have more problems adjusting to different

cultures than younger international students (Huntley, 1993; Ye, 2006). Huntley (1993) summarized some of the problems of adjustment for adult international students. According to Huntley (1993), compared with younger international students, older international students are more easily affected by cultural differences, which in turn make it harder for them to adjust to the different academic culture. Language barriers and academic stress are much more problematic for older adult international students (i.e. graduate or doctoral students). In clear contrast, younger international students (i.e. usually those enrolled in undergraduate studies) do not face the same level of stress in adjusting and are usually able to get by without a great deal of participation in class. For graduate students, however, the expectations are quite different (Huntley, 1993). For example, at the graduate level students are expected to participate in class discussions. Huntley (1993) also claims that for adult international students social adjustment is another major challenge. Since most of these adult international students have families with them or live with people of their own nationality rather than living in dormitories with other local students, they do not have the opportunity to interact very much with North Americans in general (Huntley, 1993).

Hart (1998) offers further insight on this situation. She shares her personal learning and living experience with non-white groups in a primarily white middle-class university in the U.S.A. She relates how learning experiences in Western educational system are especially difficult for students who come from other cultures simply because of a fundamental difference in their native approach to theorizing, as distinct from “the Western form of abstract logic” (Christian, 1990, cited in Hart, 1998, p.197).

Poyrazli et al (2004) and Yeh & Inose (2003) further discuss the process and difficulties of the adjustment to host societies for international students, mainly in the form of “acculturation” and “acculturative stress”. Acculturation is defined as a process of cultural changes that results from the direct and repeated communications among various cultural groups (Berry et al, 1987; Rogler et al, 1991). And acculturative stress is considered as “a marked deterioration of the general health status of an individual; it encompasses physiological, psychological, and social aspects that are explicitly linked to the acculturation process” (Poyrazli et al, 2004, p. 74). Basically, these researchers discovered that English fluency, cultural difference, and academic stress are very important issues for international students as they try to adjust to the host culture. Among these stress factors, the language barrier is the most difficult.

The needs of these international students must be taken seriously at Canadian universities especially as their numbers are increasing and their presence is so important. Cudmore (2005) discusses the importance of globalization and internationalization for the Canadian higher education system. His work focuses on international students at the Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology. In his work, he points out that Canadian higher education has become a big global market-oriented enterprise, resulting in more and more international students seeking educational opportunities in Canada. He also suggests that educators should pay more attention to the needs of international students because their presence in Canadian universities and colleges is “a key part of building a stronger international and intercultural dimension to teaching and research and a crucial global perspective to Canadian campuses” (Cudmore, 2005, p. 47).

II. Asian International Students

Asian international students are usually categorized as one large ethnic group. This is mainly because the educational systems in Asian countries are somewhat similar and Asian cultures greatly interact with each other. For instance, China, Japan and Korea are called the Confucian-heritage countries, because Confucianism is widely applied across Asian culture (Brooks & Brooks, 1998).

Facts and Figures 2005 Immigration Overview: Permanent and Temporary Residents (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2006) shows PRChina, South Korea, Japan and India, which are all Asian countries, are the first, second, fourth and sixth top resource countries for international students in Canada. Most Asian international students in Western educational systems are stereotyped as silent, polite and unsocial (Turner & Hiraga, 1996; Heggins III & Jackson, 2003), but now some educators try to re-evaluate these stereotypes of these students with deeper investigations about the students' cultures and educational backgrounds (Ramburuth & McCormick, 2001).

In their work, Ramburuth & McCormick (2001) closely investigate international students from Asian countries, particularly in terms of their learning differences compared to Australian students. Contrary to earlier findings, the evidence in this comparative research indicates that international Asian students actually do employ the same surface and deep learning approaches as Australian students (surface learning approach involves the memorizing of facts and repeatability of information; deep learning approaches requires better understanding and utilising of the facts after the memorizing). However, the significant differences between Australian and Chinese students are the learning motivations

and values that relate to the concepts of *individualism* and *collectivism*. In other words, Asian students are strongly influenced by Confucian cultural values and the mores of collectivist societies, making them focus more on the group rather than the individual (Biggs 1996; Gatfield & Gatfield 1994; Niles 1995; Tang 1996). For instance, in PRChina most teachers motivate students to study for the society's improvement and/or the country's development, while in North America most students are encouraged to study for their own interests.

Heggins III and Jackson (2003) report that in North America, Asian international students are usually hard workers and have much respect for authority, which allows most of them to gain admission into well-respected universities. Furthermore, according to Heggins III and Jackson, these students have the lowest dropout rate among all racial-ethnic groups in the USA. They tend to do better on quantitative skills tests than on language or social skills tests. Heggins III and Jackson (2003) also mention that Asian students tend to live as separated communities with people of their own nationality, studying mostly with other Asian students and prefer to use close social ties rather than professional sources of help to adjust to North American society, especially for emotional or psychological problems.

In most of these studies, the informants are Asian students mainly from China, South Korea and Japan (e.g. Turner & Hiraga, 1996; Heggins III & Jackson, 2003). However, there are many other countries in Asia such as India, Philippines and Singapore. Their cultures and education systems are quite different. For instance, India has a totally different belief system in its culture due to, for example, its history (e.g. the British colonial legacy) and geographic position. Even among China, Korea and Japan the modern education

systems are different; in China there is a central university entrance examination, while in Japan individual universities design their own examination papers. Therefore, in my opinion to categorize all Asian students as one group is problematic: The category is too vague and unhelpful for cross-cultural research. That is why in this study I focus specifically on Chinese international students. However, I also recognize that this broad category of Chinese international students is problematic because there is a lot of diversity among individuals within this group due to, for example, their formal, informal or non-formal educational experiences, their exposure to and experience with other cultures, their ages, etc. In my review of the literature I found several general commonalities between Chinese international students, which I discuss in the next section.

III. Chinese (International) Students

University students in modern China in general have particular beliefs that impact on teaching and learning. Mau and Jepsen (1990) discovered that when Chinese and North American graduate students seek help, different behaviors and perceptions become evident. The results indicate two areas of differences: vocational-educational and psychological pathological problems. For vocational-educational problems, the authors found that normally Chinese students chose a friend as their first choice for an advisor, while North American students chose an academic advisor (e.g. a professor) as the first choice. For psychological pathological problems, Chinese students prefer no one as their first choice, whereas North American students prefer a psychiatrist (Mau & Jepsen, 1990).

Guo (1996) discusses issues in adult teaching and learning in China especially the characteristics of adult learners in China. Because of the teaching and learning traditions, the influence of Confucian teaching and current educational policy in China, “adult education is geared to political and economic ends. Individual needs are not regarded as an area of high priority” (Guo, 1996, para22). In other words, Chinese students are products of teacher-centered teaching traditions and individual student’s needs are not well recognized by teachers during teaching.

Philips et al (2002) further provide some understandings of the educational culture of Chinese students in their home country to educators who are eager to learn more about their adult Chinese students in the higher education system in United States. The authors indicate that Chinese international students coming from the collectivist society have a similar learning experience in Chinese universities and a dramatically different one from that in the

United States' universities (Gallagher, 1998). Phillips et al (2002) also provide a comprehensive literature review on the subject and build a framework of "what is learning for Chinese students?". According to these studies, Chinese learning strategies are described as a Confucian-heritage learning style, and Confucian values have a great deal of influence on Chinese contemporary educational theory and practice. That is to say, moral education in PRChina is more valuable than technical training. Thus, in a 'collective' culture such as China, "people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty" (Hofstede, 1997, p. 51). This means that Chinese education should not only reflect less on the individual, but on families, schools and the whole society. Another important Confucian influence is the special teacher-student relationship. Phillips et al (2002) state, "the teacher-student role is viewed as that of parent-son (or daughter), which means, 'receiving the authority and respect that would be given to a parent'" (p. 352). Chinese students believe that their diligence can finally allow them to have success and social rewards; "innovation is not necessary nor is being a prodigy, but enduring the painful process to the end is essential" (Phillips et al, 2002, p. 354). Phillips et al (2002) conclude that the learning approaches Chinese students use accentuate the following aspects:

(1) the learning context of structured classes and demanding examinations may lead them to use a surface approach, (2) the Confucian tradition encourages and influences them to use the deep approach, and (3) achievement motivation leads them to use the achieving approach.

As "insider" researchers, Wong and Wen (2001) examine six categories of learning conceptions among Chinese university students in both Hong Kong and Nanjing (PRChina) in order to understand modern Chinese concepts of learning. Due to different historical

backgrounds in 18th to 20th Centuries, students' the learning beliefs of Chinese students from different regions, such as Hong Kong (Hong Kong was a British colony) and Nanjing, are sometimes disparate. Hence Wong and Wen (2001) build their survey based on the learning framework established by Marton et al (1993, 1996) and feature six different perspectives of learning: (A) Increasing one's knowledge; (B) Memorizing and reproducing; (C) Applying; (D) Understanding; (E) Seeing something a different way; and (F) Changing as a person (Marton et al, 1996, p.70). Their findings indicate that most students agree that acquiring knowledge is for the purpose of applying that knowledge, and reject the idea that learning is to memorize and repeat knowledge. According to Wong & Wen's (2001) findings, students claim that the learning process happens no matter whether the knowledge has been learned/remembered/ understood or not, and is just as important as the learning outcomes. In their conclusion, they compare the results from both Nanjing (PRChina) and Hong Kong, claiming that,

The students at Nanjing universities [NJU] had acquired a clearer and more consistent pattern of conceptions of learning than their counterparts at Hong Kong universities. Their views on learning as applying were very prominent, and they also valued highly the more sophisticated conceptions of learning, namely learning as seeing things differently and improving oneself. Students of both universities rejected a 'memorizing and reproducing' conception of learning, but the NJU students as a whole rejected this view more strongly. (p. 146)

In another comparable work, Li (2003) surveyed both U.S. and Chinese students about their learning perspectives. According to the data, Li (2003) compares U.S. and Chinese lists about their learning perspectives and analyzes that the U.S. lists contains social factors such as "resources, institutions, and teaching activities" and many ideas about "thinking, mental processes, and inquiry", while Chinese lists contain plenty of references to "hard work, effort, and persistence" and "strong desire and passion" (pp. 6-7). As a result,

the U.S. view of learning and knowledge is “consistent with the well-established tradition of Western epistemology”, which is a “mind orientation toward learning”, while Chinese view of learning is “consistent with the age-old Confucian understanding of learning”, which is a “person orientation” (Li, 2003, p. 10). For Chinese students, knowledge does not only mean existing body but also includes social and moral understandings. He also mentions the influences from parents and school systems, which also help shaping different learning beliefs in both cultures.

Additional studies show that international students’ (including Chinese international students) educational backgrounds and learning experiences at home conflict with their experiences in North American schools (Huntley, 1993; Poyrazli et, 2004; Yeh & Inose, 2003). In an early research, Feng (1991) states international students from the People’s Republic of China (PRChina) face financial problems, cultural differences, academic concerns and language problems. At that time, financial difficulty seemed to be the biggest problem for PRC students because they were sponsored by either the government or relatives with very limited income. In order to survive, these Chinese students have had to pay great attention to their financial needs rather than academic achievements. More limited language ability is also a problem for PRChina students. Like Phillips et al (2002), Feng (1991) also mentions that North American culture emphasizes individualism and independence, while Chinese culture emphasizes collectiveness and cooperation. As a result, PRC students do not normally have common topics to talk about with the local people, making it that much harder for them to interact socially. Because Chinese culture tends to emphasize “self-sufficiency” and “mutual assistance” (Feng, 1991, p.11), PRC students tend to live

together as a distinct community. PRC students usually do not have many academic problems because they are hard workers and respect knowledge very much. Moreover, they tend to focus on science over social sciences. Feng (1991) claims that “sciences students generally adapt better than social sciences students” because “social sciences require better understanding of North American culture, values, and social systems” (pp. 12-13).

Wan (1999) also interviewed two typical Chinese graduate students at a major university in the eastern United States who spoke with the author about their cross-cultural learning experience. They compared their learning experience in both cultures, shared their frustrations with North American academic culture and the new perspectives they got from cross-cultural learning. Wan (1991) indicates that because the North American campus has become more multicultural over the last decade, educators must pay more attention to cross-cultural learners and try to understand their learning backgrounds. The purpose of that study was to show educators that “it is not easy to be a cross-cultural learner” (Wan, 1999, p. 20) and to provide educators with suggestions to help work with international students. Most Chinese students, like these two interviewees, go to the USA to escape from the personal or political frustrations in their home country and improve their professional or personal learning skills. But after arriving in the USA, they experience communication difficulties, discrimination and also disillusionment. Despite these barriers, Chinese international students develop strategies to adjust to new environments, using their knowledge of written English to help with spoken English or reading more books after class to compensate for missed notes in class. To conclude the study, Wan (1999) gives suggestions on how schools can bridge the gap such as “providing a safe and low-anxiety

environment”, “possible English language classes” and “encouraging other students to be friends with them” (p. 20).

Lin (2002) discovered that Chinese graduate students in social science majors suffer more frustrating experience than those in science majors which reinforces what Feng (1991) found. For science majors, most knowledge is universally symbolized and understood such as Fe (Iron), $1+1=2$, and window XP. Lin (2002) claims, “when learning experience in home country could be used as resources for their study, Chinese graduate students have positive learning experience” (p. 18). However, for social science students, there is not as much common knowledge that is shared by both the Western and Eastern educational systems, and learning challenges increase dramatically because of the language barrier, the lack of training in research skills and cross-cultural information. For social science majors, many classical readings are required, which may be from one or two centuries ago, and topics discussed in the class are often associated with a pronounced Western cultural background. For instance, the readings in classic English are difficult to understand for Chinese international students. Lin (2002) also mentions that there are no shared interests between Chinese graduate students and their North American classmates inhibiting close friendships with local people. Chinese graduate students who go abroad to study are considered the most excellent students in their home country (Feng, 1991; Lin, 2002). However, in my opinion this also means that they have been molded to fit Chinese teaching and learning styles, which are significantly different from North American styles. In China most social science students are engaged in dualistic thinking, so that it is difficult and time-consuming

for them to move from a dualistic perspective to a relativist perspective and develop critical thinking (Lin, 2002).

Ye (2006) examines the relationships of acculturative stress among Chinese international college students in the USA, the interpersonal social support and the use of online ethnic social groups. Among Chinese international students, men have a harder time in their acculturative process than women; older students receive more stress than younger ones; students who are recent arrivals in the host country experience higher level of stress than those who have lived for a longer period of time in a host country. Ye (2006) also finds that Chinese international students, who are satisfied with their interpersonal social support or use of online ethnic social groups, tend to experience lower level of stress and fear. Although the present data does not show a negative relationship between the satisfaction of an interpersonal social support network and the level of online social group activity, the result still suggests that “when Chinese international students are not satisfied with their interpersonal support networks, the online ethnic social groups are good resources for informational support but not for emotional support” (Ye, 2006, p. 15).

Huang and Klinger (2006) investigate Chinese graduate students’ learning experience at two North American universities, the challenges they face and the strategies they develop to adjust in Western academic culture. According to their research, there are seven challenges for Chinese international students,

- 1) financial difficulties; 2) problems in using English for academic purposes; 3) frustrations in becoming a permanent resident; 4) difficulty in adapting to the classroom learning environment; 5) lack of critical thinking skills; 6) acculturation problems; and 7) loneliness and academic anxiety (Huang & Klinger, 2006, p.48).

Frustrations in becoming a permanent resident are first mentioned as a challenge in all the literature. Furthermore, the graduate students who involved in that study give three key suggestions to future Chinese international students as “early and careful preparation including obtaining English skills, securing financial support, and understanding the cultural differences before coming to North America” (Huang & Klinger, 2006, p.57).

Jiao (2006) provides various explanations for why Mainland Chinese international students at University of Windsor are always seen staying within their own cultural community. There are “language difficulties, cultural divergence, assessment criteria, understanding of institutional administration and corresponding response and the inertia of dependence on compatriot groups” (Jiao, 2006, pp. 108). Jiao (2006) concludes that most participants including those with good language skills failed in social interaction with other people from various cultures.

Chinese international students develop their own learning approaches while adjusting to the North American academic culture. There are many recent studies that focus on explaining learning behaviors and strategies of Chinese international students (e.g. Feng, 1991; Elkins, 1994; Chang, 1996; Zhang, 1999; Zhou, Knoke & Sakamoto, 2005). Feng (1991) mentions that Chinese graduate students tend to work harder on written assignments and examinations in order to compensate for their weaknesses on oral English and interpersonal communication skills.

