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**Cultural Communication and Miscommunication: Chinese MBA
Students in a Canadian Academic and Sociocultural Context**

by
Senquan Zhang

**A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**Faculty of Education
University of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada**

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Abstract

This doctoral study deals with communication issues of MBA students from China at Eastern Canada University (*pseudonym*). The author investigates how Chinese cultural presuppositions can lead to miscommunication and misunderstanding in the Canadian academic and social context. The main research questions are: What is the nature of Chinese/Canadian cross-cultural miscommunication and misunderstanding? What are the reasons for such miscommunication and misunderstanding? What are the consequences of such miscommunication and misunderstanding? What are the strategies for dealing/coping with miscommunication and misunderstanding?

In examining communication issues in non-instructional, real-life settings, the emphasis of the present study is on communicative competence (Hymes, 1971, 1972) and language socialization (Lazaraton, 1995). Firth & Wagner (1997) lament that although second and foreign language interactions in non-instructional settings are everyday occurrences, such as in the workplace, they have not yet attracted the attention of second language acquisition researchers. The present study addresses this gap. Johnson (1992) encourages ethnographic research, by saying that we can gain new insights by employing ethnographic approaches to understanding second and foreign language learners in schools and varied adult educational and workplace settings.

The present study is a naturalistic inquiry employing ethnographic methods; data are collected through (1) observation of the participants, (2) in-depth interviews with key informants, (3) interviews with background informants, and (4) a questionnaire. Data analysis and interpretation follow the qualitative paradigms of phenomenology and hermeneutics (Tesch, 1990). Further, Spindler's (1997) concept of transcultural sensitization has inspired the present study towards a better understanding of the phenomena and concepts involved in learning an additional language and culture.

Through its ethnographic approach, the present study shows that cultural factors significantly influenced the Chinese MBA students' sojourn in Canada and played a crucial role in various aspects of their academic work, their off-campus social interaction, their on-campus study-related interaction, and their relationships with Canadians. The present study is expected to contribute to a better understanding of language socialization in cross-cultural contexts and facilitate efficient language and professional training programs. With its emphasis on cross-cultural understanding on the conceptual level, it is further expected to contribute to the theory of language learning and language use in international settings.

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1 Introduction

The present study investigates how cultural differences can affect the understanding and communication of Chinese students in Canadian real-life settings. Canadians dealing with their Chinese interlocutors often encounter misunderstandings due to different sociocultural backgrounds; likewise, English speakers of Chinese background may feel frustrated when communicating with their Canadian counterparts. The notion of communicative competence that expands linguistics to include the sociocultural dimension is an important theoretical premise for the present empirical study. Under this premise, the use of language is related to social and cultural values.

The participants of the present study are students from Mainland China attending Eastern Canada University. In regard to their sociocultural background and their language of communication, they have to adapt to the university setting and social environment of Canada. The focus is on the Chinese students' experiences of studying and living in Canada. According to Johnson (1992), an ethnographic study is effective in examining what sociocultural knowledge students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds need in order to understand and benefit from instruction in school, or how patterns of classroom interaction and communication differ across cultures.

In its theoretical background, the study emphasizes the cultural factors in language communication, and views language as social behaviour. Centering on communicative competence and culture-specific miscommunication and misunderstanding, the present study is primarily concerned with language use in non-instructional, real-world settings; specifically, it examines how cultural differences shape the communication of Chinese MBA students with their Canadian interlocutors during their sojourn in Canada. Besides learning a second language as a different set of codes, the cultural dimension is as important as the language itself. Communicators with different sociocultural presuppositions understand and interpret verbal and non-verbal behaviour in different ways. Further, the study of cross-cultural communication is conceived as a multidisciplinary field.

A number of premises, in compliance with the theoretical background, led to formulating the research questions. One of these premises is the existence of cultural differences that give rise to problems of communication in the host institution. This premise is reflected in the research question about the nature of miscommunication and misunderstanding in the interaction between Chinese and Canadians.

Further, to deal with cultural differences, the Chinese students should be well prepared for functioning in the new Canadian environment. Here the onus is on the program organizers and the host institution who have to identify the

sources of problems. This issue is addressed by the research question about the reasons and factors causing miscommunication and misunderstanding.

Problems of communication give rise to strategies of coping, both on the part of the students themselves, and on the part of the host institution. This issue is covered by the research question inquiring what strategies of coping are employed by the Chinese students on the one hand, and employed by the program organizers and the host institution on the other hand.

If these strategies are not successful, this is not necessarily the Chinese students' fault. It is due in large part to the program organizers and the host institution not having bridged the cultural differences. This premise gives rise to the research question about the consequences of the communication problems.

Finally, the program organizers and the host institution need an effective policy that will acknowledge cultural difference and facilitate the reduction of communication difficulties. This premise is addressed by the research question inquiring into strategies for coping, and in more detail in the conclusion of the present study.

The research questions are:

- 1) What is the nature of Chinese/Canadian cross-cultural miscommunication and misunderstanding?
 - On what occasions (during what type of interaction) do miscommunication and misunderstanding occur?

2) What are the reasons for miscommunication and misunderstanding?

More concretely:

- Are individual factors the main cause?
- Are there organizational factors (related to the MBA program and the university setting)?
- Are broader sociocultural differences between China and North America causing miscommunication and misunderstanding?

3) What are the consequences of such miscommunication and misunderstanding?

- Do they lead to communication breakdown?
- Do they give rise to hostility?
- Does cultural learning occur?

4) What are the strategies for coping?

- When miscommunication and misunderstanding occur, do the Chinese MBA students continue to negotiate, do they try to make themselves understood - or do they just give up?
- What were the strategies used by the program organizers and the host institution to deal with the students' problems?

In its methodology, the present study employs an ethnographic approach to answer these questions. Consideration of the sociocultural factors in the communication between speakers of different language and culture background leads

to an enhanced understanding of the social actors' language behaviour, which includes the emic relevance of social factors. While examining the problematic aspects of cross-cultural communication, the present study also reveals its positive and constructive sides, and thus contributes to the theory and practice of second language acquisition and use, language socialization, and international higher education.

1.1 Rationale for the Study

The present study emanates from my previous research (Master's thesis) that was concerned with improving the communication between Canadian business people and their Chinese counterparts (Zhang, 1997). Researching a communication phenomenon that involves North American learners of Chinese led me to consider examining the reverse situation, involving their equivalent counterparts of Chinese cultural background who are located in Canada.

Economic, scientific, and technological globalization has resulted in English becoming the worldwide *lingua franca*. People with different cultural backgrounds acquire English as a foreign language or second language, and communicate in English. Sociocultural differences may be subtle between different cultures within the western world, but when the cultural gap is wide, as it frequently is between Chinese and people from North America, cultural barriers remain even after the language barrier has been overcome.

The significance of researching cross-cultural communication problems is evident from the relevant literature. Gumperz & Tannen (1979) point out that when fluent speakers from different cultures “assume that they understand each other, they are less likely to question interpretations” (p. 315). Fluent non-native speakers of English tend to be over-confident in their language abilities, not realizing how prone they are to miscommunication due to cultural differences. At the same time, their interlocutors who are native speakers of English may be impressed by their (non-native) language fluency, and less likely to make allowances for cross-cultural misunderstandings. This communicative situation is considered to be the most “dangerous” for misunderstandings to happen (Varonis & Gass 1985a, 1985b). The present study intends to address the issue of sociocultural differences experienced by a group of Chinese MBA students at Eastern Canada University who are otherwise proficient English language speakers. It is rooted in the communicative concept within anthropology and linguistics developed in the 1960s by Hymes (1970). By stressing communicative competence, Hymes (1972, 1974) succeeded in launching a more social and contextual view of language: language as a social and cultural phenomenon is acquired and learned through social interaction (Firth & Wagner, 1997).

In recent years, ethnographic approaches have gained wider acceptance in second language related research, but much of the ethnographic work has focused on younger language learners.

There is surprisingly little ethnographic work on the language learning and cultural adjustment of adolescents and adults relative to the many experimental and correlational studies. We have much yet to gain by employing ethnographic approaches to understanding second and foreign language learners in high schools, colleges, and varied adult educational and workplace settings (Johnson, 1992, p. 135).

Johnson (1992) encourages researchers to conduct language- and culture-oriented research not only with younger language learners, but also with adults in educational and workplace settings. “This kind of information helps explain how cultural assumptions and values can shape interactions, [and] can cause cross-cultural miscommunication...” (Johnson, 1992, p. 135). More recently, in the context of second language acquisition, Atkinson (1999) points out that despite its importance for TESOL, the aspect of culture has so far not been sufficiently discussed. The reviewed literature and my work experience in China¹ and Canada corroborate the importance of cross-cultural awareness for communication between speakers of different cultural background.

1.2 The Researcher's Background

As I have conducted an ethnographic study, it is important to introduce my personal background and experience. According to Clarke (1975), the personality of the researcher is a determining factor in topic selection, intellectual approach, and ability in the field. Punch (1994) observes that the personal and intellectual

path leading researchers to drop one line of inquiry, or to pursue another topic, often remains unknown; he calls for more intellectual autobiographies to clarify why academics end up studying what they do.

Altheide & Johnson (1994) emphasize that it is important to know where the author of an ethnographic study is coming from:

... the ethical practice of ethnography demands that the author's perspective be specified. ... The perspectival nature of knowledge is an obdurate fact of ethnography. The approach of the ethnographic ethic acknowledges this, and provides the reader with an explicit statement about where the author is coming from, which is the ethnographic version of truth in advertising, an ethical responsibility for those who elect to exercise the social science power and authorial voice (p. 490).

Saville-Troike's (1989) view of the researcher conducting a culturally oriented study relating to the researcher's own culture encouraged me to implement this study, based on my past work experience in various multilingual and multicultural environments both in China and Canada.

When teaching English at one of the eight Chinese universities that specialize in the training of translators, interpreters and foreign-language teachers, and collaborating there with English native speakers as colleagues, I was immersed in an environment rich in instances of cross-cultural communication. When miscommunication occurred, this was usually ascribed to personality problems.

My colleagues from western countries were hired by the Chinese authorities as “foreign experts”, to introduce up-to-date teaching methodology and provide culture-specific explanations to the authentic teaching materials used at university. As a teacher, I was now and then asked by the English department to accompany western colleagues and visitors as a guide when they participated in activities outside the university; sometimes I had to travel with them to other Chinese cities. This provided me with a unique opportunity to witness communication issues in real-world settings.

The westerners associated with the English department of the Chinese university were English native speakers from North America, England, Australia and New Zealand. English was the language of communication between them and the Chinese students and colleagues. Although the English spoken by their Chinese interlocutors was linguistically correct, instances of misunderstanding and miscommunication still occurred between the westerners and the Chinese. In many cases, due to the lack of cross-cultural research in China at that time, such problems were blamed on the “weird foreigners”. The westerners, on the other hand, complained that their Chinese counterparts were “bossy and rude”².

Such interpretations sounded plausible at that time. However, in retrospect, after studying at universities in Canada, consulting relevant literature and working in the Canadian multicultural environment, I came to believe that the instances of miscommunication I had experienced in China were due to differences

in the actors' cultural background. As a result of these reflections, my perspective has shifted towards the sociocultural factors in language education.

My previous professional activity as a translator / interpreter showed that problems of miscommunication would often occur in naturalistic settings among entrepreneurs who use English as their working language. Therefore I developed a personal interest in further researching the phenomenon of culture as a factor in language use, within real-world communicative settings. My working experience with Canadians in Canada, especially my participation in Canadian government trade missions to China, provided an impetus to work on intercultural communication. I became committed to the field of cross-cultural communication as a research topic after traveling to China on several Canadian government-led business delegations in the nineties³. During these missions I participated with Canadians in cross-cultural situations and interacted in Chinese/western cross-cultural settings. With the Chinese interlocutors being fluent in English, misunderstandings between them and the Canadians still occurred, and the problems of miscommunication became an important issue for the Canadian trade mission members.

During the trade missions to China, I was occasionally asked by Canadian delegates to provide a re-interpretation of items that had been negotiated during the business meetings, and I realized that a literal translation was not sufficient. Instead of a re-interpretation, I had to give extensive background explanations. For example, when a power plant project was negotiated, the Chinese negotiators

seemed to procrastinate with evasive answers. I had to explain to the Canadians that the Chinese side could not agree with the price of electric energy proposed by the Canadian side, because the price of electricity had to comply with the price set by the Chinese government authorities, and further bargaining would be futile. The Chinese counterparts indicated the difficulties not explicitly, but in an indirect manner. The experience of the Canadian business people confirmed the existence and ubiquitous nature of the cross-cultural miscommunication phenomenon in real-life settings.

Regarding my research background, the training I received at Canadian universities has been crucial for the development of my philosophical, theoretical and methodological perspectives. I attended the Language Arts program at the University of Victoria for a Master's degree, and then continued my studies at the University of Ottawa where I received training in qualitative research methodology. The unique environment at the University of Ottawa with its international campus helped me become sensitive to cross-cultural issues. Graduate study and research in Canada has provided me with academic training and a social context in which to examine cross-cultural communication taking place in a real-world setting. The present inquiry into cross-cultural communication and miscommunication therefore aims at the sociocultural dimensions rather than the relatively more narrow linguistic dimensions.

1.3 Outline of the Thesis

This inquiry focuses on issues of miscommunication, misunderstanding and communicative competence as experienced by Chinese MBA students in the Canadian English-speaking academic and social context. Relevant literature is reviewed in chapter 2 of the dissertation. In the aspect of language communication, the literature confirms the existence of cultural differences that lead to miscommunication and misunderstandings between native and non-native speakers of English. In view of the scope of the present inquiry, the reviewed literature spans the theoretical tenets of sociolinguistics, language socialization, language learning and use, and language and culture, as well as prior empirical research in these disciplines. In the centre is the notion of communicative competence as introduced by Hymes (1972, 1974), who urged linguists and anthropologists to include each other's areas in interdisciplinary research. The multidisciplinary nature of the present study is reflected in its emphasis on the use of language related to social and cultural values.

Chapter 3 recounts the research methodology used. As the present inquiry deals with language and culture, specifically with the impact of cultural presuppositions and culture-specific concepts on cross-cultural understanding, the methodology chapter includes discussions on culture-oriented research methods in the field of language education. The two different perspectives of the quantitative so-

ciolinguistic, and the qualitative ethnographic approaches are discussed in detail, as they relate to the study.

Chapters 4 and 5 constitute the empirical study. The collected empirical data are presented, analyzed and interpreted based on the qualitative paradigms of phenomenology and hermeneutics. In chapter 4, the presented data reveal how, and to what extent, the different sociocultural backgrounds of the Chinese MBA students influenced their study and life within the Canadian cultural context, both in on- and off-campus settings. In detail, this chapter describes the students' social environmental change, their confrontation with new conceptual knowledge, social interaction with Canadians, their language socialization in the new environment, the differences in political culture encountered by the students, and the effort they had to put forth to overcome tensions.

Chapter 5 shows the strategies used by the Chinese students and the YES-Canada program staff for coping with the cross-cultural gap. In detail, this chapter presents the students' strategies of avoidance and isolation, consequences of absence of communication, tension between the Chinese and Canadian students and perceived racism, and strategies of the Faculty of Administration to rectify communication problems experienced by the Chinese MBA students.

Chapter 6 concludes the dissertation, by relating the case study to the scholarly literature reviewed in chapter 2. It summarizes the study, its findings, and its contribution to second language acquisition theory, and provides sugges-

tions for the design of training programs involving Chinese and other international students in Canada.

2 Literature Review

This is a synopsis of the relevant literature that underpins the study. The present study examines the social and cultural dimensions of Chinese students' communication in Canada, with emphasis on their culture-specific expectations and presuppositions as sources of misunderstanding and miscommunication. This chapter presents an overview of literature relevant to cross-cultural communication. Here, scholarship on language and culture is reviewed, spanning the notion of communicative competence, the traditional perspectives of language acquisition and use, and the sociocultural factors in cross-cultural communication, cross-cultural interaction and cultural teaching and learning.

Since the research project is a case study that used ethnographic methods for fieldwork involving Chinese participants, some of the literature reviewed focuses on Chinese culture. Miscommunication discussed in the literature is often due to culture shock, the culture gap in general, the Chinese ideological orientations and institutional environments, and cultural differences between the collectively oriented Chinese and individually oriented North Americans. In addition, the literature review examines cultural issues in classroom teaching and learning. Key cultural concepts and indicators are identified in this chapter as they emerge from the literature. They provide the basis for the framework of cross-cultural communication for this study and the subsequent methodology and findings.

2.1 Communicative Competence

The literature reviewed in this section summarizes the development of theory in the area of second language acquisition. This section introduces the different views in the field of applied linguistics: the traditional view that stresses linguistic skills, and the sociolinguistic view that includes sociocultural factors in the use of a second language.

2.1.1 The Traditional Linguistic View

In the traditional perspective of second language acquisition, mastering a language in its linguistic aspects, like vocabulary and grammar, is sufficient for achieving communicative competence. Traditional linguists, also labeled formalists, structuralists or generativists (Newmeyer, 1998, p. 7), have defined language mainly as form. The main advocate of this view has been Chomsky (1965) who sees the goal of language learning as the mastery of decontextualized code. In this view, language is a closed system unrelated to its social or cultural environment.

Traditionally, the proficiency of language students has been evaluated at the linguistic level, and was marked low whenever insufficient on this formal level. While this evaluation might be correct, its usefulness for practice is questionable, because it is not just the native-speaker-like fluency that counts in real-life settings, but rather language use and language socialization.

In the second language acquisition skills and components models of the early 1960s, an early framework for measuring language proficiency was introduced. The models proposed by Lado (1961) and Carroll (1961, 1968) distinguished the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and certain components of linguistic knowledge (grammar, vocabulary, phonology/graphology), but did not indicate how skills and knowledge are related. These models failed to recognize the full context of language use in the contexts of discourse and situation (Bachman, 1990).

Other scholars tend to view the acquisition of a second language as a mental process, believing that the language acquisition mechanism resides mostly in the mind. In his mentalist view, Krashen (1981, 1992) projects the whole burden of language acquisition into the mind of the learner. His "affective filter" hypothesis postulates a mental shield (filter) that blocks language input from reaching the brain's language acquisition device. In his view, this affective filter exists only in adults' minds when they learn a second language, not in children's.

Linguistically oriented scholars such as Meara (1996) maintain that vocabulary is the core of learning a second language. His understanding of second language competence is fairly unique, when he argues, "whichever way you look at it, lexical competence is at the heart of communicative competence" (p. 35). This recent view stresses lexical competence as the most important component of communicative competence.

When discussing communicative competence, most traditionally oriented researchers in applied linguistics and second language acquisition are focused on non-native communicators' linguistic problems such as deficient vocabulary, grammar and a heavy foreign accent, and utilize experimental and quasi-experimental research designs. They collect, evaluate and interpret elicited linguistic data for their studies, through loud reading of text, structured exercises, elicited imitation or translation, story retelling, and oral interviews, and often follow the psychological research trend toward statistical analyses. The social concerns of language acquisition are seldom addressed in these traditional views (Johnson, 1992; Davis, 1995; Lazaraton, 1995).

In short, the literature introduced in this section views language as a form, a view that carries the labels formalist, structuralist or generative. The traditional way of measuring language proficiency is based on structural criteria and linguistic knowledge. A language acquisition mechanism resides in the mind of the learner, and lexical competence is emphasized.

2.1.2 The Interdisciplinary Perspective

Language related research has moved toward a more balanced view that encompasses social factors in language learning and use, which always occur in a social context. Thus, the scope of language and culture research is wider than the formalist view that is restricted to linguistic forms. The study of real-world lan-

guage use is an interdisciplinary field to which not only linguistics but also other disciplines are indispensable, such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, communication and philosophy. By addressing the sociocultural factors in second language acquisition, studies on speech acts have paved the road to ethnographic inquiry.

2.1.2.1 Sociocultural Considerations

The functionalist views language in broader terms than the formalist. The functionalist's description of language not only includes linguistic knowledge, such as the knowledge of grammatical rules or language patterns, but also social appropriateness. Dell Hymes (1971, 1972) is the pioneer of this function-oriented socio-linguistic perspective. His work is interdisciplinary, linking ethnopoetics, ethnography, applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, and sociocultural interaction closely together, so they result in an integrated world view (Hymes, 1996).

Advocating the inclusion of the cultural component into second language acquisition, Gass & Varonis (1991) state that, in order to explain why communication breaks down, "investigators must go beyond an analysis of the purely linguistic features of the interaction (phonology, morphology, syntax, and prosody), and consider as well its pragmatic and sociocultural dimensions" (p. 121).

In the functionalist view, language is formed in, by, and for social, cultural, and political contexts (Gee, 1998). This perspective has led to an increase in

the number of sociolinguistic and ethnographic studies in modern applied linguistics. Following Ferguson & Gumperz (1959), Hymes (1972) pointed out:

Religion, ethnicity, socio-economic position of speaker and similar social criteria may play a more important role than a grammatical similarity or difference (p. 24).

He further urged linguists and anthropologists to work toward human communication, and stated “there are no books on comparative speaking to put beside those on comparative religion, comparative politics, and the like” (Hymes, 1972, p. 50). According to Hymes’ (1970) communicative model, besides linguistic, cognitive or other psychological factors, social factors must be included in language training and evaluation. The communicative competence model has influenced syllabus design (Munby, 1978; Bell, 1981), the concept of language proficiency (Bachman, 1990), and language teaching and learning (Widdowson, 1971, 1975, 1978; Gumperz, 1982a; Savignon, 1990; Romaine, 1994; Atkinson, 1999).

The shift in linguistic theory towards a more pragmatic semantic and functionalist approach occurred at the time of the establishment of the European Economic Community and the European Common Market, when the need to teach the major languages of these countries became pressing. The well-known “Council of Europe Modern Languages Project”, an initiative in language curriculum development that started in the early 1970’s, represented a major effort to meet

this need. Parallel to Hymes' (1971, 1972) theory, the work of Wilkins (1972, 1976) within the Council of Europe project provided the impetus for the communicative approach in language studies. The concept of communicative competence developed by this early group of researchers, has been reflected in the second language acquisition literature throughout the decades that followed.

The notion of communicative competence (Hymes, 1971, 1972; Gumperz, 1982a, 1982b) that expands linguistics to include the sociocultural dimension is an important theoretical premise for sociolinguistic researchers. Accordingly, Fasold (1990) advocates a "sociolinguistics of language", in which the use of language is related to social and cultural values, naming Hymes as the initiator of this way of studying linguistics. Hymes' contribution to a number of disciplines has also been addressed in the work of Firth & Wagner (1997).

The work of cultural anthropologists such as Keesing (1976) in the newly emerging discipline of "language and culture studies" (Shaul & Furbee, 1998) has also led to research orientations that look beyond the linguistic level, aiming at the underlying cultural suppositions of the communicators. This interdisciplinary trend, which links language with social and cultural factors, has widened the scope of second language acquisition, interweaving it with the disciplines of linguistics, psychology, sociolinguistics, sociology, anthropology, communication and philosophy. These other disciplines all contribute to an understanding of the nature of second language acquisition (Gass & Selinker, 1994).

The interdisciplinary character of second language acquisition with an emphasis on social factors is most clearly stated by the researcher Polio (2000) who directs the attention of researchers and practicing language teachers towards the new journal *Language Teaching Research* (since 1997) so they can meet the needs of second language acquisition as an interdisciplinary area. According to Polio (2000), the interdisciplinary perspective in second language acquisition can stimulate new avenues of inquiry, including action research.

In summary, the literature reviewed in this section revolves around the communicative competence model, which includes the sociocultural dimension of language acquisition and language use. Within the function-oriented sociolinguistic perspective, social factors play an important role in language training, language communication and evaluation. The interdisciplinary trend in viewing language leads to the sociolinguistic and ethnographic approaches, and has spawned the new discipline of Language and Culture Studies.

2.1.2.2 Speech Act Research

In the realm of sociolinguistics, there are essentially two types of research conducted: speech act research and ethnographic research. Sociolinguistics encompasses the sociocultural aspects of language and covers a broad spectrum. However, due to its tradition, second language acquisition research in this area usually does not have a sociological orientation (Davis, 1995). Many sociolin-

guists also use methods from psychology and positivist perspectives, collecting data with experimental techniques or through surveys, and analyzing data using statistical methods (Kasper & Dahl, 1991). Speech act research has paved the way to linking language learning with cultural contexts (House-Edmondson, 1986, 1993; Cohen & Olshtain, 1993, 1994). In House's (1993) definition, the technical term for language use in a social context is "pragmatics". When learning a second language, one must learn more than just the pronunciation, the lexical items, the appropriate word order, but one must also learn the appropriate way to use those words and sentences in the second language. House-Edmondson (1986) sees pragmatics as a "discipline inside linguistics which sets out to study how language is used in communication, how it comes about that utterances have meanings in situations" (p.281).

"Much of the work in interlanguage pragmatics has been conducted within the framework of speech acts" (Gass & Selinker, 1994, p.183). Speech acts are certain functions of language, such as complaining, thanking, apologizing, refusing, requesting, inviting. Speech act research examines how the same speech act is differently expressed in different languages. Johnson (1992) classifies speech act research, as the sociolinguistic study of language use, under "survey research", a type of research that examines one or more variables for larger numbers of entities. Thus, speech act research represents a more intricate kind of language analysis that links language and culture, rather than only focusing on linguistic forms.

In one of her early empirical research projects, House (1982) analyzed the speech acts of 200 German and 100 English subjects. Using a questionnaire, she explored how advanced German learners of English perform apologies in English. Each item in the questionnaire contained a brief description of the situation, specifying setting and social role, followed by an incomplete dialogue. The respondents were asked to complete the dialogue by inserting the appropriate speech act. She concluded that German speakers tend to express requests more directly, while the English native speakers are more indirect and prefer "interpersonally active and routinized" strategies. House (1982) then points out the limitations of her study:

We believe that due to the tightly controlled contextual features resulting in maximal cross-cultural comparability, and the concentration on one specific speech act, our findings may not be without total interest. To further extend our knowledge of learners' competence and performance in apologizing, a variety of studies using different data types and enforcing different processing constraints will clearly be needed. Ethnographic studies of apology patterns in 'real-life' settings providing a rich discorsal and interactional context may well complement our finding (p. 323).

Studies on speech acts have demonstrated the culture-related difficulties experienced by language learners. For example, speech act studies can illustrate how English native and non-native speakers (Japanese) differ in their statement of disagreements, and in giving embarrassing information (Beebe & Takahashi,

1989). Speech act research also has shown that even advanced second language learners have difficulties in encoding requests and apologies (Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989).

According to Kasper & Dahl (1991), speech acts can serve to identify the use of social rules by native and non-native speakers. Some culturally oriented researchers have examined cultural differences in compliments and compliment exchanges (Manes & Wolfson, 1981; Holmes, 1988; Wolfson, 1989). Generally, these studies employ frequency counts, percentages and statistical mean. For example, Manes and Wolfson (1981) found that the semantic composition of the compliments was highly regular. The most commonly occurring adjectives were *nice, good, beautiful, pretty and great*.

Speech act research is central to House's (1993) investigation of cross-cultural communication between German native speakers and English native speakers, in a classroom setting at the University of Hamburg (Germany). Her study centered on specific speech acts such as a request, a complaint, or a suggestion, and attempted to gain insights through an analysis of conversational responses. The data were elicited via role-plays from advanced German learners of English interacting with English native speakers in a variety of simulated everyday situations. In case of an inappropriate response, a retrospective interview was conducted. In this interview, the German students were asked to reflect upon how they had understood their interlocutors' utterance, and what they had intended

with their own utterance. Such interviews revealed how their German cultural background affected the understanding and speech of the learners.

Second language acquisition researchers have developed research methodology on speech acts (Cohen & Olshtain, 1994). Role-play interviews are employed as a research method, to find a way of combining different approaches for describing a certain speech act among native and nonnative speakers of a language.

Speech act research investigates mainly the linguistic encoding of certain ritualized utterances that might vary from culture to culture, but does not address issues relating to the different cultural backgrounds of the social actors involved in cross-cultural communication. Speech act research is usually restricted to linguistic activities dealing with cross-cultural communication in simulated settings, and is therefore narrower and more restricted in scope than the ethnographic approach that examines communication in real-world settings.

In summary, the literature reviewed in this section addresses speech act research, which examines how certain functions of language are expressed in culture-specific ways, thus linking language with culture. The concept of language pragmatics, defined as language use in a social context, is a fundamental principle in the sociolinguistic study of language use with statistical methods. Speech act research helps understand the use of social rules by speakers of different lan-

guages, and helps reveal culture-related difficulties experienced by language learners and users.

2.1.2.3 The Cultural Dimension of Language Learning and Use

In the opinion of Gass & Varonis (1991), second language learners' lack of communicative competence can be due to the different cultural backgrounds of communicators with different native languages:

When the interaction involves native speakers and non-native speakers, ... the bridge is unstable if not downright shaky. When interlocutors do not share the same native language or the same sociocultural rules or discourse, the possibility for miscommunication is profound (p. 122).

Transcending the scope of speech act research, early linguistic anthropologists such as Ochs & Schieffelin (1984) and Scollon & Scollon (1981) conducted ethnographic studies of children's language socialization within diverse cultural settings. These cultural studies reveal how individuals rely on culture-specific patterns of cues, strategies, frames, and schemata to interpret and signal their understanding of, and involvement in, an ongoing event of social interaction.

Consideration of sociocultural factors in language learning and use has become popular since the 1970's. Inspired by Hymes' (1972, 1974) notion of communicative competence, the researcher Heath (1983) has won great acclaim for her path-breaking scholarship in the field of ethnographic inquiry. Her famous book, *Ways With Words* was a seminal examination of communicative compe-

tence. Her research methodology was naturalistic: language learners and users, as well as language acquisition and communication phenomena, were studied in their authenticity within their natural environment. Data were collected through qualitative methods, such as observation and open-ended in-depth interviews, rather than through elicitation.

Heath's (1983) research is a superb example of ethnographic research on language acquisition. She had developed an interest in this area in the late 1960s, when America started desegregation of students from different ethnic background. She tells the story of the oral and written language habits of black and white working class communities of the American Southeast. She spent ten years in the Piedmont Carolinas, studying the daily activities and conversations of "ordinary folk" in Trackton and Roadville, one being a black, the other a white community. In her study, she took an emic view of language use in school and at home. Parents in the two communities wanted their children to do well in school, and prepared their children for school. She found that the middle-class children did well, but the poorer children experienced various, and different, difficulties in school.

As an ethnographer, Heath (1983) naturally took an anthropologist's view of the two communities. Conducting her research right in her own anglophone home region, she did not have to deal with different languages, but with different cultures within an English language environment. She focused on uses of language in the communities, especially the ways parents talked with their children,

and compared them to the ways in which language was used by teachers in school. Based on a great deal of ethnographic evidence, she argued that the middle-class children did best in school not because they were innately more intelligent, but because their home ways of using language were more similar to the “ways with words” their teachers used and valued, such as kinds of questions, descriptions, explanations, and narratives. The teachers were more used to the ways of talking used by white middle-class children.

Heath’s (1983) work is classified by scholars in second language acquisition as an ethnography of communication (Johnson, 1992). Her work set an example for other scholars in the area of applied linguistics, and many researchers now take the ethnographic view to examine how culture influences and shapes language behaviour in realistic settings.

Conducting an ethnographic interpretive-qualitative inquiry allows the researcher to examine the social and/or sociocultural context of language learning and use, and to emphasize context and culture within language and culture studies (Lazaraton, 1995). For example, in her second language acquisition research project, Willett (1987) conducted a five-month ethnographic study of two young children (Jeni from Korea, and Alisia from Brazil) acquiring English in classrooms settings. The children were newcomers to America in a preschool situation. Besides observing their preschool behaviour, Willett also conducted in-depth interviews with their parents and teachers. She was interested in the girls’ interac-

tion patterns in preschool, in particular how these patterns might have been culturally shaped and how they may have affected their learning strategies. The parents of both girls were graduate students in the United States. Willett studied the children as a participant observer in her own daughter's nursery school. She spent five months observing every day for half an hour. She also gathered data through interviews with the girls' parents and teachers. Combining observation at preschool with parent and teacher interviews, Willett concluded that the children's interaction style reflected the values of their respective sociocultural environments at home.

Her qualitative study illustrates how culturally shaped language socialization patterns from home can affect interaction patterns and second language learning. Through the interviews, she found that the two girls approached social participation, second language use, and learning in very different ways, reflecting their respective different cultural values. The qualitative open-ended interviews used in this ethnographic study revealed cultural values and presuppositions that are integral to the process of language acquisition.

Interpretive-qualitative research has uncovered diverse cultural dimensions of language acquisition and language socialization, and has led to a more complete understanding of communication in multicultural settings (Saville-Troike, 1989). In his recent article, Atkinson (1999) describes culture and cross-

cultural communication as central yet underexamined concepts in second language acquisition research:

In comparison to other fields such as anthropology and cultural studies, there has been little serious discussion and critique of the concept in TESOL [Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages] over the last two decades (p. 625).

Atkinson (1999) further emphasizes the sociocultural factors of power relations and social identity in second language acquisition research. In his opinion, cross-cultural research is often severely criticized for disregarding the factors of unequal distribution of power and resources.

