

Identity Construction and Negotiation of Chinese Students in Canada

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Master's degree in Communication

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Acknowledgement

I would like to express my very great appreciation to the following individuals for supporting me throughout this journey.

First of all, I would like to thank my thesis supervisor Dr. Peruvemba S. Jaya for her patient guidance, valuable suggestions, and continuous support. I had ups and downs along the way, and thank you for always standing by my side.

Then, I would like to express my deep gratitude to Dr. Rocci Luppicini and Dr. Rukhsana Ahmed for having agreed to join my thesis committee. Without your valuable advice and constructive critiques, this thesis would not have been possible.

I would also like to thank the interview participants for having devoted time to this research project. Thank you all for your precious reflections and stories.

My special thanks go to my parents. I am extremely grateful to have parents like you in my life.

I hope this thesis is not the final destination of my academic career. I wish that hope will come true.

Abstract

Comparing to the aggressive growth of the Chinese student population on Canadian university campuses, their lived experience and identity issues deserve more attention that it already had. Using the theoretical framework combining social identity theory (Tajfel, 1974) and Ting-Toomey's (1999, 2005) identity negotiation theory, this thesis investigated the identity construction and negotiation process of Chinese international students in Canadian universities. The study utilized a qualitative approach combining semi-structured interviews and a thematic analysis to examine the intercultural experiences of sixteen Chinese students in the Ottawa area through their own voices. Six themes were uncovered and future implications for international education practice were further discussed.

Keywords: social identity, identity negotiation, semi-structured interviews, thematic analysis, international students

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1. 1 Research Context

According to Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE), there were 494,525 international students in Canada in 2017, an increase of 20% over the previous year. About 75% of international students in Canada are studying at the postsecondary level (CBIE, 2016). China is the top source for international students to Canada, and Chinese international students make up 28% of Canada's international student population in 2017 (CBIE, 2018). In 2016, the expenditure of long-term international students in Canada contributed about \$12.8 billion to the GDP and \$2.8 billion in government revenues (Global Affairs Canada, GAC, 2017). In terms of intangible rewards, international students have been seen as an excellent pool of highly qualified workers who meet the needs of the labour market (Han, Stocking, Gebbie, & Appelbaum, 2015; Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013; Scott, Safdar, Desai, & El Masri, 2015). They also contribute to the cultural diversity of the host society and increase the intercultural competence of domestic students by exposing them to culturally different perspectives (Arkoudis et al., 2013; Cotton, George, & Joyner, 2013; Ruble & Zhang, 2013; Tran & Pham, 2016). To improve the quality of Canada's higher education and make sure international students achieve satisfactory educational outcomes, we need to fully understand their intercultural experience through their own voices.

While studying abroad, Chinese international students face multifaceted intercultural adjustment challenges such as language barriers, academic stress, difficulty developing intercultural friendships, and discrimination (Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011; Mori, 2000; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007; Zhang & Goodson, 2011). This study deals with their identity construction and negotiation processes. Identity is one of the most important research domains in the field of intercultural communication (Chen, 2009; Shin & Jackson, 2003; Toomey, Dorjee, &

Ting-Toomey, 2013). However, the research on identity negotiation process of Chinese international students was limited (Marshall, 2009; Noels, Pon, & Clément, 1996; Wei, Liao, Heppner, Chao, & Ku, 2012; Wadsworth, Hecht, & Jung, 2008; Zheng & Berry, 1991).

In its most basic form, identity is “the human capacity — rooted in language — to know ‘who’s who’ (and hence ‘what’s what’)” (Jenkins, 2014, p. 5). Identity is often seen as a communication process and an explanatory mechanism for intercultural adjustment issues (Hecht, 1993; Ting-Toomey, 1999). Identity negotiation is defined by Ting-Toomey (1999) as a “transactional interaction process whereby individuals in an intercultural situation attempt to assert, define, modify, challenge, and support their own and other’s desired self-images” (p.40). Through the lens of identity construction and negotiation, we hope to uncover the complexity of intercultural adjustment patterns of Chinese international students.

This study investigates how Chinese international students in Canada construct and negotiate identity in intergroup and intercultural communication using an integrated theoretical framework informed by Tajfel’s (1974) social identity theory and Ting-Toomey’s (1999, 2005) identity negotiation theory. The integrated theoretical framework contributes to understanding how Chinese international students use various communication strategies and enact different self-images in perceived in-group and intergroup encounters.

Sixteen Chinese international students from two universities in the Ottawa area were interviewed. Then, a thematic analysis was conducted to explore the interview data and probe into the research questions. Through the unique stories these students share and the lived experiences they reflect on, this study hopes to uncover the sense-making process of identity construction and the negotiating patterns of their intercultural adjustment behaviours.

Implications for Canada's international education were explored based on the deepened knowledge of Chinese international students' identity construction and negotiation process. Detailed suggestions for international students themselves, host national students, educators, and post-secondary institutions were discussed.

To the best of our knowledge, limited research has been conducted on identity construction and negotiation of the Chinese international student community from the standpoint of intergroup relations and intercultural adjustment. Thus, this thesis hopes to fill the gap.

1. 2 Research Questions

The following are the central research questions and the sub-questions.

RQ1: How do Chinese international students in Canada construct and negotiate identities

- A) When they interact with Canadians?
- B) When they interact with members of their community?

RQ2: How do Chinese international students in Canada construct and negotiate identities

- A) When they interact with teachers?
- B) When they interact with peer students?

RQ3: How does the understanding of the identity construction and negotiation of Chinese international students help improve international education in Canadian universities?

1. 3 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis has six chapters. Chapter One includes an outline of the research context and the research questions. Chapter Two provides a critical review of the relevant literature and introduces the theoretical framework. Chapter Three details the data collection techniques, data analysis strategies, and the research design. Chapter Four presents the data from the semi-

structured interviews. Chapter Five reviews the data, discusses the research findings, and answers the research questions. Chapter Six concludes the research and identifies the limitations, future research directions, and the significance of this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter aims to provide the current knowledge of the topic that informs this research project and to introduce the guiding theoretical framework. Four sections will be included in this chapter: *intercultural communication*, *identity and social identity*, *identity negotiation*, and *international students*.

2. 1 Intercultural Communication

2. 1. 1 Culture

“Culture is communication and communication is culture” (Hall, 1959, p. 186). The conceptualization of culture has always been complex. In the body of the literature reviewed, different perspectives have emerged. One perspective has seen culture as a shared system consisting of knowledge, beliefs, values along with material objects acquired by members of a group (D’andrade, 1984; Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988; Samovar, Porter, & Jain, 1981). Another perspective claims culture as an establishment being shared and recreated through reciprocal actions of group members (Cronen, Chen, & Pearce, 1988; Pearce & Cronen, 1980). In the field of intercultural communication study, culture is often conceptualized as nationality (Fitch & Morgan, 2003; Hua, 2013; McCann & Honeycutt, 2006; Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003; Penbek, Yurdakul Şahin, & Cerit, 2012; Würtz, 2005), while this conceptualization has been criticized by scholars to be oversimplified since globalization has affected most intercultural encounters (Moon, 2010). Integrating both perspectives and highlighting the interaction and negotiation aspects of the intercultural communication practice, Ting-Toomey’s (1999) definition of culture will be used to guide this study: culture is a “complex frame of reference

that consists of patterns of traditions, beliefs, values, norms, symbols, and meanings that are shared to varying degrees by interacting members of a community” (p. 10).

Different cultural values orientations have been developed since the concept of value orientations was first introduced by Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961). For example, Edward T. Hall (1989) proposed the culture context model to categorize cultures into two categories: low-context culture and high-context culture. As he suggested, high-context cultures, such as Japanese, Chinese and Mexican, embrace a style of communication where messages are implied mostly in nonverbal codes, not explicitly uttered; low-context cultures like German and European American, on the contrary, tend to use low-context communication styles in which messages are explicitly stated in speech (Hall, 1989). Another framework advanced by Hofstede (1984) categorizes cultural differences into five dimensions: individualism versus collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, masculinity versus femininity, long-term versus short-term time orientation. Although these classifications have been called into question, they provide reference frames and intercultural knowledge for individuals to construct complex identities and to improve intercultural competence (Fischer, Vauclair, Fontaine, & Schwartz, 2010; Lustig & Koester, 2006; Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2011).

2. 1. 2 Intercultural Communication

While intercultural communication study initially emerged from the practice of the US Foreign Service Institute (FSI) in the late 1940s to early 1950s aiming to train American diplomats for better adaptations to host culture, multiple approaches of research have emerged ever since (Deardorff, 2006; Leeds-Hurwitz, 2010). This includes, but is not limited to conflict management (Hebbani, Obijiofor, & Bristed, 2010; Moran, Harris, & Moran, 2007; Ting-Toomey, 2010; Yuan, 2010), acculturation (Berry, 1997; Berry & Sabatier, 2010; Schwartz,

Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010; Smith & Khawaja, 2011), intercultural competence (Chen, 1989; Chen & Starosta, 1998; Deardorff, 2011; Lee, 2011; Penbek et al., 2012), and identity study (De Fina, 2003; De Fina, Schiffirin, & Bamberg, 2006; Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; Schmitt, Spears, & Branscombe, 2003; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Ting-Toomey, 1999, 2005). During the past few decades, a critical perspective that focuses on the relationship between social structure and intercultural communication has also been developed (Lengel & Martin, 2011; Martin & Nakayama, 2010; Moon, 2010).

In accordance with the definition of culture, This study will employ Ting-Toomey's (1999) definition of intercultural communication: intercultural communication is "the symbolic exchange process whereby individuals from two (or more) different cultural communities negotiate shared meanings in an interactive situation" (p.16). According to Ting-Toomey (1999), intercultural communication is based on the following assumptions. First, intercultural communication involves different cultural group memberships (Ting-Toomey, 1999). Intercultural communication encounters are usually filled with different cultural symbols, values and interaction scripts, thus "a mismatch of codes" often exists (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2010, p. 21). Second, intercultural communication is the exchange process of simultaneous message encoding and decoding (Ting-Toomey, 1999). In this process, Ting-Toomey (1999) suggested communicators should be aware of the identity meaning in the communication process to achieve shared meanings in addition to the content meaning. Third, well-meaning clashes do happen in intercultural encounters (Ting-Toomey, 1999). Communicators in intercultural encounters tend to be friendly and show good manners most of the time; however, some behaviours that are deemed proper and effective by one communicator can be seen as improper or ineffective by another (Ting-Toomey, 1999). Lastly, intercultural communication is always

context-based (Ting-Toomey, 1999). In addition to cultural values, contextual factors such as cultural visiting experience, communication skills, physical settings, and timing, affect the communication process as well (Ting-Toomey, 1999).

Within the field of intercultural communication, most researchers have been focusing on three perspectives: intercultural competence, acculturation, and identity study.

Intercultural Competence Throughout the past several decades, scholars have tried defining intercultural competence in numerous ways and the definition of this term is complex and continues evolving (Byram, 1997; Chen, 1989; Chen & Starosta, 1998; Deardorff, 2006; Deardorff, 2011; Dinges, 1983; Koester & Olebe, 1988; Lustig & Koester, 2006; Spitzberg, 1988, 1989, 2000). In general, intercultural competence is considered as effective and appropriate communication behaviours in intercultural context (Spitzberg, 2000).

Chen (1989) and Chen and Starosta (1998) proposed four dimensions that affect intercultural competence: personal attributes, communication skills, psychological adjustment, and cultural awareness. Personal attributes that affect one's intercultural communication competence includes self-esteem levels, the depth and breadth of appropriate self-disclosure, self-monitoring ability, and social relaxation (Chen, 1989; Chen & Starosta, 1998). Communication skills that lead to competent intercultural communication include knowing the host language, the ability to use descriptive, non-judgement, and supportive messages, behavioural flexibility, the ability to appropriately initiate and terminate conversations with empathy, and identity maintenance ability (Chen, 1989; Chen & Starosta, 1998). Psychological adjustment factors that influence intercultural competence include the abilities to deal with psychological stress, frustration, alienation, and ambiguity caused by the unfamiliar cultural environment (Chen, 1989; Chen & Starosta, 1998). Lastly, intercultural competency requires a high degree of cultural awareness,

which means an understanding of the host culture's social values, social customs, social norms and social systems (Chen & Starosta, 1998). Likewise, Koester and Olebe (1988) proposed a measuring system for assessing and improving intercultural competence: the Behavioural Assessment Scale for Intercultural Competence (BASIC). The BASIC skills include eight dimensions: display of respect, orientation to knowledge, empathy, interaction management, task role behaviour, relational role behaviour, tolerance for ambiguity, interaction posture (Koester & Olebe, 1988).

In the past few decades, the interest in empirical research on the intercultural competence of students in intercultural environment has been growing (Behrnd & Porzelt, 2012; Campbell, 2012; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015; Hismanoglu, 2011; Holmes, 2006; Jon, 2013; Meng, Zhu, & Cao, 2017, 2018; Penbek, Yurdakul Şahin, & Cerit, 2012; Root & Ngampornchai, 2013; Salisbury, An, & Pascarella, 2013; Schartner, 2016). It has been found that university students who have a higher level of linguistic proficiency and more overseas experience show a higher level of intercultural competence (Hismanoglu, 2011; Salisbury, An, & Pascarella, 2013). Cultural patterns also influence the intercultural competence of international students. Holmes (2006) found that the communication patterns of Chinese international students such as face concerns, roles maintaining, and relationship harmony are not compatible with the rules for competent intercultural communication in a New Zealand university. For example, Chinese students prefer to talk to their teachers in private to maintain face and harmony where their questions are not openly evaluated by the whole class and their language competence is not exposed (Holmes, 2006).

Acculturation Acculturation is another important research area of intercultural communication. Gibson (2001) defined acculturation as “the process of culture change and

adaptation that occurs when individuals with different cultures come into contact” (p. 19). By observing multicultural societies, Berry, Bouvy, Van de Vijver, Boski, and Schmitz (1994) proposed that there are four options for individuals and groups in the acculturation process: assimilation (gives up one’s own culture and embraces the host culture), integration (maintains both heritage culture and host culture), separation (maintains a traditional way of life), marginalization (discards both cultures). Schwartz and Zamboanga (2008) tested Berry’s acculturation theory with their empirical research on Hispanic college students and concluded that Berry’s classification “appear to be less well differentiated than suggested by the theory” (Schwartz & Zamboanga, 2008, p. 283). Acculturation research mostly revolves around immigrants, refugees, and sojourners (Schwartz et al., 2010). Numerous empirical studies on the acculturation experiences of international students have been conducted throughout the past few decades (Bertram, Poulakis, Elsasser, & Kumar, 2014; Cao, Zhu, & Meng, 2017; Chirkov, Vansteenkiste, Tao, & Lynch, 2007; Kashima & Loh, 2006; Li, Marbley, Bradley, & Lan, 2016; Lowinger, He, Lin, & Chang, 2014; Ramos, Cassidy, Reicher, & Haslam, 2016; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Wang et al., 2012; Yan & Berliner, 2011; Zhang & Goodson, 2011). The studies showed that multiple stressors influence the acculturation strategies and outcomes of international students, which include but are not limited to, language barriers, academic stress, culture shock, unmet expectations of university services, difficulty in adjusting teaching styles, lack of social ties with host nationals, disconnection with local communities, perceived discrimination, and financial problems (Cao, Zhu, & Meng, 2017; Kashima & Loh, 2006; Lowinger, He, Lin, & Chang, 2014; Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

Acculturation, intercultural competence and identity are always intertwined in an intercultural communication study (Chen, Benet-Martínez, & Harris, 2008; Jung, Hecht, &

Wadsworth, 2007; Noels, Pon, & Clément, 1996; Padilla & Perez, 2003). For example, Chen et al. (2008) concluded in their findings of the research on Hong Kong immigrants and sojourners that bilingual competence and integration of cultural identities contribute to the acculturation process.

The third perspective is identity, which is the main focus of this study. Next, the researcher will review the relevant literature on identity study and address the theoretical standpoint of this thesis.

2. 2 Identity and Social Identity

In its most basic form, identity is “the human capacity — rooted in language — to know ‘who’s who’ (and hence ‘what’s what)’” (Jenkins, 2014, p.5). Identity has been categorized into different types under different theoretical frameworks in the past several decades (Hecht, 1993; Hewitt, 1976; Lindesmith, Strauss, & Denzin, 1999). Hewitt (1976) distinguished between social identity (identification with certain social categories which are also functional communities), personal identity (focus on individual’s life story which also requires social confirmation), and situated identity (identification with the role making process in specific social activities). Hecht (1993) claimed that identity is intrinsically a communication process. From this perspective, he concluded four frames of identity: personal (hierarchically ordered meanings assigned to an individual by himself/herself or others), enacted (hierarchically ordered social roles enacted in social behaviours), relational (emerging in social relationships), and communal (emerging in groups and networks). Lindesmith and his colleagues (1999) maintained that identity is a multilayered concept which consists of different forms of self: the phenomenological self which denotes the inner consciousness of an individual; the interactional self which is presented and displayed to others; the linguistic self which “fill in the empty personal pronouns (I, me) with

personal, biographical, and emotional meanings” (p.14); the material self which consists of all that an individual calls his or hers; the ideological self which denotes broader cultural and historical meanings in a particular social situation (e.g., husband, wife).

Identity theory and social identity theory has been considered to be the two main perspectives in identity research with different disciplinary roots (Chen, 2009; Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Identity theory is a microsociological theory dealing with role-related behaviours which is originated from sociology (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Social identity theory, on the other hand, is essentially a social psychological theory which is concerned with group memberships and intergroup relations (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Identity theory assumes that the stronger the commitment to the role relationship an individual has, the stronger his/her role identity salience will be (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Identity salience is defined as “the probability that an identity will be invoked across a variety of situations” (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 286). Identity theory also hypothesizes that a higher role identity position in the salience hierarchy increased the individual’s probability of choosing behaviours that meet the expectations attached to that role identity (Stryker & Burke, 2000).

This thesis deals with the identity construction and negotiation process of Chinese students from the perspective of intergroup communication. Intergroup interactions are decided by the group memberships of interactants to a great extent (Tajfel, 1982b). Thus, social identity, which is derived from an individual’s perceived group memberships, is the primary focus of this study. In the next section, the researcher will introduce the social identity theory and review the relevant literature.

2. 2. 1 Social Identity

Tajfel (1974) defined social identity as “part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership” (p. 69). Following Tajfel’s definition, Turner (1982) referred to social identity as “the sum total of the social identifications used by a person to define him-or-herself” (p. 18). Social identification denotes the social categorization used by an individual; it also denotes the process by which an individual internalizes the social categorization as a part of his/her self-concept (Turner, 1982). Tajfel (1974) employed the findings of empirical research and proposed that social behaviour has two theoretical extremes: at one extreme, the interactions between individuals are completely determined by their interpersonal relationships and personal attributes where group membership does not have any influence on their social behaviours at all; while at the other extreme, the social interactions are fully determined by their group memberships. Although it is almost unlikely to expect the extreme situations to happen in real social interactions, Turner (1982) suggested under certain circumstances, the self-concept of an individual may derive only or mostly from his or her group membership. Thus, social identity is often seen as the “cognitive mechanism” to explain intergroup relations, even though how this mechanism works remains to be fully understood (Turner, 1982, p. 67).

The underlying assumption of Tajfel’s (1974) social identity theory is as follows: individuals tend to maintain their group memberships, while at the same time, they seek new memberships if it contributes to creating a positive social identity. According to social identity theory, the individual will choose to leave the group if the group does not contribute to positive social identity unless leaving the group is impossible due to objective reasons or, leaving the group conflicts with some vital values (Tajfel, 1982b; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The above process is

also referred to as social mobility, which focuses on the possibility for individuals to move from groups (Tajfel, 1974, 1982a, 1982b). On the other hand, if it is difficult to leave the group, the individual may choose to change his interpretation of the group attributes to make previously unwelcome features justified, or to accept the situation and seek opportunities to change it by engaging in social actions (Tajfel, 1974, 1982a, 1982b).

Tajfel (1982a, 1982b) proposed the social categorization-social identity-social comparison (C. I. C) framework, which is considered to be the first part of the testable theoretical framework for this study. In the sequence of social categorization-social identity-social comparison, the “acquisition of positive social identity is linked to social categorization via intergroup comparison” (Turner, 1975, p. 9). The outcome of this psychological sequence is to achieve a “positive group distinctiveness” (Tajfel, 1982b, p. 22). The major assumption of social identity theory is that even without “explicit or institutionalized” conflicts or competitions between the groups, there is a tendency to favour the in-group members over out-group members (Tajfel, 1982b, p. 24). C. I. C. framework has been tested from the perspective of psycholinguistic distinctiveness of ethnic or national groups (Breakwell, 1979; Giles & Byrne, 1982; Tajfel, 1981). Giles and Byrne (1982) contended that the social identity of immigrants influences their acquisition of a second-language. Breakwell (1979) and Tajfel (1981) found that people tend to adopt an assimilation strategy to negotiate their group identities, for example, by changing names.

2. 2. 2 Social Categorization

The building block of social identity theory, as well as the C. I. C. framework, is social categorization. Social categorization is considered to be “the cognitive underpinnings of social identity processes” (Abrams & Hogg, 1999, p. 11). It was first theorized by Tajfel (1974) as “the

ordering of social environment in terms of social categories, that is of groupings of persons in a manner which is meaningful to the subject” (p. 69). Based on the experiment's findings, Turner (1982) concluded that if the attributes that define people as members of a group are positive, then groups are more likely to be formed; concurrently, if people are categorized as members of a group, they have “strong motivational pressures” to presume the attributes are positive (Turner, 1982, p. 28).