Elkins (1994) analyzes the reasons why Chinese students are silent in the classroom and not generally regarded as good at interpersonal communication. In this research, the author points out that to know the traditional Chinese educational system is very helpful to

understand the silence of Chinese students. In China, teachers encourage collective behaviors (Hui & Triandis, 1986) and “even in a competitive situation ... helping another is more important than winning” (Elkins, 1994, p. 7). This is in clear contrast to the North American educational system, where individualist behaviors are encouraged by the society and ““first come first serve”” is the common attitude (Elkins, 1994, p. 11). Because the collective behaviors require obedience from individuals, Chinese students have been trained to follow orders or instructions without questioning; they memorize all the information given by teachers or found in textbooks. These are important reasons to explain the silence of Chinese students in the classrooms. For North American students, on the other hand, critical thinking is strongly encouraged to foster independent thinking. Chinese students often feel frustrated under this educational model, usually because of their limited English communication skills (Kleim, Miller & Alexander, 1981). To rectify this situation, Elkins (1994) offers some suggestions for North American teachers who teach Chinese students so as to encourage greater interpersonal communication skills and provide many recommended readings.

Additional research focuses on analyzing the moral implications for Chinese international students in dealing with social relations through effective communication. For example, Zhang (1999) explains the self-deprecation phenomena in Chinese culture, when Chinese “fulfill the face needs of the interlocutors in communicative events” (p. 2). Zhang further explains this phenomenon: “the ritual implications of self-deprecation are rooted in Chinese traditional ethics that favored socially over individuality” (p. 3). As evidence for this viewpoint, he cites such ancient Chinese texts as “The Analects of Confucius” and “The

Book of Rites (Li Chi)". From such evidence he concludes that "the pragmatic implications of self-deprecation lie mainly in three points: avoidance of face threats, elicitation of sympathy and self-defense" (p. 5).

Another work, by Chang (1996), discusses the moral perspectives of Chinese students in the USA, explaining the shyness and silence of Chinese students compared to their North American counterparts. Chang makes a special effort to point out the power relation between teachers and students. Teachers are viewed as powerful players in Chinese culture, and students normally remain silent and endure a "morally flawed relationship" (Chang, 1996, p. 3). In Chinese culture, normal relations mean politeness and courtesy and the display of good will so as not to offend people. For instance, when people talk about their ideas, it is not polite to show disagreements in front of them. When studying or living in a different culture or society, Chinese tend to build distant relations with local people and sometimes even put themselves into a position of the disadvantages. Thus the silence of Chinese students is "not merely the learned cultural value of ren² qing² [人情], but a functional response to power difference as they have been historically constructed in socialist China" (Chang, 1996, p. 8).

Zhou, Knoke and Sakamoto (2005) explain the assumption of passivity and silence of students from Mainland China in the classrooms of Canadian higher educational institutions. They interviewed 10 Chinese students and claim that the silence and reticence cannot be simply explained as the unwillingness to participate in the class. In fact, most interviewees show an interest to share their knowledge in the classroom but are held back because of not only the language barrier, the differences of cultural values, and the influences of teaching

and learning strategies from home country, but also the assessment methods and the attitudes of professors/ instructors and Canadian classmates. In China, silence in the classroom demonstrates the students' respect and obedience to their teachers (Elkins, 1994; Philips et al., 2002; Zhou, Knoke and Sakamoto, 2005) and Chinese teachers are proud when it is so quiet that even when a needle dropped on the ground, the sound can be heard by all the people in the classroom. Although the researchers point out that the language barrier is the most important barrier, they also found that the encouragement and kindness from the professors/ instructors or Canadian classmates are also the significant contributors to breaking the silence in the classroom. Chinese international students are more active in the classroom when they can understand and feel understood in the class. They also question the assessment methods used in the classes claiming that "you shouldn't be evaluating people based on their English skills; [rather,] it is how much knowledge and how much ideas they got [understood]" (Zhou, Knoke and Sakamoto, 2005, p. 295).

In summary, most literature point out that Chinese traditional education backgrounds and Chinese cultures have the strong impact on Chinese international students' learning styles in English-speaking universities such as traditional Chinese teacher-student relationships (Guo, 1996; Philips et al, 2002; Zhou, Knoke and Sakamoto, 2005), saving face and self-deprecation (Zhang, 1999; Philips et al, 2002; Zhou, Knoke and Sakamoto, 2005) and English education background in PRChina (Feng, 1991; Chang, 1996; Zhang, 1999; Huang & Klinger, 2006). These common characteristics are also reflected on the findings of this study. However, I am also aware of over generalizing about this large and varied

group-Chinese international students, and even in this study there is a range of differences in terms experiences, language skills and attitudes.

IV. Chinese universities

The word “university” comes from Latin “universite” and means “the whole body of teachers and scholars engaged, at a particular place, in giving and receiving instruction and the higher branches of learning” (Simpson & Weiner, 1989, p.87). It is socially defined and changes from time to time based on the social needs. For example, students in European medieval universities were “drawn predominantly from privileged social group” (Scott, 1998, p. 14). In modern times because knowledge is more important to society, university education in most countries including PRChina and Canada becomes more accessible to all the citizens.

By the end of the Qing Dynasty in China, Chinese educators realized that there were many serious problems in the educational system and it was time to introduce new knowledge from Western countries (Chen, 2005). The idea of the “university” suddenly appeared in China at that time. In 1989, based on the idea of “Zhong1 Xue2 Wei2 Ti3, Xi1 Xue2 Wei2 Yong4 [中学为体，西学为用]”, which means “Chinese learning for the foundation; Western learning for utility”, the very first university- Beijing University was set up (Chen, 2005). And “during these years (1919-1949), Western philosophers and educators such as John Dewey were invited to China, modern universities were set up ...” (Burriss, 1990, p. 114) and especially after the foundation of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, higher educational institutions dramatically increased from 25,776 to 207,898 until the Cultural Revolution (Burriss, 1990). Since 1984, more and more Chinese students go abroad to achieve their educational goals because institutional links between Chinese and foreign universities are advanced and PRC is gradually open to the rest of the world (Burriss, 1990).

Universities, as the main body of the higher educational system, have been accepted by most of the countries in the world. Although the schooling system in PRChina was seriously destroyed during the 10-year Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), it recovered and developed rapidly in the last decade of 20th Century. As PRChina opened its door and the model of modern Western universities was transplanted into the traditional Chinese educational system, many modern Chinese universities were created (Chen, 2005).

According to my experience at a highly-ranked Chinese university in Shanghai, I found that a Chinese university could be described as a dumpling; the structure of the Western university is only the outside pastry but Chinese teaching strategies are the actual inside fillings. For instance, in modern Chinese universities, the memory-repeat model is still the main teaching method, because traditional Chinese educators believe that learning process is to memory-copy-understanding (Wong and Wen, 2001; Ma, 2004), such as an old saying, “Shu² Du² Tang² Shi¹ San¹ Bai³ Shou³, Bu² Hui⁴ Zuo⁴ Shi¹ Ye³ Hui⁴ Yin² (熟读唐诗三百首，不会做诗也会吟)”, which says that if you memorize 300 poems, you can recite without writing your own. Discussion, self-directed learning, research and observation, lab, and practice are just assistant teaching methods (Gao, 2000).

In Chinese universities, “the pressures to preserve harmony, to conform, to avoid loss of face and shame mean that certain styles of teaching and learning are preferred by the Chinese” (Chan, 1999, p. 298). The curriculum has been set up for the whole programme before starting. For instance, when I studied at my university, we had only one selected course every semester and the others were all required courses with the established times and professors. The classes are mostly teacher-centred or text book-centred. The

teacher-student communication is mainly one-way directed in order to avoid conflict-from teachers towards students (Ma 2004; Gao, 2000). Student-student interaction is only encouraged outside the class such as preparation of written assignments (Biggs & Watkins, 1996; Tang, 1996) rather than in the class. Because memorizing-repeating teaching approach is still dominant, the examination is considered the main tool of assessment. Pratt et al. (1999) point out that it is a measurement of what is worthy to learn and master, and thus the academic achievement in Chinese society totally relies on the success of examinations. However, recently the educational reform in PRChina encourages teachers and students to be more creative. Solely memorizing-repeating teaching approaches are no longer the only methodologies. But in this study, all the student-participants are mostly brought up in the traditional ways.

In summary, some studies introduce the differences between Chinese and North American (academic) cultures such as Li (2003), Phillip et al (2002) and Li (1989). Some studies share Chinese international students' personal experiences such as Feng (1991), Wan (1999) and Huang & Klinger (2006). Others focus on analyzing the characteristics of Chinese students. Having reviewed the literature, I will discuss the methodology of this study in the next chapter.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

In this case study, I used the in-depth interview which is one of the qualitative research methods. In this chapter I talk about that methodology and introduce all the participants. There are eight sections: qualitative research, researcher identity, case study, in-depth interviews, participants, ethics, validity and research process and data analysis.

I. Qualitative Research

At the early stage of the development of scientific research, including both qualitative and quantitative, it is customary to report “the representations of ‘the others’” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 1) and are “inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism” (Smith, 1999, p. 1). The agenda of the scientific research was to observe and collect the knowledge about the culture, customs and habits of another non-white human group (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

They go on to point out comparisons between qualitative and quantitative researchers,

Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researchers and what is studied, and situational constraints that shape inquiry In contrast, quantitative studies emphasize the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, not processes. (p. 10)

To them, qualitative researchers are more radical and often “come up against the constraints of the everyday social world”, however, quantitative researchers “abstract from this world and seldom study it directly” (p. 12).

Qualitative research is “an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and sometimes counterdisciplinary field. It crosscuts the humanities and the social and physical science. It is many things at the same time.” (Nelson et al, 1992, p. 4) Although there is a lot of

literature that offers various definitions of qualitative research, an initial central conception can be concluded as,

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. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3)

Using qualitative research is not necessarily to capture all of the “truth”, because the reality is changing over the time and context, and cannot be fully comprehended (Guba, 1990; Goddard & Powell, 1994). However, the rich descriptions of what people say and what they do, which are provided by qualitative research methods, do offer different perspectives to the data collected by quantitative research methods (Mulhall, Kelly & Pearce, 2004).

Because the purpose of my study is to investigate the learning experiences and the adaptive strategies of Chinese international graduate students at Canadian universities, I record as many of my subjects’ points of views as possible. In this study, I do not only analyze Chinese learning strategies but also challenge the pedagogy and assessment methods employed at contemporary Canadian universities. Compared to quantitative research, I believe that qualitative research is my best tool for revealing the specifics of a particular case study; I can get closer to the participants perspectives by in-depth interviews. I believe that detailed descriptions of individual’s experiences and perspectives are more valuable than quantitative research methods which involve the analysis of numerical data. Therefore, I chose a qualitative research methodology, which emphasizes “verbal descriptions and explanations of human behavior” (Jackson, 1998, p. 16).

II. Case Study

According to Sturman (1997), case study is “a generic term for the investigation of an individual, group, or phenomenon” (p. 61). From a single example or a series of examples, a case study can help researchers understand and explain why things happen in that way because case study researchers believe that human systems can develop a characteristic wholeness or integrity (Sturman, 1997). The form of my qualitative research is the educational case study, which is “designed to enhance the understanding of educational action” (Sturman, 1997, p. 63). It is a common and effective way to do qualitative inquiry for educational academics. Stake (2005) states that,

For a research community, case study optimizes understanding by pursuing scholarly research questions. It gains credibility by thoroughly triangulating the descriptions and interpretations, not just in a single step but continuously throughout the period of study. For a qualitative research community, case study concentrates on experiential knowledge of the case and close attention to the influence of its social, political and other contexts. (pp. 443-444)

For this study, the research data is the best collected by using the case study method, which mainly comprises participants’ thick descriptions and deep reflections within their own world (Stake, 2005). Here again, the purpose of my case study is to understand the particular learning and adapting strategies of Chinese international graduate students, which they have developed from their previous learning experiences at Chinese universities. Also, it examines Asian cultural beliefs about learning to adjust to Western academic culture, and the students’ perceptions about current teaching and assessing approaches used at Canadian universities. Points of view will be collected from all participants including both Chinese graduate students and Canadian professors. For instance, Chinese graduate students I include in my case are within a certain age range so that they would be educated under very

similar Chinese educational circumstances, even though they are from various parts of Mainland China. In PRChina, we had a central university entrance examination every year, which was the main way to move on to higher education. The content of the examination was the same all over the country. So in a sense all participants were shaped by the same machine no matter which part of China they are from. I also have to mention here that Chinese universities are mainly built in urban areas so that there are enough financial and technical supports to develop higher education. Furthermore, Chinese international students are required by the Canadian government to have enough support to finish their studies in Canada when applying for visa; this means that they are all from upper middle class families. They will, however, have had common experiences along with their particular experiences, which I investigate in this case study. Though it is a less scientific methodology as a single case study can poorly represent the big population, “the small samples of cases can provide questionable grounds for advancing grand generalization” (Stake, 2005, p. 460).

III. Researcher Identity

There are many debates in the qualitative research area about the identity of the researcher. Feminist researchers for example discuss the important conceptions of “insider/outsider” (Zavella, 1996; Lewin, 1993; Narayan, 1997; Kondo, 1990; Williams, 1996). Nancy Naples’s (1996) research with women in Iowa questions shows the idea that a feminist researcher who shared some attributes of a cultural background would, by virtue of that background, have full access to women’s knowledge in that culture. Most of them

claim that insider/outsider positions are not fixed and can transform each other (Naples, 2003; Olesen, 2005). Kath Weston (1996) concludes the problem,

A single body can not bridge that mythical divide between insider and outsider, researcher and researched. I am neither, in any simple way, and yet I am both. (p. 275)

I identify myself as both “insider and outsider”. In various situations, my identity is “fluid rather than rigidly defined” (Brigham & Gouthro, 2006, p.89). As an “insider”, when I did the interviews, I felt I was in many ways inside this group of student-participants that I focus on in my study. I shared some of the same experiences and views as my interviewees. However, because I also collected and analyzed data from professors, I was an “outsider”.

IV. In-depth Interviews

To investigate a case, there are various techniques within qualitative and quantitative methods (Sturman, 1997). In this case study, data are gathered mainly through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. The in-depth interview is a commonly used qualitative research method for data gathering (e.g. Feng, 1991; Wan, 1999; Lin, 2001). It is a well-known communication means between researchers and informants for their shared topics of interest (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004; Miller & Crabtree, 2004). Compared to the “holistic” educational ethnography, these intensive interviews can “yield large quantities of descriptive qualitative data but are less time consuming” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004, p. 140). Miller & Crabtree (2004) point out key characters of depth (in-depth) interview as follows,

The depth interview concentrates on the figure at the expense of the ground – it focuses on facilitating a coconstruction of the interview’s and an informant’s

experience and understanding of the topic of interest and not necessarily on the context of that understanding. (p. 188)

Because the purpose of my in-depth interviews is to comprehend participants' personal experiences in a short period of time, I prefer individual interviews so that details would not be ignored. Individual interviews are one-to-one interactions and exchanges of ideas and meanings, in which various realities and perceptions are explored and developed (Gaskell, 2000). Bauer and Gaskell (1999) describe the nature of the individual interview, as a "triangle of mediation"; In this triangle, there are two persons (Subject 1 and Subject 2) and an object (O), which is related with a project (P) and, between S1 and S2, O is discussed in detail to serve the purpose of P. Under this mode, it is easier to communicate between a researcher and a participant and can get more information. Compared to group interviews, the individual interviews are a more convenient way to discover more details about individual stories, which are needed for this case study.

V. Participants

This case study is based on Dalhousie University (Dal), Saint Mary University (SMU) and Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU), which are three major universities in Halifax, Nova Scotia (NS), Canada. I consider Dal, with 15,500 students enrolled in 2005-2006 (Dalhousie University, 2007), a typical large university; SMU, with more than 8,500 students (SMU Academic Calendar 06/07, 2007), a middle-sized university and MSVU, with 5,498 students enrolled in 2004-2005 (Mount Saint Vincent University, 2007), a small one. There are two groups of participants I interviewed in my study.

1. One was a group of Chinese international graduate students who attended Dal, SMU, or MSVU. They had both Chinese and Canadian learning experience. Their ages were between 24 and 27. They had bachelor degrees from Chinese universities and were currently graduate students at these three universities. In total I interviewed six international students. Half were male and half were female. Two were in education programmes, one was in the library information programme, one in the financial programme, one in the computer science programme and the other was in the engineering programme.

2. The other group of four was university professors who each taught at one of these three universities. In order to better understand Chinese international students at these universities, I wanted to interview professors who had teaching experiences with Chinese international students to get their perspectives on Chinese international students. In order to collect various perspectives from all kinds of programmes, I selected one professor from Computer Science programme at Dal, two from business and economy programmes at SMU and another from Canadian studies at MSVU. There were 2 female professors and 2 male professors in my study to ensure a balance of genders.

