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An Investigation into the Transformation of Transnational Identities of Chinese Students with Study-Abroad Experiences

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An Investigation into the Transformation of Transnational Identities of Chinese Students
with Study-Abroad Experiences

by

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A THESIS

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Abstract

In our globalized and diverse world, the number of international students in postsecondary institutions is increasing more than ever. While bringing their experiences and ideas to their new settings, these students also learn and change the way they see themselves and the people around them. My project is a case study that examines the transformation of Chinese students' transnational identities against the backdrop of the internationalisation of higher education (Varghese, 2008). Based on a social constructivism paradigm, the study used a qualitative research approach in order to probe issues lying beneath the surface of behaviours (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018) and investigate six individual cases in significant depth. The study includes two phases of data collection. During the first phase, the data was gathered from two rounds of semi-structured interviews: the first round focused on the participants' experiences abroad; the second, on their home-visiting experiences. In the second phase, through a complementary data collection method, document review, I explored how the participants positioned their identities on social media by investigating their posts on WeChat, which was ubiquitous in Chinese students' lives for its wide functional range. My findings were analysed on the racial factor and the six conceptual premises of transnationalism proposed by Vertovec (2009). The study will benefit both higher education staff and faculty members in understanding Chinese students' transnational identities, while helping Chinese international students see themselves better through the lens of "transnationalism".

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Chapter 1: Introduction

*“I’m who I am, a firework of larruping color.”
(A famous deceased singer Leslie Cheung from Hong Kong)*

Internationalization of Higher Education in the Age of Globalization

The Conceptualization of Globalization

Globalization, the international exchange of markets, skills, knowledge and cultures which has been occurring for millennia (Little & Green, 2009), has been developing into a wider phenomenon, with its concentration on the flows of goods, services, knowledge, and cultures (Held, Anthony, Goldbaltt, & Perraton, 1999). The three major approaches conceptualizing globalization were proposed by Held et al. (1999) in a seminal piece of research. The hyper-globalist approach regards the convergence of nations in the political and economic domains as inevitable (Ohmae, 1997; Reich, 1991). In contrast, the skeptical approach views globalization as influenced by some major capitalist countries, explaining it as confrontation between different influential world powers and driven by changes in the world power relations (Hirst & Thompson, 1996; Shields, 2013). The third major approach is the transformationalist approach, which sees globalization as a process of transforming the relationships between nations beyond the national borders towards a more interconnected way (Shields, 2013) and disseminating common values, attitudes and behaviors throughout the world (Boli & Thomas, 1997). This study is built on the foundation of transformationalist approach.

In this era of globalization, individuals are facing more challenges and uncertainties (Giddens, 1990) when facing increasing number of mobility and transformations. Therefore, they have to develop new skills, such as foreign languages and cultural communication. Internationalization of higher education can be seen as a channel for people to access more quality-based education and improve their intercultural competence in a globalized world (Gu, 2011).

Defining Internationalization of Higher Education

Internationalization of higher education is defined as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education” (Knight, 2003, p. 2). This complex process stretches across different fields of postsecondary education, more than just bringing in international students, individuals “enrolled in institutions of higher education who are on temporary student visas and are non-native English speakers (NNES)” (Andrade, 2006, p. 134). Influenced by the “seemingly inevitable forces of globalization”, the internationalization of higher education has become the “very core of universities in many educational contexts” (Yuan et al., 2019, p. 965).

In the form of recruitment of international students, the internationalization of higher education may bring about potential benefits in terms of increased cultural capital and diversity, enriched learning experiences, expanded staff horizons and capacity, and an interconnected professional community (Jones & Killick, 2013). Simultaneously, researchers have revealed various challenges brought by the internationalization of higher education and their negative impact on student learning. For instance, the use of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in many universities (Hu & Lei, 2014) can be an obstacle for international students with limited English proficiency, preventing them from “gaining fuller participation and membership in the

classroom community” (Sung, 2019, p.11). In addition, international students may encounter cultural shock and feelings of isolation and discrimination (Spencer-Oatey et al., 2017).

Therefore, the internationalization of higher education has brought about both benefits and challenges to international students in their pursuit for higher education.

Current Situation of Chinese International Students

With the accelerating paces of internationalization of higher education in the age of globalization, recent decades have witnessed a noticeable increase in the number of Chinese international students pursuing higher education, especially in developed countries (Bodycott, 2009; Li & Bray, 2007). For example, of the more than 642,000 international students who studied in Canada in 2019, 22 percent came from China, making it the home for the second largest percentage of Canada’s international student population (Fisher, 2020).

Chinese international students are pursuing “transnational cultural capital”, which is referred to as “skills and dispositions needed to act in social fields that transcend the nation state” (Carlson et al., 2017, p. 750), to survive competition and inequality in a globalized world. For them, “transnational cultural capital” includes diverse skills and dispositions: the ability to overcome difficulties in making oral presentations and participating in whole-class discussion, the competence in displaying epistemic stances towards the course contents, the familiarity with interactional routines and participatory styles in group discussions, as well as an openness towards others or an appreciation of cultural diversity (Prieur & Savage, 2013; Sung, 2019; Weenink, 2008). The process of acquiring these skills and dispositions could also be regarded as their negotiation of multiple memberships in multiple communities and identities construction (Wenger, 1998).

Chinese Students' Transnational Identities

According to Norton (1997), “identity” refers to “how people understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future” (p. 410). From the poststructuralist perspective, the concept of “identity” is perceived as fragmented and contested, and thus evolving, hybrid, and paradoxical in nature (Block, 2007). Therefore, “identity” in this study is sometimes pluralized as “identities” and characterized by its dynamic and contradictory nature (Norton, 2000).

“Identity paradox” is defined as the permanent potential conflict between people’s individuality and the collective nature of their social life (Ramirez, 2012) and the “potential incompatibilities between individuals’ values and those of their situated environment” (Yuan et al., 2019, p. 966).

Specifically, for Chinese international students, identity paradoxes may be regarded as “a double-edged sword”. On the one hand, identity paradoxes are part and parcel in students’ daily lives, escalating in changing situations and leading to identity crisis and breakdown (Yuan et al., 2019). On the other hand, the process of coping with identity paradoxes can serve as a critical source of spontaneity, creativity, and growth for individuals’ professional and personal improvement (Yuan, 2016).

In order to sufficiently study Chinese students’ identities, it is critical to build up a view including identity paradoxes, which can “provide a sharpened focus on possible challenges and tensions experienced by Chinese students against the backdrop of the internationalization of higher education” (Yuan et al., 2019, p. 967). In Canadian universities, leaders and educators also need to develop a view including identity paradoxes so that they could combine a global awareness with a local one when developing and implementing an internationalized curriculum,

which may “help students negotiate their identity paradoxes and seek their academic learning” (Yuan et al., 2019, p.976).

Generally speaking, a view including identity paradoxes has theorized international students’ identities as in-between (Sarroub, 2002) and bifocal (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001), paying the same attention to their local and global experiences. However, the mobility and fluidity of transnational identities, the path linking people’s individuality with the collective nature of their social life (Ramirez, 2012), need further exploration. This study will not focus on the way students are tied to either “here” or “there”, but focus on their identity transformation while in or from Canadian context.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate the negotiation, construction, and transformation of Chinese international students’ identities through the lens of transnationalism, which refers to the “economic, social and political linkages between people, places and institutions crossing nation-state borders and spanning the world” (Vertovec, 2009, p.1).

When we discuss Chinese students’ transnational identities, “transnational” is often used confusingly, sometimes interchangeably, with “international” and “multinational”. According to Portes (2001), “international” pertains to activities and programs of nation-states, “multinational” to large-scale institutions such as corporations or religions whose activities take place in multiple countries, and “transnational” to activities “initiated and sustained by non-institutional actors, be they organized groups or networks of individuals across borders (Vertovec, 2009, p. 29). This is the definition adopted for this study.

Since this study is conducted under the background of globalization, it is important to look at these students' identities through the lens of transnationalism, because "enhanced transnational connections between social groups represent a key manifestation of globalization" (Vertovec, 2009, p. 2). From the perspective of students' acquiring "transnational cultural capital", the lens of transnationalism is also crucial, as competence is an important part of the theory of transnationalism (Vertovec, 2009).

Therefore, understanding Chinese students' transnational identities can provide valuable information for higher education staff and faculty members to offer systematic and sustained support to foster students' critical capacities to adjust to the internationalization of higher education and seek their academic learning and personal growth (Knight, 2003; Yang, 2014).

Research Questions

In light of the above and considering my own experiences with teaching, I am curious to explore transnational identities of Chinese students with study-abroad experiences, due to my similar personal experience, dual identity of researcher and ESL learner, and the closely interactive relationship between my students and me.

The over-arching research questions for my research are:

1. How do Chinese international students describe their identities?
2. What are major factors influencing the transformation of Chinese students' transnational identities?
3. From students' perspectives, how can university teachers develop pedagogies to help them with diverse identities?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of my research is established upon the theory of transnationalism, because it can connect students' study-abroad and home-coming experiences across the borders with emphasis on the remaining existence and importance of nation states (Kivisto, 2001). Dual or multiple orientations of “cross-cutting belongingness” (Vertovec, 2001, p. 580) are developed in “transnational social spaces” in which international students learn to negotiate their individual identities and “an enhanced bifocality of outlooks” (Vertovec, 2004, p. 970). The transnational social spaces are characterized by “triadic relationships” between groups and institutions in the host state, the sending state (sometimes referred to as the external homeland) and the minority group—migrants and/or refugee groups, or ethnic minorities (Gu, 2015). Different from a “place” referring to a particular position, point or area, “spaces” have the quality of being large and empty, allowing one to move freely and emphasizing the relationships among these three aspects.

Based on this framework of “triadic relationships”, I explored Chinese students' transnational identities through the lens of transnationalism, looking their identities as “a process of identity transformation” from different layers.

Transnationalism has its six main conceptual premises: social morphology, type of consciousness, mode of cultural reproduction, avenue of capital, site of political engagement, (re)construction of “place” or locality (Vertovec, 2009). All these conceptual premises could find their significance in affecting students' identities (the recognition of oneself, surrounding people and contexts, future orientations, emotional journey, etc.), which are defined and elaborated in the following literature review chapter.

Methodology

Due to the nature of identity, I located my research in the social constructivist paradigm, a theory of knowledge in sociology and communication theory that “examines the knowledge and understandings of the world that are developed jointly by individuals” (Amineh & Asl, 2015, p. 13).

Driven by the social constructivist paradigm, I employed the qualitative methodology. The broad category of “qualitative research” included a variety of “loosely defined” group of designs with their “own protocol for collecting and analyzing data” (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019, p. 224), and I chose naturalistic research design, which mainly “involves real-world issues and settings” (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019, p. 226).

Among various naturalistic inquiry methods, I chose case study to do my research inquiry, investigating six individual cases of Chinese international students or former students. As for the specific data collection methods, I employed semi-structured interview as the primary one and document review as the complementary one. As a window into the participants’ mind which cannot be directly observed (Kvale, 1996), a series of in-depth semi-structured interviews were used to elicit their narratives of study-abroad experiences. In addition, among the broadly-defined documents, special attention was paid to participants’ identity positioning in social media (WeChat), because WeChat played a vital role in analyzing their transnational identities aided by the development of communication technology (Lingel, Naaman, & Boyd, 2014; Francisco, 2015; Son, 2015).

As one of the world’s largest standalone mobile apps, WeChat, a Chinese multi-purpose messaging, social media and mobile payment app for IT (Intelligent Terminal) users, was

developed by Tencent Company in 2011 and its use has been proliferating at a quick pace. In 2018, WeChat covered 94% of Chinese smartphone consumers, with over 1 billion monthly active users. It was described as China's "app for everything" and a "super app" because of its wide range of functions.

WeChat played a central role in Chinese students' literacy and social lives as they "forged new friendships and developed resources necessary in coping with the myriad challenges at the university" (Wang, 2017, p. 689). As members of so-called "Internet Generation", my participants kept posting on WeChat during their study-abroad period to update their current situations and feelings. Their WeChat posts could be regarded as vital factors in their construction, negotiation and transformation of identities. Therefore, I investigated their posts from the different conceptual premises of transnational identities, in order to acquire a comprehensive understanding of their study-abroad experiences.

Assumptions

In order to understand Chinese students' transnational identities in the process of their pursuing higher education, a broadly sociocultural perspective is drawn upon, which approaches learning as a social process. According to Lave and Wenger (1991), learning is a situated activity and "an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice", thus Chinese students' academic sojourn abroad can be conceptualized as a situated process of participation in the practices in a particular "community of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.31).

Learning in a foreign university may also be viewed as an experience of identity in that it "transforms who we are and what we can do" (Wenger, 1998, p. 215), and learners are in the process of "being active participants in the practices of social communities and constructing

identities in relation to these communities” (p. 4). From this angle, “negotiating participation, membership and relationships in a given community” (Sung, 2019, p. 3) is of great importance to identity formation and transformation.

Therefore, from the perspective of Chinese international students, learning in Canadian universities is more than acquiring knowledge. It is a social and identity construction process influenced by “triadic relationships” between the host state, the sending state and the minority group (Gu, 2015), in which they have to overcome challenges brought by the internationalization of higher education and their negative impact on student learning.

About the researcher

No two sorts of birds practice quite the same sort of flight; the varieties are infinite. Every individual in the world has his or her own unique identities, which are formed in the past, never completed, never finished, and always in the process of formation. As a researcher, I have my own complex and ever-changing identities. Born in China, I used to be a professional English trainer and a university English teacher for more than eight years. After the arrival in Canada in my early 30’s, I became a female Chinese immigrant and a visible minority student in a North American university. After my graduation with the M. Ed degree, I was first a non-native English teacher in Canada, then a Chinese university English teacher with study-abroad experiences. Looking back at the trajectories of my diverse identities, I found the interwoven relationship between my students and I, which is pivotal in my professional identity formation and future academic research.

During more than 20+ years of teaching, I have taught thousands of students. Most Chinese students engaged in my teaching career belong to the young adult group preparing to pursue their university education abroad. Each of them has unique identities, which are multiple,

contradictory, a site of struggle, and subject to change (Norton, 1995). During the process of their academic and career pursuit—arriving in, staying, leaving, and/or reentering a foreign country—their transnational identities are suffused with fluidity and mobility, closely intertwined with the places they come from, and their linguistic expertise. Due to my personal experiences similar to those of my students, it is possible for me to conduct this study as an “insider” and the results will inform my professional life in the future.

Significance

In this era of globalization, with enhanced student mobility, the competence of living and studying in a culturally mixed setting has emerged as a new challenge for all students, despite their individual backgrounds (Briguglio & Smith, 2012). This study helps to investigate the way students perceive and adjust to their identity changes, to build up the recognition of identity as a certain “kind of person” in a given context (Gee, 2000), and to reduce negative impacts on student learning brought by the internationalization of higher education.

This study fills research gaps by paying more attention to the transformation of Chinese students’ identities, not focusing on their experiences in a single place—China (the home country) or Canada. Instead, this study focuses on the “fluidity, mobility and transformation” of their self-perceptions, the way they negotiate their identities and “bifocality” of outlooks (Vertovec, 2004, p. 970). I have chosen participants who have spent different lengths of time in Canadian universities and had different frequencies of visiting back to China, in order to make comparisons between their personal experiences during and after studies, between their stories with and without the influence of the home country, and among their narratives and those of others.

Findings may provide valuable information for higher education staff and faculty members in understanding Chinese students' transnational identities, improving teaching skills, and adjusting relative policies. Therefore, they could adopt "contextually appropriate strategies to seek a dynamic equilibrium between the conflicting poles in students' identity (trans)formation (Ramirez, 2012)" (Yuan et al., 2019, p. 967).

Delimitations

This study only includes Chinese students who have finished their high-school education in China and stayed abroad (cumulatively) at least for two years in the past three years. According to Erik Erikson's (1994) stages of human development, they belong to the age group of young adults (prime adults), which generally refers to people in the age range of 20 to 40. As young adults, their outlook on life and the world have been basically formed in China, which makes them be collectively viewed as the same group with common social and cultural characteristics (Grimshaw, 2010). During the process of studying in Canadian universities, they have encountered different situations and spent different spans of time abroad with different frequencies of visiting China. For those who have returned to China or graduated from university, it is more appropriate to call them "former students" or "former international students". Therefore, I use "Chinese students with study-abroad experiences" in the title of thesis to summarize all these groups. Despite their current address, what I try to explore is their identity-related issues, from the perspectives of "transnationalism" and the layers of individual, communities or institutions, and the society as a whole.

Limitations

In the research, all the participants' experiences are largely based on their memories, thus the problem of forgetting or exaggerating memory could be taken into consideration. In addition, due to the time constraints of a doctoral research and the nature of a small-scale study, I have to be very careful to avoid generalizing by presenting more in-depth descriptions, careful interpretations and constant comparisons to complement our current understanding on transnational identities.

Definition of Terms

Globalization: The international exchange of markets, skills, knowledge and cultures which has been occurring for millennia (Little & Green, 2009).

Internationalization of higher education: The process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education (Knight, 2003, p. 2).

International students: Individuals enrolled in institutions of higher education who are on temporary student visas and are non-native English speakers (NNES) (Andrade, 2006, p. 134).

Identity: How people understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future (Norton, 1997, p. 410).

Identity paradox: The permanent potential conflict between people's individuality and the collective nature of their social life (Ramirez, 2012) and the potential incompatibilities between individuals' values and those of their situated environment (Yuan et al., 2019, p. 966).

Transnational cultural capital: Skills and dispositions needed to act in social fields that transcend the nation state (Carlson et al., 2017, p. 750).

Transnationalism: The economic, social and political linkages between people, places and institutions crossing nation-state borders and spanning the world (Vertovec, 2009, p.1).

Transnational social spaces: Triadic relationships between groups and institutions in the host state, the sending state (sometimes viewed as an external homeland) and the minority group—migrants and/or refugee groups, or ethnic minorities (Faist 1998: 213, original emphasis) (Gu, 2015, p. 65).

In the next chapter, I review the literature on transnational identities and present my theoretical framework in greater detail.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter establishes the literature foundation for my research in exploring the transformation of transnational identities of Chinese students with study-abroad experiences. The first section draws a holistic picture in conceptualizing the widely-used word “identity” by distinguishing three main approaches and building up a view including identity paradoxes. The second section observes Chinese students’ identities through the lens of “transnationalism”, on six conceptual premises: social morphology, type of consciousness, mode of cultural reproduction, avenue of capital, site of political engagement, (re)construction of “place” or locality (Vertovec, 2009). The third section presents “transnational identities” as a transforming process and analyzes another influential factor closely related with this process. At the end of this chapter, research gaps are clarified to direct the future orientation of the study.

The Conceptualization of Identity

Three Approaches of Conceptualizing Identity

In the field of social sciences, the word “identity” is so frequently used that people have a misconception that it is supposedly understood without explanation. Based on my understanding, there are three major ways of conceptualizing identity presented by three academic schools: essentialist approach (Grimshaw, 2010; Hall, 1996; Spelman, 1988), symbolic interactionism approach (Cooley, 1964; Grimshaw & Sears, 2008; Hawkins, 2005; Mead, 1934), and post-structural approach (Guo & Lei, 2020; Sung, 2019; Yuan, Li, & Yu, 2019; Zhang & Guo, 2015;

Zhang, Heydon, Li, & Malins, 2020). Each conceptualization reveals the assumptions placed behind the use of the term.

The first group, essentialists, propose that people only have one core and permanent self throughout their life (Hall, 1996). They regard individuals as having one centered and unchanged identity (Spelman, 1988). From the perspective of cultural essentialism (Grimshaw, 2010), Chinese students may be collectively viewed as the same group with common social and cultural characteristics. However, it is one-sided to deem that every individual Chinese student has the same identity, which is the viewpoint put forward by the next two groups.

