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Academic and Social Experiences of Chinese International Undergraduate Students at a Canadian University

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Academic and Social Experiences of
Chinese International Undergraduate Students at a Canadian University

by

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A THESIS

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Abstract

The number of international students studying in Canadian universities continues to rise as a direct consequence of the internationalization of higher education in Canada. International students bring financial, cultural, and academic benefits to Canadian universities. Among all the international students pursuing higher education in Canada, Chinese international students take up a large portion and have become an important population group within the Canadian university community. Although Chinese international students have made tremendous contributions to Canadian universities, they also face many challenges when adjusting to their new environment. This study investigates the academic and social experiences of Chinese international undergraduate students through examining their transition process at one university in western Canada. The study is informed by Bourdieu's capital theory. Specifically, this study employs a qualitative case study as the methodology and relied on semi-structured interviews as the method. Data for the study were collected from interviews with 10 Chinese international undergraduate students. This study reveals that Chinese international undergraduate students were motivated by different factors to study in Canada; additionally, they encountered various language, academic and social challenges, but each adopted creative coping strategies such as mobilizing their digital social capital to overcome these challenges. This study also suggests that it is important for university instructors, staff and local students to value international students' cultural capital and their multilingual capital. Insights of the study can inform university policymakers, instructors, and staff to provide a better environment and appropriate support for international students.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Globalization is now an irreversible current, and its far-reaching influence on higher education has become an undeniable fact in the 21st century (Altbach et al., 2009). Our society has been transformed by the rapid development of globalization and internationalization in various aspects, one of which is the evolution of higher education (Rezaei et al, 2018). Since the late twentieth century, the internationalization of higher education has become a reality and this trend has been intensified in this century (Codina et al., 2013). Under the unavoidable effect of internationalization on higher education, no universities or postsecondary institutions can retreat from the global environment (Altbach et al., 2009). Nowadays, internationalization has become a standard for universities worldwide (Jones & Killick, 2013). There are many ways to increase internationalization within universities, one of them is the recruitment of international students (Due et al., 2015). How internationalized a higher educational organization is in teaching, researching and service, and especially the number of the international students recruited, has become an important measure to determine its successfulness, effectiveness as well as status (Zhang, 2014). Therefore, universities are becoming more open to recruiting international students and more students prefer to pursue their higher education in a foreign country.

China is now one of the world's largest international student exporters (Zou, 2015) and the increasing enrollment of Chinese international students is also a prominent feature in the internationalization of western universities (Cheng et al., 2016). Driven by their curiosity for western higher education and the desire for probing unknown territory, a growing number of Chinese students choose to cross borders for higher education every year. The total number of Chinese students studying in foreign countries in 2017 was 608,400, an 11.74% increase from 2016 (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2018). Most of the Chinese international students prefer to choose English-speaking countries as their destination for higher education (China Power Project, 2017). The top English-speaking countries for Chinese international students to study overseas are the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom and Canada.

For universities, the internationalized of higher education and the mobility of international students not only increases the number of international students in universities, it also provides diversity and many additional benefits, such as: financial benefits, cultural benefits and academic benefits (Knight, 2012). However, while studying overseas is good for students to gain brand-new experiences in learning and living, it also proves academically and socially difficult, as students are exposed to an unfamiliar environment with different cultural rules and academic requirements. Take Chinese international students in Canada as examples, Due to the immense differences between China and Canada, the challenges that most Chinese international students have to overcome are often unpredictable before they start their journey. It is often hard for many of the Chinese international students to imagine and prepare for the challenges they will eventually encounter in the host country. As a result, a large number of them are shocked by the issues they have to deal with upon their arrival in Canada and their incapacity to solve problems efficiently. This research is aimed to investigate the reasons for Chinese international undergraduate students going abroad and choosing Canada for higher education, the barriers they encountered during their transition process and their coping strategies.

International Students Study in Canada

Universities in Canada are significantly influenced by “the proliferation of global student mobility and academic cosmopolitanism” (Anderson, 2015, p. 167). Since “internationalization has become an indicator for quality in higher education” (Wit, 2010, p. 5), expanding the scale of internationalization has become a necessity for a lot of Canadian universities to maintain their reputation and international competitiveness. Based on the report from AUCC (2014), “Canadian universities are deeply committed to internationalization” (p. 4). About 95% of the universities in Canada identify internationalization in their strategic planning and 82% give priority to it (AUCC, 2014). Therefore, more and more universities and educational institutions in Canada aim to expand their presence in higher education worldwide (The Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2013). Being a top ten study destination in the world (CIC News, 2017), Canada receives a large number of international students every year. According to CBIE-

BCEI (2018), there were 494,525 international students in Canada by December 31, 2017. In a 2018 report from CBIE-BCEI, the author claims that the enthusiasm with which Canadian universities welcomed international students exceeded the official expectation; “the number is an increase of 20% over 2016, it surpasses Canada’s International Education Strategy goal of 450,000 international students in Canada by 2022, five years ahead of schedule” (CBIE-BCEI, 2018).

China is one of the top source countries for international student enrollment in Canada (AUCC, 2014). Among all the international students studying in Canadian universities, Chinese international students made up a significant portion and outnumbered international students from many countries (CIC, 2016). As of 2017, approximately 141,000 of Chinese international students were studying in Canada, 28.4% of the total number of international students in Canada (People’s Daily, 2018). This makes China “the top sending country” among all the countries that sends international students to Canada (CBIE-BCEI, 2018).

The attractiveness of Canadian higher education has strengthened over the past year and made Canada one of the most popular destinations for international students to pursue their postsecondary education. The rate of Chinese international students studying in Canada has grown by 226% from 2008 to 2017 (People’s Daily, 2018). This made Canada one of the most popular destinations for Chinese international students (CBIE, 2016). The reputation of high-quality education in Canada was established, and the “quality of living standard, the diversity and tolerance of Canadian society and the image of a peaceful country” are the main reasons that attract thousands of international students to Canada (Chen, 2007, p.778). Comparing to other English-speaking countries, Canada’s advantage lies in its secure, diverse and multicultural environment, high academic credibility, affordability and easier visa application process, which are favoured by a lot of international students (Chen, 2007). Driven by the popularity of Canadian universities, the number of foreign students that come to Canada for education purpose keeps increasing annually. The increment of international students is conducive for universities to achieve the goal of internationalizing their higher education (Urban & Palmer, 2014; Arthur & Flynn, 2011). And more importantly, the

increasing number of international students brings greater economic, cultural and academic benefits to the host countries (Chen, 2007).

Financial Benefits

Universities and institutions take the enrolment of international students seriously not only because it can sustain their position as key players in internationalized education environment and global engagement, it is also a huge financial asset since international students have to pay considerably higher tuition fees than domestic students from the same program (Leary, 2011; Huang, 2008; McCormack & Labi, 2007; Selvadurai, 1991-1992). In light of the ongoing budget cuts, the high tuition fee that international students pay for attending Canadian universities has been a huge financial resource to public universities (Anderson, 2015; CAUT, 2013; Thompson & Bekhradnia, 2010). From 2010 to 2015, despite the significant reduction in federal funding and the fluctuations in non-federal funding and other sources to Canadian universities, the revenue generated from tuition has been increasing gradually and steadily (Statistics Canada, 2016). Since international students on average have to pay three to four times the tuition fees compared to domestic students, a large portion of the rising tuition revenues is generated by international students (Anderson, 2015).

The high tuition fee is not the only aspect that boosts economic growth. As estimated in 2014, the amount of money that international students in Canada spent on tuition fees, accommodations as well as discretionary spending is approximately \$11.4 billion, which can be converted into \$9.3 billion in GDP contribution (RKA, Inc., 2016). The overall yearly expenditure of international students helps Canada support more than 122,700 job positions (RKA, Inc., 2016). Under the circumstance where the in a society like Canada that is supported by a knowledge-based economy, the maintenance of a sustainable long-term economic development is highly dependent on “the availability of high-quality human capital” (Siddiq, 2010, p. 126); the international students play a key role in the development of this new economy, that they “offer a source of human capital”. In an aging society that is Canada, sustainable growth therefore relies on

the international students as a force that “augment the economic development” of Canada (Siddiq et al., 2012, p. 239). Therefore, the benefit of the recruitment and retention of international students is not only conducive to economic advancement, it also provides potential workforce which can serve as a relief for many developed countries like Canada that are facing the decrease of population and recessionary labour market (Siddiq, 2010).

A study by Anderson (2015) also suggests that although Canada only has a relatively modest share of the “overall market share of foreign tertiary student enrollments”, the contribution these international students make is significantly beneficial for the Canadian economy. Moreover, “given the importance of international students as an economic driver” (Siddiq et al., 2012, p. 240), maintaining a considerable number of international students has become an integral element to keep a sustainable economic development (Yao & Bai, 2008).

Cultural Benefits

Internationalization “has high cultural value” and is considered by the policymakers as “a key element of the cultural capital of a university” (Lumby & Foskett, 2016, p. 98). Along with the growing number of international students, universities and institutions have become more culturally diverse as international students bring with them different cultural values, languages and practice (Anderson, 2015). Being exposed to a variety of cultural values, languages and experience can intensify students and staff’s understanding of various culture (Urban & Palmer, 2014; Geelhoed et al., 2003). Both students and staff in the university can deepen their knowledge of the cultural diversity and cultural differences under the influence of the internationalization in higher education (Rivers, 2010).

A report from CBIE (2013) demonstrates the importance of the cultural benefits that international students bring, stating that “students with education and experience from around the world contribute to the cultural and social fabric of Canada” (p. 9). With more and more international students coming to Canada every year, Canadian students have access and exposure to the multi-cultural environment within Canada.

In light of the global trend of the internationalization in higher education, maintaining and improving the diversity in universities are highly beneficial for Canadian students. One research, which examines students in high school, shows that students who attended a more culturally diverse high school are more likely to have a desire to pursue higher education in comparison to those who went to private school, where the student community are more culturally homogenized (Wolfe & Fletcher, 2013). This is also true in the university setting. Moreover, students who study in a more diverse academic and cultural environment have more possibilities to make more income and have higher family earnings (Wolfe and Fletcher, 2013). Students with the experience of dealing with diverse culture are expected to be more suitable and efficient in a global marketplace, and these experiences not only make them more attractive candidates in the increasing globalized job markets, it also assists them to become more productive and have better performance under the globalized economy (Wolfe & Fletcher, 2013). Apart from this, the exposure to the diverse cultural environment may also be conducive to the improvement of the students' personal capacities or even help students become more positive citizens (Hinrichs, 2011).

Cultural diversity in higher education is particularly beneficial for those domestic students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who might not otherwise have chances to study or live abroad, to enrich their learning experience and social interaction (Urban & Palmer, 2014, Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002; McMurtrie, 2011). Studying abroad opportunities are most accessible to students from higher socio-economical background (Denzler, 2011). Surrounded by various international students, domestic students had the ability to access to foreign cultures, and opportunities to imagine what it would be like to live and study under a different culture, which can lead them to be more considerate and establish a better relationship with international students (Geelhoed et al., 2003).

Another reason for welcoming international students is to boost the competitiveness of domestic students. The advantage of the recruitment and retention of international students in higher education is not only restricted to enlarging culture diversity, it can also contribute to intercultural education in the host

country. International students are important resources to help foster intercultural competencies of domestic students (Breuning, 2007). Intercultural competencies are perceived as a crucial skill for students to obtain under the diverse and internationalized environment (Breuning, 2007). Having the capacity to work across culture and draw insights from the cultural strength of each other is a priority for students.

International students also act as intercultural educators as the involvement of the international students in the university community serves to bring about an overall enhancement in intercultural competencies across the university campus. During the process of integrating international students into the university community, one of the primary consequences is the positive effect of enhancing intercultural competencies for both domestic students and international students (Breuning, 2007; Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004). Domestic students are exposed to the insight of other cultures whereas international students have more opportunities to socialize and network with their domestic peers, which is a critical step for them to acquire resources and opportunities in their new community (Breuning, 2007; Trice, 2004). In summary, the recruitment of international students is one of the most effective ways to bring international students and different cultures into the university community. Both research from Urban and Palmer (2004) and Breuning (2007) on international students in the United States corroborated this conclusion that the majority of international students are willing to engage with domestic students, which in the process, act as cultural resources through in-class and out of class interaction, cooperation through school projects and extra-curriculum activities, and in the process to provide more insights and perspectives from their own culture to students who grow up in the United States. The end result is that both groups of students ameliorated their intercultural competencies as well as to augment the cultural exchange in the process of mutual engagement and interactions.

Academic Benefits

International students are deemed as “big business” because of the substantial economic benefits they can bring to the domestic universities through tuition cost and other payments, as well as their dual role as

educators in intercultural competency (Altbach et al., 2009, p. 8). However, tangible economic benefits as well as the substantial cultural advantages are not the only reasons that incentivize universities to maintain its policies of attracting a greater number of students from overseas. The positive value associated with the ascending population of international students going and studying in other countries can extend to the academic aspect.

In many research universities, one of the essential compositions is international students (Hegarty, 2014). Universities are after all, in the business of education, and in the context of large comprehensive research universities, the better the quality of research output, the higher the prestige that is attributed to that university, such as on an international level, government and states “contend for academic status”, by attracting talents worldwide, for students and faculties; universities thus compete to attract talented international students and foreign scholars to boost their international competitiveness (Altbach et al., 2009, p. 15).

The enrollment of international students in research universities is vital for the universities’ research function, and empirical research has shown the positive relationship between the universities’ international student population and research output (Hegarty, 2014). Furthermore, international students can improve the international diversity to an academic environment (Altbach et al., 2009). As Grayson observed in his study, “the more diverse the campus environment”, produces the result that universities are “more likely the realization of desired educational outcome” (Grayson, 2014, p. 265). Another study focuses on international graduate students that the number of patent applications in a university was a positive function relative to increase the number of international graduate students in that university (Chellaraj et al., 2008). Researchers in the United States also stated the positive influences that international graduate students have on academic innovation which is shown by the growth in patent applications and grants, corresponding to the rising number of international students attending that school (Chellaraj et al., 2008). This correlation is particularly strong in the field of natural science and engineering (Chellaraj et al., 2008).

The former president of Harvard, Lawrence Summers, declared the necessity of foreign students' recruitment and retention by saying that, the decrease of international students endangers the quality of the research coming from universities in the United States (Chellaraj et al., 2008;). Large enrollment of international students is therefore conducive to the progressive of academic achievement in universities. In addition, international students also create more academic collaborations among different countries under the global setting, by serving as the liaison between departments from different universities in different countries (Alberts, 2007). The great number of international students "create transnational connections" due to the ties they have with their home countries (Alberts, 2007, p.141). According to Alberts (2007), students when studying abroad maintain the connections they developed in their former academic programs, that the ties are maintained even after they pursue their education abroad. In these cases, the students act as liaisons between the faculties in their former program and their new program of studies, by providing references and updates on research projects between departments.

In addition to the growing research output generated by international students, they also motivate the academic performance of their domestic peers. International students are often seen as role models for domestic students (Kinnucan, 2012). Since the qualification universities set for international students are often higher than domestic students, students from abroad are often more hardworking and disciplined than domestic students (Kinnucan, 2012). This creates additional pressure for domestic students as they now face greater competition to maintain their academic performance. Thus, the role that international students play in the university can motivate other students so as to maintain a positive overall academic environment.

Problem Statement

According to AUCC (2014), approximately 70% of the universities in Canada view the recruitment of international undergraduate students as one of their top priorities. International students come to Canada with numerous financial, cultural and academic benefits as discussed previously. They also face various challenges and barriers while adjusting to the host country (Wu et al., 2015). International students'

different ethnicity leads them to different kinds of adjustment barriers, and Asian students often encounter greater barriers than students from other ethnic groups during their adjustment process (Kwon, 2009). These barriers in general have negative effects on international students' academic performance and social life; they hinder students' process of transitioning to the new environment. Among the students from Asian, international students from China represent a significant population in many Canadian universities. The huge gap in language, culture and academia between China and Canada means that international students from China have to deal with challenges in language, academic life and social life when transitioning into Canadian society. In order to overcome these barriers, Chinese international students adopt all sorts of strategies from various resources in their surrounding environment to achieve successful overseas study experience, especially during their initial transition process where they encounter most of their difficulties during that stage. The transition process is very significant for international students as it can generate a huge impact on students' experience as a whole and can further influence students' academic achievements (Ploner, 2018). Even though the Chinese international students tried all different methods to overcome their adjustment barriers, the strategies they implement and the assistance they get from universities are not always effective or the right fit for their needs. This lead Chinese international having a hard time to adjust to the new environment and being undervalued (Heng, 2018; Abelman & Kang, 2014).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of Chinese international undergraduate students' overseas experience in Canada. To be more specific, two purposes were addressed in this study. The first purpose is to learn about Chinese international undergraduate students' life and study in Canada in order to investigate the barriers they encountered during their transition process and the coping strategies they applied to deal with the problems. Particularly the difficulties they have in language, academic and social aspects as most international students have barriers in these three aspects (Gunawardena & Wilson, 2012). The second purpose for this study is to provide recommendations for university policymakers to improve the existing international student services and other school services so as to assist international

students in a more effective way. Moreover, providing incoming international students with senior international students' experience for them to refer to and inform incoming international students to be better prepared for their overseas study experience. The following questions are addressed:

1. What are the motivations for Chinese international undergraduate students to choose to study abroad? Why do they choose Canada as their destination?
2. What are the language, academic and social barriers they encountered during the transition process?
3. How do they cope to overcome these barriers?
4. What recommendations do they give to new Chinese international students?