In his discussion of the question whether teaching language must automatically entail teaching culture, Atkinson (1999) concludes that knowledge of language and the ability to use language cannot be developed without at the same time developing knowledge of the sociocultural context in which language occurs. On the other hand, he thinks it is difficult to actively “teach” this cultural context:

The explicit teaching of culture often, if not always, depends on stereotypes and ideologically fraught simplifications – or, at the least, someone-in-particular’s notions of culture (p. 648).

In his outlook, which is relevant to the cross-cultural nature of the present study, Atkinson (1999) further stresses the growing importance of cross-cultural issues:

Certainly, the world is changing rapidly at the millennium, and in many ways is growing more transcultural than ever before. This should not be taken to mean, however, that culture or cultures are disappearing (p. 649).

In his discussion of communication and culture, Atkinson (1999) proposes a revised view of culture, as a basis for second language acquisition researchers and practitioners in the 21st century.

Summing up, the literature reviewed in this section shows how the sociocultural component affects the communicative competence of speakers of a language. Communication relies on culture-specific patterns, and following different sociocultural rules can result in miscommunication. The ethnographic view allows us to examine language socialization phenomena, and how culture shapes language behaviour in real-world settings. It further reveals the cultural values and presuppositions of learners and communicators, by addressing the cultural dimension of language acquisition and language socialization. Culturally shaped language socialization patterns from the learners' homes affect their acquisition and use of language. Factors of power relations and social identity play a role in acquiring and using language. Using language requires knowledge of the sociocultural context in which language occurs. In regard to combining language teaching with the teaching of culture, it is under debate whether or not culture can be taught in a classroom setting.

2.2 Miscommunication: the Sociocultural Perspective

Recent sociolinguistic scholarship has shown that miscommunication between non-native and native speakers of a language is mostly due to cultural differences. An early voice suggesting this concept of miscommunication is Van Dijk (1977). His view represents an important historical step towards widening our outlook on human language production. Recognizing the insufficiency of describing language as consisting of small, isolated units of description, he urges researchers to transcend these by looking at larger units. We must extend our vision to the entirety of circumstances (not only the linguistic ones) that surround the production of language. By widening their perspective to what surrounds spoken or written utterances, researchers also obtain a better understanding of what the utterances are really about.

A similar widening of the scope of language communication is suggested by Mey (1993), who uses the term *macropragmatics* (in contrast to *micropragmatics*), to describe research that deals with larger units of analysis. He defines *macropragmatics* as investigating the societal parameters of language use. According to Johnson (1992) and Tesch (1990), miscommunication due to sociocultural differences can be better analyzed by examining the participants' lives, experiences, and stories, as larger units of analysis within the qualitative paradigm.

Most of the relevant literature acknowledges that in cross-cultural interaction, miscommunication can occur even when the interlocutors have a good com-

mand of the language. Cross-cultural pragmatic failure may occur because of mother tongue and native culture interference with the target language and culture. Non-native communicators may misinterpret native speakers' intentions and vice versa (House, 1982, 1986, 1993).

Cross-cultural miscommunication often occurs in instances involving relatively fluent second-language speakers and native speakers. Scollon & Scollon (1995) have investigated the professional communication in English between Westerners and East Asians, especially Chinese, trying to pinpoint the major sources of miscommunication in intercultural contacts. One of their examples linking language with culture is the story of the Chinese host who wanted to show respect to the guests and kept repeating "today we have nothing good to eat!" This left the Western guests who were confronted with a 12-course banquet in confusion. In fact, the real message was, "you deserve much better".

Based on their experience in North America, Taiwan and Korea, Scollon & Scollon (1995) discovered that in authentic settings:

Most miscommunication does not arise through mispronunciations or through poor uses of grammar, as important as those aspects of language learning might be. The major sources of miscommunication in intercultural contexts lie in differences in patterns of discourse" (p. xii).

During their work in Asian countries, Scollon & Scollon (1995) further noticed:

Frequently intergroup miscommunication and even hostility arise when each group has failed to interpret the intentions of the other group as a result of misinterpreting its discourse conventions (p. xii).

The work of Scollon & Scollon (1995) focuses in particular on the discourse between Asians and westerners, men and women, on corporate discourse and discourse within professional organizations, and thus covers the essential range of cross-cultural communication, combining linguistic and anthropological concerns.

The cultural issue in second language acquisition also includes relations of power, especially in the interaction between learners who are non-native speakers of English and English native speakers (Atkinson, 1999). The social distance between the two groups as a factor hindering their communication cannot be excluded as a sociocultural factor, nor should it be considered minimal. Peirce (1993, 1995) points out that the second language acquisition theorists have not investigated how relations of power in the social world affect social interaction between second language learners and target-language speakers. She further laments that second language acquisition theorists have not adequately explored how inequitable relations of power limit the opportunities second language learners have to practice the target language outside the classroom.

Peirce's (1993) dissertation is based on the concepts of power relations and social identity. She examines in great detail how power is embedded in the

social relations of immigrant women in Canadian society. While concerned with the English language acquisition and language use of five immigrant women in Canada, she does not address the linguistic and sociocultural aspects of language use, but focuses exclusively on issues of social identity. In terms of second language acquisition, she discusses the societal and cultural factors that affect the learners in their real-life interactions with Canadians.

Commenting on miscommunication and communication problems between her study participants and their Canadian interlocutors, Peirce (1993, 1995) argues that it is insufficient for the immigrant women just to understand the usage rules of the English language. She maintains that theories in the field of second language acquisition should extend beyond an understanding of the appropriate rules of use in a particular society. Communicative competence alone is insufficient to overcome communication problems or miscommunication, but the awareness of the right to speak (as well as the right to be heard) should be included, that is, the self-confidence of the non-native speaker to participate in communicative events. By exercising or not exercising the right to speak, a person gains access to – or is denied access to – powerful social networks that give learners the opportunity to speak.

Thus, through examining instances of miscommunication experienced by her participants, Peirce's (1993, 1995) study extends the theory of communicative competence to include the awareness of the right to speak. In her view, language

is not a neutral medium of communication, but is understood with reference to its social meaning. In her view, the key for the immigrant women to solve the communication problems between themselves and the other Canadians is to establish a social identity in the English-speaking country. Her study shows that power relations play a crucial role in social interactions between non-native and native communicators.

In her research approach, Peirce (1993, 1995) clearly transcends the linguistic level of interaction and uses larger units of ethnographic and sociocultural phenomena when she studies the ordinary life-world. She is interested in the way the immigrant women experience their world, and how to best understand them. In this case, the worldview of the participants poses as a comprehensive “unit of analysis”, and participant constructs are used to structure the research. In Peirce’s view, power relations are a major sociocultural factor affecting the use of language.

In the context of his discussion of culture, Atkinson (1999) points out how power relations affect language communication and language learning in conjunction with other sociocultural factors:

Cross-cultural studies of early socialization and enculturation (including, importantly, language socialization ...) have contributed enormously to the understanding of how “novices” get inducted into social groups, and how social practices attain relative spatial and temporal durability. Equally, the whole ethnographic tradition in the social sciences has deci-

sively established the principle that human life is universally a highly social (i.e. socially mediated) endeavor. Such research has of course also been severely criticized for emphasizing the shared, consensual – in a sense, the neutral – character of social life, whereas the unequal distribution of power and resources gets left out of the picture or is understated (p. 645).

Atkinson (1999) further points out that the sociocultural component is often neglected in contemporary second language acquisition practice:

Although well-established methods for studying cultural models, social practices, and cultural heterogeneity and difference have been or are being developed, they are still underappreciated and underused ... (Atkinson, 1999, p. 646).

In summary, the literature reviewed in this section deals with the sociocultural perspectives of miscommunication. Consideration of the societal parameters of language use widens the scope of language communication. Researching the sociocultural component of language calls for a qualitative approach, examining people's lives, their experiences and stories. A major source of miscommunication between Westerners and East Asians lies in the misinterpretation of each other's intentions. Other communication problems arise from discrepancies in power relations and social identity of the actors; such problems can be reduced through an awareness of the right to speak. In general, miscommunication can

arise when the sociocultural component is neglected in language learning and language use.

2.3 Defining Culture

So far in the present thesis, the sociocultural aspects of language communication and miscommunication have been discussed. It is now necessary to take a closer look at the term “culture” and its wide spectrum of meaning. Due to its broad scope, culture is a multi-faceted concept and thus has been the subject of varying definitions.

Ratner (1997) understands culture in a very broad and general sense:

Culture is more than shared concepts about the meaning of things. Culture also consists of the way people raise children, educate the populace, produce goods and services, make and enforce social policies. Culture also includes the distribution of rights, privileges, opportunities, obligations, and wealth among various groups of people (p. 97).

The appreciation of music, literature, arts is also defined as culture. In its most comprehensive sense, culture includes all the shared products of human society: material entities as cities, organizations, and non-material concepts such as ideas, customs, family patterns, and language. In this broad sense, culture refers to the entire way of life of society, the ways of a people (Robertson, 1981).

The recent study by Van de Vijver & Leung (1997) on cross-cultural research methods directs our attention to the complex meaning of culture, which

includes numerous components that are pertinent to cross-cultural research. When we observe and research cultural differences, we should be aware that culture itself is too complex to be a meaningful variable. Rather, indicators of culture need to be identified, to identify which cultural factors are responsible for the differences:

Culture is an umbrella concept encompassing a host of characteristics, and we need to decompose (unpackage) the concept into more meaningful antecedents (p. 140).

Scollon & Scollon (1995) define culture from the viewpoint of sociolinguistics and anthropology:

In studies of intercultural communication, our concern is not with high culture, but with anthropological culture. When we use the word “culture” in its anthropological sense, we mean to say that culture is any of the customs, worldview, language, kinship system, social organization, and other taken-for-granted day-to-day practices of a people which set that group apart as a distinctive group. By using the anthropological sense of the word 'culture', we mean to consider any aspect of the ideas, communications, or behaviors of a group of people which gives to them a distinctive identity and which is used to organize their internal sense of cohesion and membership (p. 126-127).

This definition of culture appears pertinent to the present study in which I focus on those cultural factors that explain miscommunication between Chinese students and Canadians. In other words, the focus in the present study is on par-

ticular cultural phenomena that act as barriers in communication and understanding, when students of Chinese background use English as a second language in the foreign host setting. Explaining their notion of anthropological culture, Scollon & Scollon (1995) further state:

Of course, this book is not a work in anthropology as such, and so we will make no attempt to provide a formal definition of the idea of culture, or to make complete or rigorous cultural descriptions. As we have said above, our purpose is to single out among all of the many aspects of cultural description just those factors which have been clearly shown to affect intercultural communication (p. 127).

The meaning of culture in the present study is similar to the definition of Scollon & Scollon (1995) in still another aspect: the use of an emic perspective to examine cultural issues. Morris et al. (1999) describe the emic and etic views of culture:

In the study of cognition in organizations, and in social science more broadly, there are two long-standing approaches to understanding the role of culture: (1) the inside perspective of ethnographers, who strive to describe a particular culture in its own terms, and (2) the outside perspective of comparativist researchers, who attempt to describe differences across cultures in terms of general, external standard (p. 781).

The present study is based on the emic view of the participants, focusing on those cultural issues that affect the understanding of the Chinese students in

their communication with Canadians in the on- and off-campus settings of a Canadian university.

The definitions of culture so far reviewed in this section are quite general and do not explicitly pertain to cross-cultural communication and second language acquisition, and therefore are not unconditionally applicable to the sociocultural and academic context of international students from China who are subject to miscommunication in an unfamiliar Canadian environment. Atkinson (1999) undertakes a more specific definition and detailed analysis of the notion of culture in regard to language acquisition, language use and language socialization, when he writes:

... standard notions of culture have been found to be outdated and useless in the field [of second language acquisition] and are therefore either being avoided or actively replaced by alternative, nonstandard views of culture (p. 626).

In order to arrive at his culture definition, Atkinson (1999) analyzes the last 15 volumes of *TESOL Quarterly* (1984-1998) in regard to the notion of culture. His conclusion is that:

(a) culture is in general still very much an understudied notion in TESOL, although (b) critical perspectives on culture have started to infiltrate the field (p. 630).

After extensive discussion and analysis of the various notions of culture in the social sciences and cultural studies, Atkinson (1999), taking into account the many facets of culture, proposes the description of culture through six principles:

Principle 1: All humans are individuals (p. 641).

Principle 2: Individuality is also cultural (p. 642).

Principle 3: Social group membership and identity are multiple, contradictory and dynamic (p. 643).

Principle 4: Social group membership is consequential (p. 645).

Principle 5: Methods of studying cultural knowledge and behavior are unlikely to fit a positivist paradigm (p. 646).

Principle 6: Language (learning and teaching) and culture are mutually implicated, but culture is multiple and complex (p.647).

Atkinson (1999) concludes his analysis and definition of culture in the context of language acquisition. use and socialization by stating:

It is my belief that if we can develop a notion of culture in TESOL that takes into account the cultural in the individual, and the individual in the cultural. then we will have a conceptualization that will stand us in good stead in the 21st century (p. 648-649).

To sum up, the literature reviewed in this section introduces varying definitions of culture, representing the broad scope and the multi-faceted nature of this umbrella concept. One distinction is between high culture and anthropological culture. For the purpose of studying language communication, the emphasis is not on culture in general, but only on those cultural factors that affect cross-

cultural interaction. Culture can be understood either in its ethnographic sense from an insider's perspective, or from an outside perspective as a general external standard. A specific definition of culture in the context of second language acquisition includes language use and language socialization. In this specific, new understanding of culture, several principles such as individuality, social group membership and identity are postulated, culminating in the insight that language and culture are mutually implicated.

2.4 The Cultural Dimensions of Communication and Miscommunication among Chinese Entrepreneurs and Students in Foreign Settings

The first part of this section reviews literature outlining the distinctiveness of Chinese culture. The second part deals with communication and miscommunication in a university setting. This is followed by a review of literature relating to communication and miscommunication in the business setting. Finally, literature on the different views of acquiring communicative competence is reviewed.

2.4.1 Chinese Cultural Distinctiveness

Chinese culture evolved from the traditional views of Confucianism, which has been influencing China for thousands of years. It has been a major system of thought in China, developed from the teachings of Confucius and his disciples, and concerned with the principles of good conduct, practical wisdom, and

proper social relationships. Confucianism has influenced the Chinese attitude toward life, set the patterns of living and standards of social value, and provided the background for Chinese political theories and institutions. It has spread from China to Korea, Japan, and Vietnam (Lee, 1991) and has aroused interest among Western scholars.

The culture of a particular country is influenced by its history. It is hardly possible to find two histories and social systems that are more different from each other than those of China and North America, the former having a heritage of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, and the latter strongly influenced by the dominance of European immigrants with their western ideas, religion, philosophy and political thought. The sociocultural differences between the two realms are further compounded by the changes that have taken place in China after 1949, when it was transformed from a semi-feudal into a socialist society.

Through the fundamental historical and political changes, traditional Confucian ethics has been challenged successfully by western political philosophy, especially Marxism. Since 1949 China has undergone traumatic attempts to destroy key elements of the Chinese tradition, through political movements, i.e. the Great Leap Forward that started in 1958 and ended in 1960, and the Cultural Revolution that occurred between 1966 and 1976. During this period of time, China tried to abolish the past that the government believed had no part of the

new China: old customs, old habits, old culture and old thinking - the "Four Olds" (Watson, 1991).

Despite changes, Chinese Confucianism still plays a role in the Chinese way of thinking. In their study of Asian American immigrants, Kikoski & Kikoski (1996) suggest that Confucianism remains a common unifying element among Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese ethnic groups, and that even nowadays a knowledge of Confucian values can help North American managers understand common patterns of behaviour among Asian-American employees.

Considering the fact that since 1949, along with the influence of Marxism, China has undergone major political and economic changes that have weakened the old Chinese tradition, Confucian ethics can no longer offer a sufficient explanation for the behaviour of modern-day Chinese individuals. Confucianism has been overshadowed by Marxist and western ideology.

However, Confucianism and Buddhism have performed a similar central organizing role for the Asian societies, just as Christianity has done for the western world. Although time and acculturation naturally weaken ties with tradition, traditional ideas linger on, especially the ideas of Confucianism. One can understand many Asians and their behaviour to a certain degree through the knowledge of Confucian ethics. Confucian political and ethical concepts such as obedience towards superiors, respect for elders, collectivist altruism, etc., were the basis of

the Chinese, Japanese and Korean hierarchic feudal systems. Lee (1991) describes Chinese culture as the basis of the Asian cultural background:

For more than 15 centuries, the Chinese written language, sociopolitical institutions and belief systems have provided the main framework with which Koreans and Japanese organize their world. The Chinese culture is reflected in every aspect of the lives for East Asians (p.147).

Xing (1995) uses antithetic terms to describe the differences between the Chinese and American cultures. He presents a list of Chinese and American cultural traits from a common sense perspective, to summarize the cultural differences between Chinese and Americans:

(Chinese)	(American)
intuitive	rational
aesthetic	scientific
introverted	extroverted
self-restrained	aggressive
dependent	independent
procrastinators	proactive
implicit	explicit
synthetic	analytical
patient	impatient
collectivist	individualistic
desire for eternity	eager to change

This comparative list is based on assumptions, not on empirical research. Xing (1995) is aware that such comparisons can be singled out as being biased or

stereotyped. However, his explanation for these comparisons is that they are necessary for meaningful cultural studies. He argues that understanding and adapting to a different culture can never be achieved without a certain degree of cross-cultural consensus, which can be achieved easier if based on categories, even if they are highly generalized.

Xing's (1995) antithetic generalization is dialectic, and prone to criticism. He is clearly aware of the pros and cons of his categorization. He acknowledges that generalized descriptions of culture do not cover all individual behaviours or phenomena. The fact that some individual Chinese are impatient does not disprove the generalization that the Chinese as a people are patient. Ideally, he claims, statistical evidence should be available for generalizations, but unfortunately not all cultural facts are statistically testable.

In summary, the distinctiveness of Chinese culture, as it becomes evident in the literature of this section, lies in the historical philosophical and ethical heritage of Confucianism that is still alive in the background and influences the thinking and acting of Chinese individuals, but during the second half of the twentieth century was influenced by Western thought and Western practices. Chinese culture derives much of its distinctiveness from this hybrid nature. Still, Chinese thinking remains in strong contrast to North American thinking.

2.4.2 The Cultural Factor in Communication and Miscommunication in International Business Dealings: a Chinese Perspective

When examining cultural differences that exist between Chinese and Canadians, I do not view culture as a static concept, but as fluid and complex as cultures are these days in the “postmodern” world. I avoid stereotyping by being aware that, although the students are affected by the same cultural background and MBA experience, there are nonetheless differences according to personalities, life histories, etc. In my view, the notions of culture and culture differences are not generalizable.

Cultural differences are a factor in international business between Chinese and North Americans. Recent changes in the 1980’s seem to be leading toward a China with an emerging free market economy. Globalization in business in recent years has made cross-cultural phenomena important issues, and research on cultural differences has drawn the interest of scholars and business people alike. As Nowak & Dong (1997) have argued, cultural differences need to be recognized before they can be understood:

Only when we begin to understand the differences can we change our ways, adjust our business practices to accommodate the differences, and finally communicate to our counterparts in a mutually understandable manner (p. 116).

In discussing cultural issues, we should relate to the larger social context rather than relying on stereotypes. China and North America have distinctive his-

tories and the cultural gap between these two continents is significant. Further, the influence of Marxism over the past century has made China a country with its own characteristics, different from other Chinese speaking countries in Asia such as Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Between China and North America, the main cultural differences are reflected in the “language, geography, history, religion, and political and economic systems” (Nowak & Dong, 1997).

The work of Nowak & Dong (1997) documents cultural differences between Chinese and North Americans when doing business with each other. According to Nowak & Dong (1997), the management of multinational enterprises and joint ventures have begun to realize the key issue of cultural differences, which can jeopardize a business:

As business relationships with China increase, management of multinational enterprises and joint ventures in the U.S. and in China realizes that success depends on attention to cultural differences (p. 115).

They also find it unfortunate that there is less research available on cultural differences in a business context with China. Their work highlights the cultural differences with the intention to promote understanding and reduce the difficulties in dealing with these disparate cultures. They introduce a number of factors that are usually neglected in Chinese/North American business-related communication, as follows.

Age: It is important for the Chinese business people to know the age of their North American counterparts. The Chinese respect the elderly, who are viewed as more experienced people. In contrast, in North American business, according to the authors, young people are perceived to be more capable than their older counterparts.

Social setting: When people in China bump into each other, they just disregard it without saying an apology; it is self-understood that the occurrence was an accident. This contrasts with people in the U.S., who in a similar instance will say "I'm sorry" or "Excuse me." Also, Chinese business people usually offer a cigarette to their guest or friend, and not doing so would be considered rude. In contrast, the North American might just say "Do you mind if I smoke?" without offering a cigarette. Thus, the authors comment, cultural differences can be reflected in both verbal and non-verbal behaviour.

Public speaking and interviews: Chinese communicators emphasize ideas written on paper, while North Americans emphasize verbal skills. The Chinese are used to making their verbal presentations from written paper, while North Americans usually give speeches without reading. In job interviews, for example, the Chinese applicant is supposed to be modest and courteous, relying mainly on the written application materials that contain information about the applicant's educational background, experience, achievement and evaluations from past

years. An American applicant tends to be more aggressive, self-confident and outgoing.

Group vs. Individual Focus: the Chinese are described as group-centered, living together under the same roof and working together in a group, and depending on each other in their lives and in their work. In contrast, Americans are characterized as independent and individualistic, and cherishing issues like personal dignity and rights.

Verbal and Nonverbal Communication: the Chinese inclination to avoid disagreements is characterized by the authors as being problematic. Most Chinese are introverted and conservative, do not reveal their feelings easily, and are more subtle and indirect in their behaviour; they hardly ever say “no” when asked by others to do them a favour. As a result, in business negotiations it is not always easy to tell if they are happy, or if they agree with a suggestion. In contrast, Americans are open-minded, straightforward, and easy-going. They reveal, to some extent, through their facial expression whether they are happy or unhappy. Americans can say “no” easily and are more likely to show their frustrations and anger when things are not working out.

Greeting Habits: Chinese employees always include the title with the surname when they address American managers, to show respect. Americans use first names most of the time, even on the first day they meet.

Personal Relationships in Business: Chinese promote their business through their personal contacts (“guanxi”), while Americans do not usually rely on personal relations.

Management Plans: American companies or corporations have a strategic plan for expanding, maintaining or developing business in a certain direction, and their managers implement their own ideas to achieve these goals. In China, where most big enterprises have their own business plans, managers usually do not have ideas of their own about business, but operate according to instructions from their top leaders.

It is the collectivist Chinese view that partially explains why Chen et al. (1997) in their study on Japanese and American cross-cultural business pragmatics indicate that meeting members of a Japanese negotiation team can sometimes be difficult for Americans. Instead of having a discussion with a few decision makers, Americans working in Japan find it difficult to have meetings with a group of people - a phenomenon reflecting Asian collectivism. Although Confucianism, which was the sociopolitical and ethical basis of feudal society in Asia, has been replaced by socialist principles in modern China, it is still active and influential in the minds of many Chinese.

The sociocultural distinctions between the Chinese and North American cultures are strongly reflected in professional communication (The Economist, 1999). Chinese and Japanese professionals prefer collective decision-making

based on group consensus. The Asian collectivist concept necessitates that every detail of the issues involved has to be presented to, and understood by, everybody in a group, company or team before a decision is made. Chinese and Japanese business people discuss a plan for a long time, and tend to take a long time for making a decision. In contrast, according to Chen et al., decision-making is a fairly quick process for Americans, and American business professionals tend to involve fewer people in the process (Chen et al., 1997).

Giltsdorf (1997) emphasizes the importance of personal relationships in doing business with the Chinese. In the Chinese view, business cooperation is based on personal trust, as opposed to a written legal agreement. North Americans and Chinese have quite different attitudes towards a written contract. When specifics are agreed on and written into contracts, the Chinese expect their North American counterparts to be flexible. Chinese business people often request changes to written agreements.

Giltsdorf describes North Americans as more literal, direct and outspoken than Chinese. When Chinese communicators often feel they have given a clear hint and have been blunt, their North American listeners often do not understand the message. As Giltsdorf observes, when an Asian negotiator says, "I'll think about it", this is often an indication of disagreement and usually means "no". However, the North American counterpart will generally feel encouraged by this

statement and continue to work on the deal, not understanding the hint. This type of miscommunication goes beyond the language level⁴.

Gilsdorf points out that business contexts in western countries often involve lawyers who enjoy a high social status⁵: "In contrast to the U.S. where lawyers have considerable influence, Chinese lawyers have low status, low pay, and scanty education" (p.34). The Chinese social/legal system differs from the U.S. system. In China, although free enterprise is lately being encouraged, the government still is in firm control of the legal system, leaving little room for independent lawyers.

To sum up, the literature reviewed in this section shows that difficulties of understanding between business people from different cultures are a factual phenomenon in real-world communication⁶. In business settings, Chinese negotiators are still influenced by Confucian ethical standards such as modesty, respecting seniority, collective decision-making and avoidance of open confrontation. In doing business, personal relations and trust are as important as written contracts.

2.4.3 Communication and Miscommunication of Chinese Students in Foreign University Settings

Difficulties of cross-cultural communication experienced by Chinese students in western countries have drawn the interest of researchers, and certain cultural identifiers have been provided through their research. Sun & Chen (1997) investigated the difficulties Mainland Chinese students encountered in the process

of adjusting to American culture. Drawing upon in-depth interviews and a questionnaire containing 13 open-ended questions, they examined the “culture shock” Chinese students experienced as “sojourners”. In the view of Sun & Chen “Business people, diplomats, foreign workers, students, and voluntary workers” (p. 3) are sojourner groups, i.e. individuals who consider themselves to be temporary residents in the host society. They are *in* but not *of* the society. This understanding of “sojourner” is quite similar to the definition of Ogbu (1983) who understands sojourners as temporary immigrants (p.186).

The main difference between sojourners as defined by Ogbu (1983) and those defined by Sun & Chen lies in their social status. Ogbu defines sojourners as immigrants who occupy the lowest rung of the social ladder; they are strangers who are not part of the local status system, detached from the mainstream of their host society. These immigrants may even consider their menial positions better than what they had prior to emigration. They may be subject to discrimination, but often do not understand that they are subjected to prejudice, or they may even accept discrimination as an effect of their culture. The temporary immigrants, or sojourners, described in Ogbu’s (1983) work are usually motivated by a desire to accumulate wealth, but they do not compete for equal status with elite members of their host society. In contrast, Sun & Chen define sojourners in a wider sense, and include those who are on a mission from their home country and live in a host country only temporarily, such as business people, diplomats and students.

Both the sojourners in Ogbu's (1983) and those in Sun & Chen's sense have in common that they are living in a host culture on a temporary, non-permanent arrangement. In the context of the present study the difference in social and intellectual status between the two types of sojourners becomes of interest. In Ogbu's (1983) research, sojourners have been mostly workers and peasants who came to North America to earn money through menial blue-collar jobs and therefore did not have to adapt to the host culture at an intellectual level. In Sun & Chen's study, sojourners were educated individuals who came with certain tasks that required them to compete, and necessitated a certain degree of understanding of, integration into, and adaptation to the host culture.

Sun & Chen's participants were sojourners in their host culture, and thus people in transition; they lived in their host culture to accomplish an educational goal, and most of them planned to return to their home countries. During their sojourn, they were in the same position and had the same workload as their American peers, and therefore had the motivation and desire to compete with them.

Sun & Chen explained the problems encountered by their participants in America as culture shock. They define culture shock as a form of alienation, and a psychological disorientation arising from lack of knowledge, limited prior experience, and personal rigidity. Culture shock is generally regarded as a negative aspect of cultural adjustment, but it can also be viewed as an aspect of cultural

learning, self-development and personal growth. Sun & Chen clearly view culture shock as something natural and positive when they write:

Culture shock is commonly perceived as a normal process of cultural adaptation. In order to assimilate to the host culture individuals need to go through the stage of culture shock (Sun & Chen, 1997, p. 4).

According to Sun & Chen, culture shock becomes manifest as three dimensions of difficulty experienced by the Chinese students in the United States. First, there is the dimension of language ability that related to communicative competence. Despite their former high test scores in English, the Chinese students soon found their English language abilities inadequate for communication in social settings. The problems emerged when communicating with Americans academically and socially.

The second dimension defined by Sun & Chen relates to the students' level of awareness of cultural differences between China and America. Their study reveals that

... Differences derived from cultural values, attitudes and beliefs affect their academic and daily life. Communication is often put to an end due to cultural differences (Sun & Chen, 1997, p. 9).

Their participants indicated that they had no intimate American friends, and six of them even said they did not have any American friend. This is explained as the consequence of collectivism and individualism:

In China, the collectivistic life style in school and workplace provides people with an opportunity to develop an intimate interpersonal relationship. Frequent interactions with friends in China are common. In contrast, American people tend to be much more individualistic. Their emphasis on privacy often prevents them from establishing friendship (p. 9).

As the third dimension, adaptation to western technological resources is identified as a challenge for the Chinese students. For example, the use of computers, a basic technical skill required at American universities, was new for the Chinese students. As one participant explained:

The problem is not because we are incapable of doing things excellently, but because we are lacking the experience of handling the American university environment (Sun & Chen, 1997, p.11).

Sun & Chen's study points to the existence of significant sociocultural differences between China and North America. They further corroborate the dichotomy of learning language as a form, and using language in real-life social settings:

Most Chinese students came to the United States with high scores in TOEFL and GRE tests. However, as soon as they arrived in the United States, they immediately found that their English ability is not good enough for them to appropriately use the language in speaking and writing (Sun & Chen, 1997, p. 10).

While Sun & Chen's study addresses the wide scope of culture-related issues, Liao and Bresnahan (1996) use speech act research to study the cultural dif-

ferences between Chinese and American students. They examined cultural differences based on data from 92 Chinese (Taiwan) and 72 Americans university students. Their research reveals the ways in which politeness is manifested in the different cultures, and how the modest nature of the orientals contrasted with the non-self-denigrating nature of the westerners. They define their research as “a contrastive pragmatic study of refusal tactics between Chinese and Americans at the private interpersonal level” (p.703). Concretely, their study is based on the responses of participants from the two different cultures to six scenarios of requests in Mandarin Chinese and American English.

Liao and Bresnahan (1996) highlight the Chinese custom of using the appropriate age- and generation-specific terms when addressing each other in a Chinese cultural environment. They state that “Chinese people are sensitive of the relative age and status” (p.704), and then describe in detail the rules and concepts for addressing a stranger in Chinese. For example, when addressing adults, the male is addressed with the Chinese equivalent of “sir”, and the female with the Chinese equivalent “madam”. If the stranger looks like a student in the teens, in Chinese he may be called “handsome big brother”, and she may be called “younger sister at school”. A conservative way of addressing both males and females of this age group would be “friend in school”, while pre-teens would be addressed as “little friend”. Knowing the age of a person and acting accordingly

are important sociocultural criteria in interpersonal communication in the Chinese cultural context.

Liao and Bresnahan further characterize Chinese culture as collectively oriented and American culture as individually oriented. According to their findings, most Chinese feel that their relationship with others is more important than their own accomplishments. Chinese are more likely

... to sacrifice their self interest for the good of the group, and their happiness depends more on the happiness of those around them. Therefore they will be more willing to stay with a group that needs them even if they are not personally happy with it (p. 704).

With similar emphasis, Salili (1996) describes the collectivist orientation of the Chinese as a significant culture-specific trait in her analysis of the cultural background of 764 male and female British and Chinese students in Hong Kong. Among the participants of her study, 589 students were Chinese, 175 were British:

In these [Japanese and Chinese] cultures, collectivism rather than individualism is emphasized. Children are taught to be filially pious and obedient towards their parents and work hard to achieve so as to make their parents or families feel proud. Achievement for the good of the group rather than oneself is the concern of the individuals in these cultures. Hence, the conception of achievement in individualistic Western cultures may be radically different to that in the Asian collectivistic cultures (p. 274).

In Salili's view, Chinese students are collectively oriented, and differ from British students regarding their motivation for achievement in school.

Collectivism is also a theme in the work of Jin & Cortazzi (1993). Their study outlines major features of the cultural orientation of Chinese post-graduate students and visiting scholars at 6 British universities and 1 polytechnic. Their study involved 101 Chinese students, and 37 British academic staff members as participants. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews. Their study is organized into 4 major sections:

- Individual and collective tendencies
- Supervisor-student relationships
- Orientations to language and culture
- Acculturation and cultural synergy.

In their empirical study, Jin & Cortazzi found that members of collectivist cultures tend to draw sharper distinctions between in-groups and out-groups. In-group relationships are viewed as more intimate and more important; they also tend to share the same knowledge and see themselves as homogeneous, and are sharply distinctive from other groups. They quote a PRC Chinese interviewee: "... we know more or less the same. Among the Chinese, if I know, everyone knows. If I don't, none of us does" (Jin & Cortazzi, 1993, p. 96). They further discuss the Chinese collectivist attitude in the context of supervisor-student rela-

tionships, by comparing the cultural expectations of British academic staff and Chinese students:

British academic culture is based on the notion that students will develop independence and individuality. Individuals are believed to have their own talents and abilities and these are developed in a system of higher education in which independent thinking and self-expression are emphasized. (Jin & Cortazzi, 1993, p. 86).

Jin & Cortazzi further discovered that guidance from their teachers and leaders is more important for the Chinese students than the quest for individuality and independence:

They seek guidance from their teachers, who are expected to be moral and social leaders, experts who know everything in their specific area and who can plan for and instruct students. ... The teacher should be sensitive to any student problems and should be helpful in social and everyday issues arising out of living in another country. Like a parent, the teacher should care for students academically and socially (p. 86).