The second group, symbolic interactionists, view identity as constantly changing in social interactions. As for the definition of “I” and “Me”, Mead (1934) consider them as being included into the “self”, which is a social process, while Cooley (1964) regard them as interrelated and could not be separated from each other. From the perspective of symbolic interactionist, Chinese students change themselves through social interactions (Grimshaw & Sears, 2008) and construct their identities in a continuous interplay between other individuals and social contexts (Hawkins, 2005).

The third group of scholars are poststructuralists, who argue that individual agency has prominence. From post-structural perspective, people are diverse and different, and they may carry contradictions and tensions within themselves (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 25). Using underpinning interpretive and qualitative approaches to educational research, poststructuralists tend to regard identity as changing between multiple selves (Zhang & Guo, 2015). They emphasize “change”, the fragmented and discontinued features of identity (Bauman, 1996); and “possibility”, the variety of risks and opportunities faced by people in their lives resulting in

changes in their identities (Giddens, 1991). According to the poststructuralist viewpoint, Chinese students have to negotiate their multiple memberships in multiple communities and reconcile such various memberships into individual identities (Wenger, 1998).

In summary, the first two approaches view identity from one single angle, either as an unchanged existence, or as a socially interacting process; while the third one approaches identity from multiple angles by taking various influential factors into consideration. With the rapid paces of globalization and in the contexts of internationalization, it is beneficial for me to define identity as a whole complex, including multiple dimensions which are constantly changing and interacting with each other in the social identification process. Therefore, my study looks at Chinese students' *identities* from the poststructuralist viewpoint, which views identity as a site of struggle for individuals to claim desirable identity options and resist undesirable ones imposed by the social structures (Norton, 2000; Norton & McKinney, 2011; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). From this angle, the plural form (*identities*) is used to represent the dynamic and contradictory nature of identity (Norton, 2000).

Identity Paradoxes

The emergence of poststructuralist theories shed light on the perceived concept of identity as evolving, hybrid, and paradoxical in nature (Block, 2007), thus much attention has been paid to *identity paradoxes* to “explore how individuals interpret and cope with increasingly complex and dynamic social reality and seek their personal learning and well-being” (Yuan et al., 2019, p. 966). Specifically, two identity paradoxes are of great importance in analyzing individuals' identity construction and transformation: paradoxes between “fluidity” and “stability” and

between “personalization” and “contextualization” (Chae & Bloodgood, 2006; Hughes, 2007). These two identity paradoxes are further explained in the following sections.

Fluidity vs. Stability: Identities’ Construction and Changing

From the poststructuralist perspective, individuals are regarded as “diverse, contradictory, dynamic and changing over historical time and social space” (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 417). According to these authors, individuals’ identities are “always socially and historically embedded” (p. 417), which prompts Holland & Lave (2001) to discuss “the apparent paradox of identity being experienced as unitary and durable, while being, at the same time, variable and situated in dynamic practice” (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 417).

On the one hand, identity, stressed by Western humanist philosophy, is “the essential, unique, fixed, and coherent CORE of an individual” (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 417), illustrating the feature of its stability. Even if they are studying abroad and facing the complexities of language learning, Chinese students still find themselves in “a constant search for a stable and consistent identity”, which is disrupted by “dynamic, fluid, and often conflicted socio-cultural contexts” (Yuan et al., 2019, p. 964).

On the other hand, with multiple and mobile identities, multilingual students are moving “across linguistic, cultural and ethnic spaces of interaction”, challenging “the dominant discourse of any fixed and hyphenated identity” and pursuing “transcultural and transnational identities that allow their comfortable circulation among different worlds” (Zhang & Guo, 2015, p. 216).

Both stability and fluidity exist throughout the construction and transformation of Chinese students’ transnational identities, forming one major identity paradox. Besides it, another paradox is explained in the following section.

Personalization vs. Contextualization: Individually-struggled and Socially-given Positioning

When studying abroad, as language learners, Chinese students' positioning and social status are signaled in language. During their process of language learning, they are seen as active social agents who can gradually gain competence in using the L2 in socially and pragmatically appropriate ways (Morita, 2004). Therefore, their linguistic practices are greatly influenced by the "English dominance" favored by "racial hierarchies and language ideologies" (Haque & Patrick, 2015, p. 27), leading to the socially-given positioning of their identities. In order to understand, even merge into "Western cultures", Chinese students put great efforts in learning "Western language", the status of which is offered by the "Western society". Consequently, some Chinese students may hesitate when calling themselves as "legitimate English speakers", because such speakers, in their opinion, belongs to certain ethnicity and race that "play an important role in institutional and individual imagined communities of legitimate speakers of English" (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007, p. 675). In other words, legitimate speakers of a language are usually seen as the native speakers of that language (Roy, 2020).

Simultaneously, recent research on language and identity embraces the understandings of identities as "fluid, context-dependent, and context-producing, in particular historical and cultural circumstances", and the understandings of positioning as the chess-playing between "context" and "individual", in which "context 'pushes back' on individuals' claims to identity, individuals also struggle to assume identities that they wish to claim" (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 420).

Viewed as a whole complex, identity cannot always be "'won' or 'lost', sustained or abandoned" (Hall, 1996, p. 2). Human beings are not instruments controlled and managed by

computerized programs, instead, they have multiple and mixed sense of selves in constant changes. The topic of identity is full of changes and conflicts, interrelating and interacting with each other, thus it is of great necessity to build up a view including identity paradoxes, since “we are all minor shape shifters, from place to place and time to time, and one aspect of an individual’s portfolio of identifications may contradict or sit uncomfortably beside another” (Jenkins, 2011, p. 17).

The employment of a poststructuralist viewpoint and a view including identity paradoxes may be effectively expressed in the choice of “the transnational lens”, which is elaborated in the following section.

The Use of Transnationalism in this Study

The “transnational lens” is employed in my study, which does “the new analytical work of providing a way of seeing what was there that could not be seen before” (Smith, 2003, p. 725). Transnationalism, which refers to the “economic, social and political linkages between people, places and institutions crossing nation-state borders and spanning the world” (Vertovec, 2009, p. 1), developed rapidly in the 1990s and was used by many researchers (Glick Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1992; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; Rouse, 1991; Vertovec, 2001) to study migrants’ connection with their home and host countries.

The reasons for using “transnationalism” in my study are three-fold. First, “transnationalism” can connect students’ study-abroad and home-coming experiences across the borders. The word “transnational” can be used to describe the changing and overlapping society in which students live (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004), the social networks and social groups in

which students interact (Vertovec, 2009), and the values, attitudes, behaviors and languages in which students negotiate (Li, 2011).

The second reason lies in the remaining existence and importance of nation states (Kivisto, 2001), even in the era of globalization and the contexts of the internationalization of higher education. As groups with the largest population in most English-speaking destination countries, students' "old identities" formed in China and their transforming "new identities" abroad cannot be observed separately and "transnationalism" may help to recognize the influence of borders on the transformation of their identities.

The third reason is based on the fact that the way of typologizing transnationalism "focuses on degrees of mobility relating to transnational practice and orientation" (Vertovec, 2009, p. 19). Although the participants in my study may have different home-and-abroad experiences with different lengths and frequencies, their lives share the same characteristics of mobility, which is referred to as forms of "transformation" rather than mere (localized) change (Vertovec, 2009). That is also the reason why I use "transformation" instead of "changes" in the title of this thesis. After all, change is a momentary fad occurring only in one locality, level or scale (Rosenau, 2003), while transformation describes "a more radical change, a particularly deep and far-reaching one which within a relatively limited time span modifies the configuration of societies" (Wiltshire, 2001, p.8).

Six Conceptual Premises of Transnationalism

There are different dimensions existing under the umbrella of "transnationalism". Politically, it refers to issues of political affiliations, dual citizenships and nationalities (Vertovec, 2004). Economically, it raises issues of transfers of remittances, small businesses and

associations prompting economic development in home and host countries (Conway & Cohen, 1998; Dustmann & Mestres, 2010; Cohen, 2011). Socio-culturally, immigrants' fixed patterns and localized identities have been transformed into a multiple sense of belonging (Rouse, 1995) in a social field with time and space being overlapped (Glick-Schiller, Basch, & Szanton Blanc, 1995).

According to Vertovec (2009), transnationalism has six main conceptual premises: social morphology, type of consciousness, mode of cultural reproduction, avenue of capital, site of political engagement, (re)construction of “place” or locality. All these different “takes” on transnationalism cannot “be considered exclusive; some rely on others” (p. 4). This study not only focuses on the socio-cultural dimension and its impacts on students' identity-transformation, but also tries to explore how the conceptual premises interact with each other to form the rationale of conceptualizing “transnational identities” and shape a deep understanding of Chinese students' transnational identities. The six conceptual premises are explained at length in the following sections.

Social Morphology

Social Morphology is the sociological inquiry into the “anatomy” of society, analogous to the biological study of the morphological “form” of living creatures—the structure and composition of “tissues” and “organs” (Durkheim, 1960, p. 361). From the conceptual premise of social morphology, transnationalism is understood as a kind of social formation spanning borders, the central of which are structures or systems of relationships best described as networks among ethnic diasporas (Vertovec, 2009). According to Tololyan (1991), “ethnic diasporas” are “the exemplary communities of the transnational moment” (p. 5), the hallmarks of which is the

“triadic relationship” between: (a) globally dispersed yet collectively self-identified ethnic groups; (b) the territorial states and contexts where such groups reside; and (c) the homeland states and contexts whence they or their forebears came (Vertovec, 2009, p. 4). This triadic relationship in transnational social formations is described as networks with complex system of relationships, and each person as a “node” linked with others (Vertovec, 2009).

Specifically, when studying abroad, Chinese students have to participate in “complex and overlapping communities in which variously positioned participants learn specific, local, historically constructed, and changing practices” (Norton & Toohey, 2001, p. 312). Accordingly, they have to negotiate their multiple memberships in multiple communities and reconcile “forms of various membership into one identity” (Wenger, 1998, p. 149). For example, from the layer of self-identification, Chinese students may negotiate identity options through their preference for Chinese or foreign names, and their membership in the community intersects with notions of cosmopolitanism to affect their name choice (Diao, 2014). Furthermore, Chinese students’ transnational experiences have impact on their identities, the heart of which is a constant, emotional search for a reflexive sense of self (Gu, 2015). Specifically, their dynamic and interconnected transnational experiences can be viewed as a profound identity transforming experience, avenues for diverse social networks that reinforce complex cosmopolitan worldviews, and avenues for transnational(ized) new competences, skills and worldviews (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015).

The above-mentioned negotiating process may fully demonstrate the “multiple-ness” in identity construction, which involves “a mixture of being in and being out” (Wenger, 1998, p. 165). Therefore, it can be seen as “a complex, dynamic, situated and co-constructed process of

negotiating access, competence, membership, identities and discursive practices in different communities” (Sung, 2019, p. 14).

Type of Consciousness

In the process of social formation spanning borders, ethnic diasporas develop and share “diaspora consciousness...a strong and enduring group consciousness about the homeland, and feelings of solidarity more or less shared by the members of a diasporic collectivity in the host country” (Cohen, 1997, p. 184). “Diaspora consciousness” is marked by dual or multiple identifications: the awareness of multi-locality (“home away from home”, “here and there”, etc.), which may provide an “imaginary coherence” for a set of malleable identities (Vertovec, 2009).

In her research of diaspora consciousness formation and identity among Brazilians in Australia, Duarte (2005) identifies four interrelated patterns as indicative of diaspora consciousness: “the co-presence of ‘here’ and ‘there’; the re-creation of ‘Brazilian spaces’ in Australia; ‘othering’ in relation to the dominant culture; and increased reflexivity about the homeland” (p. 319). The co-presence of “here” and “there” refers to people’s feelings of “neither here nor there...betwixt and between” the host country and the homeland (Turner, 1969, p. 95), which could be both negative and positive. The re-creation of “Brazilian Spaces” in Australia illustrates migrants’ “creation of special spaces in the host country to make them feel connected with their homeland” (Duarte, 2005, p. 323), and their endeavor to foster a sense of “being at home in the new place” (Thomas, 1999, xvi). “Othering” in relation to the dominant culture is based on the viewpoint made by Hall (1994) that identities are constructed through difference. As for increased reflexivity in relation to the homeland, although diasporic individuals strive to adhere to their culture roots in the host country, their diasporic experience will never be the same

as that of homeland, leading to “a more in-depth and critical analysis of their country of origin” (Duarte, 2005, p. 328).

The four indicative patterns of diaspora consciousness also provide a critical lens to manifest the complexity and heterogeneity of Chinese diaspora (Fan, 2003; Ma & Cartier, 2003; Ong, 1993; Skeldon, 2003; Wang, 2007; Zhou, 2009). The formation of diaspora consciousness entails not only the negotiation and re-conceptualization of transnational identities in order to adjust to life away from the homeland, but also the “persistent attempts to create a suitable habitus in the host country” (Duarte, 2005, p. 334).

Mode of Cultural Reproduction

According to Bourdieu (1977a), cultural reproduction is the social process through which culture is reproduced across generations, especially through the socializing influence of major institutions. From the cultural perspective, a variety of areas, such as fashion, music, film and visual arts, are observed, in which transnational youth are producing “hybrid cultural phenomena manifesting ‘new ethnicities’ (Hall, 1991)” (Vertovec, 2009, p.7). Due to the lack of understanding of Western cultures and the lack of “shared repertoire of stories, artefacts, tools, actions, historical events, discourses, concepts and styles” (Wenger, 1998, p. 4), Chinese students may find it difficult to “engage actively in meaningful conversations” with local students in English-speaking countries, which “could otherwise lead to L2 interactional opportunities” (Sung, 2019, p. 12). On the one hand, during the process of understanding and accepting Canadian cultures, Chinese students could develop “diaspora values and attitudes”, which play important roles in forming their transnational identities. On the other hand, as young

adults called “Web Generation”, their transformation of identities could be realized through the channel of global media and communications, aided by ubiquitous modern technologies, which are “at the heart of today’s transnational networks” and reinforce pre-existing social patterns (Vertovec, 2009, p.5).

Research related with media culture appropriately provides an approach to better understand and interpret the cultural reproduction process among Chinese diaspora. For example, when focusing on young people, Sefton-Green distinguishes the features of new media by exploring young people’s roles as “actors within the techno-media culture circumvents”, their way of making sense of media culture, the “crucial and developing area of curriculum study”, and the nature of “changing textual regimes in general” (Sefton-Green, 2006, p. 293). Discussing “identities” in details, Wargo’s focuses on the way in which youth use “visual texts to reinforce, challenge, combat, and/or resist identities of difference” (Wargo, 2015, p. 560).

Among young people, facets of culture and identity are often “self-consciously selected, syncretized and elaborated from more than one heritage” (Vertovec, 2009, p.7). Therefore, in the field of media education, educators ought to identify and evaluate the “interaction between corporate producers and young users”, the “power relations between the two”, and the roles of young people as “users attempting to engage popular culture in meaningful ways that enter their own interests and identities into the public realm” (Burwell, 2010, p. 399). For transnational youth, cultural reproduction is viewed as a category of practice and process, which can capture the nuances of identity formation of “new ethnicities” (Hall, 1991).

Avenue of Capital

Among the three points of the “triadic relationship” mentioned in the section of “Social Morphology”, resources flow to and from and throughout the network formed by both big players, such as transnational corporations (TNCs), and little players who comprise the bulk of transnational communities (Vertovec, 2009). In the case of China, students going abroad for study represent two groups of elites in the society: the socioeconomic elite (e.g., mostly self-funded students) and the educated elite (e.g., students funded by scholarships) (Wang & Miao, 2013). The relatively small size of such elite groups occupying large amount of resource may form a new balance of the transnational network as a whole.

Belonging to elite groups, most Chinese students are language learners with complex identities, who regard their study-abroad experiences as “investments”, the definition of which is to “make meaningful connections between a learner’s desire and commitment to learn a language and their changing identities” (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 420). Drawn on economic metaphors, “investment” itself has two layers of meaning: to avoid risks and maximize profits. In the process of learning language, avoiding risks means the “importance of learners’ access to cultural resource, using (and thus learning) language as a dynamic tool” (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 419); and profits stand for “cultural capital”—the knowledge, credentials, and modes of thought that characterize different classes and groups (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), these “cultural capitals” may not be physically touched as cash, but they could bring about the same, even more benefits by being invested into one’s life.

To understand successful investment in language learning, two factors are of great importance. The first one is the relationship between investments and students’ needs, desires,

and negotiations. The second one is the establishment of “imagined communities” and “imagined identities”, the lack of the awareness of which may “hinder a teacher’s ability to construct learning activities in which learners can invest” (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 422). In a language learning classroom, “seen as a multidimensional being with a complex social history and equally complicated prospects for the future”, every individual student may have his or her special investment in language learning, which “is often fragile and is change by interaction in the social world” (Pittaway, 2004, p. 203). It is the responsibilities of educators to know that “responding to diversity in language and literacy education requires an imaginative assessment of what is possible, as well as a critical assessment of what is desirable” (McKinney & Norton, 2008, p. 202).

Site of Political Engagement

Facilitated by modern technology, a transnational framework has become “a global public space or forum”, while the “politics of homeland” may “engage members of diasporas or transnational communities in a variety of ways” (Vertovec, 2009, p. 11). When considering specific factors influencing Chinese students’ transnational identities, “the politics of evidence” is of great importance. As for Lerner (2004, p. 20), the politics and political economy of evidence “is not a question of evidence or no evidence. It is rather a question of who has the power to control the definition of evidence”.

Strictly limited by the “nine-year compulsory education law”, students have to follow certain “curriculum modules”, leading to three main differences in the analysis of their linguistic, cultural, and identity orientations. First, they have different language learning time, beginning from a relatively later age compared with peers in other countries, resulting in their weakness in

language competence and communicative skills, since “children learn language and culture through active engagement in meaningful social interactions with adults and peers” (Blum-Kulka, 2008, p. 87). Second, they have limited flexibility (free will) in linguistic choices, solely English as foreign language in the classroom. Such flexibility could motivate students’ confidence, activeness and enthusiasm in language learning because “affective factors that might play a particularly important role in second language (L2) acquisition include issues such as strength of motivation and attitudes toward language learning as well as toward target-language speakers” (Fromkin, Rodman, Hyams, & Hummel, 2005, p. 348). The above-mentioned two differences are closely related to educational policies, while the third one belongs to below-the-surface theme—one’s self-identity orientations. When Chinese students who have finished their secondary education locally have opportunities to go abroad for further education, they may face difficulties in making oral presentations and participating in whole-class discussions, and struggle from the “peripheral participation in the classroom” to “fuller participation” (Sung, 2019, p. 10). In order to prepare them well in advance, more attention should be paid to cross-cultural communication, which focuses on “a complex set of culturally specific rules such as the effective performance of interactional routines (events and acts), appropriate conversational strategies, and expressions of politeness, which are part of the pragmatic competence required to successfully participate in social communication” (Li, 2008, p. 72). It is of vital necessity for students to be familiarized with the “useful framework for understanding the interactions” as they “enter into the new discourse communities and gain expertise in their new languages and contexts of language use” (Zuengler & Cole, 2005, p. 301).

(Re)construction of “Place” or Locality

With practices and meanings derived from specific geographical and historical points of origin being transferred and re-ground, transnationalism has changed people’s relations to space “particularly by creating transnational ‘social fields’ or ‘social spaces’” (Vertovec, 2009, p. 12), thus leading to the new “translocalities” (Appadurai, 1995; Goldring, 1998; Smith, 1998).