Research Interest

My research interest started from my personal experience as a Chinese international student studying in Canada and the interest of understanding other Chinese international students' experiences in Canada. As a Chinese international student pursuing my master's degree in Canada, I faced many barriers during my transition process. The difficulties I experienced share a lot of similarities with other Chinese international students' adjustment problems. The dominant aspects that most of the Chinese international students have problems with are language, academic life and social life. As an international student who speaks English as an additional language, I am aware of the importance of mastering English. Before coming to Canada, international students whose first language is not English needed to meet certain language requirements to be accepted by the university (Zhang & Beck, 2014). Like many other Chinese international students, I met all the admission requirements. I achieved a high GPA score from my undergraduate study, I met the required language score and I have no problems socializing with people. I thought I was fully prepared and qualified for my new phase of life in Canada before I came to Canada, but during my first year in Canada, I was trapped in a mixture of the excitement of turning a new page in my life and the unceasing worries caused by my poor adjustment. I started to lose confidence and constantly question my own capacity. The stress from the course work as well as social life, and the pressure I gave to myself affected my physical and mental health. While fighting against all the hardships I faced during the

transition process, I used my own strategies, reached out for help and used the resources offered by international student services on campus. Now, after studying and living in Canada for a period of time, I overcome many barriers in language, social life and academic aspects. Although the barriers that Chinese international students face during the transition process share a lot of similarities, each of the problems that students encountered also has its own uniqueness because of the difference in their respective personality, education background, English level as well as the program they are taking. Since universities prioritize recruitment of international undergraduate students and Chinese international undergraduate students took up a significant portion of the international student population (AUCC, 2014). As a student, knowing Chinese international undergraduate students' transition barriers and their coping strategies can help me reflect on how I overcame my own transition process and find connections with their stories. On the other hand, as a researcher, my personal identity allows me to identify Chinese undergraduate international students' needs for assistance from university policymakers, and make recommendations for university policymakers to take into consideration for establishing a better environment for international students.

As Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2000) stressed that, for social constructivism, in contrast to positivism, the reality is precisely socially constructed. I identified myself in favour of social constructivism in accordance with my research topic as well as in the reviewing of my personal experience. As a social constructivist, I “gain understanding” of social phenomenon, through “interpreting subject perceptions”, and analyze them through my own lens (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p.101). Constructivism supposes that according to what we know, the reality is constructed intersubjectively through the meanings and understandings developed socially and experientially (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). I am most interested in learning from the communication between the researcher and the researched object. Advocates of constructivism believe that, findings are conducted based on researchers and subjects' interaction (Guba, 1996). In place of experimental studies, I feel I learn the most in a dialogic context where information is interpreted hermeneutically.

As Guba and Lincoln (1994) noted, our lived experience shaped us, and these will always come out in knowledge we constructed as researchers and in the data generated by our subject. Constructivism stresses the investigation of ourselves, “study ourselves and others” (Preissle, 2006, p. 691). Being one of the Chinese international students studying in Canada, I am passionate about my research topic. I see myself as a constructivist because I am also studying about myself while composing this study. My own experience can resonate with the experiences and difficulties that many other Chinese international students have. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), constructivist believes that ourselves and what we know cannot be separated. “The investigator and the object of investigation are linked such what we are and how we understand the world is a central part of how we understand ourselves, others and the world” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Research Significance

While Chinese international students are making great contributions to the universities in Canada, the risk of obtaining an unfulfilling study experience is an under-investigated territory (Preston & Wang, 2017). There is little research in the literature that explore international undergraduate students’ own opinions to study about their overseas experience (Guo & Guo, 2017), and the barriers that Chinese international students faced have their uniqueness and need to be addressed (Preston & Wang, 2017; Liu, 2009). This research addresses such gap by investigating Chinese international undergraduate students’ barriers and coping strategies through learning about their experience from their own perspectives.

This study provides university policy with an improved understanding of Chinese international undergraduate students’ experience, their struggles and their coping strategies. Insights from the study will inform policy, curriculum and service to meet the needs of Chinese international undergraduate students. The study aims to draw attention from universities on international students as they contribute significant financial, cultural and social merits to the host country, but at the same time, are vulnerable to marginalization. The data and analyzation provided based on the investigation of Chinese international

undergraduate students' transition process can help policymaker to have a better understanding of international students' needs. Therefore, university policymakers can re-evaluate the university services for international students, adjust the current support services to better fit international students' needs and demands. This study aims to make university services and resources becoming more supportive and provide more effective for assistance for international students to overcome the barriers in their transition process. This study also emphasizes the importance for university instructors, staff and local students to value international students' cultural capital and their multilingual capital. Insights of the study can inform university policymakers, instructors, and staff to provide a better environment and appropriate support for international students.

In addition, the study can be beneficial for Chinese international freshmen or other Chinese international students who recently arrived in their new host country. The experience of the participants in the study, how they manage to overcome their barriers and the suggestions they recommend are valuable references for incoming Chinese international students. This can help incoming Chinese international students to be more prepared and make informed decisions in their decisions to study abroad.

Chapter2: Literature Review

Overview

The recent trend of higher education in Canada and across the world have continuously accelerated with the rising number of international students in Canada. Being one of the major populations in Canadian universities, Chinese international students have become increasingly significant and influential to Canadian higher education. The impact of Chinese international students towards Canadian universities is embodied in various aspects, particularly in economy, academia and culture. Chinese international students attend universities outside their home country for different purposes and their motivations can be various. Apart from the benefits and challenges that Chinese international students bring to Canadian higher education, they also encountered a lot of difficulties and they learnt from all the barriers. Especially during their transition process where many of the Chinese international students run into barriers from language adjustment, cultural immersion to academic obstacles.

This chapter is presented in four parts. The chapter begins with examining the motivations that drive international students to pursue higher education in foreign universities, explicitly this section investigates the motivation of Chinese international students choosing Canada as their destination for higher education. The next section explicates the barriers that Chinese international students faced during the process of transitioning into Canadian universities, in particular their language barriers, social barriers as well as academic barriers. This section also investigated the strategies that Chinese international students use in coping with the difficulties. The third section introduced the theoretical framework for the study and the final section is the summary of the literature review.

The Motivations of International Students to Study Abroad

Universities worldwide have been competing to appeal to more international students pursuing higher education outside their home countries (Siddiq et al., 2012). The reasons for universities to recruit international students are mainly because of the contributing role students play in economy, culture and

academia in the domestic country (Chen, 2006). However, the motivations that drive international students to go to a foreign country for studying can be various.

According to Tan (2015), “the economic, social and personal value of education has been realized as motivating factors for seeking a better education overseas by individuals” (p. 1). Many international students are motivated by the booming economy and the brighter career prospect in foreign countries (Counsell, 2011). In addition to that, the conditions of policy, economy and education of their home countries can also have a huge effect on students’ decision making (Tan, 2015). Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) claimed that, one of the factors that can motivate international students to go to another country for education purposes is the dissatisfaction of their home countries. These unsatisfied factors can be drawn from academic and social issues (Singh et al., 2014). In Chen’s (2006) research, the motivation for some international students decide to study overseas is their desire to study under a professor/supervisor or their interest in learning about a particular field of study. Motivation can help international students have better decision making, and additionally their motivation also plays an important role in their adaptation to the new environment. The motivation of international students attending schools outside their home countries can be a significant factor to determine their further adjustment status (Chirkov et al., 2008).

Since universities worldwide are all eager to allure more international students, understanding their motivations and the factors that affect their decision-making can help universities conduct a targeted scheme.

Chinese International Students’ Motivations for Studying in Canada

The number of Chinese students going abroad for higher education is on the rise, and universities in Canada are favoured by many Chinese international students. Being the world’s leading study abroad market, Chinese students take up the largest portion among all the international students in Canada, and the number is still growing annually (Government of Canada, 2016). Similar to international students from other countries, the motivation for Chinese international students can also be shown from various perspectives.

First and foremost, Canada has the lowest tuition fee compares to other popular English-speaking countries for international students including Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States (Unicurve, 2016). The country with the highest tuition fee is the United State (\$20,519), followed by Australia (\$19,820), the United Kingdom (\$19,682), New Zealand (\$17,396) and Canada (\$11,701) (Unicurve, 2016). The gap of the tuition fee between the United States and Canada is \$8,818. Moreover. Canada also have the lowest living cost among the English-speaking countries for international students (Unicurve, 2016). The cost of living can be different based on the way students choose to live, like what place they choose to stay and the transportation they use for daily needs. Yet, there are still some indicators which can be used as the useful measures of students living expenses in the major English-speaking countries. International students all required to prove they have enough funds to support their living costs for visa requirement. Among the five major English-speaking countries, Canada has the lowest required annual living cost fund for international students which is CAD \$10,000 for one student per year (Unicurve, 2016). Many international students would prefer to live on-campus to be acquainted with school life in their first year. Therefore, another aspect to gauge international students' living cost is the on-campus residential fee. The on-campus residential fee is the highest in the United State, and the lowest in Canada (\$8,317) (Unicurve,2016). Minimum wages can also be a measurement for students living cost as it can indicate the expenses of basic service (dining and taxis). With no doubt, Canada has the second lowest minimum wages (Unicurve, 2016).

Second of all, many Chinese international students choose Canada for its academic reputation and the value of Canadian degrees. In China, people see studying abroad positively (Chen, 2006). Nancy (2016)'s research about Chinese international students experience in the United States explicated that Chinese students go to the United States for the quality of higher education. Chen (2007) conducted a research about the factors that made East Asia international graduate students came to study in Canada. The result of the research showed that there were "push and pull factors" that influenced students' decision of studying abroad and choosing their destination, participants in Chen's (2007) research compared Canada with other

English-speaking countries like Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Some of the common factors that made international students end up choosing Canada over these countries was because of “the higher cost of education, length of the program, academic credibility and research environment” in other English-speaking countries (Chen, 2007, p. 768). On the other hand, for many of the Chinese international students who choose to return to China after overseas study, the motivation for them to go abroad for higher education is the prestige of Canadian degree which can bring them better career opportunities. The employers in China tend to value foreign degree higher than Chinese degree (Counsell, 2011). As Bai (2008) investigated, many people in China perceive that foreign things can always outcompete domestic things. Therefore, many Chinese international students complete their degree in a foreign country aim to have a better future either in China or in Canada.

Other reasons for Chinese international students choosing Canada for higher education are the living environment and the immigration policy in Canada. The result of Chen’s (2007) research showed that the choice of coming to Canada was mostly affected by the “pull factors from Canada”. The most influential pull factor is the environment in Canada, the following factors are the “economic/cost and visa/immigration factors” (Chen, 2007, p.764). Most of the participants in Chen’s (2007) study see Canada as their first option was because of the “safe, diverse and multicultural” environment (p. 764). The immigration policy in Canada is also an attractive reason for Chinese international students with immigration motivation to come to Canada. Since Canada is trying to absorb more Chinese students as well as Chinese worker to study and work in Canada for their contribution to the Canadian economy and populations, the immigration policy becomes gradually open to attract more foreign immigrants (The Global and Mail, 2016). Moreover, as according to Li (2014), Canada see international students as “potential skilled immigrants” (p. ii), “many developed countries make the connection between attracting international students to their higher education institution and their search for top quality skilled immigrants” who are able to dedicate themselves to the national development (p. 1).

Barriers Related to International Students’ Transition Process

Despite the advantages of overseas studying, many of the international students encounter challenges while participating in higher education outside of their home countries (Wu et al., 2015). The differences in language, culture as well as academic learning process are the main aspects that set foreign students apart from Canadian students (Kenyon et al., 2012). Compared to the pressure that domestic students have to face during their freshman year, international students have to deal with more problems from language barriers, integration into a new culture and the adjustment of new education system and regulations (Ren & Hagedorn, 2007). Gunawardena and Wilson (2012) expressed the difficulties that confronts new international students aptly, that, “when international students buy into this dream, however, they encounter a plethora of misadventures related to cultural adjustment, language use and academic issues” (p. 1).

Language Barriers

One of the major problems that stop international students from achieving an unconstrained transition process is language (Galloway & Jenkins, 2005). In English-speaking countries like Canada, English proficiency is the main issue for international students who are not from English speaking background (Gunawardena & Wilson, 2012). Language barriers were reported to be the most challenging issue, particularly to those non-English native speakers.

Many researches have investigated the language issue that international students encounter during the transition process. According to what Olsen (1997) highlighted in his article, students' English is an important factor to determine whether they can win other people's respect and integrate into their peers' socialization. Language plays an essential role in communicating and socializing. As an international student in Canada, Liu's (2011) used her own experience to reveal the barriers and difficulties she has during her study. She voiced that language is the main obstacle that impedes her to have a successful involvement in the Canadian community. Because of the lack of English proficiency, she failed to understand her supervisor and classmates in her graduate courses and faced lots of issues relating to everyday life and social activities. A low English proficiency would also cause misunderstanding between

international students and professor and “leave negative impression from a professor because professor perceived that the international students were not well prepared for class” (Wu et al., 2015, p. 3).

International students whose first language is not English “struggle a lot with their English learning while simultaneously having to learn disciplinary content through English as well” (Mei, 2017, p. 5). Taking Chinese international students as an example, many of the Chinese international students know English grammar and vocabulary but have poor performance in oral English. This is because of the different English teaching methods in China and in Western countries. Many of the English teacher in China emphasize more on English vocabulary and grammar than oral English, which made it difficult for Chinese students to have the opportunity to master their English-speaking skills. It is already hard for Chinese international students using English for communication on daily basis, not to mention the great pressure they have to overcome when forced to use English to present in a group or as an individual, or simply ask questions in class (Huntley, 1993). In addition to that, international students can come across other obstacles including lecture comprehension, note taking and academic writing (Huntley, 1993). International students with difficulty using English can feel the academic stress when interaction and participation are highly requested in class (Mei, 2017).

Many of the international students also have issues in English writing. The writing problems that most international students worry about are not just due to the lack of English proficiency. Even for those with fluent English language ability may have the same issues in academic writing. The different standards of academic writing trapped many Chinese international students during their academic learning process. According to what Heng (2018) found out in her study, many Chinese international students in the United States find academic writing as one of their major obstacles to overcome. The participants in her study see writing as a challenging barrier because they are used to “writing narrative essay in China”, but the required format of writings in the United States’ classroom is “argumentative” (p. 26). The style and content of academic writing are very different in China and in the Western countries. Chinese international students need to learn to “adhering to a new format/style” of writing and “creating new ideas”, in order to meet the

requirements of academic writing in Western countries (Heng, 2018, p. 26). Zhang's (2011) study demonstrated the similar problems that Chinese international graduate students have in academic writing. Participants in Zhang's (2011) study also have difficulties in adjusting to the western format of writing and technical writing skill. Their lack of English proficiency hinders them from choosing the proper "way of expression, word choice, sentence structure and grammar" (p. 45). Moreover, some of the participants in Zhang's (2011) study also shared that the differences in their culture and epistemology which affect their way of critical thinking also have a great influence on their academic writing. The epistemological difference in China and in Canada can cause great challenges in Chinese international students' academic writing.

Beside the difficulties related to communication and academic study, many international students also suffer from the feeling of alienation due to the lack of English language proficiency. According to what Lawrence (2014) discovered in her article, international students' may have a strong and intense feeling of unsureness and confusion when living and studying in a foreign country. The barriers that students have in the language aspect may make their feeling of being locked out even more severe. Lawrence (2014) also declared that the communication difficulties that international students encounter as a result of their language barriers "demonstrating the complexity inherent in international students' transitions" (p. 224). Acculturation is another issue for many international students and the lack of English language proficiency will make it aggravated. Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga and Szapocznik (2010) claimed in their article that, even when international students' cultural background remains the same, students may suffer from the pressure that using English as an additional language bring to them during their transition into a new educational environment.

To avoid recruiting international students with low English proficiency, international students have to achieve an adequate score in certain English standard examinations so as to meet the requirements of the university admission during the application process. However, though many international students can meet the required IELTS or TOEFL test score and be accepted by the university program, a great number of them

still regard language learning as the major challenge they face in the academic field (Zhang & Beck, 2014). Gunawardena and Wilson (2012) stated that passing the required English language tests “does not guarantee that they have native-like fluency or writing skills in English” (p. 28). Ren et al. (2007) also highlighted this problem in their article that, using the language standard measurements such as: Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) as the only method to indicate international students’ language proficiency and their capacity to deal with the adjustment process into the foreign universities or programs may not be comprehensive enough. They emphasized the importance of encouraging universities to combine interview-orientated examinations with the traditional type of tests as a part of the overall assessment for admission to have a more comprehensive evaluation of the applicants.

Social Barriers

“Local language acquisition and strong intercultural ties can be important factors for adopting assimilation or integration” (Cao et al., 2017, p. 93). The language issues that international students confronted have a huge side effect on students’ social life. According to the result of Guo and Guo’s (2017) research, the main factors that are preventing international students from having a sound relationship with domestic students are their English language fluency which lead them to communication difficulties. From a cultural perspective, international students need to face a brand-new way of thinking and doing once they arrived in the foreign country (Wu et al., 2015). For many international students, transitioning into higher education and a different cultural environment at the same time may lead them into more culture shocks (Leary, 2011). And their culture shock can be influenced by the social interaction with other students (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004).

The difficulties in social aspect may hinder international students’ interaction with domestic students and trap themselves in their own comfort zone. According to Montgomery and McDowell’s (2009) research, carried out at a university in the U.K., foreign students prefer to set up their own international communities in the school which is crucial for their academic life and personal wellbeing. In the meantime, international

students are more likely to have a relatively surface and weak relationship with their domestic peers. The study conducted by Kenyon, Frohard-Dourlent and Roth (2012) about international students studying in UBC discovered the similar phenomenon that many international students mainly socialize with others from their original country. Their research also brought up that, almost half of the international students have a strong preference to join social groups that has relevance to their home country and culture. As Hamamura and Laird (2014) noted, because of the huge cultural differences and challenges in the process of acculturation, international students particularly those from East Asia, inclined to have more psychological difficulties than domestic students.