Another finding of this British study is that the Chinese students had high confidence in their English language skills, mainly in regard to grammar, but thought they knew little about the education system, the culture, society and research methods in Britain. The Chinese students experienced

... great changes in perceptions of language skills and social, cultural and academic knowledge. ... Their perceived need for knowledge of research methods is striking. Similarly, their need for knowledge about British so-

ciety and culture is fairly strong. Tutors need to be aware of these perceptions (p. 88).

In their discussion of acculturation and cultural synergy, Jin & Cortazzi state:

The Chinese students do have cultural problems in Britain, ... Their tutors also have cultural problems in their interaction with the students" (Jin & Cortazzi, 1993, p. 94).

They further report that a two-way acculturation took place: their study participants developed a mutual awareness and understanding of each other's culture. They encourage learning about each other's culture through interaction: "Cultural contact in the academic context should enable both sides to be aware of cultural differences" (Jin & Cortazzi, 1993, p. 94).

The experiences of two American professors who worked with Chinese students, Robock (1993) and Frazier (1999), are directly relevant to cross-cultural miscommunication occurring through language-use in subject-related settings. Their analyses reveal the typical culture-specific communication difficulties encountered by Chinese students due to their background. Robock trained managers in China on the first management training program of the Chinese Ministry of Machine Building in Beijing in 1985 and 1989; in 1989 he also taught at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing. Frazier has taught mid-career Chinese journalists at the University of Hawaii.

According to Robock (1993), the culture gap in the Chinese graduate students' comprehension within their subject-related study is due to the unique social circumstances of China. Chinese students' training and their work environment in China have been shaped by socialism, in particular by the Chinese form of Marxism. On the other hand, with China opening up to international business, North American managers often encounter a new and different situation in cross-cultural communication, and recognize that an awareness of the culture gap is especially important in communicating with the Chinese. Cross-cultural communication is defined by Robock as a two-sided experience. In his view, the success or failure of communication depends on how much awareness and sensitivity each side has of the other side's culture. He further states that in his experience the culture gap was evident whenever in his international business classes the focus was on culture-related topics.

He further reports that when teaching the same topic in the United States, his American students could interact and discuss the issues with ease. In contrast, when teaching Chinese students, the Chinese students did not come up with any of the expected answers. This phenomenon is viewed as a communication difficulty caused by the huge culture gap between China and North America, and not as an issue of the students' ESL learning environment. Robock blames the existence of this culture gap on China's long isolation from the outside world: his stu-

dents in China had little knowledge of the Western world and even less experience with foreign cultures.

Regarding the communicators' different sociopolitical background, he further explains the label "ideological orientations", which refers to cross-cultural communication difficulties arising from differences in ideological orientation of North American managers on the one hand, and Chinese managers trained with the socialist concepts of Marxism on the other hand. He notes that in some situations the meanings of the same words and concepts can be different in a Marxist context and in a market economy context. In still other cases, words and concepts commonly used in market economies are unfamiliar to managers who have been working in a socialist setting. He presents examples to show how miscommunication is caused by differences in understanding sociopolitical concepts.

For example, when one of his students did not understand the meaning of "monopoly" and asked Robock to give an example, the latter explained that the concept implied a situation where one firm had complete control over a specific product market area. He then illustrated it by citing the Chinese airline CAAC, which at that time was the only airline operating in China's domestic airline market. Almost immediately, the student objected strongly. According to Marxian economics, the student asserted, only capitalist countries have monopolies, not socialist economies.

Miscommunication in a banking situation is another example of sociocultural differences mentioned by Robock. When the American professor asked for a "cheque" this was understood as "traveler's cheque", because in China individuals do not have chequing accounts, nor do they write cheques.

Chinese political culture is mentioned as another source of misunderstanding. When the American professor discussed the topic of economic development in class, he asked his Chinese students to answer the question "Why is China poor?", the students could only repeat the slogans of the "party line," instead of referring to economic development issues. As another cause of miscommunication with the business manager trainees, the fact that China has not yet developed an adequate institutional environment, such as an advanced commercial legal system for supporting a market economy, is mentioned. Sociocultural differences are also identified as the cause of contract disputes.

According to Robock, the situation in China has been gradually changing. For some Chinese managers, the culture gap had been narrowed through many foreign-sponsored management-training programs in China, through study abroad, and through increased contact with foreign business firms. Nevertheless, the safest assumption in cross-cultural communication with Chinese managers is that their familiarity with western cultures is limited due to lack of emphasis on cross-cultural studies at Chinese universities, and because most Chinese students

consider such studies as "soft" and less significant than "hard" subjects like mathematics, science, and information technology.

Frazier (1999) writes about his experiences in teaching Chinese students the elements of Western-style journalism, which he calls an exercise in bridging cultural distances. Although his students of Chinese cultural background became quickly familiar with journalistic technique, they had difficulties in accepting Western values, for example in news stories. He sees the cultural differences in what Westerners think is significant in a news story, which may not necessarily be what Chinese readers view as important. Such differences were apparent in a class Frazier taught at the China School of Journalism in Beijing. At the end of the course, his students submitted written comments about the difficulties they encountered in learning about Western-style journalism to the American professor, who in his article is using this feedback to analyze the cultural differences existing between Chinese and western journalism.

In an example, a Chinese student wrote that conventional wisdom and cultural bias have long been influencing the values of Chinese journalism, and that this would explain why there are still many Chinese people confusing news reporting with propaganda. The student then concludes that communication of minds is far more difficult than that of techniques. Other students said that the western principles would be difficult to put into practice in China, given the government's controlling role in news coverage. Chinese students of journalism often

found it difficult to write western-style straight news leads, but tended to prefer a more roundabout or indirect approach. A journalism student wrote that he did not know which kind of information he should write in what order, because the information he would consider unimportant the American professor could deem important. Another of his students wrote that they did not use only one to two sentences as one paragraph in news stories. The Chinese news stories contained much information that western journalists thought was unnecessary. To Chinese readers, the lead in news stories giving the general background is important.

Frazier holds the cultural gap accountable for such differences. He understands that the Chinese really appreciate most of the western journalistic values taught in class, but could not apply such a western journalistic point of view in China. Not being able to apply in practice what was taught was a recurring theme in the comments of the American professor's students of journalism in China.

In summary, recent research on the communication problems and miscommunication experienced by Chinese students either in a Western university setting, or in a university setting in China with professors from a Western country whose teaching includes Western concepts has highlighted three main points.

First, students from China in a Western country should be considered as sojourners: they are temporary residents in a Western host society, and as such they are subject to culture shock. They are not sojourners in the sense of the foreign blue-collar workers who temporarily came to North America for earning

..

money, but they are sojourners who come to a Western country to achieve an educational goal in the host society. The culture shock experienced by Chinese students in the West becomes manifest in the three dimensions of disappointment about their own language ability, cultural differences, and adaptation to Western technology. Originating from a collectivist culture, the Chinese students draw a sharp distinction between in-groups and out-groups; they are used to frequently seeking guidance from teachers and leaders, while Western students traditionally develop independence and individuality.

Second, communication difficulties can be reduced through cultural contact in the academic context, which enables both sides to become aware of cultural differences. The comprehension difficulties Chinese students at Western universities have within their subject-related study are mainly due to the unique sociopolitical circumstances of China that formed their background. An awareness of the cultural gap between China and North America is helpful in communicating. This cultural rift has been caused by China's long isolation from the outside world, which explains why students from China have little knowledge of the Western world and little experience with foreign cultures.

Third, a major source of problems in the Chinese students' university work is their ideological orientation. Miscommunication often occurs when they do not understand sociopolitical concepts such as "monopoly". Their limited familiarity with Western concepts is due to the dearth of cross-cultural studies at

Chinese universities. Cultural differences in the academic context can be analyzed through written comments by the students about classes taught by their Western professors. In the area of teaching journalism, for example, the sociopolitical differences between the two cultures become especially evident: the straightforward Western style clashes with the more roundabout and indirect Chinese style.

To conclude, Chinese students attending American universities experience culture shock as sojourners. They are age- and status-sensitive in addressing others. In contrast to Westerners, they have a collective orientation. Filial piety motivates them to work hard, to make their parents and other family members feel proud of them. Sociocultural issues can act as stumbling blocks in Chinese students' academic achievement. When people from different cultures interact with each other, they can learn from each other's culture, which leads to culture synergy.

2.4.4 Acquiring Communicative Competence: Issues and Obstacles

Some scholars support the idea of teaching culture in the classroom (Garza, 1990; Stagich, 1998), while others disagree with the classroom teaching of culture, and suggest that real-world integration is the appropriate way to acquire culture (MacFarlane, 1997; Atkinson, 1999). In this section, first the literature with different suggestions on culture learning is introduced and reviewed. Then, literature is discussed postulating that culture learning is not only a re-

quirement for language learners, but that ESL instructors should acquire knowledge of the learners' culture, enabling them to better help the learners overcome cross-cultural problems. The last part of this section introduces the writing of American professors who train American business students to perform in various host cultures.

Cultural learning in language education means acquiring communicative competence, which will minimize cross-cultural miscommunication. As mentioned earlier, language is to be viewed as social behaviour; it is not enough to just learn a different set of codes. The cultural dimension is as important as the language itself. Some educators even consider miscommunication caused by cultural differences more serious than miscommunication caused by insufficient linguistic skills. Met (2001) points out:

Most theory and research in language education centers on language proficiency, and much of that on the development of an internalized, native-like grammar. Professional journals and books provide information about how children and adults acquire language, how vocabulary grows, and how learners gain grammatical accuracy in their new language. In comparison, relatively little has been written that provides pedagogical insight into the development of cross-cultural competence - the ability to use language appropriately when interacting with native speakers (p.37).

Cultural criteria in learning a new language may be as important to constructing meaning from utterances or print as knowing how the endings on verbs

affect meaning. Understanding how to apply the target language in real world settings is an important aspect of language-use that traditionally has received less instructional time than has explicit instruction in vocabulary or grammar (Met, 2001).

Stagich (1998) draws on his experience as an ESL instructor when he emphasizes the importance of “true language competence”, which includes the process of cultural learning. He describes his teaching experience in Japan, when he realized that, although most Japanese students were at an advanced linguistic level of English and did well in TOEFL (English as a Foreign Language) tests, they still had communication difficulties when exposed to a “cultural context”. Opposing the view of studying the English language as an object, he criticizes the fact that foreign language students often are guided towards linguistic rote learning, instead of learning to understand meaning through cultural context.

When investigating the issue of Japanese students learning English, he dwells on the controversial topic of learning a language and its culture in classroom learning situations. Two case studies are quoted: the case of Ken O. who learned English as a form but has little “functional English”, and the case of Kyoko who is not fixed on English grammar, forms and structures but can communicate. Stagich reports that many of his Japanese students who were scoring high in TOEFL (English as a Foreign Language) tests were unable to write, speak, or read competently. He suggests that exposure to cultural context, to culturally

enriched essays, readings and dialogues can offer new hope for students trained through a formal grammatical approach.

Garza (1990) suggests bringing cultural literacy into the foreign language classroom through video, and making cross-cultural awareness form part of the content of foreign language courses from the very start. He stresses the relationship between L2 acquisition and culture, and proposes to employ authentic real-life video presentations for introducing the cultural component. Garza's suggestion to use authentic video in language teaching is intended to prevent students from reciting decontextualized pattern drills, but instead induce them to learn with a functional purpose in naturalistic settings. In his opinion, the role of authentic video in providing the necessary visual and linguistic context for understanding issues of cultural literacy should not be underestimated, and the cultural dimension of communication must be considered in the teaching of languages.

What is the best way for ESL instructors to combine teaching language and culture in the classroom? MacFarlane (1997) sees the problems of teaching culture in an ESL classroom as follows:

Although proficiency in another language is now seen to include the ability to interact with native speakers and to have some understanding of their world view, neither interactional ability nor cultural understanding are easily acquired in the language classroom" (p.65).

She further states that such limitations may be overcome by providing young learners with opportunities for contact with native speakers and their culture beyond the ESL classroom.

The sociocultural dimension in training programs has been recognized as an important factor in preparing learners for real-world interaction and communication, and has been considered as a means to acquire culture in curriculum and syllabus design. Strong (1992) describes a new type of curriculum designed by both Canadian and Chinese teachers, using a communicative pedagogy, at the Canada-China Language Centre in Beijing. Strong (1992) briefly describes the curricula of English language training, as they are implemented at most Chinese universities. There, English is taught through instruction in oral English, writing, grammar, and listening comprehension:

An emphasis on grammar and translation has resulted in the situation found by Wang (1982) where many Chinese scholars and students who went to study in America could not understand their teachers and were unable to participate in classroom discussions (Strong, 1992, p. 2).

The difficulties in implementing the new curriculum at the Centre have been due to the sociocultural and socio-economic differences between Canada and China, and a lack of sociocultural awareness on the Chinese side. The curriculum at the Centre includes a reading course with numerous culturally bound references, on everything from conducting a conversation on the phone⁷ to Canadian

culture and the social and political aspects of life in Canada. Strong's (1992) study confirms the existence of significant sociocultural and socio-economic differences between China and Canada that must be considered in training programs with an international scope.

Still, there is disagreement in the literature about the feasibility of teaching culture. Some scholars prefer to teach culture in the ESL classroom, while some prefer to immerse the students with native speakers of the target culture to achieve culture learning (MacFarlane, 1997). Sauvé (1996) found it difficult to teach the Canadian way of acting in teacher-centered and -dominated culture-teaching and -learning classes, arguing that there are no "do's and don'ts" to teach. She believes that culture should be taught according to the students' needs, teaching them how to deal with social problems encountered in real-life settings.

In light of all of the above, it seems that culture-teaching and -learning programs are not without flaws, problems or pitfalls. It is one of the goals of the present study to generate information that might be useful for improving the curricula for students from non-English-speaking and non-French-speaking countries. It seems difficult to implement culture-teaching and -learning in the Canadian multicultural environment, with individuals from diverse ethnic groups. The solution to reduce cross-cultural miscommunication would lie in training the teachers to understand the learners (Sauvé, 1996).

Taylor (1990) stresses the importance of teachers' awareness of cross-cultural communication:

Students with different cultural norms are at risk if teachers have little knowledge, sensitivity or appreciation of the diversity in communication styles. Such teachers may perceive differences as problems and respond to students' diversity with negative attitudes, low expectations and culturally inappropriate teaching and assessment procedures. Culturally and communicatively diverse students, in turn, may respond with low self concepts and low academic achievement to a school climate they perceive as hostile. (<http://www.nwrel.org/cnorse/booklets/ccc/2.html>)

Warning that cultural differences can make some minority students appear as slow learners, Taylor (1990) further maintains that the major responsibility of teachers at all grade levels is to teach the language and communication skills needed for academic success, and for career and social mobility. Many students come from cultures using different, though valid, communication and language systems from what is considered "normal" in the classroom.

In her discussion about teaching culture in the context of second language acquisition, Sauvé (1996) suggests that the curricula of training programs for ESL teachers should be widened through the addition of coursework in history, political science, economics, critical pedagogy, and antiracist education as well as conflict resolution and other practical strategies for working with multicultural

groups⁸. In the case of Chinese graduate students who originate from a vastly different culture, her suggestion seems to be of special importance.

She further points out that it is problematic to teach Canadian culture in an ESL classroom because the ESL teacher education programs have not been prepared or designed to teach the cultural aspects of Canadian life:

The ESL body of theory has grown out of applied linguistics and has therefore placed a disproportionate emphasis on the structure of language and theories of language acquisition. This has been done at the cost of developing the historical, political, and economic understandings that would have served us well in coming to understand better the various groups of learners we teach” (Sauvé, 1996, p. 19).

Cultural teaching and learning is a specialized area, and culture is not a topic that any native speaker can teach to non-native speakers. According to Spindler & Spindler (1994), educators, anthropologists and social workers must reflect on their own cultures to understand cultural diversity. This understanding will help recognize the necessity of widening the scope of teacher education.

Rivers (1981) stresses the relationship between language learning and culture that has long been acknowledged and discussed. The insight into culture proceeds at the same time as the language learning - in other words, teaching for cultural understanding is fully integrated with the learners’ assimilation of the foreign language’s syntax and vocabulary. Breen (1985) makes a clear distinction between the social and the cultural perspectives of language learning: the social

perspective is represented by viewing language learning as emerging from social interaction, while the “anthropological” perspective means viewing the language class as a genuine cultural environment. Both perspectives are relevant for a study with an ethnographic orientation.

There is a growing body of literature on training and preparing students for doing international business, in order to minimize cross-cultural differences and misunderstandings. Educators are trying to provide business students with social and cultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes through classroom activities.

Dillon (1998) suggests curricular activities for overcoming the “stumbling blocks” that are responsible for cross-cultural miscommunication among professionals having different cultural backgrounds. The stumbling blocks are (p.4):

- Assumption of similarities: foreign and North American professionals automatically assume that everybody is the same, treating each other based on their culture-specific presuppositions, as if their counterparts belonged to the same culture. Due to their different worldviews, clashes and miscommunication occur.
- Language difficulties: these do not only occur on the vocabulary level, but include understanding and usage of the words in context.
- Nonverbal misinterpretations: people from different cultures interpret gestures, signs, etc., with different meanings.

- **Preconceptions and stereotypes:** the tendency toward generalization, putting persons from other cultures into certain categories, either negative or positive, which may be fueled by the mass media, rumours, etc.
- **The tendency to evaluate.** This refers to an ethnocentric attitude based on the belief that everything in one's own culture is the best, with everything else ranked below one's own culture. It means considering others' beliefs, values and norms as silly, strange or stupid.
- **High anxiety.** It takes too much effort and time to communicate with someone from another culture. The stress involved may result in rejection, hostility, or even communication breakdown.

Through culture-oriented classroom activities, these 6 “stumbling blocks” are turned into the following 16 “building blocks” (p.8):

- tolerance for ambiguity
- low goal/task orientation
- open-mindedness
- nonjudgementalness
- empathy
- communicativeness
- flexibility or adaptability
- curiosity

- sense of humor
- warmth of human relationships
- motivation
- self-reliance
- strong sense of self
- tolerance for differences
- perceptiveness
- ability to fail.

Obviously, Dillon's (1998) classroom activities are intended to enable students to achieve skills in intercultural communication. His list of "stumbling blocks" is also applicable to the case of the Chinese MBA students in the present study, and may serve to highlight some of the problems they are encountering in Canada.

Scott (1995), likewise describes his favourite assignment for his international business communication course: an international business-meal function. He believes that such activities strengthen the students' social and cultural skills in business-related contexts. Further, the students learn to better understand the roles and benefits of business-related meal functions around the world. The business-meal table is viewed as an important social setting where the sociocultural gap becomes evident and miscommunication may arise. The main goal of the

business-meal function is to train the students for their business sojourn in foreign countries.

Improving cross-cultural interaction does not mean training professionals to change their behaviour and their customs; rather, it means creating cross-cultural understanding to avoid miscommunication in international dealings - this is about adaptation, not assimilation. Applying Ogbu's (1982) view, many Chinese in North American society are *bicultural*; they know a good deal about the culture of the dominant group but do not necessarily practice it, because their convention dictates that they should not act like members of the dominant group. The possibility to train North American business people to become bicultural in Ogbu's sense should therefore be considered.

In the view of Jin & Cortazzi, 1993, learners undergoing cross-cultural communication training might fear that their original culture is downgraded, which may create a psychological barrier to learning the target culture and language. Therefore, adaptation rather than assimilation must be emphasized. People from two or more cultures should interact, willing to learn to understand and appreciate the other's culture without loss of their own status, role or cultural identity, thus achieving cultural synergy. Such cross-cultural communication emphasizes "...two-way acculturation which would mean that participants develop a mutual awareness and understanding of each other's culture" (p. 95). Seeking in-

terpretations and explanations may well bring insight to their own as well as the others' culture.

In general, the literature introduced in this section deals with issues of culture learning, especially with the question whether culture can be taught in the classroom. Miscommunication can be minimized through cultural learning that includes the acquisition of communicative competence in the sense of cross-cultural competence, as the ability to use language appropriately when interacting with speakers from a different culture. Acquiring true language competence includes cultural learning. Students with high TOEFL scores often have communication difficulties when exposed to a cultural context. In practice, using authentic video in language teaching allows students to learn language with a functional purpose for real-world settings. In the teaching of languages, the cultural dimension of communication must be considered.

A major problem in the teaching of culture mentioned in the literature reviewed in this section is that interactional ability and cultural understanding cannot be easily acquired in the language classroom. The example of a Canadian / Chinese English-language curriculum based on communicative pedagogy, which includes courses containing culturally bound references, shows how to address the needs of training programs with an international scope. A further problem is that in teaching culture there are no clearly defined rules to teach. A solution for reducing cross-cultural miscommunication would be to train teachers to understand

the learners. Teachers who are not culturally aware may perceive differences as problems and blame these perceived problems on the students, thus creating a hostile environment, which in turn results in the students' low academic achievement. Including antiracist education, conflict resolution and other practical strategies into the language curriculum helps resolve problems. One answer to reducing cross-cultural miscommunication may lie in expanding the scope of teacher training. For example, teachers must understand their own culture in order to understand the cultural diversity of their students.

An analytic approach towards understanding and alleviating miscommunication between professionals with different cultural backgrounds suggests to decompose cultural differences into a grid of "stumbling blocks" and "building blocks", resulting in a recipe for analyzing culture-specific communication problems. Another approach suggests simulating a business meal function within a course on business communication, thus preparing the students for their business sojourn in foreign countries. Improving cross-cultural interaction means adaptation, not assimilation, and appreciating the other's culture without loss of one's own status leads to cultural synergy. The overall consensus is that language and culture are intertwined, but it seems difficult to teach culture along with language. Scholars are still searching for a more efficient method to deal with culture issues in second language acquisition.

In recapitulation of the main points, this section focuses on the issue of language use in real-world settings. Language acquisition should include culture learning. If students score high in TOEFL tests, this is not necessarily indicative of their communicative competence. A curriculum emphasizing communicative competence can be used to teach Canadian culture to the Chinese. Improving ESL teacher training program can make teachers anticipate and better understand the nature of communication phenomena in general, and miscommunication phenomena in particular.

2.4.5 Strategies of Dealing with Cross-Cultural Miscommunication

Most of the literature reviewed shows that miscommunication is bound to occur between interlocutors from different cultures. A growing number of researchers are examining the phenomenon of miscommunication on the basis of different or missing cultural suppositions, but there is a remarkable dearth of literature about strategies addressing the problems on an institutional level. While the literature reviewed acknowledges the key role of the cultural component in communication, it fails to address the consequences of cross-cultural miscommunication, and how the individuals affected are coping with the problems. Thus, although the literature discusses a wide range of cross-cultural interaction issues and illustrates the various different research approaches employed in examining the cultural dimension in communication, there is very little that relates to either

how institutions deal with miscommunication in hosting international students with a Chinese cultural background, nor on how students deal with miscommunication and misunderstanding. There are likely to be positive and negative outcomes of such coping strategies on the students' side, and the host institutions' strategies of dealing with the problems.

In my examination of the problems encountered by the Chinese MBA students in Canada, attention is given to the cause of the problems as well as the consequences of the problems, not just to their outward manifestations. Investigating Chinese MBA students' English-language communication and interaction with Canadians, the present study intends to fill this gap through extending existing knowledge and adding new knowledge in the area of cross-cultural communication and cultural studies.

2.5 The Framework of the Study

The concepts discussed in the literature, as they are relevant to the research questions, lead to a framework of cross-cultural communication. This section recapitulates the main concepts discussed in the literature review, and thus serves as a basis for reiterating the research questions of the present study. It further shows how the present study is situated in the overall literature reviewed, and demonstrates why the research questions were formulated in this particular way.

The formalist, structuralist or generative view of language as a form emphasizes structural criteria, linguistic knowledge, lexical competence and a language acquisition mechanism in the learners' mind. In contrast to this formalist view, the function-oriented communicative competence model includes the sociocultural dimensions of language acquisition and language use.

Communication relies on culture-specific patterns, and following different sociocultural rules can result in miscommunication. The ethnographic view examines how culture shapes language behaviour in real-world settings and addresses issues of language socialization. Culturally shaped language socialization patterns affect the use of language. Miscommunication has sociocultural perspectives, and studying it calls for a qualitative approach that examines people's lives, experiences and stories. Miscommunication occurs when the sociocultural aspects of language are neglected.

The concept of culture in language communication is central to the framework of cross-cultural communication. Culture can be understood either in its ethnographic sense from an insider's perspective, or from an outside perspective as a general external standard. A new specific definition of culture in the context of second language acquisition includes language use and language socialization. In this specific definition of culture, principles such as individuality, social group membership and identity play a role. Language and culture are mutually implicated.

The literature reflecting the distinctiveness of Chinese culture emphasizes the Confucian heritage that has been influenced by Western thought and Western practices. Due to its cultural distinctiveness, Chinese thinking remains in strong contrast to Western thinking, through its ethical standards of modesty, respecting seniority, collective decision-making and avoidance of open confrontation.

In Canada, students from China are subject to culture shock. They are sojourners who have come to Canada to achieve an educational goal. Chinese students in the West encounter problems in verbal and non-verbal communication. While Western students traditionally develop independence and individuality, Chinese students seek guidance from teachers and leaders.

Cultural contact enables both the Chinese students and their host environment to become aware of cultural differences. Comprehension difficulties Chinese students at Western universities have within their subject-related study are due to the cultural gap between China and North America, which has been caused by China's long isolation from the outside world. Therefore, students from China have little knowledge of the Western world and little experience with foreign cultures. The Chinese students' ideological orientation, and their limited familiarity with Western concepts leads to miscommunication in the academic context.

It is necessary to achieve cross-cultural competence, which means using language appropriately when interacting with speakers from a different culture. Acquiring true language competence includes cultural learning. A language cur-

riculum based on communicative pedagogy, with courses containing culturally bound references, can address the needs of training programs with an international scope and provide cross-cultural knowledge to the Chinese students.

Culturally unaware teachers would blame communication problems on the students and create a hostile environment, resulting in the students' low academic achievement. Antiracist education, conflict resolution and other practical strategies should be included in language curricula. Training teachers to understand their own culture, so as to understand the students' cultural diversity might be a starting point.

Communicative competence is the key to achieve successful communication. Communication problems, miscommunication and misunderstanding are mainly caused by social factors, such as cultural differences. The literature review shows the obvious dearth of literature on Chinese students' communication problems in Canada. Further, there is insufficient literature regarding strategies of dealing with cross-cultural miscommunication from the host institutions, and strategies of coping from the individual students.

Based on the framework of my study, the research questions have been formulated as follows:

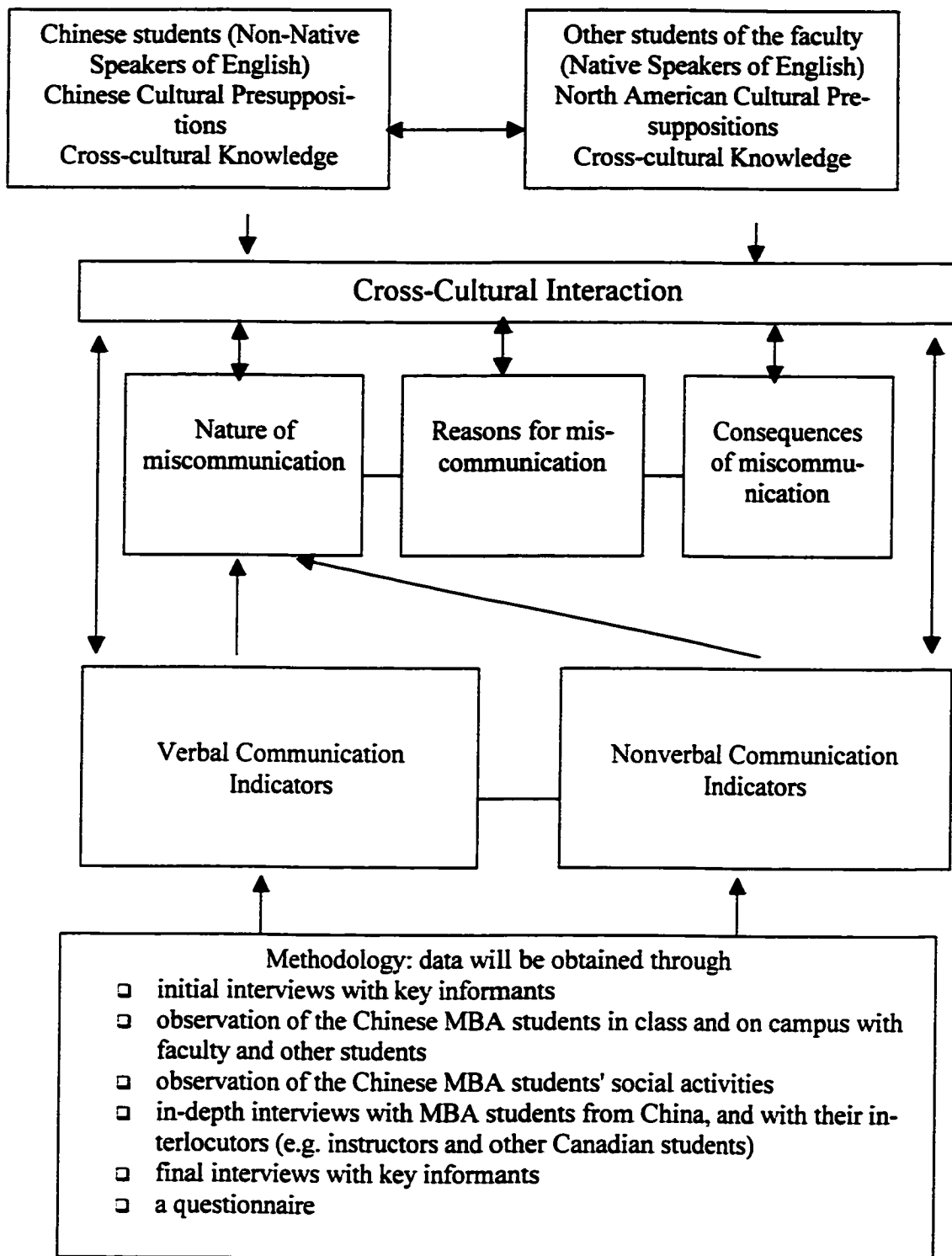
1. What is the nature of Chinese/Canadian cross-cultural miscommunication and misunderstanding?

- On what occasions (during what type of interaction) do miscommunication and misunderstanding occur?
 - Does it lead to communication breakdown etc.?
 - Does hostility arise from miscommunication?
2. What are the reasons for miscommunication and misunderstanding?
- More concretely:
- Are individual factors the main cause?
 - Are there organizational factors (related to the MBA program and the university setting)?
 - Are broader sociocultural differences between China and North America causing miscommunication and misunderstanding?
3. What are the consequences of such miscommunication and misunderstanding?
- Do they lead to communication breakdown?
 - Do they give rise to hostility?
 - Does cultural learning occur?
4. What are the strategies for coping?
- When miscommunication and misunderstanding occur, do the Chinese MBA students continue to negotiate, do they try to make themselves understood - or do they just give up?

- What were the strategies used by the program organizers and the host institution to deal with the students' problems?

In compliance with the literature review and the research questions, the framework of cross-cultural communication has emerged.

Figure 1: Framework of Cross-cultural Communication



3 Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The methodology used in the present study emanates from two major bodies of literature: first, the theory of qualitative research design, as presented in Tesch (1990), by various authors in the *Handbook of Qualitative Research* edited by Denzin & Lincoln (1994), and Marshall & Rossman (1995); second, the qualitative methodology discussion in the context of second language acquisition research, as summarized by Johnson (1992), Davis (1995), and Lazaraton (1995).

The present study examines cross-cultural miscommunication between MBA students of Chinese sociocultural background and their Canadian professors and peers who are mostly English/French native speakers. Fasold (1990) has defined the approach to the sociolinguistics of language, where the use of language is related to social and cultural values, as ethnography of communication. I collected the data for this study from real-world settings, rather than from experimental or simulated settings. Davis (1995) points out that the qualitative research process of collecting, categorizing, managing, analyzing, interpreting and explaining data involves philosophical, theoretical and methodological considerations. While the research process in the present study centered on language communication, it was at the same time culture-oriented, through the involvement of cultural interpretation and explanation.

The ethnographic researcher is interested in the way people experience their world, what it is like for them, and how to best understand them (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The basic methodological tenets of the present study are found in Maclure's (1988) qualitative/ethnographic empirical study, when he summarizes the methodology of his work as follows:

In examining the sets of specific questions and indicators addressed in each area of investigation the methodological approach was qualitative and ethnographic. Ethnography refers to the anthropological field methods used to render explicit the meanings of social action which are implicit to the participants themselves (the "emic" view). By conducting an ethnographic study the author's purpose was to juxtapose his own ("etic") observation of concrete actions and situations with the interpretations of the actors involved. This proved to be a key method for substantiating inferences (Maclure, 1988, p. 65).

Major data are obtained through observation and interviews. Stories and anecdotes obtained from the participants reflecting their lived and conscious experience constitute the real-life data. The hermeneutical nature of interpretation within an ethnographic study lies in its focus on human behaviour within its cultural and institutional context, which may reveal the consequences of miscommunication, and shows the positive and negative experiences resulting from using different coping strategies.