Please see Appendix A and B for tables of basic bio-data information about the research participants

VI. Ethics

Ethics is a commitment between researchers and subjects that promotes individual autonomy in qualitative research (Christians, 2005). Through ethics, subjects can identify themselves and protect themselves from dangerous elements. For instance, subjects can

choose whether to be audio-taped or not. Due to the fact my study is related to human being as subjects, it is very important to that I inform all the participants about the nature and content of this study in order to engage their freedom of choice in participating. I agree with Christians (2005) that the enlightened mind is rooted deeply in a pervasive autonomy, and that participants talk more freely when they clearly know the content of such a study and if their rights are addressed in the signing of an ethics consent form.

In order to pursue this study with all the participants, I obtained ethics approval from the University Research Ethics Board at MSVU. I then listed details of my study in the informational letters and sent them to all the participants in my study so that they were clearly informed of the risks and benefits of my study. As a result, all participants volunteered to share their experiences and opinions with me, and all, except one participant, were willing to be audio-taped. During the interviews and in the writing of my thesis, all participants' privacy and confidentiality were fully respected.

VII. Validity

As cultural research, this study investigates a hermeneutic focus on lived realities and mediates people's experiences and realities (Saukko, 2005). Consequently, the focus is on the culture, people and community. The methodological approaches I use are the most appropriate tools for bringing the personal, cultural and social views of a minority culture within Western countries. Although there maybe some potential issues about subjectivity and objectivity, especially with dialogic validity and self-reflexive validity such as miscommunications or conflicting views between a participant and myself, I believe I could

better draw forth more information and more varied insights by using in-depth, individual interviews. I took into consideration all the potential issues when I approached my participants. My status allows me become an “inside” researcher, as I am within the community of the student participants, which made it easier for me to access them and use the language with which they felt most comfortable. I believe that personal views are valuable whether or not I agree with them and I did not judge any of my participants’ opinions in other words. When I interviewed my participants, I kept a neutral position.

VIII. Research Process and Data Analysis

Before interviewing the participants, I read much literature on my subject and, with my personal experience, developed a purposeful and not random “sampling frame” to serve my study (Miller & Crabtree, 2000). Then, I combined the sampling frame and mapping information to design interview guides. The guides contained my main questions, sub-questions and main assumptions. Questions were divided into two kinds, closed-ended and open-ended. Open-ended questions were dominant because they better allowed for vivid descriptions of the participants’ views. Closed-ended questions, such as “did you do presentations in the Chinese university?”, were used here to compare the data horizontally among participants. Participants decided the interview location, which depended on where it was convenient for them and where they felt comfortable expressing themselves. Participants also decided the time that we met and the language they wanted to use during the interviews. Confidentiality was established between the participants and myself (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004). As with all research involving human subjects, informed

consent letters were signed by participants. Each interview lasted half an hour to an hour. In order to collect as much information as possible, fieldnotes were carefully taken, and interviews were audio-taped with one exception. Tape recorders were used to fully capture the interview and fieldnotes and were used in conjunction with the tape recording (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004). Miller & Crabtree (2004) both state, “transcription involves the complicated process of translating from oral discourse to written language” (p. 200). With regard to language used in the interviews, four of the interviews with Chinese graduate students were done in Chinese, and two interviews in English. All four of the interviews with professors were done in English. After the interviews, the audio-tapes of the interviews were evaluated for quality and all contexts were translated and transcribed. The four interviews in Chinese were translated into English during transcription by me, the researcher, and all the interviews were transcribed verbatim. In this study, it was a challenge transcribing oral Mandarin into written English, but as I am fluent in both Mandarin and English, the risk of misunderstanding the dialogue was greatly reduced.

The process of data analysis was inductive and data-led. On one hand, my data analysis aimed to break the data into parts determined by different main questions. On the other hand, each part contained data from various participants’ points of views and extended data beyond their descriptive accounts. The process starts with coding and categorizing the data. By examining it line-by-line, I defined actions or events within it and tried to stay attuned to my participants’ views of their realities. For instance, during the process, I listened to the recording of the interviews word-by-word and repeated them again and again in order to get

exact perspectives of my participants. And then I also invited an English-speaking person with a Master of Education to review the transcripts to ensure their accuracy.

All the tapes I recorded and the notes I wrote were stored in my locked filing cabinet in my home. After I completed this thesis, I destroyed the tapes and notes by shredding them.

The next step, I compared their experiences with each other. With their various backgrounds, current situations, majors and genders, I discovered both similarities and great differences. For instance, when I asked how much academic stress they encountered, the answers were totally varied. Some of them felt high academic stress while others felt low. However, when we study the various reasons behind this apparent conflict, we can understand the connections between these answers.

In the last step, I connected the data with my personal experience. Because I am also a Chinese international student, when I did the interviews, my self-reflection was significant. By reflecting on my learning experience, I could better understand my participants' perspectives and make more useful recommendations.

Here again, I believe that the personal experiences of each one are valuable no matter whether I agreed with them or not. Therefore, when I collected and analyzed data from the interviews, I considered myself as an outsider research by not ignoring or judging any information collected in this study.

Chapter Four: Data Analysis and Discussions

This is the data analysis chapter of this thesis. There are three big sections: major questions which provide readers with the questions used in the interviews, student-participants and professor-participants where I list all the findings of the interviews and conduct discussions.

I. Major Questions

According to the purpose of my study, all the interviews are conducted by four major questions.

1. According to the Chinese international student-participants, what are the major differences between Canadian and Chinese universities?
2. What particular adapting and learning strategies have Chinese international students at their Canadian universities developed to adjust to Canadian academic culture?
3. What are the learning experiences for Chinese international students in both Canadian and Chinese universities?
4. What are Chinese international students' perceptions about their cross-culture learning experience and current teaching and assessment approaches used at Canadian universities?

II. Student-participants

i. Introduction

In some previous studies, the researchers discussed the difficulties of the adjustments for Chinese international students (Feng, 1991; Wan, 1999; Lin 2002; Huang & Klinger, 2006). In these studies, Chinese international students mentioned three major difficulties of the adjustments: 1) language barriers; 2) Western (including Canadian) and Eastern (including Chinese) cultural differences and 3) academic cultural differences. My findings are in accordance with them and all the student-participants agreed that especially at the beginning of their study in Canada those three difficulties obviously existed. According to what the student-participants stated, I found that the longer the students have stayed in Canada, the less those three major difficulties were encountered. This study focuses on analyzing in detail how those difficulties apply to Chinese international students' professional study, what their adapting and learning strategies are and what their perceptions about current teaching and evaluating methods at Canadian universities are.

In section one, student-participants recalled their learning experiences in Chinese higher education institutions so that some of stereotypes people have about them can be better explained and comprehended (e.g. silence in class and relationships with professors).

Educational shock comes from encountering differing academic cultures, different power structures, and the need to use English 24 hours a day (Bunz, 1997). In this study educational shock between Chinese and Canadian higher educational institutions are particularly discussed among student-participants (e.g. paper, presentations and examinations;

group work and independent work; discussions in class) which I believe cause the major difficulties for Chinese international students to adjust into the Canadian academic culture.

In the literature, Chinese international students' learning strategies were rarely addressed. However, there were a few studies. For instance, Melton (1990) discusses the learning styles of PRChina students who learn English as a Second Language (ESL) and Wan (1999) briefly introduces some coping strategies of Chinese international students. In this study based on student-participants' learning experiences, I discovered that there are two types of adapting and learning strategies that they developed to adjust into Canadian academic environments which I loosely categorize as Chinese-Canadian and Canadian adapting and learning types. It is similar with the term of "Canadian Chinese food", which is different from traditional Chinese food but is still categorized as Chinese food. Some students are able to develop Canadian learning strategies that are similar to Canadian students (e.g. they go to the library to use research resources, they ask questions and argue with professors, and they hang out with people from other cultures). But other students create Chinese-Canadian learning approaches within the Chinese international student circle. They study together and help each other (e.g. second year students provide first year students study resources and sell second hand books to them; they discuss and solve problems depending on their own resources; and they work with mainly Chinese nationals) (Feng, 1991; Guo, 1996).

Under certain conditions Chinese international students would prefer the Chinese-Canadian strategies. For instance, in some universities or departments where there are established mature Chinese communities, Chinese international students tend to study in those communities rather than in the mainly non-Chinese Canadian academic communities

(e.g. computer science department and engineering school at Dalhousie University). When Chinese international students encounter frustrating learning experiences in the main academic culture at Canadian universities, they tend to hold back and stay in Chinese communities in order to “protect themselves”. When Chinese international students have poor English language skills and encounter a strong sense of homesickness, they tend to study with Chinese nationals in order to improve the quality of their study. In contrast, in some other conditions such as Chinese students have good language skills or do not have many Chinese peers around, Chinese international students would prefer the Canadian learning strategies. For Chinese international students who have already been exposed to Canadian cultures within China, they tend to adapt to Canadian academic environment faster. Because they are normally good at communicating with non-Chinese and have some knowledge of cultural differences, they encounter less cultural shock than average Chinese international students. When the nature of the subjects they study is very much Eurocentric which they are not familiar with, they tend to use public resources outside of the Chinese community more often and work more with Canadian peers. When Chinese international students are in a very friendly environment, they tend to be more open to Canadian cultures.

Generally speaking, after comparing the student-participants’ view of the teaching and assessment methods at Chinese and Canadian universities all the student-participants agreed that teaching and evaluating methods at Canadian universities are better approaches for self-directed and creative learning. But because of the special characteristics of cross-cultural learners, some student-participants stated that some teaching and assessment methods still need to be improved, which are discussed in the next sections.

ii. First experiences at Canadian universities

In this section I will discuss the student-participants' first cross-cultural experiences because the first living and study periods including the first days of universities and the first classes would be the time when international students experience most of the educational shock (Thorstensson, 2001; Wang, 2004). In the interviews I divided these into the first-day and first-class experiences. It is very interesting to know what student-participants' transformative process of both living and learning in a different environment were and what critical reflection they had on their cross-cultural learning experiences. As a result I found out that all of student-participants had similar experiences.

Some of student-participants recalled their first-day experiences when they came to Halifax, NS, Canada. Most of them mentioned that they felt that Halifax was very flat and expanded. They said that there were no tall buildings and only a few people were seen walking on the streets compared to what they had been used to seeing. Because these characteristics of the city were foreign to them, most of them felt lonely. As we all know, China has the largest population in the world so the cities in China are full of people and living space is very limited. In order to create more space, the buildings in China are normally very tall. Especially in traditional universities, a big population fills the campuses every day and all facilities are built close together. Therefore, all of the participants are used to having many people around. In Chinese culture the more people get together in one place, the better that place is for living. Not everyone likes crowds. For instance, Sonia said "although it is not as big as I expected, the campus is very quiet, not the same crowd as universities in China". Still, others shared their first feelings as follows:

Guo Guo: The university is very small;

David: My university is small. I mean my department is small and the whole university is too flat and expanded. In China, the buildings in my university are high and set up together;

Josh: The reason I think this is not a big university is because my high school is a big one. In high school, we have two gyms, big swimming pools, big fitness center, and big field... I was just a little disappointed about the size which was really below my expectation;

Jane: I was so surprised that rarely I saw people walking on the streets.

Although the size of the universities disappointed most participants, they showed gratefulness for the beauty of the nature here. Guo Guo said “the scenery is pretty, especially the Bedford Basin”. Also, Josh and Sonia shared that people here are very friendly and always willing to help others.

The public transportation system is totally different from what student-participants were used to in China. In Canada, most people have their own driving license when they graduate from high schools, while in China only a few people learn how to drive and usually not until after they graduate from university or even later. Most people do not know how to drive all their lives because cars are so expensive to buy and maintain in China. As a result, most Chinese international students do not know how to drive and rely on buses. Jane explained that there were only a few buses around and she normally needed to check the schedule all the time. If she missed one bus, she would rather walk a long way to campus than wait for another bus. She said, “In China, buses come every ten or fifteen minutes and they go to every corner of the city. Besides buses, we normally ride bikes because everything is so close. But here, there is no way to ride bike in the winter and I feel it is dangerous to ride bike in the same line with cars and buses.” Although these experiences seem to be not relevant with the educational experiences discussed in this study, they can

cause additional stress that affect Chinese international students' learning experiences in Canada.

According to Thorstenson (2001) and Wang (2004), educational shock for international students usually lasts throughout the first semester, followed by the majority of students successfully adjusting to the new academic culture. Most universities organize an orientation for new student at the beginning of the term. Normally that is the first taste of university life in Canada for new students. However, some of the student-participants did not feel that the orientation session was helpful for international students in general and for Chinese international students in particular. Louis told me that there was an orientation organized by his university, but he soon found out it could hardly help him because they only gave general information such as where the library or classrooms were located. He felt there were some other things he needed to know more about and he tried to ask other students including Chinese international students. As a result, he felt that Chinese international students knew better what he really needed at that time, such as information about food, rent, etc. Because some Canadian customs are very common in ordinary life for Canadians, universities assume that everyone knows about these customs. However, international students may not know these things well enough. Louis gave me an example,

Textbooks are very expensive here (in Canada). Especially, our technique books are updated very often. It is really a waste if I buy new books for every class. Therefore, I heard from other Chinese that we could buy second hand books and I did save a lot of money. In China, books are not that expensive and we used to buy new books all the time. When I was in the university in China, professors would order all the textbooks for the whole class.

In another similar example, it is very unusual to buy second hand clothes in China. I myself have never bought second hand clothes in China. In Chinese culture, only poor

people buy second hand things. Therefore, when someone gave me a list of second hand stores, I felt that it was shameful for me. But later I realized it is very common to trade second hand things in Canada because they are cheap and practical. Another example is provided by Guo Guo who pointed out she was shocked to know that stores used to be closed on Sundays and she laughed that “I was lucky that I brought something from China so that I would not starve at the first weekend”.

Through the interviews, student-participants told me that they first experienced educational shock in their first classes when they became aware of the learning differences.

Here is what some of them said:

Guo Guo: I did understand nothing. I could catch several words from professor or my classmates, but most of time I did not know what they were talking about. For all the classes I’ve took, the first class was very hard;

Sonia: I felt I spent all the time in writing notes and did not pay any attention to what the instructor said. So much information was given by the instructor;

Josh: in the first term, Wow, it is overwhelming. I was like totally freak out, because my first class is about research methods. It is pretty hard. I was out of the loop because I did not know what they were talking about. That was totally new to me. Yeah, I was shocked; in first few classes, I almost had no ideas what they talked about because of my Chinese background;

Louis: I even tape-recorded the classes with my recorder, but it was not helpful and also I did not have time to listen to them again at that time;

Jane: the most difficult part for me at the beginning is that I cannot understand the group discussions at all. The topics they chose are very Canadian, such as laws. For me as an international student, I know very limited about local situation. I can hardly catch what they said and I cannot communicate with them. I just had no my own opinion at all;

David: I did not understand what teachers said in the first class.

All the students’ first class experiences were very similar, no matter how fluent their English was and how excellent they were as students in PRChina. They all felt that it was very difficult to catch up in the first few classes. Everything was overwhelming and all of student-participants could not receive most of the information from professors in the first

classes. In the interviews, student-participants all agreed that the major problems for Chinese international students at the beginning are language barriers which are generally in accordance with previous studies (Wan, 1999; Lin, 2002; Ye, 2006).

Although student-participants all passed the language test for entering the universities in order to start their graduate studies, they found out that the “English” they learned was not practical. Two student-participants even studied in English related majors for four years in PRChina but still had difficulties in understanding, mainly because there were so many new words and slang terms they had never heard before. Additionally native-speakers tend to talk very fast. Sonia explained that,

In China, we have very different English education. Most of the textbook is teaching British English. It is focused on written English, which is more formal and grammar matters. We seldom learned the idioms and spoke with a native English speaker when we grew up. We do have listening test, but those are very simple conversations. And the spoken speed is very slow and every word is clearly pronounced. However, it is totally different here. Especially during the conversations, once missing a word, I can hardly find out.

Not only ordinary communication is difficult, but also the written assignments. Guo Guo laughed that there was one thing which really frightened her in one of her first classes. She was told that she needed to write a paper of 30 pages single spaced. Then she immediately dropped that class because she did not think she could handle that. She said although she wrote English essays during her study in Teaching English as Second Language (TESL) in PRChina, “they were only 1-2 pages”. Jane added, “In China, I only wrote some short essays before TOEFL exam (Test of English as a Foreign Language). Here normally a paper would be about 15-25 pages in English”.