The process of integrating into a new cultural environment may also expose international students into discrimination. The international students in Guo and Guo's (2017) research expressed that setting up meaningful relationship with students from the host country is only one of the challenges they had dealt with in their social life, many of them also encountered "biases and outright discrimination from their classmates, instructors, supervisors and the local community" (p. 863). Anxiety can be generated during the interaction with people from different cultures, and domestic students tend to generate "negative stereotype concerning the behaviour of newcomers" (Wu et al., 2015). Some of the international students find it hard to earn trust in the professional avenue and expressed their feelings of being treated like unwelcomed guests (Lee & Rice, 2007). Many international students failed to work with local students in their class, let alone engaging in interaction after class (Guo & Guo, 2017; Leask, 2009). Lee and Rice (2007) identified that the level of discrimination international students experienced is various base on language, culture and appearance. Their research showed that, international students with fluent English, similar cultural background and appearance as domestic students experienced minor or no discrimination. Whilst international students from the minority group on campus suffer a greater level of discrimination.

Academic Barriers

Apart from the language and social barriers that most international students have while studying in their new host country, many of them struggle with adaption to the new academic environment due to the different education system and teaching approach. Many international students, especially for those from China, find it hard to adjust to the learner-centered teaching method. As the teacher-centered teaching approach is still widely used in China (Jian et al., 2011), the student-centered way of teaching which emphasize on teamwork, classroom collaboration, and students' perspectives, which is not the same as the teaching approaches they are used to experience in China.

“Learning shock” and “academic stress” also cause international students' failure to meet the academic expectation in their host country. According to Mei (2017), many Chinese international students have little knowledge about how Western style class discussion would be like, as a result, they fail to actively participate in class. In addition to the lack of knowledge, some of the international students are unable to involve themselves in class because of the lack of confidence in their English proficiency (Lewthwaite, 1996). The research by Robertson and his colleagues (2000) showed that international students tend to be too sensitive about their English proficiency to ask for help when needed, even though they are eager to be accepted by peers and gain academic achievements. The lack of knowledge and English proficiency are not the only reasons that lead international students to academic failure, the lack of confidence and the unwillingness of asking for help also responsible for students' academic failure. Gu (2009) revealed three elements that are essential for international students' academic adaption and development, which are improving linguistic competence, having a greater sense of self-confidence, increasing the involvement in class interactions and establishing a stronger sense of independence in learning. These elements are necessary for students' academic success.

Selecting which major to study can also be a decisive factor for students' academic success. According to Huntley (1993), “the field in which a foreign student majors may also determine the probability of his or her success in academic performance and in the problems to be faced” (p. 8). Due to the language requirement for different majors, international students who major in engineering have the best performance

while the academic performance for international students in social science major present to be the worst (Huntley, 1993). Therefore, in order to encounter fewer academic barriers, it is important for international students to be fully aware of their own abilities and the language requirements for different majors, and make the informed decision when choosing majors.

Chinese International Students' Strategies in Coping with the Barriers

To better adapt to the new environment and successfully go through all sorts of barriers, studies on Chinese international students showed various strategies that Chinese international students used to overcome their difficulties.

For many Chinese international students, dealing with language barriers is their top priority as language barriers have a huge effect on both social barriers and academic barriers. Liu (2016) composed a research on the strategies that Chinese international students use to deal with the barriers they are facing while studying abroad. The participants in her research mainly had problems with vocabulary, writing and understanding the course content in class. The strategies they use for vocabulary problems are using keywords to deduce the meaning in the context of the reading, or consciously and unconsciously taking notes, highlighting key points when reading articles. To cope with the problems they have in academic writing, Chinese international students prefer to check their assignments several times once they are finished, or reach out to domestic students for help.

Solving the problems individually is not the only method Chinese international students use, they also seek help through social interaction with students from their host country (Lu, 2003). Some of the Chinese international students also choose to ask for support from the university. This includes booking appointments with the writing center for writing support, and attending different types of academic workshops, for instance workshop on citation rules, workshop on using library resources and etc. Bauer and Picciotto's (2013) study about international students in America showed that writing center is very popular for international students with problems in English writing. Participants in their study expressed

that the writing center can provide them feedback on their writing assignments and help them improve their English writing skills.

When the language barrier is too hard for international students to overcome, some of them also chose to switch majors. Wang's (2003) study of Chinese international students showed that some of the Chinese international students with language problems tend to get more practice in English or switch to another major with lower language requirements, or those with less writing intensive courses.

Most of the Chinese international students prefer to turn to their fellow Chinese students for help when they need assistance. According to scholarship on this subject, the friends between international students serve the function of boosting the students' confidence, making them more content and integrated to the foreign environment that is their new host country (JIS Students, 2017). Chinese international students will share their suffering and stress with other Chinese friends (Li, 1993) as they see their Chinese peers as "important source of emotional support" (Yan, 2008, p. 36) when they encounter negative experience in their host country. Having a close connection with other Chinese peers can help Chinese international students find a sense of belongingness.

Chinese international students also view their family as a preferred source for problem solving and emotional support. Many Chinese students call their parents to deal with the feeling of depression and frustration (Frank, 2000). Zhang's (1992) study emphasized the similar idea that the support and sacrifice from Chinese international students' parents are very beneficial for Chinese international students' academic success and social wellbeing.

Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by Bourdieu's (1986) capital theory, namely economic capital, cultural capital and social capital. Bourdieu (1986) defined capital as the "accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its 'incorporated,' embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in

the form of reified or living labor” (p. 241). It takes time to accumulate capital, and capital has the potential ability “to produce profit and to reproduce itself in an identical or expended form” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 241). Moreover, Bourdieu (1986) stated that capital has a close link with the social world; through which different forms of capital are distributed at a particular time symbolize the intrinsic structure of the social world.

According to Bourdieu (1986), there are three fundamental types of capitals in Bourdieu’s (1986) capital theories, they are economic capital, cultural capital and social capital. According to Bourdieu’s (1986), economic capital can be “immediately or directly” converted into “money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights” (p. 243). Economic capital has a direct connection with cultural capital and social capital, as both cultural capital and social capital can be transformed into economic capital under certain conditions (Bourdieu, 1986).

Cultural capital is present in the long-lasting temperament in human mind and body, in the forms of “cultural goods” and “education qualifications” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243). In addition, there are three states of cultural capital: embodied state, objectified state and institutionalized state. In the embodied states, cultural capital presents and accumulates through the socialization within the family; in the objectified state, cultural capital presents in material objects and media including books, movies, TV shows, etc.; in the institutionalized state, cultural capital presents in the forms of academic credentials such as academic diploma (Bourdieu, 1986).

Bourdieu describes social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (p. 248). It is the status, resources and connections that people have within a social group.

Economic capital is the fundamental resource that determines if a student is able to study overseas. Studying abroad often requires a student to have a greater amount of economic capital compare to their average peers, as they have to pay a higher tuition fee compared to domestic students. For students from China, it is already impossible for them to work part-time to financially support their own education in their

home country. Those who chose to study overseas face even greater economic pressure and academic pressure, making it necessary for those students to rely on their parents' economic status to support their educational endeavours. Therefore, the financial status of the parents has a significant influence on the type of education a student can obtain (Fan, 2014). Studies showed that students who can afford the high cost of overseas education are typically from families with more economic capital; according to Blanden and Gregg (2004), children from a wealthy family background can receive more education resources which can lead them to better education outcomes. Furthermore, families with higher social status, education level and income are more likely to provide their children with greater access to better education (Denzler, 2011). For international students themselves, the economic capital they invested into education can convert in cultural capital in the form of obtaining Canadian degrees or qualifications; the cultural capital they gain from the academic investment can then be exchanged at the labour market for monetary value such as better employment or higher salaries, thus transforming into economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). However, Bourdieu (1986) also explained the positive relationship between the scarcity of the academic qualifications and the "material and symbolic profits" it produced; the profit of the academic qualifications might not be as valuable as expected because of the lack of scarcity of the education credential in the labour market. So, the cultural capital they gain from the academic investment may not return them with the symbolic capital and economic capital as they originally anticipated.

Cultural capital is not the only outcome that international students can accumulate from their academic investment. Surrounded by people from higher social class with better educated family background also help Chinese international students build more social connections and can, in turn, become a steppingstone to greater access to better resources which can be regarded as social capital. According to Bourdieu (1986), "the relationship may exist only in the practical state, in material and/or symbolic exchange with help to maintain" (p. 249). Students can continuously receive resources and materials through the interaction within the social group. Having the right social connections and a prestigious academic degree can make a student more competitive in the labor market, and they can in turn use their qualifications and resources to gain

higher income as well as higher social status which can be converted into economic capital. In this sense, the three fundamental forms of capital described by Bourdieu are intertwined particularly within the community of Chinese international students, as the three forms of fundamental capital are at all times, convertible to other forms of capital, through the decision and choice of the agent actors.

Apart from the three fundamental forms of capital, another form of capital is particularly relevant to Chinese international students studying in Canada. Linguistic capital, which is itself a form of cultural capital, is another type of capitals that Chinese international students can gain from study abroad. Linguistic capital is measured based on “linguistic competency”, which is the capacity to use the language that can draw attentions and accepted by others. (Fan, 2011, p. 252). Studying in a foreign country with English as the primary language for education can help Chinese international students gain linguistic capital in English. At the same time, the lack of linguistic capital in English is also the main reason for their poor adjustment. According to Bourdieu (1992), people with less linguistic competency will face greater marginalization in social mobility and moving down in social stratifications. The lack of linguistic capital is responsible for creating the barriers they encountered during the adjustment process. Thus, the necessity for Chinese international students to improve their proficiency in English is not just for the enhancement of their linguistic capital, but also a mean for them to receive social recognition in Canada.

Additionally, Chinese international students can also bring into Canada various forms of capital. This is also one of the reasons why Canada see international students as a huge asset for its universities and communities. The high tuition fees that Chinese international students bring to Canada constitutes economic capital, while at the same time, the academic achievement that Chinese international students accomplish, generates cultural capital and symbolic capital for Canadian universities. Moreover, both domestic students and universities accumulate social capital as a result of the influx of social resources that Chinese international students bring into Canada. Upon the merits that Chinese international students can bring to Canada, it is therefore critical for the Canadian universities to study about Chinese international students and to assist them to have a smoother transition process.

Summary of Literature Review

As presented in this literature review, along with the growing trend of internationalization in higher education, students' international mobility becomes stronger, evidenced by more and more students who decide to pursue higher education in another country. Being one of the majority population in Canadian universities, "international students in Canada are highly valued and highly beneficial to this country's educational landscape, and vital to the globalized educational institution of the future" (CBIE, 2013). Therefore, understanding international students' experience through their own voice can help policy-maker and educators for their decision making (Guo & Guo, 2017). The motivations that drive Chinese international students to come overseas for higher education explained students' demands and expectations. When entering a completely different country with different language and culture, Chinese international students encounter barriers and obstacles from language, academic and social aspects, especially during the transition process. They use different coping strategies to overcome the barriers in order to have a smoother life in their host country. It is important for schools and administrators to consider the diversity of international students and domestic students within their institutions prior to developing services and supports to assist them. The literature also introduced and examined Bourdieu's capital theories and how the different forms of capitals support international students' activities.

In regard to the limitations of these literatures, not all the literature used in this review are related directly to Chinese international students studying in Canadian universities. Many of the articles are not specific to the study of internationalized Canadian higher education or Chinese international students' transition process. For example, Counsell's article is about Chinese students in the U.K., Yao and Bai's study is about international students in Australia and both researches conducted by Urban and Palmer (2014), and Chellaraj (2008) respectively are targeted at international graduate students in U.S. The reason for including all these articles into this review is that, though the articles are not based in Canada, under the internationalized environment however, the advantages of international students' recruitment in different

countries can share similarities and the experience for international students' transition process may be the same.

In conclusion, the presence of this review of literature provide some of the existing scholarship relating to the impact of internationalization in higher education and international students' transition process. Searching and Reading over all the literatures allows me to understand the pros and cons of the present research profoundly and helped me come up with new thoughts and understandings.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter, I introduce the research design for this study. The Qualitative case study method was adopted due to the purpose of the study is to explore in depth the experience of Chinese international undergraduate students in a Canadian university. After explaining the reason for choosing qualitative case study as the approach, I present the method for this study, the description of participants, how I recruited participants and examine how the data was collected and analyzed. The last part is how I controlled rigor in the research.

Research Questions

The present is aimed at investigating Chinese international undergraduate students experience from the following aspects: the motivating factors that influenced Chinese international undergraduate students' decision to study abroad and the factors that motivated them to choose Canada as their destination, the barriers Chinese international undergraduate students encountered during transition process and the coping strategies they use to overcome those barriers, and the recommendations from Chinese international undergraduate students to those newcomers.

The Qualitative Research

This study used a qualitative research strategy to investigate Chinese international students' experience in a Canadian university. Qualitative research, as oppose to Quantitative research which primarily "identifies and investigates the impact of only a few variables", qualitative research "attempts to explore a host of factors that maybe influencing the situation" (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, p. 8). A qualitative design is best used for researchers who aim to understand participants' thoughts and views. As qualitative inquiry attempts to discover and to describe in a narrative way people's daily routine and the meaning of these action (Frederick, 2011), I found a qualitative research approach is more suitable than a quantitative research approach to study about Chinese international undergraduate students' experience. This is because the purpose of my study is best aligned with the goal of composing qualitative research which is "to

understand the situation under investigation primarily from the participants and not the researcher's perspectives" (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, p. 8). Furthermore, a qualitative research approach is more applicable when researchers know little about the research issue (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). As a Chinese international graduate student myself, I share some similarities with other Chinese peers. However, there are also significant differences between undergraduate students and graduate students in various aspects (Kwon, 2009). So at the same time, I am a stranger to them and know very little about their experience of studying in Canada as Chinese international undergraduate students, that there is sufficient gap between my personal account and their subjective experience. Thus, qualitative is a more appropriate approach for this study.

The merits of qualitative research are tremendous. Researchers who choose to do qualitative research focus on the views of participants, "asks broad, general questions; collects data consisting largely words (or text) from participants; describes and analyzes these words for themes; and conducted the inquiry in a subjective, biased manner" (Creswell, 2008, p. 46). Since the research is to investigate Chinese international students' experience and perspectives, the qualitative research approach can help me explore and highlight every participants' experience and thoughts and acknowledge the individuality and uniqueness of their subjective experience. The Qualitative approach allows researchers to have a deep understanding about the participants, and it is more appropriate for study aims to look into the in-depth phenomenological experience underneath the research problem (Chen, 2007). As the purpose of this study is about exploring the barriers that Chinese international undergraduate students have through their living and learning experience in a specific manner, therefore, rather than having a variable and broad understanding on the students' experience, using qualitative approach allows me to have a more in-depth investigation on Chinese international undergraduate students' experience in Canadian university.

The Case Study Research

Based on my research question, I chose to employ a case study approach as the methodology for this study. Stake (1995) described case study approach as “the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (p. xi). The advantage of case study method is that it recognizes the individuality of the subject’s experience and presents it in a coherent and intact narrative within the context of the subject’s history. In addition, another advantage of case study, according to Merriam (1988), is that case study engages in the critical study of “a specific situation or phenomenon, they are descriptive, and they are heuristic-that is they offer insights into the phenomenon under study” (p. 21). Thus, case study is the best tool available for researchers to uncover the phenomenological experience of the subject. Compare to other research approaches, Case study can “offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon” (Merriam, p. 32, 1988). Since this study seeks to explore and understand agents as complex and multidimensional decision-makers, case study approach is therefore the most appropriate research approach to this subject matter.

There are several distinct features of case study approach. Hancock and Algozzine (2006) pointed out several characteristics of case study. Firstly, case study “focuses on the individual representative of a group, more often it addresses a phenomenon”. Second, the phenomenon of case study is examined in “its natural context, bounded by space and time”. Thirdly, “case study is richly descriptive, because it is grounded in deep and varied sources of information” and lastly, case study allows researchers to find out additional information through the in-depth study about the research topic (p. 15-16). Case study emphasize the uniqueness of the case itself (Stake, 1995). According to Stake (1995), “case study is particularization, not generalization” (p. 8). Moreover, scholarship on this subject suggested that researchers who chose case study as the research approaches need to emphasize the priority of understanding the case itself, and instead of knowing how the case is the difference from the others, case study focus more on the differences (Stake, 1995).

Case study can be applied in both quantitative method and qualitative method (Stake, 1995). Since the study is aimed to investigate Chinese international undergraduate students' experience in detail, using a qualitative case study as the methodology is most suitable for this research. Hancock and Algozzine (2006) made a comparison between qualitative case study and different types of qualitative research including phenomenological studies, ethnographic studies, grounded theory qualitative research and biographical studies. The features that set case studies apart from other type of qualitative research are that case studies are "intensive analysis and descriptions of a single unit or system bounded by space and time" (p. 11). Researchers who use case study aim to have a deep understanding of the situation in its entirety, they also hope to dig out the meaning for those involved (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). This align with the purpose of my research, which is to obtain an in-depth investigation of Chinese international undergraduate students' experience in Canada. Hancock and Algozzine (2006) also stated that case study is appropriate for researchers who have connections with the event, and researchers who chose case study as the methodology often have a special interest in the topic they are working on. Chinese international undergraduate students are part of the Chinese international student community. A study of their experience has relevance with other Chinese international students due to the similarities they share among each other. Being a member of the Chinese international student group with little knowledge about undergraduate students' life, I therefore have a strong interest in understanding their experience.