As international students and language learners, Chinese study-abroad students are gradually deepening their interaction with the world, using their “transnational identities that negotiate a complex network of values, ideologies and cultures” (Darvin & Norton, 2014, p. 55). Bhabha (1994) speaks of a “third space” in which “one no longer needs to rely on the binaries of home or host countries” (Darvin & Norton, 2014, p. 59). In this Third Space, transnational identities are accommodated and affirmed by tapping into their native cultures, knowledges and languages (Kim & Duff, 2012). However, Kramsch (2009) sees the “third place” as “too static” and reframes her own notion of language learners’ “third place” as “symbolic competence”, which seems to be related more to the agentive possibilities afforded to multilingual subjects who have “the power to change social reality through the use of multiple symbolic systems” (p. 200).

The “Third Place” is gradually replaced by “translanguaging space” in later literature. For example, Li (2011) interviewed three male Chinese first-year undergraduate students in UK by exploring their creative and critical “moments”, and found that Chinese students have shown tremendous creativity and criticality (Li, 2011) in the “translanguaging space”, where “cultural translation” (Bhabha, 1994) between traditions takes place. Darvin and Norton (2014) emphasize

the importance of a high-tech medium which “allows migrant learners to navigate more fluidly between countries of origin and settlement” (p. 63).

As an ever-changing, lifelong evolution, the construction of transnational identities may sometimes be regarded as abstract, complicated and idealized. The study of “translanguaging space” offers possibilities for teachers to “gain a better understanding of students’ linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds” (Jimenez, Smith & Teague, 2009, p. 25). Simultaneously, practical teaching skills, individualized curriculum and appropriate trainings are of great necessities in teaching ESL education, so that multilingual language learners could enjoy a transnational and multilingual space in which they can live their life freely (Li & Zhu, 2010) and become citizens-of-the-world.

Besides the conceptualization of identities and six conceptual premises of transnationalism, there is another factor closely connected with Chinese students’ transnational identities—race. As another crucial category in analyzing transnational identities, the way in which Chinese students understand race may greatly influence their self-cognition and identity transformation, and the following section explains it in detail.

Race: An Important Category in Transnational Identities

The definition and understanding of race have changed throughout history, “at times referring only to skin color, and other times as a stand-in for ethnicity” (Minniear & Soliz, 2019, p. 332). Race is defined as a group who have a common descent from cultural communities and who also have “visible” difference, which are given meaning by social actors (Fenton, 2013). Based on this definition, “racial identity” refers to the multidimensional, psychological construct that reflects the beliefs and attitudes that individuals have about their racial group membership,

and these beliefs and attitudes may develop over time (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Racial identity is socially and culturally stratified (Brunnsma & Rockquemore, 2001), and plays an important role in analyzing students' transnational identities "in every day and professional contexts in multiracial and multiethnic countries" (Kubota, 2015, p.3). Specifically, how we understand race impacts "perceptions of our own racial identity, our perceptions of others' racial identity, and our everyday interactions and behaviors" (Minnear & Soliz, 2019, p. 332).

Although there are critiques about cultural essentialism in regarding Chinese students as the same group, some educational studies offer insights into the impact of race in classrooms (Amobi, 2007; Johnson-Bailey, 2002). Belonging to the same racial group and sharing common features in "racial identity", Chinese students may "embrace and highlight their cultural traditions and values as Chinese" in their process of developing "similar interests, beliefs, and aspirations" with classmates, "accelerating rate of resource and knowledge exchange", and becoming "global citizens" on university campus abroad (Yuan et al., 2019, p. 975).

However, because of their homogeneous racial identity, Chinese students also suffer from the feeling of hurt, excluded, or ignored by others due to deep-rooted racism (Guo & Guo, 2017). As a result of discrepancies existing between internationalization policy at the institutional level, Chinese international students have to "deal with biases and outright discrimination from their classmates, instructors, supervisors, and the local community" (Guo & Guo, 2017, p.863). The situation deteriorated during the COVID-19 pandemic, when racism activities arose in many countries targeting at Chinese students, including both verbal and physical attacks (Elias et al., 2021). All these biases and discrimination may greatly influence Chinese students' identities and

call for host institutions to neutralize existing racial hierarchies and help Chinese students successfully integrate into new academic environment.

Research Gaps

It is important to highlight the gaps in knowledge in order to illustrate the significance of my research.

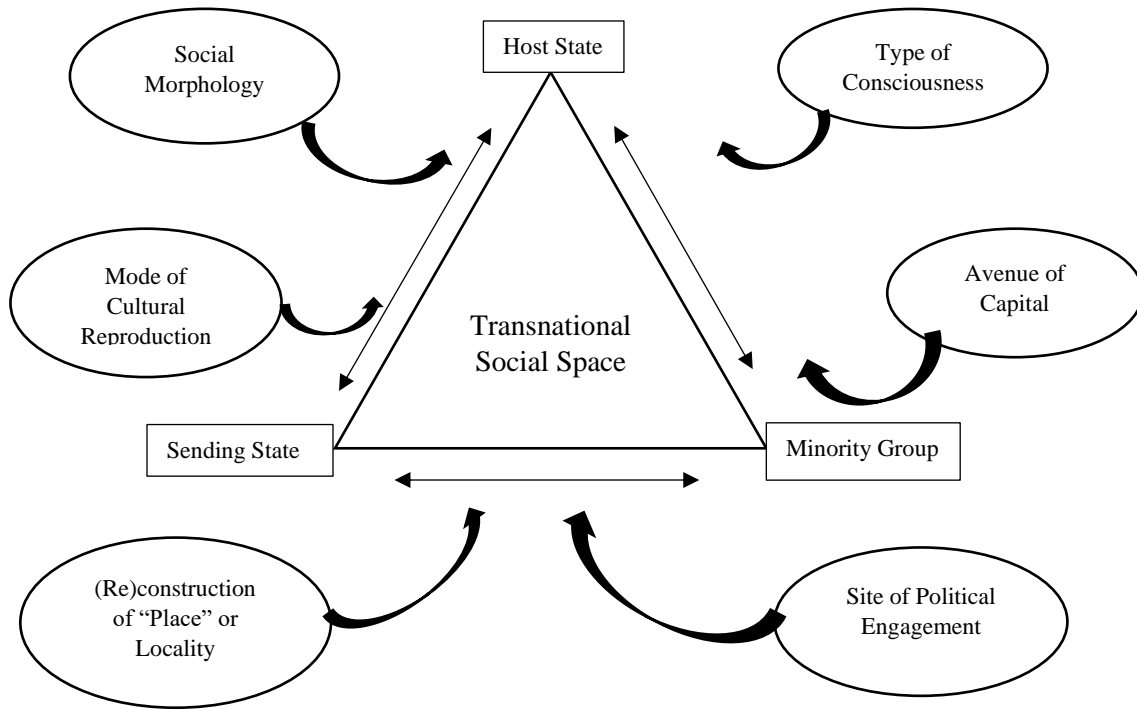
The first gap lies in the transformation of identity. Researchers have theorized transnational youths' identities as in-between (Sarroub, 2002) and bifocal (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001), but limited attention has been paid to investigate the fluidity and mobility of their self-perceptions. My research does not focus on the way students are tied to either "here" or "there", but on the way they are bound up in an interlocking web of sites, peoples, resources, and languages with their associated histories and geographies (Leander, Phillips, & Taylor, 2010).

The second gap I try to fill is the investigation of Chinese students' WeChat posts when exploring their transnational identities. Relative literature has focused on the transnational identity manifestation through technological communication platforms. For example, Dressler (2016) focused on teens' linguistic identity positioning in Facebook posts, and Wang (2017) on transnational Chinese students' literacy and networking practices in WeChat groups. From a new angle, I focus on WeChat's most frequently used function, "Moments", to collect data about their transnational identities.

In conclusion, as illustrated in Figure 1, my research is conducted in the "transnational social spaces" among "triadic relationships" between "the host state", "the sending state", and "the minority group" (Gu, 2015), through the lens of "transnationalism", and with the consideration of "race" as an important category and the focus on the six conceptual premises

(social morphology, type of consciousness, mode of cultural reproduction, avenue of capital, site of political engagement, (re)construction of “place” or locality) (Vertovec, 2009).

Figure 1 (Adapted from Vertovec, 2009 & Gu, 2015)



Equipped with the literature foundation for my research, I now move to Chapter 3, which provides a detailed description of the methodology used to answer my research questions.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter provides an overview of the philosophical and methodological underpinnings of the study. First, three main elements of research framework— paradigm, methodology, and method(s)—are introduced, from macro to micro layers, from general worldview to detailed skills and tools. Second, the chapter elaborates on some major issues in designing the research— choosing participants and designing interview questions. Third, drawing on Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Ary et al. (2002), four major elements of trustworthiness—credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability—are illustrated, followed by the specific research procedures. Finally, ethical considerations and limitations of the study are also demonstrated to complete the whole chapter.

Paradigmatic Orientation

A paradigm is a worldview— “a way of thinking about and making sense of the complexities of the world”, which can “tell us what is important, legitimate, and reasonable” (Patton, 2015, p. 190). It is also called “philosophical worldview”, which researchers need to establish at the beginning of their planning a study. In the following process, the methodological approach will be related to this worldview, and specific methods will translate the approach into practice (Creswell, 2014). In order to drive safely, one cannot gaze on the way just in front of the car; he or she has to look farther at the end of the road, judging direction from a holistic perspective. Similarly, when doing research, a researcher should be very clear about his or her paradigmatic

orientation so as to obtain and demonstrate knowledge effectively and avoid imbalances and inconsistencies among different methods, skills and tools.

Among the diverse paradigms discussed by scholars, *constructivism* is of greater importance in building up my research paradigm. Constructivism is typically seen as an approach to qualitative research (Berger & Luekmann, 1967; Crotty, 1998; Lincoln et al., 2011), and constructivists believe that “individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work” and “develop subjective meaning of their experiences—meanings directed toward certain objects or things” (Creswell, 2014, p. 46). Since these meanings are varied and multiple, constructivists “look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas”, and their research “rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation being studied” (p. 46).

Due to the nature of my study of transnational identities, I located my research in the *social constructivism* paradigm. With one more word “social”, the difference between *social constructivism* and *constructivism* mainly lies in their fields of study. According to Amineh and Asl (2015), *constructivism* is a synthesis of multiple theories diffused into one form. It is the assimilation of both behaviorist and cognitive ideals. *Social constructivism* is a theory of knowledge in sociology and communication theory that examines the knowledge and understandings of the world that are developed jointly by individuals (p. 13).

There are two main reasons of choosing the *social constructivism* paradigm. First, social constructivists view the world as understood and influenced by individuals’ complex subjective views instead of objective and manifested in its own lawfulness. Since all research is conducted by researchers with their own historical and cultural background, they should be “culturally

specific, historically located and value-laden” (Scott & Usher, 1996, p. 13). Second, as for the specific issue of “identity”, people only make sense of their identities in the social identification process (Jenkins, 2008). They are not instruments controlled and managed by computerized programs, instead, they have multiple and constantly-changing sense of selves interacting with the reality. Hence, *social constructivism* paradigm may be more appropriate in exploring students’ transnational identities.

Methodological Approach

Methodology refers to the “overall research design and strategy”, while method refers to the “technique for physically obtaining data to be analyzed in a research study” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 9). Driven by the *social constructivism* paradigm, I employed qualitative methodology in my research due to the following two main considerations. First, “methodology is inevitably interwoven with and emerges from the nature of particular disciplines and particular perspectives” (Lincoln et al., 2017). Considering methodology from a macro point of view and looking into “identity” from a constructivism perspective may effectively help us understand Chinese students’ transnational identities. Second, “identity” is complex and unique in every individual, thus a qualitative methodological approach is more appropriate in exploring the in-depth and complicated changes in one’s identities, focusing more on the persuasiveness of the research results (Neusar, 2014) than on the numbers of participants involved. As a researcher, what I seek is “an inclusive picture—a comprehensive and complete understanding of the topic” (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019, p. 226).

However, “qualitative research” is a loosely defined term that “includes a vast range of kinds of research, has a wide range of meanings and covers a heterogeneity of fields”

(Hammersley, 2013, p. 9; Preissle, 2006). Within the broad category of qualitative research, a variety of loosely defined group of designs exist with their “own protocol for collecting and analyzing data” (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019, p. 224), such as case study research, historical research, ethnography, grounded theory, and narrative research. Although these designs may differ in their purposes, boundaries, and terminology, they all “elicit verbal, aural, observational, tactile, gustatory and olfactory information from a range of sources including audio, film, documents and pictures” and “draw strongly on direct experience and meanings” (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 287).

The decision for my research design aligned with my research purpose and questions: to explore Chinese students’ establishment and development of transnational identities in English-speaking contexts and help educators find effective and beneficial strategies for all students. Instead of testing a predetermined hypothesis, my study looked at the essential character of nature of something, trying to “give voices to participants” and “probe issues that lie beneath the surface of presenting behaviors and actions” (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 288). All these considerations led to my choice of *naturalistic* research design, which mainly “involves real-world issues and settings” (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019, p. 226).

Methods

Paradigm, methodology, and method(s) are three main elements in research framework, from macro to micro layers, from general worldview to detailed skills and tools. Main kinds of naturalistic inquiry are case study, comparative studies, longitudinal studies, biography, etc. (Arsenault & Anderson, 1998; Cohen et al., 2018; Flick, 2004a, 2004b, 2009), among which I chose *case study* to do my research inquiry.

Case study can be regarded as both methodology and method (Stake, 2005; Thomas, 2011; Tight, 2010; Verschueren, 2003; Yazan, 2015). Methods and methodology display a synergetic relationship: A particular method is employed within a methodology that defines the object of study and determines what comprises an adequate reconstruction of that object (Schwandt, 2007). As a methodology, case study is the “detailed examination of a small sample” (Tight, 2010, p. 337) and an in-depth investigation of a specific, real-life “project, policy, institution, program or system” from multiple perspectives in order to catch its “complexity and uniqueness” (Simons, 2009, p. 21). It is a way to situate the study as a case within a bounded system with a tight definition, such as an organization or a special group of people. On the other hand, when case study is taken as a method, it refers to “an investigation into a specific instance or phenomenon in its real-life context” (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 292). I employed case study as a method in my study, investigating individual cases in significant depth in order to answer my research questions.

As for the specific data collection method, I selected the semi-structured interview, which is the most popular approach in qualitative study (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 236). In a semi-structured interview, the topics and questions are given, but the questions are open-ended and the wording and sequence may be tailored to each individual interviewee and responses given, with prompts and probes (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 511).

My choice of this method lies in its intrinsic advantages aligning with my participants, nature of study, and researcher-participant relationships. First, the method of semi-structured interviews is useful when participants cannot be directly observed or be expected to provide historical information (Creswell, 2014, p. 277), which is suitable for my participants with study-

abroad experiences living or having lived in Canada. Second, as the semi-structured interview questions are non-leading and interactive with participants (Carspecken & Apple, 1992), they are apt to dig up identity-related topics, which are unique in individuals, and to encourage different responses from participants. Third, semi-structured interviews may “prompt flexibility in conversations” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 236) and correspond explanations and interpretations in context (Bryman, 2004), the center of which is to build up the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee (Mason, 2002). Due to my own dual identity as a researcher and graduate student with study-abroad experiences, this interaction is of greater significance in the data collection method, a contextual and social process through which both the researcher and participants could learn and evaluate their narrative and understanding (Edwards & Holland, 2013).

Besides semi-structured interviews, I also chose document review, another primary source of qualitative data, as the complementary data collection method, in order to “develop a more complex understanding of the phenomena being studied” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015, p. 157). Although document is “broadly defined to cover an assortment of written records, visual data, artifacts” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015, p. 157), my study mainly focuses on the participants’ identity positioning in social media (e.g., WeChat, one of the most popular apps in China). The functional roles of WeChat in students’ identity positioning and specific data collection procedures are explained in the following section.

The Use of WeChat: A Special Consideration in my Study

As one of the most widely used apps in China, WeChat provides multiple functions, such as text and voice messaging, video calls and conferencing, photograph and video sharing, and

location sharing. Users can send previously saved or live pictures and videos, profiles of other users, coupons, lucky money packages, or current GPS locations with friends either individually or in a group chat.

Among these functions, the most favorite and frequently used one is called “Moments”, WeChat’s brand name for its social feeds of friends’ updates. Moments allow users to post images, texts, comments; share music and articles; and post “likes”, complementary comments or thumb-up memes. Only the friends from the user’s contact are able to view their Moments contents and comments. The friends of the user will only be able to see the likes and comments from other users only if they are in a mutual-friend group. WeChat is a special consideration in this study for its position as an unavoidable and nonnegligible platform in China. It is widely used and accepted among Chinese young adults, targeting them as both consumers and producers of media culture and their voices as an indicator of value (Sefton-Green, 2006). Collecting and analyzing the participants’ Moments can “illuminate different facets of situations and experiences” and “help portray them in their entirety and complexity” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015, p. 157).

The Choice of Participants

The next consideration was choosing appropriate participants in order to guarantee the quality of a piece of research (Cohen et al., 2018). The rationale behind my choice of participants aligned with those research gaps I was trying to fill. First, I sought to explore the transformation of Chinese students’ identities, not focusing on their experiences in one specific nation, but focusing on the “fluidity and mobility” of their self-perceptions, the way they negotiate their identities and “bifocality” of outlooks. Second, I focused on the young adult group, due to the

fact that the majority of people going abroad for study are in this group. All participants have finished their high-school education in China, thus have their living and academic habits (e.g. the daily usage of WeChat) formed in homeland. Based on these research gaps, I set up the eligibility criteria for my participants.

Based on the above-mentioned rationale, non-probability, purposeful approaches were employed in my research, which meant I selected information-rich participants (key informants) because of their recognized expertise or knowledge about the topic under investigation. In order to guarantee the size of cases were not too large as to prevent thick descriptions from happening due to data overload or move towards generalizability (Geertz, 1973), and “not so small as to prevent theoretical saturation from being achieved” (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007, p. 242), the suggested size of cases was no fewer than three. Therefore, I chose six individual cases of Chinese students with study-abroad experiences.

As for the purposeful participant-choosing strategies, I followed comparison-focused approach proposed by Patton (2015), and the category used for the six key informants was “intensity”, which referred to “information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon intensely but not extremely” (Patton, 2015, p. 506). Therefore, among all the qualified former students, final decisions were made to cover key informants with different time spans in Canada and different frequencies of visiting to China, thus all these information-rich cases could “yield insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations” (Patton, 2015, p. 501).

According to the rationales behind my choice of key informants, I chose six participants (three males and three females) according to their answers to some screening questions. All participants finished their high school education in China before going to Canada for further

education. They had stayed in Canada for at least two years (accumulatively) in the past three years, and their demographic profiles were shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Demographic Profiles of All the Participants

Name	Age upon arrival in Canada	Current age	Current address	ESL courses prior to university	Major in Bachelor's degree	Frequency of visits to China
Fan	18	21	Canada	One semester	Finance	Only once
Joseph	19	23	China	One semester	Statistics	Once a year
Maggie	19	22	Canada	N/A	English Literature	Once a year
Robin	19	22	Canada	Two semesters	Psychology	Once a year
Shi	19	22	Canada	More than one year	Economics	Once a year
Tao	18	23	Canada	Three semesters	Communication	Three times a year

Two of the participants (Joseph and Tao) graduated with their Bachelor degrees, while the other four were still students. After graduation, Joseph moved back to China, while Tao became a permanent resident in Canada. The majority of participants (five out of six) had experiences of attending ESL courses prior to university in Canada, the length of which depended on their English competences and academic requirements of different universities.