Social categorization has an accentuation effect: people tend to accentuate intra-group similarities and intergroup differences (Turner, 1982). Tajfel (1982b) argued that there are two functions of social accentuation: the cognitive function and the value function. The former is used for “ordering, systematizing, and simplifying the complex network of social groups” by categorizing individual items; the latter is used to “protect, maintain, or enhance the value systems” in terms of the group distinctiveness (p. 21). The accentuation effect of social categorization is considered as the cognitive basis of intergroup stereotypes (Tajfel, 1982b; Turner, 1982). Empirical evidence has been found to support the accentuation effect (Allen & Wilder, 1975, 1979; Doise, Deschamps, & Meyer, 1978).

Social categorization also has a homogeneity effect: social categorization “perceptually homogenizes in-groups and out-groups” (Hogg, 2001, p. 59). Tajfel (1981) explained homogeneity as “the decrease in variability in the characteristics and behaviour of the members of the out-group as they are perceived by members of the in-group” (p. 243). The endpoint of homogeneity is usually depersonalization and dehumanization of the out-group (Tajfel, 1982b). Apart from the homogenization of out-groups, in-group homogenization has also been noticed (Brewer, 1993; Simon, 1992; Simon & Brown, 1987; Simon & Pettigrew, 1990). In the empirical research conducted by Simon and Brown (1987), they found that members of minorities perceive

the in-group as more homogeneous than the out-group; they also have a stronger identification with the group membership than members of non-minorities.

Tajfel and Turner (1979) argued that social categorization is “sufficient to trigger intergroup discrimination favouring the in-group” (p. 38). A number of researchers have offered support for this argument (Billig & Tajfel, 1973; Brewer & Silver, 1978; Brown, Tajfel, & Turner, 1980; Locksley, Ortiz, & Hepburn, 1980; Tajfel, 1970, 1978; Tajfel & Billig, 1974; Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971; Turner, 1980, 1982; Turner, Sachdev, & Hogg, 1983). To test Tajfel’s argument, researchers explored the minimal situations in which groups members discriminate against out-groups and favour in-group members (Billig & Tajfel, 1973; Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel et al., 1971). In the very first experiment of a continuous research program, Tajfel (1970) found from the experiment results that dividing subjects into groups itself is enough to trigger discriminatory behaviours against the out-group. Billig and Tajfel (1973) conducted an empirical study in which social categories were established on a random basis without any real similarity. The experiment results showed that participants discriminated against out-group members even though no explicit inter-individual similarities were found among the in-group members.

Tajfel et al. (1971) then found something more interesting: when the subjects were divided into groups, they attempted to achieve “a maximum difference between the in-group and the out-group,” even though it meant their own group would have to sacrifice some utilitarian advantages (p. 150). The results also indicated that subjects tried to achieve maximum fairness when they discriminated in favour of their own group (Tajfel et al., 1971). Competitive intergroup behaviours were noticed even if it obviously conflicted with group members’ self-interest (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Brown, & Tajfel, 1979). In a study by Turner et al.

(1979), experiment subjects were more willing to sacrifice self-interest to maximize intergroup differences which favour the in-group when it concerned a more directly comparable out-group.

Hogg introduced the concept of group prototype to the social categorization theory (Hogg, 2001; Hogg & Terry, 2000). Prototypes include the beliefs, attitudes, behaviours and other attributes that distinguish the in-group from the out-group (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Group prototype is often in the form of either the representation of a group model or an ideal abstraction of group attributes (Hogg & Terry, 2000). The introduction of prototypes helps explain the motivations of social categorization. Hogg (2000) argued, “subjective uncertainty reduction is a fundamental human motivation” (p. 247). The need for uncertainty reduction motivates an individual to identify with certain social categories (groups); social categorization, in turn, reduces uncertainty (Hogg, 2000). By assimilating self to a group prototype, one validates the self-concept and knows what to expect from the social interaction (Hogg & Terry, 2000).

Another motivation for social categorization is self-enhancement (Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Hogg, 2001; Hogg & Terry, 2000; Turner, 1982). According to Swann, Griffin, Predmore and Gaines (1987), self-enhancement means “people are motivated to increase their feelings of personal worth” (p. 881), which is consistent with the argument of Tajfel (1982b) that there is a need for a human to achieve, protect and maintain a positive social identity. Turner (1982) argued that the need for positive social identity and positive self-esteem motivates people to search for “positive distinctness” of the in-group (p. 34).

Apart from intergroup relations, social categorization has also been used as the theoretical foundation to explain intra-group behaviours. Studies showed that group members are motivated to obtain knowledge of the group prototype and pay extra attention to prototypical in-group members (Hogg, 2001; Hogg, CooperShaw, & Holzworth, 1993; Hogg & Reid, 2006). Reicher

(1984, 1996) tried to account for crowd behaviours using social identity theory. For example, in his study of the St. Pauls' riots in April 1980, Reicher (1984) noticed there was a match between participants' social identity and their actions: the perceived "St. Paul community" membership of the crowd provided themselves with the criteria for legitimate actions. Moreover, group polarization has been explored in terms of social categorization (Hogg, Turner & Davidson, 1990; Mackie & Cooper, 1984; Turner, Wetherell, & Hogg, 1989). For example, Mackie and Cooper (1984) found that the norms that distinguished the group from out-groups tended to be polarized to the extreme by group members because of the accentuation effect and homogeneity effect of social categorization. Group cohesiveness, previously studied in terms of interpersonal bonds, has also been explored from the social identity approach (Hogg, 1992, 1993, 2001). Hogg (2001) suggested that group cohesiveness is a consequence of social categorization which is not just in-group attractions, but also the "the entire range of effects of categorization-based depersonalization" including ethnocentrism, group behavioural consensus, intergroup differentiation and so forth (p. 65).

2. 2. 3 Social Comparison

Social categorization is intertwined with social comparison. It is the social comparison that links social categorization with social identity (Tajfel, 1974). Festinger (1954) hypothesized that "there exists, in the human organism, a drive to evaluate his opinions and his abilities" (p. 117). He maintained that social influence processes and competitive behaviours mostly arise from self-evolution which are the consequences of inter-individual comparisons (Festinger, 1954). Tajfel (1974) then questioned Festinger's argument by pointing out that it did not pay enough attention to the influence of the social identity of individuals on evaluating and comparing themselves. Tajfel (1982a, 1982b) enriched the social comparison process by arguing that, given the situation

that group membership decides social interactions to a great extent, one can only attain positive social identity through intergroup social comparisons in most cases. The ultimate goal of social comparison between groups is to establish group distinctiveness and positive group identity (Tajfel, 1974). Positive social identity is attained by comparing to other groups in terms of “value-laden attribute and characteristics,” which is mostly culturally derived (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 40). Turner (1975) contended that social comparison is where “two groups are attempting mutual but asymmetrical differentiation from each other towards the positively valued pole of the relevant dimension” (p. 10). Mutual comparison generates constant reciprocity in the standard each group establishes and leads to competitiveness until “some final ‘inequity’ is reached” (Turner, 1975, p. 10). Positive comparisons produce high-esteem while negative comparison produces low esteem (Tajfel, 1974). However, the losing group does not always disparage the winning out-group; on the contrary, sometimes they upgrade the evaluations of the winning group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

The endpoint of the C. I. C. framework is the achievement of positive group distinctiveness (Tajfel, 1982b). Commins and Lockwood (1979) maintained that the social group functions as a contributor to the positive social identity by distinguishing itself from out-groups “along salient dimensions which have a clear value differential” (p. 282). Tajfel (1982b) found that groups tend to make more effort to establish group distinctiveness from the out-groups that are considered similar than those which are regarded as dissimilar; in accordance with this, Turner (1978) suggested that groups with similar values show more intergroup discrimination than groups with different values.

In the next section, the researcher will critically review the literature on identity negotiation and introduce the second part of the theoretical framework of this study — Ting-Toomey's (1999, 2005) identity negotiation theory.

2. 3 Identity Negotiation

In the theoretical development of identity negotiation, there are two important approaches. The first approach is Swann's identity negotiation theory. Identity negotiation was first introduced by Swann in 1987. The underlying assumption of his theory is that people have strong motivations to verify their self-concepts and tend to find more evidence for self-confirmation than actually exists (Swann, 1987). The theory suggests that people make efforts to have others see them in the same way as they see themselves (Swann, 1987). With its emphasis on the dynamics of interpersonal communication, the theory has mostly been used to explain behaviours and attitudes in organizational communication settings (Swann, 1987; Swann, Johnson, & Bosson, 2009; Swann Jr, Milton, & Polzer, 2000). Considering that the understanding of international students' experiences should be developed through the perspective of intercultural communication, the researcher will take another approach--Ting-Toomey's (1999) identity negotiation theory-- as the theoretical standpoint of this study.

2. 3. 1 Empirical Studies

Before moving to a further elaboration of the identity negotiation theory, the empirical studies on identity negotiation within the field of cultural communication will be reviewed. There are four main approaches to identity negotiation studies based on the literature reviewed.

The first approach addresses identity negotiation in organizational communication settings. Most research in this area emphasizes how identity negotiation process unfolds in the workplace. Swann et al. (2009) proposed a process model of identity negotiation. In this model, coherence,

connectedness, and competence consist of the central motives for identity negotiation in the workplace. Existing studies have discussed how identity negotiation processes impact on job performance, organizational commitment, relationship quality, health and well-being, and perceived fairness of the workplace (Johnson & Chang, 2008; Swann et al. 2009; Swann Jr, Bosson, & Pelham, 2002; Swann Jr et al., 2000; Wiesenfeld, Swann, Brockner, & Bartel, 2007). Findings suggested that when people's identities are consistently confirmed and supported, they have higher levels of job performance, work team commitment, and relationship satisfaction as well as a lower level of anxiety and physiological stress (Johnson & Chang, 2008; Swann et al. 2009; Wiesenfeld et al., 2007).

The second approach emphasizes comparing different modes of identity negotiation process in cross-cultural settings (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2013; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998; Ting-Toomey et al., 2000). Studies have shown that individuals in different cultures negotiate their identities in different ways. For example, Ting-Toomey and her colleagues (2000) studied the conflict management styles of four different US ethnic groups and found that Asian Americans tend to maintain interpersonal harmony and avoid conflicts more than European Americans (Ting-Toomey et al., 2000). In another study, Oetzel and Ting-Toomey (2003) compared the interpersonal conflict management styles of four cultures (China, Germany, Japan, and the United States). The findings suggested individuals from individualistic cultures tend to use more dominating conflict strategies and have a more independent self-image; while people from collectivistic cultures tend to use avoiding conflict styles, which is consistent with the fact that their identities emphasize more on relational connectedness (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003).

The third approach focuses on bi-cultural identity negotiation of the ethnic minority group in a multicultural society (Jackson II, 2002; Marvasti 2005; Read & Bartkowski, 2000; Toomey et

al., 2013). Bi-cultural identity is defined as an identity that is “composed of dual cultural/racial heritage influences with one parent from a particular racial group and the other parent from another distinct racial group” (Toomey et al., 2013, p. 113). For example, Asian-Americans reported facing challenges in interpersonal communication context such as not being understood empathetically and being in a dilemma situation when hearing hurtful racism jokes (Toomey et al., 2013). The identity negotiation strategies of bi-cultural individuals, as Toomey et al. (2013) found, are often seeking comfort in one identity if the other is being menaced, and identifying other bi-cultural individuals as part of their in-group.

The last approach revolves around identity negotiation in the field of intercultural communication, which is also the research domain of this study (Ethier & Deaux, 1994; Hsieh, 2006; Liu, 2015; Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 1992). Studies in this area have investigated the identity negotiation process of individuals when they enter a new culture as tourists, sojourners and immigrants. Hsieh (2006) found in her study with female Chinese international students that the participants showed more interest in negotiating a positive person-based identity than negotiating a positive group-based identity. These students negotiated identities mostly aiming at attaining interpersonal harmony (Hsieh, 2006). In the study with the students in a mid-western university in the United States, Imamura and Zhang (2014) concluded that achieving a common cultural group identity is important for the international students to be better integrated into the host culture and to better communicate with host nationals. Another study on the identity negotiation process of Chinese immigrants in Australia noted that most participants preferred a shifted identity than a blended identity when they tried to fit in a different culture (Liu, 2015). The finding of Liu’s (2015) study also suggested that identifying with culture “does not necessarily mean belonging to that culture” (p. 26).

2.3.2 Theoretical framework

The identity negotiation theory proposed by Ting-Toomey (1999, 2005) is the central theoretical standpoint of this study. Ting-Toomey (1999) defined negotiation as “transactional interaction process whereby individuals in an intercultural situation attempt to assert, define, modify, challenge, and support their own and other’s desired self-images” (p.40). In her theory, identity is seen as “the explanatory mechanism for the intercultural communication process” (Ting-Toomey, 1999, p. 39). To specify identity, Ting-Toomey (1999, 2005) came up with a composite identity consisting of eight identity domains. The first four identities that serve as primary identities are cultural identity, ethnic identity, gender identity, and personal identity. The other four are situational identity, relational identity, face-work identity, and symbolic interaction identity. Primary identities and situational identities are interdependent and intertwined (Ting-Toomey, 1999, 2005).

Identity negotiation theory assumes that all the communicators in an intercultural encounter expect positive group-based identities and positive person-based identities (Ting-Toomey, 1999, 2005). Satisfactory communication outcomes of identity negotiation include the feeling of being “understood, respected, and supported” (Ting-Toomey, 1999, p.41). According to Ting-Toomey (1999, 2005), identity negotiation theory has the following six assumptions:

First, individuals, no matter what culture or ethnic groups they belong to, are motivated by the same basic needs including identity security, trust, inclusion, connection, and stability (Ting-Toomey, 1999, 2005). This assumption is the socio-psychological foundation of the identity negotiation theory, which is consistent with Turner’s (1987) composite model of interaction motivation. In this model, sense of group inclusion, trust, ontological security, sense of facility,

self-conception sustainment, material gratification, and anxiety avoidance constitute the motivations of interpersonal interaction (Turner, 1987).

Second, individuals experience identity security in a culturally familiar environment and experience identity insecurity or vulnerability in a culturally estranged environment (Ting-Toomey, 1999, 2005). Identity security denotes emotional safety; while identity vulnerability means anxiousness or ambivalence. This assumption does not necessarily mean one should seek identity security and completely escape identity vulnerability (Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013). Pursuing identity security excessively, for example, hanging out only with in-group members, may lead to ethnocentric behaviors; on the other hand, too much identity vulnerability, for example, not connecting with in-group members at all, may cause “immobility and static state” (Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013, p. 552).

Third, individuals experience identity predictability while communicating with culturally similar others and experience identity unpredictability while communicating with culturally dissimilar others (Ting-Toomey, 1999, 2005). Interaction predictability leads to trust, and interaction unpredictability leads to distrust (Ting-Toomey, 1999, 2005).

Fourth, individuals experience identity inclusion with their desired group memberships positively affirmed; on the contrary, individuals experience identity differentiation with their desired group memberships stigmatized (Ting-Toomey, 1999, 2005). If one’s desired group membership is at a disadvantage, he/she tends to develop certain strategies to cope with such situations, for example, disparaging the comparative group or changing comparative standards (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Fifth, individuals experience identity connection in meaningful and close interpersonal relationships and experience identity autonomy when there are relationship disconnection and

separation (Ting-Toomey, 1999, 2005). Different cultural values orientations usually influence the perceptions and evaluations of identity connection and autonomy (Ting-Toomey, 1999, 2005). According to Hofstede's (2011) individualism vs. collectivism dimension mentioned above, individuals from individualistic societies may desire identity autonomy more than individuals from collectivistic societies.

Lastly, individuals experience identity consistency in familiar and predictable cultural environment marked by repeated cultural routines, and experience identity change and transformation, sometimes identity chaos, in unfamiliar and unpredictable cultural environment (Ting-Toomey, 1999, 2005). Robinson and Smith-Lovin (1992) found that people tend to attain identity stability in social interaction. Accordingly, people with low self-esteem prefer interactions that retain the low self-esteem regardless of the negative effects they may cause (Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 1992).

Recent research findings have provided empirical support for Ting-Toomey's (1999, 2005) identity negotiation theory. In Matusitz's (2015) study of French students in a university in the United States, the students dealt with cultural adjustment stress by sticking together. This is in line with the identity security-vulnerability dimension of the identity negotiation theory. Identity trust-distrust was evident in Brown's (2009) study of the experience of the international students in an England university. Interviews with these students showed that they were "bound together" to deal with the difficulties in the beginning few weeks of the term because they shared the identity of strangers in a foreign country (Brown, 2009, p. 246). Within the dimension of identity inclusion-differentiation, Holmes (2005) explored the experience of ethnic Chinese students in a New Zealand university. The findings showed that both groups of local and international students preferred homogeneous cultural groupings when assigned group tasks. Surprisingly,

they also both showed negative stereotyping attitudes towards the out-groups (Holmes, 2005). Identity inclusion-differentiation is also evident in a 400-hour ethnographic study (Collie, Kindon, Liu, & Podsiadlowski, 2010) where the researchers explored the identity negotiation process of Assyrian women in New Zealand. In their observation, Assyrian women redefined their identification with the Assyrian community and New Zealand society when one of them was under threat. Meanwhile, the research subjects tried to strike an identity balance among multiple in-groups. Lee's (2006) study with students in a mid-western university in the United States demonstrated the identity connection-autonomy dimension. The research findings showed that by meeting their intercultural friends' family and friends, students' intercultural friendships were strengthened and their identities were positively affirmed (Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013). Pitts's (2009) research findings offered empirical evidence for the identity stability-change dimension. In his 15-month ethnographic study with American students in Paris, the overseas studying experience of these students challenged their cultural identity and also enhanced their sense of self at the same time. Pitts (2009) also pointed out that student identities went through "a shift toward a more complex, multifaceted understanding of what it meant to be 'American'" in the intercultural communication process (p. 458). This dimension was also apparent in Hotta and Ting-Toomey's study (2013) with international students in a Southern California university. They noted that these students made identity adjustment and communication style shifts to gain more understanding and to increase cooperation efficiency. For example, a Chinese international student shifted to an assertive communication style from her preserved "Asian" style and changed into an "Americanized talkative self" (Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013, p. 556)

The identity negotiation theory has been criticized by scholars (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2001; Syed & Burnett, 1999). First, identity in Ting-Toomey's (2005) identity negotiation theory

is an explanatory mechanism as mentioned above. Critics have questioned the reliability of using this mechanism to explain complicated cultural phenomena since the explanatory constructs themselves also need to be explained considering the complexity of culture and identity (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2001). Second, the referring of host culture and native culture has been criticized as reductionism in today's cultural environment, because societies like Canada, US, Australia and New Zealand are becoming more multicultural and less culture-specific with global immigration (Syed & Burnett, 1999).

In spite of the critiques as mentioned above, identity negotiation theory can still be used as an essential component of the theoretical framework of this study. The empirical research reviewed showed this theory can be applied to explain the identity negotiating behaviours of sojourners (international students) from different perspectives in a relatively thorough way. Furthermore, the theory points to the direction to achieve satisfactory communication outcomes — being understood, respected and supported— by “increasing intercultural identity-based knowledge, mindfulness, and adaptive interactive negotiation skills” (Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013, p. 552). Thus, the identity negotiation theory is considered to be a sound framework to help understand the intercultural experience of Chinese international students and improve Canada's international education practice.

In the next section, the researcher will review the recent literature on international students' intercultural adjustment and Chinese international students in particular.

2. 4 International Students

In Canada, international students' recruitment is the top priority of internationalization at Canadian educational institutions (Canadian Bureau for International Education, CBIE, 2016). International students, or internationally mobile students, are “students who have crossed a

national or territorial border for the purpose of education and are now enrolled outside their country of origin” (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO, n. d.). In Canada, international students are defined as “students in Canada on a visa or refugees, neither of whom have a permanent residency status in Canada” (Statistics Canada, n. d.). International students in Canada also include offshore students who are “enrolled in a Canadian program from a Canadian institution that is not located in Canada,” and students who study via the Internet (Statistics Canada, n. d.).

With the excellent quality of its education system, its affordability among the top destinations such as the US, the UK and Australia, and its reputation as a safe, tolerant and non-discriminatory country, Canada has experienced an aggressive growth in the number of international students between 2010 and 2017 (CBIE, 2018). In 2017, there were 494,525 international students at all levels of study with an increase of 20% over the previous year and an increase of 119% since 2010 (CBIE, 2018).

2. 4. 1 Benefits of Studying Abroad

The benefits of international students for the host society have frequently been discussed. First, the economic benefits of international students are noteworthy. In 2016, the expenditure of long-term international students in Canada contributed about \$12.8 billion to the GDP and \$2.8 billion in government revenues (Global Affairs Canada, GAC, 2017). International students have also been seen as an excellent pool of highly qualified workers who meet the needs of the labour market (Han et al., 2015; Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013; Scott et al., 2015). Second, international students contribute to the cultural diversity of the host society and increase the intercultural competence of Canadian students by exposing them to different perspectives of thinking and living (Arkoudis et al., 2013; Cotton et al., 2013; Ruble & Zhang, 2013; Tran & Pham, 2016).

The benefits of studying abroad for international students themselves are also significant. They experience significant personal growth and become more independent when they study abroad (Moore & Popadiuk, 2011). Studying abroad offers an opportunity for international students to enhance academic learning, sharpen leadership skills, advance professional careers, and develop language capabilities (Dwyer, 2004; Kitsantas, 2004; Williams, 2005). Studying abroad also improves global awareness which helps international students to be better prepared for the challenges of globalization (Domville-Roach, 2007; Hoffa, 1993). Furthermore, studying abroad helps to promote international security by increasing mutual understanding between different cultures (Annan, 2001).

2. 4. 2 Challenges of Studying Abroad

Although the benefits of studying abroad are noteworthy, it can still be truly challenging for the international student community. A reasonable amount of research has revealed the challenges faced by international students from around the world (Chira, 2011; Dunne & Olivier, 2011; Kamara and Gambold, 2011; Khawaja & Dempsey, 2008; Poteet & Gomez, 2015; Scott et al., 2015; Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015).