Semi-Structured Interviews

This study applied semi-structured interview as the method for data collection. This is a common method in the field of educational research, particularly when the research involved case study, as Merriam (1988) noted that, "in case study research of contemporary education, some and occasionally all the data are collected through interviews" (p. 71). Interviews can be an effective tool for information collecting if researchers are interested in learning the participants' perspective or interested in exploring their understanding of a certain phenomenon (Berg, 1989). It is also a necessary approach when the study is to explore events in the past which are not replicable (Merriam, 1988). There are different types of interview

and Merriam (1988) emphasized on the way of choosing which type of interview for the research is based on the amount of structure prepared. Highly structured interview is used for survey of large samples and focus on the qualitative result, questions in the highly structured interview are predetermined; semi-structured interview is used when “certain information is desired from all the respondents”, this type of interview often has a list of guiding questions to explore; unstructured interview is used when researchers know little about the study to ask questions, questions in this type of interview are not planned and decided beforehand (Merriam, 1988, p. 74). Stake (1995) pointed out that “qualitative case study seldom proceeds as a survey with the same questions asked of each respondent; rather, each interviewee is expected to have had unique experience, special stories to tell” (p. 65). Moreover, researchers are expected to have a list of questions revolved around the study (Stake, 1995). Therefore, semi-structure interview method with open-ended and less structured set of questions is preferably used in qualitative case study research (Merriam, 1988).

Semi-structured interviews “are designed to have a number of interviewer questions prepared in advance but such prepared questions are not designed to be sufficiently open that the subsequent questions of the interviewer cannot be planned in advance but must be improvised in a careful and theorized way” (Wengraf, 2001, p. 5). The aim of this type of interview is to “access the perspective of the person being interviewed” rather than “put a thing in his mind” (Patton, 1980, p. 196). Semi-structured interview can allow researcher and participants to have a space for reciprocity between them, and also a space for “reflexivity in terms of dilemmas encountered within the research project” (Galletta & Cross, 2013, p. 75). Semi-structured interview is “flexible and likely to promote fruitful reflection by the participants” (Mill, 2001, p. 385). Since the study is to investigate Chinese international undergraduate students’ academic and social experience from participants’ perspectives. Employing semi-structured interview as the method to gather data can not only help the researcher to control the distance between participants and themselves, but also enable researchers to unpack rich and deep insights of the research target. In the semi-structured interview, interviewee is asked to tell stories based on all or part of their personal experience (Wengraf,

2001). Thus, using semi-structured interviewing to create an in-depth conversation with the Chinese international undergraduate students can allow me to hear their stories and to analyze their experience in a profound and meaningful manner.

There are some misconceptions of semi-structured interview that semi-structured interview is often seen as easier comparing to highly structured interviews, as researchers do not need much preparation on the questions before the interview (Wengraf, 2001). This is completely wrong according to Wengraf (2001). Wengraf (2001) explained that semi-structured interview needs researchers to invest the same amount of work as fully structured interview, the interviews need full preparation and planning. In order to successfully conduct semi-structured interviews, that researchers need “as much preparation before the session, probably and certainly; more discipline and creativities in the session; more time for analysis and interpretation after the session” (Wengraf, 2001, p. 5). Since the interview is semi-structured, researchers who chose semi-structured interview as the method need to have a clarified purpose (Wengraf, 2001). They have to make sure to conduct the interview aligned with their research purpose and avoid the interview questions being dragged away by the interviewees.

Ethic Considerations

This research was approved by the University ethics committee. In order to protect the identity of each research participant, all names are pseudonyms.

Research Participants

The data were collected from individual interviews with ten Chinese international undergraduate students who are currently attending at the River University. For the gender balance, there are five female students and five male students from age 20-23. Each of them has been living in Canada for more than one year. Participants came from a mix of different school year and majors. One of them is in the first year, three of them are from the second year, two of them are in the third year and the rest of them are in their fourth year. The majors that the participants are studying are Business, Soft Engineering, Communication

and Culture, Chemical Engineering, a double major in Computer Science and Applied Math, Economics and Applied Math. Most the participants in this study are from middle class families in China, their parents' yearly income average is about 100,000 CAD to 120,000CAD. All the participants were interviewed individually, and each of them voluntarily agreed to participate in this research by signing an interview consent form.

Table 1 Student Participants

No.	Name	Gender	Age	Major	Year in Pre-University	Year Of study
1	Ye	Female	22	Business		4
2	Tony	Male	22	Software Engineering	1 semester (3 month)	3
3	Wen	Male	20	Communication and Culture		2
4	Kathy	Female	20	Chemical Engineering		2
5	Edward	Male	20	Chemical Engineering		2
6	Frank	Male	23	Computer Science and Applied Math	1 semester (3 month)	3
7	Peter	Male	20	Economics	2 semesters (1 year)	1
8	Sharon	Female	23	Applied Math	2 years (in China) + 8month language course	4
9	Zisel	Female	22	Business		4
10	Rainie	Female	22	Business		4

Data Collection Methods

I started collecting the data at River University in Canada after I received ethnic approval from the University of Calgary. I targeted at Chinese international undergraduate students at River University who has been living in Canada for more than one year. I used the snowball sampling method to recruit the participants. Snowball sampling is a useful strategy for researchers as a mean to establish better connections

with referred participants and to ease the cultural differences between researchers and participants (Crouse and Lowe, 2018). First, I reached out to some of the participants through email, text or WeChat (Chinese phone app) to invite them to participate in this study, then I asked them if they have any recommended friends or classmates that would be interested in my research topic. Finally, I got in touch with those referred participants to see which one meet my criteria and would be willing to be the future participants of my study. All the interviews were taken place in a private workroom or at a café with mutual agreement. I had a face to face interview with each of the student participants separately and individually. All the interviews were done in the participants' first language, Chinese, which they all preferred. The utilization of participants' preferred language allows participants to feel more comfortable during the interview and expose culturally hidden ideas (Heng, 2018). There were approximately 20 leading. Each interview lasted for about 60-90 minutes, and was audio recorded. I carefully listened to the interviewers, took a few notes and asked for clarification when needed. These are better than just "tape-record or write furiously" (Stake, 1995, p. 66). To ascertain the accuracy of the information that the participants provided, some of the participants had a short follow up after the individual interview. The audio record was transcribed into text and then translated into English.

Rigor

The increasing acknowledgement of the value of qualitative research has been accompanied by a rising demand to employ criteria, strategies, and tools to promote the quality and rigor of such studies (Zitomer and Goodwin, 2014). I played two roles in my study, an insider and an outsider. On the one hand, I am a Chinese international student myself, I inevitable share the same identities and culture with other Chinese international students. As a foreigner living in Canada, I encountered the same barriers in language adjustment and integrating into the local culture as other Chinese international students. Therefore, I view myself as an insider from these perspectives. On the other hand, I am a graduate student and there are many differences between graduate students and undergraduate students. Firstly, students in graduate programs often have more matured education background than undergraduate students. Secondly, the program

curriculum and social network for graduate students and undergraduate students can be very different. Lastly, graduate students have different motivations for choosing Canada. Because of all these factors, graduate students can encounter difference barriers in academic and social adaptation. Thus, from these perspectives, I view myself as an outsider. Having a clear idea of how I should situate myself in this study, both at the very beginning and during the process, not only prevented me from either getting too close with the participants or being alienated from my research, but also helped me add greater rigor to the research. Apart from placing myself in the right position to help increase the rigor of the research, applying certain approaches when analyzing data to come out with tangible results underpins the process and is also crucial. Strategies that can enhance rigor of the research include: peer debriefing; audit trails; member checking; and reflexivity (Freysteinson et al, 2013). Using member check can help gather the information more precisely from the research subjects. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) stressed that, member check is one of the most crucial techniques for establishing the credibility of the research. Relevant literature also acknowledges reflexivity as a pertinent and valuable strategy for improving qualitative research (Freysteinson et al, 2013). Using reflexivity as an approach to let participants review the content of the interview can increase authenticity. The literature on rigor and quality in qualitative research increasingly acknowledges the significance of reflexivity (Gough 2003; Smith, 2006; Lambert et al, 2010). Using reflexivity as an introspective process by which the researcher becomes aware of and more transparent when presenting subjective influence on the research process. Although rigor might limit the extent of the researcher's freedom to engage with the research topic, it allows researchers to engage with the research topic with a specific focus, and increase the depth of the analysis. Overall, a rigorous approach to research can help increase the trustworthiness and authenticity of the research which is an essential consideration for educational researchers to achieve.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

The research finding was discussed in the following seven major sections emerged from analysing the interview content.

Students' Motivations for Going Abroad for Higher Education

Knowing students' initial motivation of going abroad is crucial for later investigation on this subject matter, as different motivation may affect their mindset as well as their later behaviors after they enter universities. Students' motivation also has a great effect on their academic achievement (Mega et al., 2014). Among the ten participants in the study, they all presented various motivations for studying abroad. Two of the participants chose to study abroad to avoid "Gaokao (高考)", otherwise known as the national college entrance examination in China. In China, Gaokao is a significant component in the Chinese education system, where the system allows colleges and universities to select students based on their exam performance (Hu et al., 2014). Because of the huge population in China, Gaokao is always very competitive which intimidates many students. This is evidently the case with some of the participants; one of the participants Ye said: "I do not want to take Gaokao, everyone makes Gaokao sounds very terrifying", and that studying abroad was an easier alternative to the brutal competition that is Gaokao. Another participant Kathy, whose parents made the decision for her to study abroad, think that going through Gaokao is too stressful for her daughter, and that study abroad can offer another option to pursue higher education. She claimed that, "study abroad was originally my parents' decision, I was not willing to go because of my introvert personality. But once it is decided, there is no way back." Kathy expressed that if she would have a chance to make her own decision again, she would not choose to come to a foreign country at such an early age.

Studying abroad as an alternative to Gaokao seems to be a popular trend; another participant Sharon decided to go abroad for higher education was because she was not satisfied with her exam score in the national college entrance examination, she did not want to take the exam again to go through the stress

again. Similar to Sharon, Frank also had a low score in the national college entrance examination, he took the exam again but still did not meet the required score for his ideal university. Both of Sharon and Frank chose to apply for university overseas as they believe going abroad can offer them a second chance to study at a prestigious university.

Some other participants had a different but somewhat similar motivation; different from those Sharon and Frank who did not do well in Gaokao, Tony obtained a high score in Gaokao, but he still decided to go abroad for higher education to avoid “Junxun (军训)”, the compulsory military training. Tony said: “I do not want to experience Junxun, I’m afraid of Junxun. My physical strength is too weak, I’m afraid that I cannot run for 10000 meters.” The military training, so called Junxun is a mandatory course for new students who are accepted into universities (Rosen, 1993). Junxun usually contains a variety of physical training and that all students must meet the requirements as a part of their post-secondary education. The fear of the physical demands of Junxun is thus another powerful motivation for students to elect opting out of the post-secondary education in China.

Another motivation is the perceived superiority of the Western style education, which in some people’s mind, places greater importance of creativity and critical thinking. Among the participants, the reason that made Edward and Peter chose to go to a foreign country for higher education was because they believe Western education fits them better and provide them with more opportunities for future development.

Unique among the participants is Wen, who favours studying abroad because of his personal identity and sexual orientation. Wen is the only one who emphasized how the diverse environment in western countries attracts him: “I chose to go abroad was because of my own sexual orientation, staying at a western country is definitely going to be better than staying at my homeland.” For Wen, the decision to studying abroad was that he perceived Western societies to be more accepting of this personal identity, and that studying abroad was a way to find a place where he can live more freely as a queer man. In addition,

Wen also explained that his parents also had a role in forming his decision; his parents preferred him to stay at a

Western country which can be beneficial for his next generation.

Other participants had a less clear motivation for studying motivation, both Zisel and Rainie's decision of going abroad was motivated by their peers.

All my friends around me went to a foreign country for education, and most of them went abroad at a very young age. Maybe it was because of peer pressure, I have a mindset that if everyone is going abroad, I should do the same. (Zisel, Business)

She personally really wanted to study abroad and the pressure from her peers and her parents also influenced her decision.

Why Students Choose Canada

Firstly, students in China tend to favour countries in the English-speaking nations; English is one of the required courses in the Chinese curriculum and is taught as the predominant foreign language in China (Li, 2014). When students are considering which place to choose as the destination for study abroad, most students prefer English-speaking. None of the Chinese international students that participated in the research considered non-English speaking countries. Of all the English-speaking countries, Canada is one of the top choices among many Chinese students and their parents, it also “receives the most of its foreign students from China” (Zheng, 2010, p. 222). Compares to other foreign countries, Canada is relatively more open to international students. The government of Canada sees international students as ideal immigrants, which can optimize the low birth rate and labour shortage in Canada. The government of Canada aware of the great contribution that international students could bring to their country (Zheng, 2010), therefore they mean to attract more international students to study and work in Canada.

The reasons of students choose to go to Canada for foreign study can be various. However, based on the answers of participants in each of the interviews, the facts that incentives them to choose Canada over other English-speaking countries can mainly be summarized as cheaper costs, good academic environment, safe living environment and friendly immigration policy.

Cheaper costs

Studying abroad is significantly more expensive than studying in China for the majority of Chinese students. All of the participants in this study are self funded. Some participants work part-time or win school scholarship to support themselves, but most of their expenses are funded by their parents. Knowing the high cost of going abroad for higher education, most of the international students see the expenses as an influential factor when they are deciding which country to go to. According to Unicurve (2016), the cost of international students studying in Canada is the lowest in comparison to other English-speaking countries. And the relatively low cost of studying in Canada attracted international students to choose Canada. One of the participants Sharon said:

Studying in the United States is relatively more dangerous, and the cost is quite high. The U.K. does not allow a lot of immigration. Compares to Australia, it's easier to immigrate to Canada and the cost is a lot cheaper. (Sharon, Applied Math)

Similar to Sharon, another participant Frank also compared the major popular countries that Chinese international students choose to study overseas, he found himself in favor of the education system in North America: "I want to choose a university within the North American education system, so it's either the United States or Canada. I think going to the United States would be more expensive." Almost every participant sees the cheaper cost of studying in Canada as an attractive reason for them to choose Canada.

Academic reputation

The highly recognized academic environment in Canadian universities is also a reason that makes Canada very attractive to international students. One of the participants Sharon said that compares to the academic environment in China, Canada has a better academic environment:

I have visited some universities in China, those prestigious universities definitely have a preeminent academic environment, but the academic environment in those ordinary Chinese universities are not that great. (Sharon, Applied Math)

She also shared that she can feel a noticeable difference between the academic atmosphere in Canadian universities and the universities in China. The academic environment is closely related to the reputation of the university and faculties. Some of the Chinese international students in the research believe being accepted by a university with good reputation can provide them with a good academic environment, therefore, they came for a specific university or a specific major. Tony said: “my parents made the decision (of coming to Canada) for me. They wanted me to major in oil and gas, and this university is famous for this major, so I came.”

Most of the participants expressed that the curriculum in Canadian universities has left them with a good impression of its academic environment. Frank said: “compares to Canada, universities in Australia only have three academic years, I don’t think they would have enough degrees to offer.” He believes the curriculum in Canadian universities contributed a sound academic environment for international students.

However, not all Chinese international undergraduate students who ended up study in Canada see Canada as their first-choice destination. As some of the participants mentioned in the interview, their first choice was to study in the United States since the United States has a larger number of prestigious universities and it is well-known by many Chinese international students for its professional academic environment. However, because most of the prestigious universities in the United States require higher costs of education and more competitive admission requirements, many of them did not have enough funds to support themselves or they failed to meet the requirements. Since Canada and the United States are

geographically close, and they have a similar education system as well as the academic environment, some Chinese international students chose to study in universities in Canada instead. For example, Peter's original plan was to study in the United States. Even though he had his high school grade, he did not meet the admission requirement of both the English language test and SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test) test:

My IELTS (International English Language Testing System) test score was around 5.5 (out of 9) when I was still in China, it was pretty hard for me to reach a high mark in the SAT test. But having a good SAT grade is significant for applying for school in the United States. (Peter, Economics)

Instead of keep trying to achieve a high score in the SAT test, he chose to apply for universities in Canada as most Canadian universities only require international students to take the English language test. As he explained: "the education system and academic environment in Canada and in the United States are quite similar, so I decided to study for a period in Canada and then go to the United States." Peter believes that studying in a Canadian university can be beneficial for his future academic development in the United States. Another participant Frank shared the similar opinion that obtaining a degree from a university in Canada can be a good springboard for Chinese international students to pursue a career or postgraduate studies in either Canada or the United States. Some other participants also stressed that having a western degree can be very beneficial for their future development after returning to China.

Living environment

Most participants expressed their pleasant impression and expectation of the environment in Canada. Especially for those who chose Canada as their first-choice country, they chose Canada as their destination mainly due to the secure and multicultural living environment.

I had a comparison between the major English-speaking countries. The weather in the United Kingdom is too humid and cold, the weather is too hot in Singapore and Australia. I would feel like living under the storm of shots and shells if I go to the United States, therefore I chose to come to Canada. (Wen, Communication and Culture)

Wen also expressed that he has benefited a lot from the multicultural and open living environment in Canada since he came here: “in comparison to China, the living environment in Canada is more tolerant and I can have more choices.” Due to Wen’s sexual orientation, he felt a lot more relaxed in Canada than in his home country: “the living environment here has also made me become more open and tolerant. There are used to be many things that did not make sense to me when I was in China, including homophobia.”.