In the field of second language acquisition, qualitative research is alternatively known as naturalistic and interpretive. Thus, employing a qualitative meth-

odology enables the researcher to derive and describe findings that promote greater understanding of how and why people behave the way they do. Qualitative researchers believe that human behaviour is too complex to explain or predict based solely on statistics or theoretical considerations.

According to Larsen-Freeman & Long (1991):

What is important for researchers is not the choice of a priori paradigms or even methodologies, but rather to be clear on what the purpose of the study is and to match that purpose with the attributes most likely to accomplish it. Put another way, the methodological design should be determined by the research question (p. 14).

Summing up this introductory section, the research methodology underlying the present study is based on the theory of qualitative research, in the light of the different opinions and debates that have characterized second language acquisition research during recent years. Within the qualitative paradigm, I have identified the ethnographic approach as best suited for investigating and analyzing the participants' miscommunication experiences in real-world settings and in the cultural and institutional context of Canada, thus matching the research design with the purpose of the study as expressed by the research questions.

3.2 Research Approaches in Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistic research focuses on the sociocultural factors that affect the learning and use of language. The basic premise of sociolinguistic-based research

in the area of second language acquisition and use is that second language data do not represent a static phenomenon. Many external variables such as culture differences, social status, gender differences, etc. affect the learners' use of a language. In the sociolinguists' view, language and culture interact with each other, and understanding of one requires understanding of the other (Deng & Liu, 1989).

Learning and using a foreign language means more than mastering it at the linguistic level; it includes learning to see the world as native speakers of that language see it. It also means learning the ways in which a language reflects the ideas, customs, and behaviour of a society, thus learning to understand the "language of the mind" (Deng & Liu, 1989, p. 4).

Being concerned with the sociocultural factors in language use, the present study examines cultural differences as they affect the communication between the Chinese MBA students and their Canadian interlocutors, not in ESL classrooms but in their MBA-related study context, and in naturalistic settings within the unfamiliar Canadian environment. Thus, it reaches beyond language learning and emphasizes language use. Further, it is not intended to examine Chinese culture in general as an object through observation of routine activities, but rather to produce an explanation and cultural interpretation of sporadically occurring problematic instances of miscommunication.

So far, most culture-oriented researchers in the field of second language acquisition have examined language use in the framework of speech acts and

functions, using elicitation techniques such as role-play and completion tasks (House, 1993). In addition, experimental designs and statistical data analyses have been used to identify the use of social rules by native and non-native speakers (Kasper & Dahl, 1991).

While speech act theory has significantly contributed to understanding the cultural component of language communication, it is considered insufficient for understanding and analyzing the full scope of real-world language use. Mey (1993) strongly urges researchers “to turn to the real world of language as it is used” (p. 208). Thus, in the present study I investigate cultural presuppositions that play a role in real-life communication, with language as the vehicle. Cultural presuppositions are pieces of real-world information from a different culture that are necessary for understanding. My intention is to look beneath the surface of language, at the level of the underlying culture-specific concepts.

Davis (1995) points out a common misconception of qualitative research in the area of applied linguistics, when she states that second language acquisition researchers commonly understand qualitative studies as merely utilizing non-quantitative or non-statistical techniques:

... This limited definition of qualitative research ignores the philosophical, theoretical and methodological considerations involved in conducting any form of qualitative research and has allowed for a number of associated problems of definition and legitimacy (Davis, 1995, p. 432).

The study of miscommunication due to cultural presuppositions calls for the type of qualitative research that seeks to discern meaning. Thus, the present study interest lies mainly in the “comprehension of the meaning of text/action” (Tesch, 1990, p. 67). This research method encompasses theoretical, philosophical and methodological considerations, thus yielding multi-faceted data on the participants’ lived experiences and stories.

Although ethnographic study is within the realm of sociolinguistics, its different research methods and research setting set the ethnographer apart from the mainstream second language acquisition researcher. Davis points out that researchers using ethnographic methods have tended to work and publish outside of second language acquisition and ESL, in areas such as education, anthropology, and the sociology of language. Thus, research on second language acquisition and use has increasingly become interdisciplinary. As early as 1974, Hymes called for a sociocultural dimension in linguistics when he wrote:

Until recently linguistics and sociology seemed miles apart in the United States. Structural (formalist) linguistics was conceived as a discipline which concerned itself little, if at all, with society. ... The whole temper of linguistics was impersonal and formal to a degree (Hymes, 1974, p. 70).

Previously, he had already elaborated on the relationship between anthropology and linguistics:

Of the sciences concerned with men, anthropology has the closest and fullest ties with linguistics. In principle it already recognizes linguistic re-

search as part of its concern, and already includes some acquaintance with language and linguistics in its training. The required combination of training in linguistics and in social analysis can perhaps be effected under the aegis of anthropology more readily than under any other (Hymes, 1972, p. 117).

Hymes (1996) has ever since been a strong advocate of the interdisciplinary nature of language education, through his call for a comprehensive sociology of language, integrating the fields of sociology, social psychology, education, and anthropology.

In summary, in its methodology the present study views language and culture as interacting with each other, and the understanding of one necessitates an understanding of the other. Reaching beyond language acquisition, I emphasize language use in context, to render an explanation and cultural interpretation of the participants' miscommunication. To uncover the underlying culture-specific concepts of the participants, the study is transcending speech act theory, both in scope and method. By encompassing philosophical, theoretical and methodological considerations in a multidisciplinary view, I avoid the fallacy of a qualitative approach that merely utilizes non-quantitative techniques. The sociolinguistic orientation of the present study is manifested in its emphasis on the sociocultural dimensions of language communication, in an integrated view.

3.3 Qualitative Research and the Ethnography of Communication

According to Johnson (1992), the ethnography of communication combines anthropological and sociolinguistic perspectives to address the study of communicative behaviour as it functions in different cultural contexts:

Work in this field centers on what a speaker needs to know to communicate appropriately in a speech community and on how such knowledge is learned and used. By extension, it might inform us about what a writer needs to know to communicate appropriately and effectively in a discourse community (Johnson, 1992, p. 133).

It is one of the main premises of this study that language is human behaviour which "... unlike that of physical objects, cannot be understood without reference to the meanings and purposes attached by human actors to their activities" (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 106). The terminology, the interactive styles and philosophical and theoretical assumptions of the ethnography of communication seem the most appropriate methodological basis for this topic.

The present study focuses on the phenomenon of culture-specific presuppositions as they influence specifically the English language use of speakers of Chinese background and in more general terms the communicative processes in which they are engaged. The participants' lived experience is explained and interpreted by the researcher, through the researcher's perspective.

The hermeneutic tradition in philosophy provides much of the theoretical basis for most qualitative research that is done from an interpretive perspective. Interpretation is a central concept in hermeneutics and has influenced the general approach of qualitative researchers.

Hermeneutic theorists claim that there is no objective reality, and therefore no possibility of developing correct knowledge about reality. Instead, we develop interpretations of the world. Phenomenological description, combined with hermeneutic interpretation, makes up the qualitative researcher's story, or narrative (Tesch, 1990). The researcher's key concepts of argument are grounded in the story itself, rather than imposed on it by the investigator's perspective or someone else's theory.

Hermeneutics is defined as the study and interpretation of human behaviour and social institutions, an "exegetical method for identifying and explicating the meaning in a text, a culture or the mind of a social actor" (Schwandt, 1994, p. 121). In the hermeneutic school of thought, scholars apply the interpretive tradition to the empirical world by likening the world to a text that must be read (Barritt et al., 1985). Within the present study, the social actors provide the information for a phenomenological description of their lived, conscious experience in an interlingual, intercultural environment.

In language- and culture-related research, linguistic anthropologists, ethnographers of communication and other qualitative researchers interested in lan-

guage issues have offered an alternative to mainstream second language acquisition studies. The use of ethnographic methods in language-related study has resulted in a split between ethnographic researchers and mainstream second language acquisition researchers, which has led to the present dichotomy in research approaches between the traditional, more linguistically oriented view, and nontraditional ethnography of communication.

The present study draws attention to cultural issues related to language use and language socialization. According to Johnson (1992), “there are two general focuses of ethnographic study that are particularly relevant to the field of second language acquisition and teaching” (p. 132-133). One is the educationally oriented ethnography represented by Spindler & Spindler (1987) and Wolcott, (1987), and the other is the ethnography of communication represented by Heath (1983), Hymes (1972), and Saville-Troike (1989).

Although Spindler & Spindler’s (1997) work is not directly related to language communication, their research tradition informs us about both enculturation and acculturation processes. Their views are helpful in understanding ways for making educational experiences more culturally sensitive and appropriate. They point out that, although qualitative studies are on the rise, the purpose of cultural studies is not quite clearly presented in certain studies:

Our reading of ethnographic work in the schools suggests to us that that some people doing ethnography do not know what they are doing it for

except that it is 'qualitative', 'descriptive' and that these are suddenly deemed desirable methodological attributes. ... The object of ethnographic research by anthropologists is to discover the cultural knowledge that people hold in their minds, how it is employed in social interaction, and the consequences of its employment (Spindler & Spindler (1997, p. 71).

The present study attempts to synthesize a phenomenology of intercultural miscommunication in the form of stories, based on the belief that the purpose of ethnographic research is to describe and interpret the cultural behaviour of a group, including its communicative behaviour. The cultural context is crucial. Cultural context may be defined as the school or classroom culture, or it may extend into the home, community, and wider society (Johnson, 1992).

The present study with the Chinese MBA students takes their academic and living environments as cultural context, in contrast to linguistically oriented methodologies that define linguistic units of analysis: the word, the sentence, a discourse, a speech act etc. Within the qualitative research design, the term unit of analysis is defined phenomenologically as an instance in the participant's lived experience, or hermeneutically as an instance of human behaviour. Or, in Tesch's (1990) terms, in qualitative research we deal with the description of events, or stories.

I investigated the real-life experience of Chinese MBA students as they were immersed in a naturalistic English-language environment. Since the goal of this study is cultural explanation, it is ethnographic in nature. The shared values

and behaviours of the Chinese MBA students are of interest, rather than differences in individuals due to personality, ability, or cognitive style (Johnson, 1992). The characteristics of ethnographic study are summarized by Davis (1995), in the context of her discussion of qualitative research in second language acquisition:

Linguistic anthropologists, ethnographers of communication, and other qualitative researchers interested in language issues have offered an alternative to mainstream second language acquisition studies in viewing acquisition not only as a mental individualistic process, but one that is also embedded in the sociocultural contexts in which it occurs. From this point of view, mental processes are not unimportant, but they are situated in a larger sociocultural context that is equally important. In other words, ethnographers and other qualitative researchers take a holistic perspective in conducting research (Davis, 1995, p. 432).

The present research project was undertaken as a naturalistic inquiry using ethnographic methods. According to Schwandt (1994), naturalistic inquiry leads to “understanding the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it (emic view), as social actors” (p. 118). In the present study design, I have adopted a “naturalistic” approach to my fieldwork (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Naturalistic inquiry “...is intended to denote one of the paradigms that developed in reaction to positivism...” with the researcher as “the major form of data collection device” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 250).

According to Tesch’s (1990) model, the qualitative paradigms of phenomenology and hermeneutics are the appropriate concepts to apply. Guba and

Lincoln (1989, 1994) contrast the hermeneutic or interpretive paradigm (also called constructivist) with the conventional positivist paradigm.

Examining cross-cultural communication in a variety of social contexts leads to thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of communicative instances, and the interpretation of the thoughts and meanings of the participants in their emic view.

This way of implementing empirical research is in compliance with Tesch's (1990) perspective of phenomenology, which is the detailed description of conscious experience. In this study, I am using the phenomenological approach by describing the conscious experience of the study participants as social actors. Conscious experience means the sum of participants' intercultural communicative experiences, which I will interpret through the hermeneutic strategy of "a singular event [being] understood by reference to whatever it is a part of ..." (Tesch, 1990, p. 68), thus revealing the underlying cultural presuppositions that might be the basis for miscommunication.

Fasold (1990) has been one of the linguists to follow Hymes' (1971, 1972) call for linking linguistics with other disciplines. In Fasold's (1990) definition, the approach to the sociolinguistics of language that relates to social and cultural values is called the ethnography of communication. The goal of ethnographic language and culture research is to explain the meaning of language in human life. Although research on speech acts and ethnography of communication are both

under the umbrella of sociolinguistics, they differ in research orientation and methodology.

Summing up this section, the methodology basis of the present study is provided by the theory of qualitative research in conjunction with the principles of the ethnography of communication which studies communicative behaviour in the context of culture. To understand instances of miscommunication, I am examining the participants' lived conscious experience, following the theoretical tenets of phenomenological description and hermeneutic interpretation. The present study is undertaken as a naturalistic qualitative inquiry using ethnographic methods: describing and analyzing the emic view of the participants in thick descriptions that emphasize the cultural context. In other words, the study uses methods of ethnographic language and culture research to reveal the underlying cultural presuppositions of miscommunication, as they become apparent in the participants' stories of their cross-cultural communicative experiences.

3.4 The Research Design

This section describes the research design features of the present study, including the changes that dynamically evolved during its progress. To ensure the anonymity of my informants, all the names of participants and the name of the university they attended are pseudonyms.

Overall strategy and rationale. The present study is empirical, exploratory, descriptive and interpretive. It seeks a deeper understanding of the Chinese MBA students' lived experiences of communication phenomena in a Canadian academic and social environment. This understanding is gained by interviewing study participants and informants from Cohorts 1 and 2, who were all students from Mainland China enrolled in the YES-Canada program, regarding cross-cultural miscommunication and misunderstanding they have encountered in on- and off-campus settings. The goal is achieved through an ethnographic approach within the qualitative paradigm, which provides me with contextual knowledge in the sociocultural settings. A key reason for choosing the ethnographic approach for the present empirical study is that ethnography includes the study of the speech and actions of people in social groups. In the ethnographic approach, the researcher studies instances and makes assertions. This strategy allowed me to understand how the students define their situations, and thus shed light on miscommunication arising from cultural differences. This overall strategy of a qualitative inquiry with ethnographic orientation provides answers to the research questions.

Site and sample selection. The participants of the study were 54 MBA students from China studying at the Faculty of Administration of Eastern Canada University. For observation within my field study, I selected sites of two different categories: on-campus and off-campus. The on-campus observation sites were

lecture halls, meeting rooms, cafeterias and other locations at Eastern Canada University. The off-campus observation sites were locations in Ottawa outside the university premises, such as the students' homes, restaurants, shops and market places. The in-depth interviews were conducted in meeting rooms at university. Informal interviews occurred frequently in any of the on- and off-campus locations mentioned.

My strategy of sample selection involved first contacting the program administrators and informing them about my intended study, then informing the entire group of 54 Chinese MBA students. For conducting in-depth interviews, I needed to select a representative sample of 8 key informants. The actual selection of the 8 key informants happened with the co-operation and assistance of the students' ESL instructor and the students' monitor.

My role as researcher. Being the instrument in the study, I had to be accepted by the participants as part of their lives. Negotiating entry into the group of participants involved gaining their trust, to maximize the opportunities for gathering data, and ensure full responses to the research questions. My acceptance as a researcher by the participants was facilitated by our shared cultural roots, and they felt comfortable telling their stories in Chinese.

Data collection method. I gathered information through participation in the students' setting, direct observation and interviews. As a participant observer, I immersed myself in the students' academic and social settings, which allowed me

to experience reality as they did. Data were obtained through observation of verbal and nonverbal behaviour of the Chinese MBA students in real-world English-language settings. My observation activities consisted of systematic noting and recording of events, behaviours and statements in classroom and daily life situations.

For the research fieldwork, 8 key informants were selected from the focal group of 54 participants who were the students of YES-Canada Cohort 2. A pilot study with 3 background informants helped confirm the study's premises and assumptions; among these 3 background informants, one was from Cohort 1, one was from Cohort 2, and one was a student from the regular MBA program. Stories and anecdotes obtained from the participants through in-depth interviews reflect their lived and conscious experience and thus constitute real-life data. I conducted such in-depth interviews with the 8 key informants and 3 additional background informants that would yield data about the students' communicative experiences and reveal cultural differences, and thus contribute to answering the research questions. The study employed an ethnographic approach; the primary data were gathered from observation of the participants and various types of interviews. Transcribing and categorizing the field data from observation and interviews and displaying them in narrative form yielded stories of the participants' lived experience which then could be canvassed for clues relating to the research questions.

Following collection of the qualitative data, a questionnaire was distributed to the participant group in order to consolidate and confirm information on the participants' educational background and their working experience in China. Out of 54 participants, 42 completed questionnaires.

Data management. To bring order and structure to the large amount of collected data, as the data collection progressed, I consolidated the hand-written notes and audiotapes by transcribing them into word processor files on my computer. After each observation or interview, I would organize the data into categories according to the research questions. I would then revise and supplement the categories to reflect those new additional data that did not fit the initial questions.

Data analysis strategy. After I had the data available in structured and orderly categories that reflected the research questions, I proceeded with the analysis. I displayed the data in narrative form, using thick description, and interpreted the participants' experiences and stories, focusing on their behaviour within its sociocultural context.

In summary, the research design of the present study is characterized by the overall methodological strategies of a qualitative inquiry with ethnographic orientation, which includes the speech communication and actions of people in social groups. The main purpose of the ethnographic study was to enhance understanding of foreign students. In particular, the present study addresses the problems encountered by Chinese students in Canada through thick description of

their experiences. This focus was set during the design stage of the study, and there was no intention to actively recruit Canadians as study participants. The purpose of the study was to examine the phenomena of miscommunication occurring in realistic settings from the emic view of the Chinese students, and thus provide a better understanding of the Chinese MBA students' lives, experiences, and stories.

3.5 The Case Study

The present study is designed as a case study. "A case study is defined in terms of unit of analysis" (Johnson, 1992, p. 75). The focus of a case study can be a teacher, a classroom, a school, an agency, an institution, or a community. The purpose of a case study is to describe the case in its context. The individual or other entity is studied in its naturally occurring state and environment.

3.5.1 The MBA Program and YES-Canada

Business in China is in need of management expertise. There is tremendous competition among Chinese university graduates to enroll in western MBA programs. At the same time, the pressure to study abroad is rising for young energetic people in the Chinese business world, due to its increasing competitiveness, and the globalization of business and economy. Under these circumstances, the YES-Canada program was initiated in 1997 by Mrs. Lau, the president of a marketing company by the same name located in British Columbia. Its purpose has

been to provide an opportunity for young business executives from China to study on a Canadian MBA program.

The program is being implemented at Eastern Canada University in Ottawa, Canada. As of April 2001, 3 cohorts with a total of 124 students had come from China to Canada to attend the YES-Canada MBA program. The present study deals with Cohort 2.

To recruit prospective MBA students in China, the YES-Canada company does a large amount of administrative work to arrange their stay in Canada. On the Chinese side, YES-Canada has to facilitate the process of studying abroad through its political connections with the Chinese government, since Chinese students must be granted permission from their government to study abroad. On the Canadian side, YES-Canada has to arrange Canadian visas for the Chinese students it recruits.

Eastern Canada University's MBA program has been promoted in China by YES-Canada, through marketing campaigns in four of China's major cities: Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen. The program marketing has involved information seminars, newspaper ads, and by working directly with Chinese schools, educational authorities and government agencies.

There are more YES-Canada applicants in China than the program can handle, so the students are recruited through competitive selection. For example, for the recruitment of the focal cohort of this study (54 students), about 400 - 500

participants attended each of the four info-sessions organized by YES-Canada in China.

The students from China entered the MBA program with the ambition of becoming better business professionals. In the area of business training, there is no regular exchange program between China and Canada that offers a degree. In this situation, the YES-Canada program, through private arrangement, opens the door for Chinese business-oriented people to get further relevant training and education in the Canadian environment.

The YES-Canada program can be summarized as a privately arranged opportunity for Chinese students and practitioners of business administration to earn a Canadian MBA degree. In the absence of government-sponsored exchange programs between China and Canada that offer a degree in business administration, the program is providing a solution for business-oriented Chinese professionals to obtain their MBA degree in Canada.

3.5.2 The Chinese MBA Students at Eastern Canada University

Cohort 1 was a comparatively small group consisting of 18 students who began their 15-month program in September of 1998 and graduated in December of 1999. Cohort 2, the focal group of the present study, consisted of 54 students, who began their 15-month program in March of 1999 and graduated in June of

2000. Cohort 3, consisting of 52 students, is presently (2001) still attending the MBA program at Eastern Canada University.

Cohort 1. The first cohort of 18 Chinese MBA students that came to Canada under the YES-Canada program studied at Eastern Canada University during 1998/99. This group did not receive any special treatment but attended the MBA program just like the other Canadian and international MBA students. The students of this first cohort were not segregated as a group in their own classes, nor were they subjected to mandatory weekly ESL counseling sessions throughout the duration of the MBA program. Thus, the students of Cohort 1 had opportunities to interact with Canadians, going through their entire program immersed in a class of Canadian students.

However, this immersion in a Canadian class environment was fraught with difficulties for the Chinese students of Cohort 1, their Canadian peers and university staff. The professors, administrators and Canadian students realized that the Chinese students of Cohort 1 had numerous problems due to their different background in language and culture. For example, they could not work well with Canadian students, especially within the frame of their group work assignments. The Chinese students seemed passive and often refused to speak out. This was interpreted as an unwillingness to contribute to the group work. They seemed to take advantage of the Canadians by letting them do the talking, and seemed to be mainly interested to formally fulfill attendance requirements. This information

was gathered in the pilot study through interviews with one of the 3 background informants, and it was confirmed during my fieldwork with administrators at the Faculty of Administration. The administrators at the faculty recalled the Canadian students' confusion and dissatisfaction with the Chinese students, and remembered Canadian students reporting to them that they had difficulties in understanding the Chinese students, although they would like to communicate with them, as they were sure they could learn a lot from their Chinese peers.

The Chinese students on their part were trying to be polite and modest, and at the same time were afraid of making mistakes. Also, they felt they were not familiar with the western ways of the Canadians, and with the topics of the MBA program. Their Canadian peers often had to urge the Chinese students to speak out; this left the Chinese students helpless, and made them look non-cooperative. When the Canadian students wondered why the Chinese students were so shy, they would ask them about this during their group work, which only served to making the Chinese students embarrassed and thus compounded the communication problems.

During the pilot study, another one of the 3 background informants provided more interesting information. According to this informant, working in the same group with Canadian students was stressful. It was probably the reason why she volunteered to transfer from Cohort 1 to Cohort 2, although she was reluctant to discuss this issue in more detail.

Cohort 2 (the focal group of this study). In view of the culture-specific problems experienced by Cohort 1, the program organizers tried to minimize the difficulties by adjusting the program delivery. This adjustment consisted of adding mandatory ESL sessions to the program of the YES-Canada students. Through this arrangement, the Chinese MBA students were initially segregated from the Canadian and other international MBA students. In other words, they spent the first half of the MBA program in Chinese-only classes, and were integrated into classes with Canadian students only during the second half of their MBA program.

For graduation as an MBA, a total of 40 completed courses were required. YES-Canada students attended the 24 core courses in Chinese-only classes. They attended 16 selective courses in classes with Canadian students. Setting up a Chinese-cohort class was a special arrangement to help the Chinese students get used to the different educational system in Canada which was new to them.

The Faculty of Administration offered the same courses to the YES-Canada students and to the regular MBA students. The only curricular difference was that the YES-Canada program included an additional weekly ESL session.

When I began the fieldwork for the present study in January of 2000, Cohort 2 had six months left to complete their MBA program. At this time, the Chinese students had finished their core courses and were taking selective courses together with the Canadian students. Almost all YES-Canada students chose

course ADM 6259 International Corporate Financing, and there were about 50 Chinese students attending this course in January 2001.

The 24 core courses for the YES-Canada and regular MBA program are as follows:

- ADM 5200 Data Analysis 1: Descriptive Statistics and Probability
- ADM 5220 Strategic Marketing Context
- ADM 5235 Management Skills 1
- ADM 5240 Financial Statements and the Accounting System
- ADM 5250 Fundamentals of Corporate Finance 1
- ADM 5255 Analytical Methods in Managerial Economics
- ADM 5260 The World of the General Manager and of Strategic Management
- ADM 5201 Data Analysis 2: Statistical Inference and Regression Analysis
- ADM 5210 Governance
- ADM 5221 Strategic Marketing Management
- ADM 5230 Managing Organizational Behaviour
- ADM 5241 Managerial Accounting Information and Decisions
- ADM 5251 Fundamentals of Corporate Finance 2
- ADM 5231 Managing Human Resources
- ADM 5236 Management Skills 2

- ADM 5242 Financial Statement Analysis
- ADM 5256 Macroeconomic Policy
- ADM 5270 Strategic Management of Information Technology
- ADM 5257 Pricing Decisions in Managerial Economics
- ADM 5261 Strategy Formulation
- ADM 5280 Operations Management 1: Strategic Decisions
- ADM 5232 Strategic Human Resource Management
- ADM 5262 Strategy Implementation
- ADM 5281 Operations Management 2: Operating and Control Decisions.

After completing the 24 core courses listed above, the students had to select another 16 courses. Many of them selected too many courses at the beginning of the semester, because they could not make up their mind what courses to take. It was common among them to drop courses for which they had signed up earlier. During the data collection period of my study (January – June 2000), the selective courses listed below were offered at the Faculty of Administration. The courses were arranged in the three blocks #3, #4 and #5. The duration of each block was about 6 weeks. Thus, each course would be completed in 6 weeks' time.

Selective Courses available for the Chinese students (January – April, 2000):

Block 3 (5 January 2000 – 25 February 2000)

- ADM 6200 Forecasting for Management 1
- ADM 6210 Models of Public and Social Governance
- ADM 6220 Consumer Behaviour
- ADM 6222 Marketing Research
- ADM 6230 Organization Design
- ADM 6240 Activity Based Costing
- ADM 6250 Applied Corporate Finance 1
- ADM 6252 Investments: Equity Instruments
- ADM 6262 Technology in the National and International Environments
- ADM 6266 Multinational Management 1
- ADM 6268 Comparative management 1
- ADM 6271 Business Telecommunications Systems
- ADM 6395 Case Competition
- ADM 6450 Financial management for High – Tech Firms
- ADM 6460 Business Law 1
- ADM 6495 Seminar: Government Relations – I
- ADM 6914 Project and Program Evaluation 1
- HAH 6201 Population Health and Epidemiology
- HAH 6260 Health Services Organization and Policy
- HAH 6261 Strategic Management of Health Care Organizations

Block 4 (28 February 2000 – 20 April 2000)

- ADM 6201 Forecasting for Management 2
- ADM 6211 Public Consultation and Multistakeholder Governance
- ADM 6221 Integrated Marketing Communications
- ADM 6223 Consumer Products Marketing
- ADM 6231 Managing Change
- ADM 6242 Advanced Financial Statement s and Decisions
- ADM 6251 Applied Corporate Finance 2
- ADM 6253 Investments: Fixed – Income Instruments
- ADM 6263 Technology Adaptation and Innovation in a Corporate Environment
- ADM 6264 Technology R & D
- ADM 6267 Multinational Management 2
- ADM 6269 Comparative Management 2
- ADM 6270 Systems for Electronic Commerce
- ADM 6461 Business Law 2
- ADM 6495 Seminar: Government Relations – I
- ADM 6915 Project and Program Evaluation 2
- HAH 6202 Research Methods for Health Care Management
- HAH 6250 Health Care Finance
- HAH 6262 Health Care Law

Block 5 (1 May 2000 – 17 June 2000)

- ADM *High Technology Marketing
- ADM *Global Marketing
- ADM 6495A Seminar: Managing Capital Assets
- ADM 6495B Seminar: Competitive Intelligence
- ADM 6497A Seminar: The Political Economy of Globalization: Issues in International Economics
- ADM 6497B Seminar: The History of Management Thought
- ADM 6497D Seminar: Consulting to the Technology Sector
- ADM 6497E Seminar: Management Consulting
- ADM 6497F Seminar: Basic Concepts in Canadian Taxation
- HAH 6214 Patient Services Administration
- HAH 6263 Management of Community and Long Term Care
- HAH 6270 Information for Health Care Delivery and Management

The two first courses in block 5 marked with an asterisk* (High Technology Marketing, Global Marketing) were for YES-Canada students as well as for others. The maximum enrolment in these two courses was 45 students, and priority was given to YES-Canada students.

3.5.3 Overview of the Participants

The case study was conducted with 8 key informants from Cohort 2, which consisted of 54 MBA students, from January to June 2000. At the beginning of the study, 3 background informants were interviewed for a pilot study. A questionnaire was administered on 26 May, 2000, to 42 Chinese MBA students.

Participants	Number	Time
Cohort 2	54	January to June, 2000
Key Informants	8	January to June, 2000
Background Informants	3	January, 2000
Questionnaire Participants	42	May, 2000

3.5.4 Background Information on the Students

Regarding the English language background of the students from Cohort 2, most of them had started to learn English in Middle School, and some even in Elementary School, as part of the regular school curriculum in China (as shown in questionnaire #3). To qualify for entry into the MBA program, most of them had passed the TOEFL (Teaching of English as a Foreign Language) test in China, before coming to Canada. The few who had not passed the TOEFL test before

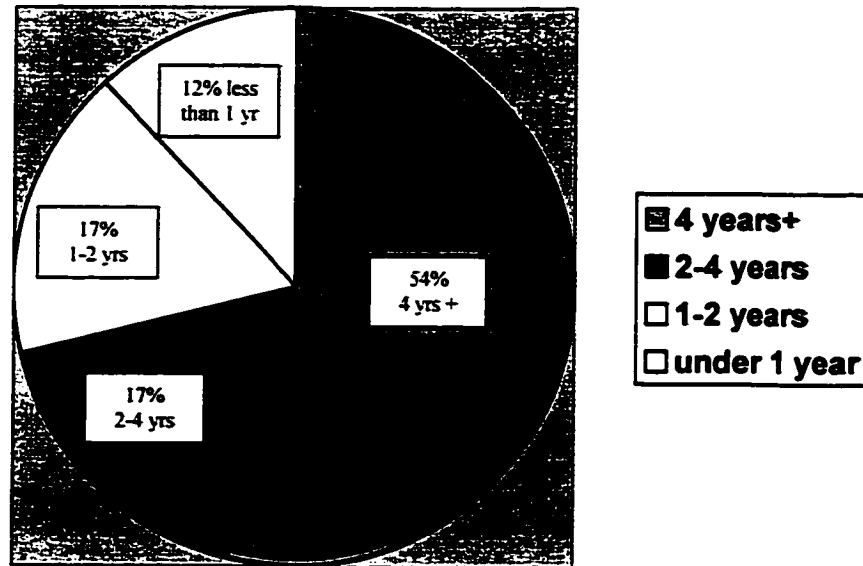
coming to Canada had to undergo ESL training at the Second Language Institute at Eastern Canada University, to thus obtain their entrance qualification for the MBA program. About 10% of Cohort 2 had not passed the TOEFL test in China, a percentage estimated by one of the background informants in the pilot study.

After all of them had fulfilled the TOEFL requirement for graduate students, the students of Cohort 2 were still supposed to continue attending weekly ESL sessions every Tuesday from 12:00-13:00, throughout the whole MBA program.

In comparison with Cohort 1, the second YES-Canada cohort spent more of their time together as a homogeneous group, both in their academic and social lives. The students of Cohort 2 (our focal group) were treated as one large culturally homogeneous group.

The 54 Chinese MBA students of our focal group stayed mostly within the environment of their Chinese peers, both on and off campus, and on the MBA program seldom worked in inter-ethnic groups. Not all students recruited for the MBA program had been students in China, many of them had been professionals and company executives. According to the data obtained through the questionnaire, 98% had worked in China after graduating from university. Among those, 54% had more than four years of working experience in China. 17% had 1-2 years working experience in China, 17% had 2-4 years working experience in China, 12% had less than one year of working experience in China.

Figure 2: Data on the Students' Work Experience in China



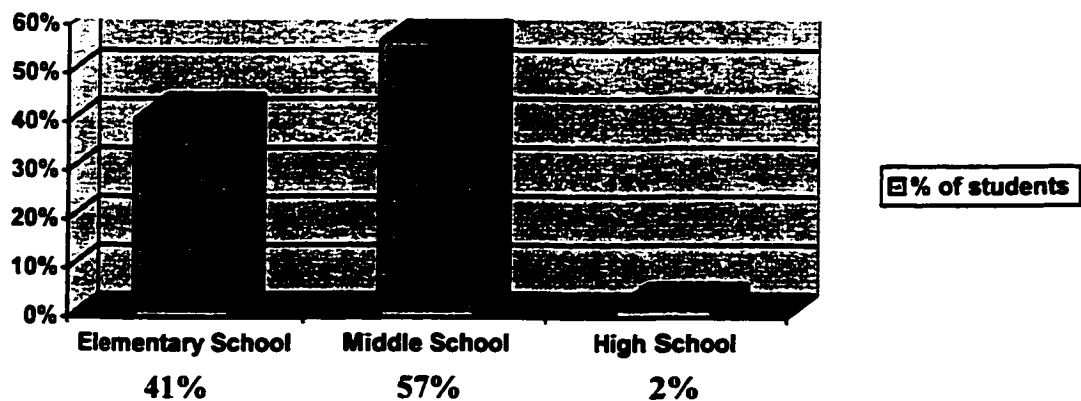
Further, 66% of these Chinese students had dealt with English-speaking business people in China, and they acknowledged that cultural understanding was an important issue; 34% had not dealt with English-speaking business people in China and they either marked "No" or left blank spaces (questionnaire).