Language barriers are considered to be the major challenge that international students face in both academic and social settings (Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006; Scott et al., 2015; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Trice, 2003; Wu et al., 2015; Zhang & Goodson, 2011). Trice (2003) interviewed 54 faculty members of a top mid-western university in the United States and concluded that effectively communicating in English was perceived by the faculty members as the biggest struggle for international students; moreover, the language barrier could affect the overall academic performance. Poyrazli and Kavanaugh (2006) studied 149 international students in five different universities in the United States and found that participants with lower

levels of academic performance reported lower levels of English mastery. Socially, language barriers can hinder international students' social performance, as students will less likely be able to communicate with host nationals. In their systematic review, Zhang and Goodson (2011) found that thirty-seven out of sixty-four studies reported English proficiency as the most frequently mentioned predictor of sociocultural adjustment for international students. Studies consistently show that low levels of English competency contribute to acculturative stress which often leads to depression and anxiety (Dao, Donghyuck, & Chang, 2007; Duru & Poyrazli, 2007; Sümer, Poyrazli, & Grahame, 2008). The challenges posed by language barriers also follow international students when they try to enter the labour market. In their research on international students in two universities in Ontario, Canada, Scott et al. (2015) found that language barriers were considered as the main obstacle by participants when they searched for employment opportunities.

The second challenge that international students face is academic stress. Empirical research showed varied results regarding international students' academic stress (Misra & Castillo, 2004; Misra, Crist, & Burant, 2003; Khawaja & Dempsey, 2008). Misra et al. (2003) found that international students experience a higher level of academic stress than host nationals; while in a comparative study of American students and international students at a university in the United States, the results showed domestic students experience higher levels of academic stress (Misra & Castillo, 2004). In another study with Australian university students, the results showed no difference in the levels of academic concerns and difficulties between host nationals and international students (Khawaja & Dempsey, 2008). Misra and Castillo (2004) explained these results by pointing out that there is a possibility international students might have chosen not to disclose their academic stress since admitting to stress might be regarded as "a sign of

immaturity and weakness” in some cultures (p. 144). For example, Wei et al. (2007) noted that Chinese international graduate students tend to keep upsetting emotions to themselves when they experience stress because they do not want to lose face or be embarrassed in front of their peers. Apart from language barriers, unfamiliarity with the host country’s education system and teaching style is another cause of academic stress (Chen, 1999; Mori, 2000). Moreover, unmet expectations for high academic achievements from families, friends, instructors and sponsoring organizations, may cause stress as well (Chen, 1999; Mori, 2000).

The third challenge that international students face is the lack of friendship with host nationals. Studies have found that international students tend to build close friendships with co-nationals (Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011; Neri & Ville, 2008). Co-national friendships help to enhance the unique cultural identity, increasing self-esteem, providing emotional support, and attenuating the acculturative stress (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Hendrickson et al., 2011; Kim, 2001; Maundeni, 2001). However, too much reliance on co-national friendships has drawbacks. International students who spend more time with co-nationals tend to be less willing to adjust to the local culture and form friendships with host nationals and students from other countries (Church, 1982; Ward & Searle, 1991). These students may also have less academic success compared to those who do not spend as much time with friends from the same country (Neri & Ville, 2008). Furthermore, co-national friendships affect language skills improvement which impedes the long-term cultural adjustment (Kim, 2001; Maundeni, 2001). On the other hand, intimate friendships with host nationals can be beneficial (Fritz, Chin, & DeMarinis, 2008). International students who have more friends from the host country report a higher level of open-mindedness and satisfaction as well as a lower level of communication anxiety, loneliness, and homesickness; these students also have more opportunities in terms of career development

(Hendrickson et al., 2011; Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2008; Williams & Johnson, 2011; Zhang & Brunton, 2007). Students with more host national friends may also develop greater identification with their home culture (Kashima & Loh, 2006).

However, although the contact with host nationals is beneficial and desired by most international students, the actual host-sojourner encounters are limited (Dunn & Olivier, 2011; Gareis, 2012; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2005; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Zhang & Brunton, 2007). In Canada, only 31% of East Asian international students reported having Canadian friends (CBIE, 2014). Dunn and Olivier (2011) found that international students in Canadian universities live in different social circles from their domestic fellows, with both parties aware of the existence of the circles and indicating the desire to transcend these circles. In the United States, East Asian international students have a lower level of satisfaction regarding the friendship with host nationals compared to the international students from Europe (Gareis, 2012). Zhang and Brunton (2007) studied the experience of Chinese international students in New Zealand and found that most participants had fewer opportunities participating in the activities of the local community as well as making friends with New Zealand students than they had expected. In the Canadian context, international students struggle with the difficulty of meeting domestic students in the absence of formal venues such as university classrooms and initiating informal interactions (Dunn & Olivier, 2011). Even though international students manage to find the opportunities to interact with domestic students, the interactions usually do not extend beyond the classroom and to their regular social networks (Dunn & Olivier, 2011). Language is considered to be the most prominent barrier to friendship with host nationals (Hendrickson et al., 2011; Kashima & Loh, 2006; Sawir, 2005; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Wang et al., 2012; Wei et al., 2007; Wei, Liang, Du, Botello, & Li, 2015; Yang,

Noels, & Saumure, 2006; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Zhang & Goodson, 2011). International students report embarrassment and being self-conscious about their language fluency, grammar, and accent when they talk to host nationals (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Cultural difference is another contributor. Asian international students in a North American university may experience more of a contrast in culture patterns than students from Europe (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Besides, personality may affect international students' friendship networks as well (Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

Compared to the challenges of building friendships with domestic students, studies showed that international students are more successful in developing intercultural friendships with other international students (Hendrickson et al., 2011; Poteet & Gomez, 2015; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Yeh & Inose, 2003). In their research on international students from the universities in Atlantic Canada, Poteet and Gomez (2015) found that shared experience of being away from home made these students bond with each other.

Another challenge for international students that is frequently discussed is discrimination (Kamara & Gambold, 2011; Lee, 2015; Lee & Rice, 2007; Mason, 2017; Ozer, 2015; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007; Ramos et al., 2016; Wei et al., 2015). Poyrazli and Lopez (2007) found that international students in the United States experience a higher level of discrimination than domestic students; also, European international students experience less perceived discrimination than students from other countries. Lee and Rice (2007) found similar results that international students from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East reported more discrimination compared to the students from Europe, Canada, and New Zealand. The discrimination international students experience outside the university campuses have also been noted. When investigating the challenges the international students face in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada,

Kamara and Gambold (2011) found that international students feel more welcomed and comfortable on campus than off campus. Many international students interviewed reported incidents of racism when they were outside the university campuses (Kamara and Gambold, 2011).

Other challenges for international students include homesickness, financial problems, and the lack of opportunities to integrate into the local community (Archer, Ireland, Amos, Broad, & Currid, 1998; Chira, 2011; Fritz et al., 2008; Kamara & Gambold, 2011; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007; Scott et al., 2015). Homesickness is a psychological reaction to “a number of circumstances which involve separation from familiar and loved people and places,” which often leads to loneliness, depression, emotional distress (Archer et al., 1998, p. 205). Poyrazli and Lopez (2007) found that international students experience a higher level of sickness compared to domestic students. Younger students, students with a lower level of language proficiency, and students who report a higher level of perceived discrimination tend to experience more homesickness (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). Existing studies have indicated that financial problems are another source of stress for the majority of international students (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Although the pressure from tuition and living expenses could be hard for both international students and domestic students at the post-secondary education level, international students face off-campus work restrictions, higher tuition fees and limited access to loans and scholarships (Fritz et al., 2008; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). In their research on the international students in Halifax, N.S, Kamara and Gambold (2011) found that some international students feel there is an “unequal exchange of value” between their universities and themselves (p. 26). Apart from homesickness and financial problems, studies also show that international students in Canada have been

struggling to connect with local communities, which affects their adjustment to the host society and undermines their opportunities in job search after graduation (Chira, 2011; Kamara & Gambold, 2011; Scott et al.,2015).

Interactions with domestic students could be one of the most frequent and important intercultural contacts; thus, stereotypes held by host nationals against international students can be quite impactful (Spencer-Rodgers, 2011). To better understand the experience of international students, studies have explored the attitudes and behaviours from the standpoint of host nationals. In his study with domestic students in a west coast university in the United States, Spencer-Rodgers (2001) found that although the host nationals held fairly positive attitudes toward international students, they regarded international students as a quite homogenous out-group, that is to say, a group of foreign individuals; the non-American status of the international students was highlighted despite the significant heterogeneity of the community. In Spencer-Rodgers's (2001) research, international students were frequently described by domestic students as "socially and culturally maladjusted" (p. 651); negative attributes such as loneliness, anxiousness, cluelessness, naivety, unsociability, and deficiency in English were also mentioned. On the other hand, positive characteristics of the international students were reported as well. For example, the group was described as friendly, hard-working, open-minded, adventurous, and interesting (Spencer-Rodgers, 2011). Host nationals who interact less with international students may rely more on stereotypic knowledge to support their intercultural behaviours; however, high levels of interaction with international students may make the intercultural communication barriers more salient (Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern, 2002). Communication anxiety also impacts the relations between host nationals and international students. Dunne (2009) found that domestic students in an Irish university feel anxious about the possibility of being misunderstood

by international students; they also feel anxious about being admonished by their in-group members. Furthermore, Spencer-Rodgers and McGovern (2002) found that the perceptions of realistic threats such as admission to a competitive program, financial aid, and employment opportunities, may as well affect domestic students' attitudes towards international students.

2. 4. 3 Chinese International Students

In 2017, about 28% of the international students in Canada came from China — the top country of citizenship of international students in Canada, which aligns with the fact that China has been the top geographic priority of recruitment emphasis of institutions (CBIE, 2018). China is also the top country of origin at the university level of study with nearly half of the international students from China enrolled in post-secondary programs (CBIE, 2016). Existing studies have explored the motivations of Chinese international students studying abroad (Chirkov et al., 2007; Wang & Walker, 2010; Yang et al., 2006). For example, Wang and Walker (2010) noted that the two motivations most Chinese international students reported are “learning” and “escaping personal, social and physical pressures” (p. 283).

In general, Chinese international students have been perceived as smart, studious, friendly, shy, and polite by host nationals (Ruble, 2011; Ruble & Zhang, 2013). However, Chinese international students have also been perceived as speaking broken English, sticking with Chinese only, and socially awkward (Ruble & Zhang, 2013). Some American students also reported Chinese international students as “loud” “intrusive on personal space” and “never speak English” (Ruble & Zhang, 2013, p. 209). Ruble and Zhang (2013) explained that the impression of “never speak English” is due to the fact that Chinese international students are not motivated to speak English and not attempting to make positive impressions on domestic students.

In the past decade, a fair amount of research has been conducted to understand the cultural adaptation of Chinese international students (Ching, Renes, McMorrow, Simpson, & Strange, 2017; Du & Wei, 2015; Guo, Li, & Ito, 2014; Han, Han, Luo, Jacobs, & Jean-Baptiste, 2013; Huang, 2012; Jung, Hecht & Wadsworth, 2007; Li, Liu, Wei, & Lan, 2013; Lowinger et al., 2014; Wei et al., 2007; Yan & Berliner, 2011; Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, & Todman, 2008;). Studies have shown that Chinese international students face multiple challenges such as improving their English skills, learning the communication style of the host country, changing their ways of thinking, meeting new classroom expectations, balancing work and play and so on (Ching et al., 2017; Heng, 2016; Zhang & Zhou, 2010; Zhao, 2016). Zhang and Zhou (2010) found that cultural differences and language proficiency are the two main factors that influence the cultural adjustment process of Chinese international students in Canada. Zhao (2016) maintained that social media is beneficial to the cultural adaptation process of Chinese international students in Canada because it reduces the linguistic demand and face-to-face interaction, which makes it more comfortable for Chinese students to develop friendships with domestic students.

The results from the International Student Barometer (2014) study indicated that Chinese students in Canada are less motivated to actively seek out friendships with other international students or Canadian students due to the significant number of co-nationals. The friendships with Chinese fellows may help Chinese international students better adjust to the new environment, but it also poses a threat to their effort of integrating into the host society (Lu & Zong, 2017).

Recent studies showed that Chinese international students experience anxiety and depression while studying abroad (Ching et al., 2017; Han et al., 2013; Li et al., 2016). According to the result of a survey among Chinese international students at Yale University, forty-five percent of

the participants reported symptoms of depression, while twenty-nine percent reported symptoms of anxiety (Han et al., 2013). Studies also indicated that Chinese international students whose emotional attachment to their ethnic identity is more significant are less likely to seek mental health treatment and professional counseling service (Li et al., 2016); at the same time, language deficiency, stigma and shame, and perceived discrimination limits their access as well (Blignault, Ponzio, Rong, & Eisenbruch, 2008; Lu, Dear, Johnston, Wootton, & Titov, 2014).

Although Chinese international students are usually perceived as a homogeneous group, significant differences among the experiences of individuals do exist. For example, older Chinese international students experience more “culture shock, job, visa concerns, and immigration pressure,” while students at a younger age experience more homesickness (Yan & Berliner, 2011, p. 528). Chinese male students experience more stress regarding professional achievement, while women are more concerned with financial situations and dating issues; engineering and natural science students tend to make friends only with co-nationals, while students in business schools have more friends from the host country (Yan & Berliner, 2011).

There are commonalities in the cultural adaptation patterns of Chinese international students from all around the world, while different host countries could provide quite varied experiences (Ruble & Zhang, 2013). Thus, this study will contribute to advancing the understanding of the experience of Chinese students in the Canadian context. To our best knowledge, identity construction and negotiation process of this community from the standpoint of intergroup relations are limited in the existing body of research (Pak, Dion, & Dion, 1985; Zheng & Berry, 1991). Thus, this thesis aims to fill the gap.

In the next chapter, the researcher will introduce the methods I used to collect and analyze the research data and provide a justification.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter will first introduce the overall methodological approach for investigating the research questions following by the specific data collection techniques and data analysis strategies. For each section, justification will be provided. Then, the researcher will discuss the strategies to assess the trustworthiness of this study and the role of the researcher. Lastly, a detailed research procedure will be presented.

3. 1 Methodological Approach

Different methodological approaches to identity have emerged in the past few decades (Watzlawik & Born, 2007). It seems like scholars have agreed on the fact that there is no “best way” to study identity since different methods hold different assumptions (Kroger, 2007).

The advantages and disadvantages of both qualitative and quantitative methods have frequently been discussed. Quantitative methods employed in identity studies often start with questionnaires (Watzlawik & Born, 2007). Although this methodological approach often provides information about general attributes of identities of a fairly large sample, the drawbacks of this method cannot be neglected (Kroger, 2007). It can be extremely difficult to generate new hypotheses and findings under this approach since questionnaires are pre-formulated and inflexible (Marcia, 2007). Moreover, standardized questionnaires define and measure identities “with more stability that they occur in psychological realities” (Mey, 2007, p. 58).

On the other hand, qualitative methodologies have been commonly used in identity studies. In general, qualitative researchers assume that “there is no single ‘objective truth’ that can be measured” (Kroger, 2007, p. 186). Contrary to the quantitative approach, qualitative methods can better explore the complexity of identity through individual case studies (Kroger, 2007). This

methodological approach provides a more holistic view in exploring the research subjects' experience (Kroger, 2007; Marcia, 2007). It also recognizes the fact that different life experiences of researchers influence the interpretation of research data (Kroger, 2007). Moreover, qualitative methods have been used to investigate the aspects of identity that could not be measured through the quantitative approach (Kroger, 2007).

This study adopted the qualitative approach, for it better addresses the research objectives. One of the goals of this study is to describe the experiences of Chinese international students. The in-depth semi-structured interviews can help generate a rich description of the research data, which enables the researcher and readers to better understand the experience of this community.

3. 2 Data Collection

3. 2. 1 Sampling

De Fina's (2003) work on Mexican immigrants' identity provided a valuable sampling reference for this study. In her research, a total of fourteen participants were recruited, and the findings were fruitful. Likewise, other empirical studies have offered support for a similar size of samples (Hung & Hyun, 2010; Toomey et al., 2013). Therefore, a sample size of sixteen Chinese international students was used in this study.

Particularly, the snowball sampling method was used. Snowball sampling, or chain referral sampling, identifies prospective participants "through referrals made among people who share or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest" (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981, p. 141). Although it has widely been considered effective to recruit hard-to-reach populations (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Noy, 2008; Sadler, Lee, Lim & Fullerton, 2010), the snowball sampling technique itself can also be a "particularly informative procedure" in recruiting research subjects for this research (Noy, 2008, p. 331).

3. 2. 2 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews, as opposed to structured interviews and unstructured interviews, were used in this study. Structured interviews usually aim to produce quantifiable answers, while unstructured interviews have been mostly used in the narrative analysis where a life story needs to be told (Brinkmann, 2013). Semi-structured interviews are based on a set of predetermined open-ended interviewing questions carefully worded and asked through the same sequence, which allow probing questions to emerge in the ongoing conversation between interviewer and interviewee (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Patton, 1990). The semi-structured interview, according to Kvale and Brinkmann (2008), is a form of interview designed for “obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena” (p. 3). Compared to the other two interviewing styles, a semi-structured interview allows the researcher to ask follow-up questions and to fully uncover the topics that are deemed important to the study.

Instead of group interviews, one-on-one interviews were used in this study. The most important reason for choosing individual interviews is because it allows for confidentiality considering the topics could be sensitive. It is easier for interviewees to share their personal stories and honest opinions in a private conversation between the researcher and the interviewee him-or herself, where the atmosphere of “trust and discretion” is better created (Brinkmann, 2013, p. 27). Another reason for choosing one-on-one interviews over focus group is because individual interviews allow the researcher to delve deeper into the participant’s stories and reflections, while group interviews usually fail to do so because of “the public nature of the process” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 315).

As Kroger (2007) stated, identity studies in a qualitative approach often investigate the “phenomenological aspects of the experience in a holistic manner and commonly from the perspective of participants themselves” (p. 186). Phenomenology studies the lived experiences and assumes that the shared experiences can be narrated (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Phenomenological interviewing, as a specific type of in-depth interviewing techniques, consists of three components (Seidman, 2013). The first component should address the past experiences of participants; the second addresses present experience; the third component focuses on the overall descriptions of the interviewee’s experience (Seidman, 2013). To understand the experience of Chinese international students through their narratives, the researcher developed an interview protocol (see Appendix 4) under the guidance of phenomenological interview protocol with the purpose of fully exploring the responses to the research questions.

An in-depth interview is essentially a flexibly structured form of interview that aims at thoroughly probing the responses of the research subjects (Yeo et al., 2014). In the process of an in-depth interview, researchers should use multiple techniques such as follow-up questions to achieve in-depth exploration and explanation of the answers (Yeo et al., 2014). During the semi-structured interviews, interviewers can improvise and invent questions, probes, and other kinds of interventions under the guidance of an active follow-up strategy (Wengraf, 2001).

Following the initial response, multiple probing techniques including detail-oriented probes, elaboration probes, clarification probes and contrast probes can be used to deepen the responses to the interview questions (Patton, 1990). The detail-oriented questions are mainly used to capture the details of an experience by asking who, where, what, when and how (Patton, 1990). Elaboration probes are used when the interviewer wants to keep the respondent talking more about a topic. Verbal cues such as *would you elaborate on that* and nonverbal cues such as gently

head-nodding, sometimes a combination of both, are used to communicate the interviewer's interest in encouraging the interviewee to elaborate (Patton, 1990). Clarification probes should be used naturally and gently when the interviewer needs clarification on the responses that are perhaps ambiguous and not fully understood (Patton, 1990). Last but not least, a contrast probe is used to define the boundaries of a response by making the respondent compare it with other experiences, feelings, or actions. In sum, interviewers should be able to use different probing techniques to increase the data richness, to maintain control of the interview, and to fully explore the opinions, reasons, and concerns that underpin the initial answer which is very likely superficial (Patton, 1990; Yeo et al., 2014).

3. 3 Data Analysis

3. 3. 1 Narrative Analysis

Qualitative approaches to identity often include, but are not limited to narrative identity analysis and semi-structured interview techniques (Watzlawik & Born, 2007). Narrative analysis, as a major trend in identity study, has been employed in a fair amount of research (De Fina, 2003; Faulkner & Hecht, 2011; Georgakopoulou, 2006; Iborra, 2007; Kirk & Wall, 2010; Riessman, 1993; Somers, 1994). Ochs and Capps (1996) defined narrative as “verbalized, visualized, and/or embodied framings of a sequence of actual or possible life events” (p. 19). The prototype of a narrative is a story, which is defined as the narratives that have temporal ordering and unexpected actions with the purpose of communicating a particular interpretation of the teller (De Fina, 2003). Identity is often produced and reproduced in narratives, and narratives have been considered as one of the main components in the process of identity construction (Iborra, 2007; Jenkins, 2014). Thus, to understand the experience of Chinese international

students and to explore the identity construction and negotiation process of this community, a narrative analysis was performed in this study.

There are two main approaches to narrative analysis: sociolinguistic approach and sociocultural approach (Grbich, 2013). The sociolinguistic approach assumes that “it is possible to break down all narratives into units of meaning and to map them in such a way that their common properties will be revealed” (Grbich, 2013, p. 219). The sociocultural approach, on the other hand, sees stories as “complete entities” to reflect the narrator’s life experience and the culture behind it (Grbich, 2013, p. 221). Therefore, research from the sociocultural approach does not segment data into themes or other forms of fragmentation (Grbich, 2013). This study chose the former path. Although it is sometimes criticized for leaving out the impact of power relations and social context (Grbich, 2013), the sociolinguistic approach has yet been a commonly used and effective scheme to help gain insights into the identity issues of cultural groups (De Fina, 2003).