Social diversity is not the only feature that made Canada attractive to international students, Canada is also known for its beauty of nature. Zisel had been to Canada once before she started her undergraduate study, and it was the beautiful scenery and peaceful living environment that attracted her to study in Canada:

I came to Canada for a summer camp during my 11th grade summer vacation. We did a road trip across Alberta and visited all the great sceneries. That trip left me an awesome impression about the living environment in Canada. (Zisel, Business)

Although not everyone had a chance like Zisel, who was able to visit Canada before her university study to get some first-hand experience of the living environment in Canada. Most of the participants heard from their friends about the good living environment in Canada. One of Frank’s friends was studying in Canada when he was considering where to apply for. His friends provided him with a lot of information about universities in Canada and also his own perspectives about living and studying in Canada:

I chose Canada was because I had a very good friend in high school. He went to UBC and he told me a lot of good things about Canada, his words made me think that Canada could be a good place to go to study. So, I decided to apply for Canada. (Frank, Computer Science and Applied Math)

Many other participants also expressed their expectation of being surrounded by a peaceful living environment when they start their new chapter in Canada.

Immigration policy

Canada is often known as a nation of immigrants. The relatively open immigration policy in Canada is another reason that attracted a large number of Chinese international students to choose Canada over other English-speaking countries. Seven of the ten participants in the study expressed their desires to continue staying in Canada after graduation. Some of them want to stay in Canada for mainly for future academic or career development, however, there are also many of them specifically find becoming a permanent resident of Canada more attractive. Edward said: “I already spent lots of money coming to Canada for a degree, I would not feel it worthy if not getting the PR. Plus it’s getting more and more competitive in China too.” Another participant Peter perceived the same idea: “My parents prefer me to go back to China right after graduation, but there’s no harm for me to get a PR as I have already been here for so long.” Same as Edward and Peter, some of the other Chinese international students in the study also expressed that people and companies in China still see western degree as a valuable asset, but since study oversea is becoming easier and more affordable, having a foreign university degree is not enough for them to compete with others in such a competitive world. Thus, becoming a permanent resident of Canada can offer them another option. Sharon shared: “I chose Canada was because it is easier to immigrate to Canada. I personally want to immigrate to Canada, and my dad also wants me to immigrate to here.”

Although the number of overseas returnees in China is increasing, there are still a large number of Chinese students end up staying in the host country (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2018). Most of the participants indicated that they all thought about staying in or immigrating to Canada after graduation. Although some of them changed their mind of staying afterwards, they all see the Canadian immigration policy as an influential factor for their decision making.

Other reasons

Some participants in the study chose Canada was because of their parents’ decision and the existence of supporting familial network in China. Of the ten participants, Kathy came to Canada at the youngest age. Her parents made the decision to sent her to Canada for both high school and university. It

was not hard for Kathy's parents to decide where to send their daughter to for better security protection and support. Kathy's parents have friends living in Canada, so they chose Canada as their friends could take care of Kathy and give her more support while she is staying here. Three of the other participants also expressed that their parents prefer Canada over other countries as they have friends or relatives living in Canada, so it is easier for them to seek help if emergency happens.

A large number of the senior high schools in China, especially those international high schools, now have collaboration programs with universities in other foreign countries due to the high demand of Chinese students going abroad for higher education. The programs offer courses that use curriculums from foreign countries, so students can apply for universities overseas directly after they finish 12th grade courses. Three of the ten student participants came to Canada through the collaboration programs with Canada in the international senior high school they went to respectively. They can apply for universities in North America, and they all chose Canadian universities due to the familiarity they have to Canadian curriculum and the lower admission requirements. Ye shared: "I have to take IELTS or TOFEL test to apply for universities in the United States, I don't need to take them to apply for Canadian Universities"

The programs are beneficial for students who want to go abroad for overseas study. As the participants expressed, most of the courses are taught in English which makes it easier for participants to get used to the English speaking and teaching environment when they arrive at the host country. At the same time, because of the huge difference between the curriculum in the Chinese public schools and the curriculum that international schools use, it is hard for students from international high school to transfer back to a public high school in the halfway or to take the national college entrance examination if they do not want to go abroad anymore. One of the participants Rainie had this struggle: "one of my very close friends transferred to an international senior high school so as to study in Canada. I did the same cause I don't want to be apart from my friend. I didn't think too much about what going abroad means to myself." Rainie transferred to an international school in grade 9 under the influence of her friend. She considered

about going back to a public senior high school and apply for universities in China, but it was too late for her to change her decision:

I thought about not going abroad in grade 11, but I could not keep up with other students in the public senior high school. The textbook contents I was studying were not the same as the contents that were taught in the public schools, so I cannot take the national college entrance examination.
(Rainie, Business)

Although Rainie hesitated at whether she should still go study in a foreign country or not, she had no other options but to continue her journey of studying abroad.

Barriers that Students Encountered

Participants expressed that they faced many barriers while studying and living in Canada. The difficulties they encountered can be boiled down to three genera: the language barrier, academic barrier and social barrier.

Language barriers

The language barrier is the prominent issue that most Chinese international students encountered when they first came to Canada, and the problem they have with language would affect their academic performance and social performance. The majority of the participants expressed that they had problems in communicating with other people in English when they first came to Canada. Ye said: “my English was not that great when I first start studying in here, so I felt shy to speak English to other people.” Another participant Frank indicated similar sentiment:

“The English I learned in China is like “dump English. I have no problem with grammar, but different for oral English. Not that I cannot speak English, I feel like I cannot open my mouth sometimes. I think I’m just embarrassed to speak English.” (Frank)

Like Frank and Ye, all the participants mentioned their barriers in oral English when they think about the language problems they encountered in their first-year adjustment process, particularly their problems of using oral English for communication.

I had problems communicating with my homestay family when I first started living in Canada. Like I told my homestay family I will come home for dinner, but maybe because my homestay family did not understand what I said or there was some misunderstanding, they did not prepare dinner for me. (Rainie)

The lack of fluency in oral English will unavoidably cause misunderstanding and miscommunication, it will also hinder the Chinese international undergraduate students' ability to make friends with domestic students or other foreign students.

My English is not that great, so it is very hard for me to chat with local students. I have to be super concentrated like taking IELTS test to listen to every sentence they said. I need to organize my own language before I speak, and I can't always express myself clearly. I do not enjoy this way of communication. (Zisel, Business)

Participants not only have problems in spoken English, some of them also stressed the issues they have in English writing, especially academic writing.

I have no idea on how to write an essay when I first came here. I studied in a public high school in China, they (the teachers) will not teach you how to write an essay, they only teach you how to take the tests. I was very frustrated when I first start writing essays, I do not know about the writing style and how to cite articles. I have to ask my friends and classmates to know how to write essays (Wen, Communication and Culture)

Another participant Kathy expressed that English writing was the hardest language barrier for her to overcome when she first started studying in Canada: "I thought spoken English would be my biggest

problem when I first came here, but later I found that listening, speaking and reading is a lot easier in comparison to writing.”

All the language problems that participants shared are not only restricted to those who did not meet the language admission requirements and took required language class before starting their program, but also a reality to participants who met the language requirements. For those participants, they came across similar types of language barriers; as Ye shared, meeting the language admission requirement is not enough for her to have a smooth transition process: “meeting the admission requirement only means you can get in the university, but a smooth adjustment depends on students themselves.” Zisel indicated the same feeling that even though she met the language admission requirement, she still encountered significant language barriers during her transition process. Another participants, Wen thinks that students who failed to meet the language requirements and attended the required language course may encounter fewer language barriers, due to lighter course demand, compare to those who have passed the language requirement: “those who took the language course may have a smoother transition. Taking one or two semesters of the language course allows you to have more time to adjust.”

Academic barriers

The stage of stepping from high school into university is challenging not just for international students, but also for domestic students. A large number of university students have experienced academic difficulties and fail to adjust to the academic environment in the university can cause lots of problems like depression (Nichols, 2011). For international students, the problems they have on the academic aspect can be even more severe because of the differences in language, the ways of teaching and curriculum. Most of the participants expressed that the program was harder than they thought, and the problems they faced are various based on their study major. For those who majors in social science, business or art programmes, they found the first couple of years very challenging. Many of the courses in this programme are lecture based and requires many interactions within the class. These kinds of programme have a high requirement

for students' English proficiency. Since the majority of Chinese international students are still in the language adjustment process when they first start university and most of them have little knowledge about the western curriculum, they encountered a lot of problems in understanding the course content. Zisel said:

My English was not very good at the beginning. Although I score 6.5 (in IELTS test), I think it was partially because of my luck. I had a lot of problems in class. I can barely understand anything in my first semester, so I have to rely on reading and self-study. I felt very stressful for not being able to understand the teacher. (Zisel, Business)

Whereas, for participants who major in science and engineering, they did not mention that they have a lot of problems with their school work at the beginning stage. "I did not have many academic problems at the beginning," said Tony, "I can rely on the old knowledge I learnt before." According to the participants, a lot of their courses are closely related to numbers and calculation and most of the Chinese international undergraduate students already acquired a solid knowledge basis of math, physics and chemistry. Therefore, some of them found the course contents very easy and not challenging enough. As Frank perceived, "I do not think the Math course I learnt here can be comparable to China. I learnt Math myself back in China, and I think the Math I learnt here is too easy to deal with." The difficulties they had at the beginning of their university study are more about the difficulty of adapting the westernized teaching methods.

There was one course that bothered me a lot, so I ended up dropping it. The way of the teacher giving us questions was very weird for me. The teacher was giving the lecture at the front while we were doing the exercise. We got the correct answer by following the method, but our teacher got a different answer. So he explained the question was a fault and changed the description of the question at will. (Wen, communication and culture)

Participants in Art and business programmes also expressed that they had problems regarding course selections and how to do well in exams. "I do not know what courses to choose in my first year and I do not know how to study and get good grades." Shared by Ye. On the other hand, participants major in

Engineering and science programmes expressed that they have fewer problems within how to choose courses. Tony said: “there were only two courses you can choose yourself, most of the courses are mandatory, they (the department) will schedule the courses for you every semester, you do not really need to choose courses yourself.” Nevertheless, there are also downsides of having the program choosing courses for you. “Some of the mandatory courses are not necessary, but you cannot drop them. It’s such a waste of time and money” said Tony.

However, all the participants expressed that they encountered various difficulties in in-class participation. Many of the participants expressed that they inclined to participate less in the in-class discussion. This is because of the lack of fluency in spoken English and the inexperience in the Western class setting. Participants shared that when they are having a group project that requires oral presentation, they prefer to let the native speakers in their team to take the lead. Rainie said, “when our presentation requires the oral part, I would prefer to team up with local students, so he/she can take over the oral part of the presentation.” Whereas, if the group project is paper work based, many participants are more willing to work with other Chinese international students. Tony shared, “I will have to spend more time if I’m working with foreign students. The way their thinking is very different from mine, and you have to use your second language to communicate with them. Working with other Chinese students is more efficient.”

Social barriers

All the Chinese international undergraduate students in the study encountered social barriers in varying degree. Because of the huge cultural gap between China and Canada, and the language difference, most of the participants found it hard to make friends, particularly with domestic students. Ye shared: “I thought I would make lots of foreign friends to practice my English, I would be more outgoing and very popular among friends. All these were what I expected study abroad should be like.” Like Ye, each of the ten participants had a positive expectation about their social life in Canada before they came. Tony said:

I really want to wind into the local student community at first cause my parents asked me to. But later on, you would realize that the difference in culture made it almost impossible to set up close relationships with domestic students. (Tony, Software Engineering)

Most of them tried to realize their expectation but failed after many tries. “I was hoping to make more foreign friends before I came here, so I chose to live with people who are not from China. But my experience taught me I can never become close friends with them” said Zisel. The maladaptation of university transition and the huge difference in their living habit left Zisel with a strong culture shock:

I was living with a domestic student in the first semester and we have completely different living habits. She likes to take shower in the morning while I prefer to do it at nighttime. For example, I have class at noon and she has class at nine in the morning, she will get up, start taking shower and do her makeup at around seven to eight. The noises she makes always wake me up. It was quite annoying for me to experience this everyday. (Zisel, Business)

The differences are not just limited to living habits, the differences in lifestyles is another reason that stops participants from winding into the local students’ community. Rainie said: “domestic students enjoy talking about hockey or a movie star, but I know nothing about it. The local students in my dorm building will ask me to go to the bar on campus every Thursday when the bar has discount, but I do not like going to the bars, so I never go. This could be part of the reason why I cannot fit in with local students”. Zisel and Rainie are not the only ones who think they can never blend into the local student community, as a matter of fact, none of the participants think they have genuinely blended into the local community. And most of them gave up the attempt to integrate into the local student community after various tries and stopped considering it as an essential part of living in Canada.

Another problem that most participants shared was the maladaptation of living independently. As most of the Chinese international undergraduate students shared, it was their first time living and study in a completely different country all by themselves. Although most of the participants expressed that they

have relatives in Canada or their parents have friends in Canada for them to reach out to when they need help, they still have to heavily rely on themselves for most of the times. Most of the young Chinese international students in the research have had no experience of living on their own and have no clue on how to take care of themselves. “I lost a lot of weight in my first year, because I didn’t know much about cooking and I don’t really like western food” said Ye. Another participant Sharon shared that the lack experience of living alone lead her to other problems: “one of the challenges for me is to find the right direction. I always need someone to lead the way to prevent from getting lost myself. And I had no idea how to apply for those things like SIN number and bank cards.” In addition to these practical skills of which most participants are inadequate, living alone also lead many of them to a strong sense of loneliness and homesickness. Frank shared:

Establishing my social circle was slower than I thought. I thought I would make lots of friends immediately when I get here, but it was not as fast as I thought it would. I was in the language program at that time and I spent most of my time preparing for the IELTS exam. I can only write practice tests when I feel tired. I felt very lonely. Every time when I went out, there would be airplanes flying by. I looked at the plane and thought how I wish I could be back home. (Frank, Computer Science and Applied Math).

Rainie had the same feeling when she first arrived in Canada: “I had a really hard time in my first half year in Canada, I missed my mom and dad too much.” She slowly started getting used to the life in Canada, but she still has the feeling of homesickness: “I call my parents almost everyday and I always comfort myself that there are only 4 months till I can go back home again. I go back to China very often, basically I will go back every vacation, even the vacation is only 15 days long.”

Despite all this, many of the participants also related to the experience of being ignored or misunderstood because of discrimination and stereotyping. Particularity in the classroom where they reported they were treated unfairly. Rainie shared: “it was in my first year and it was my first time having

to do a group project with my classmates. I think I did the same amount of work as others did, but they do not think I did good enough, so I got 5% less than others in the peer evaluation. This made me feel being subjected to discrimination. Another Chinese international student in my team also got a very low score in peer evaluation, and that Chinese student dropped the class.” Discrimination and stereotyping are not limited in the school setting, the discrimination that Kathy experienced was from people outside campus: “I experienced and witnessed lots of discrimination, especially from students in primary school and high school. There was one time I was walking past a junior high school, I heard them (students from that junior high school) calling me Chinese. They said it so loud and defiant” said Kathy. She also noted that the proficiency of English is extremely important for Chinese international students, and Chinese international students could be caught in discrimination if they cannot be fluent in English: “I heard the teammates I worked with in my first year judging other Chinese students’ English proficiency right in front of me, like ‘that person’s English is so bad.’ I felt very uncomfortable hearing that, because I was just like the person they were talking about two to three years ago.”

Strategies to Overcome the Difficulties

Chinese international undergraduate students in the research shared various strategies they used to overcome their barriers. Many of them expressed their preference for using the university services on campus to help solve their problems. Four of the ten participants failed to meet the language demand of the admission requirements, so they took the required language course before they started their programme. They all found the language courses helpful for them to overcome their initial language barriers and useful for their later study. Frank shared: “the teachers in the language programme help you practice your English, they correct your pronunciation and the problems you have in conversational English. We were divided into many groups for interactions. And our reading teacher specifically told us not to use our mother tongue in class. I think it was nice for us to communicate in English, I felt less shy to speak English.” Sharon also expressed that taking the language courses gave her a lot of opportunities to practice her English in spoken

and writing. Nonetheless, none of them see taking language class as a necessity to get over language problems:

I do not recommend taking language class to overcome language barriers to other Chinese international students. You are already in that English-speaking environment; it is hard not to practice your English on a daily basis. Even the people who are close to you are all Chinese, but there are still no guarantees that you don't need to talk to English speakers. Taking the language class can help you learn in a systematic way for sure, but it's not necessary if you are not required to take it. (Frank, Computer science and Applied Math)

Frank also noted that there are so many other ways for international students to practice their English, and there are also various options of university services that students can use to solve their problem in language and course work.

Speaking of the available university services that can help students get over their barriers, most of the participants mentioned and used the writing center service at the university. Of the ten participants, eight of them found writing center very helpful for their written English. Ye said: "I book an appointment with the writing center every time when I need to submit an essay." Like Ye, many of the participants see writing center as the only place they go for writing help. Sharon said: "I think the writing center is very useful, they will help me correct my paper, check my grammar mistakes." Because of insufficient training in academic writing, some participants see writing center as a good place to learn academic writing from native speakers. As Edward shared: "writing center is a very helpful place. Some Chinese international students can't think like Canadians, write like Canadians. They never had any systematic training." Due to the popularity of writing center to Chinese international students, some of them complained about the limited resources that the writing center offered which cannot accommodate everyone's need: "you can only book writing center for limited times every week, they should open up more hours during exam time" said Ye. Other school services that were mentioned by the participants include services provided by student

success center, mentor-mentee program, various orientations specifically for freshmen or international students and different drop-in workshops. But the majority of the participants did not find those support services to be as useful as writing center, as Ye mentioned: “the orientations held by the university were to teach you the general way of solving problems. They are not very useful for specific needs.”

Other than the university service that Chinese international students use to deal with their difficulties, participants in the study brought up a variety of their own strategies for overcoming the barriers they suffer. As one participant, Ye noted: “in order to practice my English, I forced myself to participate into more social activities on campus to communicate with native speakers, and to reach out to professors when I have questions with course work.” Other than taking part in school activities and having more interactions with professors, many of the participants also considered watching English TV series and English movies as a useful strategy. Participants find it not only helpful for their English learning but can also help them bridge the culture gap. On the other hand, Frank discovered another method to overcome his barriers, and this strategy helped him with his language problems, and provided him with a chance to make more friends: “I often go to the church when I first came here. I had many opportunities to talk to native speakers at the church and I also made a lot of close friends from going to the church.”