Procedure

Step 1: Testing of Interview Questions and Screening Emails

Before the formal data collection, a testing of the interview questions on a Chinese student was conducted. The two rounds of interview questions were sent to one of the researcher's friends, who had the same study-abroad experiences but would not participate in this research. The testing participant was offered enough time (one week) to reflect on questions' effectiveness and pertinency. By doing so, the researcher revised the interview questions and sharpened interview techniques, further preparing for the formal data collection stage.

I recruited participants from an English language training school I opened with some partners in 2010. In the following decade, hundreds of students finished their courses and went abroad pursuing their further education. Some of these students received emails from our school regularly for situation updates and future service. To conduct this study, I first applied for a permission from our school, allowing me to use those email addresses. Then I chose students dating back to five years (2015), emailed them to ask if they were interested in taking part in my research, and selected key informants (who had stayed in Canada accumulatively at least for two years in the past three years) by some screening questions. The screening emails had "Individual Email Invitation" (Appendix A) as attachment and participation was voluntary and confidential. After formal participants (key informants) were recruited, the following semi-structured interviews began.

Step 2: Semi-structured Interviews

The questions for the two rounds of interviews were designed to respond to my three overarching research questions. According to my theoretical framework, the semi-structured interview questions aimed at finding out answers for all the research questions by observing participants' identities from the six conceptual premises through the lens of transnationalism.

I conducted two rounds of interviews, each of which was designed to last for about one hour. Since all participants had study-abroad experiences, despite their present address, the first-round interviews focused on their study-abroad experiences (time spent abroad) in order to understand the influence of the hosting nation (Canada) on their identities. The second-round interviews focused on their home-visiting experiences (time spent in China), trying to explore the impact on their transnational identities related to different time spans abroad and different frequencies of visiting to China. Each participant was contacted by email one week before the first-round interviews and provided with the electronic "Individual Interview Consent Form" (Appendix B) and "Individual Interview Protocol" (Appendix C and D). The two rounds of interviews were conducted by Internet-based video conference (Zoom), which was password protected. The whole interviewing process was audio-taped by the Zoom recording feature, transcribed, and translated (if necessary).

In order to avoid the "linguistic factor in which the researcher may be conducting the interview in a language that is not his/her first language or the respondent's first language" (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 517), each interview was conducted in the language that participants preferred to use (English or Chinese). Scholars find that Chinese study-abroad students often still have difficulties with expression on certain issues, even if their social, cultural and academic

experience are strongly mediated by English (Burnett,2003; Durkin, 2004; Skyrme, 2007). Therefore, the freedom to be interviewed in their first language can help the participants feel at ease and promote the likelihood of their disclosure of personal thoughts, emotions and beliefs (Chiu, 2009). All the six participants chose to be interviewed in Chinese, leading to the “translation dilemmas” discussed in the following section.

Step 3: WeChat “Moments” Review

In between the two rounds of interviews, the participants were provided with “WeChat Post Consent Form” (Appendix E) and “WeChat Post Rubrics” (Appendix F) and asked to offer their WeChat Moments posts (both in English and Chinese) during the study-abroad period. For privacy-protection and copyright considerations, only Moments open to public (shown to everyone in participants’ circle of friends) were collected.

The design of WeChat Post Rubrics was based on my interview questions, serving as a complement to the participants’ answers. All rubrics contents were in the form of words. If there were contents including photos/pictures, the participants were asked to describe them in words so that no images of other people could be shown. If there were contents including copyrighted music/videos, the participants were asked to describe the contents and their feelings in words. The participants were asked to provide their Moments as their own wish without any quantity limitation, and email their rubrics to the researcher after completion.

Step 4: Data Analysis and Synthesis

In the data analysis stage, I followed the three analysis procedures proposed by Miles et al. (2020). The first step was “data condensation”, meaning the process of “selecting, focusing,

simplifying, abstracting, and/or transforming” the data to make it stronger (Miles et al., 2020, p. 12). It was also in this step that I finished my first cycle of coding. For the interview transcriptions, I used “Descriptive Coding” to “assign labels to data that summarize in a word or short phrase” (Miles, et al., 2020, p. 121) and “In Vivo Coding” to “use words or short phrases from the participant’s own language in the data record as codes” (Miles, et al., 2020, p. 122). For the WeChat postings, I used “Emotion Coding” to label the “emotions recalled and/or experienced by the participant, or inferred by the researcher about the participant” (Miles, et al., 2020, p. 125).

The second step was “data display”, which meant to find connections between the data, reorganize the coded meanings, and formulate higher levels of themes (Miles et al., 2020, p. 10). The thematic coding of my data, a second round of coding, was mainly based on the six conceptual premises of “transnationalism” in my theoretical framework, responding to my research questions —influential factors of transnational identities and useful pedagogical applications.

The third step was “conclusion drawing and verification”, which were “vague at first, then increasingly explicit and grounded” (Miles et al., 2020, p. 13) as I reviewed and distilled the participants’ recommendations in a third round of coding.

Translation Dilemmas

Each interview was transcribed immediately after it was finished. Given the option of choosing the language they preferred (English or Chinese) to be interviewed, all the six participants chose Chinese based on their daily language usage, leading to a heavy translation

workload. Besides translating interview transcriptions, some of the participants' WeChat "Moments" were also posted in Chinese and needed translation.

Translation dilemmas arose when dealing with words and phrases with no equivalent meanings in another culture, as well as those terms which might cause confusion to participants and readers. In order to guarantee the accuracy of translation, I took measures such as providing more descriptive accounts of the participants' original meanings instead of direct translation, seeking confirmation from the participants, and asking some Chinese native speakers to do peer review. The above-mentioned measures addressed the translation dilemmas effectively.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness, addressed as "a parallel to the term rigor" (Patton, 2015, p. 546), refers to the validity construct in qualitative research, aiming at supporting the argument that the research findings are "worth paying attention to" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). My research draws on its four key criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Ary et al. (2002): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

According to Roberts and Hyatt (2019), credibility in qualitative research "indicates that a research process was used to establish the accuracy of your instrument(s)" (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019, p. 242). From the perspective of investigators, credible research requires them to "adopt a stance of *neutrality* with regard to the phenomenon under study", which means "to understand the world as it unfolds, be true to complexities and multiple perspectives as they emerge, and to be balanced in reporting both confirmatory and disconfirming evidence with regard to any

conclusions offered” (Patton, 2015, p. 51). Specifically, in my research, it means the extent to which the findings reflect the “mobility of Chinese students’ transnational identities” and the possibility of realizing a deep *understanding* of this specific sojourner group including “*descriptive* (what happened in specific situations); *interpretive* (what it meant to the people involved); *theoretical* (the concepts, and their relationships, used to explain actions and meanings); and *evaluative* (judgements of the worth or value of actions and meanings)” (Miles et al., 2020, p. 306).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe some techniques for ensuring credibility, three of which are of greater effectiveness in my research. First, prolonged engagement and persistent observation enable a researcher to develop a full understanding of the society in which his or her research is conducted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It was unrealistic to depend on two rounds of semi-structured interviews to ensure such “engagement” and “observation”, thus I employed document review as the complementary data collection method to analyze participants’ Moments posted by WeChat. These Moments covered the most important events in their sojourns, go back as far as five years, and last for at least two years accumulatively, compensating for the deficiency in duration and persistence of my research.

Second, researchers could improve depth and scope of study by building rapport with participants over time (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Due to my personal experiences similar to those of my students and my identity as their former teacher, it is relatively easy for me to build up rapport with the participants. Furthermore, in the process of data collection and analysis, I kept in contact with the participants so as to clarify any confusions arising from data transcription and translation.

However, too much rapport, close relationship, and deep self-involvement may lead to personal bias, negatively influence the research credibility, and call for the employment of the third technique—triangulation, which is to confirm the data at different times, in different settings and situations, and compare between the findings between different participants (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 1999). Triangulation “bridges issues of reliability and validity” and is suitable “when a more holistic view of educational outcomes is sought, or where a complex phenomenon requires elucidation” (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 266). It is useful and practical in my research “where a researcher is engaged in case study, a particular example of complex phenomena” (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 266). Specifically, I used “time triangulation”, “instrument triangulation”, and “sampling triangulation” (Denzin, 1970; Kirk & Miller, 1986; Cohen et al., 2018): taking two rounds of interviews, comparing participants’ narratives and answers, using WeChat posts as supplementary materials, choosing participants with different time spans abroad and different frequencies of visiting to China.

Transferability

Transferability, as an analog to external validity, is the “applicability of research findings to setting and contexts different from the one in which they were obtained” (Gay et al., 2012, p. 598). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the degree of transferability is “a direct function of the *similarity* between the two contexts, what we shall call *fittingness*” (Patton, 2015, p. 584). In terms of research context, my research was conducted online by Zoom meeting. This concentration of space, together with the relatively small sample size (six in total) may cause “attrition” to the trustworthiness of my research (Gorard, 2014), leading to my following

strategies to solve the problems resulting from the struggle between ideal research trustworthiness and “practicalities” or “cost-benefit analysis” (Gorard, 2014, p. 54).

My main consideration of transferability lies in the following three strategies. First, different from large-scale quantitative research or interviews of hundreds of people, my research tends to use “thick description” to interpret data with greater depth and situated context (Geertz, 1973; Holloway, 1997), and the “characteristic of the sample, people, settings, etc.” are “sufficiently explained for comparison purpose” (Miles et al., 2020, p. 307). Second, as for the sample limitations, I try my best to cover all possible sub-groups under the sampling frame—to include as many situations in study-abroad experiences as possible: different lengths of staying, different back-to-China visits, different future plans, to name but a few. By doing so, my sampling is “diverse enough to provide broader applicability when relevant” (Miles et al., 2020, p. 307). Third, my research covers at least two-year track (accumulatively) of participants’ identity-transformation journey (as full-time students staying physically abroad), offering enough time and space for exploring their transnational identities in a process-based and non-fixed manner. Thus, the “processes and outcomes are applicable in comparable settings” and findings could be replicated, where possible (Miles et al., 2020, p. 307).

All these strategies dealing with transferability are aiming at answering the questions raised by Miles et al. (2020): “We need to know whether the conclusions of a study—a case study, in particular—have any larger import. Are they transferable to other contexts? Do they fit? How far can they be generalized?” (Miles et al., 2020, p. 307). In this regard, the goal of my research is not to change theory based on a small cohort of people, but to prompt theoretical development from a new angle through different lens.

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research refers to “the factor that helps the reader trust your data analysis” (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019, p. 242). As an analog to replace the quantitative concept of reliability, the underlying issue of dependability is “whether the process of the study is consistent, reasonably stable over time and across researchers and methods” (Miles et al., 2020, p. 305).

The most important strategy to ensure dependability is “inter-rater reliability checks” (also known as “intercoder checks”), which is a dimension of both reliability and credibility. It is especially appropriate for my research because “interrater reliability is appropriate with semi-structured interviews, wherein all participants are asked the same questions, in the same order, and data are coded all at once at the end of the data collection period” (Patton, 2015, p. 1219). Specifically, I asked two qualified peers with Master degrees and study-abroad experiences to read through one unanalyzed and anonymized transcript, compared their coding to mine for alignment, and found missing new codes and wording differences. By doing so, the dependability of my research could be ensured, since “reliability plays a minor role in qualitative research and relates primarily to the reliability of multiple coders on a team to reach agreement on codes for passages in text” (an interview transcript) (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 211).

Another technique of ensuring dependability proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) is to invite some “external auditors” to validate the research. Accordingly, during the process of data analysis, I invited peers with the same above-mentioned qualifications to do “peer debriefing” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), letting them read my interview transcriptions and data analysis in order to provide some new perspectives that I might have overlooked.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to neutrality, “replacing the quantitative concept of objectivity” (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 248). Different from quantitative research in which objectivity is key and bias is to be avoided and reduced at all costs, subjectivity in qualitative research is an accepted dimension. In the paradigmatic orientation section, I have mentioned that my research is located in the constructivist paradigm, and constructivists “embrace subjectivity as a pathway deeper into understanding the human dimensions of the world in general as well as whatever specific phenomena they are examining (Peshkin, 1985, 1988, 2000a, b)” (Patton, 2015, p. 1248). Although subjectivity could be accepted in qualitative research, it is also important for researchers to ensure confirmability in their study.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), one of the major techniques of ensuring confirmability is reflexivity and the role of the researcher, which means to understand “how one’s own experiences and background affect what one understands and how one acts in the world, including acts of inquiry” (Patton, 2015, p. 1248). As for my research, due to my life story and personal experiences similar to those of my participants’, I have deeper understanding of their confusions, challenges, and difficulties encountered abroad, because the researcher’s first-hand knowledge and experiences are important (Robson, 2011). In addition, the closely interactive relationship between my participants and I may build up “a sense of rapport”, leading to “feelings of trust and confidence” (Cohen et al., 2011). Taking these two factors into consideration, I find it relatively advantageous for me to explore the transnational identities of Chinese students with study-abroad experiences.

Conversely, the above-mentioned advantages could also trigger some hidden problems. First, when playing my role as an insider, I might lose sight of those issues perceived by an outsider, whose perspective may contribute to new interpretations of the same phenomenon. Second, although close relationship with participants may allow more in-depth and natural data, it might also affect the researcher's judgment in the interpretation of the findings. In order to prevent such subjectivity, I use approaches including the combination of interview texts with participants' demographic profiles and the interview context, the follow-up communication with participants for further clarification, and peer reviews.

Despite all the approaches, there is an acknowledgement that bias does exist in qualitative research and researcher perspectives are desirable in some cases. Objectivity is "refracted through the researcher's eyes" and "cannot escape some subjective roots" (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 25).

Ethical Considerations

Confronted with an ethical dilemma and striving for a relatively high "costs/benefits ratio" (Cohen et al., 2011), just as most researchers in educational field, I put my major ethical considerations into two aspects: ensuring participants' equal rights, and managing data correctly.

Ensuring participants' equal rights throughout the whole study is to identify potential "harm, stress and anxiety, and a myriad of other negative consequences for research participants" (Robson, 2011, p. 194). Specifically, my considerations include informed consent, free from coercion, privacy, anonymity, and good relations. Informed consent ought to be stringently observed before designing the research. Although all of my participants are adults who are free from "parental consent", their right to freedom and self-determination should be fully respected.

Only those former students who have given permissions for email contacts were contacted as potential participants. They were fully informed with research details, such as their rights and responsibilities, the research procedures and personal documents to be collected, as well as the use of qualified peers to do “inter-rater reliability checks” and “peer debriefing” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although they may know me personally as former students, participation is voluntary and confidential, and they may join at free will and quit at any time. As for “privacy”, since those participants were interviewed and their WeChat posts were collected and analyzed, it was of great importance for me, as the researcher, to make my intentions clear and explicit and obtain their informed consent in advance. Simultaneously, in order to avoid the reveal of their identities, I used aliases to abide by the principle of confidentiality. Above all, the key to the successful resolution of interwoven methodological and ethical issues lies in good relations, a sense of rapport which leads to feelings of trust and confidence (Cohen et al., 2011). My dual identities as a researcher and former teacher could facilitate the establishment of good relations with the participants.

Data management mainly embraces the storage, maintenance, and access of data. All collected documents and relative materials are stored in my home and the electronic transcripts kept confidentially with a secure password in my private computer. Data access is restricted to the participants, the researcher, the supervisors and the future examiners. The data could only be used for academic purposes such as doctoral thesis and future publications.

Limitations of the Study

When considering the investigation of identity as a complex process, we may find three methodological features in common, which may lead to corresponding three limitations in this

field. First, researchers' observing or analyzing perspective "is not the only one" and their conclusions "will inevitably be 'situated' and partial", contributing to the fact that "language teachers, learners, and researchers might experience in contexts in which 'truth' remains a relative term" (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p.435). Second, identity researchers "need to ensure that they leave conceptual room for the actions and investments of human agents" (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 427), causing the limitation that some identifications so strongly determine social relations that resistance is difficult (Luke, 2009). Third, the necessity of deeper research in political and economic factors influencing language learning remind us of the limitation that "the category 'class' has not received the kind of attention accorded other identity categories such as gender, ethnicity, and race" (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 436). Specifically in my study, all participants belong to the socioeconomic and educated elite groups in China (Wang & Miao, 2013), thus their social class and relations may lack diversity.

In this chapter, I provide a detailed description of the methodology used to carry out my study: a qualitative case study and two stages of data collection. In the following chapter, Chapter 4, I would present a detailed account of the data obtained through the interviews and WeChat posts.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents the data obtained from two sources: 1) two rounds of semi-structured interviews conducted with six participants; and 2) WeChat postings collected from six participants during their study-abroad period. I organize my findings by the racial factor and six conceptual premises proposed by Vertovec (2009) in the Literature Review Chapter: social morphology, type of consciousness, mode of cultural reproduction, avenue of capital, site of political engagement, (re)construction of “place” or locality. The first two sections are related to the racial factor, the following six sections to the six conceptual premises of transnationalism, and the last section to the special consideration of WeChat postings.

Racial Factor: Individual Identities

All the six participants in my study were high school graduates at their first arrival in Canada. Belonging to the same age group, their views of life and the world had been basically formed in China. As non-native English speakers, most of them had experiences of attending ESL courses prior to university in Canada.

When asked to describe their identities in their own words, all participants’ answers reflected a close connection with China. Even if they admitted the influence of their study-abroad experiences on their identities, they still put their “Chinese” identities in the first place. Two of them (Maggie and Shi) explicitly stated they were “unrelated with Canada”. Maggie said, “I would like to describe myself as ‘a Chinese female student’. Actually, I seldom make connection with Canada of my own accord unless someone, for example, the hairdresser would

ask me about my status quo in detail.” Shi said, “I would like to describe my identity as ‘an international student’. My identity perception is built up on my Chinese background, and I regard myself unrelated with Canada.”

In contrast, two university graduates (Joseph and Tao) stayed in Canada for a relatively long time and expressed their identities as follows. Joseph said, “The most critical years in forming my worldview were spent in Canada. I regard my worldview as ‘half Chinese, half Canadian’ and I am willing to accept Canadian values.” Tao said, “I used to be an international student from China. Now I am a permanent resident living in Canada.”

Although six participants were affected by Canadian society to varying degrees, they did not hesitate in admitting their close bond to China. For example, although Maggie expressed her emotional distance from Canada, she used a simile to describe her feelings towards China, “I do have complaints about my homecoming experience this time, but I still love my country. My feelings towards China are just like the feelings to my mother: even if I often complain, I still love her.”

In summary, despite their different lengths of time in Canada, all participants employed “Chinese” as the primary description of their identities and expressed their close connection with their motherland.

Racial Factor: Chinese Students’ Identities as a Group

When asked to define Chinese international students’ identities as a group, all participants agreed that this group contributed greatly to Canadian society. However, most of them (four out of six) regarded such contribution more closely related with financial income brought by Chinese

international students to Canadian universities, as Robin expressed that the biggest influence brought by Chinese students was their tuition fees. Besides financial benefits, three participants (Maggie, Joseph, and Fan) added several other positive impacts on local universities. Maggie considered the university to be more “diversified” with Chinese students; Fan viewed Chinese students as “commonly rigorous in study” so that they could “perform more actively in team work”; and Joseph said that the group of Chinese students could deepen Canadians’ understanding of Chinese culture.