Reading in English is also another challenge. Sonia said she could read a maximum of 15-pages of English per day because she had to check the new words or phrases with the

dictionary page to page. But she calculated that she had to read 300 pages per day in the first semester if she wanted to finish reading all the books professors provided.

While the participants' English language skill varied and they all received English language training in PRChina, the average language starting point for these cross-cultural learners is in general much lower than that of their Canadian counterparts. The students' comments about their first day/first class experiences suggest that Chinese international students' first experiences are generally tough for them and academic supports are strongly needed.

iii. Adapting and learning strategies

1. Changes in preferred learning strategies

Five of six student-participants commented that their learning strategies have changed a lot since they first came to Canada. Most of them now use self-directed learning strategies and in China they used to use both teacher-guided and self-directed learning strategies.

Louis said now study is “Reading, thinking, writing and discussion.” Sonia is the exception among all the student-participants. She did not consider that her learning strategies changed a lot. She explained that, “all my classmates are Chinese here, so I felt the same when we studied together. The only difference is now we use a different language for study.”

When I asked what learning strategies are more effective, teacher-guided or self-directed, Guo Guo explained that, “It depends. In my field, I think teachers should inspire you but the major part should be your own effort.” According to Won and Wen (2001), it is surprisingly known that Chinese students from PRChina strongly reject the idea of “learning is memorizing and reproducing”, although they are educated in that way. Similarly, in this study all student-participants also did not agree with that idea. Guo Guo said that in Chinese universities she had to do “memorizing and reproducing” in order to pass courses, but she sometimes would even skip classes and do some self-reflections. Most student-participants believe that self-guided learning strategies are more effective when they study in Canadian universities, while teacher-guided learning strategies are preferred for study in PRChina. Josh and David both mentioned that misusing the learning strategies would reduce the quality of study. For instance, David said that some of his classmates who

were from PRChina still used the same teacher-guided learning strategies in Canada and did not learn as well as in PRChina.

Jane and David recalled that in China, they normally wasted half of the term playing or reading novels and used the other half of the term studying to prepare for the examinations. However, after they came to Canada, they felt they had to be intense all the time. Take Jane as an example. Except the classes every week she had to attend, she normally had 2-3 assignments each week, which meant she had to finish one assignment every 3 days and did not have any free time at all. However, in Sonia's class, 100% of the students are Chinese international students. She said there were not many chances they could actually work with Canadians and discover other learning strategies.

2. Two types of adapting strategies in academic studies

In this section, student-participants talked about developing their adapting strategies in academic studies. Since the class style in the Western educational system is mainly learner-centered, and there is an emphasis on understanding, application and the ability to integrate learning (Yee, 1989), Chinese international students have to develop some adapting strategies. For instance, Chan (1999) claims that "Long silences in the class-room may not simply be indications that students are refusing to participate, but that they may be thinking about the answers and require more probing and encouragement from tutors" (pp. 302-303).

Although it was hard at the beginning, all the student-participants developed various adapting approaches to adjust to the realities of Canadian academia. There are two main ways as I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. One is Chinese-Canadian adapting type and the other is Canadian adapting type. I am aware that these two types are not

clearly defined with a straight boundary between them and sometimes overlap with each other. Accordingly, among the student-participants, Louis, David and Sonia mostly used the Chinese Canadian adapting strategies; Guo Guo and Josh mostly used the Canadian adapting strategies; and Jane used a combination of the two, demonstrating how these categories are sometimes not so clearly delineated. My purpose in this study is not to judge whether one type is more effective but to explain Chinese international students' particular learning behaviors. In other words and as Josh explained, the different learning ways are more effective in some situations than in others.

Louis shared his adapting strategies as follows,

When I went to class, there were always some Chinese students who came earlier than me. Then they would tell me how to select classes and professors, how to study in and after class. For instance, some professors would provide clear PowerPoint slides and their notes were very easy to understand, in contrast, some professors' classes were very abstract and hard to understand. . . . I would ask the Chinese students in that class if I did not understand. As I said, there were always some Chinese in the class who were here longer than me and they normally got more in the classes. Then I would ask them and we could discuss the assignments and share notes together. And also I compensated for that with more readings.

He is a typical example of what I have labeled the Chinese-Canadian adapting and learning type. In his major, there are many Chinese international students every year and the adapting strategies are developed by those experienced students who have studied for several years. Then newcomers like Louis are introduced and continue using the same adapting strategies. In other words when Louis came, he learned from other Chinese international students in their departments. Normally there are enough learning resources in the Chinese international students' circle. He pointed out that until now he never borrowed books in the library and has not been using university services regularly. A similar thing can be said for Sonia and David. For instance, in David's class most of his classmates were non-Canadian

and sometimes his professors would put individual Canadian students into different groups so that they were not ignored. David worked with other Chinese a lot using their mother language. Therefore, he was not affected by Canadian academic culture when he made efforts to study in Canada.

Some student-participants prefer to develop their Chinese-Canadian adapting type because of their frustrating learning experiences here. Jane gave the writing center in her university as an example. She went there once to improve her paper writing. The staff there told her that her paper was good except for some minor grammar mistakes. Then she submitted her paper to her professor but her professor corrected her mostly for structural problems. She felt that the writing center was not useful for her as an international student, because they did not know what her real writing problems were. As a result she had doubts about relying on some of the university services.

Language barriers are another reason for some student-participants to create the Chinese-Canadian adapting and learning type. David said that when his workload was particularly intense, he wanted to discuss the problems with other Chinese peers because his English was not good. He felt if he tried to communicate with non-Chinese peers, he would waste time on likely misunderstandings.

In some majors, there are fewer Chinese students pursuing their degrees and the knowledge they learn is very much from an Eurocentric academic approach. Therefore, Chinese international students have to learn from other students and adjust to the main Canadian academic culture. Take Guo Guo and Josh for examples. There were no other Chinese international students in their majors and they summarized their adapting strategies

as reading and writing on their own, discussing with classmates and taking advice from professors. “Do the same as Canadian students do”, Guo Guo stated. They are very open to co-operating with other people whenever they have opportunities.

Because of the subject matters, Jane told me she likes to work with Canadian classmates. She also studied about copyright issues for example. There are very different systems in China compared with Canada, such as what kinds of information we are allowed to tell other people and what is supposed to be confidential. Therefore, in her major she needed to work with Canadian students who are familiar with their own Canadian culture rather than fellow Chinese international students who live outside of the culture. In those situations, the Chinese international students’ learning type is closer to that of fellow Canadian students.

iv. Chinese international students' responses to the pedagogy in Canadian universities

In this section Chinese international students' perceptions and critiques of the pedagogy used in Canadian universities are addressed. Most of the previous literature states that there is a difference in academic cultures between Chinese and Canadian universities (e.g. Feng, 1991; Wan, 1996; Lin, 2002; Huang & Klinger, 2006). This difference is sharply recognized as one of the prime concerns for Chinese international students' adaptation and adjustment. There are various forms of pedagogy in Canadian universities such as group work, paper writing, presentations, and examinations. The perceptions from Chinese international students to the pedagogy in Canadian universities are discussed in this section.

1. Group work

Most student-participants recalled that in China teachers did not organize much group work and they did not have much training on how to co-operate in formal group work. This meant that they felt disadvantaged that they hardly had any formal group work learning experience. It is common sense for Chinese students that working independently is the most valuable, for the Chinese educational philosophy encourages them to finish their homework independently as they would do in examination. Group work is merely a study tool.

Most student-participants mentioned that the group work in China was mainly casual and not calculated as part of their final mark for their courses. All of them told me that in China they only did group work once or twice in their 4-year university study, and that most of it was just for the final projects. However when they studied in Canada, group work was important in their final assessment. Furthermore, some student-participants pointed out that

the idea of group work in China is also different than in Canada. Sonia, Josh and Jane described the group work experiences in China as,

Sonia: For most of the group work, the best student in the team did all the experiments and others just wrote the report so we did not actually know what group work is or how to co-operate;

Josh: In China, we competed among groups and we also competed with each other in the same group. We were ready to compete anytime rather than sharing ideas with each other, such as “the idea is mine, not yours”;

Jane: We normally did not share responsibility even in a group and the work end up with either partners doing things separately or one person would finish all the work.

They realized that in that type of group work they did not need to know how to share ideas and negotiate with group members. After doing group work in Canada, their opinions about group work were different. Jane described the experience as follows,

Here (in Canada) people know better how to work together. We all know what to do when we start our projects. Canadians pay more attention to the fairness. If I do more in this part or it is too challenging for me, they will volunteer to share some of the work load with me.

Although Chinese international students had limited experience of co-operation work, and normally could not share their opinions with group members at the beginning of their learning experiences in Canada, in facing this new challenge most the student-participants had positive thing to say. For one thing, they believe by communicating with group members, they can practice their oral English; for another, they all realized that group work is a bonus for study:

Guo Guo: And we did learn something different from different classmates. I had a group member, who's from Japan. She told us [about] the education in Japan. And another classmate, he is a Canadian, but he worked in Nunavut for several years. And he told us [about] a different education. It was interesting;

Sonia: Personally I think one's ability is limited and no student can get all the information from the courses. If two or more work together, we can work out more problems than one can. Even the best student can still learn something from others;

Josh: I can exchange my opinion with others and they can give me suggestions;

Jane: I can find new perspectives from other people through group work;

David: Group work can help me solve the problems in a shorter time. I find some of my classmates are very active in the class and can offer innovated ideas;

Louis: Group work can solve some problems I cannot solve personally. We can share our research with each other.

Guo Guo, Jane and David view group work as a resource for collecting information and they preferred to listen to others rather than express their opinions. Sonia, Louis and Josh believe they should also share their opinions.

When student-participants compared group work and independent study, they all viewed both as equally important. Guo Guo's opinion was, "Both. If you learn independently, you will have time to think more or, what can I say, that word, to *contemplate* that topic. But if you learn socialized [in a more social setting], you are exposed [to] more resources." Similarly, Josh also said, "I like both. I like independent work because I can sit down and read. I can do a little bit of thinking. Then I can change my opinion with others in group work." Jane concluded that, "In a word, they (group work and independent study) can complement with each other."

When I asked all the participants whether they prefer fellow Chinese students as their group members, they all denied that they view nationality as their standard to choose their partners and, even when they do work with Chinese, it is not just because they are "Chinese". Josh argued: "That is a stupid superstition [to say Chinese like to work together]. Some people just like to categorize people into groups. I will not judge people on their nations. You are in Canada now. [An] individual always has something to contribute to groups. I have no preference [for] any nation". And Louis explained his standards, which are also shared by most of the student-participants,

If I choose partners by myself, I would choose either those who are experts in the area we will study in or those who are easy-going and are willing to talk with me.

Some student-participants prefer to work with foreigners, as Guo Guo, David and Jane explain:

Guo Guo: I do like working with foreign country students, because I can learn more;

David: I can practice my English;

Jane: I try my best to avoid working with international students including Chinese, not because of their nationality, but because of the subject matters. Normally the topics professors choose are very Eurocentric or very local and I did not know them at all, therefore I have to find group members who are familiar with the topics.

In my interviews, I also discovered why most of the time Chinese students still worked with fellow Chinese students. Take Louis and David as examples. In their majors most of the students are non-Canadians and Chinese students are always the top students. According to their standards of choosing group members, they normally work with Chinese students. Secondly, there is the language barrier which I mentioned in the second section of this chapter. David said at first he wanted to practice English and he chose non-Chinese for that purpose, but later on he realized the communication problems would sometimes reduce their quality of group work. He then preferred to choose Chinese to secure his study quality. Thirdly, there is still racial discrimination. Guo Guo told me the most impressive group work she could remember was at time her group discussed educational styles in various cities in PRChina. There was a Canadian fellow in her group. His resources and perspectives on PRChina were totally different from hers and they had a disagreement. She felt he was kind of anti-China. In addition Jane's dilemma was that she was the only Chinese international student in her class, and she felt her Canadian classmates were hesitant to work with her. She shared the frustration of her experience as follows,

The difficult part is to find partners when we do group work. Nobody in the class ever asked me to be their partner. Most of time, I have to go and ask if anybody can be my partner. I normally go and ask classmates I think may not have racial discrimination

and seem friendly to Chinese. Sometimes, if I still cannot find a group by myself, I have to ask the professors to find me a group.

2. *Assessment tools at Canadian universities*

In Chinese universities, there are usually two major examinations in a term - the mid-term and final-term. Passing these two examinations means passing the whole course and small quizzes are not crucial to the final result. Therefore in PRChina the examinations become the only assessment tool no matter whether the work is qualitative or quantitative. In Canada, however, professors use various assessment tools such as term papers, presentations and/or examinations. In Canadian universities I discovered, term papers were more important in qualitative courses and examinations were more important in quantitative courses. Qualitative courses are about personal and social experiences which can refer to the subjects such as interactions of human beings and cultures; quantitative courses are based on scientific approaches which refer to numbers and amounts. Presentations are used in most courses. Some researchers find out that because of the language issue Chinese international students have higher academic achievements in quantitative courses than in qualitative courses (Suzuki, 1980; Hsia, 1988). The findings in this study support this. Equally important I discovered that language was not the only reason for it. Unfamiliarity with Canadian academic assessment tools and the subject matters are two other major reasons.

According to all my interviews, student-participants felt they lacked paper writing and presentation skills for studying in Canadian universities. Of the six student-participants five

did not know how to write academic papers or do presentations in class. To my understanding, the lack of familiarity with Canadian academic assessment tools is one of the most important reasons to explain Chinese international students' academic difficulties in different majors.

In some qualitative courses, writing academic papers here is very different from doing so in Chinese universities. Here we are expected to adhere to certain styles and papers weigh more in the assessment of one's academic success. Jane explained that "in China, we think we should use our own opinion to write the papers, but here we need to refer to former researchers to support our own studies." Because of the language differences and lack of experiences with professional writing training, all the student-participants have lower academic writing skills in English than Canadian students at the beginning. Jane continued:

In China, references are not that important; while here they are key elements for a paper. At first, I did not cite from other papers, but then professors would ask me how to prove my points. Later on, I knew I had to use other people's opinions to support mine, and know where to find references and how to use a database. However, in the first term, I did not know all these things at all.

However, Louis and David both pointed out that in their majors, which mostly require quantitative courses, they only wrote some reports with very simple sentences and equations. That is similar to what they did in Chinese universities. Louis adds, "[And] grammar and references are not that important".

With regards to presentations, most student-participants recalled that in China they only did formal presentations for the final oral defense of their dissertations or projects. Clearly none of them had any presentation training before arriving in Canada. Louis recalled his first presentation in Canada,

I was extremely nervous at the beginning. As you know, I did not do any (presentations) in China and presentations are like giving talks in public. At first, I just read out what I could see in the slides. Later on, I learned how to do presentations through listening to other people and understanding [how to do] them on my own.

Examinations at Canadian universities are also different from ones in Chinese universities. Canadian examinations have more open-ended questions for students to express their own opinions. Tom, one of the professor-participants, explained that even in computer science there were ten ways to solve one problem and he often asked students to use their own ways to explain things. However, Chinese international students are accustomed to repeating their professors' ways and did not create their own. Therefore, even though they had lots of examination experience within China they could not do well in certain parts of the examinations in Canadian universities. Louis provided his opinion:

In China, professors told us the outlines before the exams. We would memorize the exact information they provided and write on the exam sheets. Here (in Canada) some professors did the same thing, but most of them do not only test the knowledge we got from the class, but also test how we apply that knowledge in research. It was really hard on me. At the beginning, I did it the same way as I always did in China. But I did not do well in the exams, because I didn't know how to extend the information I got from the class.

3. Ask or answer questions

Participation is important in Canadian universities. However to some professors participation does not only mean to show up in class but also means speaking up in class. According to various studies and the professor-participants, Chinese international students tend to be quiet in class (Chang, 1996; Phillips et al., 2002; Zhou, Knoke & Sakamoto, 2005). Hence Chinese international students might not get good participation marks, simply because they do not speak up in class. In this section the student-participants help to explain the silence of Chinese international students.

Based on the interviews all the student-participants seldom asked or answered questions in class back in China. In previous studies, Chinese international students are stereotyped as silent students in the class because of their shyness (Turner & Hiraga, 1996; Heggins III & Jackson, 2003). In this study, all student-participants did not agree to “shyness” as the only explanation and thought “it is stupid to say so” (Josh). In conclusion I found out that language barriers, academic cultural differences, moral education in PRChina, and the nature of the subjects are the main reasons for what is perceived as their silence.