The Chinese MBA students' English-language background was a relevant factor in the present study. In most cases, the Chinese MBA students had learned English in a Chinese environment, in formal classroom situations in China. They all had graduated from university in China, where the curriculum of the public education system includes English as a major course, no matter what other subject might be their major. The Chinese MBA students had background training from

various different areas; in China they had majored in subjects like economy, human resources management, English, management engineering, linguistics, mechanical engineering, civil engineering, medicine, advertising, finance, accounting, international trade, information management, architecture, history, polymer science and engineering (data from interviews and questionnaire).

Due to differences in local conditions, they had not all started learning English at the same time. Generally speaking, schools in urban areas in China offer English to schoolchildren at an earlier age than schools in rural or remote areas, because such schools are short of teaching resources. The data obtained from the questionnaire (Appendix B) indicate that 57% of the Chinese MBA students started learning English while in Middle School (grade 6 or 7); 41% of the Chinese MBA students started learning English while in elementary school, and 2% started learning English while in high school.

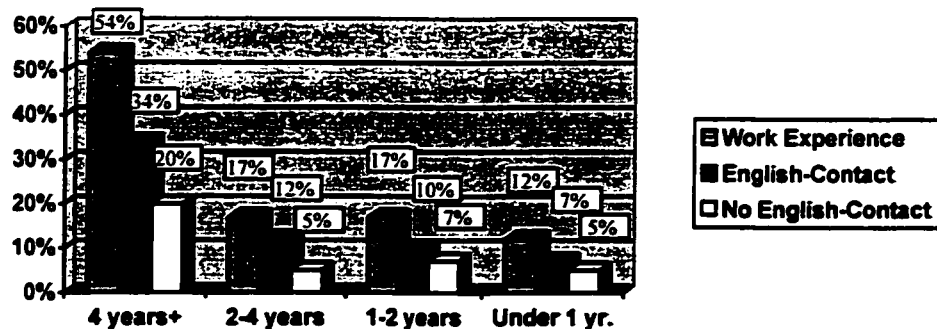
Figure 3: Stages at which the Chinese MBA students began learning English in China



Knowledge of the participants' English language background is relevant to the present study because, generally speaking, the study focuses on sociocultural differences reflected in their communicative behaviour when they interact with English speakers. In particular, the study examines the types of miscommunication likely to occur, how messages are interpreted, why some utterances cause frustration, and what consequences these misunderstandings may have.

For the present study, information on the Chinese MBA students' work experience is useful. According to Figure 4 below (which is an extension of Figure 2 with more specific data added), in the group of 4 years+ experience, 34% had dealt with English-speaking business people in China, 20% had not. In the group of 2-4 years, 12% were with, 5% without English speaker contact. In the group of 1-2 years, 10% were with, 7% without English speaker contact. In the group of under 1 year, 7% were with, 5% without English speaker contact.

Figure 4: The Participants' Background in China



The students were from well-educated affluent family backgrounds. Their

families were in a situation to appreciate the value of an MBA education in Canada. All participants in the present study held a Chinese Bachelor's degree (confirmed in the data obtained from question #1 in the questionnaire), which in view of the Chinese social circumstances is a remarkable achievement - they belonged to the lucky few who had made it to university: in China, only 5% of high school graduates pass the university entrance examination, to which people in China refer as Devil's Gate.

The Chinese MBA students had no difficulties in using computers. With their obviously well-to-do background, they proved to be information-technology-oriented. Through my observations and interviews with students from the Chinese MBA program and from the questionnaire, I found that the Chinese MBA students represented the social elite in their age group: they held a Chinese Bachelor's degree when coming to study in Canada, and they all had received English language training prior to coming to Canada (data from questionnaire).

The 8 key informants of Cohort 2

After the university ethics committee had approved my research project in January 2000, I confirmed the ethics clearance with the Chinese MBA student group's administrator. He gave me a timetable of lectures and the contact information of the professors. I then followed his directions and went to the lecture hall where the Chinese students were attending a lecture. When the lecture was over, I addressed the student group, explaining my research project and asking for

volunteers to participate. A number of students spoke to me, expressing their interest in participating, but said they needed to obtain the ESL counselor's permission. They explained that they could not make decisions on their own, and, as an example, told me that they were not allowed to put their CV out on the Internet without the counselor's permission.

I met with the ESL counselor, informed her of my research project and asked her to let the Chinese students participate in my study. I told her that I needed 10 students for in-depth interviews and discussion meetings. She read my project description and commented on the participant selection, saying that most of the Chinese MBA students did not interact with Canadians, but for this type of study I would need students who actually communicated with Canadians. The ESL counselor then named 8 students who in her opinion would interact with Canadians. I nominated another 2 students who had escorted me from the lecture hall to the ESL counselor's office, and who were waiting around the corner during my discussion with the ESL counselor. The ESL counselor and I designated the rest of the student group as a cohort for observation.

The ESL counselor subsequently informed the students' monitor who himself was an MBA student about my research project. On the following day I had a meeting with the monitor, during which we reviewed the list of 8 participants suggested by the ESL counselor. After looking at the list of names, the monitor said that there were people in the group who were more suitable than

these. With the assistance of the monitor, I finalized the selection of the 8 key informants. These 8 students had in common that they were highly outspoken, extroverted, self-confident and more communicative than the rest of the cohort. The 8 key informants are characterized below in brief biographical descriptions.

- Shen Hong had worked in a company Shanghai, where he had been in charge of advertising silk products. In his job, he had used both Chinese and English. He had experience in dealing with English-speakers.
- Su Ning had worked for 4 years as an in-house accountant at a software company in Shenzhen. She did not have experience in real-life interaction with English-speakers.
- Zheng Wu had worked for 2 years as an executive for an international trading company in Shanghai. He had working experience with English-speakers.
- Zhao Jie had been in charge of medical equipment sales in an import / export company in Guangdong. She had used both Chinese and English in her work.
- Liu Gang had worked for 2 years as an executive in a high-tech company in Shenzhen, where he had been in charge of information management. He had experience dealing with English-speakers, mainly through interpreters.

- Cui Hua was an architect and engineer, and had worked for 3 years as a supervising construction engineer in Guangdong. There she had had little contact with English-speakers.
- Zhang Jian had been an executive sales manager at a Chinese trading company in Shenzhen. He had only one year of work experience, and had interacted frequently with English-speakers.
- Wu Yi had joined the YES-Canada program after graduating from university in Guangdong. She did not have any work experience in China. She had hardly interacted with English-speakers in real-life settings.

One of the key informants, Zheng Wu, was the “monitor” (student representative) of Cohort 2. He agreed that these 8 students were a good choice for participating in my study. He said that these 8 students were well suited because they were extroverted and willing to share their stories with others. He further mentioned that they were very articulate and enjoyed discussions.

The eight key informants were sociable and actively volunteered in the study. Due to the Chinese cultural characteristic of collective activities and information-sharing, it was very efficient to work with these eight students, because they also contributed information from the other members of the participant group who usually felt uneasy talking about their negative experiences. Thus, the instances and events were shared experiences among the eight key informants and

the others in their cohort. Further, while the eight key informants shared their stories with me, they involved me in social activities with many of their friends, thus enabling me to gain a more comprehensive view of the large picture of the cohort. I could see how confident and lively they acted within their own group – a striking contrast to situations when they were immersed with Canadians.

To summarize, the circumstances of the YES-Canada-recruited Chinese MBA students at Eastern Canada University were characterized by the necessity for cultural adaptation. After the compatibility problems experienced by Cohort 1, the students of Cohort 2 received special treatment during the first half of the program by being segregated into Chinese-only classes and receiving ongoing English-language training in mandatory weekly ESL sessions. Regarding their MBA curriculum, the YES-Canada students attended the same courses as the other “regular” Canadian MBA students. The main difference was that the YES-Canada students of Cohort 2 were treated by the MBA program organizers as a culturally homogeneous Chinese group. Regarding their background, many of them had business experience from China, but they had little experience interacting with English-speaking people from Western countries. For conducting the present study, 8 key informants and 3 background informants were selected from the 54 students of Cohort 2, and a questionnaire was administered to 42 students of Cohort 2.

3.5.5 The Relation between the Researcher and the Students

Among the theorists describing the ethnographic approach, there are different opinions regarding the researcher's background. Ochs & Schieffelin (1995) define the ethnographic approach as descriptions that take into account the perspective of members of a social group, including beliefs and values that underlie and organize their activities and utterances. In their opinion, the ethnographer typically is not a member of the group under study, but a member of the readership of the study. In presenting an ethnographic account, the researcher has to communicate worldviews and sets of values that may be unfamiliar and strange to the reader. In this view, the ethnographic study provides the background information, explanation and interpretation that enables the reader to understand the behaviours described.

From a different angle, other researchers see the positive aspects of an ethnographic study conducted by a member of the studied group. Saville-Troike (1989) points out the advantages of studying one's own culture, enabling ethnographers to use themselves as sources of information and interpretation. She further stresses another advantage of ethnographers working within their own culture: in the paradigm debate on research methods, some of the major questions regarding validity and reliability raised by the quantitatively oriented social sciences can be at least partially resolved.

In conducting this qualitative study, it was important to introduce my personal background and experience to the study participants. My personal history in its diversity has shaped my ethnographic perspective. The different roles I played in China made me familiar with Chinese society in urban areas; this widened my social views and helped me in dealing with the Chinese participants. During my transformation from an athlete to a middle school teacher, then to a language instructor in a Chinese university, I dealt with people from different walks of life and different countries. In the course of my changes of social identity in China and subsequently in Canada, I became interested in people's experience and views under various circumstances. I developed the skill of easily conversing with others. I also learned to be an alert and attentive listener, and to have empathetic understanding of, and a profound respect for, the perspectives of others. This background was helpful in conducting the qualitative study (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). In summary, I was equipped for being a good listener when immersed with the Chinese YES-Canada students.

Phenomena of miscommunication and misunderstanding are usually unpredictable and do not happen in a regular pattern, but occur as sporadic instances in communicative situations. While using theory as a guide in data collection, I assumed the role of "instrument" in the actual research. My working experience as English teacher, translator, interpreter and student contributed to my functionality as ethnographic researcher, and helped identify me as "authentic" to the

study participants. In my interaction with them, they recognized that “the researcher knows enough about the setting and the people, their routines, and their environments to anticipate how she will fit in” (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 65), as “most participants detect and reject insincere, unauthentic people” (ibid.).

Knowing the age of a person, and acting accordingly, is an important sociocultural criterion for the Chinese. This also played a role in the relationship between myself and the Chinese MBA students. It would not have been sufficient to just introduce myself as a Chinese-Canadian researcher. In order to obtain information from the Chinese students, i.e. to achieve open and frank conversations and persuade them to tell me their stories, I had to gain their trust and friendship by giving them information about myself and my academic and work background in Canada and China. Further, I told them my age, which led to more information about my family circumstances and background, such as marital status, job of spouse, number and age of children.

The importance of the age of a person, and knowledge of the age of a person as a basis for working together, is a concept specific to the Chinese culture. As I, a Chinese-Canadian, made friends with the Chinese MBA students, we wanted to know each other’s ages, like most Chinese would. At the beginning of my field study the 8 key informants had taken me as their “buddy”, behaving informally towards me; later, when they realized that I was older than they, one of the female students suggested they call me “Elder Sister Zhang”. I stopped them

right away and suggested that we did not have to be “too polite”; after all, we were in Canada, and did not have to act the Chinese way, and they should just call me by my name. Another Chinese student wanted to confirm this and asked me if I really meant it. Due to my own Chinese roots I actually appreciated the Chinese students’ polite attitude, and although the respectful address they suggested would make me sound old, I would be proud being properly addressed as “Elder Sister Zhang” in a Chinese cultural context.

During the period of my field study, I had weekly meetings with sub-groups of the 8 key informants, in twos, threes, and one-on-one. I arranged these meetings one week ahead of time. Due to their varied course selection I could not meet with all 8 key informants at the same time. These meetings typically would take place at lunchtime. Socialization took place when I had lunch with them, or watched TV together with them in the evening, or went out for social activities with them, in downtown Ottawa. I also took three of them to the annual book fair in the gym of Rockcliffe Public School in Ottawa, and all of us bought books there.

I had a different relationship with the 8 key informants than I had with the rest of the Cohort 2 students. My work with the 8 key informants included in-depth interviews and observation, and with the rest of the group it only consisted of observation, mainly during their MBA classes, and occasional conversations when they were with the key informants.

Later in my fieldwork, having developed a close relationship with the 8 key informants built on mutual trust, they realized that my research was intended to bridge the gap in understanding which they encountered on a daily basis. The fact that 2 of them invited me to meet their parents who were coming from China to visit them shows the close relationship I developed with the group of 8 over time. They understood it might help them and future Chinese student groups bridging cultural differences so they could focus better on their academic success. They understood that the present study might lead to improvements in training programs involving Chinese trainees.

My close connection with the students constituted an advantage for the study, which was designed to reflect the emic view of the Chinese students (Saville-Troike, 1989). I have the same linguistic and ethnic background as the Chinese students, and I attended Chinese schools and universities as they did. The points we had in common made the participants feel more secure and willing to share their stories with me.

However, there were also differences between the participant group and myself, especially regarding working experience in China. The majority of them had worked as CEO's, managers and sales representatives, while I had been a teacher at the English department of a Chinese university.

The data collected for the study mainly came from their MBA related environment. My Chinese background enabled me to be an effective instrument for

data interpretation. Furthermore, I believe that the emic view of my study can support other ethnographers, who work on Chinese cultural issues without having a Chinese ethnic and cultural background.

Summing up the relationship between myself as the researcher and the participants, I assumed the role of the instrument in this ethnographic inquiry. A close researcher-participant relationship was established by introducing my personal background and experience to the participants, which convinced them that their participation in the study would be conducive to improving their circumstances. Thus the conditions were created for gathering data, in form of in-depth interviews, observation and through the questionnaire.

3.5.6 The Pilot Study

Besides the 8 key informants within my focal YES-Canada Cohort 2, I had 3 additional background informants. They provided me with background information, which helped in setting up the design of the main study, and provided me with an opportunity to discuss my findings. These three additional sources of background information were:

- A student from Cohort 1 of the YES-Canada Chinese MBA program, who had worked in China as a sales manager for medical equipment;
- A student from Cohort 2 of the YES-Canada MBA program who had been transferred from Cohort 1 to Cohort 2. In China, she had worked

in Guangzhou in an import/export company for approximately three years, before coming to Canada for the MBA program. She had a special status as an informant, being able to provide in-depth background information;

- An MBA student of Chinese background who studied on the regular MBA program. This informant was not a YES-Canada student, but had an educational background and work experience from China similar to the YES-Canada students. Prior to coming to Canada, he had worked as an English teacher for students in technical areas at a Chinese university.

Before working with the participants in Cohort 2, I conducted interviews with these three key informants in order to gain a general picture of the YES-Canada program. The objective of the pilot study was to prepare the main study. The interviews with the background informants yielded information on the YES-Canada program: when it had started, how it was established, and how the students had been recruited in China, and who in China would be qualified applicants and be admitted into this program.

The three background informants also presented me with their views of the YES-Canada students and the program, from their various viewpoints: (a) the regular MBA student viewed the YES-Canada students as being as good as any other graduate students at Eastern Canada University; (b) the YES-Canada

student from Cohort 1 criticized the students' lack of interaction with Canadian students and (c) the YES-Canada student who originally was in Cohort 1 and later was transferred to Cohort 2 found it preferable to be in Cohort 2, working only with other Chinese students.

Before commencing the fieldwork with Cohort 2, I also interviewed the key informants to test the research questions, and to learn about their understanding of cross-cultural communication. The 3 background informants were given special attention because they could provide an overall view of the YES-Canada program and its relationship to other MBA programs. They also were a source of information on the YES-Canada program policy, history, and future plans, from their particular perspective. The 3 background informants were well informed about the YES-Canada program, its organization and their Chinese fellow students – the reason why I selected them as interviewees was their expertise in the MBA area that was valuable for my research.

Summing up this section, the 3 background informants were important in conducting the pilot study, which assisted in setting up the design of the main study. The contributions of the pilot study to the main study were significant. Being insiders, the 3 background informants had valuable experience and feedback to offer, which yielded useful information for preparing the field study. They knew the students of the various cohorts, and provided an overall view of Cohort 2 and its relationship to the first. They characterized the program's policies and

history from their particular perspectives, and provided me with an opportunity to test the validity and relevance of the research questions.

3.5.7 Data Collection Instruments

Participant Observation

According to Goetz & LeCompte (1984), having multiple data sources facilitates triangulation, prevents reliance on initial impressions, helps avoid bias, and enhances the development of valid constructs during the study. To cover the wide range of cross-cultural communication phenomena, I conducted observation with the participants in class, on campus, in social activities and in their day-to-day cross-cultural communication. Through immersion among the Chinese MBA student group during the field study, I gathered observational data from their various activities, by taking field notes during and after the incidents. In the university setting, I obtained observational data from lectures attended by the entire Cohort 2, or by a large part of Cohort 2. At the end of each day, in a further data management step, I transcribed the field notes into word processor format and categorized them. The observational data served to verify and corroborate the data obtained from interviews.

I usually met with sub-groups of the 8 key informants in the computer lab in the basement of the Vanier building where the Faculty of Administration is situated, from where we would go to various observational environments. For ob-

taining observational data in off-campus social settings I visited their living quarters, had lunch with them, visited friends together with them, accompanied them to church and went shopping with them. Now and then I would give one or two of my key informants a ride in my car to grocery stores in Chinatown, which would have been quite far to walk, especially in cold weather.

Interviews: Structured Interviews

Besides using observation, I conducted in-depth interviews. A typical qualitative interview is a one-on-one session in which the researcher asks a series of open-ended, probing questions (Gay, 1996). In addition to serving triangulation objectives, interviews have a unique purpose, namely to acquire data not obtainable in any other way. There are certain issues that simply cannot be observed, including (but not limited to) past events, events occurring outside the researcher's sphere of observation, and mental processes.

Spindler & Spindler (1987) point out how general interviewing strategies lead to emic goals: since the interview participant has the emic, native cultural knowledge, the ethnographic interviewer must not predetermine responses by the kinds of questions asked. The management of the interview must be carried out so as to promote the unfolding of emic cultural knowledge in this most heuristic, natural form (Johnson, 1992).

At the beginning of the study, I conducted several structured interviews with the 8 key informants, using several sets of structured questions:

- A set of questions on the Chinese students' background and their experience of cross-cultural interaction in China;
- A set of questions on their experience at Eastern Canada University;
- A set of general questions pertaining to their cross-cultural experience.

Interviews: Unstructured Interviews

During the occasions when I was with the Chinese MBA students, I usually had discussions with 2 or 3 key informants, and in most cases 3 to 5 more students from the rest of the cohort would join us, as interested bystanders and listeners. The in-depth interviews I conducted with the 8 key informants were either audiotaped or recorded in handwritten notes. The interview data were recorded with the participants' consent. These interviews were unstructured in the sense that, instead of using a predetermined set of questions, I asked questions on incidents that I had observed, or questions inspired by my field trip, thus motivating the participants to tell their stories from their point of view. Such unstructured interviews took place frequently during my fieldwork, and the language used in these more informal interviews was usually Chinese.

The data obtained from all the interviews constituted the basis of my findings on how cultural factors influence cross-cultural communication, when and where communication and misunderstanding were likely to occur, the reasons for miscommunication, as well as the consequences of such miscommunication.

Questionnaire

I designed a complementary questionnaire to provide a basis for triangulation, which was administered to 42 students of the YES-Canada cohort. The questionnaire data yielded background information on the Chinese students: information about their learning needs, language(s) used in their work place, and about the sociocultural environment in which they had lived and worked in the past.

A questionnaire is not strictly defined as a qualitative data collection instrument, but I decided to use the questionnaire to verify information on the students' background, and for triangulation (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). The questionnaire included questions grouped in structured response categories, and an open-ended question. Besides clarifying and confirming information from the participants, the questionnaire was helpful for me to avoid bias in my study. The questionnaire reached the majority of the cohort (42 out of 54 students), and thus provided an extension to the structured interviews that only covered the 8 key informants.

In summary, in my data collection I emphasized the gathering of data from multiple sources. My data collection instruments were as follows:

- Participant observation, which yielded data from various observational environments, such as on the students' communication and behaviour in class, other on-campus places, social activities and daily life;

- Structured interviews, with sets of pre-determined questions on the students' background and experience in China, their new experiences in Ottawa, and their cross-cultural experiences;
- Unstructured in-depth interviews as the main data source, which yielded the participants' views and stories on instances of miscommunication and other culture-related incidents;
- A questionnaire, which was completed by 42 students of my focal cohort, for obtaining certain background information that could not be gathered through observation and interviews, and for triangulating the data obtained through observation and interviews.

These data collection instruments were complementary to each other, and served to encompass the wide scope of the culture-related issues that have been examined in the course of the present study.

3.6 Summary

This section recapitulates and summarizes the main points of the methodology chapter. In its research methodology, the present study is based on the theory of qualitative research and on an ethnographic approach that aims at understanding the emic view of the participants in real-world settings, through phenomenological description and hermeneutic interpretation. By showing how language and culture interact with each other, it reveals culture-specific concepts and

cultural differences as sources of miscommunication, and highlights the sociocultural dimensions of language communication in an integrated multidisciplinary view. It examines communicative behaviour in the context of culture. Thick descriptions emphasize the context in the participants' stories of their intercultural communicative experiences.

In its research design, the present study is conceived as a qualitative inquiry with ethnographic orientation. Regarding sample selection, from the focal cohort of 54 Chinese students 8 key informants were selected. A pilot study with 3 background informants and a questionnaire to 42 participants helped confirm the validity of the study's premises and research questions, provided further background data and served to triangulate data obtained from interviews. Displaying stories of the participants' communicative intercultural experiences revealed clues for answering the research questions.

The case study for which this methodology was chosen includes Cohort 2 of the YES-Canada-recruited Chinese MBA students at Eastern Canada University, the instances of miscommunication they encountered in their new environment, and their need for cultural adaptation. The students of Cohort 2 were initially segregated as a culturally homogeneous Chinese group, due to the compatibility problems experienced by Cohort 1.

Establishing a close researcher-participant relationship with the key informants enabled me to assume the role of the instrument in this ethnographic in-

quiry, and gather data in form of in-depth interviews, observation and through the questionnaire. The collected data covered a wide scope of culture-related issues, and yielded stories of cross-cultural communication and miscommunication which I analyzed within their context. For the data analysis, categories and concepts that had functional relevance to the participants in the setting gradually emerged. Each phase of data analysis entailed data reduction as the collected data were brought into manageable chunks. Interpretation of the data brought meaning and insight to the words and acts of the participants as social actors.

As the study progressed, the data from the observations and interviews were categorized into several types, guided by the research questions. This evidence was sorted according to its relevance to the research questions. I also examined the data regarding potential interpersonal individual factors or biased information that might be overshadowing or influencing the sociocultural and socioeconomic factors. Data analysis, data collection and writing were coordinated as the present study unfolded.

I then classified the data according to the type of experience encountered by the Chinese students:

- Their different understanding of the Chinese/Canadian university environment,
- The cultural gap they encountered in their academic studies,
- Their experience of language use with Canadians in on- and off-campus settings,

- Their understanding of western democracy and Canadian politics, and
- The strategies used by Canadian institutions to help the Chinese students adapt to the Canadian environment
- The strategies used by the Chinese students for their adaptation to the Canadian environment.

Through observation, interviews and the questionnaire I verified that in most cases Chinese cultural background suppositions clashed with western concepts that were introduced to the students from China, which was aggravated by a lack of interaction with Canadians.

In the present study, language communication is viewed as a social phenomenon of interaction between interlocutors, rather than a formal linguistic act in a closed system that is isolated from social interaction. Academic disciplines such as linguistics, anthropology, sociology, psychology and education provide rich research traditions and an ever-developing variety of issues and questions that relate to second-language use, learning and teaching (Johnson, 1992, p. 14). The present study is interdisciplinary, through adding sociocultural dimensions to linguistics, and linguistic dimensions to social science.

In the following two chapters the empirical data will be presented, reflecting how sociocultural factors can influence cross-cultural communication.

4 Indicators of Miscommunication and Misunderstanding

This chapter presents data on miscommunication and misunderstanding as experienced by Chinese MBA students in Canada. The change in their social environment was profound. The Chinese students faced a new world that was different from their own. In their MBA work, they had to deal with new concepts, and they had difficulties interacting with Canadian professors and students who did not share their Chinese cultural background. Having learned English in classroom practice in China, in Canada they were supposed to use English in real-life settings, as part of their learning experience. They were subject to misunderstanding when exposed to the Western democratic ideas and practices of Canadian political culture.

Besides presenting data derived from instances of miscommunication and misunderstanding the students experienced, I also report data on successful communication. For example, an incident of misunderstanding (department store vs. shopping mall) was quickly resolved. Through my ethnographic approach, I used a wider angle to examine the Chinese students' social and university lives in order to see the whole picture. This view includes misunderstandings in general due to cultural differences, such as the students' disorientation in the absence of a political instructor. The data presented encompass both on- and off-campus settings.

4.1 Social Environmental Change

The data presented in this section illustrate how the students' change of environment from China to Canada was a source of cross-cultural misunderstandings. The educational system and physical setting of the university they encountered in Canada was fundamentally different from their expectations which were based on their past educational experience in China. Their misconception of the Canadian environment led to the misunderstanding that they were ignored and not given proper care.

4.1.1 Change of Sociocultural Setting

After coming to Canada, the Chinese students experienced a radical change in their social identity. They had to adjust to their new positions as newcomers, sojourners and members of a visible minority. As business people who turned into students, they also experienced a loss of status.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, many of the YES-Canada-recruited MBA students had worked as professionals and executives in China before they came to Canada for study. As such, they had been in contact with business executives from western countries, mostly North Americans. They had dealt with Western business people in their role as employees of prestigious Chinese enterprises, and thus were the counterparts of Canadian executives in the China business.

The MBA students recalled that the westerners they met in China had been patient with the Chinese; when confusion occurred, the westerners would speak slowly and would repeat their explanations in different ways. The Chinese students considered this “making exceptions and allowances”. In their opinion, the reason for this was that “the westerners knew they were in China, a country with its own language and culture.”

The Chinese MBA students’ stories revealed incongruities between the reality they encountered in Canada and previous experiences they had had in China. In an interview, Zheng Wu lamented:

In China, the foreigners were friendly to us, but in Canada I noticed that many people here are prejudiced against us. In China, we belong to the Han majority, here in Canada we belong to the coloured minority. Some people do not respond when I talk to them, they do not take us serious ...

In China, where they had enjoyed a high social status, the students had found it easy to communicate with Westerners. Once in Canada, they realized they were members of a visible minority, and had the impression that some Canadians were prejudiced towards them. Their awareness of racial prejudice encouraged them to remain apart from Canadians. This was one of the social environmental factors that hindered the cross-cultural communication between the Chinese students and Canadians.

In summary, their experience in dealing with Westerners in China clashed with their status as sojourners in Canada. The sudden change from a prestigious elite position to a minority member and sojourner led to the perception of racial prejudice, which as a member of the Han majority they had never before experienced in China. The story of Zheng Wu further reflected one type of miscommunication due to social factors in a real-life setting: when the Canadians to whom he spoke did not respond for some reason, he thought they did not take him serious due to racist attitudes.

4.1.2 University Educational Environment

Dissatisfaction and certain worries among the Chinese MBA students were caused by their Chinese sociocultural presuppositions. In the new Canadian university environment, the Chinese students felt that they were no longer the elite students as they had been in China, but had been placed into an environment without an administrative infrastructure that would comply with their Chinese view. In their opinion, they did not get the expected attention and care from the authorities at the Canadian university.

4.1.2.1 Educational Experience

Change of Status and Identity. In the Chinese students' understanding, in order to be proper, a university program has to be government-sponsored, otherwise it cannot be considered prestigious. In their view, universities are always op-

erated and owned by the state. In the Chinese educational system, the public universities are the most prestigious (just like in Japan), and their students are considered the “regular” students, who have passed the nationwide university entrance examinations. In contrast, private university programs are considered to be for “irregular” students – the ones who failed the nationwide university entrance examination and were thus excluded from attending the state universities. These “irregular” students do not enjoy government subsidies, but are responsible for all university fees themselves. When students apply for a job after graduation, a significant distinction is made by the employers between the “regular” graduates from a public university, and the “irregulars” who graduate from a private program.

The YES-Canada-recruited MBA students had graduated from public universities in China. Once in Canada, they realized that the “YES-Canada” program was based on a private arrangement, organized by a private marketing company in British Columbia. Thus, although their recruitment in China was conducted under the official auspices of Eastern Canada University, they suddenly found themselves as “irregulars” in Canada, when they realized that they were treated as a special group.

Su Ning said that the students of Cohort 2 did not like to be called YES-Canada students, especially not towards others from outside the Faculty of Administration. This was not surprising, because Chinese students are particular

about the classification of a university as either public or private, and the distinction is even marked in graduation certificates in China. The YES-Canada program was considered private by the students themselves, which in conjunction with the change in social identity contributed to their inferiority complex⁹.

One of the background informants gave an example to show how the YES-Canada-recruited MBA students felt about the program in which they were enrolled. When the students from Cohort 1 saw themselves classified in their transcripts as YES-Canada students, they became so upset that they started to protest strongly against this identity. They were afraid it might show as an undesirable special designation in their graduation certificate. Thus, the students' presupposition that a proper program has to be backed by the state created the misunderstanding about their status as being inferior to the regular MBA students.

Lack of a mentor ("Political Instructor"). The Chinese MBA students were graduates from Chinese universities, where a political instructor was assigned to both undergraduate students and graduate students. Political instructors in Chinese universities are figures of authority who keep track of the students' general progress in the aspects of academic studies, politically and ethically correct behavior, sports activities, etc. Being used to the political instructor's guidance in China, the Chinese students saw the absence of a similar figure of authority in Canada as neglect and lack of care from the side of the university. At Eastern Canada University, they could not find a substitute for their "political instructor". In the absence

of a central figure, they wondered who was in charge of them. Was it the local Chinese-Canadian off-campus administrator, or the Mandarin-speaking coordinator/administrator, or the ESL counselor, or the director of the MBA program, or perhaps the dean¹⁰ of their faculty? The involvement of so many people confused the Chinese students, who expected daily guidance through a central figure of authority. They had no idea who was in charge of their university affairs. Su Ning said:

I wanted to talk about being eligible for scholarships, but I did not know whom to ask. The coordinator for the Chinese MBA program did not come up with help, he himself is also a Chinese student, not much different from us, but we found out we know as much as he.

For supervising and regulating their daily activities outside their subject-oriented lectures, classes and sessions, in China they had received sociopolitical and ethical guidance on a daily basis, which made them feel they were taken serious and considered important. They expected the same attention in Canada. Zheng Wu said:

The Chinese embassy takes care of the official students, not us. The university should take care of the YES-Canada students.

Chinese students coming to Canada on an official arrangement still receive attention and care from the Chinese authorities, through the Cultural Section of the Chinese Embassy. Students from China can come either through official ar-

rangement or through private arrangement. The former have an easier and more protected life than the latter, because the government-sponsored Chinese students receive regular help and guidance from the embassy of their country, through its educational division. As Zheng Wu phrased it:

There are some Chinese students sent here on an official arrangement, several of them live on Cambridge Street, and often you can see cars with red plates parked in front of the house shared by several Chinese students. These were the Chinese embassy officials visiting them to see if they needed any help. Look at us, we do not get such attention.

This highlighted the feeling of desolation the Chinese MBA students experienced in the Canadian environment. Back in China, they had enjoyed the same official privileges as the other students – they had all been treated equally by the Chinese government. Here in Canada, being self-sponsored and having come through private arrangement, they did not receive attention and care to the same degree as their government-sponsored peers who had come to Canada as the officially recognized “students abroad”. Therefore, whenever the YES-Canada students saw the red-plated cars of Chinese Embassy representatives parked in front of the officially sponsored students’ lodgings, they were reminded that they were not attached formally to either the Chinese or to the Canadians; their identity seemed to have changed from a “state cadre” in China to a “second-class student”. While the Chinese Embassy was heavily involved in the lives of the officially

sponsored students in Canada, the YES-Canada students felt that a sociopolitical mentor figure to whom they could look up was missing.

To sum up, the YES-Canada students of Cohort 2 were not happy that they were treated as a special group, in which they did not know whom to ask for help and guidance. In the absence of the daily *règlement* through the equivalent of a political instructor they felt helpless and lost, and complained that the university did not take care of them - a misunderstanding due to differences between the educational systems of China and Canada.

4.1.2.2 Physical Setting

From their background in China, the students understood the university as a safe compound surrounded with walls, with big gates that are closed, barred and watched by security personnel at night. According to their indigenous university stereotype, directly inside the big gates there should be a beautiful garden, and all students should live on campus inside the walled compound. In China, the universities are strictly campus universities, which are not integrated in the city. They include everything necessary for the students' daily lives, and have their own complex infrastructure. In contrast to their expectation, in Ottawa the Chinese students had to go through street traffic between the university and their living quarters. Three of my key informants, Zheng Wu, Su Ning and Cui Hua lived on

Lees Street, half an hour's walk from the university. All three emphasized that living off-campus was a new experience for them.