Participants also shared a highly unified concern about Canadian’s negative impressions on Chinese student group, which, according to Joseph, were “misunderstandings”:

Objectively speaking, more than half of Chinese students could bring negative influence on Canadian society. There were many Chinese “dandies” in our university living extravagant and dissipated lives, who would leave local people the impression of “parvenus driving luxury cars”. Actually, they were totally different from the real image of Chinese people. Such negative impressions may do great harm to Chinese people’s reputation, because most industrious Chinese people don’t have the opportunity to go abroad for financial reasons. Furthermore, I don’t think those Chinese scholars and postgraduate students could well present China, because many of them are introverted. They would rather bury themselves in research than go out to display their images as Chinese people.

For all the participants, such misunderstandings of Chinese students as a group may lead to the feelings of isolation in classroom, in extreme cases, even biases and discrimination. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic triggered racism targeting Chinese people in many countries

and accompanying biases and discrimination inevitably influenced Chinese study-abroad students' identities. When asked about their experiences during COVID-19, luckily, all participants did not have first-hand experience of racial discrimination. However, all participants expressed that their social network (friends, colleagues, relatives, etc.) experienced COVID-related verbal or physical attacks. Tao told her story in detail:

I didn't experience any discrimination myself, but one of my former colleagues did. She posted such experience on her WeChat Moments. She was wearing a mask when stepping onto a bus, an old man without a mask murmured to her, "I wish you would die", then got off the bus quickly. She was too astonished to respond. You know, I began to wear mask very early. Every time I went to public places, I said to myself, "If anyone were to say anything bad to me, I would definitely fight back". I even planned my bad language in advance (Laugh).

In the process of fighting against misunderstandings and biases and calling for more comprehensive understanding from Canadian people, all participants conveyed their common features in "racial identity" (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014) by highlighting their contributions to Canadian society and protecting the reputation of Chinese students as a group.

Social Morphology: Nodes in Triadic Relationship

As the sociological inquiry into the "anatomy" of society, social morphology is the conceptual premise on which transnationalism is regarded as a kind of social formation spanning borders (Vertovec, 2009). From the participants' perspective, this social formation process is also the process of negotiating their multiple memberships in multiple communities, in which

they are “nodes” linked with others in the networks of triadic relationship among China, Canada and the ethnic group of Chinese study-abroad students (Vertovec, 2009).

One important factor reflecting the participants’ self-identity perception was their choices of using Chinese or English names. When asked about their name preference, the result was a close tie. Three participants (Maggie, Joseph, and Robin) preferred to use English names, and the main reason was to facilitate foreigners’ pronunciation. In addition, Joseph also added another reason for his usage of English name—the convenience of showing social etiquettes:

I prefer to be called by my English name, because the usage of English names seems to be more equal in workplace. For example, in Chinese culture, one usually adds titles when calling superiors, such as “President Ma”, “Chairman Wang”. In this case, it seems a little impolite if “President Ma” is called by his Chinese name “Ma Jie”, but it’s totally OK if we call his English name “Mark”.

In comparison, the other three participants (Fan, Shi, and Tao) insisted on the usage of their Chinese names for different reasons. Fan and Tao had easily pronounced Chinese names, while Shi simply expressed his lack of interest in using English names:

I think it doesn’t matter if I have an English name or not. Even though my Chinese name is difficult for foreigners to pronounce, I still use it. I was suggested by others to have an English name, but I said I didn’t like that.

As “nodes” in the triadic relationship (Vertovec, 2009), the participants tried to negotiate their membership in Canadian community by establishing a circle of foreign friends. Two participants (Maggie and Shi) admitted that they had no foreign friends and their circle of friends were totally made up of peers sharing the same experiences with themselves: Chinese study-

abroad students. Two participants (Joseph and Fan) made limited foreign friends, the number of which remained almost unchanged, even decreased during their stay in Canada. The other two participants (Robin and Tao) had a different definition of “foreign friends”. Instead of local Canadian people, they made friends with people from other Asian countries, such as Japan, Korea, Iran, and Saudi Arabia.

In spite of their different circles of friends, most participants (four out of six) agreed on the positive impacts brought up by foreign friends on their study and life. Some benefits were related to daily life (Fan), while others to their deeper understandings of Canadian society (Joseph).

I think making local friends is helpful to our study and life. Local friends may update us with local news and latest campus information, such as university strikes, new regulations, and tips in choosing courses. We often ask local classmates for help when dealing with essay-writing strategies, because native speakers are good at writing. (Fan)

I think foreign friends could offer me different perspectives. For example, I used to think that Canadians would not be interested in such a “boring” major as mathematics. Instead, they would choose practical majors (business or engineering) or art-related ones (filmmaking or directing). I was in a shock when one of my foreign friends, a handsome white guy, decided to choose math as his major and become a math teacher in the future. I presumed him to be cool and belong to the “fashion field”. Such experiences taught me a lesson: don’t use stereotypes to judge people. (Joseph)

As for their connection with old friends in China, all participants kept in touch with them by WeChat, demonstrating the vital role of this “app for everything” as a social media platform.

Three participants (Joseph, Fan, and Tao) expressed their feelings of a weaker connection with

friends in China, while the other three (Maggie, Shi, and Robin) kept close connection with their best friends in China while studying abroad.

When the participants went back for a visit to China, only two of them (Joseph and Fan) received comments from their friends in China, saying that they were not the same as before. These comments were from two perspectives. Fan's changes were mainly seen from physical appearance, with her friends' comments on her "different dress style" and "being slimmer, prettier, and more fashionable". However, Joseph developed deeper thoughts of such changes in the eyes of his friends in China:

As for my changes commented by my friends, I would attribute them to two aspects: going abroad and growing up. These two aspects are interacting with each other to form my characteristics. For me, the influences of such two aspects are $1+1>2$, because the distance between my peers and I is widened not only by maturity, but also by our different channels of acquiring knowledge and information. Our different perspectives have established our different views of life, value and the world.

Another indispensable aspect in the networks of triadic relationship (Vertovec, 2009) was the connection with family members, in which several interesting similarities were found in all six participants. First, they all maintained contact with their family members in China via WeChat on a medium to high frequency basis (from every day to once a week). Second, they all contacted with their mothers in most cases and their topics were solely about daily life. Third, all participants confirmed the positive influence of family members on their study-abroad experiences. For example, Fan used the following simile to describe supports from her mother:

From the day I arrived in Canada, I made WeChat video calls with my mother every day, and this habit never changed. I told everything to my mother and I felt good. She knew all my secrets, difficulties, conflicts, and confusions. Our every-day video calls were like keeping diaries, which could enrich my life, encourage me, and provide me positive supports.

When the participants had opportunities to go back to China, another interesting phenomenon appeared. Half of them (Maggie, Fan, and Robin) complained about the “dual attitudes” of their family members, which were described vividly in the following way:

I think my mother just treated me in her own way no matter how many times I went back to China. For the first several days, she treated me extremely well, saying that she missed me so much, making all kinds of delicious foods for me, and being nice and tolerant. Then she became annoyed by my “bad habits” and began to complain about my laziness—messing up my room, loafing on my study, etc. (Maggie)

Despite such complaints, all six participants felt happy and proud of the comments from their family members about their changes after going abroad, in which the most frequently used words were “mature” and “independent”. Shi said, “My family members said I became mature and more aggressive, due to my independent living abroad. Every mother’s child is handsome.” Fan expressed in the following way:

They said I was a kid before going abroad, but now became mature. In the past, when they taught me some manners, I was unwilling to listen to them. However, after my study-abroad experiences, I found what they had told me was right. I also began to understand my parents’ difficulties and challenges in life.

In contrast, when asked about anything their family members could learn from them, the majority of participants (five out of six) said that they had little influence on their folks. The only exception was Tao, and her answer was very simple, “I would share what I saw and learned abroad with my family members, for example, the daily supplement of health care products.”

In conclusion, in the networks of triadic relationship, each of the participants was a node connected with their deeply rooted origins in China, newly established relationships in Canada, and Chinese international students as a group. It was also in these networks that they experienced happiness and suffering, faced difficulties and challenges, and enjoyed their changes and growth.

Type of Consciousness: Conflicted Sense of Belonging

According to Vertovec (2009), ethnic diasporas develop and share “diaspora consciousness” marked by dual or multiple identifications. As for the participants in my research, such “diaspora consciousness” sheds light on their attachment to both China and Canada and a conflicted sense of belonging.

At the stage of their first arrival in Canada, all the six participants had different feelings about the host country. Two of them (Maggie and Fan) expressed their freshness, excitement and curiosity when stepping onto this new land, while the other participants suffered from certain negative passions, such as strangeness and inadaptability to surroundings.

It was my first time going abroad. I set foot on a foreign land full of longing and yearning, so my first feeling was fresh and curious. I enjoyed breathing the air of freedom and never thought of any difficulty and challenge in the future. (Maggie)

When I first arrived in Canada, I felt terrible, and that feeling became worse overtime.

Winters here were extremely cold. In addition, the life in Canada was very boring, because

there was hardly any entertainment. I even thought of fleeing from this city. I felt life here was like in Tibet—a cold depopulated zone, no wonder the crime rate was low. (Shi)

Shi was an exception among all six participants, because his negative feelings about Canada remained, even increased over time. However, other participants gradually got used to the life in Canada within one year and enhanced their emotional attachment to their Canadian living and studying experiences, just as Tao said in her story:

I could still remember the day I first arrived in Canada. It was a sunny day, just like today. A song named “wavin’ flag” was played in the car picking me up from the airport, and I fell in love with it immediately. However, the world outside the car still looked far away and unfamiliar. I stayed in a family hotel for several days, and the surroundings were terribly dirty. Actually, I felt disappointed about Canada then. Later, I moved to another district of the city, where my impression of Canada changed greatly. I like the district very much and called it “my home”.

There was another interesting coincidence in participants’ impressions of Canada: a big “village”. For example, Robin and Fan lived in Canada’s second and fourth largest city respectively, but both of them called their cities “villages”. However, they understood such “ruralized life” in two different ways. Robin enjoyed the “quieter and better atmosphere for study” in Canada; but Fan complained about the underdeveloped municipal infrastructure in a “so-called city as small as a village” with only a few malls and underdeveloped transportation, “especially in winters”.

In stark contrast with the participants’ various feelings about Canada, they shared the same close connection with their motherland even being away from her. All participants reflected that

they missed China in certain aspects. Even if some of them did not suffer from homesickness, it was their growing-up experiences and the time spent with family members that made their life in China unforgettable. They used WeChat to follow what happened in China and felt happy and proud for her fast development.

Recent years witnessed great changes and rapid developments in China. In contrast, the city I lived in Canada was relatively a “village”. I went back to China in vacations and was surprised and marveled by its rapid developments every time. I really looked as a “village girl” there. (Tao)

The participants’ emotional attachment to China could also be reflected in their home-visiting experiences. Most of them (four out of six) felt happy and excited to meet family members and friends in China, while the other two (Joseph and Shi) summarized their feelings as “complicated”. Shi said, “I had a complicated feeling when I went back to China for the first time: both familiar and strange. It was hard to express.”

During their stay in China, the participants mainly updated latest news in Canada by WeChat and Instagram. When asked about anything they missed in Canada, the list included two types of items: something concrete and/or abstract. As for concrete items, Maggie missed the traffic in Canada because she met traffic jams everywhere in China; Joseph missed Canadian foods such as poutines and Subway Lobster Rolls which could not be found in China, as well as the free Internet because he could not use YouTube and Google in China; Robin missed cinemas in Canada, because many new films were not released in China. Of course, they also missed certain abstract feelings or emotions in Canada. For example, Joseph said, “I also missed the atmosphere and living pace in Canada. In China, everyone was busy every day, while life in

Canada was very relaxing.” Shi said, “I missed the feeling of freedom in Canada very much, because I could do whatever I liked. But in China, my parents didn’t permit me to stay up late for a night out.”

From the above statements, it was safe to conclude that these participants still regarded Canada and China as separate categories and frequently compared their experiences in Canada with those in China. Some comparisons were about daily life (Shi), while others went deeper into social and cultural layers (Joseph).

After coming back to China, I could feel obvious differences between these two countries in my daily life. For example, in Canada, cars always gave way to pedestrians, while things were different in China. Maybe there were too many people in China, and cars had to “fight for” the right of way. (Shi)

I often compared my experience in China with the situation in Canada. For example, when government employees were fussy and their business processes were slow and inefficient, I would think of those high-efficient civil servants in Canada who never deliberately put obstacles in our way. (Joseph)

In conclusion, the participants’ feelings about Canada were different, but they shared the same strong connection with China. Canada and China had distinct positions in their hearts, thus they frequently made comparisons between their experiences in these two countries. Such comparisons presented their dual identifications marked by the conflicted sense of belonging and emotional attachment to both countries.

Modes of Cultural Reproduction: Diaspora Values and Attitudes

In the conceptual premise of modes of cultural reproduction, the “hybrid cultural phenomena” (Vertovec, 2009) produced by transnational youth manifest their “new ethnicities” (Hall, 1991). Specifically, participants in my research have developed “diaspora values and attitudes” during their process of understanding and accepting Canadian cultures, which refers to the simultaneous adoption of new values and attitudes and maintenance of certain Chinese values and attitudes.

All six participants admitted that they knew little about Canadian culture at their first arrival in this country, except for such brief public information as its remote distance from China, cold climate, frequent snowfalls, and maple leaves. Two of them (Maggie and Shi), after living in Canada for more than two years, articulated their lack of interest in learning more about local culture.

No offense. I think neither Canada nor U.S.A. has the local “culture”, because they are all countries of immigrants. I don’t know much about the Aboriginal Culture, except that the aboriginal people have many privileges. I didn’t try to familiarize myself with Canadian culture. Nor was I interested in it. My social network is formed by Chinese people, so I couldn’t share common topics with local Canadians and am hardly willing to learn their culture. (Maggie)

However, their attitudes toward China were remarkably consistent: they became more patriotic when living abroad. They not only took pride in their Chinese identities, but also developed a critical stance toward their own traditional cultures.

I regarded Canada as a very civilized country and people here had higher cultivation than most areas all over the world. From my perspective, such civilization was a very ideal social situation, “forcing” me to improve my behaviors and qualities. From this angle of “reflective thinking”, Canadian culture helped me develop introspections and critiques towards Chinese culture, a sense of better understanding. (Joseph)

I think many foreigners had deep misunderstandings towards China, and they insisted that serious problems existed in China. However, when you asked them “Have you been to China?”, they answered no. All their opinions about China came from media platforms, such as Twitter. Actually, online information was not always true. I think foreigners’ ideas about Chinese people often went to extremes: some regarded Chinese as nice people, while some hated Chinese. I think some white people had a kind of “racial superiority”. (Shi)

During their stay in Canada, all participants acknowledged the impact of Canadian culture on them, both positively and negatively, all of which helped them to make sense of their identities. The first beneficial influence was the concept of equality and freedom, which meant manners, private spaces, and people-oriented society, as described by Fan and Joseph:

Living in Canada for several years, I got used to their culture and would do as Canadians.

When I was back in China, I often held doors for people behind me and said “thank you” and “sorry” all the time, which could be regarded as the Canadian culture’s impact on me. (Fan)

The first thing I have learned from the Canadian society is the equality and respect among people, which has impressed me deeply. Now, I can treat others from an equal and friendly angle. Second, the Canadian society is people-oriented with user-friendly designs, both practical designs of stairs and buses and abstract designs of course selection system and

university regulations. In this society, everything is designed to facilitate people and minimize their troubles. (Joseph)

The second was the value of individualism, meaning an awareness of independence and pursuing for happiness, as narrated by Robin and Fan. Robin said, “I think the biggest difference between these two countries is that Chinese society is more ‘collectivist’, while Canadian society is more ‘individualist’. My greatest achievement is to become more independent. I love the freedom to think independently.”

The life in Canada is more relaxing. Canadians don’t regard working as the most important thing in their lives. They pursue happiness and enjoy life. They wouldn’t ignore celebrating festivals and accompanying family members. I accept and admire such attitude: happiness is the most important thing. We should enjoy every day in life. (Fan)

The third positive cultural effect on the participants was the acceptance of diversity—becoming more respectable and tolerant to people from different countries. All participants reiterated their basic principle of rejecting any discrimination and bias towards people, despite their nationalities and cultural backgrounds. For example, when asked about the way of treating people from other countries, Shi and Tao said that they would like to treat people with different nationalities equally, respect their cultures, and never discriminate against anyone.

On the other hand, Maggie, one of the participants who explicitly expressed the lack of interest in Canadian culture, told us an interesting story about the negative influence of Canadian culture, though it could be different in her eyes and in her mother’s eyes.

My mother was not satisfied with my dressing and make-up styles, which, in her opinion, were formed in the university and negatively influenced by “Canadian culture”. However, I

obtained all fashion-related information from websites and Canada only offered me a more tolerant surrounding. Actually, I could hardly call Canadians “fashionable”, because most youngsters here were wearing simple clothes—T shirts, hoodies, leggings, and so on.

It was also very difficult for my mother to understand those special groups existing in Canada, such as LGBTQ, but for me, they were just common friends living beside me. I got a few tattoos in Canada, which made my mother furious and she wouldn't even talk to me for a long time. I knew that tattooed people might not be accepted in certain governmental or military positions in China, so I only tattooed in small private areas. Furthermore, I didn't tattoo for beauty or fashion, and those patterns had special meanings for me.

In conclusion, all the participants had very limited understanding of Canadian culture at their first arrival, but they were gradually influenced by it. Although some of them were not interested in learning more about local culture, they could not deny certain benefits acquired from it. In this way, they built up “diaspora values and attitudes”, which formed an important aspect in the transformation of their transnational identities.

Avenue of Capital: English Language Competence and Intercultural Competence

Most Chinese international students come from the socioeconomic and educated elite groups in China (Wang & Miao, 2013), thus their experiences in Canada are also considered as their “investments”, meaning their pursuit for “cultural capital” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). In my research, the “cultural capital” mainly includes two competences: English language competence and intercultural competence.

English language competence refers to students' ability to communicate in English independently and smoothly. Overall, all six participants encountered varying degrees of

difficulties in English when they just arrived in Canada. In order to be qualified for the entrance of Canadian universities, they took IELTS, an international standardized test, to assess their English language competence. Only Maggie got 6.5 in IELTS, exempting her from the ESL program requirement before taking formal university classes; and the other five participants had to attend ESL programs provided by different universities. As for their evaluation of the ESL programs, four participants (Joseph, Fan, Shi, and Robin) claimed that their English competence improved. The only exception was Tao, who regarded it as “time-wasting” as follow:

I got 6 in IELTS when I just arrived in Canada. I lived in an English-speaking homestay. I had no problem in daily communication, but felt confused when playing local games with their children. After all, I didn't grow up locally, thus was not familiar with their cultures. I regarded taking ESL courses as an “interim period” for me to get adapted to the life abroad. Still, I found the content of ESL courses too simple and naïve, which couldn't improve my English greatly. I felt it was time-wasting to take ESL courses one level after another, but it was the only way to enter into formal courses in the university.

After the successful completion of ESL programs, these five participants began their formal university courses. When asked about their academic journey in Canada as a whole, all six participants admitted that their study-abroad experiences did greatly improve their English competence. Even so, some of them were also aware of their deficiencies in English, which required further improvement. For instance, Maggie regarded English as the biggest academic difficulty, because her professors often commented her word choice in writing as “not so nativelylike” and her quotations as “not leading to the main idea”. Shi insisted that the process of

learning English was like that of learning Chinese, in which one had to keep studying in spite of his or her age.

Participants' improvement in English competence could also be reflected in their homecoming experiences. All six participants had increased confidence in communicating with English speakers when they went back to China. Besides larger vocabulary, they were also confident in their communication and conveyance skills, such as developing topics, sharing cultural backgrounds, and showing "empathy", as expressed by Maggie and Joseph.