For social perspective, most of the participants chose to connect with the Chinese student community over trying to establish close bond with domestic students. Edward shared: “I feel happier when I’m hanging out with other Chinese students. We all came from the same cultural background, so I have more common topics to talk about with other Chinese international students than domestic students.” Many participants shared that it’s a lot easier for them to make friends with other Chinese international students, and they tend to make more Chinese friends or attend Chinese student clubs to deal with the feeling of loneliness. Some of the other participants also noted that they like to call or video chat with their parents when they feel lonely and homesick, and hanging out with friends can help relieve their feeling of loneliness and homesickness.

The Use of First Language

Chinese is still widely used in most participants' daily study and everyday life. For academic aspect, all the Chinese international students in the study expressed that they use Chinese to help them with learning new vocabularies, understanding the reading content and having a fluent group discussion with other Chinese teammates.

I use Chinese to discuss with other Chinese international students about course content after class.

For example, I sometimes use Chinese to clarify the criteria of our homework with other Chinese students. (Rainie, Business)

Some of the participants noted that when dealing with team projects, they prefer to team with other Chinese students. In that case, they would not have language barriers among each other, and it will be easier for them to explain themselves in their mother tongue. To solve comprehensive problems they have regarding course content, some participants mentioned watching relevant video in Chinese or read Chinese articles to understand the class content better: "if I can't understand what the professor is teaching that day, I will look for the relevant teaching videos in Chinese or go on "Baidu (百度)"(Baidu is a search engines in Chinese, which is similar to Google), and "Zhihu (知乎)" (Zhihu is a question-and-answer site in Chinese, which is similar to Quora) to search for Chinese articles" said Sharon. Except for using Chinese for learning class content, after class discussion, and team project, almost half the participants mentioned that they will translate the class reading into Chinese by using Google translate if the article has lots of difficult vocabularies or the contents are too complex to understand. Although the translation is not one hundred percent accurate, translating the English article into a Chinese version is a more efficient way to help them understand the content. Tony said: "if there's an article that I really can't understand, I will paste the article on google translate to read the Chinese version because I can read faster in Chinese." He also noted that reading the Chinese translation of the paper is not helpful for his English learning, but nevertheless, it is the most effective way to get the main idea of the content.

For the social aspect, Chinese is used more often by Chinese international students. Due to the social barriers and differences in cultural background, most participants prefer to hangout or interact with their Chinese peers for social activities. Ye said: “Chinese is the main language I use for my social life, I talked to my parents in Chinese when I call them, and I always use Chinese to communicate with my Chinese peers.”

Chinese is not only used for face to face interactions, Chinese international students in the research also use Chinese widely on social medias. One of the Chinese social app WeChat (微信) was constantly brought up in the interviews and all the participants conveyed their preference for using WeChat as their everyday social and study tool. WeChat is the most popular social media with various mobile services and has a large number of Chinese users (CNNIC, 2016). As Edward noted on the application of WeChat in his everyday life: “I use WeChat all the time to interact with my friends and family. Whenever I need to talk to my family (in China), I’ll use WeChat.” Similar to Edwards, other participants also heavily rely on WeChat for social networking as it does not have geographic limitations as traditional methods of communications. Although WeChat is originally created as an online chatting app, many Chinese international students also use WeChat for studying purposes. Almost all the participants in the study sample shared that they have used WeChat to send class notes or discuss about the course content with other Chinese classmates, as Ye commented on the usefulness of WeChat in relation to class works: “if all my teammates are Chinese, we will use WeChat for online discussion, it’s very convenient”. One of the participants Tony also use WeChat to share the tips of university life with new comers: “I write articles about my experience and posted them through the club’s official account on WeChat, one is about how to pick-up student card, one is a rating article about all the food at the university food court”, he found it useful to share his first-hand experiences with newcomers through a media platform to help them.

Suggestions to New Chinese International Students

For most Chinese international students, the first year of the transition process is always the hardest. There are tons of new knowledge to learn and new environment to get used to. However, most participants expressed they gained a lot of experience and became more mature during the process. During the interview, they brought up the regrets they had in their first-year adjustment and recommendations they have for new Chinese international students to avoid the difficulties they encountered. Zisel described her freshman experience to be analogous to giving birth to a child: “the most difficult time was my first year, everything is brand new. It’s very easy for a person to feel depressed and anxious when he/she is under an unfamiliar circumstance”. She noticed that having negative emotions can make adjustments even harder, thus, she recommended Chinese international freshmen to be more positive about the challenges and not to be afraid of asking for help. Another participant, Kathy also gave out the similar suggestion in accordance to her experience: “since I’m taking engineering, I always had the fear of failing my courses in my freshman year, and there was more stuff to take care of myself as I moved out of my homestay family. I found it hard to get used to the new stage of life at first.” Late on, Kathy found that the difficulties she encountered were not as hard as she thought, and she suggested new Chinese international students be more confident when facing the barriers they might encounter and not overthink about the difficulties. Some participants also suggested new Chinese international students to be clearer with their study interest: “they (new Chinese international students) should choose to study what they like or what they are good at” said Edward. Edward thought it would be easier for new students to overcome the barriers in academic and language if they are good at or passionate about the major they choose, and Wen believe it is important for new Chinese international students to know what major fits them: “I recommend freshmen to do some research before selecting their program, so they don’t have to waste money and time on switching programs”. Another participant, Tony emphasises the importance of goal setting: “it would be better for freshmen to be more aware of what their goals are, what they like about and what they want to do”. Tony related that he benefited a lot from the method of goal setting: “once you have a clear goal, you would work hard to achieve your

goal. You won't be sightless or directionless. I made my goal clear in my second year, I adjusted myself based on my goal and I started working towards it ever since".

Many participants expressed their regret on the courses they took in their first year and recommended new students to be more careful with course selection. Rainie, Sharon and Ye all noted that they were not very satisfied with the course they selected in their first year. Ye shared: "all I want was to take the same course with my friend in my first year, so I didn't look into the course content to see if I like it or not". Sharon explicated the similar regrets: "if there's anything I can change, I wish I could spend more on how to choose my courses. Because of my cursoriness in my first year, I ended up taking two extra courses which were a big waste of money and time". Both of them suggested to new Chinese international students to look into the course contents or syllabus and professors before deciding on which course to take: "there's an online rating website for students to rate their professors, new Chinese international students can go through that website before choosing their courses" shared by Ye. Rainie offered another suggestion about taking courses: "don't finish all the easy courses at the beginning, take some hard courses". She also noted that keeping all the hard courses at the end may cause students a lot of academic stress.

In order to make more friends and better adjust to the new environment, a lot of the participants recommended new Chinese international students to participate in more social activities. Frank said: "if I can make some changes in my freshmen year, I would establish my social circle faster, learn more about my friends and be more active in social and campus activities". He specifically emphasised the importance of participating in social activities: "attending social activities can give you more opportunities to know more people and to know about the culture of the host country". Frank also reported that attending social activities to make friends also relief his sense of loneliness. Echoing Frank's recommendation, Zisel shared that: "I recommend Chinese international students to participate in more club events, you can know a lot of things from attending the activities". Similarly, Rainie suggested that: "they can attend more activities held by the library, especially events for international students. And it's better for them to participant more events in their first year, they won't have that much time in their second year".

Apart from getting involved in social activities, some of the participants suggested having a part time job as a useful way for new Chinese international students to practice their communication skills and gain social experience. Participants who had experience of having a part-time job all found it very useful. As Ye mentioned: “having a part-time job helped me to be more willing to communicate with local speakers, I think that’s very helpful for me”. Some of the other participants also shared that their experience of working part-time helped practise their oral English and boosted their self-accomplishment. However, despite the merits, participants noted that it is also important for students to balance their study and work. As Tony expressed in the interview: “it’s necessary for students to adjust the balance of studying and working”. Some participants cautioned new Chinese international student to work part-time as they will have a tight schedule in their first year. Both Kathy and Edward believed that having a part-time job is unnecessary and can be a huge distraction as their job is to pay all their attention to their academic achievements. Edward said: “I don’t think it’s necessary to work par-time, you are here for study, it would be a waste if you spend all your time on a part-time job”. Kathy expressed similar opinion: “I would not consider having a part-time job, I can earn scholarship if I can do well in school. I might think about working part-time for research purposes, but I’ll never choose to work in a restaurant”.

Chapter 5: Data Analysis

Motivations

Why study overseas?

The reasons for Chinese international students in the research to go abroad for higher education are variable but also share some similarities. When asking participants the exact reasons that motivated them to study abroad, some of them shared their aspiration for Western education and environment, they believed the foreign study experience and foreign degrees are valuable. Some of them expressed their fears and discontent with “Gaokao (高考)” (the national college entrance examination), “Junxun (军训)”, (the compulsory military training for first year university students in China), the exam-oriented education system as well as the monocultural environment in China. As in Tan’s (2015) research, students going abroad for higher education is motivated by their personal value of education. Same as the result in Tan’s study, most of the Chinese international students in this study described that they had high expectations of study overseas and they were curious about the western higher education. Participants’ motivations also showed their dissatisfaction with their home country at various degree. Consistent with what Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) stressed in their study, students’ dissatisfaction of their home country is one of the reasons that motivated them to study overseas. Maringe and Carter’s (2007) conducted a research about African students studying abroad in England showed, the reasons that caused lots of the African students to study in a different country was because they are not satisfied with their nation’s current economic or political conditions. Yet contrary to Maringe and Carter’s findings, none of the Chinese international students in this research brought up economic or political dissatisfaction about their home nation, their discontents are mainly about the academic and social problems. Chen’s (2006) research revealed that students would choose to study overseas because of their interest to a well-known professor or a particular field. Since all the participants in this research are undergraduate students, none of them mentioned their desires in working with a professor as their motivation. However, similar to Counsell’s research, the driving reasons for some

of the Chinese international students to study abroad are because of the western education system and the perceived better career development. Some of the participants also expressed that going abroad was their parents' decision. This result is in accordance with Will's (2016) study that parental pressure can be one of the reasons for students to study overseas. Apart from the pressure that students gain from their parents, peer pressure is also one of the reasons for students to follow their peers to study abroad. One of the participants expressed that the influence of her peers is one of the decisive reasons that motivated her to go abroad. Chen's (2006) study showed a similar result.

Class reproduction

Class position is closely related to cultural capital and education capital (Bourdieu, 1977). According to Bourdieu and Boltanski (1978), the strategy for people in upper class use to achieve class reproduction is no longer just the direct transfer of wealth and property to their children, but the investment their economic capital into their children's education. Children from upper class family are able to inherit their parents' class position through acquisition of educational credentials (Bourdieu, 1977). Class position can be passed down though the conversion of parents' economic, social and cultural capital into their children's education investment. Robinson and Garnier (1985) indicated in their study that, parents from upper social class with prestigious jobs are capable to use their social resources and economic resources to provide their children with good education, which in turn help their children to get prestigious jobs to reproduce their class position. That is to say, people in upper class can convert their own capital into their children's education investment to ensure the reproduction of their class position. Participants in this study are all from middle class families in China. Because of the huge expenses of overseas studying, middle class families are more likely to send their children to pursue higher education in a foreign country as they have more economic capital to financially support their children. It is more difficult for Chinese students from working class family to study abroad. The investment of parents' economic capital into overseas education can provide participants with greater chances to acquire more prestigious educational credentials. Moreover, since foreign educational certificate and overseas studying experience are highly valued by many

companies and employers in China, participants are more likely to get better job opportunities to gain more capitals, which enable them to achieve class reproduction.

Why Canada?

Most of the participants had compared Canada with other major English-speaking countries before deciding to come here. Similar to the Chinese international students who chose to study in Malaysia for reasonable tuition fee and less living expenses (Singh et al., 2014), most of the participants in my study expressed their favour of Canada was because of its lower tuition fee and the cost of living. Based on one of Unicurve's (2016) study about the tuition fee and living costs in major English countries including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States, Canada has the lowest tuition fees for international students. Although the fees are affected by the exchange rate as well, the big gap between Canada and the top three countries (Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States), which have similar tuition costs, still puts Canada in a dominant position of the low tuition fee. Apart from the primary tuition fee cost for Chinese international students, the money they have to spend on living costs, including accommodation, is another big expense. Even for having a very simple lifestyle, the cost of living can be on top of the cost of the tuition fee. Taking the living cost funds required to get a student visa, the on-campus residential fee and minimum wage as the measurements, the cost of living expenses is the lowest in Canada compares with the United States, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom (Unicurve, 2016). Canada has the lowest expense in both tuition fee and living cost, and this makes Canada an ideal destination for many Chinese international students, particularly for those with a limited budget for study abroad. Although many of the participants choose Canada for its lower cost, their family are still of the higher social class with more economic capital compare to those who cannot study overseas. Bourdieu (1986) believed that children in different social classes receive different cultural capital. Children from families of higher social class and more economic capital are potentially to acquire more culture capital and achieve greater academic success.

Other main factors that influence Chinese international students in this study to choose Canada for higher education are that participants perceived better academic reputation, nicer living environment and friendlier immigration policies. This is different from the Chinese international students in Singh's (2014) research who choose Malaysia because of "the proximity of the University and/or the country to their home and the sense of sharing the same culture and language", but quite similar to Chen's (2006) study about the pull factors from Canada that clinched East Asian international graduate students' decision to study in Canadian universities.

The academic reputation of Canadian universities is very attractive to Chinese international undergraduate students in this study. The prestige of Canadian universities can bring students with symbolic capital. The participants highly valued their study experience in Canada and their Canadian degrees which can be beneficial for their future academic and career development. They also believe the universities in Canada can provide them with a better academic atmosphere. Will (2016) demonstrated the similar findings in her study about Chinese international students in the United States, her participants believed universities in the United States would offer a better academic environment with more freedom and recourses, and their foreign degree can bring them better opportunities. Participants in this study expressed the similar idea that the Canadian degree can equip them with more symbolic capital that can help them become more competitive in the job market. Having a more valuable degree, participants can have better employment opportunities and are more likely to have higher financial income. The cultural capital they gained from studying in university can be convertible to economic capital through academic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Some of the Chinese international students in the research expressed that Canada was not their first choice, but the reasons they choose Canada was because of the similar education system in Canada with other popular countries like the United States. Some of the participants expressed that their grade could not meet the admission requirement of those prestigious universities in the United States, but their grades can get them into more well-known universities in Canada, compared to that of China. Studying in university can help students gain knowledge and skills which is a type of the embodied cultural capital, and the more

prestigious the university participants attend, the more institutionalized culture capital and symbolic capital they will receive (Bourdieu, 1986).

In accordance with Chen's (2006) research, Canadian environment and immigration factors are the other two reasons for participants to choose Canada, and the living environment in Canada is the most influential one especially for participants who choose Canada as their top choice. Most of the participants view the environment in Canada as safe, open and diverse. Both of the natural and cultural environment is very attractive to Chinese international students. One of the participants sees the multicultural and open living environment in Canada as his major motivation to choose Canada due to his homosexuality. The participant perceived that he could not be discriminated based on his sexuality in Canada, yet, there is no exact relevant studies can highlight the same idea. In addition, participants' motivation to immigrate in the future is another major factor pulling them to study in Canada. Seven out of the ten participants in the study planned stay in Canada after graduation, and all of them expressed their intention of immigrating to Canada. The immigration policy in Canada became increasingly open, supported by The Global and Mail (2016), many participants choose Canada is aiming for immigration. This result is consistent with Li's (2016) research about Canadian immigration process. Li's (2016) study examined the reasons for international students choose Canada as their destination, and many of the participants in that study expressed that the option of becoming an immigrant of Canada influenced their decision making.

Parents' opinion has a strong influence on participants' decision making. As international students need to pay greater amount of tuition fees, all the participants shared that they need their parents' economic capital to be able to afford the huge cost of study overseas. Therefore, participants need to consider their parents opinions in order to receive financial support from their parents. One of the main reasons for parents to choose Canada over other countries is based on their social capital. Many parents prefer their children to study in Canada is due to their social connections in Canada. Li (2014) described this type of social resources as "existing social support network" (p. 67). Same as the result is Li's study, some of the participants in this study came to Canada because of their parents' relationships with friends or relatives

who live in Canada. Additionally, the participants expressed that their parents can be more assured of their well-being, and they can receive more supports with the help of their parents' social network in Canada.

Barriers

The finding of this study revealed a variety of barriers that Chinese international undergraduate students face during their transition process. As examined in research, barriers from language, academic and social aspect are the major issues that Chinese international undergraduate students encountered, this is in concordance with Gunawardena and Wilson's (2012) study and Ren and his colleagues' (2007) study.

Language barriers

Language is one of the major issues for Chinese international students in the study during their adjustment process. The education system helped the dominant language remains its legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1992). English is the most dominant language in Canada, Chinese international undergraduate students need to accumulate linguistic capital from learning English to avoid being marginalized and moreover as a mean to move up the social stratifications in the university setting (Bourdieu, 1992). All participants said they had difficulties with English when they first came to Canada. From the participants' perspective, this is probably because China is not an English-speaking country and English is not widely used in Chinese international students' daily activities when they were in China. Similar problems were reported by Gunawaedena and Wilson (2012) who found that international students who are not from an English-speaking background see English proficiency as their major issue. In my study result, participants with various English proficiency all reported that they had great difficulty in English writing and speaking. This study result is in consistent with Bauer and Picciotto's (2013) study about international freshmen's writing in the United States. International students in their research encountered many problems in spoken and written English. One of the main reasons that cause Chinese international students' language barriers in writing and speaking, as shared by the participants in my study, was the exam-orientated way of English teaching in China and the differences between the teaching way of English writing in China and in the host

country. The same idea is also highlighted by Wang (1999), the English teachers in China tend to focus more on vocabulary and grammar instead of speaking which made a lot of Chinese students unable to communicate in oral English.