In this physical setting, Eastern Canada University contravened the students' preconception of a university as they knew it from China, and they complained about its lack of security. It was not a place off-limits to the general population like in China, where only a few chosen ones (to whom they had belonged) have access, but it was open¹¹. unguarded and contributed to the students' disorientation. Frustrated by living off-campus, Su Ning told her story:

One of my first bitter experiences in Canada was that I walked home alone from the library, it was not like the universities in China, where you could use the gates as an indicator. I lived on Lees Street in Ottawa, it was shortly after 6:00 o'clock in the evening, but it was already dark. I followed one of the paths to go home, I walked and walked but could not find my place, everything looked strange. I finally asked someone for directions, I realized that I had been heading the wrong way. I was cold, tired and hungry after spending a few hours at the university, guess what I did next? I cried.

Su Ning further mentioned that the Chinese students of Cohort 2 had expected the university to arrange a campus dormitory for them, but somehow this did not seem possible.

In this situation, the Chinese MBA students' preconception of the university as an exclusive environment clashed with the reality of the public environment at Canadian universities, and they interpreted the discrepancy as insufficient

care by the Canadian university and complained about being neglected. This instance is an example of a misunderstanding that was not caused by verbal communication, but by conceptual differences that were directly reflected in the students' circumstances. Their pre-conceived notion resulted in misunderstanding.

In summary, misunderstandings were often caused by sociocultural concepts indigenous to China, which the students tried to apply to their new Canadian environment, but which proved to be incongruent. They remembered the Westerners they had met in China as being more friendly than the Canadians they met here. In their academic life, they felt neglected and without guidance. They were not used to the open physical layout of the Canadian university which is not a closed and locked compound, and were worried about their security. The university environment was different from their expectations. This section illustrates how misunderstandings at the conceptual level, which can happen in both physical and abstract terms, were a result of the students' presuppositions, and did not necessarily arise from language communication. This fact corroborates the complex nature of cross-cultural misunderstanding in its different forms.

4.2 New Conceptual Knowledge

Besides conceptual clashes with their new social environment, the Chinese MBA students encountered new sociocultural concepts in their MBA program in Canada. Being unfamiliar with such new concepts hindered the Chinese students

in their academic performance. This does not mean the Chinese students lacked a solid general academic basis; on the contrary, they were hard workers with a strong competitive spirit. The data presented in this section relate to conceptual issues in their MBA study.

4.2.1 New Concepts Via MBA Classes

On their MBA program, the Chinese students faced the challenge of dealing with non-Chinese concepts that were new to them. Comprehending such concepts was not a matter of the language only, but required an understanding at the sociocultural level. In this section, three such concepts that were new to the Chinese students are presented as examples: lobbying, hiring human resources and the role of a CEO.

Lobbying

An interview revealed that, in their MBA studies, the Chinese students encountered difficulties in dealing with culture-specific topics. For example, lobbying is not a valid concept in Chinese politics¹². Shen Hong described his confusion about lobbying as follows:

When I learned about lobbying in a lecture, I was confused, to me this sounded like anarchism. How is it possible that a business representative can influence the government! According to our view, the government provides the guidelines for businesses, and the businesses have to follow these guidelines.

The traditional Chinese emphasis on obedience also applies in this context; initiatives from private business that deviate from the government's policy are not acceptable. Chinese history has made the country a monolithic block, with heavy intrusiveness of the state. Lobbying in China by foreign companies is a sensitive issue, because influencing the government has not been a common practice in China. In this case the Chinese student perceived lobbying as anarchism. This instance further illustrates how an unknown concept can be a barrier in communication and/or a source of miscommunication.

The reported instance about the concept of lobbying shows that the socio-political differences between China and Canada are a major factor of understanding and learning in the Chinese students' MBA studies. When confronted with such unfamiliar Canadian concepts, they might react with surprise or confusion, but in reality they were acquiring a second set of sociocultural knowledge that was in contrast to their first set.

Learning Canadian business concepts is essential for bringing progress to China. Fundamental changes in business administration and management must be introduced to China. After graduation, the Chinese MBA students will apply the knowledge and skills they acquired in Canada to the Chinese business environment. In an interview, Zheng Wu warned that mere imitation of a western life style in superficial ways would not bring real change to China, and identified the

understanding and application of sociopolitical concepts as the key to modernizing China:

It takes more than “Karaoke” [the sing-along jukebox adapted from Japan that has become a symbol of westernization in China] alone to make China democratic or modern. I mean that this is superficial, we need to understand the western concepts of politics and business to modernize China.

Summing up this section, the data of a Chinese student misunderstanding lobbying as anarchism shows how a Western political concept which was out of range to them became a barrier for communication, and thus a source of miscommunication.

Human Resources

The Chinese MBA students’ degree of familiarity with Canadian politics and economics was important for their subject-related studies. When the hiring of human resources was discussed in class, the Chinese students had background interferences from the Chinese principle of “relationship” or “referral” (*guanxi*), which means recommendations for a job based on personal connections. Su Ning said:

I should hire someone who is a relative, or who has been recommended by an influential person. This would be my criterion.

In the context of hiring human resources, the principle of *guanxi* dominated the Chinese students’ thinking. They had difficulties expressing how to

handle human resources, and what criteria to use for hiring employees. They sensed the fundamental differences between the Chinese and Canadian systems, and before saying or writing something on the topic, they first pondered at it for a while, trying to relate it to their own background experience in China. They usually hesitated quite a while before answering, to figure out a solution and come up with an answer, because of the two colliding sets of ideas in their minds. Each time before answering a question in class relating to social issues, they first had to decide which of the two different sets of socio-economic concepts made sense.

For example, Zhao Jie recalled that she handed in a paper on human resources, in which she was supposed to define the criteria for hiring employees. The Chinese concept of hiring acquaintances, relatives or friends dominated her thinking, but she did not want to put it into writing. As she was unfamiliar with the official guidelines for hiring human resources as introduced in the MBA course, the paper was less than one page. However, the professor did not consider this a paper and asked her to work hard on improving her English, so that she could write a full paper on the subject.

Zhao Jie, on the other hand, was confident about her English language skills and pointed out that she had passed the TOEFL test in China. She further explained that, had she been familiar with the Canadian concept of hiring human resources for business, she could have produced a lot more writing. Although she had successfully completed the course ADM 5231 “Managing Human Re-

sources”, she had difficulties in describing the course’s main concepts. Her problem of understanding was due to her lack of prior subject knowledge and conceptual discrepancies. This instance illustrates how the Chinese students had to put forth more effort than their Canadian peers when attending courses relating to sociocultural topics. It also shows how the Chinese student’s lack of taken-for-granted background knowledge was interpreted as a lack of English language proficiency. To minimize cross-cultural misunderstanding, the Chinese MBA students need to acquire a solid understanding of western concepts, besides perfecting their English.

The Role of CEO

Zheng Wu who was the monitor of the Cohort 2 students said that many of them found it difficult to give a presentation on the topic “The world of executive management: imagine you were a CEO, what would you do?” This presentation was an assignment for the core course ADM 5260 “The World of the General Manager and of Strategic Management”. In this course, the professor would randomly choose five or six students to give impromptu presentations in class, to show they had done their assignments. In an interview Zheng Wu said:

This is one of the worst topics we have encountered. Most of us couldn’t think of anything to answer this question. I could not imagine how a CEO would act in a Canadian context. If I said “a CEO should be loyal and responsible to the state construction, and should follow or reinforce the

Party policy, or the instructions from superiors”, the professor would probably laugh at me and give me a low mark.

For someone from China, the question what to do as a CEO represents an unorthodox way of thinking; in the hierarchy of a Chinese state-run enterprise, each level of leadership has to follow orders of the level above. Decisions are made in groups, and business executives hardly ever make decisions on their own. Such conduct is considered representing good business ethics. In the course of the interview, Zheng Wu explained further:

The role of a CEO in the Canadian sense is so different from the Chinese CEO. As I understand the CEO role in a Canadian company, the CEO does hands-on work in business. In contrast, the CEO of a Chinese company acts more like a bureaucrat or administrator, he has to follow the Party line, and has to be political-minded in general.

Zheng Wu also recalled that, during the same course, the professor had tried to help the students with the assignment of their presentation, by discussing company strategies with them. When the professor asked the class “What would you do if you were the CEO?” most Chinese students avoided eye contact with him, to minimize the chance of being selected for answering the question. The question was difficult for the Chinese students not because of their poor English, but because their frame of reference was the socio-economic system of China, where the understanding of the role of CEO is different from Canada. This in-

stance further illustrates the difficulties Chinese students had in their MBA subject at the conceptual level.

In summary, although the Chinese students learned about new concepts in their MBA coursework, their Chinese way of thinking still interfered with a full understanding of the new concepts in context. Learning the Canadian business concepts was difficult for the Chinese students due to their different conceptual background, and professors and students should be aware of this as a source of miscommunication and a barrier to learning.

4.2.2 Different Literary Heritage: Unfamiliar Metaphors

This section describes the difficulties the Chinese students encountered in their MBA-related readings in the form of culturally bound metaphors and literary background knowledge, which constituted another source of miscommunication. When they came across an unknown metaphor in their MBA-related reading of newspapers and magazines, it could not be resolved like a vocabulary problem through a simple lookup in a dictionary, but would require more research. It left the students helpless and discouraged them from further reading.

Characters and events from fairy tales often occurred in magazine articles and other MBA-related readings, and they presented problems of understanding to the Chinese students. Not knowing the background of a metaphor, or a character from the literature, would leave the students guessing about the meaning and pre-

vent understanding altogether. Characters from western fairy tales usually are unknown to the Chinese; knowledge about them is not favoured by the Chinese government, although some western fairy tales may actually have originated China. Therefore, schools in China do not actively promote the knowledge of western fairy tales and popular fantasy. On the other hand, people who have gone through basic education in North America take such knowledge for granted.

The following instance illustrates the importance of culture-specific background knowledge for successful communication, specifically the reading comprehension necessary for the MBA-program. During my fieldwork, for some of the key informants I assumed the role of a Chinese-Canadian friend to whom they would confide their problems on and off campus. Two of the key informants, Zhao Jie and Liu Gang, were looking for articles related to economic development in China, in reference to their MBA studies. Liu Gang asked me to keep my eyes open for articles relevant to business in China.

One day, Zhao Jie and Liu Gang were discussing their assignments and projects in my presence. Zhao Jie said that her area of interest was the development and administration of the Internet in China, particularly e-commerce, and she needed some information and reference material to work on this project. I remembered just having read a long article on the Internet in China, in the latest issue of the *Economist*, and mentioned this article. She wanted to read it, so the next day I gave her the issue of the *Economist* that contained the article.

When I asked Zhao Jie later if the magazine had been helpful, she said she found it interesting and relevant. She said she had noticed the magazine was for readers like her group - the Chinese MBA students who would later be business managers. It seemed relevant to her because many of the job offers and the advertising were MBA-related, and she planned to use certain articles as a reference for writing a paper for one of her MBA courses. She said that she could always look up unknown words in a dictionary, but that she had other comprehension difficulties with the text, and showed me a few examples. The problematic passages contained metaphors and other associations embedded in the western cultural tradition - in literature, philosophy, history and mythology, which played a key role for understanding the meaning of the article, but which were not part of the Chinese cultural background knowledge.

Zhao Jie pointed out an article containing the culture-specific metaphor of Goldilocks, referring to an economy that is neither too hot, nor too cold:

I read this very interesting article in the Economist, with the title "The Goldilocks economy". I found something very confusing here which I did not understand. The article discussed America's famous "new economy" that promised rapid growth without inflation. It mentioned that America's economy is overheating: retail sales jumped by 10% in the 12 months to March. What is the "Goldilocks economy" mentioned in this article? I looked it up in my Collins English Dictionary, and I found the meaning "a person (esp. a girl) with light blond hair", but what is the relevance with

economy? Then I checked my big Webster's, but "Goldilocks" was not there at all.

The importance of cultural background knowledge is further illustrated through the following instance, which describes how a Chinese MBA student obtained background knowledge that was critical for understanding, by word of mouth in an informal setting. I had lunch with Zhao Jie, while the TV news was on. One of the news items described how a tornado had hit Texas, and had left many areas damaged. We heard someone - maybe a Texas resident - say that the "Land of Oz is here". When I said "this person even makes jokes on a natural disaster like that", Zhao Jie did not understand my comment and asked "What jokes?" and "Who has arrived?" I then explained to her how, at the beginning of the story "The Wizard of Oz", a farmhouse in Kansas was carried by a tornado to the fairyland of Oz, and also gave her a summary of the characters in the story.

The story of "The Wizard of Oz" was not only a barrier of understanding in the news context of the tornado in Texas, but also in an article on the year 2000 presidential election campaign in the U.S., as illustrated by the next instance in this section. One day I met Zhao Jie who said that she had read an article on U.S. election issues, but did not understand certain passages. I asked her why she was interested in the U.S. election campaign, and she explained:

We are in North America, but because of our visa we cannot go to the United States of America. We like to read about the U.S. Recently the news is full of the U.S. presidential election.

The article Zhao Jie showed me read as follows:

These men are both works in progress. What may be clearest so far are the principal doubts each must overcome. Ask Gore's aides to define the most important message he must convey about himself in the coming weeks and they will universally answer: He has to show the voters he has a heart. Ask Bush's advisors the same question and in their most candid moments they will answer: He has to convince Americans he's got enough smarts for the job.

One candidate needs a heart; the other needs a brain. Forget the road to the White House. This contest is looking like a race down the yellow brick road to Oz. It's the Tin Man versus the Scarecrow. The Tin Man, er, the vice president, seems to be facing two principal problems relating to voters. One is the sense that he is overly political and calculated; the second is the sense that he's insufficiently inspiring and commanding as a leader.

The Scarecrow, er, Bush, is making a strikingly different bet. He's probably spent less time talking about his life story than any presidential candidate in recent memory, and aides say that the party and campaign advertising is likely to heavily emphasize issues over biography as well (Brownstein, 2000).

In the context of the campaign news, the presidential candidates were compared to characters from the Land of Oz: George W. Bush to the Scarecrow,

and Al Gore to the Tin Man – understandable for the average North American, but gibberish to someone from China where western fantasy literature is virtually unknown. In Chinese schools, western fairy-tales and other tales of fantasy are not available for reading as they are in Canadian schools and libraries. Characters like Goldilocks, the scarecrow and the Tin Man from “The Wizard of Oz” are not known to most Chinese readers, and Zhao Jie who encountered these metaphorical characters in her reading did not understand the associations.

The story of “The Wizard of Oz” is part of the North American literary heritage. However, without knowledge of the story, the metaphor is confusing and meaningless to the reader, deterring from further reading¹³. Zhao Jie’s experience shows the importance of cultural background knowledge for reading comprehension.

Summing up the main point in this sub-section: the Chinese students’ learning was inhibited when they encountered unknown metaphors and characters from Western literary heritage. The school curriculum guidelines in China are set by the National Ministry of Education, and the Chinese central government is not motivated to introduce western literature as reading material in schools. Thus, most western fairytales are still unknown to the Chinese. According to the data, this gap in literacy prevented the students to understand their MBA-study-related readings.

4.2.3 At Ease with Mathematics and Statistics

The Chinese students preferred courses with a mathematics and science orientation to courses relating to sociocultural issues. The data corroborated that miscommunication occurred only in contexts involving sociocultural issues. In other subjects within “hard science”, such as mathematics and statistics, the Chinese students felt that they could do better than many Canadian students.

The courses considered comparatively easy by the Chinese students were on financing: ADM 5240 Financial Statements and the Accounting System, ADM 5241 Managerial Accounting Information and Decisions. Courses were also considered comparatively easy by the Chinese students were on economics: ADM 5255 Analytical Methods in Managerial Economics, ADM 5256 Macroeconomic Policy, ADM 5257 Pricing Decisions in Managerial Economics. The comparatively difficult courses were on marketing, ADM 5220 Strategic Marketing Context, ADM 5221 Strategic Marketing Management, and courses on management: ADM 5280 Operations Management 1: Strategic Decisions, ADM 5281 Operations Management 2: Operating and Control Decisions. As Su Ning summarized:

Among us Chinese, my mathematics is not so good, but on the MBA program I am doing well in statistics- and mathematics-related courses, which I find easier than other topics like marketing. From my Canadian classmates I get the impression that the Chinese schools demand a higher level of mathematics than the Canadian schools. I am not very good at mathe-

matics compared with other Chinese students, but I was surprised to see how easily I could deal with the statistics course in Canada.

Zhang Jian confirmed this when he said:

The Chinese are smarter than Canadians regarding mathematics. I have a friend in computer science and he often helped out Canadian students with mathematics assignment.

Cui Hua said in an interview:

Of course we have communication problems with Canadians. In the MBA program I would never be as good as an English native speaker. The concepts in mathematics are the same everywhere. If I change to computer science I could apply the basic concepts I learned in China and could be as good as the English native speakers. Some of my friends are in computer science, and they are doing well among the other Canadians. Many of us are talking about technology as our strong point.

In another interview, Zheng Wu announced his serious intention of switching to computer science after graduating from the MBA program. He explained that he felt out of place in the MBA program not because he couldn't do the assignments, but because he did not know how to market a product, and how to do product promotion based on concepts he did not understand from his Chinese background and training.

In summary, the Chinese students had confidence to succeed in fields of hard science. This insight helped answering the research questions, as to where

the Chinese students are subject to misunderstanding and miscommunication. The data in this section further illustrate their problems of understanding in their subject-related study that are due to the sociocultural gap between China and Canada.

4.3 Social Interaction

When people interact with each other, their interaction can be verbal and non-verbal. The interactive behaviour reflects the cultural background of the communicators. Differences in cultural background are often sources of miscommunication in face-to-face interaction. This section centers on face-to-face interaction between the Chinese students and Canadians. I have organized data relevant to this subject into three sub-sections of social interaction:

- Professor/student interaction
- Student/student interaction
- Interaction in day-to-day encounters.

In real-life situations, the instances include both verbal and non-verbal communication. “Non-verbal communication might be thought of as any form of communication which is not directly dependent on the use of language....Such non-verbal aspects of communication as nodding the head most often accompany speech and are part and parcel of the verbal system of language use” (Scollon & Scollon, 1995, p. 142).

4.3.1 Interaction with Professors

One of the tasks facing the Chinese students was to get used to the Canadian university atmosphere. In China, they had been educated to respect the authorities, older people, and especially teachers. Teachers in China have a special status: they are called “engineers of the human soul”. They are not only expected to teach knowledge, but are also regarded as role models for students as well as parents. Thus, the question how to behave towards professors was another controversial issue for the Chinese students. It was surprising for them to see the Canadian students interact with their professors on an informal basis, almost as equals, even addressing them by their first names as certain professors required them to do.

The Chinese MBA students, due to their ingrained respect and formal behaviour towards teachers, found it difficult to talk to the professors without addressing them by their formal title and surname. They hesitated to call a professor by his/her first name, even when the professor told them to do so. They continued to behave towards professors in a formal, sometimes deferential manner like they had done in China. As Shen Hong said:

I tried to behave casually towards the professors in my mind, but I could not act accordingly. I felt nervous because I was taught to behave towards professors with respect, and in a formal manner.

The Chinese students found it difficult to behave in a casual manner as the Canadian students did. They were used to the formal relationship between professors and students in China, which is characterized by a serious atmosphere. When they interacted with Canadian professors, they noticed that their Chinese ways of behaving respectfully towards professors were awkward and inappropriate, and they found it difficult to initiate a conversation with a professor. For example, during a course break of course ADM 6259 “International Corporate Finance”, I observed how Wu Yi, who was sitting in the second row, addressed the professor formally in a humble and low voice, but before the professor could react another fast-talking not-so-humble Canadian would cut in and speak with the professor. Probably the Canadian student did not even notice that Wu Yi was about to start a conversation with the professor. Wu Yi just could not force herself to act informally like her Canadian classmates. In most cases, the Chinese students appeared shy and kept a low profile.

At university in China, professors are supposed to behave in a respectable way, and students are expected to be deferential. They do not expect professors to crack jokes during their lectures. When a Canadian professor joked during a lecture, the Chinese students did not even realize it was a joke, because they were used to professors in China being extremely formal, serious and humourless in their lectures.

During an integrated class with Canadian and Chinese MBA students, the professor wanted to show a chart through an overhead projector. When trying to turn on the projector that was installed at the front of the classroom, he could not find the switch immediately, and the class was waiting. Finally, a Canadian student from the back of the classroom told the professor where to look for the switch. The professor then found the switch and commented to the class: "Who put together such a clumsy design?" At first the Chinese students did not react. They laughed only after the Canadian students laughed, which to the Chinese students served as confirmation that it was indeed a joke.

Wu Yi highlighted the differences in the professors' style between Canada and China:

In China it is common that the students invite their professor when a course is over, or at the end of a semester. On such an occasion, we treat our professors with tea and snacks in the classroom. In Canada, our professors actually invited us at the end of the semester. We were amazed to see the Canadian professors are not conceited and haughty.

According to the Chinese students, if a professor at a university in China made a mistake in a lecture, the students would wonder and ponder at it, thinking that the professor must have a reason for this. In some cases, they would be quiet about a professor's mistakes, in an attitude of respect, and discuss the mistake only after class. They would not point out mistakes to the professor in public.

The class atmosphere at the Canadian university was much more democratic, and the professors were open-minded. This is illustrated by the following incident that occurred in a class of about 35 Chinese and 15 Canadian students. The lecture was entitled “Investments: Fixed-Income Instruments” and involved topics like calculating interest rates, and capital gain and loss. The professor explained the capital gain/loss situation if someone bought Canadian bonds at a certain price and kept them for 5 years. In the course of the lecture, the Chinese students actively communicated with the professor like their Canadian classmates, and there were no interaction problems. The difference between the Chinese students’ and the Canadian students’ attitude only became apparent when the professor made a mistake.

The professor wrote the months of the year on the blackboard. He then presented an annual interest calculation and defined the fiscal year as “from March 1 to the end of next March”. This way of calculating would include the month of March twice, and thus come up with 13 months instead of 12; the correct count would have been from March 1 to the end of February of next year. I observed that several Chinese students immediately started discussing the professor’s error among within their group in a whispering tone, but none of them spoke out to point out the error. While this internal discussion among the Chinese students was going on, a Canadian student spoke up and, without hesitation, pointed

out the error to the professor. This instance reflects how the Chinese students are not as outspoken towards their professors as their Canadian peers.

In this incident, the Chinese students were impressed by the Canadian professor's handling of his error. He did not make himself look superior to the students, or show embarrassment as the Chinese students expected from their past experience at university in China. During our follow-up discussion, Liu Gang described the behaviour of a lecturer at his Chinese university as follows:

We had a lecturer who sometimes wrote English words on the blackboard that contained spelling mistakes. Several times, while the students pondered at the misspelled words, he would notice his error and would say "I intentionally wrote it wrong to test you, to see if you notice the mistake". Like this he avoided embarrassment.

The Chinese students found the Canadian professors easy-going and open-minded regarding correction of their own mistakes. The communication problem between the Chinese students and their Canadian professors originated in the formal Chinese way of addressing an authority, which prevented the students from initiating communication. From their perspective, their behaviour was not appreciated in the Canadian cultural context, where students are not expected to be deferential or humble. It was a Chinese cultural presupposition that obstructed communication with the Canadian professors.

4.3.2 Relationship with Other Students

One of the challenges the Chinese students faced was to establish friendships with Canadians, so they would understand each other better. The Chinese students completed their core courses in Chinese-only classes, and during this time were detached from Canadian students. At the beginning of my field study, the Chinese students had completed all their core courses, and were attending selective courses where they were mixed with Canadian students. Although the Chinese students were in the same classes with Canadian students, they automatically kept to their ethnic-Chinese in-groups. For example, when the professor asked the class to form work groups of 5 students, the Chinese students were interested in forming work groups involving Canadian students, but were unable to do so. They ended up in Chinese-only groups, with the Canadian students also forming groups of their own. In a conversation Liu Gang described their incompatibility with Canadian students that prevented them from doing their academic work with Canadians:

The Canadians do not work with us. Even now, when we are finally integrated with the Canadian students in class, they still do not work with us in the same group. We have not established mutual understanding and friendship with the Canadian students. We Chinese form our own groups even after being integrated with Canadian students in class.

The Chinese students found it difficult to establish close relations with Canadian students because of their long isolation in Chinese-only classes when

taking the core courses. Even after attending integrated classes with Canadian students, they could not easily build a working relationship with their Canadian classmates.

The following incident, which was reported in an interview, reflects how a Chinese student unknowingly offended one of his Canadian peers through an interaction that would be considered friendly among the Chinese. The instance illustrates the “risks” that are involved in initiating a conversation with Canadians, in the eyes of a Chinese student. Shen Hong reported:

The professor returned a marked paper to us. One of us asked the Canadian student sitting beside him “What mark did you get?” while stretching his head over to look at the Canadian’s mark. The Canadian student abruptly turned over the paper in protest and asked the Chinese classmate “What are you looking at?”

Shen Hong said his Chinese classmate was surprised by such a reaction. The Chinese are accustomed to sharing information among friends, acquaintances and colleagues. For the Chinese, maintaining a good relationship - in this case the relationship with their Canadian classmates - means they have to be open to each other. Why hide this information like a secret?

The above instance illustrates how certain communication problems between the Chinese and the Canadian students are unpredictable. Although the Chinese student knew how to raise a question in English, his question was rejected as intrusive when he applied it in a naturalistic setting. Learning a language

is one thing, using it is another - an example of language socialization. This incident shows how sociocultural factors affect communication.

It is evident that communication in real-life settings includes verbal and non-verbal aspects. Another incident, in which a Chinese student did not keep an appointment, revealed how the Chinese sociocultural background influenced both the verbal and the non-verbal behaviour of the students, and how their Chinese ways were not understood by the Canadians. Cui Hua was convinced that it was easier to meet people at university in China: "One can just walk over to someone and knock on the door. The situation is quite different here."

Cui Hua recalled that she and a Canadian student had arranged to meet at the library the following week. When she arrived at the library at the time of their appointment, she did not see the Canadian student; she assumed that the Canadian student "had forgotten the appointment", and left. Later she found out that in reality the Canadian student had not forgotten the appointment, but had been slightly delayed in traffic and had arrived about ten minutes after the time of the appointment. In recounting this incident, Cui Hua explained:

When the Canadian student was not there at the arranged time, I thought to myself she must have forgotten the appointment with me. At home in China we are always casual with each other, if an appointment is forgotten, we just meet another time.

The Chinese are not used to arranging appointments with a private person.

As Cui Hua explained:

In China, if someone would not show up for an appointment, the other person would not be surprised or disappointed. People in China readily accept certain reasons for not keeping an appointment: it could be due to transportation difficulties, or perhaps the person was too busy and there was no way to inform the other party. In the case of a missed appointment, we would think: we can meet later, somewhere else, maybe in the dining hall. We are not surprised if someone doesn't show up, we are flexible, not strict with this.

It was clear from her explanation that Cui Hua missed the appointment not because she could not communicate in English with precision, but because she did not wait for the Canadian student due to her Chinese cultural presuppositions. She did not expect the Canadian to take an appointment seriously, and just assumed her Canadian counterpart had forgotten the appointment, like many Chinese would do. She was not motivated to wait 10 or 15 minutes longer. Further, she did not feel bad about missing the appointment. When describing the incident to me, she said that she had not even thought of apologizing or saying sorry. It was not a serious enough matter to warrant an apology.

In another incident, which I observed in a restaurant, Zheng Wu's Chinese cultural background was revealed when he tried to clarify an issue he did not understand in a conversation:

Canadian: This really is a good restaurant, I am going to take my husband here one evening.

Zheng Wu: What? Why do you take your husband here in the evening?

Canadian: Why not?

Zheng Wu: You see each other every day, you should invite people who are your friends, not your husband.

The Canadians who heard this conversation were puzzled and did not understand, and asked Zheng Wu to explain this further. His response was:

Why would a married couple with children behave in such a romantic way, like young people when they are dating!

Zheng Wu mistook the Canadian woman's suggestion as being romantic towards her husband, which did not fit his concept of a married couple. He further explained:

People are "romantic" with each other when they are not married, after marriage everything goes back to normal and becomes boring. In China we have the saying "marriage is the tomb of romance". Many of my classmates are now getting divorced.

Again, there were no language difficulties to impede understanding.

Zheng Wu understood the first sentence perfectly well, but in his own words:

I did not understand why the Canadian woman said that she had to take her husband to the good restaurant, "old couples" (*laofu laoqi*) don't have to do this. You do this with your friend(s) (*pengyou*).

The above instance illustrates how culture-specific presuppositions can act as a stumbling block in cross-cultural communication. Zheng Wu's comment shows how easily miscommunication can occur in real-life settings. When he innocently applied his cultural presuppositions in a casual conversation, the Canadian was puzzled. Finally, through further conversation they discovered their cultural differences. This instance also shows the positive side of miscommunication, which in this case revealed the sociocultural nature of the discrepancy, and thus improved the mutual cultural understanding of both the Chinese and the Canadians.

4.3.3 Miscommunication in Day-to-Day Encounters

The Chinese students had learned to greet others in English. In the Canadian social context, they found out that the greetings they had practiced were too bookish, and not practical. As Zhang Jian said:

I used to greet Canadians according to English drills: "How do you do", and sometimes "How are you?" and I found out that, in reality, Canadians usually do not give the expected answer. We practiced several types of greetings in our English class:

A: How do you do?

B: How do you do?

Or:

A: How are you?

B: I'm fine, thank you. And you?

A: Very well, thank you.

I think this kind of pattern drill is not really suitable for daily use. I noticed that the Canadians simply say “Hi”.

While the above complaint of the Chinese student addresses communication at the level of speech acts, the following instance reveals the significance of culture-specific appropriateness when greeting people from a different cultural background.

When I was in the computer lab together with a few Chinese MBA students, the technician who was a Canadian walked past. Su Ning greeted him, “Hi Bill, you have coloured your gray hair”! Bill showed no reaction, but seemed embarrassed that his coloured hair was used as a topic in public in the presence of several listeners, and just said, “Em, ye”. Su Ning continued, “You look five years younger”, and Bill again did not respond. Now Su Ning realized that the conversation she had initiated was not going as she had expected because Bill was embarrassed by her remarks. She said to me: “I don’t know how to talk to Canadians. It seems I am not a good talker.” Thus she saw her cultural failure as a linguistic one.

We noticed that Bill was embarrassed, with several people grinning at him. I told Su Ning that Bill was obviously embarrassed and she should not continue with this topic. Her response was “there is nothing embarrassing, many Chinese men and women colour their hair”. Su Ning had used the statement as a greeting and a compliment, and had expected a friendly answer from Bill. Now

she wondered “Why did he not just say he coloured his hair yesterday? If he were Chinese he would be happy instead of being embarrassed.” She explained further that it was no secret, or reason for embarrassment to go to a hair salon in China. A visit to a hairdresser in a fancy hair salon in Beijing only cost 35 Yuan, which is equivalent to about 5 Canadian dollars. In her view, whether man or woman, colouring one’s hair and talking about it is so common, and should not be a reason for embarrassment. What Su Ning said about Bill’s hair is considered “normal and friendly” among Chinese acquaintances.

Su Ning had wanted to greet Bill, and when mentioning his coloured hair she was just trying to be friendly, and to her surprise she created an embarrassing situation. The Chinese students all knew from their English classes in China how to chat about the weather or pets, but in real-life settings their Chinese way of greeting people spontaneously came through.

Very common Chinese ways of greeting each other are, “Have you eaten?” or “Where are going?” In contrast, chatting about the weather or a pet is considered to be the western way. As the following incident revealed, Canadian “do’s” and “don’ts” can lead to embarrassing conversations. In an interview, Zhao Jie recalled the following episode:

I met my neighbour walking her poodle, she greeted me with a smile. I remembered that the English teacher had taught me to greet people by talking about the weather or their pet, instead of using ‘Chinglish’ greetings like asking others if they “have eaten their meal”. So I started my

conversation about her pet. I asked the neighbour “Do you bathe your dog?” The neighbour responded “I’m sorry?” I repeated my question. She was at a loss at first, then her smile disappeared and she answered “of course” in an insulted manner and walked away.

In China, it is not common to apply the same high pet-care standards as in western countries. Dogs are not even allowed in big cities in China. However, in Canada, many dog owners treat their dogs almost like a family member. Zhao Jie had heard about “bathing the dog” during her stay in Canada, and she simply wanted to greet her Canadian neighbour in what she understood to be the Canadian way, by talking about her dog. At the same time she was curious to find out if the dog owner really “treated the dog like a baby”, and of course did not intend to imply that the dog might be dirty. Again, it was not a language difficulty that caused the misunderstanding, but the application of culture-related “do’s and don’ts” without considering the circumstances that could lead to a misunderstanding.

Another problem for the Chinese students when greeting people was their perception that “Canadians are quite conceited”. The Chinese students’ thinking is dominated by presuppositions from their cultural background: customers and shopkeepers become acquaintances and talk to each other privately when meeting outside the shop. Most of the students of YES-Canada Cohort 2 were from south-

ern China, where private business has traditionally been prevalent, more than in other parts of China. Wu Yi, who was from the south, told the following story:

In my hometown Guangzhou, the baker did not only sell his pies, but made friends with his customers. They would greet each other like acquaintances, no matter if in the bakery or elsewhere when people met. People here are different. I went shopping at a shoe store in a downtown Ottawa shopping mall a couple of times, and the shopkeeper was always friendly and polite. But then I met her in an outside location, and was about to greet her, but she only looked at me briefly and walked away. I was disappointed by this conceited attitude, and decided to go shopping elsewhere.