I didn't have such opportunities to communicate with English-speaking foreigners in my hometown, because it was not a very internationalized city. If I had chances, I would be confident in my English communication, because my skills were improved abroad, such as topic development and cultural backgrounds. (Maggie)

I felt confident in communicating with English-speaking people due to my study-abroad experiences. I had enough opportunities to communicate with local people in Canada, so I was not afraid of talking with foreigners. As for the communication skills, I think the most important one is "empathy" when communicating with people from different cultures. We should put ourselves in his or her position and offer practical assistance. For example, if one gets lost, we might not help by telling correct ways to the one who has no idea of roads and orientations in a strange city. Instead, we can take this person to the destination or call a taxi and communicate with the taxi driver in advance. Only those who have lived in different cultures may have such "empathy" to others. (Joseph)

With improved English language competence, participants broke the linguistic barriers of building connections between cultures and acquired their intercultural competence, which is

defined as the ability to respond appropriately and effectively in the changing sociocultural contexts. It was also through this process that they changed the way they saw themselves and their identities in the reflection of other people.

The majority of participants (five out of six) admitted that their intercultural competence was developed through taking part in activities or joining in organizations and/or clubs during their study in Canada. Their experiences were rich and colorful, but they all had a feeling in common: fruitful and rewarding. Simultaneously, they compared activities and organizations on Canadian campus with those in China, found their differences, and tried to be adapted to the cultural diversity.

When I was a freshman, I became a team member of CSSA (Chinese Students and Scholars Association) in our university. The team I belonged to was “program team” in charge of events organization and management. I became the team leader in the second year, and was elected VP in the third year. Compared with those events organized and supported by Chinese universities, our activities belonged to the “Grass-root Class”. Although our activities were not so glamorous, they could still be considered as “large-scale events”. There were only several people in our team, thus we became extremely busy when holding activities and found our abilities greatly improved. (Maggie)

I joined the “Killers of the Three Kingdoms” (a board role-playing game) Club and acted as executive. Although named after a game, this club covered much more than playing cards, where I accumulated rich social experience. We organized various student activities, including “Take Me Out” (a blind dating show). By taking part in these activities, I met new friends from different majors and circles and acquired skills for future career, such as

organizing calendars and planning events. I think the biggest difference between activities in Canada and those in China lies in the fact that we have to put more efforts and have more considerations when planning events as international students. In China, there is no problem of cross-culture communication. However, in Canada, if we would like to organize an activity to celebrate Chinese Dragon Boat Festival, we will have much more considerations: Will the timetable be appropriate for Chinese students? Will it be suitable for the university calendar? Will it be a Chinese event or welcome foreign visitors as well? Will it be hosted in Chinese or English? (Joseph)

When asked about “rewards from their investments”, the participants’ answers varied, but they all gave positive feedback about their study-abroad experiences. Specifically, Joseph acquired the correct relationships among people and the way to treat people from relatively low social class, which greatly affected his manners. Fan was “changed from a princess into a queen”, who could think independently, have clearer academic and career plans, and deal with all kinds of emergencies by herself.

In conclusion, all participants admitted that both of their English language and intercultural competence were improved during the study abroad period, which could be regarded as “successful investments” in establishing their future academic and career foundations, as well as their transnational identities.

Site of Political Engagement: Gradual Adaptation to New Surroundings

Different from students going abroad for junior or senior high school, all participants in my research had graduated from high school in China before going to Canada for tertiary education. They had experienced the whole process of “nine-year compulsory education” in China.

Belonging to the young adult group, they had closer connection with “politics of homeland”, leading to their various ways of engagement in diasporas or transnational communities (Vertovec, 2009).

Comparing with the education they received in China, Maggie was the only one who could not adapt to the tertiary education in Canada, and she complained of a “feeling of distance” as follow:

When I just arrived Canada, I found the education here kept people at arm’s length. For example, all teachers were very friendly, smiling and answering questions, but they didn’t have any personal relationship with students after class. We didn’t have “advisors”, just like in U.S. universities; neither did we have “tutors”, just like in Chinese universities. Classmates just left separately after class, being psychologically quite far away from each other.

In Chinese universities, the conception of “class” exists as a collective, in which students are more closely connected. Chinese university students have some peer “tutors” or “counsellors” who know them well and are ready to offer academic assistance and suggestions about daily life. However, in our university, we only have TA in science and engineering departments to deal with academic problems, such as correcting homework for professors. To be honest, I don’t like the mode of education in Canada and I don’t think I have benefited from it. I lack the “sense of belonging”, and that is the reason why I plan to leave Canada after graduation. I feel that I am not much connected with this country and will not miss it when I leave.

Obviously, Maggie was more adapted to the surroundings in Chinese universities, where students’ personal lives were more closely interrelated with each other and teachers had closer

connections with students after class. In contrast, the other five participants preferred the education in Canada for the freedom and independence it offered to students.

The education here was open and free. Different opinions were welcomed so that it could be easier to study in a Canadian university. University courses were quite difficult, but the classroom atmosphere was great. Teachers would not feel offended by students' critical thoughts; on the contrary, they would encourage students to express themselves bravely. That was the biggest difference between Canadian education and Chinese education. In China, students were required to be obedient, while Canadian education helped to develop their critical thinking. I felt better adapted to Canadian education, like ducks to water, due to my open-minded characteristics. There were too many disciplines at class in China, thus I always felt fettered. (Fan)

I think a big gap exists between the education in China and that in Canada. Actually, they are two completely different systems. People without study-abroad experiences could never imagine the freedom of education in Canada. I finished my education from kindergarten to high school in China. In order to prepare for the National College Entrance Examination, I spent every day studying with the same group of classmates. We kept studying from 6 am to 10 pm, thus had no life except studying. There was a saying, "A test will decide your life". Chinese teachers required students to answer questions according to "standard answers". Besides mathematics, students were even required to write essays using fixed thoughts and examples. However, students in Canada are free to express their opinions and teachers don't cram their ideas into students. Nobody's fate is decided by a single test. Instead, every quiz,

mid-term test, final test, paper, presentation, and attendance occupies certain percentage in final scores. (Tao)

Another significant difference in education between these two countries was the teacher-student relationship, for which all the participants focused on two key words: distant vs. friendly. Three participants (Maggie, Shi, and Robin) regarded the teacher-student relationship as remote without deeper communication. For example, Shi said university teachers only played their roles of imparting knowledge into students without establishing any personal relationship. However, the other three participants (Joseph, Fan, and Tao) felt that they were treated equally and friendly by teachers, just as friends. Joseph praised teachers in Canada as “friendly” and “never put on airs”, forming a sharp contrast with those teachers in China who were “strict” and “always forced students to obey their orders”. He regarded teaching in China as a kind of “instructing” or “cramming”, while that in Canada a kind of “conversation” or “communication”.

In conclusion, influenced by the nine-year compulsory education law in China, all participants’ linguistic, cultural, and identity orientations were inevitably branded with the mark of the politics of homeland (Vertovec, 2009). Although they had grown up in China and their outlook on life and sense of values were formed there, most of them could still gradually enjoy and adapt to the new surroundings abroad. It was also in this process that they negotiated their transnational identities and “an enhanced bifocality of outlooks” (Vertovec, 2004, p. 970).

(Re)construction of “Place” or Locality: A Micro Chinese Socio-cultural Circle

Reconstruction of place or locality refers to the establishment of transnational “social fields” or “social spaces” by consciously creating a different micro society within a larger society

(Vertovec, 2009). Specifically, the participants in my research have proactively reconstructed a micro-Chinese socio-cultural circle within the larger Canadian society.

When asked about their impression of Canadian society, five participants (except for Maggie) expressed that Canada was a good option for international students.

In my opinion, studying in Canada is cost-effective. In the circle of international students, Canada is a relatively good option. Most Canadians have high qualities and respect others. Canada is a tolerant country with many ethnic groups. I would recommend Canada to people who are planning to study abroad. (Shi)

I would like to recommend Canada as a study-abroad destination. In terms of external surroundings, Canada is suitable for study for its peace and safety. In terms of academic surroundings, Canada has a good academic atmosphere, which will influence a student gradually. By the way, the tuition fees of our college are relatively low, so I regard the education I have received as cost-effective. (Robin)

However, all participants also acknowledged the existence of a gap between their expectation of life in Canada and the real situation, leading to the intention and possibility of establishing a micro-Chinese circle within the larger Canadian society. All participants admitted their lack of psychological preparation before going abroad, resulting in their disappointment upon arrival in Canada. Some participants felt disappointed about external environments, expressed by Maggie and Shi as follow. Maggie said, “Before going abroad, my impression of Canada was picturesque idyllic scenery. However, the real situation was beyond my expectation and we have ten-month winter here.” Shi said:

There is so huge a gap between my expectations before going abroad and the real life here in Canada. The main difference lies in infrastructures. I used to regard Canada as a developed country, but actually it is a very rural nation with only several big cities. Even in those “big cities”, infrastructures are much less developed, compared with big cities in China, such as Peking and Shanghai. On the first day I came to Canada, seeing a desolate field when the airplane was landing, I felt very disappointed, almost in tears. I was more disappointed, almost collapsed, when knowing that this “field” was the economic center in our province!

Besides external environments, some participants also explained about their “boring life”. For example, Fan said, “I used to think my life in Canada would be extremely glamorous, but I found it actually very common, just studying hard every day.” Robin said, “I had expected my life in Canada to be interesting and colorful, but finally had nothing to do but studying.”

Unsurprisingly, confronted with unexpected situations in a strange country, Chinese study-abroad students banded together to form a micro socio-cultural circle. As mentioned in the section of “Social Morphology”, these participants had no or very limited circle of foreign friends. Their daily communication was mainly connected with those friends sharing the same identities with themselves. It was also in this circle that they could facilitate their adaptation in Canada on the one hand, and express their nostalgic feelings for home on the other. Maggie described the formation of such a micro-Chinese socio-cultural circle as “a social network formed by Chinese people”, in which she became more patriotic and took more pride in her own traditional culture.

After staying in Canada for some time, all six participants have gradually adapted to their life in the new country. However, half of them (Maggie, Shi, and Tao) regarded such adaptation as passive rather than active. It seemed that they had no choice but to acquaint themselves with the environment. Maggie said she was adapted to the life in Canada, but did not like the life here. Shi consistently encouraged himself to “persevere to the end” after “making painstaking efforts” to go abroad for study. The other three participants (Joseph, Fan, and Robin) took measures in order to merge actively into Canadian life, one of which was to improve their English by communicating with local people. By mastering local language, Joseph could go out, communicate with people, and obtain information online or from local mass media. Fan also improved her English by talking with local people and improved the teacher-student relationship by talking with professors before class.

Passively or actively, the participants put efforts in adapting themselves to the life in Canada. However, when they had opportunities to go back to China, their connection with local friends in Canada were greatly weakened into simple “likes” or comments in Facebook or Instagram. Joseph expressed his different attitudes of treating different groups of friends:

I barely connected with my foreign friends in Canada after coming back to China, for our different living circles and time differences. Occasionally, we gave likes or comments to each other in Facebook. As for those Chinese friends I got to know in Canada, even if we lived in different cities, we still had close contact with each other, mainly by WeChat. That is to say, Chinese friends could be taken back to China, while foreign friends had to be left behind in Canada.

As for Joseph, whether he chose to continue the relationships with friends depended on their common Chinese socio-cultural circle rather than geographical locality. Although some participants were willing to leave the Chinese socio-cultural circle to be more engaged in the Canadian society, it was understandable that the micro-Chinese socio-cultural circle was considered as the first choice among Chinese international students for their own convenience.

In conclusion, no matter how they lived and acted, the participants were not completely isolated from either society. Their practices derived from specific geographical and historical points of origin, together with the creation of transnational social spaces (Vertovec, 2009), formed an important aspect of Chinese students' transnational identities on the conceptual premise of reconstruction of place or locality.

WeChat Postings: A New Window to Explore Transnational Identities

All the six participants in my research had been using WeChat as their main social platform for many years. During their stay in Canada, they used WeChat as the primary media of communication. They kept in touch with family members and friends in China by WeChat, mostly by text/voice messaging and video calls. They also established a strong connection within the micro circle of Chinese study-abroad students by sharing comments and feelings on WeChat Moments postings.

There were three main positive emotions presented in their WeChat postings: happiness, excitement, and sense of fulfillment. The first emotion, happiness, together with its synonyms such as “fresh”, “joy”, “relaxed”, appeared most frequently in the occasions of “friendship in Canada” and “connection with family members in China”. For example, the majority of

participants (five out of six) posted their happy time spent with friends on WeChat: Maggie posted several photos of celebrating Chinese New Year with friends with her comments “What a happy day!”; Joseph posted “Finally relaxed!”, a photo of eating at a fancy restaurant with friends after preparing for the final exam together, and a location sharing; Fan uploaded a video clip of visiting natural museum with her ESL classmates and expressed her feelings by posting “The greatest joy is appreciating the beauty of nature!”. Besides friendship, there was another occasion in which the participants felt happy—communicating with their family members. Tao posted several screen shots of her WeChat conversation with her mother about a recipe for a traditional Chinese soup, together with a sentence “I hope my soup could be as fresh as my feeling!”; Shi posted screen shots of playing online game with his cousin in China and his comment “A happy online weekend!”. In addition, the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic greatly influenced the participants’ study-abroad experiences. Since all courses were transferred online, some of them struggled back to China and released their happy feelings on WeChat. For instance, Robin posted a photo of his luggage and the comment “Happy to be back to the real world!” after nearly a month of mandatory quarantine.

The second positive emotion was excitement, mainly expressed in the occasions of “achievements in Canada”, “activities/clubs/organizations in Canada”, and “Canadian society/culture”. When talking about their achievements in Canada, Joseph posted a photo of his GPA after getting an A+, and Tao posted her university offer after transferring successfully. Both of them used emotion icons of “proud”, “victory” and “cheer” to express excitement. As for the experiences of taking part in activities, Maggie posted a short video clip of her speech on the CSSA National Day Gala in which she expressed her excitement as a student representative.

Furthermore, getting to know Canadian cultures, Shi and Robin felt so curious and excited that they posted such feelings on WeChat. Shi posted some photos of poutine and a sentence “I felt so excited to try poutine for the first time—a Canadian specialty!”; and Robin posted a selfie beside a totem pole and commented “Stepping into the gate of Canadian culture with an excited heart...”.

The third positive emotion was sense of fulfillment, offered by four participants under the category of “the education received abroad”. Maggie posted a video clip of an artwork (one of her assignments); Joseph posted a photo of his degree certificate; Fan posted several photos of small gifts from colleagues after finishing her first co-op; and Tao posted photos and video clips of her graduation ceremony. All the four participants explicitly described their postings as “achievements” “realize my dream” and “sense of fulfillment”.

WeChat posting was more than expressing positive emotions, and negative emotions occupied a position of equal importance. The participants mainly revealed three negative emotions in their postings: homesickness, difficulties/challenges, and worries. As a predominant feeling permeating in study-abroad experiences, homesickness appeared most frequently when the participants just arrived in Canada. All of the six participants posted farewell messages together with photos and/or video clips on the day of leaving China to express their reluctance to be apart from the motherland. It was also a common phenomenon that these students felt nostalgic in Chinese traditional festivals. For example, Shi posted a video clip of lion dancing and panda dancing for Chinese New Year Celebration, and used a sentence from an old Chinese poem to illustrate his homesickness: “On festive occasions more than ever one thinks of one’s dear ones far away”.

Different from homesickness, encounters with difficulties and challenges were shown in various contexts and forms. Some participants met with difficulties during the process of adapting to university academic surroundings. For instance, Shi posted a photo of taking class by Zoom meeting with “I began to feel a headache”, a way to express his frustrations of dealing with online courses in the special time of COVID-19. Robin’s comments about academic difficulties were more humorous: he posted “Speechless...Got up early for class. Suddenly I found it was Family Day and there was no class!” together with a meme picture of a dead fish with the words “Just kill me!” Same as Robin, Fan posted a meme picture of a cute rabbit lying on the ground with the words “Beaten by life” to express her tiredness when “A new semester began, but I wanted more rest!”. Besides academic difficulties, challenges in daily life also appeared in participants’ WeChat posts. Specifically, Maggie posted her complaints about Canada Post by using a picture of tortoise and a comment of “The speed of tortoise”; Joseph posted a photo of “Error 404” on his laptop screen and said “Cannot open my Gmail in China” with an emotion icon of “sweating” representing embarrassment.

Though appearing less frequently, the feeling of worry was mainly found in the occasion of COVID-19. Five out of six participants posted their concerns with such plight of the human race. They forwarded relative articles, posted encouraging and praying pictures, and made invigorative comments to fight against the disaster. For instance, Tao posted “Get back to normal” with a line of “praying” emotion icons; and Fan posted a poem “A grain of sand in the age, falling on an individual’s head like a mountain” to express the feeling of helplessness when facing a major disaster in human history.

Compared to what they told me in the interviews, all the participants revealed stronger feelings in their WeChat postings, by using more emotional words, meme pictures, and emotion icons. Although sometimes they might “show off” by posting certain positive self-images on WeChat, different types of emotions expressed in Moments could still be regarded as “snapshots” of participants’ transnational identities in a virtual world. In the course of their identity positioning and transformation, such postings portrayed their different sides and illuminated diverse facets of experiences in detail.

In this chapter, I organized my findings according to the racial consideration and six conceptual premises of transnationalism presented in the Literature Review Chapter, and used emotion coding from the participants’ WeChat posts as a new angle of exploring their transnational identities. The emphasis of this chapter was put on data description and summarization, and the next chapter, Chapter 5, would focus on data discussion.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter is divided into three themes corresponding to my research questions. Moving beyond a surface description of data collected from interviews and WeChat posts, I reviewed each theme in accordance with the literature review chapter and found my answers to the three main research questions. The first and second research questions were about influential factors of participants' transnational identities, and the third one about the participants' process of adapting themselves to their transnational identities. My answer to each of the three questions was summarized in two words in order to draw conclusions about the transformation of Chinese international students' transnational identities.

Unity and Struggle

My first research question was: How do Chinese international students describe their identities? I designed this question according to the poststructuralist viewpoint on which my study was built. The group of poststructuralist scholars viewed identity as a site of struggle for individuals to claim desirable identity options and resist undesirable ones imposed by the social structures (Norton, 2000; Norton & McKinney, 2011; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). In the process of struggle, identity was evolving, hybrid, and paradoxical in nature (Block, 2007), and two identity paradoxes (fluidity vs. stability; personalization vs. contextualization) played important roles in individual identity construction and transformation (Chae & Bloodgood, 2006; Hughes, 2007).

Identity had the characteristics of stability as the “essential, unique, fixed, and coherent CORE of an individual” (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 417). Specifically, Chinese international students shared the same contextualization in their identity positioning (Haque & Patrick, 2015; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007). They belonged to the same racial group and had common features in “racial identity” (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2001; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014) “in every day and professional contexts in multiracial and multiethnic countries” (Kubota, 2015, p.3).

My study also witnessed evidence of stability and contextualization in Chinese students’ transnational identities. All participants grew up, finished their secondary education, and had their world outlook basically formed in China. After their arrival in Canada, they remained close bond with their motherland and always put their “Chinese identities” in the first place. They had very limited or no circle of Canadian local friends but kept tight connection with family members and friends in China. They used WeChat, the most frequently used Chinese app, as the main channel of communication; and their feelings most frequently expressed on WeChat posting were homesickness and taking pride in their identities as Chinese. As the analysis indicated, they formed a micro-Chinese socio-cultural circle within the larger Canadian society, in which they were united to “embrace and highlight their cultural traditions and values as Chinese” (Yuan et al., 2019, p. 975).