Most student-participants mentioned that their time in class was very limited and they had to spend most of the time trying to comprehend the context of the classes. Guo Guo said, “I still do not ask a lot of questions in the class. I guess, most of time I concentrate on catching what my classmates and teachers are talking about, so I do not have time to ask questions.” Chinese students prefer taking notes most of the time because they can review and think about them after class. However, language barrier is narrowing due to the fact that Teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) education is blooming in China now. Tom and Katya Drysdale, two of the professor-participants, both stated that back in the 1980s Chinese international students did not have as good a level of English skills as they do now; they have a better sense of grammars and listening skills. Tom recalled his experience with Chinese international students twenty years ago and said “They did not have grammar skills like they have now. I know some of them copied notes from other Chinese students after class. Now I think they can understand me in class.” Compared with their counterparts in 1980s, they have had a better language education before they arrive in Canada. But still their language skills need to be improved in order to join in the discussions in class.

Some studies also showed that the teacher-student relationships and different classroom cultures are major causes of the cross-cultural learning challenges (Feng, 1991; Guo, 1996; Philips et al, 2002; Lin, 2002). In my study I try to connect those issues, particularly to explain the silence of Chinese international students. There are significant differences between being silenced and being silent. These student-participants are taught in moral education in PRChina that the teacher-student relationship should be very strict. Teachers are 100% powerful in this relationship. Most Chinese students are not allowed to question or challenge their teachers when they grow up. Teachers are to be respected and students must show their respect and admiration by listening carefully and being good students, as in well-behaved. For instance, my mother was a primary school teacher thirty years ago and she was always proud of being a good teacher. She would say that in her class all the pupils were so quiet that they could clearly hear a dropped needle. Sonia also explained that:

In China, teachers normally do not allow us ask questions in class because they are very busy with delivering course contents. They are expected to teach everything in class rather than leave problems to students after class. Therefore, they wanted to control students and were not willing to be interrupted. Anyway, teachers just did not encourage us to talk in the class from the time we were very young. We got used to this idea- DO NOT MAKE SOUNDS IN CLASS.

In other words, student-participants were silenced all the time by Chinese teachers when they grew up. As a result, Chinese students did not develop their critical thinking skills because no one ever teaches Chinese international students to question the information and opinions which are passed on by the teachers so they generally believe that these are 100% correct (Lin, 2002; Huang & Klinger, 2006). In Chinese educational philosophy, the teachers' responsibility is to pass the knowledge on to the students and the students' responsibility is to comprehend what they receive from the teachers. However, as Margaret, one of the

professor-participants stated, in Canada professors were ready to be challenged and they expected students to have their own opinions.

Another big concern for Chinese international students in class also comes from moral education in PRChina (Chang, 1996; Zhang, 1999). They see some personalities as more valuable than others- those who show sensitivity to other people's feelings, who are humble and know how to save face. In Chinese culture, scholars are admired for having those personalities. They believe "Tian1 Wai4 You3 Tian1, Ren 2 Wai4 You3 Ren 2" (There is endless sky, there are endless oracles), which means there are always people somewhere who know more than you. Also, Chinese students are taught that "the bird that stands out will be shot first" and "the taller tree will catch the wind first" (Pratt, 1992, pp.303). Hence Chinese students are told not to be too proud of themselves. They are silent and keep their opinions within their minds. Sonia's experience, which is shared by Josh, is that:

When I answer a question, I also think about other issues besides the question itself. For instance, am I showing off? What should I do if I have the wrong answer? Why do those good students not answer the question? When I have a question, I am hesitant to ask. Because I am afraid that my question is a stupid question or that there are already people who know the answer. I normally think about other people's feelings.

Josh described the difference as follows:

But in Western [Canadian] culture, from my understanding, people need to talk. For instance, if you buy something, you don't talk to the sellers; they might think that you are an awkward customer. They don't know what you want or whether you are with them or not. People just need to talk. People here just want others to know what their feelings are.

Some student-participants claimed the class size as a significant difference in the classroom culture. Most of them told me that in China they have large classes and the large size class would have over 200 students. In such big classes, Josh said it was impossible to

raise questions. However, in graduate level class here, there are normally very small class sizes- around 20 or less. There is time for all individuals to participate.

In addition, the nature of the subjects is mentioned as a major concern, especially in social, education and humanity programmes. Guo Guo explained that:

I do not think Chinese students do not ask or answer questions in class because they are shy. I do believe there are shy people and that is their personality. But it is not only because of their shyness that they do not answer questions. It is really the language barrier and the nature of the subjects. Sometimes, when a professor asked me a question, I have to say 'pardon, pardon' several times. Especially when they said idioms, I did not really understand what they were talking about. I consider myself as a talkative person in China. But when I raised a question, I did not know which word I should use for my things, I just give up; even when I expressed what I wanted to say, but nobody understood me or responded me, I had to give up again. Sometimes, my classmates talk about the schools, policies in Nova Scotia. They know the situation here, but I did not know and I had no opinions to share.

Josh also agreed: "I think one of the reasons is subject matter. There are things I am not familiar with, and I do not want to embarrass myself in front of people".

Although student-participants still did not ask or answer questions as often as Canadian students, they all agreed that the frequency of asking and answering questions increased considerably after arriving in Canada. In my study, I discovered that the classroom environment is very important and if all the students talk, it is more likely that the Chinese international students also start to talk. There are some situations when Chinese international students feel comfortable talking. For example, Josh told me that he likes private communication with classmates or professors. Or when professors broke the whole class into small groups, he felt he could more freely give comments or ask questions than when he spoke in front of the whole class. However, in other situations, it is hard to break the ice in class. For instance, Sonia told me that in her class nobody ever asks or answers

questions. In that case, it was impossible for her to speak, because she thought it was important to be perceived as “normal” as everyone else in class.

v. *The relationship with professors and peers*

1. *Relationship with professors*

When I interviewed Sonia, Sonia described an interesting phenomenon on campus in Canada. She said that,

In China, we care about age and admiration very much. We assume that elder people are normally the people who have more knowledge and should be respected. Therefore, we can clearly separate students and teachers on campus in China. It was so easy to separate them as if they were labeled. However, when I walked on campus here (in Canada), I could hardly distinguish who are professors and who are students. It is very interesting to me, maybe because of my education background.

In fact, the professor-student relationship in China is influenced by Chinese culture as previously discussed. The relationships among people in China are easily known to the public by various titles they call each other. Chinese people call their relatives by their relationships not by their first name such as “first brother” or “second sister” rather than Tom or Jane. Another example is that at work Chinese people call their boss by their titles such as “manager” rather than by his/her first name. The same thing happens in the professor – student relationship in China. Chinese students add “teacher” or “professor” with professors’ last names to show their relationships and respect. In Chinese culture, only friends call each other by their first names. However, in Canadian culture people always call each other by their first names. Therefore, that can cause a misunderstanding among Chinese international students. Most student-participants believed Canadian students have better relationship with professors because they call each other by their first name like friends. However, Josh disagreed and explained that “It is superficial. It is like when you see people in the street, saying hello to each other. But it does not mean they know each other. It is just the thing people do here. There is no preference over any other person.” All the

professor-participants agreed that there is no big difference between their relationship with a Canadian or a Chinese student.

Some professors discover that Chinese international students tend to keep their distance and are hesitant to talk with them. Guo Guo told me that,

Canadians do communicate with professors more, through email or telephones. They often sit at the cafeteria and talk to each other. But I do not like. I just cannot do that while I am a student. when I am a student, I know teachers are nice, but I do not want to get too close to them, to some of the teachers. I really do not know the reason.

Guo Guo considered her professor-student relationship in a formal one even though she feels more comfortable with a casual one. I think this can be explained by their moral educational background in China (Chang, 1996). The professor-student relationship is reflected in how people address each other, and as I explained in the previous chapter, Chinese students are taught to keep a certain distance with teachers taking their studies very seriously (Guo, 1996). Consequently, “In China, it is impossible to call professors by their first names” (David), no matter how close students and professors may be. And Chinese international students call professors with their titles to show their respect and anxiety to the professors.

Margaret, a professor-participant, told me that some other professors complained to her that Chinese international students rarely came to their offices during the academic term. There are two reasons. On one side, Chinese international students are not used to questioning professors because of their learning experiences in China, which is well understood by most professors. On the other side, in fact Chinese international students always want to show their best side to professors in order to “save face”. And they think if they do not meet their professors often, there will be fewer conflicts between them.

Therefore, the professor's offices would be the last place they would think of if they wanted to solve a problem. Even if they go and ask a question, they will first measure whether their issue is too simple or whether it has come up in class. They need to preserve a good impression of themselves to their professors. Jane described one of her experience with professors,

At the beginning, when I went to ask some questions, they would say they already taught these in class and ask me why I did not know. I was shocked and felt myself so stupid at that time. Later on, unless necessary, I never went to professors' offices.

In a word, 5 of 6 student-participants concluded that they have a distant and more formal relationship with most professors except their supervisors. All of them prefer the professors who take the initiative in talking with them and are willing to help them over those who seem to be unapproachable.

2. Relationship with peers

According to the interviews, the student-participants' relationship with their peers is for the most part distant and exists only in the classroom. Most of them ascribe this mainly to cultural and age differences. All of the student-participants are from PRChina, which is considered a communist country, while Canada is a democratic country. They speak Chinese and are exposed to Asian culture. In Halifax, local people speak English and are influenced by North American culture. The hobbies, living styles and the foods they consume are totally different. This lack of commonalities makes communication between these two groups of people even more difficult. Jane told me a story,

For instance, one of my classmates once did a presentation on "multi-language book collections in the library". He said, "we [English-speaking people and you other] do not share the same language, therefore it is impossible for us to become friends."

Maybe he said this without thinking, but I felt that in their mind English-speaking students think we are different. I think they want us to adjust into their culture but they do not make an effort to understand us.

In fact, other Chinese international students shared the same opinion that cultural and language barriers are impossible to get over, and that it is better to stay with their own people. David said, “It is very normal to get close with our own people. I prefer Chinese because there are not many misunderstandings so they are easier to get along with.” In Canada, especially in the Atlantic region, the mainstream society is a very powerful “white” society. Other nationalities including Chinese, Indian or Middle Eastern are in the minority ethnic groups, which are positioned more equally with each other than with the mainstream society. In order to protect themselves and avoid conflicts, Chinese stay in their own group or get close with other minority groups. Louis said he is close with mainly Chinese and Indians and they could talk about the cultural and lifestyle differences between China and India. In other words, as Louis explained, he and his Indian peers were more interested in knowing each other’s cultures and knew how to appreciate them.

Margaret also mentioned in her observations that although Canadian students are interested in other cultures, they are hesitant to talk with international students from other cultures. Age differences also affect this relationship. All the student-participants are 24-28 years old. Jane explained that, “My classmates are all around their thirties and most of them have former working experiences. I felt that I cannot join in their conversation on stocks, the economy or babies.” Consequently, most student-participants maintained a strained relationship with their white classmates and hardly develop friendships.

vi. Differences in required English skills and in examinations across subjects of study

In this study I believe that the difference between Canadian and Chinese education systems in the social and humanities programmes such education, sociology and political science is bigger than in some science programmes such as engineering, mathematics or computer science. In other words, student-participants in education, business or so received more of an educational shock than others. Therefore, the discussions in this section are very diverse depending on different majors the students are undertaking. In science programmes, Louis and David both told me that because in their majors they have their own language such as equations and symbols which are all the same both in Canada and in China, a lack of English language skills is not a problem for them because they only use simple grammar and sentences.

In the social and humanities programmes, it is totally different. The ideas have to be explained in English so the English writing skills are much more important. Some of the student-participants express their opinions as follows,

Guo Guo: I do think content is more important, but if you did not write the sentence in the right way, it may cause misunderstandings. Know more about grammars is really important;

Sonia: The knowledge is like the water and your mouth is like a tap. You may have enough water, but if you cannot open the tap, the water coming out is only small amount; in contrast, if you have little water, even when you fully open the tap, the water coming out is still a small amount;

Josh: To me, on one side, if you do not have good ideas, even your writing is like Shakespeare's, there is no use because we are writing for profession. On the other side, if your English is not good, even you have brilliant ideas, people cannot get it.

Obviously, these student-participants agree both English writing skills and the content of one's papers are important. However, as I analyzed in the previous chapter, all the

student-participants seldom get professional English writing training even though they major in English. Their English writing skills were very limited when they came to Canada. Some student-participants felt frustrated because of this disadvantage.

All the professor-participants also observed that Chinese international students have lower English writing skills than the average Canadian students. For instance, Katya Drysdale and Tom both mentioned that Chinese international students do well in answering questions which can be memorized. And they are not good at answering open-ending questions, because the answers of those questions are flexible and unpredictable. Tom explains that one reason is because “Chinese international students are not use to this kind of questions”. In China, almost all the examinations require recalling knowledge memorized by students, and do not test students’ ability to apply this knowledge. I believe this is reinforced by their lack of English writing and reading skills. Katya Drysdale pointed out that,

There are some short answer questions and there are a lot of [other questions needed to be understood what I am asking]. Because I do not ask question that is easy to memorize, it is more that you have to figure out what I am asking. I think it is not a question about intelligence, but a question about the understanding of the language. After the exams, they will bring the questions to me and once they understand the questions, they know the answer.

I think even when Chinese international students understand the examination questions, they still have to express their opinions and organize their sentences and leave time to edit their grammar. Because of having to address these concerns during a set time frame, they sometimes have to rush to fill up in the examination paper but with less consideration for content.

vii. Assessment at Canadian universities

“Fairness” is very important in the assessment of students’ work and Canadian professors try to treat every student equally. But what is fair and how to be fair in international education are seldom mentioned in previous researches. Margaret stated, in her observation, Chinese international students concentrate much more on studying than the average Canadian students. In Chinese culture, students have been encouraged to spend 100% of time on study since primary school. As most of the student-participants were growing up, especially during their high school years, they only had two places to go: home and school. Take Guo Guo as an example, her classes always started at 8 am and finished at 7 pm every weekday in her high school. After she went back home, she normally did her homework until 11 pm. Student-participants were more sensitive about the final marks from their study. To them their marks reflected their success or failure. In other words if they put in a lot of effort but cannot achieve what they think they could get, due to negative cross-cultural learning influence such as the language barrier understandably, they can become deeply frustrated. Jane, for instance, said, “I studied from the moment I woke up and to 1:00 AM or 2:00 AM almost everyday through the academic term but my marks were still around or below average. I did not know why but I tried my best and I was very upset about that.”

In the literature, researchers such as Heggins III & Jackson mention that Chinese students often have higher levels of achievement because of their Chinese educational backgrounds in science programmes. This is rarely mentioned in social science, humanities programmes. In Wan’s (2001) study, one of the participants talked about her experience. She was asked to write an essay in class within a limited time, but she could not finish it on

time because she was writing in English which is her second language. However, her professor would not give her extra time because he/she thought it was not fair to other students. In contrast, the student thought it was not fair to her either. Jane shared similar learning experiences and said,

In my view, I do not feel this kind of thing is fair because our (Chinese and English speaking students) starting places are totally different. However, the professors seem to think all the students start at the same level and should be treated equally. They never think about us as international students in our position. For example, I did an assignment and because of my mistakes in citation, the professor gave me three deductions in my assignment. Probably he did not know I did not know what citation was at all until I came here.

And again on the subject of marks for participation, some of Jane's professors gave her as B or B- for participation because she showed up every class but did not speak regularly in class. Nowadays people understand there are different kinds of students. Some of them like talking in class but some do not. Assessment of students' participation in Canadian universities, it would appear need to be redefined. According to my study, most of these negative learning experiences can happen when there is a big academic gap or language barrier in the subject matter or when professors do not have experience with Chinese international students. When all of the professor-participants talked about their means of assessment, they said they were aware of certain disadvantages international student including Chinese face in cross-cultural learning. They try various ways to interpret what is fair. Margaret said that although she considers English writing skills as very important for her assignments, "the English writing skill is related to your application of ideas here and it becomes part of our assessment", she has a different standard for international students, particularly those who speak English as a second language. For instance, she continued that, "This year, I have a student (Chinese undergraduate international student) whose English is

so bad that if anybody who is an English speaker wrote that way, they would fail. But I would not fail the student”. But she also added that there is still a “bottom line” even for international students. Tom said he does not deduct for spelling and grammar in examinations as long as he can understand their meaning. And if his graduate students write theses, he would send some of these students to the writing centre to get the grammar corrected. Katya Drysdale pointed out that she does not care about the grammar too much in examinations, unless someone’s examination papers are full of red marks, or she “might take maybe 2 points off” (Katya Drysdale). But she would try her best to correct as much as she can so that students can get feedback to help them improve.

viii. Differences between Chinese and Canadian universities

“University” as a concept came from Western countries to the Chinese educational system in the eighteenth century (Chen, 2005). Although Chinese modern universities take North American universities as models, especially the setting up of various departments and the administration system, their character is very much Chinese formalized (Chen, 2005). I have identified there are seven major differences.