The above incident is consistent with relevant literature (Gilsdorf, 1997), which emphasizes the importance of building a personal relationship for doing business in the Chinese environment. In the eyes of Wu Yi, there was no apparent reason for the Canadian shopkeeper ignoring her customer when they met outside the shoe store. Instead of being friendly and returning the greeting, like the bakers in Guangzhou, the Canadian shopkeeper refused to build a closer relationship, which Wu Yi interpreted as prejudice towards her.

My explanation to Wu Yi was that the Canadian shop-owner obviously focused on doing business. To the shop-owner, personal relations with an individual customer were not so crucial. If she has good quality shoes for sale in her store and competitive pricing, the customers come for these reasons, not because of good personal relations. I also reminded the student that the shop-owner per-

haps simply had not recognized her, because to many Canadians all East Asians - Chinese, Japanese, Koreans - look the same, and that many Canadians cannot distinguish and recognize individuals among the Chinese.

I captured an incident of miscommunication on campus when a Chinese student mistook the joke of a Canadian as a serious statement - people from different cultures have a different sense of humour. I was with Wu Yi outside the Faculty of Administration building, when we met a Canadian student who carried a large briefcase. Wu Yi and the Canadian with the briefcase greeted each other, and Wu Yi asked "Why are you carrying a big briefcase today?" The Canadian student answered "I'm a lawyer". Wu Yi was puzzled by this answer and turned to me "He is a lawyer? He is a student!" Wu Yi did not associate the big briefcase with a lawyer, and so did not understand the humour in the Canadian's answer, but took the answer at face value.

Lawyers walking around with large briefcases filled with documents are not a common sight in China. Only in recent years have private law firms emerged, and their offices are quite simple. Only the most prestigious Chinese law firms have home pages on the Internet, and these are usually law firms located in the U.S. or Hong Kong, which still has a special status within China, according to the official Chinese principle "One Country, Two Systems" (Dai, 1998, p.32). For about half a century in China, civil conflicts have been resolved through persuasion and education rather than through litigation. This is why the

Chinese student, when confronted with a “lawyer”, had no concrete associations in his mind, and therefore no way to recognize the humour. In my interviews, the Chinese students themselves admitted that, while they had their own sense of humour, they always appeared to lack humour when interacting with Canadians.

Regarding expressions of thanks, the Chinese students rarely used thanking formulas among each other, and they thought it unnecessary to be overly polite. As Liu Gang said,

I have heard the Canadians say “thanks”, “excuse me” and “sorry” so many times. If they wanted to pass by, they would say “excuse me”, and they never pushed me a little bit. After passing by, they would say “thanks”. Many times I wondered what did I do that they thank me?

The Chinese students wondered why their Canadian peers “talk so much” when it did not seem necessary. They thought that Canadians were often using “thanks”, “sorry” and “please” in instances which, according to Chinese sociocultural patterns, did not deserve any special attention or justify a comment. Zhang Jian found it difficult to behave like the Canadians, using all these polite but “unnecessary” expressions:

Saying “thanks” or “sorry” too often sounds phony. When we bump each other with our elbow, or step on each other’s foot, we know this is not deliberate but accidental, and this is self-understood.

In Zhang Jian’s view, the words “thanks” or “sorry”, if used too often, would create distance between them and make them feel like strangers. The phe-

nomenon described by this key informant of my study is confirmed by Nowak & Dong (1997), who in their study also mention that the Chinese, when bumping into each other on a busy street, just disregard this without saying an apology. It is commonly assumed that such occurrences are accidental.

Instances of polite acceptance and refusal often reveal cultural differences.

In the words of Su Ning:

I don't know what to say and what to do when getting a drink or a gift from a Canadian friend, if I should refuse it politely or accept it right away. If it is a gift, I don't know when to open it.

Even towards the end of their program, the Chinese MBA students were still nervous about social interaction with Canadians that involved acceptance or refusal. They knew that according to Chinese culture they were not supposed to accept offers right away, but rather politely refuse and even keep opposing their counterpart who makes the offer, who in turn is supposed to keep insisting. When Chinese speakers shift to English, their Chinese presuppositions keep dominating their English speech, giving way to misinterpretation and miscommunication.

This was illustrated by an instance when I visited a Canadian family, together with Su Ning. On the table there was a mug (a souvenir from a foreign languages training program, as I found out later), which attracted our attention. It carried the writing: "No English is Spoken Here. But We Do Speak Français, Deutsch, Chinese..." Su Ning found this extremely amusing and funny, pointed at

the mug and laughed in disbelief, because in her group they were supposed to speak only English among each other. The Canadian host who noticed her interest in the mug reached into the kitchen cabinet and took out another identical mug, which was still in its original plastic packing, and offered it to her as a present. Su Ning of course was happy about the offer, but her response was “Keep it for yourself!” The Canadian host was baffled by this response which he mistook as a rejection, and asked “You don’t like the mug?” Su Ning suddenly became aware of the miscommunication that had taken place and accepted with the words “Thanks, I like it”.

Su Ning later told me that she had been “thinking in Chinese”, and had translated the appropriate Chinese polite response into English, where it sounded like a real refusal. In China, presents are never accepted directly at the first offer, but there has to be a polite to and fro: the recipient refuses at the first offer and the donor insists, sometimes more than once. It is the same politeness that is a familiar sight in Chinese or Japanese restaurants: when the waiter presents the bill at a table with two or more guests, every party at the table ostentatiously tries to grab the bill to pay for it. In my past experience, western viewers of this ritual who were not familiar with the culture-specific polite habit of “fighting to pay the bill” took it as a real fight and had asked me what the fight was about. When I invited Su Ning to the university cafeteria, she said that normally she would have insisted on paying for everything, but she did not want the Canadians there to watch us

fight. The data in this section illustrate how the Chinese students were prone to miscommunication through cultural differences in their day-to-day encounters with Canadians.

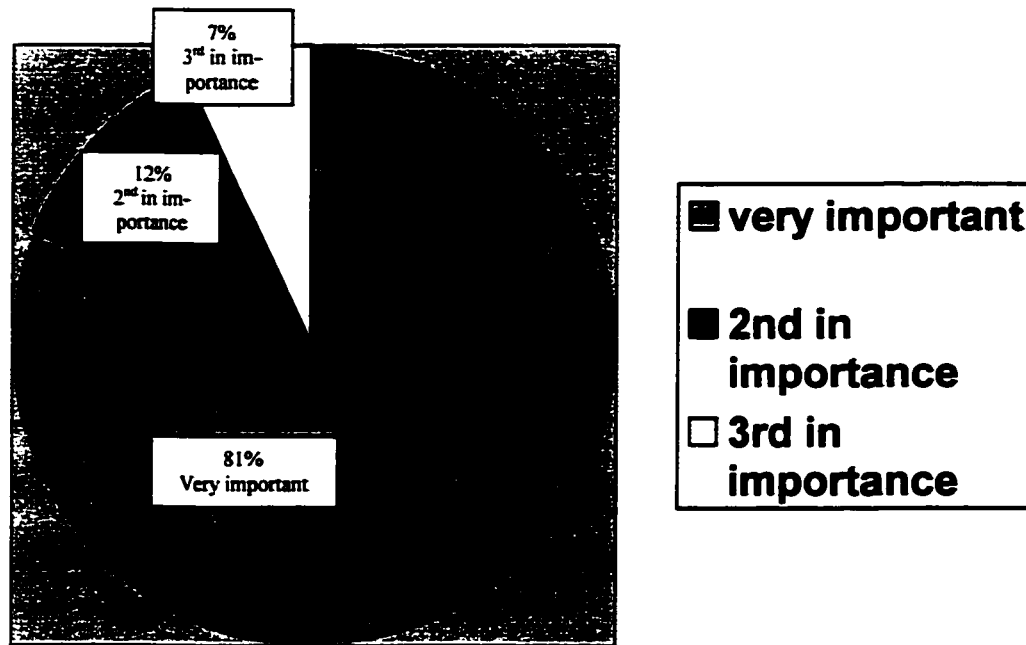
4.4 Language Socialization

Language is a social phenomenon. Second language learning and use of the Chinese students was not restricted to language classes, but included social interaction with Canadians. Cross-cultural interaction in real-life settings was a learning opportunity for both the Chinese students and Canadians.

4.4.1 Learning through Interaction

The Chinese students had joined the YES-Canada program because they wanted to learn more about western culture, gain exposure to international business processes and get business networking opportunities. The data from question #21 in the questionnaire show that, on a scale of 5 points regarding the importance of real-life interaction, 81% of the Chinese MBA students considered interacting with Canadians in naturalistic settings as very important, 12% considered it second in importance, and 7% considered it third in importance.

Figure 5: Importance of Real-Life Interaction with Canadian Students, as Perceived by the Chinese MBA Students



The Chinese students were aware of the valuable opportunities of interacting with Canadians while in Canada. As Leeman & Ledoux (2001) state "... young people should gain knowledge about each other's background, circumstances and culture in order to further mutual understanding and to combat prejudice, discrimination and racism associated with ethnic-cultural differences" (p. 188). My field data show that the Chinese students were ready to exchange ideas with Canadians in real-life interaction. Such interaction was a form of learning for the Chinese students. Most of the Chinese students were not confident in English communication with Canadians; is also reflected by the answers to question # 4 of the questionnaire, which indicate that the students need more real-life communi-

cation with Canadians. The following is drawn from a conversation involving myself ("Zhang"), two Chinese MBA students (Zheng Wu and Cui Hua), and a Canadian graduate student shows how confusing English geographic terms can be for students from China, who only learned the names of places in their Chinese phonetic transcription. It also demonstrates how learning takes place in real-life situations:

Canadian student: My home is in Newfoundland, I will go there in the summer, and come back in September.

Zhang: How long does it take to drive from here to Newfoundland?

Canadian student: Three days. (Turning to Zheng Wu) Newfoundland is one of the poor provinces in Canada.

Zheng Wu: I do not believe that. I looked up the map the other day. I saw good transportation in Newfoundland. In China the poor provinces are in remote areas, they are poor because they do not have good transportation.

Cui Hua: What is the difference between Canada and New Zealand?

Canadian student: Er...
(At this moment the two Chinese students started talking with each other in a hushed voice in Chinese, Zheng Wu explaining to Cui Hua that Newfoundland is a province of Canada.)

Cui Hua: (smiling) I mean Newfoundland.

Obviously, Cui Hua's communication problem here was due to her lack of prior subject knowledge in Canadian geography. Although she had learned about world geography in high school in China, the western names were always in Chinese transliteration, with certain fixed Chinese characters that had to be used for phonetic transcription. For example, all Chinese students learn about the Great Lakes in Middle School. They are even supposed to write down the names of the five lakes in order of their size, using the Chinese transcription of the lake names, which can only roughly approximate the sound of the English words.

The conversation can be viewed as an example of miscommunication. However, from a more positive and benevolent angle, the Chinese students are actually making their way towards successful communication. Through the conversation, Cui Hua learned that a province in Canada, Newfoundland, sounds similar to New Zealand, while the Chinese versions of these two places sound quite different ("Niufenlan" as opposed to "Xinxilan"). This instance may look minor at first sight, but it shows the positive side of immersing the Chinese students with Canadian students, and thus allowing them to exchange useful knowledge with each other. Although the conversation made one Chinese student appear as a person lacking certain knowledge, such interactions should be encouraged.

In this conversation multiple factors caused miscommunication. First, the language difficulty: Cui Hua did not know the English version of "Newfound-

land". Second, cultural and economic differences contributed to the confusion, when they made Zheng Wu wonder about the relation between transportation and poverty. In this instance of miscommunication Zheng Wu failed to produce the expected response, but contradicted the Canadian student. Then, in a separate instance of misperception Cui Hua confounded Newfoundland with New Zealand.

4.4.2 Appropriateness in Language Use

When imitating utterances of Canadians, often the Chinese students were not aware of the actual meaning and the implications of what they were saying. Thus, when the following incident of miscommunication occurred, the Chinese student did not know what he had said wrong.

In a parking lot, Zhang Jian saw a car backing up and almost bumping into another parked car. He expressed his feeling of surprise by exclaiming "Jesus Christ". His Canadian friend showed disapproval of the expression and said "that sounds like Jack" (Jack was known to be a rude person, who sometimes used "four-letter words"). Zhang Jian was confused, because he thought the expression "Jesus Christ" was equivalent to the common Chinese exclamation "My heavens", which in China is not understood as "rude". Through this incident Zhang Jian realized that it was socially inappropriate, and considered a blasphemy, to use religious terms out of their proper context, especially in exclamations. Zhang Jian was embarrassed about his *faux pas*, and the incident turned into a learning ex-

perience. Without real-life contact with Canadians he would not have noticed that he touched on a social taboo when using the name of a deity to express surprise.

Zhang Jian's confusion went farther than just recognizing he had committed a social blunder. He was wondering why his Canadian peer, from whom he had learned the expression, had been allowed to use "Jesus Christ" with impunity for expressing surprise - there had been no criticism from the listeners.

Now I know the meaning of this expression. In the future, if I am in a similar situation, shall I shut up and be humble and not use "Jesus Christ" any more like the English native speaker, or can I afford to be native-like, just use this expression like the Canadians?

Zhang Jian was criticized for inappropriate language behaviour or lack of cultural awareness - *quod licet Iovi non licet bovi*? After all, Zhang Jian had "learned" the expression and imitated his Canadian peer only because the Canadian was not criticized for saying it, and after he had concluded the expression was safe to use.

In this instance, the Zhang Jian uttered an unexpected and unaccepted expression. The Canadian student's criticism came unexpected for the Chinese student, because he lacked the cultural frame of reference for deciding if an expression is appropriate or not. The Chinese student and the Canadian student did not share the same assumptions and knowledge about the world. According to Scollon (1995) "When two people have very similar histories, backgrounds, and experi-

ences their communication works fairly easily because the inferences each makes about what the other means will be based on common experience and knowledge” (p. 11-12).

4.4.3 Words in Sociocultural Context

People with different cultural background often do not appreciate each other’s humour. They may not understand or even recognize humour in conversations. Without an understanding of each other’s cultural background, it is hard to understand simple statements, even if the words are familiar.

On one occasion, I was with about twenty students in a restaurant. The students were from different faculties and different departments of Eastern Canada University. We were all seated at four different tables with one cheque. It was the closing dinner for the Interdisciplinary Conference 2000 at Eastern Canada University, an event arranged by the Graduate Students’ Association, where the presenters at the conference were invited to dinner. I sat at the same table with two Chinese MBA students and several other Canadians. The Chinese students clearly enjoyed the opportunity to interact with Canadians, and participated in a lively fashion in the conversation, which at that point was quite informal. It was a friendly atmosphere among equals. This was a rare chance for the Chinese students to interact with Canadians on an equal footing, without having to feel inferior.

While we were talking at the tables in the restaurant, we encountered a situation where everyone had to laugh except the Chinese students. The waitress came and said that, within the scope of the dinner, everyone could have one non-alcoholic drink, and either have buffet or order food from the menu. Alcoholic drinks would have to be paid for personally. Everyone at our table ordered ice tea and buffet. When we were almost finished with our dinner, the waitress came and asked: "Anybody would like to have some coffee?" Before anyone could answer, the waitress quickly added: "Daddy allows you a cup of coffee". This is how she indicated that coffee was included.

The Canadians at my table started laughing and ordered coffee; I also ordered coffee. Liu Gang and Su Ning neither laughed nor did they order coffee. At that moment I recognized this was an instance of miscommunication, and initiated a discussion. In a joking manner, I asked the Canadian sitting beside me, who happened to be an ESL instructor, "Wasn't that an insult to compare us with children?" The ESL instructor replied: "No, it's just a joke." I then decided to find out what the two Chinese students thought of the waitress's remark. Liu Gang said:

I did not know what she meant, I thought she was asking about my dad. I thought to myself if she asked me to answer, I was ready to say my dad is in China.

Su Ning simply said "I did not understand her".

The waitress's statement "Daddy allows you a cup of coffee" was not understood by the Chinese students, because in their culture there is no "daddy" stereotype image, in the sense of "daddy" always being responsible for paying the bill. The waitress and the Canadian students, on the other hand, shared the common North American stereotype of "daddy always pays the bill".

This instance shows how differences in cultural presuppositions can act as stumbling blocks for understanding, even if the statement is linguistically transparent to the listener/reader. As the Liu Gang's comment indicates, the colloquialism "daddy" for "father" was well understood. The communication failure in this case was due to a joke that is impossible for most Chinese listeners to accept: putting the listeners in the position of youngsters. In Chinese culture, the older generation is treated with the utmost respect, therefore it is hard for the Chinese to imagine an age-related joke¹⁴. At the same time, the incident illustrates the elusive nature and unpredictable occurrence of culture-related miscommunication.

In this instance, miscommunication was caused by a lack of alignment of mental state (Traum & Dillenbourg, 1996) between the Canadian waitress and the Chinese students. The Chinese students could not recognize what the Canadian waitress intended to communicate. Scollon & Scollon (1995) explain the cause of miscommunication: "Two people from the same village and the same family are likely to make fewer mistakes in drawing inferences about what the other means than two people from different cities on different sides of the earth" (p. 12).

4.5 Political Culture

The Chinese YES-Canada students attended university in Canada primarily to acquire Canadian concepts of administration and business management. At the same time, their stay in Canada also made them aware of the different political systems between China and Canada. Programs like YES-Canada contribute to modernizing China not only at the economic, but also at the political level: the Chinese students gain exposure to western democratic ideas and practices. The phenomenon of miscommunication occurred when the Chinese students expressed themselves in a way that did not fit the Canadian social context, and revealed the sociocultural differences between China and Canada.

4.5.1 Quarrel or Debate

While in Canada, the Chinese MBA students were exposed to the style of democratic government and politics. During an interview when sociopolitical issues came up, Liu Gang mentioned how surprised he was about Canadian Prime Minister Chrétien being criticized openly by his own party and being asked to resign, and how the Prime Minister remained firm and announced that he would not resign, but stay. Liu Gang also said he tried to discuss politics with Canadians but found it very difficult. This is his view in his own words:

I am not used to seeing the political leader get attacked like that, he (Chrétien) has to fight so hard even when he is still in power. I mentioned this political incident to a Canadian classmate and said that Canadian politi-

cians “quarrel” a lot, but my humour was not understood, instead I was corrected for using a wrong word. I know the word “debate”, but I deliberately did not use it, because in my opinion attacking the country’s leader like this just went too far. I think I am often underestimated and misunderstood by Canadians.

Liu Gang’s critical view of Canadian political debate was not even understood by his interlocutor, but was regarded as a language mistake. This illustrates how cultural presuppositions shape speech and thus can lead to miscommunication. In this particular instance, the fact that Liu Gang did not use the linguistically appropriate term shows that he recognized the differences between Canadian politics with its “over-democratic” style, in his view, and Chinese politics.

This instance shows that learning about the concept of open political debate was a real experience of democracy in Canada for the Chinese students. Before coming to Canada, they would not have dreamed of such open “verbal fight” in parliament. In Chinese politics, state leaders are idolized, and it is beyond a Chinese citizen’s imagination that their leaders would have to defend themselves against criticism in public. When the Chinese students saw the Canadian Prime Minister being openly criticized and even asked to resign, this directly contravened their culture-specific concept of government. In accordance with their presuppositions, they automatically classified the Canadian-style political debate as illegitimate in the Chinese sense and called it a “quarrel”. This indicates how an inappropriate choice of words by members of a different cultural community

should not automatically be interpreted as a linguistic, or stylistic mistake, or “language problem”, but should be traced back to the speaker’s background suppositions as a deeper-lying conceptual problem.

4.5.2 Sociopolitical Interaction

On another occasion, when I went to see the ceremony of the Unknown Soldier in downtown Ottawa together with Zhao Jian and Cui Hua, the difference in political style between China and Canada became manifest. The two Chinese students were surprised to see the Canadian Prime Minister walk in the procession, with “crowds of ordinary people” lining the streets. They thought he was very brave being so close to the “masses”. I had to think back to my previous China visit, when the Chinese official in charge of foreign visitors arranged a visit for the representative of a Canadian environmental group to a neighbouring city. In front of the convoy there was a police car with lights and siren to clear the way through the crowds. It was not surprising, therefore, that the Chinese students were impressed by the Prime Minister of Canada behaving like an ordinary citizen during the event. Through this event, the Chinese students further realized that the Prime Minister’s democratic posture reflected the necessity for Canadian politicians to gain publicity for upcoming elections.

On this occasion I told the Chinese students that I had passed the Prime Minister’s official limousine a few times, when he was being chauffeured from

his residence to Parliament Hill. Cui Hua asked me if the limo had the window curtains drawn, automatically assuming that such an official limo had curtains. I explained, to their surprise, that there were no curtains in the limo and the glass was not even tinted, otherwise I could not have noticed the Prime Minister in the back seat and the two men in suits and sunglasses in the front seats.

Discrepancies in understanding like the above are sociopolitical issues. When Liu Gang called a debate “quarrel”, this was already a step towards understanding western political concepts. Viewing the misnomer only as a linguistic “mistake” would ignore the significant conceptual gains the students have already achieved. Language is important, but at the same time language should not be the only benchmark for the students’ intelligence in real life situations. In the understanding of Scollon & Scollon (1995), experiences as they were encountered by the Chinese students are characterized as informal learning.

4.6 Miscommunication and Communication Success

The data presented in this section show how the road leading to successful communication in their cross-cultural setting was rarely smooth for the Chinese students. One such instance occurred during an MBA class in May, 2000, as discussed in this chapter (the shopping-mall-vs-department-store incident). Such data on successful communication were only collected during the advanced stage of the Chinese students’ participation in the MBA program.

4.6.1 A "Stupid Question"

The following incident started as miscommunication and ended in communication success, thus demonstrating the dialectic nature of cross-cultural communication in its various facets. In an interview, Shen Hong reported in detail how a question he asked in class was considered a "stupid question" by a Canadian classmate. Through interaction, the misunderstanding was eventually resolved. Shen Hong described the incident as follows:

During one of our MBA lectures, several of us started a discussion in Chinese, because there was a question, but nobody dared to ask the professor. In the context of the marketing concepts introduced in the lecture, we wanted to find out where certain products could be sold better: in a shopping mall or in a department store, but we did not have a clear definition of these two commercial units. Finally, I volunteered as the spokesperson for the Chinese students and publicly asked the professor the question: "How do you differentiate a shopping mall from a department store?" Before the professor could come up with an answer, a Canadian student cut in and said to me "Don't ask such a question, it's a stupid question, it's a waste of our time."

We were upset about the Canadian classmate who had called the question "stupid", and several of us Chinese students approached the Canadian student after the lecture to make sure that in the future no such interferences would occur. One of us told the Canadian student "Let us ask questions, they are important for us." After some heated discussion, the Canadian student finally apologized and admitted that the question had not been "stupid".

This case made evident that, if the Chinese students speak up, communication is improved. The incident shows the dialectic nature of cross-cultural communication. At the beginning of the miscommunication incident, there were hard feelings between the Chinese students and their Canadian classmate. The incident then developed into cross-cultural interaction, and was eventually resolved. The atmosphere changed from tense to friendly, and a mutually respectful relationship between the students involved could be established.

Resolving this incident of miscommunication made the Chinese students feel successful in their role as graduate students. Retrospectively, they were proud of interacting and communicating with an initially critical, later apologetic Canadian peer. They felt like catalysts that made their critical Canadian peer's educational cross-cultural experience possible. They were happy to have an opportunity to succeed in a controversial, initially embarrassing situation, which began as a miscommunication incident but had a constructive result.

4.6.2 Presentation at the Conference

The story of Liu Gang described in this sub-section illustrates how knowledge of the subject in its sociocultural and economic context leads to communication success even if the language is flawed. A two-day conference was held at Eastern Canada University: the 3rd Annual Graduate Student Interdisciplinary Conference, February 25-26, 2000, at Eastern Canada University. Graduate stu-

dents presented their research work, and the only MBA research presented was by a student from the YES-Canada program.

Liu Gang, a YES-Canada MBA student participated in this conference on an equal level with graduate students from other faculties and departments of Eastern Canada University. He gave an excellent presentation, with a computer slide show. The topic of his presentation was: *The Comparative Utility of Cash Flow Analysis in the Evaluation of Three Cases in the Brewing Industry*. He discussed share values and investment, and it was well presented. Although his English was flawed - he concentrated so much on his subject that he pronounced "Toronto" the Chinese way as "Duolunduo" - the audience seemed to enjoy his presentation. Towards the end of his presentation he invited the listeners to ask questions, and answered them all to their satisfaction. Despite his imperfect English, there was no communication problem. Because he knew his topic inside out, he could interact freely with the audience in a realistic setting.

It is important to create the opportunities for the Chinese students to speak in real-life settings, and thus give them confidence in their English-language communication. This importance is reflected in a comment made by one of my background informants who was a member of the first YES-Canada cohort. In discussing her experience of dealing with her Canadian classmates, the background informant explained:

I used to think that the Canadian students would look down upon me if I let myself be heard by them. I found out that the Canadian students do not mind if I speak with some linguistic flaws, they know I am a foreigner, even if I make a grammar mistake they do not ridicule me. I am not ashamed of my Chinese accent as I used to be.

I have to contribute to group work. If I do not contribute, the Canadian students would not like me. If I said something not quite right, it is O.K. to say it and share it with the Canadians. They want to hear your opinion. I used to be asked by the Canadian students to talk. Someone would say: "What do you have to say?" At this point if I refuse to speak English because I am modest, I will certainly be evaluated with a bad mark by them. Now I have learned to speak without being invited to talk, because I am expected to say something, not just to sit there and listen; some of my classmates do not speak out because they think they do not deserve the attention of others.

Presenting at the conference was a valuable experience for Liu Gang. According to his own assessment, he was considered to be weak in English on the YES-Canada program. The presentation he gave at the conference was a joint research project between him and his supervisor. He said that without the push, support and courage of his supervisor he would have been too timid to give the presentation. His supervisor was present during his presentation to give him moral support. The story of Liu Gang shows that a YES-Canada student was as competent as other students in presenting his work at the conference. His English was not perfect, like in the case of many international students. However, for achiev-

ing a successful presentation, knowing his work and the concepts involved was already half the battle.

4.7 Cross-Cultural Miscommunication: Premise for Understanding

According to one background informant, viewed in hindsight the Chinese students' instances of miscommunication were in fact valuable experiences. Often they were, or could conceivably have been stepping stones to further cross-cultural interaction and understanding, as the background informant from Cohort 1 recalled:

When I look back to the beginning of our program, I see how difficult it was to communicate with Canadians. We went through difficult times, but we successfully survived, and we understand the saying "No pain, no gain". We are glad we were in the first group, not in the second.

There are instances in the present study that reflect the positive side of the integrated-class arrangement Cohort 1 had throughout the MBA program. Li Xiaodong reported the following experience:

I was timid, fearing they would laugh at me if I did not speak "standard English like the Canadian students." I remember how, the more I hesitated to speak English, the weaker I appeared among the lively Canadian students. It was a difficult time for me. Now when I think back, although we from the first group experienced more communication difficulties, we had a good understanding of the Canadian university and its students. For ex-

ample, we became familiar with Canadian students at Eastern Canada University.

When the students of Cohort 1 had been immersed in classes with Canadians, miscommunication was a common occurrence. In retrospect, such experiences sometimes turned out to be quite humorous. Another incident from Cohort 1 reported by a background informant was as follows:

A Chinese student participated in an MBA group work session, but did not actively contribute to the discussion. He was silent most of the time, and only the Canadian students were carrying on the discussion. But he wanted to speak out because he did not want the other Canadian students to think he was too lazy to participate in the group work. He was trying hard to understand the topic, and he finally found a reason to say something. He noticed that the other Canadian students were discussing some topic in French among themselves, and he cut in and told them if they did not stop speaking French he would start speaking Chinese with the other Chinese participants in the work group. The Canadian students immediately switched to English. He realized that the Canadian students took his "threat" with humour and were not in the least upset by his remark, but even tried to help him in the group work. Such an experience hardly ever happened to the students of Cohort 2 due to their lack of interaction with Canadians.

One background informant explained that she eventually found a survival trick for working with Canadian students, which she explained as follows:

The Canadian students are actually very nice people. They encouraged me to speak and work with them; when we did teamwork, they did not mind my non-standard English.

In summary, the Chinese MBA students of Cohort 2 spent less time with Canadian students during their MBA program, at the expense of their cross-cultural interaction skills. In contrast, the students of Cohort 1 had not been subject to special arrangements, but were treated like the other Canadian students. They were never segregated nor were they required to attend weekly ESL sessions. They appeared more experienced than the students of Cohort 2 because they had been through thick and thin.

Many of the problems encountered by the Chinese MBA students in Canada on and off campus were mainly due to their different sociocultural background. Examining their experiences has shown that misunderstanding and miscommunication are inevitable, but often can be turned from stumbling block into building blocks. Becoming aware of the students' cultural differences can help judging their academic work, and further improve their program of study (Taylor, 1990; Sun & Chen, 1997).

4.8 Summary

The data from in-depth interviews and observations presented in this chapter pertain to the research questions, in particular to question 1: "What is the na-

ture of Chinese/Canadian cross-cultural miscommunication and misunderstanding? Specifically, on what occasions (during what type of interaction) do miscommunication and misunderstanding occur?" The data are contained in the participants' stories and my observations, and shed light on the cultural differences between China and Canada that cause problems of understanding. They illustrate the complex nature of cross-cultural miscommunication and misunderstanding in their different forms. Depending on the setting, on the background of the social actors and other incidental factors, the problems appeared in a wide spectrum ranging from verbal miscommunication to absence of communication, or simply frustration because a pre-conceived notion or expectation did not fit the different cultural environment. All manifestations of miscommunication as they are apparent in the data have one point in common: they involve some conceptual discrepancy, or misconception.

A major impediment in the Chinese MBA students' communication was their change in social identity from business executives and members of the elite in China, to sojourners and minority members in Canada, which affected their social status and self-confidence. Perceived racism prejudiced their communication, or prevented it altogether. Despite the fact that they took the same courses as the Canadian MBA students, the private YES-Canada arrangement created a stigma of inferiority in their imagination, based on Chinese understanding of a prestigious program, which has to be government-sponsored. The absence of a central

guiding figure of authority in their studies. like the “political instructor” at university in China, created the impression for the students that the Canadian university did not take care of them. With its open physical layout, Eastern Canada University did not fit their concept of a campus university as a walled compound inaccessible to outsiders. Generally speaking, discrepancies emerged whenever the students tried to apply their indigenous Chinese concepts to their new Canadian reality.

The absence of western literary background knowledge proved to be an obstacle in communication. Mathematics- and science-related topics were not subject to miscommunication like topics related to sociocultural concepts. In their communication with Canadian professors, their Chinese concept of being formal and deferential to superiors, teachers and elders inhibited communication.

An obstacle for the Chinese MBA students’ communication with other Canadian students was created through their initial segregation in Chinese-only classes, for taking the MBA core courses. Thus, even after being integrated with Canadian students in taking the selective courses, they still had the tendency to form Chinese-only in-groups, and could not easily build a working relationship with Canadian students. The Chinese students found it difficult to initiate a conversation with Canadians, due to the different understanding of privacy in the Chinese and the Canadian cultures.

Jokes are usually culturally bound, and thus were a major source of miscommunication for the Chinese students. Incidents involving polite refusal or acceptance created misunderstandings, and the inappropriate use of colloquialisms and slang produced embarrassment. With background suppositions from a different political system that avoids open conflict, the Chinese students interpreted the Canadian political debates as “quarreling”. Thus, the different political styles of China and Canada created misunderstandings. Miscommunication, when resolved through ensuing discussion, led to communication success instead of communication failure. The data further show that the onus to resolve misunderstanding and miscommunication is eventually on the Chinese students – the host culture does it only in a limited way, through intercultural education in teacher training.

Answers to research question 2, about the reasons for miscommunication and misunderstanding, become evident in the data. Research question 2 reads as follows: “What are the reasons for miscommunication and misunderstanding? More concretely, are individual factors the main cause? Are there organizational factors (related to the MBA program and the university setting)? Are broader sociocultural differences between China and North America causing miscommunication and misunderstanding?” The students’ verbal and nonverbal behaviour reflect their presuppositions and their Chinese way of thinking. The main source of the problems in understanding encountered by the Chinese students lies in their pre-conceived notions and culture-specific concepts from China, which are incon-

gruent with the categories in their new environment and result in clashes with their new Canadian reality on- and off-campus. In short, their Chinese ways do not fit Canada. Due to their preconceptions from China, the Chinese MBA students encountered a reality that did not comply with their expectations when immersed in the different academic and social environment of Canada. The data revealed how, and to what extent, their different sociocultural background influences the Chinese students in their subject-related studies and readings. In their MBA-subject-related study, the cultural dimension in their use of English was a crucial factor. Originating from the People's Republic of China, the students had little knowledge about the Western ways in this country - the Canadian political, social, economic and academic reality. Misunderstandings typically took place whenever their presuppositions did not match the concepts and realities of the Canadian social, economic, political and educational systems.

The study provided answers to research question 3 "What are the consequences of such miscommunication and misunderstanding? In particular, do they lead to communication breakdown? Do they give rise to hostility? Does cultural learning occur?" Despite miscommunication and misunderstanding, cultural learning occurred when the Chinese students interacted with their professors and Canadian peers. Interaction with Canadians in real-life situations was necessary for them, as part of acquiring communicative competence. Exposure to the Canadian cultural context led to an improvement in understanding and contributed to

closing the cultural gap. Cultural learning occurred through real-life interaction with Canadians.