Writing is another language problem for many Chinese international students in my study. Participants in Zhang's (2011) study about Chinese international graduate students' academic writing reported a similar English writing issue they encountered. Zhang's study found that a lot of Chinese international graduate students' difficulties in writing are in associate with technical writing skills and the difference of epistemologies in various cultures and disciplines have affected their English academic writing. Quite different from Zhang's (2011) research, participants in my study reported that their writing problems were due to the lack of understanding of academic writing and the technical writing skill, but none of them mentioned how their epistemology affect their writing. All the participants reported that they have had writing problems at a different stage of their study. Even for participants who are well-trained in writing for exams purposes, due of the huge difference of academic writing in western universities and the ones taught in China, as stressed by Heng's (2018) study and Bauer and Picciotto's (2013) study, many of them still find academic writing very challenging. Moreover, amongst the participants in this study, some expressed they had very minimal training on academic writing in China.

The academic writings in China and those in Western countries are very different in format, style, and content (Heng, 2018). Participants from the study noticed that academic writing need a "argumentative format" (p. 26) and emphasis on "original ideas and argument" (p. 27) in comparison to the writing criteria in China. Chinese international students in their study explained that the Chinese way of writing tend to be more general with less emphasis on logic and argument. According to Bauer and Picciotto's (2013) study, international students are not the only group having difficulties with academic writing, the appropriateness of using evidence and how to analyze articles based on professors' requests also confuse students who were educated under the domestic education system.

Participants in my study explained that their English proficiency is an influential factor in their academic performance and determine how well they can blend into the local community. The poor English proficiency can result in academic barriers and social barriers. Liu's (2011) research brought up the same viewpoint that international students' poor English proficiency can hinder them from participating in class and integrating into the local community. Participants in my study also expressed that low English proficiency can result in misunderstanding and miscommunication, this point is also in consistent with Liu's (2011) study. The language problems that Chinese international students in my study have affected their behaviours in social and academic settings. As a result, many Chinese international students participated in the research tend to avoid interaction with native speakers because of the poor performance in oral English. Similarly, Lawrence's study (2014) showed that international students tend to lock themselves up because of their uncertainty caused by their low English proficiency.

The language barriers that participants encountered in this study are not only restricted to students who did not meet the language requirements and were conditionally accepted by the university, but also to those who met the required score in the language tests. In Bauer and Picciotto's (2013) study, they found the similar phenomenon on Chinese international students in the United States that language barriers also apply to those who got a high score in the English standard test or who started learning English in the host country since early teen years. For the participants who met the language admission requirement in my study, they expressed that passing the English standard test can only allow them to be accepted to the university but is not enough for them to function well in their study and social life in Canada. This study results support Gunawardena and Wilson's (2012) viewpoint that exam score cannot necessarily reflect students' English proficiency.

Academic barriers

The result of this study showed that the barriers Chinese international students have in the academic aspect were mainly derived from their low English proficiency. Because of the lack of fluency in listening

and speaking, participants have troubles in understanding the instructions and the contents of the course. Thus, they suffered a lot of academic stress. This phenomenon can become more severe if the class requires a lot of interactions and participations (Mei, 2017). For many participants in my study, class participation and group work were huge issues for their academic life. Most of them found it hard to actively participate in class discussions because they cannot express themselves clearly and freely in English, as supported by Yan and Berliner's (2009) study. For group projects, which are unavoidable as class assignments, some of the Chinese international students in the research prefer to team up with other Chinese international students instead of domestic students for a smoother collaboration. Their English proficiency hindered their interaction with local peers. Yan and Berliner's (2009) article about the academic stress of Chinese international students in the United States shared similar findings. Their study found that Chinese international students' poor English proficiency is one of the main reasons that limited their involvement in class and their communication with their teachers or their faculty. In addition to that, participants' attitudes towards their English ability also affect their participation in class and their interactions with local peers. International students intend to have fewer interactions in class and with domestic students when they are insecure about their English deficiency, as supported by Lewthwaite's study (2000). Lewthwaite's study highlighted that the lack of confidence in their language ability is an impediment to international students' class involvements. Moreover, another reason for international students' poor interaction within the class and with domestic students is the insufficient knowledge of western academic background (Yan and Berliner, 2009). Yan and Berliner noted that international students' different academic background has a large influence on their class participation. Their study explicated that students-teachers' interactions are less expected by the teachers in China and a lot of the Chinese international students are greatly affected by this. However, remaining quiet in class is completely opposite to the expectations of western professors. Because of the huge difference in language and in education background participants in my study prefer to work with other Chinese students for a more efficient collaboration.

The maladaptation of the Western curriculum is another academic barrier that many international students encountered. According to the data, most of the Chinese international students in my study expressed they had a hard time adjusting to the western curriculum as it is high pressured and very different from the curriculum in China. Guo and Guo (2017) investigated the policy and international students' experience under the internationalization of Canadian higher education. As their study showed, participants found the curriculum less internationalized. They had a hard time adjusting to the curriculum because they can rarely relate themselves to the course resources or the related course resources were not accurate. Consistent with their findings, the participants in my study faced similar curriculum barriers. But quite different from Guo and Guo's study, the reason for participants in my study having problems adapting to the curriculum is the varying degrees in course difficulties and between majors. Participants in my study also explicated the difficulties they had in choosing courses. They had problems in managing their own courses and directing themselves to decide which courses to choose and which courses can meet their needs. As a result, some of them ended up taking extra courses, fail to properly manage their course load or taking courses that are not useful. This finding is similar to Yan and Berliner's article, students in their article reported the challenges they had in self-management and self-discipline. They explained that Chinese students were "accustomed to being given strict direction and rigorous discipline in their studies", and it is hard for them to adjust the "self-directedness" that characterizes the education system in the United States. Because of the difference in academic setting and curriculum in participants' home country and the host country, all of these learning shock lead Chinese international students into a negative academic performance (Mei, 2007).

Every Chinese international student in the study encountered similar academic barriers. However, the degree of their difficulties varied based on the difference in their respective majors. This finding is consistent with Huntley's (1993) study that the majors that international students choose to have a huge impact on their academic achievements and the barriers they would encounter. As the findings showed, participants major in science and engineering have more problems in regarding the westernized teaching

way at the initial stage of university study, whereas, participants in social science, business or art programmes face more interaction and comprehension problems, including: being unable to understand the professors and fail to meet the expectations of other team members in group projects at the beginning of their studies. Nevertheless, as they became more adapted to the local environment and as their English proficiency improved over time, most of the participants expressed that the barriers they had encountered during their early transition process disappear overtime.

Social barriers

Most Chinese international students in the research confronted various social barriers. Their English proficiency is one of the main factors that affect students' social activities as highlighted by Guo and Guo (2017) in their study, and the culture shocks is another cause for social barriers. In concordance with Tamara's (2011) viewpoint, international students can experience greater culture shock when they encounter two overlapping barriers at the same time, as they needed to adjust to a different culture while entering higher education. As the finding showed, most of the participants reported that they encountered most of their social barriers during their transition process since they need to adjust to a different culture and a different study environment at the same time. Though they faced many difficulties, their expectations for their social life were high; the majority of the participants had high expectations of establishing a close relationship with local students before they came to Canada. They wanted to make more domestic friends to practice their English and immerse themselves into the local community. Nevertheless, most of their interaction experience with their domestic peers were disappointing; according to the participants, they found it hard to make friends with local students because of the difference in language, cultural background and lifestyle. Guo and Guo's (2017) research indicated the same finding that international students have difficulties in making friends with domestic students because of the same factors. This finding is also consistent with Kenyon, Frohard-Dourlent and Roth's (2012) research, many Chinese international students in the study chose to stick with other Chinese peers. Coming from the same cultural background allows Chinese international students to have more common interests and topics to share and express with other

Chinese students. It is also easier for them to establish a close social network with those from the same cultural background. The close and mono-cultural social relationship between Chinese international students can offer them space where their “ethnic and cultural values can be rehearsed and expressed” (Furnham & Alibhai, 1985, p.709). However, according to Wang’s (2003), Chinese international students tend have less English improving opportunities as they choose to associate with their Chinese peers rather than domestic students. The study finding also indicated that many participants experienced loneliness, especially when they first came to Canada; the reasons for their lonesome feeling are struggling to set up a new social network and lack of friends and companions, as indicated by Tsai, Wang and Wei (2017).

The finding showed that discrimination and stereotype are also parts of the social barriers that many Chinese international students in the research encountered. Some participants find it hard to work with native students in an academic setting with domestic students, and local students are more likely to have a negative stereotype to newcomers based on their performance. This finding is consistent with Wu, Garza and Guzman’s (2015) viewpoint in their research. Chinese international students in my study reported that their English proficiency is an influential factor in their discrimination and stereotype experience and caused misunderstanding and miscommunication. This is similar to Lee and Rice’s (2007) study of international students’ cognizance about discrimination in the United States. Their study indicated that international students’ English insufficiency can put them under a greater chance of being exposed to discrimination and stereotype. Participants in their study not only faced discrimination because of deficiency of their English skills, they also include receiving negative comments on their home culture or country, not being welcomed in class and outside of class, direct confrontation because of their international status. Based on the participants experience in my study, most of the discrimination and stereotype that Chinese international students received are negative. They were discriminated because of their weaker class performance, their identity as ethnic minorities and their lack of English proficiency. In Ruble and Zhang’s (2012) research about the stereotype of Chinese international students held by Americans, the stereotypes contain both positive ones and negative ones. Contrary to Ruble and Zhang’s study, there is no finding

show Chinese international students' experience of positive stereotype from domestic students. Domestic students may have positive stereotype towards Chinese international students, however, the phenomenological experience indicates that most Chinese international students only received negative stereotype.

Coping Strategies

This study showed Chinese international students implement various coping strategies to overcome the barriers. According to the participants in this study, language barriers have a huge influence on Chinese international students' academic and social life, as highlighted by Liu (2017), many of their coping strategies are aimed to solve the difficulties they have in language adjustment in order to overcome their academic and social barriers.

The use of university resources: As the result shows, most of the Chinese international students found the university services to be very helpful. And among all the services provided by the university, writing support was highly rated and had a lot more demand from Chinese international students in comparison to other university services like orientations at the beginning of school year and mentor-mentee service. Most of them see writing service as the most beneficial university service as a mean to enhance their academic writing skills. This finding is consistent with Bauer and Picciotto's (2013) study that, writing center is used by a lot of international students for writing support and it is also recommended by instructors to the newcomers. Participants in my study shared that the writing center can correct their writing mistakes and give them specific feedback based on their essay. Writing center is served as a "solution" to international students' writing "problem" (Bauer and Picciotto, 2013). Chinese international students in this study also used university recourses for other purposes; they shared that getting involved in more social activities on campus can offer them a chance to communicate with native speakers and learn more about the local community. This finding supports the result of Wu, Garza and Guzman's (2015) study. On the other hand, for Chinese international students who did not meet the language admission requirements, they

attended the required language classes offered by the university they went to. All of them found it very helpful for their language adjustment.

The use of their own resources: Apart from the recourses that university offers, participants also have their own strategies to overcome the barriers during their transition process. As the findings show, Chinese international students in this study have their own learning methods to better understand their course readings and the course contents. In accordance with Liu's (2017) research findings, they used keywords to help understand the articles. Some of them also reached out to professors and their peers for academic support. To improve their English, some of them watch English shows and movies to practice English. English shows and movies often contain a lot of western culture, watching these shows can help Chinese international students to learn more about the host country's culture to bridge the culture gap. Participants in the study established relationships with local students and teachers to better adjust to the academic and social environment in the host country. They built relationships with their Chinese peers for companionship and academic support. Moreover, they maintained their connections with their friends and families in their home country for emotional support. Pierre Bourdieu (1986) introduced the concept of social capital theory as social capital is the combination of actual or potential resources that are bounded to a group of people. And all the members in the group can share the resources provided by the group. The relationships among Chinese international students and their network with their family and friends overseas formed most of the meaningful social capital in according to Bourdieu's social capital theory. The academic and social support that were exchanged among Chinese international students can be summarized as the social capital they created in their group. The network of relationships they obtained is not "a natural given" or "a social given" as explained by Bourdieu (1986, p. 249) in his social capital theory, it is generated by students themselves. The act of reaching out to Chinese peers for help and initially providing help for other peers allowed them to establish a network of relationships. Moreover, the aim for students to set up connections though sharing information is to produce or reproduce social relationships that they can use for short for long period, this is supported and confirmed by Bourdieu's social capital theory. Based on the

study result, most of the Chinese international students in the study expressed that they make friends through classes and various social events, others set up social networking through going to church events. Chinese international students in the study sought to relieve their sense of loneliness through talking to their family or friends in China or other Chinese peers, which help them ease their homesickness and make them feel less isolated. Similar in Li's (1993) study that Chinese international students share their stress and unhappiness for moral support, and Frank's (2000) study indicated the similar viewpoint that parents play an important role when students suffer depression.

Strategic use of Chinese: English is the dominant language in Canada and is highly valued in the Canadian society, participants need to improve their English proficiency not just for academic purposes, but also to gain linguistic capital as to earn social recognition from people around them. On the other hand, participants see Chinese as a significant asset due to their previous Chinese education background and their ties to China. People use different linguistic strategies based on how they distribute their linguistic capital which are closely linked to the education system and their social class (Bourdieu, 1992). The findings showed that participants see their first language as a very essential linguistic tool for their academic and social life. From an academic perspective, many participants in the study used Chinese for their English learning. This is similar to the idea that Anton and DiCamilla (1998) indicated, that the students' first language in general can be beneficial to students' foreign language development and serve as a usual tool in language acquisition. According to the study findings, most of the Chinese international students translated new vocabularies into Chinese for better understanding and comprehension. Some of them even translated the entire article into Chinese to make reading comprehension more effective and accurate. In accordance with Rolin-Ianziti and Varshney's (2008) study about students' view of their first language, most of the participants in their study use their first language to "memorize vocabularies and to comprehend grammatical explanation". Their study also indicated that first language can help students with their "target language" learning, especially vocabulary and grammar. Except for using first language to learn English, participants in my study also used Chinese websites or related Chinese articles for study references. They

reported that having Chinese articles and study materials for references provided them with additional support to have a better comprehension of course contents. Moreover, when participants are working with other Chinese students for a group project, they use Chinese for discussion. They used their first language for communication to make their work more effective. This is consistent with Swain and Lapkin (2000) study about how foreign university students use their first language. They explicated the similar idea that students' first language is beneficial for them when they work together on a project. And the first language is also beneficial for their foreign language learning. For social perspectives, Chinese is also widely used for participants' social activities. Based on the findings, participants used Chinese to maintain their social networking with other Chinese students. Since most participants prefer to associate with their Chinese peers, they may use English for interactions in class, but they cling to use Chinese for the rest of the time. All the participants highly valued the significance of Chinese to their academic and social life in the host country. Similar in Cao et al.'s (2018) study about international students in Belgium, participants in their study see their heritage culture as an important asset to their academic integrations and it's beneficial for their "learning styles, coping strategies and support seeking behaviours."

The use of technology: Technology tools like Chinese social applications such as WeChat are very popular among Chinese international students in the study. Participants used WeChat to exchange lecture notes or discuss class contents with their Chinese classmates. They also used WeChat to communicate with their Chinese peers for social purposes, as well as remotely interact with their family and friends in their home country. Many of the Chinese students rely on technology for social purposes. Bourdieu's social capital theory illustrated that "relationships may only in the practice state, in material and/or symbolic exchanges which help maintain them" (p. 349), he did not discuss the impact of technology (like WeChat) on these relationships. With the innovation of technology, many individual's networking is developed online. Where Bourdieu's social capital theory fell short is how the use of technology shape people's relationship in a group. Technology has modified the methods with which people conduct social interactions; as Julien (2015) argued: "through online social interactions, individuals make expressions of social capital

that specifically affected and extend their relationship” (p. 365). Julien (2015) proposed a new form of social capital through online interaction: “digital social capital”, and this new form of social capital can be applied to the interactions of participants in the study as many of their interactions particularly their connections with their family and friends in their home country are heavily relied on technology social networks. Technology tools for people’s social networks like WeChat became a major communication tool for Chinese international students. Guo, Wu and Liu’s (2018) research about the changes of parent-teacher relationships in China demonstrated that technology has made the communications between parents and teachers easier and more diverse and WeChat has become their major communication tool. Although their study is in a different setting, it illustrated how important WeChat is in Chinese people’s life. Apart from using WeChat for interactions and discussions, some of the participants also use WeChat to share their experience with new Chinese international students. They aimed to help new Chinese international students to be better prepared for overseas studying and be aware of the difficulties they may have during the adjustment process. Dalglish et al. (2011) conducted a similar study about how technology help international incoming students to be prepared for university. They used “DDVD (Data DVD)” as the technology tool, attempting to bring up students’ awareness of what questions they should ask, the barriers and the coping strategies. Other social network technology tools are also widely used by participants. Participants in the study used popular web applications such as “Baidu (百度)” (searching engine in Chinese) and “Zhihu (知乎)” (question-and-answer site in Chinese) to search for related study materials, and they used messenger and email when they need to communicate with their teachers or local classmates outside of classes.