In general, there are four modes of narrative analysis: thematic analysis, structural analysis, interactional analysis, and performative analysis (Riessman, 1993). The thematic analysis emphasizes the content of the research data (Riessman, 1993). Language, in the thematic approach, is viewed as a resource rather than an investigation subject (Riessman, 1993). Researchers adopting this approach categorize the data into groups and try to find common thematic patterns to develop a theory or to improve understanding of the subjects (Riessman, 1993). Structural analysis, on the other hand, investigates language seriously. The narrative devices used by a narrator are thoroughly examined in this analytic approach such as syntactic constructions, referential terms, implicatures and so on (De Fina, 2003; Riessman, 1993). The interactional analysis emphasizes the dialogic process between the speakers, while performative

analysis sees narratives as performances that are practiced by research subjects (Riessman, 1993).

Ideally, a narrative analysis consisting of four above-mentioned analytic approaches can to a large extent explore the identity construction process of research subjects. For example, De Fina (2003) combined the four approaches in her identity study with 14 Mexican immigrants in the United States. Overall, more than 11 perspectives of analysis at three different levels (lexical level, textual level, and interactional level) were performed (De Fina, 2003). Due to the time and paper length constraints, the researcher only performed a thematic analysis in this thesis.

3. 3. 2 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is often considered as a tool to identify, analyze, and report patterns within research data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This analytic approach emphasizes “identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data, that is, themes” (Guest, MacQueen, & Gamey, 2012, p. 10). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the data analysis process usually consists of six phases. Before the actual analysis starts, researchers should spend enough time immersing themselves in the data by repeated reading until able to make sense out of the content (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The second phase is coding the data. Coding consists of separating the interview data into units and developing the categories into which the interview data can be arranged (Guetzkow, 1950). In this phase, Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested that researchers should code for all actual data extracts and every potential theme. For this study, the researcher coded the data manually. After all the data have been coded, the next step is to sort the codes into potential themes. Saldaña (2015) defined a theme as “a phrase or sentence that identifies what a unit of data is about and/or what it means” (p. 140). A group of candidate themes and sub-themes should be created and refined at the end of this phase (Braun &

Clarke, 2006). Then researchers should review the themes to make sure the themes are internally homogeneous and externally heterogeneous (Patton, 1990). It means all the data within one theme should form a coherent pattern, and all the themes should reflect the “the meanings evident in the data set as a whole” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 21). The last two phases are naming the themes and producing the analysis report.

3. 4 Trustworthiness: Credibility, Dependability, Confirmability, and Transferability

This study is a naturalistic inquiry in nature. The naturalistic paradigm, as opposed to the rationalistic paradigm, assumes that the inquirer and the respondent are influenced by each other, and there are multiple realities instead of one single reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Within the naturalistic paradigm, the researcher used the four criteria proposed by Guba and Lincoln (1982) *credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability* to assess the trustworthiness of the study.

Credibility is demonstrated through the question “how vivid and faithful the description of the phenomenon is” (Beck, 1993, p. 264). Dependability refers to the level of stability with the factors of instability and unpredictable changes taken into account (Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In naturalistic paradigm, confirmability is a qualitative definition of objectivity, which refers to the degree to which the interpretation of the data is reliable, factual, confirmable and not biased (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Multiple techniques can be carried out to safeguard the trustworthiness of qualitative research regarding credibility, dependability, and confirmability. These techniques include triangulation, audit trails, peer debriefing, member checks and so on (Guba & Lincoln, 1982).

Ideally, triangulation would enhance the research credibility to a great extent (Guest et al. 2012). If different methods of data collection across different participant groups produce similar

themes, the research results are more credible. However, the sample of this study is relatively small, and it is not practical to compare different methods due to the time constraints. Thus, this study did not include triangulation. Practically, audit trail, deviant case analysis, and attentive translation were used to increase the credibility of this study.

Audit trail requires researchers to keep track of the data analysis process from beginning to end (Guest et al. 2012). It includes recording the rationale of data inclusion and exclusion, the techniques employed to find themes, and the coding checks (Guest et al., 2012). In this study, the researcher used the audit trail techniques as mentioned above to enhance the transparency and credibility of the study.

Deviant case analysis is another commonly used tool to improve credibility by reporting cases that contradict the thematic patterns in an interview dataset (Guest et al., 2012). In this study, the author presented the case that was found not consistent with the narrative patterns. Then, the in-depth exploration and an alternate explanation were presented.

Last but not least, translation issues in this study could be quite challenging, which means the attentive translation may be the most important approach to building up the credibility of this research. Certain translating concerns have been noted in the literature reviewed such as how to faithfully convey the meanings of culture-specific and language-specific metaphors (Larkin, Dierckx de Casterlé, & Schotsmans, 2007; Van Nes, Abma, Jonsson, & Deeg, 2010). In this study, the participants were asked to choose the interview language between English and Mandarin, and Mandarin was very much preferred. Hence, if the translated transcripts cannot accurately reflect the meanings that the participants truly intend to express, the credibility of the study will be intensely undermined. Existing studies have discussed the benefits and downsides of using a single translator and that of using multiple translators (Lopez, Figueroa, Connor, &

Maliski, 2008; Twinn, 1997). However, to protect the confidentiality of the participants, the researcher could only do the translation on her own. To make the translation as accurate as possible, the researcher drew on Brislin's (1970) seven-step translation model to make a verbatim translation (Brislin, 1970; Lopez et al., 2008). The researcher first read the transcripts in Mandarin and made notes, annotations, and emotional expressions which were deemed necessary for the data interpretation. Then, if any questions arose in the translation process, the researcher checked the previous translation and made notes for later revisions. Especially, when language-specific meanings could not be expressed accurately in the target language, equivalences were provided with detailed explanations written down.

Apart from credibility, dependability, and confirmability, transferability of working hypotheses also plays an important part in establishing the trustworthiness of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability depends on the degree of fittingness between the sending and receiving contexts (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The naturalistic paradigm does not attempt to achieve generalizability that will be consistent "in all times and in all places," but to seek the possibility of transfer between contexts (Guba, 1981, p. 81). To assess the fittingness of the qualitative research, several techniques can be used including establishing the typicality of the respondents, checking the representativeness of the data, and examining the fittingness between the research results and the data that the results are generated from (Beck, 1993). Researchers can make the transferability possible by providing the thick descriptive data and the thick description of the context, which allows the potential appliers to make judgements about the fittingness between the earlier and later contexts (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3. 5 Role of Researcher

Scholars have frequently discussed the role of researcher as insider and outsider (Haniff, 1985; Labaree, 2002; Merton, 1972; Ohnuki-Tierney, 1984). Insiders are defined as the members of “specified groups and collectives or occupants of specified social status” (Merton, 1972, p. 21), while outsiders are usually defined as out-groups. In qualitative research, the disadvantages of being an outsider have been noted all the time. For example, Merton (1972) argued that it is difficult for outsiders to truly comprehend the alien societies and cultures. The underlying assumption of his argument is if one does not engage in continuous socialization in the life of research subjects, he or she cannot fully understand their feelings, values, and behaviours and accurately decipher the “nuances of cultural idiom” (Merton, 1972, p. 15). The position of an insider, on the other hand, enables researchers to have the privileged access to and the exclusive knowledge of the target group (Labaree, 2002). In this project, the researcher, a Chinese international student from the University of Ottawa, considered herself as an insider. The position of an insider also makes the data analysis more convincing and adequate since the researcher has shared experiences with and greater access to the research subjects (Labaree, 2002). Moreover, the researcher’s capability to interpret culture-specific cues in the interview data enhances the credibility of the study.

However, the researcher is also aware that being an insider does not guarantee the quality of the research. Certain concerns have been addressed by scholars in the studies of insiderness (Deutsch, 1981; Labaree, 2002; Merton, 1972). The pre-constructed assumptions and the possession of advanced knowledge may undermine the accuracy and objectivity of the researcher’s interpretations (Labaree, 2002). Meanwhile, the familiarity and intimacy with the research subjects may hinder the researcher’s opportunity to gain insights into unnoticed phenomena (Labaree, 2002). To leverage the insiderness and at the same time maintain

objectivity and accuracy, the researcher tried to step back from the familiar phenomena and question her insider knowledge. The researcher is also conscious of the surmise that “the greater the number and variety of group affiliations and statuses distributed among individuals in a society, the smaller, on the average, the number of individuals having precisely the same social configuration” (Merton, 1972, p. 24). Thus, avoiding false assumptions is crucial to building the trustworthiness of this study.

3. 6 Research Procedure

After achieving the ethics approval from the Research Ethics Board of the University of Ottawa, sixteen Chinese international students were recruited through snowball sampling method between December 3, 2017, and December 9, 2017. The recruitment letters (see Appendix 1) were sent to the participants via email. In-depth semi-structured interviews were then conducted with these participants in the form of individual interviews. The interviews were scheduled at the study rooms of Morisset Library, University of Ottawa and lasted between 40 minutes and 85 minutes.

The interviews of 16 participants were completed in one week. Consent forms were signed, and demographic information sheets were filled out on site by the participants. Participants were asked to choose the interview language: English or Mandarin. All of the 16 participants chose Mandarin as the interview language, but one participant answered one of the interview questions in English. In the process of the interviews, the researcher followed the interview protocol to make sure the important aspects of the topic were covered. The interviewees were encouraged to share personal experience and reveal true opinions. After achieving the consent of the participants, the interviews were audio-taped.

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The audio files then were fully transcribed and translated from Mandarin into English by the researcher. Then, the researcher performed the data analysis in six steps (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

An audit trail was used at this stage to ensure the transparency and credibility.

In the next chapter, the researcher will discuss the findings from the interview data.

Chapter 4: Results and Analysis

In this chapter, data findings will be explored through thematic analysis (see Appendix 6 for the coding table). Six themes and a total of nineteen sub-themes emerged from the interview data. Each theme will be supported by direct quotations from the participants. Pseudonyms will be used.

4.1 Participants

The sample consists of 16 Chinese international students studying at two universities in the Ottawa area, the University of Ottawa and Carleton University. Two of the participants are studying at Carleton University, with the rest of them studying at the University of Ottawa. Overall, there were ten female participants and six male participants. Participants ranged from 20 to 32 years of age, with 15 out of 16 participants in the 20-26-year-old range. Eight of the participants were undergraduate students, while seven out of the remaining eight participants were graduate students pursuing master degrees; the sample also includes one doctoral student. Three of the participants are enrolled in the programs taught in French, with the remaining thirteen in English-taught programs. The length of stay in Canada for the participants ranged from 3 months to 6 years, with most participants in the 3-6-year range (Please see demographic information in Appendix 4).

4.2 Theme One: Identity

During the interviews, participants were asked to discuss whether they identify themselves with specific groups and communities and how they describe their identity. The result showed enlightening patterns. Five sub-themes emerged under the theme *Identity*, including *nationality*,

status as a student, personality, common interests, and struggles. The following paragraphs will explore these sub-themes.

4. 2. 1 Sub-theme 1: Nationality

When identifying themselves with certain social groups, participants manifested different perceptions of the importance of underlining nationality. Most of the respondents considered nationality as the indispensable and the most prominent component of their identity. Meagan is a 23-year-old female who is a second-year graduate student in the Department of Communication, University of Ottawa. She recounted that when meeting new friends, she always positioned herself as Chinese. "Because people living here are from different countries and of different ethnicities, which means we all represent our own cultures when we communicate. The more you communicate with people of other ethnicities, the more you belong to Chinese community" said Meagan. Being aware of the existence of the intercultural communication, in this case, reinforces the salience of nationality.

Some participants pointed out that nationality was only important to them when they were still in school. Grace is a 26-year-old female who is a third-year graduate student. She indicated nationality would be no longer important to her when she was in the workplace. "In school, I would emphasize my nationality. After I graduate, I would probably emphasize more my specialty, degrees, and skills" said Grace, who is expecting to graduate this summer.

On the contrary, a few participants stated that nationality was not a must-have in their self-identification. Claire, a 21-year-old undergraduate student of statistics, has been living in Canada for six years since high school. She expressed that only under particular circumstances would she consider nationality as a salient feature. She said,

"I would not shout out, like, 'I'm Chinese,' unless we are talking about specific topics. For example, when someone asked 'are you an international student?' or someone wanted to talk about tuition, or when people were interested in how I managed to live alone in this country."

Leo is a 20-year-old male undergraduate student of electrical engineering, who has also been living in Canada since high school. He explained the reason that nationality was not a priority to him in comparison with other layers of identity. He expressed that,

"I think for the people I have met, they don't care where you are from because Canadians are from everywhere."

Overall, nationality was considered by participants as the building block of their identity. Interestingly, even if all the participants embraced their Chinese nationality and took pride in being Chinese, some participants did not think that nationality played an impactful role in constructing their identity in intercultural communication practice.

4. 2. 2 Sub-theme 2: Status as a student

The data showed that all the participants considered "student" as the predominant theme in the construction of their identity. While appearing in different combinations, such as "a Chinese student," "an international student," "a Chinese international student," "a graduate student," "a nursing student," or in its simplest form "a student," the status as a student was a common theme in the self-identifications of the respondents. Lily is a 24-year-old female student who is in her first year of graduate study. She identified herself as "a Chinese international student," going on to identify herself with multiple sub-groups. She said,

"I'm first a Chinese international student, but I have also identified to several sub-groups, like 'a graduate student,' because graduate students are generally older than undergrads; like 'a married student,' You know, it's because I pay more attention to my family; and like 'a graduate student who has working experience' Anyway, all my identifications are based on the central concept of being 'an international student.'"

Despite the unanimous agreement of "student" as the core concept of their identity, participants expressed different views on the necessity of addressing themselves as "an international student." Neil, a 24-year-old male undergraduate student of electrical engineering, indicated that he identified himself as Chinese and a student. "I just don't think I have to define myself as an international student," said Neil. Sara, a 26-year-old female student of food science and nutrition, expressed the similar thought. "The status of being an international student is not so important to me, being a student is all that matters," said Sara.

The results further showed that participants slightly changed their self-identification in different social settings. "I would introduce myself as an international student at the school, and as a student from the University of Ottawa at the workplace," said Lily.

4. 2. 3 Sub-theme 3: Personality

By asking participants to identify themselves with specific groups or communities, most of them first addressed their nationality or their status as a student. Some respondents then went on to add more details based on different individual experiences. For example, Eric identified himself as a member of the group where people "study very hard but lack social contact with people from other cultural backgrounds." Eric is a 24-year-old male undergraduate student of Finance. In another case, Sara put herself in a category comprising "the Chinese international

students who have lived in Canada for a long time," which distinguished herself from those who just arrived.

A few participants did not identify themselves with any groups or communities. They emphasized personal attributes rather than social categories. Cathy is a 22-year-old female graduate student of communication. "I mean, I am who I am..... Right now, I don't have the urge to identify myself as a Chinese or international student. For me, my personality is important, being Chinese or being an international student is not," said Cathy, the first-year master student who just arrived in Canada three months ago.

Another interesting case is Rachel. She is a 23-year-old female graduate student of French literature. Her program is taught in French. Rachel indicated that she would like people to think of her as "an international person" who is open to making friends with people from any cultural backgrounds.

"I don't think I identify myself with any communities. If I have to, I would probably identify myself as a Québécois, because I speak French and I have lots of friends from Quebec. They have given me so much care, love, and encouragement, even more than my Chinese friends. And they are also, like, a minority in this city, so I chose to support this group and have been trying to fit in..... but I know I'm not a Québécois..... what I'm trying to say is, if I go to another city or country someday, I may find something new, something different again (to identify with) where I'm from is never important to me."

4. 2. 4 Sub-theme 4: Common interests

In addition to nationality, status as a student, and personality, the data results showed participating in interest groups contributed to participants' identity construction. During the interviews, it has been noticed that sharing the common interests and hobbies, working together

as a group, and studying in the programs taught by French all have an impact on how participants described their identity. Grace, a fan of Korean culture, indicated "I identify myself with a fan community who loves Korean culture. I watch Korean soaps, listen to K-pop and I love Korean food. Korean culture is, like, all around my life."

Participants also recognized that shared experiences played a part in forming their identity. Selena is a 21-year-old female undergraduate student who is in the Nursing program. In her third year, Selena worked in the Ottawa Hospital as a student nurse with several fellow students from her program. She said,

"I'm a Chinese international student, other than that, I also identify myself as a nursing student..... we worked as a group in the hospital, five or six of us, and we became very close. We speak the 'language' only we can understand. We share those experience that only we can relate to."

Participants who study in the programs taught in French, such as Rachel and Ryan, identified themselves as the minority. Ryan is a 24-year-old male graduate student who is in the Communication program, which is taught in French. He expressed that,

"I'm a graduate student in a program taught in French. I feel like I'm in a minority because I'm different from most people in the Chinese community, which makes me feel lonely sometimes."

Both respondents identifying themselves as Francophone indicated that language and the awareness of being in the minority could affect identity construction. For example, Ryan said,

"Sometimes, I identify myself as a Francophone, someone who speaks French. Another word I would use is 'Francophile,' means being friendly and emotionally"

closer to French and people who speak French..... I think I would just put myself in this category. I like hanging out with people who speak French. I have friends from North Africa and Arabian countries. Talking to them makes me feel relaxed.”

4. 2. 5 Sub-theme 5: Struggles

During the interviews, some participants indicated they identified with both Chinese culture and Canadian culture. These respondents also pointed out that they were trying to find a balance between the two cultures. Ginny is a 22-year-old female undergraduate student of finance and used to work for the International Office. She said,

“There is a circle of Chinese and a circle of Canadian. I think I belong to the part where two circles overlap. I wish I can embrace both, but it turned out I'm neither..... Canada has some really good perspectives that I identify with, such as attitudes to romantic relationships. However, I don't think I can ever do it because I'm Chinese and traditional Chinese values would always be in my blood..... On the other hand, it is not until I came here that I realized for the first time that I know so little about China. For example, when people are interested in Chinese culture, like Chinese brush painting, and want you to introduce it to them, it suddenly struck me that I knew so nothing about my own culture..... The bright side is that it makes me have more respect for Chinese culture.”

Some participants discussed how studying abroad had been exercising an influence on their identity. Harper is a 23-year-old female graduate student who studies Public Administration. She mentioned that when she talked to her friends in China, she felt they had developed different ways of thinking.

"This is the moment when I realized how my experience of studying abroad had changed me. I felt that my identity as an international student stands out and becomes visible."

More participants recounted their experience of identity struggles. "When I went back home, I found I don't have any friends in China," said Jeremy, a 24-year-old male undergraduate student of computer science, who has lived in Canada for five years. Likewise, Rachel indicated "I feel distant from China because I have some real friends here, and that helps me find my place in this society." For these Chinese students, even though they still identify themselves as Chinese, they have become less emotionally attached to their home country.

On the other hand, some unpleasant voices from their own country made these Chinese students feel somewhat abandoned. "They would say something like 'oh you deserved it' when some negative news came out about international students or Canada," said Rachel.

4. 3 Theme Two: Intercultural Friendships

The interviews have uncovered rich information on how participants experienced and perceived intercultural friendships. Participants were asked to talk about their social life and reflect on their intercultural relationships in multiple interview questions. The following sub-themes emerged in the interview data: *Factors*, *Stepping out of the comfort zone*, *English as a Second Language (ESL)*.

4. 3. 1 Sub-theme 1: Factors

During the interviews, participants discussed four major factors that affected their intercultural friendships: cultural background, language barriers, shared interests, and personality.

Among the four major factors that participants considered as influencing their intercultural friendships, cultural background was the most mentioned and believed to have the greatest impact. Participants were quick to acknowledge that they had a hard time finding conversation topics since they grew up watching different TV shows and movies, listening to different types of music and eating different food. For example, Lily recalled her experience of chatting with a Non-Chinese friend.

"If she starts to talk about the movie stars and pop singers she likes, I might never have heard about them..... so the topics we can talk about is limited, and I have the feeling she is changing topics to make me less awkward."

In fact, respondents admitted that even if they managed to find a topic to start the conversation, the participants in the conversation might have different perspectives. For example, Jimmy, the 32-year-old male doctoral student of earth science, remarked that cultural differences between him and his friends resulted in different perspectives when they engaged in a conversation.

"Sometimes I talked about the things happening in China, but their responses were often not what I had expected. For example, when I talk to Chinese students about 11.11, their reaction would be like 'Oh I ordered, I spent, what about you.' While my Canadian friends seemed to be more concerned with the fact that Chinese are so crazy spending billions shopping in one day."

On the other hand, participants acknowledged that different eating habits and choices of entertainment have a significant impact on intercultural friendships. Most participants indicated

they did not enjoy going to pubs and drinking; instead, they preferred staying at home playing board games or having dinner together at a restaurant.

Regarding food preferences, the results showed the respondents preferred Chinese food when dining out. Some participants indicated they had tried introducing Chinese food to their friends, but they seemed not to take it very well. Food is an important cultural marker that influences both personal and social identity construction of individuals, especially in intercultural settings (Fischler, 1988; Happel, 2012). Happel (2012) argued that group members use references to food as shared practical identities, including food preparation traditions and culinary preferences, to achieve positive group distinctiveness. In this study, the interview data showed that food preferences impacted the participants' effort to build intercultural friendships with Canadian students and other international students.

Language barriers were reported to be another huge influencing factor that inhibited participants' attempt to develop intercultural friendships. Participants were quick to acknowledge that deficient language skills remained a long-standing problem even though they have lived in Canada for years. Their language skills, according to some respondents, were barely enough for them to handle lectures, course assignments, and simple daily conversations. When it comes to making friends with natives and other international students, a lot of participants expressed that their language abilities were not enough for them to have a casual conversation or to express themselves naturally. "I couldn't understand the inside jokes they made, so I was just sitting there embarrassed and didn't know what to do," said Cathy.