First of all, according to the student-participants, the purposes of studying in universities are different. In China, most students study only for the credentials of a degree not for their own interests. In fact, when they take the national university entrance examination and apply for various majors, it is usually their parents who decide what majors their children should be in and the children know little of what they will do in those programmes.

Sometimes parents’ choices may not reflect the children’s interests. Therefore, even after they are enrolled, students may not have a clear personal purpose for their studies. In Canada, I believe the purpose of studying in universities is often to discover new knowledge and explore one’s interests. For instance, David told me that,

In Canada it is positive learning. For my interests, I will preview and also review all the things before and after the class. Here I read a lot and then find problems and then look for more books to read to solve the problems and then new problems come out. In China, it is negative learning. I never previewed the class and I would only review what teachers taught in class.

Secondly, all student-participants stated there is an examination-driven learning style in their Chinese universities. As I mentioned briefly in the previous chapter Guo Guo also told me about her learning style in China which is also shared by the other students,

In Chinese universities, we just took classes and wrote examinations. You only need to take the last several classes and the teacher would tell you the key points for the exam. You just need to prepare for that part and then you can pass the examinations. I really

do not like that style, because we really learn nothing. And after the examinations, we just threw everything away, because that was just the short memory and the material only remained in our memory for a short time.

As a result, their study relied on mostly the teachers. They took notes about what teachers said and did not need to do their own research. However, in Canadian universities most student-participants are self-directed, which is a reflection of the interest-driven learning style.

Guo Guo continued to describe,

But in Canadian universities you got many experiences of preparing the presentations, many writings and we have to force ourselves to read more, learn more. So by that way, we do learn some during our educational experiences. We will pay more attention to what we learn and we learn things consistently, when we choose courses we are interested in.

David added that,

Here, it is impossible to get good mark without reading and studying by myself. Some of my friends (Chinese international students) now still keep the same learning style as before. But they do not get good marks here. One main reason is that we have mid-term, final-term and also several small assignments such as reports all through the whole term. We have to work hard all the time rather than studying in last few classes.

Thirdly, the teaching strategies are generally quite different in both Chinese and Canadian universities. Sonia explained that, "In China, teachers pass information to students, just one way." Guo (1996) refer to this as "duck feeding" (para 26). And David continued that, "Teachers would give us all the answers for the examinations in the last few classes for memorization. If you go and ask questions, they would tell the solutions directly." However, here teachers pay more attention to their communication with students, which is "teacher-student interactive" (Sonia). David said,

When I have problems, I will consult with my supervisor. Even then, my supervisor here will only tell me where to find books that can help me solve the problems, but does not tell me directly how to solve it. I still need to work independently.

Fourthly, the ways of the assessment are dramatically different. Here again I have to emphasize that generally speaking, in the Chinese education system, examinations are the

only assessment tool from kindergarten to university. Therefore, along with the knowledge we have to learn from various subjects, we learned examination skills such as how to organize our time in order to finish on time or which part of the questions should be done first. Most of the time, the purpose of the study is to get higher marks in the examinations rather than applying knowledge. In Canada, various assessment tools are used to measure the quality of the education. Guo Guo claimed that,

Here, they have how many percent for attendance, how many for paper, how many for presentation and how many for discussion. However, in China it is just score, final score for the final examination. If you pass the examination, you pass the course; if not, then.....[you fail].

David added that,

..... professors divide the mark for these assignments. They evaluate students overall not only for their ability to take exams. The assignments here are also very different from the ones we did in China Here the exams are not as important as in China.

Fifthly, when Josh shared his experiences, he told me that compared to Canadian universities Chinese universities have a smaller amount of educational resources. He explained that, “Apparently, there are more educational resources, [but] less population here. In Canada, you can be specialized and do your little research.” In contrast, Sonia thinks that there are actually enough educational resources in China, although it often appears not. She explained that is because “we do not know how to organize and co-ordinate that.” For instance, when we were students in PRChina, students could only borrow books from their own library, and the libraries in universities rarely shared their resources with others in China. In Canada, libraries in universities are more open to the public. Students here can borrow books online from other libraries all over Canada.

Sixthly, in China, as I mentioned before, students are encouraged to focus on study.

Therefore, there is not much access to programmes for relaxation and universities do not organize leisure activities very often. Louis finds out that,

There are more social activities and clubs in my university. Although normally we are very busy with study, I know some Chinese students who only, after when they graduated and started working, had time for leisure activities. Then they joined in some clubs they were interested in.

The last but the most important, all student-participants find they have more freedom in Canadian universities than in Chinese universities. For instance, it is hard to change majors once you get into a university in China, while in Canada it is very easy to do in Canada.

The opinions are shared as follows,

Guo Guo: More, here in Canada, we can choose courses, so whatever we choose is what we are interested in. However, in China, every course is designed and required. We do not have any choice. Here like we still have time to drop the courses we do not like after we even start the courses. But it will never happen in China. Well, I cannot say it will never happen, but until now I have not heard about that;

Sonia: The curriculum design is standard [in China]. I remember we do not have many elective classes. Most of courses are already settled down since your first day in this university. I stayed with the same classmates for four years. Here, if you ask a student, who is your classmate, they will say I do not have the same classmate for four-years through;

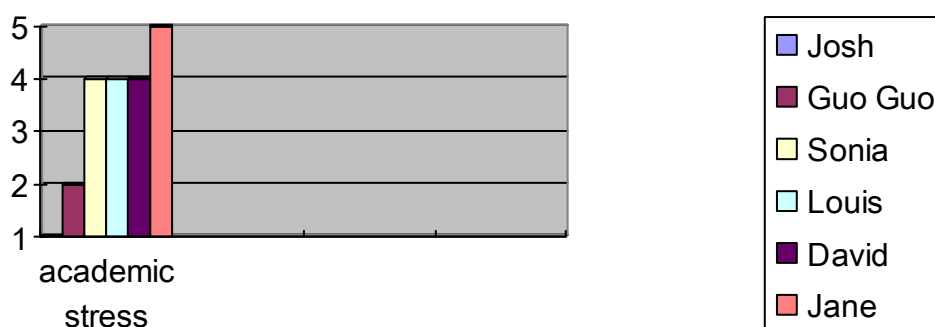
Josh: There are more free styles and not very organized classroom [in Canada]. They encourage you to say whatever you think and speak for yourself. Tell what you think and what you want even if that is very ridiculous. As soon as you can provide evidence to prove that, you can pass the course. While in China the only way to pass a course is to reach instructors' requirements. Here it is looser and more individualized;

David: It is very free to study here. I mean class schedule is very flexible and I can choose what kind of research or class I want to do. Whether you can get a good mark or can graduate on time depends on your willingness. Class is very casual. Some people stop professors in the middle of the class; people can answer the phone and can go to the washroom; people even bring food and eat in class.

Based on these opinions, I conclude that the two higher educational systems are two opposite poles. In a word, Canadian universities are much more democratic.

ix. Academic stress

I use level 1 to 5 to represent the level of stress felt by the student-participants. (1 = no stress, while 5 = the highest level of stress). All student-participants felt a certain level of stress: Josh is in level 1; Guo Guo is in level 2; Tony is in level 4; Louis is in level 4; David is in Level 4; Jane is in level 5.



I found 4 of 6 student-participants felt academic stress above level 3. For the student-participants the more frustrating the experiences are, the higher the level of stress they have. For instance, Jane said that she was stressed out and even cried several times at the beginning. In her interview, she explained that she faced more of the difficulties which affect the quality of cross-cultural learning as discussed in my studies than others; the gap between Canadian and Chinese academy in her major, the cultural differences associated with the nature of her major, and the misunderstandings among her professors and classmates. For instance, she was hunting for jobs last summer, but because she lacked Canadian work experience and due to her status as an international student, she could not get off-campus jobs, not even interviews. She told me that she tried all the possibilities which her department posted on the website. When she went to ask for help from her advisor, he/she could not

understand her and still thought the reason why she could not find a job was because she did not check out the jobs he/she posted on the website.

The better English skills the student-participants have, the lower level of stress they have. Josh and Guo Guo graduated from English related majors in China and have better English communication skills than others. Therefore, they feel more comfortable adjusting to the English-spoken environment.

x. *Conceptions about their cross-cultural learning experiences*

1. Chinese sayings

At the end of each interview, I asked the student-participants to conclude their cross-cultural learning experiences with Chinese sayings. I collected all of them with translations as follows,

Guo Guo said, “吃的苦中苦，方为人上人”. It means if you are willing to take the hardship, to participate in it and continue what you have stated, finally you will have an achievement. This is her motto since she was in junior high school.

Sonia said, “喜忧参半”. It means the whole cross-cultural learning experience is mixed with half happiness and half worry.

Josh said, “自由的学，快活的学，快乐的合作，从学习中体会到乐趣”. It means to study in the free field, study for fun, and study for yourself and let’s have fun. Josh had very positive attitude, which might be the reason why his academic stress was the lowest.

Louis said, “三人行必有我师”. It means there will always be something a person can learn from others when three people walk together.

Jane said, “路漫漫兮其修远，吾将上下而求索”. It means that the journey is long; our searching is up and down.

David said, “适者生存”. It means that only people who can adapt to the environment around them can eventually survive.

According to their expressions above, most student-participants appreciate their cross-cultural learning experiences. For instance, Guo Guo told me that one of her purposes for studying abroad was to extend her views. She commented positively that, “It is helpful

for my personal development. I learned things from another culture. I think I can use this experience for teaching when I go back to China. I will bring a different perspective to my friends.” Although Guo Guo, Sonia, David and Jane implied that the cross-cultural learning experiences were hardworking and time-consuming journeys, Guo Guo and Louis believed that because their journeys were full of adventures, they learned more things than they would have imagined.

2. Conceptions about their cross-cultural learning experiences

Some of my participants also talked about gender differences. Margaret found out from her experiences that female Chinese international students are more likely to communicate with professors and Canadian students than male Chinese international students. She said that so far she has not had any male Chinese international students coming to her office. However, David provided another very interesting perspective on this issue. He felt many people were more willing to communicate with female Chinese international students. He commented, “Professors would think females are a weaker group and need help. I always see Canadian boys say hello to Chinese girls directly, but never see them do that to Chinese males, nor do Canadian girls. I feel that Chinese males are an isolated group.” According to my study, there is less communication between Chinese males and the mainstream Canadian society. On one hand, pride is one of the male characteristics, and possibly they tend not to show their problems to others. On the other side, there is the stereotype that the male is always independent and strong enough to solve his problems. However, in my

interviews it was clear that Chinese males are eager to get help and interact as much as Chinese females.

Some student-participants felt they do not belong in the Canadian universities and the society in general. Jane told me that she did not feel she belonged to the university because she felt lonely and had no friends. She felt she was only a guest and now tries her best just to finish her studies so that she could start “a new life”. As international students they complained that they could not get as much help as immigrants or Canadian citizens. For instance, public libraries often offer language programmes for immigrants, residents and even visitors, but exclude international students. Again, it is very difficult for international students in certain majors to find jobs either for a practicum or after graduation, because lots of jobs are open only for residents and immigrants. In contrast, all my student-participants paid almost double the tuition fees and made a contribution to the local economy. I feel it would be fairer if they got the service they paid for. For instance, although universities arrange some social activities to help students make friends such as parties, some of my student-participants felt they could not make friends in that kind of situation. Louis said, “On the one hand, I did not have much time to go to parties; on the other, I could not talk with people in such noisy place. I normally went there alone and came back alone.” Again, once I talked with a Japanese international student at Dalhousie University, he said he had many language problems when writing papers. When he went to the writing center, he was told to be fair and that every student only had half an hour each time. He told the people that half an hour was too short for him, but they responded that if he wanted, he could make another appointment, however he was too late for his paper’s deadline.

III. Professor-participants

I interviewed four professors who have long-time teaching experiences with Chinese international students in both undergraduate and graduate levels. Margaret is a female professor in Canadian Studies; Katya Drysdale is a female professor in Business; Dr Don is a male professor in Business; and Tom is a male professor in Computer Science. They mostly talked about their interactions with Chinese international students from their own point of view. Their perspectives helped me understand the learning experiences of Chinese international students in Canadian universities from various angles.

All four professor-participants discovered that there are academic differences between Chinese international students and Canadian students. First of all, Chinese international students concentrate more on studying and achieving high marks compared to the average Canadian students and their definition of being successful students is clear defined, which I have already discussed in the previous chapter. Margaret expressed a common opinion among the professors:

We have a sense that they [Chinese international students] are very much focused on achieving high scores and high grades to achieve success while in this country. Our students [Canadian students] decide their success by being all-round people. So they are involved in community affairs, volunteering, or involved in student politics. They are also involved in their studies, plus they might have jobs. So getting a high mark does not become a determining force.

In my opinion, there are different ideas about what a “student” really is at university. As I noted previously, in Chinese academic culture, scores from examinations are everything for a student, and quantitative assessment is frequently used from kindergarten to university to assess students. Therefore, students in China are told to focus on their studies all of the time. However, in Canada, as Margaret said, scores do not mean everything and being involved in

social aspects is also valuable. For instance, in China for students to be enrolled in universities depends entirely their scores from the National University Entrance Examination, while in Canada references are very important for gaining admittance along with the marks to universities.

Secondly, based on their various teaching and supervising experiences with Chinese international students, professor-participants all agreed that Chinese international students, because of their cultural and educational background, do not challenge or question their professors very much. Margaret shared her experiences:

We have the expectation that Chinese students are reticent to criticize their elders or to criticize opinions. They may, in their own minds, be critical of what they have heard and want to say something, but they won't speak out. We think they are trained in that way, culturally and politically not to question an authority while in this country. I think we are probably completely at the other end of the spectrum. We go to a class almost expecting to be questioned as a faculty member. We are very comfortable to be challenged.

Tom also found that Chinese international students defer to him too much. He discovered that his Chinese students would always guess what he wanted rather than finding their own way. Even when there are ten ways of doing one project, his students would ask him which way he expects and never question his way of doing it. He told me that,

They are trying to do what they think I want. Very often what I want is for them to explore. They keep asking me what you want in this. This is an assignment. I will say it depends. They will say do you mean this, this or this? I will say you tell me what this is and defend your position on it.

In other words, professors in Canada expect their opinions to be challenged and they encourage students to create their own ideas in their professional areas. Through discussions, professors can know students better and then give proper guidance. In contrast, Chinese international students do not share their opinions. They are normally well prepared

for what professors want or teach but not used to sharing their own ideas. In that situation, professors can hardly know whether Chinese international students understand or not.

Thirdly, among the professor-participants, there were various opinions about how often Chinese international students come to their office for help. Margaret and Tom shared the similar experience that Chinese international students come to their office less often than Canadian students. Margaret also pointed out that there were more female Chinese students coming to her office than male students. Both of them notice that “they [Chinese international students] have been trained that way; an old fashion way by Canadian practices” (Margaret). Tom also claimed that, “it could be that they [Chinese international students] are afraid to think they do not know anything if they are coming for help.” However, Katya Drysdale and Dr Don felt that international students, in general, came to their office more often than average Canadian students, because, “they [international students including Chinese] want to make sure they understand, but also in many cases they want to do well” (Katya Drysdale).

Fourthly, the professor-participants all assert that Chinese international students did not have much experience with the pedagogy at Canadian universities such as presentations, group works or examinations. For instance, Tom and Katya Drysdale felt Chinese international students did well in quantitative work especially anything involving mathematics but had problems when they were required to present and support their ideas such as “tell me your opinion and support it” (Katya Drysdale). Katya Drysdale thinks that it is still “a question about the understanding of the language”. She often asked questions which are more about the students having to figure out what she was asking. Tom said,

“They [Chinese international students] are really concerned and want to know which one [the solution of the problem] I should use” in terms of answering open-ending questions, while Tom expected they could pick an answer and find their own ways to support it. For another instance, Tom told me that he felt Chinese international students did not have presentation training and did not know what to expect at the beginning of the term. He normally would arrange that a Canadian group start first to show others what a presentation should be like. Katya Drysdale also found out that sometimes because of lack of confidence about their oral English communication skill, Chinese international students seldom appear to be the main speaker for group presentations.

Fifthly, when professor-participants talked about their general relationship with Chinese international students, most of them considered that they had quite formal relationships. However, they have different perspectives about these formal relationships with students. Katya Drysdale told me that she likes to keep more formal during the semester with students in general. After the semester, she said she still kept in touch with her former students, at which time it would be more like a friendship. But, Margaret tried to create a more casual environment for Chinese international students so that they can feel comfortable about going to her office and sharing their own opinions. Tom said in his classes Chinese international students always kept their distance from him and never sought his help. However, in his lab where there is a less formal teaching-learning relationship Chinese international students were more eager to talk or even argued with him.