Suggestions for New Chinese International Students

As the study result showed, participants brought up various advice for new Chinese international students to be better prepared for the new chapter in their life. According to the findings, many of the participants expressed their regrets in courses selection. They suggested the newcomers pay more attentions

to the course contents and the number of courses that are needed. Some participants stressed that having a clear goal of what they like and what they want to pursue is very significant for university study. It is important for new Chinese international students to have a serious consideration of what program they want to study, so they will not end up having to switch major which is a waste of money and time. In addition to studying, participants in the study also recommended the incoming students to attend social and campus activities which are beneficial for their language adjustment and culture integration. To relieve the sense of loneliness and homesickness, many participants encouraged incoming students to make more friends through social activities, this is consistent with Heng's (2018) research findings. Participants in Heng's study also reported that making friends can help them find a sense of belonging, and this is very helpful for them to seek for academic advice.

Participants in my study also highlighted the importance of having confidence. In Heng's (2018) study, Chinese international students also suggest newcomers not to be afraid of seeking help and be more open to new people and new cultures. Although some of the participants in this study have a negative opinion on working part-time as a student, most of them see having a part-time job as a beneficial way for incoming students to have more opportunities to practice their spoken English and have more exposure to the host culture. Among all the participants in the study, most of them described their transition process as a stressful and tough journey, but none of them denied the benefits they obtained from their adjustment process. They expressed that the challenges and obstacles they encountered while studying in Canada made them become more mature and better with handling difficulties.

English Privilege

English is not the most primary language in China, but it has high language privilege. According to Qi (2016), English has a significant influence on the education as well as the society in China, and it has become the primary foreign language. English can help promote the internationalization in China and one of its major functions is for international communication (Yong & Campbell, 1995). According to the

participants, English is highly valued by many companies and employers in China, high English proficiency and English degrees are beneficial for them when competing with other people in the job market. This seems to reproduce the privilege of English and linguistic inequality (Guo & Beckett, 2007). Chinese is the dominant language in China, but English, as a foreign language, has incomparable language privilege to other foreign languages in China. On the other hand, how Chinese and English are treated is completely different in Canada. English is the dominant language in Canada, and having high English proficiency is the basic requirement for Chinese international students to have a smooth life and study in Canada. Since Chinese is not commonly used in Canada; it is not highly valued as a foreign language. Mastering English can help Chinese students appear to be more competitive in the job market in China, but when they are in Canada, their competence of Chinese language is not highly valued by the employers and companies. Although Chinese has become increasingly popular due to the economic growth of China (China Daily, 2017), the language status of English remains the highest at an international scale.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Research Question

The purpose of this study is to examine Chinese international undergraduate students' major transition barriers and their coping strategies by investigating their experience while transitioning into Canadian universities. The research questions of this study are:

1. What are the motivations for Chinese international undergraduate students to choose to study abroad? Why do they choose Canada as their destination?
2. What are the language, academic and social barriers they encountered during the transition process?
3. How do they cope to overcome these barriers?
4. What recommendations do they give to new Chinese international students?

Summary of Findings

The findings were based on individual interviews with ten Chinese international undergraduate students studying at River University in Canada. The participants are in different school year and different majors. The study looked into Chinese international undergraduate students' overseas study experience, so as to find out the students' motivations for studying abroad and coming to Canada, the barriers they encountered during the university transition process, the coping strategies they implemented and the recommendations they have for incoming Chinese international students.

The findings revealed that most Chinese international undergraduate students came to study abroad was because of their unwillingness to follow the traditional Chinese education system. The stressful exam like “Gaokao (高考)” and the intensive physical training like “Junxun (军训)” were the main factors that pushed those students away from pursuing higher education in their home country. Apart from that, the motivations for some of the Chinese international undergraduate students going abroad for higher education were due to the desire for a western style of teaching and diverse cultural environment. In addition, the influences that students got from their parents and friends was another driving reason for them to study in

a foreign country. All participants are from middle class family and studying abroad can help them gain more capitals to achieve class reproduction. Finally, among all the popular countries for overseas study, Canada was not the top choice for every Chinese international undergraduate student in the study, but after comparing with other English-speaking countries like the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia to name but a few, they chose Canada because of its low tuition fee and living expenses, high academic reputation, safe and multi-cultural living environment as well as the friendly immigration policy to international students.

The findings revealed that, the barriers that Chinese international undergraduate students encountered during their transition process include language, academic and social aspects. Language is the major difficulty for Chinese international undergraduate students, and it has a large effect on students' academic and social performance. Because of the differences in language speaking environment and the way of English teaching in China and in Canada, students had a lot of problems in spoken English and English academic writing. The problems they have in language proficiency led to miscommunication and misunderstanding. The level of their English proficiency also affects their academic performance. The study showed that Chinese international undergraduate students found it hard to participate in class discussions and to understand the course contents. Apart from that, the differences between the teaching method and curriculum design in China and in Canada made it difficult for some students to adjust to the western curriculum in Canada. Moreover, Chinese international undergraduate students encountered a varying degree of academic difficulties based on the difference of study majors they are in. On the social aspect, the study revealed that Chinese international undergraduate students' English proficiency hindered them from establishing a closer relationship with domestic students; simultaneously, the gap they have in cultural backgrounds and lifestyles further hindered the two groups to bond and connect in a meaningful way. Therefore, Chinese international undergraduate students prefer to build friendships with their Chinese peers as they have much more in common. Discrimination and stereotype are also the problems that some of the

students have to deal with, and most of their experiences of being discriminated were the result of the insufficiency of their ability to command English.

In order to overcome the barriers, the Chinese students in this study used various strategies aiming to achieve a smoother transition process. The methods that students implemented can mainly be summarised into four categories, the use of the university's resources, the use of students' own resources, the use of their mother tongue, and the use of technology. As the findings showed, Chinese international undergraduate students received significant help and useful information from the writing center, orientations from the university, mentor-mentee services on campus, language classes and other social activities provided by the university. These services and events not only assisted them with their school work, but also offered them chances to interact with native speakers and to know more about the local community.

For students' coping strategies, Chinese international undergraduate students also have their own methods to overcome the barriers they encountered during their university adjustment. Regarding language and academic aspects, students used keywords to help them better understand the study materials, and some of them watched English shows or movies to improve their English and their knowledge of the Western culture. Regarding the social aspect, Chinese international undergraduate students made social connections through going to social events outside campus, and they would reach out to their Chinese peers or their family and friends in China for emotional support.

In addition, the finding highlighted the importance of using Chinese as a coping strategy to solve the challenges that Chinese international undergraduate students have during the transition process. The use of Chinese in their English learning is beneficial for their understanding and comprehension of the learning materials. Students can have a better understanding of the course content through reading related Chinese references. Since Chinese international undergraduate students prefer to socialize with their Chinese peers outside of the classroom, Chinese is very essential to their social life as well. Last but not least, the use of

technology also made Chinese international undergraduate students' transition process easier to go through. Students use technology tools like WeChat for study and social life. They use WeChat to exchange notes, form group discussions, chat with friends and family as well as share experiences with incoming Chinese international undergraduate students. The use of technology tools has made students' life becoming much more convenient, eased the interactions between students, and facilitated the constructions and maintenances of students' social networks.

The study also presented the suggestions that Chinese international undergraduate students have for newcomers. Chinese international undergraduate students recommended incoming students to be clear about their goal and be confident about their new life in Canada. The findings also confirmed the significance of Chinese international undergraduate students attending social events to make friends. Most students found their engagements in social activities very beneficial for their adjustment in language, academia and social life. Getting involved in social events can also reduce their feeling of loneliness and homesickness. Additionally, for some Chinese international undergraduate students, having a part-time job also offered them chances to practice their English and to know more about the local culture.

Reflections

Through the study, I have personally gained a lot of improvements as a researcher and obtained a better understanding of my themes as well as my study interests. From social constructivism perspective, the interaction between the participants and me and the insights gained from this study contribute to the construction of knowledge about international students. The different strategies that participants implemented to cope with the barriers, particularly how they used technology and internet to obtain digital social capital are the contributions of my study. Results of the study have implications for higher education institutions and incoming Chinese international students. On the other hand, there are some limitations and implications of this study which can be helpful for future research in this field.

Limitations: The sample of this study was relatively small. Only ten Chinese international students at River University were interviewed in this study. I tried to interview more students from other majors but not everyone has enough time to finish the 60-90 mins face to face conversation with me. And for some students who showed interest in this study, they did not meet the criteria for participating in the study, so I could not include them in the study. An ideal study for the present subject matter would be to find ten Chinese international undergraduate students from ten different majors to see the impact of study different majors on students' life and study. However, with the restriction of limited time and resources, I did not find participants major in different majors respectively. Moreover, since I used snowball sampling as the method to recruit the participants, most of the participants I interviewed tended to introduce their classmates to me as my potential participants. So, three of the participants came from the same majors and same school year with many things in common. On one hand, it was good for me to make comparisons among participants and tried to seek for the uniqueness of each participant in other aspects. On the other hand, the study sample was lack of diversity. Furthermore, because of the size of the sample, the participants only represent limited types of Chinese international undergraduate students studying in Canada. Not every type of Chinese international undergraduate student was included in the study. Additionally, although the study was conducted through the investigation of Chinese international undergraduate students' personal experience, the findings only revealed a few typical features shared among Chinese international undergraduate students in Canada. Using this study to summarize Chinese international undergraduate students' experience in general is overgeneralized. This study can be served as reference for other related studies on Chinese international undergraduate students in Canada, it cannot be generalized to other contexts.

The translation is another limitation of this study. The interviews were all completed in Chinese as all participants prefer to use their first language (Chinese) to answer the questions. Therefore, the audio record and the transcriptions of the interview were in Chinese. I analyzed the transcriptions and translated them into English. In order to minimize the loss of information during the Chinese-English translation

process, I confirmed repeatedly with the participants to make sure the English version of the transcriptions can accurately convey their meanings by sending them the English transcription. Nevertheless, it was hard to find the exact English translation for some of the Chinese expressions. I kept some of the Chinese expressions like “Gaokao” (高考) and “Junxun” (军训) with English definition. For other Chinese expressions which need a particular Chinese cultural context to explain, I selected various English expressions with similar meaning to let the participants choose which one of the English expressions can best convey their perspective. Though I tried my best to minimize the researcher’s bias, it was hard to avoid in translation.

Implications: The finding and analysis of the study on Chinese international undergraduate students’ experience during the transition process has implications for policymakers, educators and other faculties in the universities and higher education institutions.

Universities could offer more English language programs for Chinese international undergraduate students to assist them in having a smoother language transition. The majority of Chinese international undergraduate students see language adjustment as their top barrier. And the lack of English proficiency can have huge effects on their academic and social adaptation. Universities can encourage domestic students to get involved in the English workshops or English study groups as mentors, so Chinese international undergraduate students can learn about colloquial English, English slang and local cultural mores as mentees. Apart from that, Chinese international undergraduate students can have more opportunities to establish a cross-cultural friendship with local students through learning English. For domestic students, it is necessary for them to be more aware of the importance of embracing Chinese international undergraduate students as well as understanding the struggles and hardships that Chinese international undergraduate students have to go through. Universities should hold culture events for Chinese international undergraduate students to introduce their cultures to domestic students in order for domestic students to be more knowledgeable about the cultural diversity in Canada. In that case, local students could be more open and

respectful to other cultures, Chinese international undergraduate students could have more opportunities to communicate with local students and experience less discrimination and stereotype.

Educators and policymakers need to pay more attention on the internationalization of higher education in Canadian universities and institutions. The internationalization of higher education has become the trend and universities across the world are all trying to keep up with this trend. The internationalization of higher education is not just about the increasing recruitment of international students, but also the internationalization of the curriculum and teaching methods (Ardakani et al., 2011; Knight, 2004). Many participants expressed their difficulties in getting used to the Canadian curriculum and methods of teaching as they are very different from those in China. Educator and policymakers could build up the level of internationalization in curriculum and teaching methods. Instead of requiring international students to adapt to the western curriculum and teaching methods in Canada. Policymakers and educator need to improve their curriculum and teaching methods by combining the conducive aspects of the curriculum and teaching methods from other nations to internationalize their academic environment. This could not only help Chinese international undergraduate students and international students from other countries to have a better academic adjustment, but also accelerate the internationalization of the higher education in Canada.

Universities provide various social activities for international student and have various student services specifically set up for international students to assist their life and study in Canada. However, many participants were not very satisfied with the services and activities that the university offered for them. They found some of the services and activities could not meet their needs and some of the events were lack of publicity that they did not get the chance to experience them. Knowing students' demand is significant for policymakers and educator to provide a better academic environment for both domestic students and international students. Policymakers and educator could encourage international students to give them more feedbacks and suggestions on the university services and events, so they can focus more on what students need and avoid the waste of resources on other aspects. For instance, many of the participants highly valued the writing support services provided by the writing center on campus. However, they also expressed that

the writing center cannot accommodate everyone's demand due to limited resources. Policymakers should provide more services like writing center to replace the ones that students rarely used. Additionally, the publicity of some of the events and student services are not noticeable enough. Universities should put more efforts into advertising events so as to attract more Chinese international undergraduate students to participate.

The current study also has implications for incoming Chinese international undergraduate students and Chinese students who are considering going abroad for higher education. Learning from the experience of Chinese international undergraduate students in senior years could be very beneficial for other Chinese students especially for newcomers. Universities should hold social events to build up the connections between new Chinese international undergraduate students and their senior peers. In this respect, the senior Chinese international undergraduate student can share about their experience including what they did to adjust to the Canadian universities, the available resources they used for better adjustment and their own coping strategies for overcoming the barriers during the transition process. New Chinese international undergraduate students could receive more suggestions through communication with their senior peers and be better prepared emotionally and academically for their new chapter overseas.

Future Studies

Many of the future study ideas on Chinese international undergraduate students' experience could be inspired by the current study. Due to the limitation of time and resources, only ten Chinese international undergraduate students participated in the study, and each of them was only interviewed for 60 to 90mins long. There were many interesting questions arising from the interview, but participants were only able to give a brief answer to some of the questions for the sake of time. Researchers in future studies could invest more time and efforts in interviewing the participants. Interviews could take up more time with more interactions with participants, so researchers are more likely to make more observations and establish a closer relationship with the participants.

The current study found out the relationship between Chinese international undergraduate students majors and their academic barriers through the comparison of participants from various study areas. The result of this study separated the participants into two broad categories and illustrated the major academic differences of students in those two categories. Future studies could recruit more Chinese international undergraduate students from other study majors to add more varieties to the study sample so that researchers could have more resources to make comparisons among the participants. In that case, researchers could gather more extensive data from the interviews and are more likely to obtain deeper understandings about how Chinese international undergraduate students' choice of major may influence their performance during the transition process.

There are other crucial elements that were not discussed in the current study; instead of choosing participants based on their gender, school year, and major, future studies on Chinese international undergraduate students' experience could set up more criteria to broaden its scopes, and to recruit a greater number of future participants. For example, future researchers could consider criteria such as student's family income, social class and previous education. Participants coming from different financial, social backgrounds and educational background are likely to have different adjustment barriers, and their motivations and attitudes toward study abroad will likely vary.

Furthermore, participants in the current study also vary in their English proficiency; some of them met the language admission requirements, while others were conditionally accepted by the university and took the required pre-university English class to meet the language requirements. The finding showed that the Chinese international undergraduate students, regardless of their levels of English proficiency, encountered similar language challenges when adapting to Canadian universities. Overall, participants who received high scores in the designated English standard test faced many difficulties in language adaptation, similar to those who received lower scores. Future studies should investigate into the admission requirements for Chinese international undergraduate students; a study could be designed to look into whether using exam-based English language tests as the main measurement is adequate to evaluate the

students' English proficiency. Researchers in the future studies could also discuss the possible methods that universities can implement to enhance the defects they have in measuring Chinese international undergraduate students' English proficiency during the admission process.

The current study only revealed Chinese international undergraduate students' experience during the transition process from their own perspectives. Future studies on Chinese international undergraduate students could include perspectives from professors and domestic students. The addition of professors and domestic students' perspectives in future studies can provide more angles to the current study which can present the study findings in a more comprehensive way. Moreover, current study brought up how Chinese and English are treated differently in China and Canada. Even China is not an English-speaking country, English can remain its high language status in China and reproduce its language privilege. However, Chinese is not highly valued as a foreign language in Canada. Future study can further investigate how English maintains its language privilege in China and how English reproduces its language privilege at the international scale.

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Appendix A: Guided Interview Questions

Academic and Social Experiences of Chinese International Undergraduate Students at a Canadian University

Participant Name:

Date:

Basic information (name, major, school year, monthly expenses)

What kind of high school did you go before you came to Canada?

What do you think about going abroad for higher education?

What makes you choose to come to Canada?

What is your original motivation for studying abroad?

What's your expectation before you come to Canada? Is the life in Canada the same as you expected?

What does internationalization mean to you? How do you understand it?

How do you feel about your major so far?

During first your transition process at River University, what challenges did you encounter?

- Language, academic and social

What strategies did you use to overcome the challenges?

- Language, academic and social

To overcome your challenges and barriers, what kind of school services did you use for help?

Do you think your life has become easier? or harder? after your first-year transition process.

If you have chance to re-do your first year, what kind of chances would you make?

In your opinion, what are the difference between international students and domestic students?

- Do you think you've wind into the local life?
- Do you feel lonely or homesick very often?
- How did you deal with your loneliness?
- Do you see yourself as an outsider?
- Do you think it's important to wind into the local life?

Do you think meeting all the admission requirements means you can have a smooth transition?

- How do you think about the standard of the admission requirements?

- Based on your learning experience at River University, do you think the standard of the admission requirements are reasonable?

Do you think Chinese is important in your current studying and social life?

- Academic, social

What's your biggest achievement so far?

To what extent do you think western life has affected you?

How do you think about part-time job?

What kind of changes would you like to make to the university?

What kind of recommendations would you like to give to the new Chinese international students?