Also, participants believed having shared interests was important in building intercultural friendships and sometimes helped overcome the difficulties brought by cultural difference and language barriers. Harper talked about her friendship with an African Canadian student in the

interview. "She follows K-pop, Japanese bands, and Taiwanese soap operas, so we hit it off," said Harper. Another respondent, Lily, described her experience of joining a choir. "When I was in the choir, music is my language. I don't have to talk to people. Even if I have to, we talk about music which is we are both interested in..... It was a wonderful experience" said Lily. Likewise, the 24-year-old undergraduate student, Eric, detailed his experience of meeting friends by playing online video games such as Defense of the Ancients (DOTA).

Eric also recalled the experience of joining a table tennis club but admitted "what happened in the table tennis court stayed on the court and didn't go further." Although having shared interests suggested a good start for these students to develop intercultural friendships, how to extend the bonds to daily life was identified as a big challenge. Another interviewee discussed the similar experience. Ryan described that,

"I couldn't find opportunities to hang out with them except for playing basketball. Maybe, for them, if we met by playing basketball, then we should only play basketball together. Like, there is no point hanging out outside the basketball court."

In addition to cultural differences, language barriers, and common interests, participants also pointed out that personality played an important role in fostering intercultural friendships. They indicated the compatibility of personality, also noted as interpersonal attraction, impacted the likelihood of two people becoming friends. "If we hit it off right away, we can be friends," said Neil.

4. 3. 2 Sub-theme 2: Stepping out of the comfort zone

Participants used "comfort zone" to describe the situation that they felt more comfortable interacting with "insiders." During the interview, participants reflected on their social experience

and went on to express that stepping out of their comfort zone was crucial to personal development.

On the one hand, participants believed a lack of communication with Canadians and other international students limited their networks. Thus, overcoming cultural and language barriers and developing meaningful intercultural friendships were considered necessary for developing a successful network and gaining access to more job opportunities. When asked to discuss the importance of keeping in touch with the people who do not belong to the Chinese community, Harper indicated,

"It's important because you need to build a network and Canadians have more resources. You may get references if you are friends. That's kind of selfish thought, but also a win-win situation."

Likewise, Jimmy indicated Chinese were in the minority in the country, which means it would not be easy to make a living from only this community. He admitted "some people did it, but I don't think I can. So, I need to reach out."

Many participants stated they preferred to work in a Canadian organization rather than working with Chinese. Participants expressed that building interpersonal relationships with colleagues in the workplace also required them to step out of their comfort zone. "I'm not making any effort to blend in right now, but I have to be social if I start working," said Sara.

On the other hand, stepping out of their comfort zone was considered important because it helped increase participants' visibility in the society and make their study-abroad experience worthy. Meagan stated that the more she communicated with Canadians and people from other countries, the more visibility she had in the society. Ryan who worked part-time in the Human Resources department of the University of Ottawa described his experience.

"After hanging out with my Chinese friends for the whole weekend, it reassured me the fact I was in Canada when I saw my Canadian colleagues on Monday morning."

Respondents expressed that if they only communicated with Chinese, it made no difference from staying at home. "I don't want the studying abroad experience to be worthless," said Leo.

4. 3. 3 Sub-theme 3: English as a Second Language (ESL) program in establishing intercultural friendships

ESL in Canada usually refers to the program that helps students who are not native English speakers improve their language skills so that they can meet the language requirements when they enter an academic program. The participants who took ESL courses acknowledged that they were able to make friends with fellow international students from other countries in ESL classrooms. Selena indicated that ESL was the place where she could make real friends. She said,

"I met some Japanese exchange students in ESL. In my class, about fifteen out of twenty are Japanese, they were extremely nice, and we became very close. I felt terribly alone the moment they went back to Japan."

Participants went on to suggest that ESL created more opportunities for meaningful interpersonal communication. Sara recounted that she took ESL courses three times a week in the same classroom with the same teacher, and it was a small class where students had more interactions with each other. She expressed that,

"In a lecture with hundreds of students, I could hardly find the opportunities to talk to others, let alone make friends with them."

Some participants also acknowledged that ESL made them realize the significance of intercultural communication. For example, Leo recalled his ESL experience in high school as "eye-opening."

"My classmates were from all around the world, like China, Korea, Brazil. The teacher gave the assignments that highlighted culture differences. I remember once we were asked to introduce our own language to the class, and I was so shocked by what others presented. I realized for the first time that my knowledge of other cultures is so little and superficial. I realized that as an international student, I should try to be more 'international.' Then I started making friends with them, sharing my thoughts with them, and trying to listen to others more than myself."

4. 4 Theme Three: Teacher-Student Relationships

During the interviews, participants were asked to reflect on their experience of teacher-student relationships. The following sub-themes emerged under this theme: *lack of communication, different cultural perspectives in the classroom, identity-related tolerance and encouragement.*

4. 4. 1 Sub-theme 1: Lack of communication

During the interviews, participants admitted a lack of communication with teachers in their experience of studying abroad. Class size was considered as one of the barriers to active communication by some participants. For example, Sara said,

"I rarely talked to the teachers when it's a lecture which is a big size class with hundreds of students in the room, and I rarely asked questions. But I did talk to the professors from my department and asked them questions."

The perception of the student-teacher relationship also influenced participants' experience. Ginny, the 22-year-old undergraduate student, indicated that she felt distanced from teachers. "I don't think it's about language or culture. Our relationship is more like boss and employee" said Ginny.

Although a few interviewees expressed that they did not think keeping in touch with the teachers was necessary, most of the respondents were quick to acknowledge that they should make more effort to communicate with teachers. For example, Meagan, the 23-year-old master candidate who is writing a research paper, indicated "I'm not a proactive person, so I don't meet my supervisor too often. But I do feel it's helpful to have more communication with teachers because only when you are happy with the relationship, you have motivations to do well in that course".

4. 4. 2 Sub-theme 2: Culturally different perspectives in the classroom reinforce self-identification

Some graduate student participants reflected on their experience and indicated that the graduate seminar was a culturally diverse environment where various perspectives emerged in group discussion. The respondents pointed out that in fact, international students were in the majority in their classes while Canadian natives were in the minority. Meagan indicated there was a total of 20 students from 11 to 13 different countries in one of her seminars. Some participants stated that they experienced identity salience when the professor and other students had limited knowledge of the culturally specific topic they presented. For instance, Meagan described her experience in a seminar presentation.

"It's a seminar, and my paper is about the 11.11. The professor never heard of it and commented 'so novel and original.' You know, for me, the 11.11 is a huge thing that has been going on for years; but for him, it's a fresh topic. It was the moment that I realized my identity is noticeable."

As a result, some participants came to acknowledge that they realized the importance of the intercultural communication and thus showed more respect to not only other cultures but their own culture.

4. 4. 3 Sub-theme 3: Identity-related tolerance and encouragement

During the interviews, a few participants indicated they experienced discrimination from their teachers. However, they pointed out that they had taken it as an accidental episode since most of the teachers were friendly. Ginny recalled her unpleasant experience of being discriminated against by her ESL teacher.

"He always had complaints. I think he discriminated against international students, especially Chinese students. But I supposed it's a problem of his character. It was not always happening."

Another participant who noted discrimination is Ryan. He indicated this perceived unfairness caused him extreme mental stress. He said,

"It was extremely rare, but sometimes I felt I was being discriminated against in a very subtle way. I think it's because of my language ability, not because I'm an international student or I'm Chinese. It made me so stressed and miserable like I should be ashamed of myself because my French is not as good as others."

On the other hand, some participants who recalled the experience of discrimination indicated that they had experienced it in a good way. The participants acknowledged that the teachers showed more tolerance and gave more encouragement because of their identity. Leo described his experience and suggested that the teacher showed more tolerance towards him regarding the academic requirements because he is an international student.

"There was one course that I have taken twice. I got a very low score for the report assignment the first time I took it, so I dropped it. Then the second time, I got a higher score, even higher than some of my Canadian classmates. I felt that the teacher was lowering the grading standards on purpose for me because I don't think the thing I wrote has met his expectations."

Although some participants felt they were "taking advantage of" their identity, most of them indicated they were pretty happy about it and considered the teachers as "nice and caring." For example, Jimmy told the story about his Ph.D. qualifying exam, indicating he was thankful that his supervisor "took care of him."

"Ph.D. candidates need to take a qualifying exam usually at the end of the first year. My boss agreed to postpone the exam until my second year because he figured I need more time to adjust and improve my language skills."

Some respondents noted that they received encouragement from their teachers. For instance, Harper acknowledged that some professors in her program tended to be more tolerant and encouraging because she was Chinese. Harper is a 23-year-old master candidate in the Public Administration program taught by French. Most Chinese international students are in the programs taught in English. The participants who were in the programs taught in French, such as

Harper, Rachel, and Ryan, indicated that they always found themselves to be the "only Chinese in the class." Harper indicated the encouragement enabled her to achieve better academic performance. She said,

"For example, they would say something like 'you are doing very well considering you are Chinese.' Or, some teachers would add a note in the paper reviews, such as 'cheer up!' It was heartwarming."

Similarly, the third-year nursing student, Selena, recalled the conversation happened between her and her first lab teacher. She expressed that if teachers demonstrated caring and showed an understanding of her situation, her anxiety and stress would be reduced.

"I was so stressed after my first lab session because I couldn't understand what she was saying. She talked very fast with lots of heavy medical terminologies. I went to her after class and talked to her about how I felt. She said something I will never forget. She said, 'you are not alone, you are not the first international student I had, you know. Please talk to me if you have questions and concerns'. That meant a lot to me."

4. 5 Theme Four: Classmate Relationships

During the interviews, participants were asked to discuss the experience of communicating and interacting with their classmates. The theme *Classmate Relationships* is organized into three sub-themes to reveal the reflection of participants: *overall experience, reflections and reasons*, and *group work*.

4. 5. 1 Sub-theme 1: Overall experience

Most participants indicated that the relationships with their Canadian classmates and international students from other countries were positive but not intimate. Participants acknowledged that they were more likely to develop close friendships with their Chinese classmates. Most communication and interactions with their non-Chinese classmates, according to the participants, occurred only in the classroom. Participants also pointed out that even if they had managed to make friends with the classmates from other countries, their friendships either stayed at a superficial level or ended up being "Facebook friends" and "Instagram friends" after one or two years.

4. 5. 2 Sub-theme 2: Reflections and reasons

The data showed participants had different reflections on the reasons for the circumstances as mentioned above.

For participants who were in the program like Electrical Engineering where the number of Chinese international students is relatively significant, communicating with Chinese was considered more "accessible" and less "demanding." Leo and Neil are both seniors of Electrical Engineering; they indicated that they chose to do most of the academic activities with Chinese peers including presentations, research projects, homework, and the study for finals. "If I could find a few Chinese who I actually knew in that class, I just wouldn't bother spending more energy to know other people; if none of my Chinese friends were taking the course, then I would have to team up with other students," said Neil. Leo also indicated he was more likely to hang out and bond with his Chinese peers after class.

For participants who are pursuing graduate studies, the lack of communication and interactions with students from other countries was considered partly due to the fewer commonalities among the students. The backgrounds of graduate students are usually more

diverse in terms of age, professions and social roles. For instance, Harper indicated that some of her classmates were much older than her and had jobs in the government which "makes it kind of unrealistic to see them often after class."

Most participants attributed the lack of communication with non-Chinese classmates to cultural difference. Some respondents indicated that they had tried to hang out with their non-Chinese classmates after class but felt like an "outsider." For instance, Lily reflected on her experience of trying to "fit in" and indicated the conversation topics between her and her classmates were mostly about cultural differences.

"I used to go to the Royal Oaks to have a drink with my classmates after class on Wednesday evening. And soon I realized that what we were talking about is mostly cultural differences, like 'I have been to your country and my experience is.....'. These are pretty good warm-ups. But if you keep talking about it, the topic will be exhausted very soon. As the conversation goes, I felt like an 'outsider' and tired. Finally, I stopped going."

In addition to cultural difference, some participants indicated language barriers, different choices of lifestyle and recreation activities also posed challenges to their relationship building effort. For example, Ginny noted her not enjoying pubs and parties caused a big problem because most of her classmates would choose to go to a pub or party when they wanted to hang out. Likewise, Jeremy admitted that he never thought about going out with his classmates because "I have no idea what they like and what they do."

A few participants indicated that their expectations about the relationships with their non-Chinese classmates were different from that with Chinese peers. For example, Eric stated he labelled friendship in different ways. "The friends I made in class are those who I can have an

academic discussion with," said Eric. Similarly, Ginny referred to her classmates as the friends who she could "do homework together" and "do group work together," not as the friends who she could "eat together after class."

Nevertheless, some participants pointed out that even back in China, their relationships with classmates could not be considered as "close," either. Lily indicated she built close friendships mostly with the members of the clubs she joined. She expressed that,

"When I was an undergrad, most of my friends were from the clubs. My classmates and my roommates were always like 'come and go,' but I saw my club members all the time for four years, so it made sense that I was closer to them."

Another challenge identified by the respondents is the existing exclusive friend circles. For instance, Meagan indicated that she felt kind of embarrassed and isolated when she suddenly joined the group. "It's awkward even if it's a Chinese group" said Meagan.

Rachel is the only one, of the sixteen participants, to state that she preferred hanging out with her non-Chinese classmates than Chinese. Rachel attributed it to her personality.

"I like going out with my Canadian classmates because they didn't make me feel that we had to go very close to each other like we have to do everything together because we are friends. I don't know why but Chinese students like groups and they always stick together."

Institutional barriers were indicated by some participants as hindering their ability to form friendships with classmates. Participants acknowledged that it was challenging for them to develop friendships with their classmates because everyone had a different schedule and most of them did not live together. Cathy, the 22-year-old graduate student, indicated meeting once a

week with limited communication in the classroom was far not enough to build meaningful relationships. Lily also added "it is businesslike and everyone wants efficiency. So, it is hard to develop a personal relationship."

4. 5. 3 Sub-theme 3: Group work

Some participants indicated group work provided them with more opportunities to communicate with their classmates and form friendships. Even though a few participants suggested it would be easier and more comfortable working with their Chinese friends, most respondents admitted that group projects were the best chance for them to encounter non-Chinese students and make new friends. However, Sara indicated although group work contributed to classmate relationships and intercultural friendship building, the duration of group work was "too short to build a long-term relationship."

4. 6 Theme Five: Communicating with Canadians

Participants were asked to reflect on their experience communicating with Canadians. To better understand their experience, three sub-themes emerged from the interview data: *overall impression, struggling to make friends, understanding the importance of intercultural contact.*

4. 6. 1 Sub-theme 1: Overall experience

During the interviews, participants agreed that their experience with Canadians was overall positive. Many participants considered themselves to be lucky because most of the Canadians they had met were nice. "Maybe I'm lucky or insensitive for this kind of thing, but I've never met Canadians who were just terrible or racist," Said Harper. Similarly, Jimmy indicated that he was "grateful" for having only met nice Canadians. Selena told the story of how she started dorm life with her three Canadian roommates.

"I was so scared that I might be excluded from their circle because my roommates were all Canadians. But it turned out they were super nice, and we became very close. They helped me a lot. One of them participated in an exchange program and went to Hong Kong. I was excited because I couldn't help wondering I might have some influence on her decision."

While most participants identified the overall experience as "positive," some participants indicated they had the unpleasant experience of being discriminated against. Two female students reported they had been cursed out with horrible language. Sara told the story of her being treated aggressively by a homeless man.

"I was insulted by a homeless man when I was waiting for the bus. He wanted some money, and I told him I didn't have any cash on me. He told me that there was an ATM right across the street and asked if I can get some for him. I said, 'sorry, but my bus is coming.' And he said, 'Fucking Chinese bitch.' I was so pissed off and started arguing with him. I think I was being discriminated against because I'm Chinese."

Another participant, Rachel, described her unpleasant experience in a coffee shop. She indicated the experience made her realize she was an outsider.

"I was in Second Cup doing my homework, and a man came over, said something horrible to me. I was shocked and scared. But someone came to me immediately and told him to stop. I felt helpless and weak and didn't know what to do because I'm alone and I'm a girl. It was the time that I realized I was an outsider."

Eric, the 24-year-old male student, recalled the experience of being taken advantage of by his landlord but indicated it could be his conjecture.

"I had the feeling that my previous landlord wasn't treating me in the way that he should be because he thought Chinese was too shy to speak out for themselves. He might take advantage of that, my identity."

4. 6. 2 Sub-theme 2: Struggling to make friends

Many participants indicated they had only a few Canadian friends while some indicated that they did not have Canadian friends at all. "It's strange that I don't have a lot of Canadian friends because they seem so nice, polite, and welcoming," said Ryan.

Participants identified the cultural differences between themselves and their Canadian peers as a primary barrier to forming friendships. For instance, Sara noted that it was "even difficult to make friends with CBC (Chinese born in Canada), so it's not only about language, it's the way you think, your lifestyles, and personality. You are always feeling you are not fitting in."

Some participants indicated that they had fewer opportunities to meet Canadians outside of university than to meet their Chinese peers. For instance, Grace indicated "if you don't go to parties, then you don't get a lot of chances to meet them face-to-face." A few participants admitted that they were worried they couldn't fit in even if they went to a party. Another participant, Ginny, expressed that the classroom was the only setting she could encounter Canadians. "I don't know what kind of activities or events I can participate in to meet locals," said Ginny.

Also, several participants indicated that they were not motivated to make friends with their Canadian peers because they had enough friends from the Chinese international student community. "Because the Chinese international students are a big group in quantity, so you will always find someone to hang out with. So, if I think I already have enough friends, I don't have the energy to make friends with Canadians," said Jeremy.

While participants indicated they had struggles to make friends with Canadians, their friendships with other international students and the immigrants seemed to progress well. Most participants reported they had formed friendships with international students from other countries. Some respondents indicated sharing the identity of “outsider” made them bond with each other. For instance, Lily reflected on her friendships with two international students from the Middle East countries.

"We are both from a foreign culture, so it would be easier for us to communicate. We both have the 'outsider' identity in ourselves, and the commonality of our identity makes us become friends."

Several participants indicated international students and immigrants tended to be more open to Chinese culture and lifestyle. On the contrary, they found natives to be "somewhat resistant" to the foreign cultures. For instance, Ginny described the experience of working with international students at the International Office of the University of Ottawa.

"I think my colleagues were open to communicate, to truly accept Chinese culture and bring it into their lives. While for some natives I know, they are not as open as you might expect. That's the problem."

Furthermore, an interesting pattern was found in the interviews that participants always emphasized their friends' ethnic origins instead of nationalities. Participants acknowledged that Canada was a country of immigrants and Canadians' multiple cultural identities played an important role in the intercultural communication. During the interviews, many participants addressed their friends' origin cultures even if they were Canadian citizens. For example, Megan indicated she always introduced her roommates as "Latin American Canadian," while

Lily noted that when she talked about her "Cote d'Ivoire friend," she was actually referring to a Canadian who has Cote d'Ivoire background.

4. 6. 3 Sub-theme 3: Understanding the importance of intercultural contact

During the interviews, participants were asked if they thought keeping in touch with the people who do not belong to their community was important to them. Most participants gave an affirmative answer.

Some participants indicated that they defined the communication with Canadians as intercultural communication. For instance, Meagan reflected on her experience and noted that intercultural communication was the most prominent label on the relationships with her Canadian friends.

"We belong to different communities, so for what I understand, our communication is intercultural communication. This is how I define our relationship."

Many participants considered communicating with Canadians as an opportunity to eliminate misunderstanding and bias, and for themselves to become more culturally competent. For instance, Grace described her experience of making friends with a Muslim student from Canada.

"Before I came to Canada, I always thought of extremist when I heard the word, Islam. Then I made friends with some Muslims and realized they are no different from me. I have learned to understand and respect cultural diversity."

Furthermore, several participants indicated they wished to change the stereotypes of Chinese through intercultural communication. For instance, Grace stated she wanted to crush stereotypes of Chinese girls being materialistic, easy and shy.

Besides, many participants indicated keeping in touch with Canadians was also for practical concerns, such as network and language acquisition. When asked about plans after graduation, most of the respondents expressed the intention to stay and find a career in Canada and work with Canadians instead of Chinese. Participants were aware that developing a Canadian network would help them achieve their career goals. Some participants also acknowledged the advantage of making friends with Canadians in overcoming the language barriers. For instance, Selena, the third-year nursing student, indicated her profession required strong language skills, so she needed to practice English with her "non-Chinese friends" more often.

While most participants indicated communicating with Canadians helped them better integrate into the host society, a few expressed that they would not force themselves to fit in if it meant they had to be dragged out of their comfort zone. "I was really worried that I might not be able to fit in before I came here. But then I realized I don't have to fit in if it made me uncomfortable" said Cathy.

4. 7 Theme Six: In-group relationships: Chinese Community

During the interviews, participants reflected on their experience with the members of the Chinese community. Two sub-themes were uncovered: *Chinese international students and immigrants*, and *Sense of belonging*.

4. 7. 1 Sub-theme 1: Chinese international students and immigrants

When asked about the experience of communicating with the community that they identified themselves with, some participants acknowledged that they sensed some tensions between the Chinese international student group and Chinese immigrants who had lived in the country for years. Harper described her experience with both groups and expressed her concerns.

"Personally, I think Chinese international students and Chinese immigrants had some misunderstandings toward each other and sometimes even looked down their noses at each other. Chinese immigrants were like 'you students know nothing about Canada,' and students were like, 'god knows what dirty tricks you played to get here.' You know, a lot of Chinese immigrants work in restaurants and are considered having a lower social status. Some Chinese international students think they damaged the image of the Chinese community."

Ryan joined a volleyball club and a dragon boat team organized by the Chinese immigrant community. He indicated "these people are very nice and they are trying to live a fuller life. I'm always happy to be with them." However, Ryan also acknowledged that many Chinese immigrants held stereotypes of international students such as having a rich family and coming to Canada at a young age.