The opposite sides of the two identity paradoxes, fluidity and personalization, existed in the course of Chinese students’ challenging of “fixed and hyphenated identity” (Zhang & Guo, 2015, p. 216) and individuals’ struggle to “assume identities that they wish to claim” in the chess-playing between “context” and “individual” (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 420). From racial perspective, such struggle was an inevitable result of international students’ suffering from the

feeling of hurt, exclusion, or being ignored by others due to deep-rooted racism (Guo & Guo, 2017).

All participants in my study expressed the intention to fight against the fixed identities imposed on Chinese students, which in their opinion, were caused by long-term misunderstandings and biases. They felt unsatisfied, even helpless about the fact that the main benefit brought by Chinese students to universities was only tuition revenue. They also put efforts into eliminating negative impressions of Chinese students among Canadian people and calling for the establishment of the real image of Chinese people.

Although all participants were affected by Canadian context to different degrees, their close connection with China remained the same. In the chess-playing between context and individual (Norton & Toohey, 2011), they all claimed “Chinese” as the primary description of their identities. Under the same category of Chinese people, it was no wonder that their attitude towards racism during the COVID-19 pandemic was highly unified.

In summary, Chinese international students developed their transnational identities in the struggle to claim desirable identity options and resist undesirable ones imposed by the social structures (Norton, 2000; Norton & McKinney, 2011; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004), which could be described as a contradictory unity, in which the two identity paradoxes interrelated and interacted with each other. Such dialectic relationship led to further exploration of Chinese students’ transnational identities in the following research question.

Fluidity and Imbalance

My second research question was: What are major factors influencing the transformation of Chinese students’ transnational identities? This research question was closely related with my

theoretical framework established upon the conception of transnationalism. “Transnational social spaces” (Vertovec, 2009) were formed among the “three aspects” of the host state, the sending state, and the minority group (Gu, 2015). Therefore, transnational students negotiated their individual identities and enhanced their “bifocality of outlooks” (Vertovec, 2004) through the fluidity of “triadic relationships” (Gu, 2015).

My findings proved such fluidity by exploring the transformation of Chinese students’ identities instead of focusing on their experiences in a single place. Simultaneously, my study also discovered the unbalanced characteristics in the “triadic relationships” (Gu, 2015). That is to say, the “three aspects” had different influences on the participants’ transnational identities.

Seen from the conceptual premise of social morphology, each of the participants in my study was viewed as a “node” linked with others in networks with complex system of relationships (Vertovec, 2009). According to Norton and Toohey (2001), they participated in “complex and overlapping communities” (p. 312) to negotiate their multiple memberships in multiple communities and reconcile “forms of various membership into one identity” (Wenger, 1998, p. 149). For example, in his research of Chinese students’ self-identification through name choice, Diao (2014) regarded their use of English names as being affected by notions of cosmopolitanism. However, the main reason of my participants’ usage of English names was practical: to eliminate pronunciation difficulties. That is to say, they would rather keep their Chinese names as far as possible, illustrating their proactive connection with the motherland. Such connection with the motherland could also be shown in their stable and frequent communication with family members and friends in China, which greatly influenced their study-abroad experiences. Besides the effects of “the sending state”, those of “the minority group” (Gu,

2015) was reflected in the fact that the participants' circle of friends was dominated by peers sharing the same identities with themselves, even if they admitted advantageous impacts of Canadian local friends.

Seen from the conceptual premise of type of consciousness, the participants shared "diaspora consciousness" marked by dual or multiple identifications (Vertovec, 2009): the conflicted sense of belonging to both China and Canada. Duarte (2005) identified four patterns as indicative of diaspora consciousness, the evidence of which could be found in my study. Specifically, although they gradually developed various degrees of emotional attachment to Canada, their close connection with China remained unchanged, showing "the co-presence of 'here' and 'there'" (Duarte, 2005) and the re-creation of "Chinese spaces". They also made frequent comparisons between their experiences in Canada with those in China, illustrating "'othering' in relation to the dominant culture" and "increased reflexivity about the homeland" (Duarte, 2005, p. 319).

Seen from the conceptual premise of modes of cultural reproduction, the participants developed "diaspora values and attitudes" (Vertovec, 2009) in the process of adopting Canadian cultures and maintaining Chinese cultures. Data collected from the interviews revealed their lack of knowledge of Canadian cultures at the first arrival. Emotional connection with Canada was formed over time, but the influences of local cultures, though mostly positive, could not be compared with those of Chinese cultures. It was safe to conclude that the participants were deeply rooted in "the sending state", where they developed reflective and critical thinking of cultures of "the host state" (Gu, 2015). The complementary data-collecting channel, WeChat Moments posting, focused on the participants' development and expression of "diaspora values

and attitudes” (Vertovec, 2009) as “actors within the techno-media culture circumvents” (Sefton-Green, 2006, p. 293) in order to “reinforce, challenge, combat, and/or resist identities of difference” (Wargo, 2015, p. 560). There was a homogeneous distribution of their emotions, positive or negative, related with the “three aspects” (Gu, 2015) of “transnational social spaces” (Vertovec, 2009), occupying the same importance in their identity construction and transformation.

Seen from the conceptual premise of reconstruction of place or locality, the participants changed their relations to space by creating transnational “social fields” or “social spaces” (Vertovec, 2009, p. 12)—consciously creating a Chinese micro society within a larger Canadian society. Previous literature of “Third Space” (Bhabha, 1994; Kim & Duff, 2012) and “translanguaging space” (Darvin & Norton, 2014; Li, 2011; Li & Zhu, 2010) were proved to be over-idealized in my study. All participants felt comfortable and persisted in living in the Chinese micro society, even if they adapted themselves to the life in Canada. Given chances to go back to China, their connections with Canada were weakened immediately.

In summation, Chinese international students’ identity construction and transformation could be viewed as a complex and dynamic process of negotiating memberships into different communities. In this process, the sending state (China) and the minority group (international student group) had more impacts on their transnational identities, leading to the imbalance among the three aspects of “triadic relationships” (Gu, 2015).

Rigidity and Changes

My third research question was: From students’ perspectives, how can university teachers develop pedagogies to help them with diverse identities? Moving from the surface exploration of

Chinese international students' transnational identities, this research question applied theories to practice and went deeper into pedagogical applications, which could be answered from the angle of their common origins and the influences from the sending state (China).

As a unified group living in a Chinese micro society, Chinese study-abroad students shared common social and cultural background and “politics of homeland” (Vertovec, 2009). In the conceptual premise of avenue of capital, most Chinese study-abroad students came from two groups of elites in the society—the socioeconomic elite and the educated elite (Wang & Miao, 2013). They regarded their study-abroad experiences as “investments” in pursuit of “cultural capital” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) including such competences as English language competence and intercultural competence. In the conceptual premise of site of political engagement, their “investments” were inevitably imprinted by the relatively rigid education system and nine-year compulsory education law in China.

As Chinese high-school graduates arriving in Canada, the main difficulties and challenges acknowledged by the participants were deficiency in English competence, weakness in communicative skills, and difference in teacher-student relationships. These difficulties and challenges could result in their lack of confidence, activeness and enthusiasm in language learning. Although most participants deemed ESL programs in Canada as successful preparations for their university study and their study-abroad experiences as successful investments for their future life, they still called for certain changes and further improvement in relevant aspects.

The exploration of the participants' academic experiences on Canadian university campus leads to the following measures to be taken in the future. First, curriculum for ESL programs ought to be designed in a more reasonable way, compromising more detailed levels and

progresses according to different students' needs and desires. It was also in this way that educators could obtain "an imaginative assessment of what is possible, as well as a critical assessment of what is desirable" (McKinney & Norton, 2008, p. 202). Second, Chinese students may feel uncomfortable about the "feeling of distance" between their teachers and them, which could be eliminated by teachers' efforts in showing more solicitudes to them and respecting every student as "a multidimensional being with a complex social history and equally complicated prospects for the future" (Pittaway, 2004, p. 203). Third, educators should bear in mind the habits and characteristics of Chinese students' forming a Chinese micro socio-cultural circle within the larger Canadian society, which could greatly influence the construction and transformation of their transnational identities. Therefore, instructors may encourage study-abroad students to "step out of their small circles" and merge into the "imagined communities" (Norton & Toohey, 2011). For example, one of the participants, Joseph, sang high praise for his professor's organizing a "Chinese culture familiarization party" in which every foreign student was offered "a Chinese name" according to the pronunciation of his or her English name. Instead of feeling strange and difficult in calling Chinese classmates' names, many Canadian students began to recognize the beauty of Chinese culture represented by Chinese names, which, Joseph said, was "a big success" in Canada-China culture exchange and communication.

In conclusion, in the course of studying abroad, Chinese students formed their transnational identities in "transnational social spaces" (Vertovec, 2009), which was a fluid and contradictory unity influenced by the "three aspects" of the host state, the sending state, and the minority group (Gu, 2015) to different extent. Understanding the paradoxical nature and complexity of transnational identities, teachers could help Chinese students "understand their relationship to the

world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future” (Norton, 1997, p. 410).

In this chapter, I looked at the findings from Chapter 4 to answer my research questions. In Chapter 6, I will recapitulate the study and discuss its significance, limitations, and future directions.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This chapter recaps the arguments and puts forward some thought-provoking ideas regarding the transformation of transnational identities of Chinese students with study abroad experiences. In the context of globalization and internationalization of higher education, this project adopted a qualitative methodology and used the “triadic relationships” (Gu, 2015) among “transnational social spaces” (Vertovec, 2009) as the theoretical framework. There were two stages of data collection: two rounds of semi-structured interviews, followed by the collection of WeChat Moments posts. Regarding the original contribution to knowledge, although transnationalism theory is not new, this study understood Chinese students’ identity transformation under transnationalism and provided identity as a basis for conceptualizing the meaning of transnational identities.

This chapter is organized in four sections. The first section revisits all the research questions, showing links across findings and research questions. The second section reminds readers of the significance of this study. The third section proposes some limitations of this study, and the final section concludes by exploring implications for future research.

A Review of Research Questions

This study began as a personal quest to make sense of my own identities when looking back at the trajectories of my study abroad and immigration experiences. Who am I? How did my identities develop and change over time? What factors influenced my transnational identities? I therefore set up my primary research purpose: to explore multiple cases of Chinese students’

establishment and development of transnational identities in English-speaking contexts and call for educators to tailor their pedagogical techniques according to each learner's multiple facets of identity and different learning needs.

Altogether, there were three main research questions:

1. How do Chinese international students describe their identities?
2. What are major factors influencing the transformation of Chinese students' transnational identities?
3. From students' perspectives, how can university teachers develop pedagogies to help them with diverse identities?

Regarding the first research question, Chinese international students belong to the same racial group and share common features in "racial identity" (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2001; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014), leading to their same contextualization in identity positioning (Haque & Patrick, 2015; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007). However, in the struggle to claim desirable identity options and resist undesirable ones imposed by the social structures (Norton, 2000; Norton & McKinney, 2011; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004), they have developed their transnational identities, which could be described as a contradictory unity, in which the two identity paradoxes interrelated and interacted with each other. In relation to the second research question, the main finding is that the sending state and the minority group have more impact on Chinese students' identity construction and transformation than the host state, leading to the imbalance among the "three aspects...[of] triadic relationships" (Gu, 2015, p.65). As for the third research question, university educators may develop practical pedagogies by paying more attention to Chinese students' common origins and the influences from the sending state (China).

Only by understanding the paradoxical nature and complexity of transnational identities could teachers help Chinese students with diverse identities.

My Harvests from the Study

There were several points I learned from this study. First, in the literature review chapter, I looked at Chinese students' transnational identities as a course from different layers: self-perception, interpersonal communication, intercultural interactions, institutional and social influences, and so on. Second, it was the first time for me to undergo the complete process of conducting academic research: choosing topic, reviewing literature, designing methodology, collecting and analyzing data, until the final stage of writing thesis. Such personal experiences helped to build up the confidence in my abilities as a scholar. Third, collecting the participants' identity positioning in social media (WeChat) opened a new window for me to portray their study-abroad experiences completely and explore their transnational identities in a virtual world.

On a larger scale, this study could help Chinese international students see themselves better through the lens of transnationalism. This could benefit both higher education staff and faculty members in understanding Chinese students' transnational identities.

Limitations

There were several factors that limit the transferability of my findings. First, due to the time constraints of a doctoral research, the number of participants was small, so I designed the interview questions to elaborate their transnational identities. The second limiting factor was the short duration of the study. Two rounds of semi-structured interviews provided only an emerging picture of Chinese study-abroad students' identity transformation. However, my research could

be viewed as a stepping stone for future studies in this field. A final limiting factor was that all interviews had to be conducted online in the period of COVID-19, but it could also be regarded as an advantageous aspect in collecting data related with the special situation of pandemic, a complementary of participants' emotional connection with both countries.

Future Directions

Identity is a relatively mature field, but researchers could still find more future directions in exploring transnational identities built upon my study. First, they could interview more students at the exact time of their going-abroad and coming-back-to-homeland in a longitudinal study, so as to get more in-time feedbacks of their experiences. Second, in order to improve the representativeness of research, they may consider of combining quantitative surveys into qualitative-oriented study. Third, it will be helpful to create a forum where educators could be offered the opportunity to exchange information and ponder on deeper questions rather than conventional thinking within their past career boundaries.

Although this thesis comes to an end, it is the starting point for my future academic journey. My personal story, together with all Chinese students with study-abroad experiences, never come to an end. Everyone is distinctive, like a firework of larruping color, whose identities are shaped, changed, and lightened by special individual experiences; and we could form a colorful world by respecting, understanding, and helping each other.

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Appendix A –Individual Email Invitation

Individual Email Invitation Text

Dear XXX,

My name is Miao He and I am a doctoral student at the University of Calgary. I am reaching out to invite you to participate in my dissertation research study, titled: An Investigation into the Transformation of Transnational Identities of Chinese Students with Study-Abroad Experiences.

The study includes two phases of data collection. In the first phase, as a voluntary participant in the research, you will participate in the two-round individual interviews by Internet-based video conference (e.g., by Zoom®). A full description of the study can be found in the attached Individual Interview Consent Form. There will be some questions related with COVID-19 in the interviews. In the second phase, you will be asked to provide some WeChat “Moments” posts during your study-abroad period, according to the attached WeChat Post Consent Form.

This study has been approved by the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (REB20-0649). Participation is completely voluntary and confidential.

If you choose to participate, please answer the following questions regarding to your study-abroad experiences and return the answers by email to miao.he1@ucalgary.ca.

Q1: Where do you come from? Where are you now living?

Q2: In the past three years, where have you been living for more than one month? For what reasons?

If you have any question or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Miao He, Doctoral Student
Telephone: 236-967-1848
Email: miao.he1@ucalgary.ca

OR

Dr. Sylvie Roy, Professor and Supervisor
Telephone: 403-220-5641
Email: syroy@ucalgary.ca Thank you for considering this request.

Kind regards,
Miao He

Appendix B –Individual Interview Consent Form

Individual Interview Consent Form

Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:

Miao He
Doctoral Student, Werklund School of Education
Mobile: 236-967-1848
Email: miao.he1@ucalgary.ca

Supervisor:

Dr. Sylvie Roy
Werklund School of Education

Title of Project:

An Investigation into the Transformation of Transnational Identities of Chinese Students with Study-Abroad Experiences

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

This study has been approved by the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (REB20-0649).

Participation is completely voluntary and confidential.

Purpose of the Study:

In our globalized and diverse world, the number of international students in postsecondary institutions are increasing more than ever. More and more Chinese young adults (YA) are pursuing their university education abroad, and each of them has a unique identity, which is multiple, contradictory, and full of changes. During the process of their academic and career pursuit—arriving in, staying, leaving, and/or reentering a foreign country—their transnational identities are suffused with fluidity and mobility, closely intertwined with the places they come from, and their linguistic expertise. During the process of identity formation, they may encounter with great confusions, challenges and difficulties and the purpose of this study is to provide effective ways of helping them solve these problems, and call for educators to tailor their pedagogical techniques according to each learner’s multiple facets of identities and different learning needs.

The over-arching research questions for this study are:

1. How do Chinese study-abroad students describe their identities?
2. What are major factors influencing the transformation of Chinese students' transnational identities?
3. From students' perspectives, how can university teachers develop pedagogies to help them with diverse identities?

You are considering an invitation to participate in two-round interviews focusing on your study-abroad experiences and home-coming experiences (time spent in China) respectively. There will be some questions related with COVID-19 in the interviews. I now invite you to participate in the study as outlined below.

What Will I Be Asked to Do?

As a voluntary participant in the research, you will have opportunity to participate in two-round individual interviews by Internet-based video conference (e.g., by Zoom®). If you choose to participate in the interviews using Zoom, you will be accessed through a password-protected university account. Zoom has high level security precautions built in so your confidentiality is protected. Your interviews will be recorded by using the Zoom feature and uploaded and stored on a password protected computer without any personal identifiers. The interviewer will explore your transnational identities, focusing on your study-abroad experiences and home-coming experiences (time spent in China) respectively.

The anticipated length of each round of the interviews is one hour.

Participation in the interview is completely voluntary. You may refuse to participate altogether in the study or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss.

I grant permission to be audio-taped:

Yes: ___ No: ___

What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?

While participants' emails are required to contact participants, no personal identifying information will be collected in the two-round interviews for the purpose of the study. Participants may choose to use a pseudonym during the interview, if they prefer. However, *all study data will be reported in an anonymous format and no personally identifying information* will be included in study reports. *Confidentiality is assured.*

Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?

Risks:

Risks associated with participation in this study are no more than what participants encounter in their daily experience as students within the higher education setting.

Benefits:

Findings will provide valuable information for higher education staff and faculty members in understanding Chinese students' transnational identity, improving teaching skills, and adjusting relative policies. Participants will likely find the interviews provide an opportunity to recapture and reorganize their experience, and help them better see themselves through the lens of "transnationalism".

The research will try to minimize any potential negative impact on participants and the benefits likely outweigh any potential risks. The opportunity to share feedbacks and private documents will likely leave these participants feeling positive about their participation. If they have experienced difficulties related to study-abroad experience, then this will provide them a confidential opportunity to share and express their own feelings and opinions.

What Happens to the Information I Provide?

Participation is completely voluntary and confidential. You are free to discontinue participation at any time during the study. No one except the researcher and her supervisor will be allowed to hear any of the digital recordings of your interviews. Statistical analysis will be completed on an encrypted, password-protected computer. Some qualified scholars will be invited to do "inter-rater reliability checks" or "peer review" and have access to your interview transcriptions, but there will be no identifiers associated with your data. Study findings will be summarized and remain anonymized for any scholarly presentation or publication of results. Study data will be kept in a locked office only accessible by the researcher. Data will be destroyed five years after the completion of the project.

If you initially agree to participate in the research study but subsequently withdraw, then your data may be removed from data set and destroyed if the request is made less than two weeks after the interview. In the case that you choose to withdraw more than two weeks after your interview, then any data gathered to that point will be retained and used in the study.

Signatures

Your signature on this form indicates that 1) you understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) you agree to participate in the research project.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant's Name: (please print) _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Name: (please print) _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Questions/Concerns

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Miao He, Doctoral Student
Telephone: 236-967-1848
Email: miao.he1@ucalgary.ca

OR

Dr. Sylvie Roy, Professor
Telephone: 403-220-5641
Email: syroy@ucalgary.ca

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at 403.220.6289 or 403.220.8640; email cfreb@ucalgary.ca.

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.

Appendix C –Individual Interview Protocol (1)

Individual Interview Protocol (1)

Date:	
Participant ID:	
Digital recording file name:	
Physical record file name:	

Overview and Informed Consent

Thank you for agreeing to this interview today. My name is Miao He and I am a doctoral student in the school of education at the University of Calgary. Before we begin the interview, I will take some time to review the purpose of this research and to confirm your informed consent to participate. A copy of the consent form was sent to you previously for your review and signature. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, please ask.