Sixthly, the professor-participants have different perspectives about the importance of English writing skills in academic assessment. For instance, Margaret said that professional

writing skills are related to the application of ideas in academic study. She said in terms of writing, readers not only comment on the content, but also on the way of expressing the writing ideas, e.g. whether ideas are expressed in a professional way. In contrast, some other professor-participants such as Tom and Dr. Don asserted that as soon as they can understand the content, the mechanics of grammar do not concern them at all. They did not consider that is part of academic studies.

Last but not least, general speaking, all the professor-participants agreed that Chinese international students do better in quantitative courses than qualitative ones. However, because of the examine-driven and mathematics-centered curriculum in PRChina (Yee, 1989), most Chinese students mostly use “the surface approach” such as memorizing and repeating. In other words, Chinese students are exposed to as teacher-centered methods which have stressed the need to know many factual details. For instance, the mathematics course in Chinese basic education curriculum is very intensive. I compared mathematics’ curriculums in both China and Canada and found out that in junior high schools Chinese students already finish the mathematics’ curriculum that Canadian students have to learn in senior high schools. Hence Chinese students have to spend their time to repeat the information passed by teachers. Thus, when Chinese international students go abroad and study in the Western-cultural classroom, they continue their normal learning approaches and have some disillusion about teachers who do not expect detailed outlines or memorized information. However, in most qualitative courses, according to Margaret, it is more important to explain or analyze the facts than to just memorize them.

Chapter Five: Findings, Recommendations and Limitation

In this chapter, the summary of findings and recommendations will be provided. Some of the findings are in accordance with the previous literature and others are newly published. According to these findings, I believe my recommendations for both university policy-makers and educators can improve the international educational environment in Canada: They aim to improve the quality of life for both international students and Canadian-born students. Meantime the recommendations for Chinese international students can help them shorten their process of adjustment to Canadian universities. And in this last section, I will discuss the limitations of this study and the potential for further research.

I. Summary of Findings

This study shows that international students have a variety of learning experiences in Canada. Because Chinese international students transfer from the Chinese learning environment to a totally different learning environment, they need to have courage, determination, and persistence in order to achieve the goal. The previous chapter reveals thirteen major findings, as follows:

1. According to both Chinese international student-participants and the Canadian professor-participants, Chinese international graduate students hardly have any experience with the pedagogy and assessment tools used in Canadian universities and also have hard time to adjust into the life style in Canada which reflects on their learning experiences as well at the beginning of their first terms. This is supported by previous students by Lin (2002), Huang & Klinger (2006) and Jiao (2006).

2. According to most Chinese international student-participants and Canadian professor-participants, the average Chinese international graduate student has fewer writing and oral English skills than the average Canadian student at least when they begin studying at Canadian universities.

3. According to the Chinese international student-participants, where there are mature Chinese student networks (e.g. in some Canadian universities or in some departments), Chinese international graduate students prefer to use the learning resources in these networks rather than the resources provided by universities. Their adapting and learning strategies are taught informally by other Chinese students.

4. When the subjects are globally standardized, Chinese graduate students are more likely to have positive cross-cultural learning experiences. In contrast, when the content of the subject is Eurocentric or Canadian-centered, Chinese international graduate students lack confidence to share opinions and most of their learning strategies are the same as Canadian students such as using reference desks in the libraries, or getting help from professors.

5. When Chinese graduate students had better English training and had more exposure to Western culture within China (e.g. some Chinese international students have studied in English majors), they tended to have less frustrating cross-cultural learning experiences in Canada.

6. According to the Chinese international student-participants, when the educators had few or no experiences with Chinese international students, Chinese international graduate students were more likely to have frustrating experiences and rarely feel comfortable with educators.

7. The Chinese international graduate students are more active in small group discussions or in private communications rather than in front of large groups of people.

8. According to the Chinese international student-participants, because of the subject difference, language barrier and racial concerns, in certain conditions some Chinese international graduate students tend to work with Chinese peers, but others tend to work with non-Chinese peers.

9. According to the Chinese international student-participants, there is more freedom of choice in what may be studied in Canadian universities than in Chinese universities.

10. According to the Canadian professor-participants, Chinese international graduate students seem to have fewer critical thinking skills and did not question professors. Lin (2002) and Huang & Klinger (2006) also support this finding.

11. According to the Chinese international student-participants and Canadian professor-participants, the language barrier, some admired personalities in Chinese moral education (e.g. saving face, being humble) and the style of the student-teacher relationship in PRChina are the major reasons to explain the Chinese international graduate students' silence in class (Zhou, Knoke, & Sakamoto, 2005).

12. According to the Chinese international student-participants and Canadian professor-participants, there are some stereotyping, misunderstandings of both Chinese international students and Canadian professors (e.g. Chinese students are shy so they do not question teachers; Chinese students are only good at science subjects; Canadian professors are like Chinese teacher and do not like being challenged) (Turner & Hiraga, 1996; Lin, 2002).

13. According to the Canadian professor-participants, they develop certain types of teaching methods to assist international students including Chinese when they have had some experiences with international students (e.g. lowering their standards for English skills of Chinese international students in assignments, presentations and examinations; arranging group discussions among various ethnic groups; understanding the silence of Chinese international students).

II. Recommendations

The findings of this study suggest that Canadian universities must pay more attention to international students particularly the Chinese students who have limited access to public services compared with citizens and immigrants, but who also contribute a great deal to the economy and diversity in Canada. Hence I will pose recommendations for Canadian universities, educators and Chinese international students in this section:

(1) Canadian educators must develop their understanding of cultural differences, be more culturally sensitive and more open to communicating with Chinese international students. Educators can read some materials about various cultures in order to identify what are acceptable or not in different cultures. Additionally, educators must listen to students' stories and opinions and make an effort to get to know them well. For instance, nowadays a readers theatre (e.g. Brigham, Walsh, and members of the Women, Diversity, and Teaching Collective, 2006) could be used so that international students can present their own voices in a creative way, which educators and other students could engage with and learn from. In my study, some effective ways to teach Chinese international students are also introduced by the professor-participants such as the ways to arrange the group works and presentations between Canadian students and international students. Equally important, Canadian educators must enhance the non-Eurocentric curriculum in their teaching in order to fit in the international education.

(2) Universities should at the very least provide regular workshops, interactive sessions or orientation programmes as opportunities to help international students adapt to the dominant academic environments; I suggest these could include presentation and group work

skills as well as English writing and oral skills. Current students' services could be enhanced (e.g. better staffed, open for longer hours, willing to tutor one to one, etc.) to be more helpful to international students.

(3) Chinese international students need to do more preparation themselves before starting their study in Canada (e.g. better language preparation and a study of pedagogy and assessment in Canadian universities) such as paying more attention to the aiming university's website and getting information about academia in Canada as much as possible. Further, Chinese international students should be encouraged to communicate with people from various cultures and develop their critical thinking (Lin, 2002; Huang & Klinger, 2006).

i. Educators

The educator is a crucial element in any teaching-learning relationship especially in international education. In the past, Chinese international students are mostly enrolled in science programs and make up only a small part of the whole student body in Canadian universities. However, the number is increasingly dramatic as more and more Chinese international students go into a variety of programs (programs that hardly had any international students before or still have only a few now). When there is a small international student community in a program, the participants are more likely to feel ignored and can easily get frustrated. Also not many Canadian educators have experience and/or a good understanding of how to teach international students. It is extremely important for Canadian educators to make efforts to comprehend their students individually, especially international students.

In the last chapter, student-participants compared their learning experiences in both Chinese and Canadian universities. It is understandable that Chinese international students may not be familiar with the Canadian teaching environment, and therefore assumptions for Canadian students cannot apply to Chinese international students: English written and comprehensive skills as well as presentation and group work skills are examples. In my view, Canadian educators should automatically provide Chinese international students some information at the beginning of the term on how to get the academic assistance they require such as where to get English writing assistance and how to get referencing help. (For instance, in Canada copyright is very important and citation styles are emphasized in paper writing. However, normally Chinese international students do not know what is “copyright”

or about proper referencing such as the American Psychological Association [APA], Modern Language Association [MLA] or Chicago until they get marks deducted in their papers.) If they were familiar with such things before they started their studies, they could adapt more quickly to the Canadian academic environment and likely have more positive learning experience. While it may take additional time and effort to give Chinese international students the assistance they require (i.e. having opportunities to write more than one draft of a term paper), it must be acknowledged that this is an important commitment to ensure that all students have equal opportunities. Furthermore Canadian educators should attempt to enhance the non-Eurocentric curriculum in their teaching and provide more international teaching examples and teaching materials. Then the international students might be more familiar with the content of their courses and become more comfortable with contributing to the discussions.

According to some of the student-participants and some of the professor-participants, because of their educational experiences in PRChina, Chinese international students are not used to asking professors for help or to challenging them. They feel their relationship must be more formal especially at the beginning of the term. Many believe teachers are absolutely right all the time and teachers have 100% power in class. Because Chinese international students are not trained in critical thinking (Lin, 2002; Huang & Klinger, 2006) and use mostly a surface learning approach (Phillips et al, 2002), in some cases, the educators should understand and negotiate with their Chinese ways of learning. For instance, educators should understand that the silence of Chinese international students in class does not mean they are not eager to learn or deserve deductions on their participation mark and

that is just a different learning style. In other situations they may need to encourage Chinese international students toward changing so that they can better adjust to the Western academic culture (e.g. educators can create a friendly environment and help Chinese international students learn to talk about their ideas in class). In my opinion, Chinese international students need to be encouraged by Canadian educators to build up the teacher-student relationships both in and out of class. In other words because many Chinese international students are used to doing what is expected of them they do not know how to initiate a connection, so it would be more effective for Chinese international students if the professors ignore and/or disprove those stereotypes. For instance, as Margaret mentioned Chinese international students never asked for an extensions for their assignments but Canadian students sometimes do. In certain situations Chinese international students would even hand in an incomplete paper or end their assignments with less consideration because of the deadline. In their minds they can hardly imagine asking for extensions from professors. Margaret continued that among Canadian students it is common to ask for an extension in order to revise the assignments. If Canadian educators tell Chinese international students ahead of time that it is possible to get an extension with acceptable reasons, they might treat assignments as opportunities for updating their professional knowledge rather than as a task that has to be finished precisely on time.

According to the interviews, of Chinese international student-participants, they prefer smaller group work among 2 to 3 people or private communication with professors rather than facing a big group of people. This may be due to the fact that they lack confidence in their English skills or are nervous to speak English in large groups. Certainly in China

students are told not to show off in public (Chang, 1996; Guo, 1996; Zhang, 1999). Consequently, it is more likely for them to share their opinions and get involved in discussions with a limited number of people. From the interviews with professor-participants, I agreed with Margaret that if there is a mixed group of people from various cultures, it is good for both Canadian and international students including Chinese to learn from each other. This can break down barriers between them and they can enjoy the diversity within classroom. Actually, from the interviews with student-participants, Guo Guo, Jane, Sonia and Josh also demonstrate an interest in working with people from various cultures. However, they are sometimes hesitant to join in the groups because they are worried they might offend people carelessly. Therefore, educators in such instances could exercise the power to pull them together. For instance, Margaret sometimes would divide her class into small groups and encourage students from various cultures to work in one group. She believed once those students worked together they would learn more about each other's cultures better.

According to some student-participants, educators should make some adjustments in their assessment system when assessing the academic achievements of international students in particular (Jiao, 2006). For instance when an assessment is related to language ability and classroom performance such as a participation mark, there should be a different standard for students who do not have English as their first language.

ii. University policy-makers

Universities are expected to take care of students' learning and experiences in their life on campus. Although there are many student services on campus such as the student union, the writing center and the career planning center, most of these services tend to focus on the needs of domestic students. Some of the student-participants complained that universities did not understand them and they felt that they were only visitors without the same rights as the Canadians. They are treated as "others" all the time. As Canadian universities are profiting from the extra fees such as international student differential fee paid by international students, they are obligated to ensure that they are providing the best learning opportunities for international students. Universities must improve their services on campus for international students. Otherwise, international students will have frustrating experiences, poor quality learning opportunities and the reputation of Canadian universities will decline. Below are some suggestions for universities based on the findings of my study.

First of all, this study demonstrates that the time period from the first week of classes to the end of the first term is crucial for international students with respect to their academic acculturation and adaptation. During this time international students are very critical of their first impressions of all the universities' services and relationships with people around them. And as we know, human beings normally judge things by the first impression. Therefore, if universities want to keep good connections with international students, they should try to relieve their international students from the stress of the academic acculturation (Feng, 1991; Wan, 1999). For instance, universities could organize workshops which are more practical for meeting the study needs of international students and for helping them with

the kinds of academic conflicts they may encounter. Universities could also encourage Canadian students to help international students to build up their friendships so that they can support each other later on. For instance, Mount Saint Vincent University arranges a Canadian buddy for each new international student at the beginning of the academic year so that they can make friends and help each other.

Secondly, I would suggest that the improvement of the English writing skills of Chinese international students become more of a priority. There are two major reasons why Chinese students want to study abroad. One is to gain professional knowledge in their majors and equally important is to study English. As English has become more dominant in the world, skills in English will be very useful to them in the future whether they stay in Canada or go back to China. At present most universities have writing centers to help students improve their writing skills. But compared to most students, international students need more of this kind of service. In some big universities, they have a time limit for every appointment which is too short for international students. For certain programs such as history, education or English, professional English writing is very important. But people in the writing center only correct general grammar mistakes, which is not enough for academic writing. Wan (1999) suggests that the university should provide language workshops. Further, universities should offer some kind of courses particularly to improve Chinese graduate students' professional English skills. Since TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) teachers can only teach the general structure of English writing, in my opinion, it would be better to offer a course in writing and comprehension in the specific departments rather than from the language institutions. A professor in a given department knows better what his/her

students require to succeed. For undergraduate international students, general English writing skills are enough in the beginning, but for graduate international students, for whom the purpose of study is to do advanced research in their focused areas, a higher level of professional English skills is necessary.

Thirdly, from this study, we have learned that a lack of knowledge about Canadian academia is the hardest adjustment for Chinese international students to make in Canadian universities especially at the beginning. Therefore, I would recommend the provision of a kind of pre-university program before the beginning of the first semester that could help them learn some basic teaching and learning skills in Canada such as how to prepare for in-class presentations, how to participate in group work or generally to understand some of the cultural norms of the Canadian classroom. An in-depth orientation session would be helpful particularly for international students, which is not simply about location of the facilities on campus but also about the complexities of Canadian culture (Yusuke & Zhu, 2006).

Fourthly, I would recommend creating a friendly environment that can make international students eager to connect with their universities where they can balance leisure activities with study time (Li & Stodolska, 2006). For instance, Jane and Louis both tried to make more friends on campus. They went to pubs where there are always many students. But they always went there alone and came back alone. Jane said that she tried to talk with people there but within those noisy environments people did not understand her and were not patient to talk with her. After a couple of times she just gave up. Louis said he did not go to many activities on campus because on one hand he was so busy with study and on the other hand he did not find many interesting activities except some sports like skiing. Hence

creating some activities where international students can make friends with Canadian students and in which the newcomers are interested are very important. For instance, small tea or coffee parties would be good for Chinese international students because they can talk with people in small groups. Again, badminton or table tennis is widely played in Asia and basketball is also very popular among male students so these are the kinds of sport activities that would appeal to Chinese international students.

Fifthly, for international students, once they finish their studies in Canada, they will consider either staying here or going back to China (Huang & Klinger, 2006). Job hunting then becomes very important to them in making the decision. Canada is an immigrant country and in certain provinces like Nova Scotia immigration is encouraged. In my view, international students should be considered ideal for immigration, because they are familiar with the Canadian society and may have some local friends to help them adjust more quickly to their adopted country. Furthermore, I consider international students represent a great resource for the sensitization of other students about different cultures within Canadian society and what they have to offer this country, such as foods, art, culture, ideas, etc. Therefore, there are more focused services needed in the career planning centers for international students. If the restrictions for international students, when applying for jobs in Canada, were made known and modified, perhaps more and more international students would be inclined to stay in Canada. Even within my time here the policy has improved – off-campus work permit.

Sixthly, according to my study, Chinese international students are most familiar with being receivers of information as they were in China, so their ability to seek information

through resources is limited. Although Canadian universities have recently made their services more accessible by websites and workshops, it is still hard for international students to find the resources they need especially when they are still not confident with their English. For instance educators can bring the workshops to the classes where there are more international students.