4. 7. 2 Sub-theme 2: Sense of belonging

Many respondents stated the in-group communication gave them a sense of belonging. For example, Ginny indicated that her Chinese friends made her feel less lonely and more rooted in the society. Some participants also indicated in-group communication provided a sense of safety. Meagan reflected on her intercultural friendships, indicating that her friendships with Chinese tended to be more stable, thus making her feel more "secure." She said,

"Last year I had the feeling that I kind of drifted apart, so I started to try to reach more Chinese consciously. Other international students, or even Canadians, they might go to other cities or countries for their career, while most of the Chinese students would choose to stay. So, our relationships would be more stable, and our friendships last longer."

Cathy expressed that communication with Chinese helped her better adjust to the new environment and overcome the emotional insecurity.

"China is not a culturally diverse country, so it was challenging for me to communicate with locals when I arrived. Talking to Chinese helped me ease the insecurity. Just seeing a Chinese face made me feel warm."

"Feeling familiar and warm" was also constantly found in participants' narration. Some participants compared their Chinese friends to "family." Meagan indicated "even though I had some close non-Chinese friends, I can't celebrate Chinese New Year with them. No matter how long I have lived here, Christmas is never as important as Chinese New Year to me. These traditions brought us together as a family."

4. 8 Summary

In sum, this chapter analyzed the findings from the interview data and presented six themes, namely *identity*, *intercultural friendships*, *teacher-student relationships*, *classmate relationships*, *communicating with Canadians*, and *in-group relationships: Chinese Community*. Nineteen sub-themes were explored under the six main themes. In the next chapter, I will discuss the findings and address the research questions.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter includes two parts. The first part will address the first two research questions: **1.**

How do Chinese international students in Canada construct and negotiate identities A)

when they interact with Canadians; B) when they interact with the members of their community.

2. How do Chinese international students in Canada construct and negotiate identities C) when

they interact with teachers; D) when they interact with peer students. The second part will

address the research question **How does the understanding of the identity construction and**

negotiation of Chinese international students help improve international education in

Canadian universities?

5. 1 Research Question 1 & 2

How do Chinese international students in Canada construct and negotiate identities when they interact with Canadians/the members of their community/teachers/peer students?

For the first part of the discussion, I will reorganize the research questions and findings to offer a thorough exploration of the interview data. Social identity theory and Ting-Toomey's (1999, 2005) identity negotiation theory will be used as the theoretical perspectives to provide a better understanding of the experience of Chinese international students.

5. 1. 1 Identity Domains The first assumption of Ting-Toomey's (2005) identity negotiation theory is: "In order to understand the person with whom you are communicating, you need to understand the identity domains that she or he deems salient" (p. 219). In this study, participants strongly valued their student identity above and beyond any other identity domains. Ethnic identity is another important identity domain participants deemed salient in their everyday

intercultural encounters. Participants also appreciated personal identities that denote their unique personal attributes and multiple group-based identities.

Throughout the interviews, it became clear that the identity domains that participants deemed salient were constantly changing in a variety of interaction situations. Hence, ethnic identity was not always deemed salient in intercultural encounters; in a like manner, the student identity was negotiated in different ways in intergroup encounters.

To decide which domain of identity should be evoked in the interaction, participants first evaluated and defined the interaction situation. Ethnic identity, which is, in this case, the Chinese nationality, was usually perceived as salient by participants if they were aware that the communication activities took place in intercultural situations.

However, the complexity of everyday encounters determined even if in intercultural situations, the salience of ethnic identity may be challenged and modified. For instance, some participants indicated ethnic identity was deemed salient only when they were in school. Believing the workplace to be a less culturally diverse environment than the university campus, participants attempted to downscale the salience of ethnic identity and evoke other domains of identity such as person-based identities at the workplace. Furthermore, participants had different perceptions about how other communicators in the intercultural encounter perceived their desired identity, which also influenced the identity negotiation process. For instance, participants deemed their ethnic identity less salient if they assumed other communicators in the intercultural encounter did not see ethnic identity as an influencing factor.

Being in the bigger student community consisting of individuals of different ages, genders, ethnicities, education levels and so on, participants negotiated their student identity in different ways while communicating with their perceived out-group members in daily encounters. For

participants in this study, considering themselves as an international student and a Chinese student was the most common ways of negotiating their student identity. While negotiating their student identity, each participant demonstrated a unique pattern which was shaped by their distinguishable individual factors. Nevertheless, this study found some participants tended to disconnect themselves from the international student group. According to the social identity theory, if the group membership does not contribute to a positive social identity, the individual will choose to leave the group and seek new memberships. For participants in this study, physically leaving the international student group is impossible; thus, they chose to emotionally disconnect themselves from the group to maintain their desired social identity.

According to social identity theory, achieving positive group distinctiveness is the expected outcome of the psychological sequence of social categorization-social identity-social comparison (Tajfel, 1982b). Throughout the interviews, participants added distinguishable attributes to their perceived group memberships to achieve a group distinctiveness. For example, participants used defining attributes to describe their perceived group identities such as “a group where people study very hard but lack social contact with people from other cultural backgrounds” or “the Chinese international students who have lived in Canada for a long time.” To identify themselves with such groups, participants distinguished themselves from the socially active Chinese students and the newcomer Chinese students. However, this seems to challenge social identity theory since participant’s categorization did not always lead to positive group distinctiveness. In the first example, the participant reflected on his social life and indicated the lack of intercultural contact was something he was struggling to change. In other words, the identification did not help produce positive comparisons and high-esteem. One possible explanation is that because the identity construction was not based on culturally derived value-laden attributes. According to

Tajfel and Turner (1979), the positive group identity, which is the ultimate goal of social comparison, was attained by comparing to other groups in terms of culturally derived value-laden characteristics. The participant did not consider “lacking intercultural contact” as a culturally derived attribute, thus not attempting to achieve positive group distinctness through the identification.

In their research on international student identity, Tran and Gomes (2016) proposed that many international students considered themselves “cosmopolitan and international” because they saw themselves in mobile and transient circumstances and aspired to global mobility (p. 6). In this study, however, though participants considered themselves in transient circumstances, most of them did not express the aspirations of global mobility. Two out of sixteen participants did not consider themselves belonging to any ethnic community, but only one of them considered herself as international and embraced a dynamic and changing identity. To explain the circumstances, several factors need to be taken into consideration including the participants’ motivations for studying overseas and their intercultural adjustment patterns. When asked about the reasons of pursuing education in Canada, participants indicated multiple factors, including the fierce competition in The National Higher Education Entrance Examination at the home country (commonly known as Gaokao), Canada’s high-quality education, the wish to explore new cultures, and the intention for immigration after graduation. When asked about their plans after graduation, most participants indicated the intentions to either stay in Canada working and settling down or go back to China. For participants who intended to pursue a career and immigrate after completing their education and who planned to go back to their home country, it made sense they did not aspire to global mobility. On the other hand, the interviews data indicated most participants were more attached to their ethnic identity and struggling with the

difficulties in engaging in meaningful intercultural interactions, which offered another possible explanation of why they did not consider themselves “international.”

Except for ethnic identity and student identity, participants also developed group-based identities that are based on common interests and shared experiences. Two group-based identities were uncovered throughout the interviews, including workgroup identity and fan group identity. For the participant who worked as a student nurse together with her fellow students in the Ottawa Hospital, the workgroup identity was derived from the knowledge of her membership of the practice nurse group and the emotional significance attached to it. The workgroup identity also reinforced the participant’s nursing student identity which distinguished her from other student groups. South Korea’s pop culture, also known as Korean Wave, hit China and Southeast Asian countries in the late 1900s and soon started a fever in Japan in the early 2000s. In the past few years, K-pop culture has expanded beyond Asia and started to storm the world with numerous fan groups forming all over the world (Kim & Ryoo, 2007; Sung, 2014). For the participant who categorized herself into the Korean culture fan community, the fan group identity exerted an influence on her lifestyle and helped her establish friendships with the members of the fan community.

The data results also revealed the relationship between language and identity, which was not expected before the interviews. Two out of the three participants who studied in French-taught programs identified themselves as Francophone or Francophile. According to Statistics Canada (2016), about 820,000 out of 920,000 people in the Ottawa census area speak English at home which is almost 4.75 times the people who speak French at home; for immigrants, about 71 percent of the immigrants in the Ottawa census area speak English, while only 12 percent of Ottawa-based immigrants speak French. Thus, the Francophone community is in the minority in

terms of quantity in Ottawa. Among Chinese international students pursuing post-secondary education in the Ottawa area, only a small amount of them chose French as the language of class and the first official language spoken. The French-speaking participants remarked that they considered themselves, the French-speaking Chinese international students group, as a minority within the minority. The complex relationship between language and identity can be explored from a sociolinguistic approach, but if speaking a minority language is a distinguishing attribute, the identity construction of these two Francophone participants can also be interpreted through Tajfel's (1974, 1982b) social identity theory. To achieve a positive group distinctiveness and produce high esteem, people are strongly motivated to presume the attribute that defines their group membership is positive (Tajfel, 1982b). For the subjects in this research, instead of seeing themselves as a marginalized group, they tended to embrace their Francophone identity and constructed themselves as trilingual speakers who had social and economic advantages over their monolingual or bilingual counterparts.

In sum, participants valued both social identity and personal identity, while they emphasized more on social identities especially in intercultural encounters. Social identities that participants considered salient consist of ethnic identity, student identity, and other group-based identities including workgroup identity and fan group identity. Although participants considered "student" as their most important social role, ethnic identity was deemed most salient in their intercultural relationships. Also, participants highlighted or concealed different domains of identity in various interaction situations. Two interesting patterns were discovered. The first is participants tended to highlight their ethnic identity in a more culturally diverse environment such as a university campus comparing to other social settings. The second intriguing discovery is some participants tended to disconnect themselves from the "international student" group under certain

circumstances. Unlike other findings where international students may consider themselves “cosmopolitan and international,” such a pattern was not discovered in this study. Overall participants did not demonstrate global mobility or consider themselves an “international” individual.

The following paragraphs will discuss the participants’ identity negotiation process from an intergroup communication perspective. Ting-Toomey’s (1999, 2005) identity negotiation theory will be used as the theoretical perspective to contribute to a better understanding of the experience of Chinese international students. According to Ting-Toomey (1999), negotiation happens when international students in intercultural encounters attempted “to assert, define, modify, challenge, and support their own and other’s desired self-images” (p. 40). Five identity dialectic themes from the identity negotiation theory are as follows: identity security-vulnerability, identity inclusion-differentiation, identity predictability-unpredictability, identity connection-autonomy, identity consistency-change (Ting-Toomey, 1999, 2005). To address the research questions, the Chinese international students’ communication with Canadians, in-group members, teachers and peer students will be categorized into the five dialectics and discussed under each theme.

5. 1. 2 Identity Security — Identity Vulnerability The first of the five themes in the identity negotiation theory, suggested individuals experience emotional safety in a culturally familiar environment and emotional vulnerability in a culturally estranged environment (Ting-Toomey, 1999, 2005). In this study, participants acknowledged identity security while communicating their perceived in-group members and indicated identity vulnerability in their intergroup communication with Canadians, teachers, and peer students.

For most of the participants, their perceived in-group members are their Chinese peers. Participants experienced more emotional security and familiarity while interacting with their in-groups. Close relationships with fellow Chinese students help participants better adjust to the new cultural environment and cope with culture shock.

Participants also experienced more emotional security when they were with their fellow international students. Sharing the identity of an outsider from a foreign culture, participants felt safer interacting with international students than with domestic students and were more likely to develop intercultural friendships with them. However, after these international students finished their education and returned to their home countries, participants experienced loneliness and emotional vulnerability again.

Participants experienced anxiety and ambivalence while interacting with Canadians. Identifying the cultural difference to be the biggest challenge in developing meaningful relationships with Canadians, it became clear that participants realized they were in a culturally unfamiliar environment. By putting labels on friends, participants considered their friendships with Canadians as “intercultural communication” which were excluded from their daily social networks. In Lee’s (2006) study on intercultural friendships, he found that cultural similarities and differences were popular and entertaining topics for intercultural friends, which helped bring on closeness. In this study, Lee’s findings were only partly confirmed. Though participants reflected on their experience and admitted the conversation topics were mostly culture-related at the beginning, they also indicated these topics would be exhausted soon and eventually they felt like an “outsider.” Whereas exploring cultural similarities and differences was usually considered to be an exciting, rewarding, and eye-opening process for intercultural friends (Lee,

2006), as the findings indicated, its limited effects on reducing the emotional isolation and vulnerability should be addressed as well.

Compounding the anxiety brought on by cultural unfamiliarity, being unable to communicate effectively with Canadians due to the deficient language skills complicated their identity vulnerability. For example, being unable to understand an inside joke in a group get-together made participants feel awkward and isolated.

Struggling to build more profound and meaningful friendships with Canadians, participants indicated their superficial relationships confused them and caused anxiety. Another recurring statement participants identified as causing isolated and vulnerable feelings is the existing friendship circles of Canadian students that exclude outsiders. Besides, experiencing an unpleasant incident also caused identity vulnerability. Participants experienced being upset and having anxiety when under discrimination at the hands of strangers or their landlords.

Participants also experienced identity vulnerability while interacting with teachers and fellow students. The findings suggest that the perceived discrimination from teachers caused participants extreme stress and performance anxiety. The previous findings showed the language skills of international students was the most salient and problematic marker of their ethnic identity (Wadsworth et al., 2008). In this study, participants who reported perceived discrimination also connected it to their language skills. Interestingly also, these participants seemed to try to disassociate the discrimination from their ethnic identity or to define it as “an accident.” Besides, although participants did not report negative emotions towards it, the perceived tolerance of academic performance from teachers indicated possible lower expectations of international students, which was also considered discrimination by some students. On the other hand, participants' lack of communication with teachers implied that they

tended not to seek help from teachers while coping with stress, which exacerbated their negative feelings and increased vulnerability.

Compared to undergraduate classes and graduate classes, ESL classrooms were considered as a more culturally diverse, relaxing, and identity-safe environment by participants. Teaching international students from different cultures around the world, ESL teachers usually emphasize creating a culturally diverse environment where students can represent their own culture, share cultural experiences, and learn cultural similarities and differences from each other. The process of seeing their ethnic identity and international student identity “reflected on a daily basis” made participants less likely to see themselves as an other, thus reducing their emotional vulnerability to anxiety (Steele & Cohn-Vargas, 2013, p. 74).

Furthermore, the findings show that participants’ reflection on interactions with peer students emphasized interpersonal relationships, not classroom interactions. However, although participants in this study considered peer students to be the most important source of intercultural friendships, they struggled to develop deep and meaningful relationships with non-Chinese students outside the classroom context. Reflecting on the reasons, most participants referred to cultural differences and language barriers.

Interestingly, for participants in the Electrical Engineering program at the University of Ottawa, the large number of enrolled Chinese international students seemed to put them in a dilemma. On the one hand, having more Chinese students in class made the classroom a more culturally familiar environment which possibly reduced the emotional anxiety and identity insecurity. The previous findings indicate that the more identity security individuals have, the more likely they are to have interactions and develop friendships with out-groups (Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013). On the other hand, the data findings show that the Chinese students of Electrical

Engineering engaged in most academic activities with their Chinese peers and were more likely to build interpersonal connections with Chinese students after class. In this case, we need to figure out in future research that if the Chinese international students did experience promoted identity security, and if so, what prevented them from interacting with out-groups.

The findings also suggested peer attitudes affected Chinese international students' identity negotiation process. Perceived discrimination, exclusion and threat from peers exacerbated emotional vulnerability, while peer support increased emotional safety. Participants indicated they experienced emotional relief when they found their peer students who had been perceived by them as discriminatory and exclusionary were actually supportive and empathetic. Participants also indicated that group work created more opportunities for them to interact with other students. An open and friendly attitude from group members provided emotional support and reduced participants' anxiety.

The assumption of security-vulnerability dialectic is that when individuals are in a culturally estranged environment and experience anxiousness or ambivalence, they are less likely to step out of their comfort zones and reach out to culturally different others. In this study, participants' experience of identity vulnerability constrained them in a familiar cultural environment where they could stick with in-group members and feel safe. When participants had more interactions with out-groups than in-groups over a period, they started seeking more connections and belongings to the Chinese community. Anticipating their out-group friends to be more unstable, participants felt more emotionally secure about their relationships with Chinese community members.

However, though venturing out of their comfort zone means participants have to confront identity vulnerability, they recognized the significance of doing so and looked to immerse themselves in the host culture for future career development concerns.

5. 1. 3 Identity Inclusion — Identity Differentiation This dialectic underline “membership-based boundary maintenance issues” (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 220). The identity negotiation process aims to strike a balance between perceived emotional nearness and perceived emotional remoteness towards both in-groups and out-groups (Ting-Toomey, 1999, 2005). Ethnic identity is a group membership category which participants in this study were emotionally and spatially close to. Although participants indicated they perceived Chinese community as in-groups, they did not desire more communication and interactions with the group members. By keeping proper emotional nearness towards in-groups, participants tried to mitigate the impact of lack of interactions with out-groups and achieved a balance. Realizing the possible harm brought on by too much ethnic identity inclusion and emotional attachment, many participants struggled to increase emotional and spatial nearness to other group-based identities and to achieve a sense of belonging to the host society. Some participants chose to live with host nationals and other international students in shared houses to maintain remoteness towards in-groups in terms of spatial proximity.

Too much inclusion makes individuals question the significance of their personal identities, while too much differentiation causes the feelings of loneliness and being excluded (Ting-Toomey, 1999, 2005). Participants negotiated their identity by emphasizing personal attributes and de-emphasizing their ethnic identity; at the same time, when participants experienced too much emotional or spatial remoteness, they actively sought out more interactions with in-groups.

While interacting with peer students in the university context, participants tended to swing between their Chinese student identity and international student identity depending on the contexts of interaction. While interacting with other international students, emphasizing identity similarities enabled participants to experience emotional inclusion and to develop intercultural friendships. On the other hand, emphasizing ethnic identity allows participants to bring out culturally different perspectives to enrich the cultural experience. Regarding the identity negotiation process while interacting with host national students, the findings showed participants tended to separate themselves from other international students and addressed their ethnic identity.

While interacting with host nationals outside the university context, especially in the workplace context, participants realized they were in the ethnic minority and tended to increase emotional nearness by de-emphasizing ethnic identity.

Interestingly, the findings did not show much evidence about in-group favouritism and perceived stereotypic behaviours from out-groups; in contrast, in-group criticism was frequently observed throughout the interviews. Reflecting on their experiences, participants expressed their unfavourable opinions of the behaviours and attitudes of particular in-group members in the Chinese international student community and the Chinese immigrant community. By criticizing some of their fellow Chinese students for being “aimless” and “always sticking together,” participants tried to segregate themselves from those whom they deemed to be diminishing the group membership, so as to maintain positive distinctiveness. A critique of the Chinese immigrant community was also mentioned by respondents such as “low social status” and “illegal immigrants.” In fact, participants indicated the existence of mutual stereotypes held by Chinese students and Chinese immigrants. Under the influence of stereotypic attitudes towards

Chinese immigrants, the newcomer students tended to differentiate themselves from the former community to maintain a positive self-image.

5. 1. 4 Identity Predictability — Identity Unpredictability This dialectic underline the interaction predictability and unpredictability issues. It assumes people experience identity predictability while “interacting with familiar others” and experience unpredictability while interacting with unfamiliarity others (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 220). Identity predictability leads to trust, while identity unpredictability often leads to awkwardness, anxiety, and distrust (Ting-Toomey, 1999, 2005). The findings show that participants experienced both interaction unpredictability and predictability while interacting with out-groups including teachers, peer students, and host nationals.

While interacting with teachers, the interaction unpredictability that participants experienced mostly came from teachers’ unpredictable reactions to culturally different perspectives and perceived possible discriminatory attitudes. Immersed in a culturally diverse classroom environment, participants tended to maintain their identities, especially social identities. When participants felt their identities were challenged, they experienced an increase in anxiety and uncertainty. For example, one respondent indicated she experienced anxiety and a decrease in self-esteem when her cherished cultural values were questioned and criticized by a teacher. On the other hand, with their identities being constantly and positively affirmed by teachers, participants’ anxiety and uncertainty decreased. Throughout the interviews, two respondents reported perceived discriminations from their professors. They acknowledged the perceived discriminatory attitudes caused them extreme emotional uncertainty and performance anxiety. Perceived threats to individuals’ social identity decreased their confidence to predict the interactions with out-groups (Gudykunst, 2005).

While interacting with peer students, the interaction unpredictability that participants experienced mostly came from the possible stereotypic attitudes and domestic students' attitudes toward intercultural friendships. During the interviews, some participants indicated they experienced stereotype threats when they interacted with peer students. Perceiving that their peer students held stereotypes about Chinese international students, the participants' emotionally significant group membership was under threat. With the increasing perceived threat to one's social identity, he or she will be less confident in predicting others' behaviour and more likely to experience anxiety and low-esteem (Gudykunst, 2005). Another source of unpredictability is different attitudes towards friendships between Chinese students and domestic students. Throughout the interviews, participants indicated that they struggled to develop meaningful friendships with host national students. For participants, the different expectations in friendships between themselves and the locals, and the possible disinterest of host national students in developing close friendships with international students confused them and diminished their confidence to predict the behaviours of out-group members (Gudykunst, 2005).

On the other hand, participants reflected on their intercultural experience and indicated that more quality intercultural contacts helped increase the understanding of cultural similarities and differences and eliminate intergroup misunderstandings, stereotypic attitudes, and bias. With enhanced intercultural competency, participants were more likely to predict out-group behaviours accurately and reduce anxiety and distrust.

Group work was also considered to be an effective process to help reduce identity unpredictability and build mutual trust between international students and domestic students. Working with out-group members in a cooperative task increases individuals' confidence in predicting others' behaviour (Gudykunst, 2005). When participants participated in group tasks,

they experienced an increase in intercultural contact, interdependence, and intimacy, which helped them develop more identity predictability.