Purpose of the Study

In our globalized and diverse world, the number of international students in postsecondary institutions are increasing more than ever. More and more Chinese young adults (YA) are pursuing their university education abroad, and each of them has a unique identity, which is multiple, contradictory, and full of changes. During the process of their academic and career pursuit—arriving in, staying, leaving, and/or reentering a foreign country—their transnational identities are suffused with fluidity and mobility, closely intertwined with the places they come from, and their linguistic expertise. During the process of identity formation, they may encounter with great confusions, challenges and difficulties and the purpose of this study is to provide effective ways of helping them solve these problems, and call for educators to tailor their pedagogical techniques according to each learner’s multiple facets of identities and different learning needs.

The over-arching research questions for this study are:

1. How do Chinese study-abroad students describe their identities?
2. What are major factors influencing the transformation of Chinese students’ transnational identities?

3. From students' perspectives, how can university teachers develop pedagogies to help them with diverse identities?

What Will I Be Asked to Do?

As a voluntary participant in the research, you will have opportunity to participate in two-round individual interviews by Internet-based video conference (e.g., by Zoom® or Skype®). The interviewer will explore your transnational identities, focusing on your study-abroad experiences and home-coming experiences (time spent in China) respectively. If you agree, your interview will be audio recorded, and will be stored as digital files on a computer that will be used for data storage and processing in this study.

The anticipated length of each round of the interviews is one hour.

Participation in the interview is completely voluntary. You may refuse to participate altogether in the study or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss.

What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?

While participants' emails are required to contact participants, no personal identifying information will be collected in the two-round interviews for the purpose of the study. Participants may choose to use a pseudonym during the interview, if they prefer. However, *all study data will be reported in an anonymous format and no personally identifying information* will be included in study reports. *Confidentiality is assured.*

Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?

Risks:

Risks associated with participation in this study are no more than what participants encounter in their daily experience as students within the higher education setting.

Benefits:

Findings will provide valuable information for higher education staff and faculty members in understanding Chinese students' transnational identities, improving teaching skills, and adjusting relative policies. Participants will likely find the interviews provide an opportunity to recapture and reorganize their experience, and help them better see themselves through the lens of "transnationalism".

The research will try to minimize any potential negative impact on participants and the benefits likely outweigh any potential risks. The opportunity to share feedbacks and private documents will likely leave these participants feeling positive about their participation. If they have experienced difficulties related to study-abroad experience, then this will provide them a confidential opportunity to share and express their own feelings and opinions.

What Happens to the Information I Provide?

Participation is completely voluntary and confidential. You are free to discontinue participation at any time during the study. No one except the researcher and her supervisor will be allowed to hear any of the digital recordings of your interviews. Some qualified scholars will be invited to do “inter-rater reliability checks” or “peer review” and have access to your interview transcriptions, but there will be no identifiers associated with your data. Study findings will be summarized and remain anonymized for any scholarly presentation or publication of results. Study data will be kept in a locked office only accessible by the researcher. Data will be destroyed two years after the completion of the project.

If you initially agree to participate in the research study but subsequently withdraw, then your data may be removed from data set and destroyed if the request is made less than two weeks after the interview. In the case that you choose to withdraw more than two weeks after your interview, then any data gathered to that point will be retained and used in the study.

Verbal Affirmation of Consent

Your verbal consent to participate indicates that 1) you understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, 2) you agree to participate in the research project, 3) you agree to audio-recording, and 4) you agree to provide your private documents.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

If you have not yet returned your signed written consent form, please do so by email after the interview.

The First-Round Interview

Demographic Questions

1. Where do you come from? Where are you now living?
2. Please briefly describe your academic experiences in the past three years.
3. Please briefly describe your identity, i.e. to answer the question “who are you?” in several simple words or phrases.

General Questions

4. When did you first arrive in Canada? How did you feel when you just arrived there? Has that feeling been changed overtime? Can you give me some examples and tell me why?
 - a. At what point do you think it has been changed? Can you give me an example?
 - b. Why do you think it has been changed at this point?

5. Did you use an English name in Canada? Why or why not? Would you like to be called by your English name or Chinese name? Why?
 - a. When and where did you first get your English name? Who gave it to you? Do you like it?
 - b. In what situation do you usually use your English name? Why?
6. How did you feel about China when you just arrived in Canada? Has the feeling been changed during your stay there? Can you give me some examples and tell me why?
 - a. Was there anything back in China that you missed very much? What and who were they?
 - b. Did you follow what was happening in China when you were in Canada? In what ways?
7. What did you know about the Canadian culture when you just arrived in Canada? Has the situation changed overtime? Can you give me some examples and tell me why?
 - a. How did the unfamiliar values and attitudes impact on you?
 - b. Do you think you get better understanding about your own culture? Why?
8. How was your English when you just arrived in Canada? Has your English ability been improved over time during your study? Can you give me some examples and tell me why?
 - a. What is the biggest achievement you have made in your study life?
 - b. What is the biggest difficulty you have met in your study life? How did you cope with it?
9. Did you have any foreign friends in Canada? Was your foreign friends' circle changed overtime? Can you give me some examples?
 - a. Did you try to establish relationships at the very beginning?
 - b. How important do you think they were to your study life?
 - c. How and why have these changed or not changed over time?
10. Did you maintain contact with your best friends in China during your study in Canada? Why and in what ways?
 - a. Have the ways in which you were in touch with your friends in China changed over time? Why?
11. How was your connection with your family members when you just arrived in Canada? Has that connection been changed over time? Can you give me some examples?
 - a. How often did you contact your family members in China? In what ways?
 - b. What did you normally talk about?
 - c. What role did they play at the beginning and during your study in Canada? Any changes?
12. What did you think of the education you received in your university at the beginning of your study? Has the impression changed over time? Can you give me some examples?
 - a. Was that similar to the education you received before you went abroad?
 - b. Do you think you have benefited from the education you received in your university? In what aspects?

- c. What influences do you think Chinese students may have brought to the University?
13. How did you see the teacher-student relationship in your university at the beginning of your study? Has the opinion changed over the course? Can you give me some examples?
 - a. Was that different from that in China?
 - b. How and why have these changed or not over time?
 - c. What role did they play in your study life?
 - d. What did you learn from these relationships?
 14. Did you join any activities/ clubs/ organizations during your study in Canada? What roles did these activities/ clubs/ organizations play in your study and life over time?
 - a. Were there any activities different from those in China?
 - b. What did you learn from these activities?
 15. Did you think about your life in Canada before going abroad? Was the real situation different from what you had expected? Have you developed a new understanding over the course of your study?
 - a. What preparations (academic, life, psychology) did you make before going abroad?
 16. Did you feel well-adapted to the life in Canada when you just arrived there? Has that feeling changed over time? Can you give me some examples and tell me why?
 - a. How did you get adapted to Canadian life?
 17. What do you think you have learned from the Canadian society and culture? What influences do you think Chinese students may have on the Canadian culture and society?
 - a. Was there anything similar?
 - b. Was there anything different?
 - c. Was there anything you cannot find in China?

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. If you have any follow up questions or if you would like to share any relative materials, you can reach me by my contact information on the informed consent form.

Appendix D –Individual Interview Protocol (2)

Individual Interview Protocol (2)

Date:	
Participant ID:	
Digital recording file name:	
Physical record file name:	

Overview and Informed Consent

Thank you for agreeing to this interview today. My name is Miao He and I am a doctoral student in the school of education at the University of Calgary. Before we begin the interview, I will take some time to review the purpose of this research and to confirm your informed consent to participate. A copy of the consent form was sent to you previously for your review and signature. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, please ask.

Purpose of the Study

In our globalized and diverse world, the number of international students in postsecondary institutions are increasing more than ever. More and more Chinese young adults (YA) are pursuing their university education abroad, and each of them has a unique identity, which is multiple, contradictory, and full of changes. During the process of their academic and career pursuit—arriving in, staying, leaving, and/or reentering a foreign country—their transnational identities are suffused with fluidity and mobility, closely intertwined with the places they come from, and their linguistic expertise. During the process of identity formation, they may encounter with great confusions, challenges and difficulties and the purpose of this study is to provide effective ways of helping them solve these problems, and call for educators to tailor their pedagogical techniques according to each learner’s multiple facets of identities and different learning needs.

The over-arching research questions for this study are:

1. How do Chinese study-abroad students describe their identities?
2. What are major factors influencing the transformation of Chinese students’ transnational identities?

3. From students' perspectives, how can university teachers develop pedagogies to help them with diverse identities?

What Will I Be Asked to Do?

As a voluntary participant in the research, you will have opportunity to participate in two-round individual interviews by Internet-based video conference (e.g., by Zoom® or Skype®). The interviewer will explore your transnational identities, focusing on your study-abroad experiences and home-coming experiences (time spent in China) respectively. If you agree, your interview will be audio recorded, and will be stored as digital files on a computer that will be used for data storage and processing in this study.

The anticipated length of each round of the interviews is one hour.

Participation in the interview is completely voluntary. You may refuse to participate altogether in the study or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss.

What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?

While participants' emails are required to contact participants, no personal identifying information will be collected in the two-round interviews for the purpose of the study. Participants may choose to use a pseudonym during the interview, if they prefer. However, *all study data will be reported in an anonymous format and no personally identifying information* will be included in study reports. *Confidentiality is assured.*

Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?

Risks:

Risks associated with participation in this study are no more than what participants encounter in their daily experience as students within the higher education setting.

Benefits:

Findings will provide valuable information for higher education staff and faculty members in understanding Chinese students' transnational identity, improving teaching skills, and adjusting relative policies. Participants will likely find the interviews provide an opportunity to recapture and reorganize their experience, and help them better see themselves through the lens of "transnationalism".

The research will try to minimize any potential negative impact on participants and the benefits likely outweigh any potential risks. The opportunity to share feedbacks and private documents will likely leave these participants feeling positive about their participation. If they have experienced difficulties related to study-abroad experience, then this will provide them a confidential opportunity to share and express their own feelings and opinions.

What Happens to the Information I Provide?

Participation is completely voluntary and confidential. You are free to discontinue participation at any time during the study. No one except the researcher and her supervisor will be allowed to hear any of the digital recordings of your interviews. Some qualified scholars will be invited to do “inter-rater reliability checks” or “peer review” and have access to your interview transcriptions, but there will be no identifiers associated with your data. Study findings will be summarized and remain anonymized for any scholarly presentation or publication of results. Study data will be kept in a locked office only accessible by the researcher. Data will be destroyed two years after the completion of the project.

If you initially agree to participate in the research study but subsequently withdraw, then your data may be removed from data set and destroyed if the request is made less than two weeks after the interview. In the case that you choose to withdraw more than two weeks after your interview, then any data gathered to that point will be retained and used in the study.

Verbal Affirmation of Consent

Your verbal consent to participate indicates that 1) you understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, 2) you agree to participate in the research project, 3) you agree to audio-recording, and 4) you agree to provide your private documents.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

If you have not yet returned your signed written consent form, please do so by email after the interview.

The Second-Round Interview

General Questions

1. How did you feel when you went back to China for the first time? Did the feeling remain the same for the followed times? Can you give me some examples?
 - a. At what point do you think it was changed? Why do you think it changed at this point?
 - b. Was there anything back in Canada that you missed very much?
2. How did you feel about Canada when you went back to China for the first time? Did the feeling remain the same for the followed times? Can you give me some examples?
 - a. Do you still follow what is happening in Canada when you are in China? In what ways?
 - b. Do you normally compare your experience in China with the situation in Canada?
3. Do you feel confident in communicating with English-speaking foreigners back in China? Can you give me some examples?
 - a. Where does the confidence come from?

- b. Are there any communication skills you have learnt from them?
4. Do you think your study-abroad experience continue to influence who you are and who you want to be after your return? Why? Can you give me some examples?
 - a. What do you think was the biggest change in your personal life upon your first return? Has that changed for the followed times?
5. Have your friends (both foreign and Chinese friends) had any influence on you? Have you had any influence on them? Can you give me some examples?
 - a. Can you just be yourself in front of them? Or do you have to create a public image in front of them?
6. How do you see people with different nationalities and cultural backgrounds? Can you give me some examples?
 - a. How do you think you are perceived by people with different nationalities and cultural backgrounds? Why?
7. How was your relationship with your family members when you went back to China for the first time? Did the situation change for the followed times? Why? Can you give me some examples?
 - a. Did your family members make any comments on your change when you were back to China?
 - b. Do you think you have influenced them in some way?
8. How was your relationship with your best friends in China when you went back to China for the first time? Did the situation change for the followed times? Why? Can you give me some examples?
 - a. What role do they play in your life? Are there any changes?
 - b. Did your best friends in China make any comments on your change when you were back to China?
 - c. Do you think you have influenced them in some way?
9. How do you assess the education you received abroad? Is it the same as you have expected? Can you give me some examples?
 - a. Will you go abroad for further education in the future? If yes, which country are you going to? Why?
10. Did you keep in touch with Canada when you were back in China? In what ways?
 - a. Was your homecoming experience different from what you expected? Why?
11. Would you like to share with me your experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic?
 - a. Where were you living when the pandemic began?
 - b. Do you think the pandemic will have influence on your future life? In what ways?

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. If you have any follow up questions or if you would like to share any relative materials, you can reach me by my contact information on the informed consent form.

Appendix E –WeChat Post Consent Form

WeChat Post Consent Form

Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:

Miao He
Doctoral Student, Werklund School of Education
Mobile: 236-967-1848
Email: miao.he1@ucalgary.ca

Supervisor:

Dr. Sylvie Roy
Werklund School of Education

Title of Project:

An Investigation into the Transformation of Transnational Identities of Chinese Students with Study-Abroad Experiences

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

This study has been approved by the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (REB20-0649).

Participation is completely voluntary and confidential.

Purpose of the Study:

In our globalized and diverse world, the number of international students in postsecondary institutions are increasing more than ever. More and more Chinese young adults (YA) are pursuing their university education abroad, and each of them has a unique identity, which is multiple, contradictory, and full of changes. During the process of their academic and career pursuit—arriving in, staying, leaving, and/or reentering a foreign country—their transnational identities are suffused with fluidity and mobility, closely intertwined with the places they come from, and their linguistic expertise. During the process of identity formation, they may encounter with great confusions, challenges and difficulties and the purpose of this study is to provide effective ways of helping them solve these problems, and call for educators to tailor their pedagogical techniques according to each learner’s multiple facets of identities and different

learning needs.

The over-arching research questions for this study are:

1. How do Chinese study-abroad students describe their identities?
2. What are major factors influencing the transformation of Chinese students' transnational identities?
3. From students' perspectives, how can university teachers develop pedagogies to help them with diverse identities?

You are considering an invitation to provide some of your WeChat "Moments" posts for the exploration of your transnational identities. In order to protect your privacy, only "Moments" open to "public" (shown to everyone in your circle of friends) will be collected. You will be provided with the WeChat Post Rubrics and invited to provide your WeChat "Moments" posts accordingly.

What Will I Be Asked to Do?

As a voluntary participant in the research, you will have opportunity to provide some of your WeChat "Moments" posts during your study-abroad experiences according to the WeChat Post Rubrics. For privacy-protection and copyright considerations, only posts open to "public" will be asked to be offered. If there are contents including photos/pictures, you will be asked to describe them in words so that no images of other people could be shown. If there are contents including copyrighted music/videos, you will be asked to describe the contents and your feelings in words. All the descriptions will be filled out in the WeChat Post Rubrics, and the researcher will use these descriptions as the complementary materials of the interview questions. All of your WeChat "Moments" posts and relative contents will appear in literal form and be stored as digital files on a computer that will be used for data storage and processing in this study.

Providing WeChat "Moments" Posts is completely voluntary. You may refuse to provide WeChat "Moments" posts at any time without penalty or loss.

I grant permission to provide my WeChat "Moments" posts: Yes: ___ No: ___

What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?

While participant email is required to contact participants, no personal identifying information will be collected in participants' WeChat "Moments" posts for the purpose of the study. *All study data will be reported in an anonymous format and no personally identifying information will be included in study reports.*

Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?

Risks:

Risks associated with participation in this study are no more than what participants encounter in their daily experience as students within the higher education setting.

Certain risks may exist in data collected from publicly available social media (WeChat), but the researcher will take measures to minimize such risks.

Benefits:

Findings will provide valuable information for higher education staff and faculty members in understanding Chinese students' transnational identities, improving teaching skills, and adjusting relative policies. Participants will likely find the study could provide an opportunity to recapture and reorganize their experience, and help them better see themselves through the lens of "transnationalism".

The research will try to minimize any potential negative impact on participants and the benefits likely outweigh any potential risks. The opportunity to share feedbacks and private documents will likely leave these participants feeling positive about their participation. If they have experienced difficulties related to study-abroad experience, then this will provide them a confidential opportunity to share and express their own feelings and opinions.

What Happens to the Information I Provide?

Participation is completely voluntary and confidential. You are free to discontinue participation at any time during the study. No one except the researcher and her supervisor will be allowed to read any of the digital files of your WeChat post contents. Study findings will be summarized and remain anonymized for any scholarly presentation or publication of results. Statistical analysis will be completed on an encrypted, password-protected computer. Study data will be kept in a locked office only accessible by the researcher. Data will be destroyed five years after the completion of the project.

If you initially agree to participate in the research study but subsequently withdraw, then your data may be removed from data set and destroyed if the request is made less than two weeks after the interview. In the case that you choose to withdraw more than two weeks after your interview, then any data gathered to that point will be retained and used in the study.

Signatures

Your signature on this form indicates that 1) you understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) you agree to participate in the research project.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant's Name: (please print) _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Name: (please print) _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Questions/Concerns

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Miao He, Doctoral Student
Telephone: 236-967-1848
Email: miao.he1@ucalgary.ca

OR

Dr. Sylvie Roy, Professor
Telephone: 403-220-5641
Email: syroy@ucalgary.ca

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at 403.220.6289 or 403.220.8640; email cfreb@ucalgary.ca.

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.

Appendix F–WeChat Post Rubrics

WeChat Post Rubrics

Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:

Miao He
Doctoral Student, Werklund School of Education
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Supervisor:

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Title of Project:

An Investigation into the Transformation of Transnational Identities of Chinese Students with Study-Abroad Experiences

You are required to provide your WeChat “Moments” posts according to this WeChat Post Rubrics. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

For privacy-protection and copyright considerations, only posts open to “public” will be asked to be offered. If there are contents including photos/pictures, you will be asked to describe them in words so that no images of other people could be shown. If there are contents including copyrighted music/videos, you will be asked to describe the contents and your feelings in words.

This study has been approved by the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (REB20-0649).

Participation is completely voluntary and confidential.

WeChat Post Rubrics

WeChat Moment Post Contents	Check (✓) where applicable			
	Textual Only	With Photos/Pictures	With Music/Videos	With Other Contents

				(Please Specify)
1. First arrival in Canada				
2. Achievements in Canada				
3. Difficulties/Challenges in Canada				
4. Friends/Friendship in Canada				
5. Connection with Your Family Members Living in China				
6. Classroom Experiences in Canada				
7. Activities/Clubs/Organizations in Canada				
8. Canadian Society/Culture				
9. Feelings about Canada When You are Back in China				
10. The Influence of Your Study-Abroad Experiences (Academic) on Your				
11. The Influence of Your Study-Abroad Experiences (Career/Life)				
12. Your Connection with Canada When Back in China				
13. The Education You Received Abroad				
14. People's Comments on Your Change after Going Abroad				
15. Your Situation and Feelings during COVID-19 Pandemic				