Last but not the least, as I said, one purpose of this study is to help create a diverse learning environment in Canadian universities. In this study I believe when Chinese international students make the effort to merge into the Canadian academic environment, they should also be given more opportunities to contribute their knowledge and experiences to Canadian higher education. I also believe that acculturation is not the process of assimilation but the process of adapting to the diversity. Therefore, just as the international students must make an effort to adjust it is important for Canadian educators to set an example of this understanding by learning more about the background culture and previous education of their international students. They must meet them half way.

iii. Chinese international students

Before coming to Canada Chinese international students should do more research and preparation. Internet is connected all over the world (Huang & Klinger, 2006). After arriving in Canada, Chinese international students really should make efforts by themselves to reach out from their own communities and be more accessible to the Canadian society. There are certain stereotypes in Chinese international students' minds about teachers which

need to be corrected such as teachers are absolutely right or cannot be questioned. In fact professors are willing to be challenged and glad to hear students' opinions.

It is understandable that many Chinese international students would prefer to stay within their own community; it is less possible to hurt people or be hurt through cross-cultural miscommunications. However, this boundary also prevents a lot of exchanging of information coming in from outside of the community such as universities, professors and social organizations. One suggestion for Chinese international students is not to compare universities in PRChina with Canadian universities, but learn how to study in new ways in Canadian universities. Because in my study, there are many differences between Chinese and Canadian universities, especially with regard to the freedom of expression, if Chinese international students operate under the assumption that universities in China and Canada are the same, they might use the same way to study in Canada as they did at home, and this will lead to frustrating learning experiences. In contrast, without that assumption Chinese international students will take more advantage of the existing services of their universities such as libraries, writing centers and student service centers. However I do not mean to imply that it is wrong to study and live only with Chinese nationals. But in some situations, which I mentioned in the previous chapter, it is necessary for them to attempt to break down the barriers between themselves and the Canadians around them. If Chinese international students can look more openly they might be able to find more opportunities to improve their ways of learning.

III. Limitations and Further Research

i. Limitations

Three limitations of this study are listed as follows,

1. The population of participants in this study is limited and they cannot represent all the Chinese international students in Canada. Also I am aware of the complexity of adult learners which is hard to explain by nations. This study only focuses on limited participants' experiences. Therefore, in future research a more representative sampling of this population would be helpful.

2. This study focuses on Chinese international students in graduate programs at the masters level which does not necessarily apply to other levels of study such as undergraduate or PhD. In addition, special programs are not included in this study such as those of medicine and law students.

3. The participants in this study are from three Canadian universities in Halifax, NS, therefore the results do not apply to all the universities in Canada. Additionally samplings from various provinces may reveal different findings.

ii. Recommendations for Future Research

1. Although this study reflected only the perspectives of a small number of Chinese international graduate students and Canadian professors, the findings might well be extended through a study of a greater number of students drawn from other levels of education (e.g., undergraduate and/or PhD levels).

2. Although gender and age differences are mentioned as to criteria for the selection of research participants, the findings were not specific to age and gender, other than, for example, female Chinese international students are more open and likely to get help than male counterparts. Hence future research can extend the findings related to gender and age differences.
3. Future research can further address other forms of pedagogy, classroom organization and assessment in Canadian universities (e.g. art-informed or web-based assignments and poster presentations).
4. Future research can extend the findings to other international students from other nations such as Japan, Korea or India, as these are some of the sending countries that send the highest number of international students.
5. Future research can be extended to locations beyond Halifax involving students and professors from all over Canada or even North America.
6. Future research can be conducted by other methods to extend the data (e.g. observations, focused groups or the storytelling).

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Appendix A: Table of student-participants

Name	Age	Gender	Current Major	Chinese educational background
Guo Guo	27	female	Education related	English Education
Josh	27	male	Educational related	Business and English
Jane	24	female	Library Information	Library Information
Louis	25	male	Computer Science	Computer Science
David	24	male	Engineering related	Engineering
Sonia	25	female	Finance related	Computer Science

Appendix B: Table of professor-participants

Name	Margaret	Katya Drysdale	Don	Tom
Department	Canadian Studies	Business related	Business related	Computer Science

Appendix C: Information Letters and Consent Forms

Information Letters

For student-participants:

December 18th, 2006

Dear student:

My name is Jia Zhu, and I am a graduate student in the Masters of Education Program in the Faculty of Education at Mount Saint Vincent University.

You are invited to participate in a research project, which is conducted for the purpose of writing a thesis for my Master of Arts in Education (M.AEd). My research paper will be called: A Cross-cultural Learning Case Study: Comprehending Chinese International Students' Learning Approaches at Canadian Universities.

The research project will focus on the learning experiences of a group of Chinese international graduate students who were originally from China and now study in Halifax. The purpose of my study is to understand the particular learning strategies that Chinese international students have developed to adjust to Western academic culture since arriving in Canada. I am also interested in examining their beliefs about learning and their perceptions about current teaching and assessment approaches used at Canadian universities. My study can help Canadian educators better understand Chinese international students' learning

behaviors and improve their own teaching and assessing approaches for Chinese international students in particular and for cross-culture learners in general. This study will also help Chinese educators and students understand the differences between Western and Chinese academic cultures, which will benefit Chinese international students in their cross-cultural learning experiences at universities.

Your participation will involve one interview with me, which will be one to two hours long. During this interview, you will be free to speak Mandarin or English, whichever you feel most comfortable with.

Fieldnotes will be made during the interview. With your permission, I would like to audiotape the interview. All tapes, notes and transcriptions will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home. After I complete this thesis, I will erase the tapes and shred the transcriptions and fieldnotes.

You will be asked to choose a fake name, or “pseudonym”, for the purposes of assuring confidentiality in reporting the research. I will use these pseudonyms in my thesis, in any presentations of this research. Your identifying information such as your program, university or residence, or any information that would allow others to identify who you are will also be omitted when I refer to you in any reporting of this study.

If you decide not to continue your involvement in the research at any time, for any reason, you can discontinue without penalty and your contributions can be withdrawn, too, if

you wish. If you are interested, I will provide you with a copy of my thesis by e-mail attachment. I also intend to publish my study in an academic educational journal.

Thank you for expressing an interest in this study. If you have questions about how this study is being conducted and wish to speak with someone who is not directly involved in the study, you may contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Board (UREB) c/o MSVU Research and International Office, at 457-6350 or via e-mail at research@msvu.ca.

At any time during this research I will be happy to answer any of your questions. My phone number is [REDACTED], and email address is [REDACTED]. My supervisor's name is Dr. Sue Brigham. She can also address any concerns or questions you may have about this research. She can be contacted at 457-6733 or by email at: susan.brigham@msvu.ca.

I look forward to seeing you soon!

Sincerely,

Jia Zhu

Graduate Student

Faculty of Education

Mount Saint Vincent University

For professor-participants:

December 18th, 2006

Dear professor:

My name is Jia Zhu, and I am a graduate student in the Masters of Education Program in the Faculty of Education at Mount Saint Vincent University.

You are invited to participate in a research project, which is conducted for the purpose of writing a thesis for my Master of Arts in Education (M.AEd). My research paper will be called: A Cross-cultural Learning Case Study: Comprehending Chinese International Students' Learning Approaches at Canadian Universities.

My research project will focus on the learning experiences of a group of Chinese international graduate students who were originally from China and now study in Halifax. The purpose of my study is to understand the particular learning strategies that Chinese international students have developed to adjust to Western academic culture since arriving in Canada. I am also interested in examining their beliefs about learning and their perceptions about current teaching and assessment approaches used at Canadian universities. My study can help Canadian educators better understand Chinese international students' learning behaviors and improve their own teaching and assessing approaches for Chinese international students in particular and for cross-culture learners in general. It is critical to attract more students from various cultures to enrich Canada's diversity. This study will also help Chinese educators and students understand the differences between Western and Chinese

academic cultures, which will benefit Chinese international students in their cross-cultural learning experiences at universities.

Your participation will involve one interview with me, half an hour to one hour long, about Chinese international students' learning approaches at Canadian universities. During these interviews, you can speak English with me, which you will feel comfortable with.

Fieldnotes will be made during the interview. With your permission, I would like to audiotape the interview. All tapes, notes and transcriptions will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home. After I complete this thesis, I will erase the tapes and shred the transcriptions and fieldnotes.

You will be asked to choose a fake name, or "pseudonym", for the purposes of assuring confidentiality in reporting the research. I will use these pseudonyms in my thesis, in any presentations of this research. Your identifying information such as your program, university or residence, or any information that would allow others to identify who you are will also be omitted when I refer to you in any reporting of this study.

If you decide not to continue your involvement in the research at any time, for any reason, you can discontinue without penalty and your contributions can be withdrawn, too, if you wish. If you are interested, I will provide you with a copy of my thesis by e-mail attachment. I also intend to publish my study in an academic educational journal.

Thank you for expressing an interest in this study. If you have questions about how this study is being conducted and wish to speak with someone who is not directly involved in the

study, you may contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Board (UREB) c/o MSVU Research and International Office, at 457-6350 or via e-mail at research@msvu.ca.

At any time during this research I will be happy to answer any of your questions. My phone number is [REDACTED], and email address is [REDACTED]. My supervisor's name is Dr. Sue Brigham. She can also address any concerns or questions you may have about this research. She can be contacted at 457-6733 or by email at: susan.brigham@msvu.ca.

I look forward to seeing you soon!

Sincerely,

Jia Zhu

Graduate Student

Faculty of Education

Mount Saint Vincent University

Informed Consent Forms

For student-participants:

I have read the information letter about Jia Zhu's research project titled "A Cross-cultural Learning Case Study: Comprehending Chinese International Students' Learning Approaches at Canadian Universities", dated December 18th, 2006, and I understand that I will be involved in one interview, which will be one to two hours long, and I will be free to speak Mandarin or English, whichever I feel most comfortable with. I will be interviewed without payment.

I understand that Jia Zhu will take fieldnotes and with my permission she will audiotape the interview. The fieldnotes will be written in English. All the fieldnotes, tapes and transcriptions will be stored in her locked filing cabinet in her home. After she completes this thesis, she will erase the audio tapes and shred the transcriptions and fieldnotes.

I will be asked to choose a fake name, or "pseudonym", for the purposes of assuring confidentiality in reporting the research. Jia Zhu will use this pseudonym (fake name) for presentation and in any resulting publications. My identifying information such as my program, university or residence, or any information that would allow others to identify who I am will also be omitted when she refers to me in any reporting of this study.

In addition, if I decide not to continue my involvement in the research at any time, for any reason, I can stop the auto-taping without penalty and my contributions can be withdrawn, too, if I wish.

If I am interested, Jia Zhu will provide me with the thesis from this research by email attachment. I understand that Jia Zhu intends to write the thesis and publish an article about this research in an educational journal.

If I have questions about how this study is being conducted and wish to speak with someone who is not directly involved in the study, I may contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Board (UREB) c/o MSVU Research and International Office, at 457-6350 or via e-mail at research@msvu.ca.

Also, if I have further questions or concerns with Jia Zhu now or at any point during the research. Her phone number is [REDACTED] and email address is [REDACTED]. Her supervisor's name is Dr. Sue Brigham. She can also address any concerns or questions you may have about this research. She can be contacted at 457-6733 or by email at: susan.brigham@msvu.ca.

Signature: _____

I hereby give permission to be audio-taped in the interview.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Jia Zhu, graduate student researcher

For professor-participants:

I have read the information letter about Jia Zhu's research project titled "A Cross-cultural Learning Case Study: Comprehending Chinese International Students' Learning Approaches at Canadian Universities", dated December 18th, 2006, and I understand that I will be involved in one interview with her, half an hour to one hour long. I will be interviewed without payment.

I understand that Jia Zhu will take fieldnotes and with my permission she will audiotape the interview. The fieldnotes will be written in English. All the fieldnotes, tapes and transcriptions will be stored in her locked filing cabinet in her home. After she completes this thesis, she will erase the audio tapes and shred the transcriptions and fieldnotes.

I will be asked to choose a fake name, or "pseudonym", for the purposes of assuring confidentiality in reporting the research. Jia Zhu will use this pseudonym (fake name) for presentation and in any resulting publications. My identifying information such as my program, university or residence, or information that would allow others to identify who I am will also be omitted when she refers to me in any reporting of this study.

In addition, if I decide not to continue my involvement in the research at any time, for any reason, I can stop the auto-taping without penalty and my contributions can be withdrawn, too, if I wish.

If I am interested, Jia Zhu will provide me with the thesis from this research by email attachment. I understand that Jia Zhu intends to write the thesis and publish an article about this research in an educational journal.

If I have questions about how this study is being conducted and wish to speak with someone who is not directly involved in the study, I may contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Board (UREB) c/o MSVU Research and International Office, at 457-6350 or via e-mail at research@msvu.ca.

Also, if I have further questions or concerns with Jia Zhu now or at any point during the research. Her phone number is [REDACTED], and email address is [REDACTED]. Her supervisor's name is Dr. Sue Brigham. She can also address any concerns or questions you may have about this research. She can be contacted at 457-6733 or by email at: susan.brigham@msvu.ca.

Signature: _____

I hereby give permission to be audio-taped in the interview.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Jia Zhu, graduate student researcher

Appendix D: Interview Questions' Guide

For student-participants:

1. What was your first feeling when you came to the university here? What happened in the first day?
2. What did you think about your first class experience here? Is it different from your experience in China?
3. What size of class are you often in?
4. How often did you have group work when you studied at Chinese university? How about now?
A. None B. Seldom C. Frequently
5. Please talk about your first group work experience or the most impressive group work experience.
6. Do you prefer working with Asian students or Canadian students when you do group work? Why?
7. Do you think your learning attitudes and approaches are different when you work with Asian students and Canadian students?
8. Which one do you prefer, group work or independent work now?
9. Do you feel that learning is an independent thinking process or a socialized one? Why?
10. How often did you ask/answer questions in the class when you studied at Chinese university? How about now?
A. None B. Seldom C. Frequently

11. What is your attitude about the saying that Chinese students do not ask/answer questions because they are shy in the class? What do you think are the reasons?
12. Do you think asking questions in the class can help you understand the content? Why?
13. Did you ever call your professors by their names without respect saying such as Dr. or Professor?
14. Do you feel it is necessary to add respect saying? Why?
15. How often do you communicate with your professors?
16. What kind of relation do you think was/is between you and your professors? Such as very formalized, like friends or even close?
17. How often did you do presentations when you studied in China? How about now?
A. None B. Seldom C. Frequently
18. Please talk about your first presentation experience here, both group and individual?
How do you feel about presentation?
19. If you do a group presentation, whom will you prefer to work with, Chinese, other international students or Canadians? Why?
20. What do you think is more important in your writing assignments, English skill or your paper content?
21. Do you often get lower marks because of your English writing skill? Do you think it is fair?
22. What do you think are the differences between Chinese and Canadian universities?
23. Please tell some learning experiences which you had to deal with the differences. What did you do to solve the problems?

24. What was your former learning style in China, Self-directed or teacher-guided? How about now?
25. Do you think your learning approaches are changing when you study here?
26. Which style do you think is more effective according your experience both in China and Canada? Why?
27. Do you feel academic stress after you came to Canada? What level? (1none-5 extremely)
28. What do you think cause the stress? How do you reduce the stress? Are there anything or anybody helping you?
29. If possible, please conclude your cross-cultural learning experience with a Chinese word or a Chinese old saying.

For professor-participants:

1. Generally, how many Chinese international students have you taught or met?
2. What size of classes do you normally teach?
3. What are the differences between Chinese international students and Canadian students about group assignments?
4. Do you find Chinese international students like working within nation or Asian students? What do you think of it?
5. Which do you think Chinese international students do better, group work or individual work?
6. What are the differences between Chinese international students and Canadian students about presentation? Any impressive experiences?
7. Which do you think Chinese international students do better, presentations or papers/exams?
8. How fast do you speak when you teach in the classes? Is it the same as ordinary condition?
9. How much do you think Chinese international students understand in your classes?
10. What is your opinion about the silence of Chinese international students in the class?
11. Do your students often call you by your first name? How about Chinese international students?
12. What do you think your relations with Chinese international students? Is it the same as Canadian students or different?
13. Do Chinese international students often come for help such as presentations, papers,

group works?

14. What kind of classes do Chinese international students do better, qualitative ones or quantitative ones? What do you think are the reasons?
15. What do you think is more important, learning process or result?
16. Do you think hard working is valuable even without good result?
17. Is English skill an important part in your assessment about the assignments? Do you treat Chinese international students the same as Canadian students in this part?
18. What is your general opinion about Chinese international students that you taught? Such as characters or learning styles.
19. What level of the academic achievements do Chinese international students normally get in your class?
20. As you see, what kinds of difficulties do Chinese international students have in their study?
21. What are the differences from other international students do Chinese international students have?