While interacting with host nationals outside the university context, the interaction unpredictability that participants experienced mostly came from the unpredictable aggressive behaviours and racist jokes. The findings show that some participants experienced aggressive behaviours from strangers and racist jokes from intercultural friends. Such experiences directly posed threats to participants' social identity and self-esteem and thus decreased their confidence to predict the behaviours and attitudes of out-group members.

An increased understanding of the variability of out-group members helps decrease interaction unpredictability (Gudykunst, 2005). According to social identity theory, individuals tend to perceive a "decrease in variability in the characteristics and behaviour of the members of the out-group" (Tajfel, 1982b, p. 13). In this study, while dealing with social harassment, participants indicated they perceived the unpleasant experiences as accidents and did not intend to generalize. By understanding the variability of out-groups, it can be assumed that participants are more likely to be capable of accurately predicting the behaviours of culturally different others in future interactions by adopting this strategy.

Moreover, the identity predictability-unpredictability dimension can be used to explain participants' intentions of emphasizing their intercultural friends' ethnic origins instead of nationalities. Throughout the interviews, participants indicated that they always addressed their friends' cultural backgrounds if those cultural identities were perceived salient by their friends and were used to guide their interpersonal interactions. By putting out-groups in the same categories they categorize themselves, participants were more likely to predict their behaviours (Gudykunst, 2005).

5. 1. 5 Identity Connection — Identity Autonomy This dialectic emphasizes “interpersonal relationship boundary regulation issue” (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 220). Identity negotiation theory assumes that individuals desire connection in meaningful and close interpersonal relationships and experience identity autonomy with relationship separation (Ting-Toomey, 1999, 2005). Cultural value orientations such as individualism and collectivism have a significant influence on the interpretations of connection and autonomy (Ting-Toomey, 1999, 2005). The findings show that participants negotiated their identity through this lens in intercultural friendships.

Canada is considered to be a society that emphasizes individualism and China is considered to be a society that emphasizes collectivism although the degrees of individualism and collectivism obviously vary within both societies (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). In collectivistic cultures, social relationships emphasize more on the interdependence and connectedness among individuals; while in individualistic cultures, independence and autonomy are held desirable (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Therefore, in a highly individualistic and mobile society like Canada, the perceived concept of friendship is less enduring and permanent than in a collectivistic culture like China (Bulthuis, 1986). However, international students from collectivistic cultures tend to consider the amiability and sociable behaviours of host nationals as an offer of deeper friendships (Mori, 2000). In this study, participants expressed their confusion and disappointment about the superficiality of their intercultural friendships with Canadian students. A recurring statement of participants about their interpersonal relationships with Canadians is that they found it weird they had not made more friends with natives because they seemed so nice, friendly, and welcoming. Experiencing rejection, disappointment, anxiousness,

and unpredictability, Chinese international students were convinced that it was safer to stick with their in-group members.

5. 1. 6 Identity Consistency — Identity Change This last dimension of identity dialectics assumes that “a tolerable range of identity consistency or rootedness and identity change or rootlessness” should be established in cross-boundary intercultural identity negotiation process (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 221). Too much identity consistency leads to ethnocentric behaviours and too much identity change results in identity chaos (Ting-Toomey, 1999, 2005). This dialectic also indicates that the more emotional security, membership inclusion, interaction predictability, and relational connection an individual experiences, the more likely she or he is to open to identity change, and vice versa (Ting-Toomey, 1999, 2005).

Participants experienced identity consistency or identity stability when they interacted with culturally familiar others on a daily basis; at the same time, they experienced a dynamic process of identity change. As Tran and Gomes (2016) indicated, the identity of international students is “complex and evolving” (p. 5). The newly formed identity of international students includes a refreshed self-concept “as well as an expansion of their understandings of others” (Pitts, 2009). When asked if they perceived any changes compared to before, participants indicated their identity changes through expressions such as “my perceptions about people from other cultural backgrounds are different” (Leo), “I’m more open to new cultures and have more respect for them” (Harper), and “I have different perceptions about where I belong now” (Rachel). By reflecting on their sojourner experience, they were perceptive of the changes in their personal identities and developed multifaceted interpretations of their social identities.

In terms of ethnic identity, the findings show that participants developed a stronger identification with their home culture and their ethnic identity while studying abroad, which is

also supported by Savicki and Cooley (2011). Immersed in a culturally diverse society, the ethnic identity of Chinese international students was reflected continuously in daily intercultural interactions. For some respondents, the stronger identification resulted from the bi-cultural acculturation process or integration process (Berry, 1997; Savicki, 2012). According to Berry (1997), integration means maintaining the cultural integrity “while at the same time seeking to participate as an integral part of the larger social network” (p. 9). Separation process also resulted in stronger identifications to their ethnic identity (Savicki, 2012). Although most participants identified a wish to better integrate into the host society, their actual behaviours were more like a separation process in which they held on to their home culture identity and avoided intercultural interactions (Berry, 1997).

On the other hand, the findings show that the ethnic identity of participants was disturbed on some level. Participants indicated that their experience of studying abroad changed their mindsets and covertly differentiated them from their Chinese friends who do not have overseas study experiences. With the mindsets and perceptions about Chinese culture being “subconsciously transformed,” participants grasped a new identity by refreshing their understandings of both home and host culture (Tran & Gomes, 2016, p. 142). Moreover, although having maintained a strong affiliation with their family members, some participants acknowledged that the studying broad experiences disconnected them with their old friends in China. Participants struggled to maintain their home-based social networks and to keep in touch with their friends on a regular basis during the years of studying abroad. With the diminishing social connection to their home country, the students became less emotionally attached to their old identity and more likely to initiate an identity change.

5. 1. 7 Summary First of all, participants showed some interesting identity negotiation patterns while interacting with Canadians. The Chinese international students being interviewed tended to exclude their friendships with Canadians from their regular social networks and label them as “intercultural interactions.” Deficient language skills and cultural differences were considered the major barriers to effective intercultural communication, which resulted in the increasing anxiety and vulnerability. Participants also perceived threats to their self-esteem and desired social identity when they experienced aggressive violent behaviours from strangers and racist jokes from intercultural friends. On the other hand, participants tried to increase interaction predictability and decrease anxiety by perceiving the unpleasant experiences as “accidents” and not generalizing.

While interacting with Chinese community members, participants negotiated identity through the identity inclusion-differentiation dialectic. Participants tended to mitigate the impact of lack of interactions with out-group members by keeping proper emotional nearness toward in-group members. To increase emotion nearness to other social identities except for ethnic identity and to achieve a sense of belonging to the host society, some participants chose to live with host nationals and fellow interactional students in shared houses and maintain remoteness toward Chinese community members. Participants also tried to negotiate a positive self-image by differentiating themselves from the “aimless” Chinese peers who “always stick together,” and the Chinese immigrant community members who are usually perceived as “low status” and “illegal.”

While reflecting on their interactions with peer students, participants emphasized interpersonal relationships rather than classroom interactions and considered their classmates to be the most important source of intercultural friendships. Participants experienced more

emotional security while interacting with fellow international students because they share an “outsider” identity. At the same time, they struggled to develop deep and meaningful relationships with domestic peers outside the classroom due to the language barriers and cultural differences. Different expectations in friendships between participants and domestic students and the possible disinterest of the latter group diminished participants’ confidence to predict behaviours. On the other hand, positive peer attitudes such as showing supportive and empathetic, were considered to help reduce emotional vulnerability. Group work also helped reduce unpredictability and built mutual trust.

While interacting with teachers, this study found that perceived discriminatory attitudes caused participants extreme stress and performance anxiety. A lack of communication with teachers increased participants’ emotional vulnerability and interaction unpredictability. On the other hand, with their self-concepts being constantly and positively affirmed by teachers, participants’ anxiety and uncertainty decreased.

5. 2 Research Question 3

How does the understanding of the identity construction and negotiation of Chinese international students help improve international education in Canadian universities?

The implications for international education will be discussed on two levels: individual level and institutional level. On the individual level, suggestions for Chinese international students, educators, and host national students will be discussed; on the institutional level, suggestions for higher education will be discussed.

5. 2. 1 Implications for Chinese International Students First of all, Chinese international students need to be fully aware of and understand their identity, especially social identity. Only when they are conscious of “the constraints of their ethnic cultures on their identity

development,” they can initiate more identity change and undergo more satisfactory acculturation process (Hsieh, 2006, p. 877). For example, based on the cultural dimension study of Hofstede et al. (2010), Chinese culture is certainty-oriented which influences the learning styles and cognitive patterns of Chinese international students. Being certainty-oriented, Chinese students may show less preference to cooperative learning than traditional expository learning; correspondingly, they may have worse performance in an educational environment that emphasizes cooperative learning than in a transitional learning situation (Huber, Sorrentino, Davidson, Epplier, & Roth, 1992). By understanding such constraints on themselves, these Chinese students can consciously increase their uncertainty orientation to initiate positive changes.

The second implication for Chinese international students is to increase the intercultural contact in terms of quality and quantity. The more connection the international students have with out-group members, the less anxiety they experience, and the more likely they are able to predict others' behaviour. Indeed, the acculturation process of international students is influenced by numerous factors and stepping out of the comfort zone takes a lot of courage. To make their study-abroad experience worthwhile, Chinese international students need to fully understand the benefits of integrating into the host society and bravely take the first step. For example, it will help new international students get out of their comfort zone more quickly and easily if they attend the orientation sessions, join a club, and explore local community.

5. 2. 2 Implications for Educators As Savicki (2012) suggested, “it is the role of international educators to recognize the anxiety that the culture information onslaught may generate, and to provide support and clarification” (p. 231). For educators, to help Chinese international students negotiate a positive identity and achieve the satisfaction of their study-

abroad experience, they need to put effort into developing a trustful teacher-student relationship and an identity-safe classroom atmosphere.

The reported lack of communication with their teachers indicates the fact that participants tended not to seek help from teachers while coping with stress. For Chinese international students in Canadian higher education institutions, their teachers are usually from different ethnic and social backgrounds. While interacting with culturally unfamiliar others, these students experience less identity predictability and less trust. Thus, how to build a trustful interpersonal relationship between Chinese students and teachers remained a challenge for both parties. While interacting with these students, educators need to initiate the conversations that make them feel emotionally safe and included. Also, educators may need to clarify their expectations about the academic outcomes and classroom performance, give culturally responsive instructions, and show more encouragement.

Chinese international students choose Canada as their overseas study destination mostly with the intention of pursuing a successful career in Canada after graduation. Thus, it is an important goal for the educators to prepare their students for Canada's culturally diverse working environment and to help them obtain intercultural competence. To achieve these goals, educators need to initiate diverse cultural perspectives in the classroom and make sure every emerging cultural perspective is equally heard and respected. Educators also need to be mindful of making assumptions and stereotypic comments.

Language deficiency is considered to be the most salient and problematic marker of Chinese international students' social identity. Thus, to create an identity-safe classroom atmosphere, educators need to be aware of the possible identity vulnerability and anxiety brought on by the pressure to "speak up," while at the same time, encourage discussion and contribution. Educators

also need to be careful of too many jargons and culturally specific idioms that may confuse the international students.

Meanwhile, educators need to be mindful of individual differences and discard stereotypic attitudes. Although Chinese international students strongly value their ethnic identity in an intercultural environment, their personal identities and other types of group-based identities should also be recognized. From the educators' perspective, categorizing the students into the categories that they identify themselves in is crucially important to effective classroom education.

Also, this study suggests that educators create more opportunities for international students to participate in group tasks, which helps these students build mutual trust, interdependence, and intimacy with their peer students. In this study, Chinese international students identified a preference to work with their in-group members. Thus, how to sensitively structure the group membership and ensure both positive identity negotiation outcomes and satisfactory academic outcomes becomes a highly strategic task for educators. This requires educators to understand these students' cultural background, identity negotiation process in intercultural encounters, and possibly personal attributes. Educators need to balance the group membership diversity and the possible identity anxiety caused by minority representation in the group. They also need to make sure every member of the group is involved in the task and contributing.

5. 2. 3 Implications for Host National Students Understanding how international students negotiate their identity in intercultural encounters helps host national students reduce their anxiety while interacting with international students and challenge their stereotypes, which contributes to positive educational outcomes (Dunne, 2009). For example, understanding Chinese international students' perception of friendships helps host national students understand

why Chinese students always stick together. Since Chinese students are more collectivism-oriented, they desire a more enduring and permanent friendship than Canadian students who are more individualism-oriented. They seek more identity connection in interpersonal relationships while host students may desire more identity autonomy. Thus, even if international students indicate a strong need to develop the intercultural friendship with host nationals, the different attitudes towards friendship may hinder the effort of both groups.

Furthermore, understanding the identity domains that Chinese international students deem important in different intercultural encounters enables the host national students to have more intercultural competence, thereby enhancing the intercultural experience of both groups. For example, for Chinese students, their emotionally significant group membership is usually ethnic identity. When perceiving a threat to their ethnic identity, Chinese students tend to experience more anxiety, uncertainty, and low-esteem; as a result, they reduce the interactions with out-group members to seek out identity security. Host national students are more likely to be mindful of the communication process if they have an understanding of Chinese students' identity negotiation process.

5. 2. 4 Implications for Higher Education in Canada The first suggestion on the institution level is regarding the improvement of the language skills of Chinese international students. Although international students usually have to meet the language requirements to be admitted to an academic program, participants in this study indicated language deficiency remained to be the biggest obstacle in their daily intercultural encounters, especially when they want to make intercultural friends. Canadian universities need to make sure the language ability of their students meet both academic requirements and social needs. To achieve this goal, this study suggests that institutions develop mentoring programs to help international students

improve their language after arrival. Although some institutions have mentoring programs to help international students adapt to the new cultural environment, these programs need to be reevaluated and carefully designed to truly motivate international students to participate.

The second suggestion on the institutional level is regarding the enhancement of intercultural friendships with host national students and other international students. In this study, group work is considered by participants the best way to build intercultural friendships. However, the students indicated they rarely joined clubs and participated in any group activities except for group tasks. Institutions need to involve international students in diverse extracurricular activities where they can connect with their Canadian peers.

The third suggestion on the institutional level is about building the connection between the international student community and the Canadian society. One struggle the Chinese international students widely identified in this research is that they did not have enough opportunities to meet local people, develop networks and engage in community activities. Institutions need to develop community-based programs and involve international students in community-focused activities. Connecting with locals outside the university context helps international students better rooted in the host society and develop mutual understanding with host nationals. For example, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) developed a joint program with the Essendon Football Club (EFC), City of Melbourne and the Australian Federation of International Students (AFIS) to help international students in Australia to connect with the local community (Riordan, Withers & Smith, 2009). By hosting free football games and skills teaching sessions, the program encourages international students to engage in not only physical development but personal development themes such as leadership and teamwork. In another example, the University of Western Australia created a Community Service Program to

encourage international students to participate in various community-based activities, such as fundraising, blood donation and cooking for people with special needs (Riordan et al., 2009).

These programs could be good examples for Canada's international education practice.

5. 2. 5 Summary By uncovering the complex identity construction and negotiation process of Chinese international students, this study further proposed several strategies to help improve Canada's international education practice. For international students, the study suggests that they are fully aware of and understand their identity and at the same time increase intercultural contact regarding quantity and quality by venturing out of comfort zone. For educators, the study suggests they build trustful interpersonal relationships and identity-safe classroom. To achieve these goals, educators need to clarify expectations, give culturally responsive instructions, initiate diverse cultural perspectives, avoid making stereotypic comments, sensitively instruct group tasks, and show more encouragement. For host national students, the study suggests they are mindful of the intercultural communication process and put more effort to understand Chinese students' identity negotiation process. For higher education institutes, the study suggests they develop carefully designed mentoring programs to help international students improve language skills after arrival, involve international students in diverse extracurricular activities, and connect international students to local communities.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In the last chapter of this thesis, the researcher will discuss the personal interest that leads to this study, research significance, limitations, and the suggestions for future research.

To conclude, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how Chinese international students in Canada construct and negotiate identity in intergroup and intercultural relationship settings. The interviews enabled the students to share their unique stories and reflect on their lived experiences. The data revealed how Chinese international students construct different domains of identity and the identity negotiation patterns of this community.

6. 1 Personal Interest

I grew up at a time when my parents can afford to support me studying abroad and so do millions of parents now in China. The experience of studying abroad was overwhelming at the beginning and now still makes me nervous sometimes. When I first arrived, I chose to use my English name that my language teacher from Australia picked up for me when I was six. Then, I was asked half the time what my real name was, like I was using a fake name that doesn't belong to me. Until today, I'm still confused about when and where I should introduce myself as Jennifer. That's my story of names. To my surprise, many of my Chinese friends chose to use an English name even when introducing themselves to a bunch of Chinese. Thanks to that, I still didn't know their "real" Chinese names yet, at least some of them. My own experience of struggling with names and the observation of my peers struggling with theirs got me thinking: if my name is a part of my identity, then what is my identity; if changing my name is how I negotiate my identity, then how do Chinese students negotiate their identity. At last, my research interest moved beyond names and went further into the identity issues of Chinese international

student community.

6. 2 Significance

The importance of studying international students hardly needs stressing given the fact that Canada puts a great amount of effort into international education to infuse global perspectives and to strengthen its labour market. To achieve such goals, international students must be prepared with sufficient intercultural knowledge, and at the same time, their well-being must be looked after. This thesis shed light on Chinese international students' identity issues through their own voices and dug deeper into their lived experience and sense-making process. The findings provided insights for the optimization of Canada's international education strategies. For Chinese international students, the findings of this study can help them better understand and reflect on their intercultural adjustment experiences, improve their social well-being, and achieve satisfactory education outcomes. For university educators, post-secondary institutions and policy-makers, the findings of this study provide insights into the complex issue of international student identity, which will help the stakeholders increase mindfulness, deliver better services and lay the groundwork for successful international education.

6. 3 Limitations

Although the study results have achieved the objectives outlined in the research design, several limitations to this study should be recognized. First of all, although the thesis is about the identity construction and negotiation of Chinese Students in Canada, the results of this study cannot be applied to all Chinese international students in Canada. All participants in this study are Ottawa-based; thus, the study results should be assumed to be only indicative of the Ottawa area. The impact of demographic features of host destinations on the identity construction and

negotiation should be taken into account. Ontario hosts the largest number of international student, which is almost 120 times that of Prince Edward Island (CBIE, 2016). Likewise, the Chinese community makes up a small proportion of Ottawa residents but represents a larger proportion of the total population in Toronto and Vancouver (Statistics Canada, 2017). Besides, students who are enrolled in French-Language universities and live in French-speaking cities may have different experiences from those enrolled in English-langue universities. Therefore, the identity construction and negotiation of Ottawa-based students should be differentiated from that of Toronto-based students, PEI-based, or Vancouver-based students, and so forth.

Second, the sample size was limited due to the time and resource constraints. Given the overall Chinese student population, the small sample may have weakened the study's capabilities to capture all the perspectives posed in research questions. Besides, due to the nature of snowball sampling method, the participants may share similar socioeconomic background, characteristics and social experiences. Thus, the study findings cannot be applied to the whole Chinese student community.

Third, the transcripts translation was recognized as another potential limitation. In this study, all the interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese, and then the transcripts were translated into English by the researcher. Although the research tried to maintain the accuracy while translating, the fact that sometimes the target language did not express the precisely same meanings and emotions of the source language cannot be ignored.

6. 4 Suggestions for Future Research

The findings of this study inform future research on identity construction and negotiation in the following areas. First, the study can be replicated nationwide to explore the overall experience of Chinese international students in Canada. Besides, a comparative study may be

useful to examine the impact of demographic features of host destination on the subjects.

Second, the study findings indicate that Chinese international students at different levels of education have different studying abroad experiences. Students pursuing bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees may have different intercultural adjustment paths and identity negotiation patterns. An exploration of the experience of sub-groups such as Ph.D. candidates can provide further insight into the overall experience of Chinese international students in Canada.

Second, methodologically, an integrated approach of quantitative and qualitative analysis may be useful to help collect comprehensive data and provide a broader perspective regarding the research issues.

Third, the study findings indicate that the Chinese international students undergo identity change across different phases of the adjustment process. Thus, future research can perform a longitudinal study by collecting data at various points in international students' journeys of studying abroad.

Fourth, the perspective of domestic students may help understand the intergroup dynamics and the experience of international students. In this study, Chinese students recognized several barriers to intercultural friendships. It may be helpful to look into these perceived barriers from domestic students' point of view and to identify possible new perspectives.

Fifth, in China and worldwide, post-millennials, also known as Generation Z, are beginning to enter higher education. Unlike the millennial participants in this study, Chinese post-millennials grew up in a different political, economic and cultural environment. They are constantly challenging the old traditions of home culture and the old stereotypes of the outside world. Therefore, it may be interesting and enlightening to study the identity of Chinese post-millennial students.

Sixth, the study findings show that participants tried to maintain their home-based social network and stay connected with their old friends in China by using Chinese social media platforms. Interestingly, they also use them to connect with their Chinese friends within Canada. Thus, the impact of sticking with Chinese social media service on the intercultural adjustment and intercultural friendships building needs to be uncovered.

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Appendix

Appendix 1 – Letter of Recruitment for Participants

Recruitment Letter

Researcher: Fangfang Yu

Department of Communication, Faculty of Arts, University of Ottawa
phone number:
email:

Supervisor: Peruvemba S. Jaya

Department of Communication, Faculty of Arts, University of Ottawa
phone number:
email:

Dear [NAME],

I am an MA student in the Department of Communication, University of Ottawa. I am conducting research on the Identity construction and negotiation process of Chinese international students in Canada. With permission from the University of Ottawa's Research Ethics Board, I would like to invite you to participate in an interview to help explore a better understanding of the overall experience of Chinese international students. Knowing how Chinese international students think and talk about themselves is the central motive for this study. Thus, your experience as an international student is of great value to this study. The goal of the study is to understand how Chinese international students construct and negotiate identity and explore the significance of the findings for the improvement of international education.

Participants who are Chinese citizens, registered as international students, currently enrolled in either undergraduate or graduate program in University of Ottawa and Carleton University, will be recruited.

Participation in this study consists essentially of attending an interview which will last approximately two hours. The time and location of this interview will be arranged at your convenience. It is anticipated that interviews will run from December through January.

Your identity, and that of all participants, will be safeguarded by the use of pseudonyms. The interview will be audio-taped and transcribed. The audio files and transcripts will be stored as a password-secured document in the principal investigator's password-secured laptop. Only the principal investigator and the thesis supervisor will have access to the data collected in this study. A copy of consent form outlining all the details of your participation including risks, confidentiality and data conservation will be sent to you via email if you agree to participate in the research.

IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND NEGOTIATION OF CHINESE STUDENTS IN CANADA

I sincerely hope you will agree to participate in this study. Please contact me by [DATE] by email or phone if you are interested.

Thank you,

Fangfang Yu

Appendix 2 – Consent Form

Consent Form

Title of the study: Identity Construction and Negotiation of Chinese Students in Canada: Implications for International Education

Researcher: Fangfang Yu
Department of Communication
Faculty of Arts, University of Ottawa
phone number:
email:

Supervisor: Peruvemba S. Jaya
Department of Communication
Faculty of Arts, University of Ottawa
phone number:
email:

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by Fangfang Yu.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to understand identity construction and negotiation of Chinese international students and explore the significance of the findings for the improvement of international education strategies.

Participation: My participation will consist essentially of attending an interview with the researcher. My participation will last approximately two hour during which I will be asked to reflect on my experience with living and studying in Canada as an international student. Conversations in the interviews will be audio recorded.

Risks: My participation in this study will entail that I may disclose some personal information such as personal stories, which may cause emotional discomfort. There are no other known risks in participating in this study. I have received assurance from the researcher that every effort will be made to minimize the risks by being offered the choice of refusing answering the interview questions.

Benefits: My participation in this study will contribute to the understanding of the identity construction and negotiation process of Chinese international students in Canada. This study also helps gain insights at the topic of international education improvement. Also, my participation in this study will provide the opportunity to develop a better understanding of my own identity construction thus increasing my intercultural competence as an international student.

Confidentiality: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for purpose of this study and that my confidentiality will be protected through the use of pseudonyms that will only be shared between the researcher and the supervisor.

Anonymity: Anonymity will be protected in the following manner: pseudonyms will be used instead of all the identifiable names including my name and other names appearing in my stories.

Conservation of data: All data (both hard copies and electronic data, including audio-tapes, transcripts, questionnaires and notes) will be kept in a locked cabinet for five years in the office of the thesis supervisor to which only the principal investigator and the thesis supervisor have access. After the 5-year retention period, all research data will be safely deleted and discarded.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will not be withdrawn.

Acceptance: I, _____, agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Fangfang Yu of the Department of Communication, Faculty of Arts, University of Ottawa, which research is under the supervision of Dr. Peruvemba S. Jaya.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or her supervisor.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5
Tel.: (613) 562-5387
Email: ethics@uottawa.ca

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participant's signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix 3 – Demographic Information Sheet

Demographic Information Sheet

Instructions: Please provide a response for each of the following questions. In order to protect your personal information, a pseudonym will be used.

1. Name: _____
2. Gender: Female Male You don't have an option that applies to me. I identify as (please specify) _____
3. Date of birth: _____
4. Nationality: _____
5. Current status of education: Undergraduate Program Master Program Doctoral Program Graduated
6. Name of the university: the University of Ottawa Carleton University
7. Program: _____
8. Length of time in Canada: _____

Appendix 4 – Demographic Information

Sam ple No.	Gender	Date of Birth	Age	Current Status of Education	Name of University	Program	Course Languag e	Length of time in Canad a	Pseudo nym
1	Female	1994-09	23	Master	University of Ottawa	Public Administration	French	5 years	Harper
2	Male	1985-01	32	Doctoral	University of Ottawa	Earth Sciences	English	3 years	Jimmy
3	Female	1996-10	21	Undergraduate	University of Ottawa	Nursing	English	3 years	Selena
4	Female	1993-09	24	Master	University of Ottawa	Communication	English	1 year	Lily
5	Male	1993-05	24	Undergraduate	University of Ottawa	Finance	English	4 years	Eric
6	Female	1991-09	26	Undergraduate	Carleton University	Food Science & Nutrition	English	5 years	Sara
7	Female	1995-03	22	Undergraduate	University of Ottawa	Finance	English	6 years	Ginny
8	Female	1991-01	26	Master	University of Ottawa	Communication	English	3 years	Grace
9	Female	1995-12	22	Master	University of Ottawa	Communication	English	3 months	Cathy
10	Female	1994-07	23	Master	University of Ottawa	French Literature	French	2.5 years	Rachel
11	Male	1993-11	24	Undergraduate	Carleton University	Computer Science	English	5 years	Jeremy
12	Female	1994-06	23	Master	University of Ottawa	Communication	English	1.5 years	Meagan
13	Female	1996-03	21	Undergraduate	University of Ottawa	Statistics	English	6 years	Claire
14	Male	1993-11	24	Master	University of Ottawa	Communication	French	3 years	Ryan
15	Male	1997-02	20	Undergraduate	University of Ottawa	Electrical Engineering	English	6 years	Leo
16	Male	1994-04	23	Undergraduate	University of Ottawa	Electrical Engineering	English	5 years	Neil

Appendix 5 – Interview Protocol

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

The interviews will be conducted in Chinese or English depending on the choice of the interviewee.

1. Tell me about your life in China. You can start with either school life or social life.
2. Tell me about why you came to Canada.
3. Tell me about what impressed you most when you come to Canada.
4. Tell me about your overall impression about Canada.
5. Tell me about your school life and social life in Canada.
6. Tell me about your experience with teachers/professors.
7. How do you find life in Canada? How does it compare with your life in China?
8. Do you identify yourself with any group or community? Any interactions, memories, or stories with regards to that?
9. Tell me about your experience with peer students.
10. Have you made friends with people from other nationalities? Any special moments or stories you would like to talk about?
11. Tell me about your experience with locals.
12. Is it important to you that you keep in touch with the community you identify yourself with? Why? How important is it to you to keep in touch with the people who do not belong to your community?
13. Tell me about your experience with the members of your community.
14. Do you feel a sense of belonging right now? If not, why?
15. Do you have any plans after graduating from university?
16. Do you think that you have changed, in any aspects, after you came to Canada?

Appendix 6 – Coding Table

Table 1 Initial Codes

Theme 1: Identity	Theme 2: Social life	Theme 3: Relations with teachers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • represent different cultures • important but not must-have • proud to be Chinese • graduate student • student who has married • emphasizing “student’ at workplace • personality is important • Chinese international students • feel distant from China • work hard but lack social life • only important in school • categorization as an international student is not important • emphasizing “international student” on campus • based on different individual experiences • being international • identity becomes visible while communicating with friends back home • belong to Chinese community • being international • common hobbies • not a priority comparing to other identities • francophone student • know both cultures but difficult to integrate • emphasize personal attributes rather than social categories • shared experiences/language • being the member of a workgroup • study in programs taught by French • self-identification • not knowing enough • respect both home and local culture • more respect for Chinese culture • developed different ways of thinking • common hobbies • shared experiences/language • being the member of a workgroup • study in programs taught by French • self-identification as minority • find a place in host society • feel abandoned by home country 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • different cultural background • limited topics • small class with more interactions • eye-opening experience • culture differences highlighted • have to social if in a working situation • make study-abroad experience worthy • easier to make intercultural friends • experience discrimination from teachers and Canadians • different cultural perspectives • important for job opportunities • work in a Canadian organization • interpersonal attraction • important to personal development • lack of communication limits • language barriers for casual conversations • shared interests overcome barriers • more comfortable interacting with own people • different food and entertainment choices • increase visibility • communicating with colleagues • make some real friends • experience stereotypes from local community • create opportunities for meaningful relationships • extend the bonds to daily life • networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more respect to home culture and other cultures • realize the importance of intercultural communication class size • cause stress and ashamed feelings • take advantage of the identity • encouragement helps achieve better academic performance • boss and employee • should try talking to teachers more frequently • feel distant • identity becomes visible when others are not familiar with the culturally specific topics • discrimination from teachers • most are friendly • a problem of bad character • personal choices • cultural diversity in graduate level seminars • discrimination based on language ability • reduce anxiety • international students are majority • discriminated against in a subtle way

IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND NEGOTIATION OF CHINESE STUDENTS IN CANADA

<p>Theme 4: Relations with classmates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • different labels on friendships • existing exclusive friend circles • limited classroom communication • more opportunities to communicate • more comfortable with Chinese • too short for a long-term relationship • work only with Chinese • superficial and short-term friendships • language barriers • choices of lifestyle • personality contributes • perceptions about friendships • feel like an outsider • topics focus on cultural differences • closer with Chinese classmates • communication with non-Chinese only exists in the classroom • large number of Chinese students in Engineering program • have less in common for graduate students • everybody has different schedules • more accessible and less demanding • different backgrounds and social roles • hang out with Chinese outside the classroom 	<p>Theme 5: Relations with Canadians</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • positive • Canadians are nice • practicing language • better integrate into the host society • lucky and grateful • no Canadian friends at all • cultural difference • not fitting in discrimination • insulted in public • being an outsider • difficult to meet Canadians outside classroom • not motivated • friendships with other international students • sharing the identity of outsider • immigrants are more open • emphasis on ethnic origins • label on friendships with Canadians • eliminate misunderstanding and bias • increase intercultural competence • respect cultural diversity • crush the stereotypes of Chinese • network 	<p>Theme 6: Relations with community members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adjust to new environment • feel warm and emotionally secure • feel like a family • inconsistent perceptions of the necessity of in-group communication • a sense of safety • more stable friendships • some students always stick together • don't have goals • aimless • divided into small groups • disconnections between the groups • graduate students have different social circles with undergraduates • tensions and misunderstanding • happy to be with Chinese community • stereotypes of international students • less lonely • more rooted in the society • career development • help each other • Chinese business system
<p>Theme 7: Career development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stay here after graduation to find a job • Canadian companies: the Chinese workplace disaster • it's a challenge to be more involved in the local culture • it takes a long time into the local culture • when it comes to job hunting, identity has an impact • international students are rarely considered in government work 	<p>Theme 8: Sense of belongings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • belonging not from friends • need a student visa and working visa • a lot of Chinese people • club activities will bring a sense of belonging • a sense of belonging to both China and Canada 	<p>Theme 9: Changes after arrival</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • government supervision • social equity • care for vulnerable groups • environment • culture diversity/polite • Chinese less friendly and helpful than Canadians in general • slow pace of life • the lack of entertainment • not very convenient • people less competitive and more honest • become more self-reliant

Table 2 Candidate Themes

Theme 1: Identity	Theme 2: Sociality status	Theme 3: Teacher-student relationships
<p>Sub-theme 1: Perceptions of nationality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • represent different cultures • belong to Chinese community • only important in school • not a priority comparing to other identities • important but not must-have • proud to be Chinese <p>Sub-theme 2: The status of student as core concept</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • categorization as an international student is not important • emphasizing “international student” on campus • emphasizing “student” at workplace <p>Sub-theme 3: Personality matters most</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • personality is important • based on different individual experiences • emphasize personal attributes rather than social categories • being international <p>Sub-theme 4: Interest group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • common hobbies • shared experiences/language • being the member of a workgroup • study in programs taught by French • self-identification as minority <p>Sub-theme 5: Identifications to various subgroups based on the status of international student</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chinese international students • graduate student • student who has married • work hard but lack social life • francophone student <p>Sub-theme 6: Identify to both Chinese culture and Canadian culture: finding balance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • know both cultures but difficult to integrate • not knowing enough • respect both home and local culture <p>Sub-theme 7: Struggles between the old identity and new identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more respect for Chinese culture • developed different ways of thinking • identity becomes visible while communicating with friends back home • feel distant from China • find a place in host society • feel abandoned by home country 	<p>Sub-theme 1: Intercultural friendship: cultural background, common interest and personality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • different cultural background • limited topics • different cultural perspectives • shared interests overcome barriers • interpersonal attraction <p>Sub-theme 2: Status quo</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more comfortable interacting with own people • extend the bonds to daily life <p>Sub-theme 3: Perceptions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • important to personal development • lack of communication limits networks • important for job opportunities • work in a Canadian organization • communicating with colleagues <p>Sub-theme 4: Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have to social if in a working situation • language barriers for casual conversations • different food and entertainment choices <p>Sub-theme 5: Solutions: get out of comfort zone for career development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increase visibility • make study-abroad experience worthy <p>Sub-theme 6: English as a Second Language (ESL) program in establishing intercultural friendship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • easier to make intercultural friends • make some real friends • create opportunities for meaningful relationships • small class with more interactions • eye-opening experience • culture differences highlighted <p>Sub-theme 7: Discrimination and stereotypes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • experience discrimination from teachers and Canadians • experience stereotypes from local community 	<p>Sub-theme 1: Lack of communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • class size • feel distant • boss and employee • should try talking to teachers more frequently • personal choices <p>Sub-theme 2: Different cultural perspectives in classroom reinforce self-identification</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cultural diversity in graduate level seminars • international students are majority • identity becomes visible when others are not familiar with the culturally specific topics • more respect to home culture and other cultures • realize the importance of intercultural communication <p>Sub-theme 3: Identity-related tolerance and encouragement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discrimination from teachers • most are friendly • a problem of bad character • discriminated against in a subtle way • discrimination based on language ability • cause stress and ashamed feelings • take advantage of the identity • encouragement helps achieve better academic performance • reduce anxiety

<p>Theme 4: Peer relations</p> <p>Sub-theme 1: Get along but not close</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • closer with Chinese classmates • communication with non-Chinese only exists in the classroom • superficial and short-term friendships • language barriers • choices of lifestyle • different labels on friendships • existing exclusive friend circles • personality contributes • perceptions about friendships • feel like an outsider • topics focus on cultural differences • different backgrounds and social roles <p>Sub-theme 2: University system</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • large number of Chinese students in Engineering program • more accessible and less demanding • work only with Chinese • hang out with Chinese outside the classroom • have less in common for graduate students • everybody has different schedules • limited classroom communication <p>Sub-theme 3: Group work in establishing friendships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more opportunities to communicate • more comfortable with Chinese • too short for a long-term relationship 	<p>Theme 5: Communicating with Canadians</p> <p>Sub-theme 1: Overall impression</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • positive • Canadians are nice • lucky and grateful • discrimination • insulted in public • being an outsider <p>Sub-theme 2: Reality: out of touch with Canadians</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no Canadian friends at all • cultural difference • not fitting in • difficult to meet Canadians outside classroom • not motivated • friendships with other international students • sharing the identity of outsider • immigrants are more open • emphasis on ethnic origins <p>Sub-theme 3: Understanding of the importance of intercultural contact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • label on friendships with Canadians • eliminate misunderstanding and bias • increase intercultural competence • respect cultural diversity • crush the stereotypes of Chinese • network • practicing language • better integrate into the host society 	<p>Theme 6: In-group relations: Chinese community</p> <p>Sub-theme 1: Criticism of the in-groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • some students always stick together • don't have goals • aimless <p>Sub-theme 2: Subgroups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • divided into small groups • disconnections between the groups • graduate students have different social circles with undergraduates <p>Sub-theme 3: Disconnection between international students and Chinese immigrants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tensions and misunderstanding • happy to be with Chinese community • stereotypes of international students <p>Sub-theme 4: Sense of belonging, sense of safety and well-being</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • less lonely • more rooted in the society • a sense of safety • more stable friendships • adjust to new environment • feel warm and emotionally secure • feel like a family • inconsistent perceptions of the necessity of in-group communication <p>Sub-theme 5: Network</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • career development • help each other • Chinese business system
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Table 3 Final Themes

<p>Theme 1: Identity</p> <p>Sub-theme 1: Nationality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • represent different cultures • belong to Chinese community • only important in school • not a priority comparing to other identities • important but not must-have • proud to be Chinese <p>Sub-theme 2: Status as a student</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • multiple subgroups based on the central concept of being “an international student” • categorization as an international student is not important • emphasizing “international student” on campus • emphasizing “student’ at workplace <p>Sub-theme 3: Personality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • personality is important • based on different individual experiences • emphasize personal attributes rather than social categories • being international <p>Sub-theme 4: Common interests</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • common hobbies • shared experiences/language • being the member of a workgroup • study in programs taught by French • self-identification as minority <p>Sub-theme 5: Struggles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify with both Chinese culture and Canadian culture • find a balance • more respect for Chinese culture • developed different ways of thinking • identity becomes visible while communicating with friends back home • feel distant from China • find a place in host society • feel abandoned by home country 	<p>Theme 2: Intercultural friendships</p> <p>Sub-theme 1: Factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • different cultural background • limited topics • different cultural perspectives • language barriers for casual conversations • different food and entertainment choices • shared interests overcome barriers • extend the bonds to daily life • interpersonal attraction <p>Sub-theme 2: Stepping out of comfort zone</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more comfortable interacting with own people • important to personal development • lack of communication limits networks • important for job opportunities • work in a Canadian organization • communicating with colleagues • have to social if in a working situation • increase visibility • make study-abroad experience worthy <p>Sub-theme 3: English as a second language (ESL)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • easier to make intercultural friends • make some real friends • create opportunities for meaningful relationships • small class with more interactions • eye-opening experience • culture differences highlighted 	<p>Theme 3: Teacher-student relationships</p> <p>Sub-theme 1: Lack of communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • class size • feel distant • boss and employee • should try talking to teachers more frequently • personal choices <p>Sub-theme 2: Different cultural perspectives in classroom</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cultural diversity in the graduate level seminars • international students are majority • identity becomes visible when others are not familiar with the culturally specific topics • more respect to home culture and other cultures • realize the importance of intercultural communication <p>Sub-theme 3: Identity-related tolerance and encouragement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discrimination from teachers • most are friendly • a problem of bad character • discriminated against in a subtle way • discrimination based on language ability • cause stress and ashamed feelings • take advantage of the identity • encouragement helps achieve better academic performance • reduce anxiety
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<p>Theme 4: Classmates relationships</p> <p>Sub-theme 1: Overall experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • positive but far from intimacy • closer with Chinese classmates • communication with non-Chinese only exists in the classroom • superficial and short-term friendships <p>Sub-theme 2: Reflections and reasons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • large number of Chinese students in Engineering program • more accessible and less demanding • work only with Chinese • hang out with Chinese outside the classroom • different backgrounds and social roles • have less in common for graduate students • feel like an outsider • topics focus on cultural differences • language barriers • choices of lifestyle • different labels on friendships • existing exclusive friend circles • personality contributes • perceptions about friendships • everybody has different schedules • limited classroom communication <p>Sub-theme 3: Group work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more opportunities to communicate • more comfortable with Chinese • too short for a long-term relationship 	<p>Theme 5: Communicating with Canadians</p> <p>Sub-theme 1: Overall impression</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • positive • Canadians are nice • lucky and grateful • discrimination • insulted in public • being an outsider <p>Sub-theme 2: Struggling to make friends</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no Canadian friends at all • cultural difference • not fitting in • difficult to meet Canadians outside classroom • not motivated • friendships with other international students • sharing the identity of outsider • immigrants are more open • emphasis on ethnic origins <p>Sub-theme 3: Understanding of the importance of intercultural contact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • label on friendships with Canadians • eliminate misunderstanding and bias • increase intercultural competence • respect cultural diversity • crush the stereotypes of Chinese • network • practicing language • better integrate into the host society 	<p>Theme 6: In-group relationships: Chinese community</p> <p>Sub-theme 1: Chinese international students and immigrants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tensions and misunderstanding • happy to be with Chinese community • stereotypes of international students <p>Sub-theme 2: Sense of belonging</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • less lonely • more rooted in the society • a sense of safety • more stable friendships • adjust to new environment • feel warm and emotionally secure • feel like a family
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Université d'Ottawa
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa
Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

Ethics Approval Notice

Social Sciences and Humanities REB

Principal Investigator / Supervisor / Co-investigator(s) / Student(s)

<u>First Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>Role</u>
Peruvemba	Jaya	Arts / Communication	Supervisor
Fangfang	Yu	Arts / Communication	Student Researcher

File Number: 11-17-07

Type of Project: Master's Thesis

Title: Identity Construction and Negotiation of Chinese Students in Canada

Approval Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Expiry Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Approval Type
11/30/2017	11/29/2018	Approval

Special Conditions / Comments:

N/A

**Université d'Ottawa**

Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

This is to confirm that the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board identified above, which operates in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement (2010) and other applicable laws and regulations in Ontario, has examined and approved the ethics application for the above named research project. Ethics approval is valid for the period indicated above and subject to the conditions listed in the section entitled "Special Conditions / Comments".

During the course of the project, the protocol may not be modified without prior written approval from the REB except when necessary to remove participants from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) pertain to only administrative or logistical components of the project (e.g., change of telephone number). Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes which increase the risk to participant(s), any changes which considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project and safety of the participant(s). Modifications to the project, including consent and recruitment documentation, should be submitted to the Ethics Office for approval using the "Modification to research project" form available at: <https://research.uottawa.ca/ethics/forms>.

Please submit an annual report to the Ethics Office four weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to request a renewal of this ethics approval. To close the file, a final report must be submitted. These documents can be found at: <https://research.uottawa.ca/ethics/forms>.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Office at extension 5387 or by e-mail at: ethics@uOttawa.ca.

Signature:

Gabriel Petitti
Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research
For Barbara Graves, Chair of the Social Sciences and Humanities REB