5 Strategies of Coping and Dealing with the Cultural Gap

The data collected in the previous chapter confirm the existence of a cultural gap, as stated in the rationale of the study. The numerous concrete examples help answer the research questions 1-3. As the literature review shows, not much research has been done in the area of students' coping strategies in cross-cultural learning situations. This chapter intends to help fill this gap in cross-cultural studies.

This chapter is devoted to research question 4, examining how the students and the institutions cope with the problems, in two main sections: a) coping strategies of the students, and b) the responsiveness of the faculty to the students' problems. While the students dealt with the problems using their own *ad hoc* strategies, the faculty tried to improve the MBA program for the students of YES-Canada Cohort 2, to minimize culture-specific problems of understanding.

5.1 *Coping Strategies of the Students*

When the Chinese students encounter miscommunication and misunderstanding, do they continue to negotiate? Do they make an effort to make themselves understood, or do they prefer to give up? Due to the conceptual differences between the two cultures, the students' lack of confidence and perception of prejudice, they developed their own coping strategies to survive and succeed in the Canadian academic and social environment.

5.1.1 Avoiding and Refusing to Ask Questions

To prevent cross-cultural misunderstanding and miscommunication from happening, the Chinese students often avoided interaction with Canadians, and only discussed questions among themselves. They kept a low profile in this strategy of avoidance. Such behaviour puzzled their professors. During the field study, I spoke with a professor from the Faculty of Administration who taught a course to the YES-Canada students. In disapproval of the Chinese students' behaviour, he asked me, "Why are the Chinese students always talking to each other in lectures, so I have to stop them?" The Chinese students were reluctant to ask the professor for help in class. Instead, they discussed problems among themselves in a low voice. By doing this, they left the professor with the impression of "undisciplined" students – a misunderstanding created by the students' refusal to ask questions.

The reasons for this strategy of avoidance became apparent in Zhang Jian's comment:

Anything I say would be wrong. The best would be trying not to speak English in class, not to ask questions or discuss any problems in class, so others cannot make fun of me.

In my interviews with the key informants, they used the Chinese proverb "Silence is golden" to defend the Chinese students' passive attitude in class. They did not want to take a chance making mistakes in public. Zheng Wu reported nu-

merous occasions where the Chinese MBA students did not realize what was going on in class, but did not dare to ask. They tried to solve problems by asking each other later, but whatever they did not understand in class could not be easily resolved after class, because they could not accurately recall the problematic situation or event.

The Chinese students were reluctant to raise questions in class. The students listened to the professor's lectures without asking questions: it was a scenario of one-way communication. When I asked if they had any problems understanding the lectures, the answer was, "Yes, there were problems, but we would not want to ask." In their passive behaviour they were in striking contrast to their Canadian classmates, as the following instance shows.

The incident occurred during an integrated lecture, with approximately 40 Chinese and Canadian students attending. There were 30 Chinese and 10 Canadian students in this class. At one point during the lecture the professor briefly paused and asked if anyone had questions. A Canadian student who was sitting in the back of the lecture room raised his hand. When the professor gestured to him to speak, the Canadian student said: "Can you speak louder please!" Most Chinese students were surprised to hear this straightforward and therefore unexpected request. When we talked about the Canadian student's request after class, Shen Hong said:

A Canadian student can afford behaving like that. He can be sure that nobody will criticize him for anything. Had a Chinese student said that he could not hear the professor clearly, the others would blame him for insufficient English listening comprehension, or lack of communications skills. That's what we are worried about.

Sometimes it took a while before the Chinese students voiced problems of understanding they encountered in their MBA classes. Liu Gang carried his questions from a lecture into a restaurant, where we shared the same table with several Canadian students. Liu Gang told stories about his hometown in China, and about the kindness of his grandmother who had raised him through most of his childhood. Obviously the restaurant meeting was an opportunity to soothe his feelings of nostalgia. During this conversation, he turned to the Canadian student sitting beside him and brought up a problem from class:

In an MBA lecture on marketing, we did not know why all the Canadian students had been laughing in class when the professor said something that sounded like: "someone sent a fax. telling (something...) it was... a cat..."

Liu Gang was eager to find out why everyone had been amused by the professor's remarks. However, he could not reproduce the context because he had not understood it at that time when the professor had made the statement in class. When I suggested to him that it might have been something like "he let the cat out of the bag", he recognized the idiomatic expression. and one of the Canadians at the table explained the meaning to him.

When the problem in understanding had occurred in class, he had not ventured to ask the professor to repeat or explain the statement. His was the typical attitude of the Chinese MBA students who would usually not discuss problems in public, but rather in an informal setting. He had not asked the professor when the joke caused laughter, because he was afraid of appearing ignorant. This strategy of refusing to ask questions was bound to lead to serious misunderstandings in the YES-Canada students' MBA studies, because the professors did not even know that they had a problem in understanding.

Another instance showed that even in those informal settings off campus, where their academic reputation was not at stake, the Chinese students were often reluctant to ask the Canadians questions. I was walking through downtown Ottawa with Zhang Jian and Wu Yi. We passed a shop where on a sign above the shop-window "beaver tails" were advertised. In the shop-window pieces of pastry in the shape of a beaver tail were displayed. Zhang Jian appeared happily surprised and exclaimed, "Now I understand!" and explained:

We sometimes went skating on the Rideau Canal. We often heard Canadians say 'Let's go for a beaver tail', but because I did not know what exactly that was, I never followed them.

In this instance, to avoid potential embarrassment, Zhang Jian had pretended not to be interested in "beaver tails". Even later, he never bothered to ask what a "beaver tail" was, because he was afraid his question might be interpreted

as ignorance. He was actually curious to know what it meant, because to him it had sounded like a kind of food made from beaver meat. In reality, the “beaver tail” is just a kind of pastry, which was invented by an Ottawa baker in 1978 and is virtually unknown also to people from other parts of Canada, except to tourists visiting Ottawa’s historic Byward Market.

Summing up this section, the Chinese students usually tried to keep a low profile in their classes and not ask questions in public. They preferred to solve problems among themselves within their Chinese in-group, rather than presenting the problems to the whole class. Postponing a question from class to a more informal environment did not provide a solution, because the problem could not be reproduced. Even in casual contexts, the Chinese students still would hesitate to actively speak out and ask for clarification of problems in understanding. Such escapist strategies of coping were detrimental to their progress in improving their on- and off-campus communication.

5.1.2 Collective Isolation

Another method of coping with their new environment involved forming a Chinese-only in-group, in which the students communicated in Chinese with each other. The Chinese MBA students of Cohort 2 hardly had any friends who were English native speakers with whom they could work together on their MBA study topics. Due to this isolation, the majority of Chinese students did not experience

miscommunication caused by cultural differences as shown in question # 5 of the questionnaire. These questionnaire data are in compliance with the students' complaints about their isolation. When discussing their interactions with English speaking Canadians, Zheng Wu gave the following explanation:

We don't communicate with the other Canadian students. The Canadians do not like us ..."

During class, the Chinese MBA students communicated among each other mainly in Chinese. Even towards the end of their 15-month MBA program, they would still sit together and discuss their work in Chinese. They rarely had discussions in English with other Canadian students. This was unfortunate, because in reality the Chinese participants of the present study were eager to learn more about western culture, and they wanted to interact with Canadians. They did not intentionally form an in-group within the Canadian university. Zhang Jian, who had dealt with westerners back in China, realized his isolation from Canadians in Canada and commented:

Back in China, we dealt more with Westerners than here in Canada.

In regard to the extent of using English, the Chinese students' lives at the Canadian university were similar to their lives in China. Zheng Wu commented on their isolation as a Chinese in-group in the Canadian environment:

Most of us live together. When there are no courses, we stay away from the university, there is hardly any spare time activities arranged by the program.

The Chinese students' isolation was compounded during the holiday season. They knew that the Canadian students joined their families for celebrating Christmas and the New Year. To escape isolation, most of the YES-Canada students went back to China during the holiday season. Zheng Wu explained why they did not stay in Canada over the holidays:

When the Canadians are celebrating their holidays Christmas and New Year, we have no place to go to celebrate with them. We Chinese students would not set up a Christmas tree among ourselves. If we had Canadian friends, we would like to stay here over the holidays. We actually have no reason to go back to China in December / January, because there is nothing going on in China during the Western holiday season, our New Year's holiday season in China is in February, but then we have to be back in Canada at university.

Zheng Wu here referred to the fact that the holiday season in Western countries is offset from the Chinese New Year celebration by several weeks. Although China has officially adopted the Western calendar, the big New Year's celebrations among the people still follow the lunar calendar. In China, the western holiday season is not a popular folk holiday as in western countries. It is not a time of festivity, and the Chinese students' relatives and friends only got two days off for the Western January 1st New Year. In China, the main holiday season is

the Chinese Lunar New Year, usually in February, with approximately ten days of continuous festivities, celebrations, and visiting of relatives and friends. However, at that time, the Chinese students had to be back in Canada for the winter semester. Thus, when the students went back to China during the Canadian holiday season, they did not find any holiday atmosphere there.

In traveling back to China during Christmas / New Year, they were disadvantaged in two ways. First, spending the Canadian holiday season in China, they missed the Christmas / New Year festivities in Canada. Then, in February, when all of China was enjoying the holiday season of the year, they were back in class in Canada. Thus, during the year of their MBA studies in Canada, the Chinese students missed both the western Christmas / New Year celebrations in Canada and the festive season in China at Chinese New Year.

To ease their loneliness, YES-Canada staff arranged a party for the Chinese students, on Chinese New Year's Eve¹⁵. This Chinese New Year's party took place off campus, at the "Air Force Officers' Mess" located in downtown Ottawa, which was a relatively exclusive clubhouse, not within in walking distance. It had been rented for that evening by the YES-Canada program. YES-Canada staff helped the students with their transportation to the downtown location. The event was intended to make the Chinese students feel at home. However, there was no Chinese-style celebration atmosphere. The party was like spending any evening

with friends, with lots of beer, and turned out to be another instance of collective isolation. At the party, Zhang Jian commented on the event:

In China I often went to places like this with my friends after work. This is like a regular nightclub in Shenzhen. Nowadays, nightclubs are getting common in China.

Since their Chinese New Year's party perpetuated the students' isolation as an ethnic and cultural in-group, some of them preferred the New Year's atmosphere in a Chinese-Canadian church to the beer-bar environment where only drinks were sold, but nothing reminded of Chinese culture.

I saw only 5 or 6 Chinese students at the party, many of them were not present. After the party had been in progress for about one hour, more students were gradually arriving. A group of 10 newly arrived Chinese students stormed into the bar. Zhao Jie, who was one of these late arrivals, saw me when she entered the bar and came to talk to me. The optimistic and happy person she was, she enthusiastically reported that she and her friends just had a wonderful time celebrating Chinese New Year in a Chinese church. The atmosphere at the church described by Zhao Jie was festive in the Chinese sense. The church members had even prepared food for the guests, from both the northern and the southern Chinese cuisines to make everybody happy. Had it not been for the Chinese church, all Chinese MBA students would have been deprived of their traditional Chinese New Year's celebration. As it was, a group of ten had found their way into a

community of the same cultural background. to participate in a Chinese-style New Year's party. However, neither the YES-Canada party nor the Chinese church party contributed to reducing their isolation as a Chinese cultural in-group.

The instance of the Chinese New Year's party indicates that the Chinese students. in their isolation. had to look for security and solidarity and found it within the Chinese-Canadian sector of society. in church. Without the active role of the Chinese-Canadian church organizations, the Chinese MBA students would have had nowhere to turn for consolation. Fortunately, Canadian multiculturalism provided them with their indigenous cultural environment when they needed it most. as will be outlined in the next sub-section.

Summing up this section. the Chinese MBA students' life was characterized by lack of social interaction with. and ensuing isolation from. the mainstream Canadian society. Escapism during the holiday seasons compounded their isolation. Despite the efforts of YES-Canada staff to take care of them on Chinese New Year's Eve as a special group in an exclusive place. many of them used their own strategies of coping. such as joining the celebrations at Chinese church. The best place for them to get cultural support would still be the Chinese community in Ottawa.

5.1.3 Integrating Themselves into the Local Chinese Community

In their social ties and activities, the Chinese MBA students were attracted by the Chinese-Canadian segment of Canadian society, where they could break out of their isolation in the university setting and feel at home in a Chinese cultural background. The Chinese church was an attractive location for the Chinese students when they felt lonely and became homesick. Some of them went to church on Sunday to meet other Chinese.

Several of the Cohort 2 students joined a Chinese-Canadian church as active members soon after arriving in Ottawa. Zhao Jie and Wu Yi were such converts: they both were baptized in a Chinese church in Ottawa in June of 2000, subsequently went to church on a regular basis. I asked Zhao Jie and Wu Yi if they had been Christians in China. Their answer was no, they had become Christians after arriving in Canada. They both confirmed that they did not attend church in China when they visited there during the holiday season.

On one occasion I went along with Wu Yi to the Chinese-Canadian church they attended every Sunday. Everyone there was ethnic Chinese, and the priest spoke Chinese during mass. The people attending chatted with each other in Chinese. The church attendees were given an opportunity to speak out and discuss their concepts of happiness. Some said happiness was to find an ideal job. For example, a nurse from China who had to do odd jobs in a Chinese restaurant in Ottawa said she would like to find a "decent" job. Another Chinese woman de-

scribed that she had been a medical doctor in Beijing and was now doing odd jobs. One of the Chinese students said, “happiness is to study well”.

Not all Chinese students who attended the Chinese-Canadian church stayed with the church. About a dozen of students from Cohort 2 attended Chinese church at some point, but most of them went there a few times, and then did not continue. When I started my field study, 5 students from Cohort 2 were loyal Christians. Those students who quit attending church did not share the same interests with the other Chinese-Canadians churchgoers. For example, the Chinese students did not want to focus on material things like most Chinese-Canadians, such as what kind of cars or how many fridges they had in their household – the students said these were not topics of interest to them. As they were attending an MBA program, the Chinese students were more interested in academic topics and work-related issues.

The Chinese students from Cohort 2 stayed mostly within a Chinese environment, both on and off campus. On the MBA program, they hardly ever worked in inter-ethnic groups. Through their isolationist strategies of coping with the new Canadian environment they maneuvered themselves into a passive, lonely and isolated situation, in a vicious cycle that distanced them even further from the Canadians.

The Chinese students’ strategies of coping only served to further widen the cultural gap between themselves and the Canadians. The more passive an atti-

tude the Chinese students held, the more misunderstandings between Chinese and Canadians developed. They tended to view the Canadians based on assumptions and stereotypes, and such an understanding kept them apart from the Canadians. For example, in view of the Chinese MBA students' minimal interaction with Canadians, I tried to find out why some of the YES-Canada students had joined a Chinese-Canadian church. I asked one of the converts if she had considered joining an English/French-Canadian church, where she could interact with Canadians of non-Chinese background, and thus get to know the English/French segment of Canadian society better. She responded that this was a good idea, but added "I'm afraid the Canadians would not accept us."

In the case of this Chinese student, her conclusion was that she would not be accepted in an English-Canadian church, without even having tried to join. She automatically assumed she would be excluded. The phobia of being excluded was due to the isolated in-group life style of the YES-Canada students, which made them feel subject to discrimination. Based on my experience with Canadian churches¹⁶, I ascribe this student's pessimistic attitude to her isolation from Canadian society. The problem here lies in the Chinese student's perception that results in a strategy of avoidance, in her attempt to cope with the unfamiliar Canadian environment.

5.1.4 Consequences of Coping Strategies

The Chinese students' isolationist coping strategies were not helpful for reducing cross-cultural miscommunication. On the contrary, they led to further misunderstanding and absence of communication, and aggravated the situation.

5.1.4.1 Misunderstanding Remains a Problem

The Chinese MBA students' strategies for coping with their already isolated situation often drove them further apart from the Canadian students. Their comparative isolation made it difficult for them to interact with Canadian professors and students, and to establish friendships with Canadians. The relationship between the Chinese students and Canadian students actually deteriorated over time. The Chinese students, through absence of interaction with Canadians and lack of experience in cross-cultural communication, were easily insulted by reactions from Canadians to certain culture-specific behaviour, such as verbal or non-verbal disapproval. Two such incidents occurred during the time when the MBA students took their selective courses.

Shen Hong told the story how, before the start of a lecture, a Chinese student in the back of the classroom called his friends who were just entering the classroom. He wanted to attract their attention and invite them to come and sit together with him during the lecture, for convenient in-group discussions. Some of the Canadian students were irritated by this loud communication, and one of

them put her finger across her lips, indicating to him to be quiet. The Chinese students who saw this gesture considered this Canadian student as fussy and ethnocentric. Shen Hong further reported:

The Chinese student felt insulted by this rude gesture, and I agreed with him. You often hear Canadian students talk in loud voices in hallways and elevators, disregarding our presence. They can talk loud, but not us Chinese!

Shen Hong then continued about the same topic, relating to a different incident:

My friend who lives in Ottawa told me that some Canadians dislike the Chinese, because they consider the Chinese noisy people. My friend was in a shop in Chinatown, and when he talked to someone, a white Canadian beside him told him not to yell so close to his ears. I now realize how annoying it is when someone tries to interfere with one's behaviour.

The instance shows how the Canadians and the Chinese blamed each other for rude behaviour, each of them applying their own culture's etiquette.

Another of my key informants, Cui Hua, described an incident of "bad manners" that occurred in a lecture attended by both Chinese and Canadian students. A Chinese student took a cup with a hot drink to the classroom and slurped from it, which is considered normal and socially acceptable in China (as well as in Japan). He wondered why the slurping made the Canadian students turn their heads and look at him in disapproval. He did not know what the problem was, be-

cause in China he had done this all the time and nobody had felt bothered. As he kept slurping, the repeated stares from Canadian students made him guess that it was probably not acceptable to slurp.

The Chinese students hardly had any conversations with Canadian students, and there was a lack of cultural understanding from both sides. The Chinese student did not know it was considered bad manners to slurp, because nobody told him. In China and Japan, everyone knows that slurping makes hot tea drinkable, because the airflow in slurping reduces the temperature of the hot drink. The Canadian students obviously did not share this understanding, but considered the slurping simply as bad manners.

The above incidents illustrate the consequences of lack of social interaction and communication between the Chinese students and Canadians.

5.1.4.2 Misconceptions from Isolation

The YES-Canada students of Cohort 2 only communicated in English, not in French. To the Chinese students who only spoke English, communication within the bilingual English/French environment of Eastern Canada University meant an additional effort. The unique characteristics of a bilingual university added to their confusion. It was more difficult for Chinese students who did not speak French to get acquainted with Canadian students. For example, a number of Canadian students often greeted others in French. When the Chinese students

were addressed in French, they did not know how to react, and they did not return greetings in French. Thus, a Canadian students' friendly gesture that was formulated in French usually would not make it through the language barrier.

For example, Wu Yi showed no reaction when she was greeted by a Canadian student in the computer lab with "bonjour". Obviously the French-speaking Canadian tried to initiate interaction with the Wu Yi by greeting her, but did not anticipate that most YES-Canada Chinese MBA students did not speak French, but only English. When I asked Wu Yi if she was aware of being greeted in French, she commented:

I thought he was expressing surprise about something. I do not know French, and I do not expect Canadians who I do not know to greet me in the first place.

I repeatedly heard Chinese students complain that, in their opinion, the Canadian students were conceited and didn't want to talk to them. It was a lack of interaction that led to this negative perception. First, the Chinese MBA students did not expect to be greeted by Canadian students. Second, the participants of YES-Canada Cohort 2 were not given the opportunity to work closely with Canadian students, to lay a basis for mutual understanding.

While most Canadians learn French as school children, in the group of 54 Cohort 2 students only one had learned French in China, in a mandatory course within the requirements for his Bachelor's degree. This background, combined

with their relative isolation, made it difficult for the Chinese students to function within the unique English/French bilingual environment at Eastern Canada University. Also, French was not on their MBA curriculum.

In short, more miscommunication occurred when the Chinese students encountered francophone students at the bilingual University of Ottawa who addressed them in French. Even simple greetings were misunderstood; due to their lack of interaction with Canadians the Chinese students excluded *a priori* the likelihood of being greeted by Canadian students.

5.2 Responsiveness of the Faculty of Administration

In an international educational setting, the host institution has to deal with cross-cultural problems confronting foreign students. In the case of Chinese students, the institution is facing students who come from a monocultural background with a monolithic social structure where they have not experienced problems created by social and ethnic-cultural diversity and inequality. The administrators and teachers of the Canadian host institution should be made aware of the Chinese students' unique background suppositions.

In dealings with Chinese students, the host institution should implement ways of coping with ethnic-cultural identity as a social, educational and personal construct. Program administrators and teachers of the Canadian host institution should be aware of the potential effect of cultural differences in the students' aca-

demic and personal lives. They should develop and apply a culturally responsive pedagogy and interculturally inclusive curricula (Leeman & Ledoux, 2001).

5.2.1 The Experience of Cohort 1

After the difficulties encountered by YES-Canada Cohort 1 when mixed with Canadian students, the program organizers at Eastern Canada University responded to the Chinese students' needs and adjusted the MBA program for Cohort 2. One of the background informants recalled the circumstances of Cohort 1:

In Cohort 1, we had lots of problems when mixed with Canadian students, especially when working on group assignments. We did not talk when we were supposed to, we simply did not know how to get engaged in a discussion. We were also worried we might say something stupid because we were not familiar with the topics. Because we did not appear active in discussions and the MBA studies, in a peer evaluation some of the Chinese students were evaluated by Canadian students with a low mark. The group work we did with the Canadian students was considered bad by the Canadian students. The problems of Cohort 1 caused the change for Cohort 2 of Chinese MBA students.

In the context of peer evaluation during the MBA program, further problems were described by another background informant who had originally been in Cohort 1, and was later transferred into Cohort 2:

Some of us got low marks for group work because we did not actively participate in-group discussions, and did not take the initiative in group assignments. We got the image of students who do not contribute to group

work, but only benefit from the Canadian students. Therefore the Canadian students gave us low marks in the peer evaluation.

Cohort 1 also had had a housing arrangement different from Cohort 2. Some of the students of Cohort 1 had roomed with Canadians. In some cases, the Chinese students who shared an apartment or house with Canadians moved out, to room with their Chinese compatriots, because they wanted to live with people of the same cultural background. Many of Cohort 1 students did not like their housing arrangement with Canadians.

One of my background informants explained why his friend preferred to move to a new location he could share with other Chinese roommates. When the student returned to the quarters he had rented from the Canadian landlady, he would start cooking a meal for himself. As most Chinese, he liked stir-fried dishes; while he was stir-frying, the landlady would come and tell him to stop making so much noise. The Chinese student found the criticism disturbing and took it as an intrusion. Rather than explaining to the landlady that this was the way of preparing Chinese dishes (every Chinese cook makes noises of 'ding ding dang dang', as he explained to other Chinese students when he told the story), he became upset and started talking to his Chinese classmates about moving away. He finally moved out to room with other Chinese students.

The same background informant also told the story of a classmate of hers who lived in a Canadian family and faced a different problem. The classmate was

expected to do the same amount of house cleaning as her landlady, who was a housewife and therefore did not have the academic workload of an MBA student. The Chinese student was usually too tired to prepare meals for herself, let alone do cleaning work. Also, due to the affluent status of their families in China, most of the YES-Canada students were not used to doing housework.

The problems encountered by Cohort 1 had not been anticipated by the faculty: the Chinese students had not been seen as special or different, but had been treated ordinarily just like the other Canadian students. After the abovementioned problems had emerged, several program adjustments and changes were implemented by the Faculty of Administration. With cohort 2, the faculty addressed the Chinese students as members of an ethnic-cultural group and associated them with the cultural characteristics of that group.

5.2.2 Program Changes for Cohort 2

The YES-Canada MBA program was a new program that commenced in 1998. The focal group of the present study, Cohort 2, started on the MBA program in March of 1999 and graduated in June of 2000. One of the background informants, who knew both cohorts 1 and 2 as an insider, summarized the program changes made for Cohort 2 by the faculty administrators.

After the disorientation the students of Cohort 1 had experienced by being mixed with Canadians in the MBA classes from the very beginning, it was de-

cided that the Cohort 2 students would take the 24 core courses as a homogeneous group, in Chinese-only classes, obviously with the intention to minimize cross-cultural miscommunication and culture shock. During the second part of the program they would then attend their 16 selective courses in normal MBA classes, integrated with Canadian students. Through this program change, the Cohort 2 hardly had any contact with Canadian students during the first half of the MBA program. Another change made for Cohort 2 was to add a mandatory ESL counseling session to the program. The ESL sessions were emphasized and played a central part throughout the MBA curriculum, to the extent that they overshadowed the MBA courses.

Another response of the Faculty of Administration to the students' problems was to create new personnel arrangements for Cohort 2. An English counselor was hired to assist Cohort 2 throughout their MBA studies. In addition to the Mandarin-speaking administrator who had been hired to help the Cohort 2 students with their academic concerns, a part-time Mandarin-speaking off-campus administrator was hired to assist the students with their housing and other logistic issues, to facilitate their adjustment to North American culture. Appointing a housing administrator helped the students of Cohort 2 to a certain degree, because they did not have to deal with housing issues by themselves. Through the help of the housing administrator, they could now share their living quarters with members of their own cultural group. No matter where they lived, all Cohort 2 students

had roommates from their own group, with the same ethnic and cultural background.

5.2.3 Consequences of the Adjustments

Superficially, the new arrangement with Cohort 2 seemed to work better than the one with Cohort 1, because cross-cultural miscommunication could be largely avoided. It seemed to be an improvement over the situation of the Cohort 1 students who had encountered numerous problems due to cultural differences. With Cohort 2 students attending their core courses in Chinese-only classes, there were no more complaints from the Canadian students as in the case of Cohort 1. But the apparent improvement was at the expense of the students' interaction with the Canadian environment, the lack of which, as has been demonstrated, was problematic. Thus, although the faculty tried to improve the Chinese students' study conditions, the cultural gap and related problems on the conceptual level were not addressed by the changes.

The students of Cohort 2 expressed dissatisfaction with numerous aspects of their program. When they realized that they received special treatment different from the other MBA students, and different from the previous YES-Canada Cohort 1, they felt they were disqualified as regular students, and some of them questioned the validity of their TOEFL (English as a Foreign Language) score. Zhao Jie spoke out to me as follows:

We were recruited in China for the same program, but they (Cohort 1) were treated like the other international students, and we are not. Compared with Cohort 1, we are being treated as children. Like this we do not have any contact with other Canadian students.

The background informant from Cohort 1 told me:

We from the first and second groups know each other very well. Some of us even were classmates in high school in China. Those from the second group envied us (from Cohort 1) when they realized how isolated they were.

Liu Gang expressed his confusion about "unequal treatment" as follows:

There is a former schoolmate of mine, also from Guangzhou, who is studying at your Faculty (of Education). She does not have to attend ESL sessions, and she is together with other Canadian students. I would also like to attend the Faculty of Education. What does it take to enter the Faculty of Education as a graduate student?

The students of Cohort 2 spoke Chinese most of the time, both on and off campus. When I started the present study in January of 2000, they had had little experience interacting with Canadian students. Following the suggestion of their ESL counselor, the Chinese students made an effort to speak English all the time among themselves, but it didn't work out. They always relapsed into speaking Chinese. The Chinese students were supposed to speak English among themselves, at university and at their living quarters. They were supposed to monitor each other for speaking Chinese. At beginning of their MBA program, they tried

to do so, but they soon found it awkward to communicate with their compatriots in a foreign language.

In short, the adjustments made by the YES-Canada administrators for Cohort 2 were a two-edged sword indeed. On the one hand, there was less miscommunication in the ethnically and culturally homogeneous MBA classes during the first half of the MBA program. On the other hand, this was achieved at the cost of cross-cultural social interaction, which initially was absent from the study and the lives of the Cohort 1 students and lead to isolation.

5.2.4 Perceived Racism

Some of the key informants considered the Chinese students' problems induced by ethnocentric and racist attitudes on the Canadian side. They wondered why it seemed to be acceptable when certain Canadians spoke with a heavy foreign accent, while their Chinese accent was considered bad pronunciation, and they were corrected and segregated as ESL learners. They considered this unfair. They interpreted the emphasis on their English language deficiencies as a coded form of racism, which created the stereotype of the racist white Canadian.

The Chinese students encountered culture shock in Canada, and often found themselves in a situation of emotional torment and severe depression. They longed for home and for contact with their families. They sometimes took a defensive position about their own culture and country, by demonstrating some sort

of Chinese "cultural supremacy." On various occasions, the Chinese students would say that in many respects they were better than other students.

Despite the good intentions of the MBA program organizers, the Chinese MBA students did not like being formed into a special Chinese-only class, but wanted to be integrated into the larger Canadian social context, like the other international students at Eastern Canada University. In their perception, being an ESL learner carried the stigma of an immature student. Zheng Wu commented:

Not every Canadian speaks perfect English. I have heard people (professors) with different accents, some accent we could not tell. We have a difficult time to understand people (professors) with an accent, but we are in a special group being corrected for our Chinese accent and pronunciation. Others can have accents. Chinese are not allowed to have an accent.

In an interview, Liu Gang said:

We came to Canada expecting to be immersed in a Canadian learning environment with Canadian students. We did not expect to be kept away from other students.

Having the status of qualified graduate students on the MBA program, the Chinese students had expected to be treated like the other international students.

At the time when I began the fieldwork for the present study, the Chinese students had already started to express their criticism towards the special treatment they received as ESL learners, and refused to attend the weekly ESL session. Many of them felt that the ESL session was "for beginners", and they

wanted to be independent like other Chinese students at the university, especially since they had passed the English-language requirements. Some had passed the English requirement before joining the YES-Canada program, and some passed the English requirement after coming to Canada at the Second Language Institute of Eastern Canada University. In one of the ESL sessions I visited, only four out of the 54 Cohort 2 students attended.

On one occasion I was with several of the students, discussing new trends of international training in Japan, where public universities are trying to attract MBA students from other parts of Asia, in an effort to compete with universities in North America. The Chinese students commented that the Japanese culture was very similar to the Chinese culture, in most aspects virtually identical, and they said that their own preference had been North America because of its western cultural environment. The cross-cultural experience was a main reason why they had come to Canada for schooling, instead of going to Japan. Therefore, addressing and bridging the cultural gap should be one of the primary goals of international training programs in Canada.

5.3 Summary

This chapter provides answers to research question 4: “What are the strategies for coping? When miscommunication and misunderstanding occur, do the Chinese MBA students continue to negotiate, do they try to make themselves un-

derstood - or do they just give up? What were the strategies used by the program organizers and the host institution to deal with the students' problems?" The coping strategies used by the Chinese students, and the strategies of dealing with their problems used by the Faculty, were attempts to reduce and mitigate the effects of cross-cultural miscommunication.

The students' coping strategies were characterized by keeping a low profile and avoiding asking the professors questions in class. Even when they did not understand an issue, they would not speak out, in fear of being ridiculed for making a mistake in public. Rather, they would discuss questions within their group, which created the image of "undisciplined" students among the professors – in reality this strategy of avoidance was due to their lack of self-confidence. In the Chinese students' academic work, this strategy of avoidance was a serious problem, because issues they did not understand remained unclear, and their professors did not even know they had a problem of understanding. While more incidents of miscommunication may have been averted, in reality the problems were not solved, but rather compounded.

In their private lives, the students turned to the local Chinese-Canadian community for cultural support – another escapist strategy that provided them with temporary solace, but on the other hand prevented cross-cultural interaction and served to widen the cultural gap. On and off campus, the students had very little interaction with the mainstream of Canadian society.

After the culture shock experienced by the members of Cohort 1 due to their abrupt immersion in the Canadian environment, the faculty responded with changes for Cohort 2 that were based on the idea of a more gradual acculturation. However, the special treatment given to Cohort 2 caused complaints among the students about being stigmatized as second-class MBA students. They wanted to be integrated in the Canadian social context like the other Canadian and international students.

In view of the obvious failure of the students' own coping strategies, cross-cultural interaction that contributes to eliminating miscommunication and misunderstanding must be addressed by the Canadian host institution systematically on the curricular level, through interculturally relevant activities. Such activities must address and elucidate the differences between the two cultures at the conceptual level.

Considering the Chinese students' different cultural background, the host institution has to realize their need to adjust to the Canadian university environment before the start of the MBA program. While facing culture shock, the Chinese students were suddenly subjected to great pressure through a very intensive academic program under severe time constraints. Besides issues of culture and identity, the intensiveness of the course was also a reason why the Chinese students isolated themselves. Their primary purpose was to pass the MBA course – hence they tended to avoid problems of miscommunication so as to pass the

course. Their intensive curriculum arrangement added to the students' academic and sociocultural disorientation and contributed to their isolation in Canada. which suggests that the time frame of the program should be reviewed.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Overview

The present study illustrates how cultural differences affected the understanding and communication of Chinese students in their academic studies and real-life social settings when attending an MBA program at a Canadian University. The theoretical premise for this empirical study is the notion of communicative competence, which comprises the sociocultural dimension of language use. The study is interdisciplinary in nature (Hymes, 1972, 1974, 1996). The ethnographic approach used in this study provides an understanding of the Chinese students' emic view (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Guba & Lincoln, 1994), and shows how verbal and non-verbal behaviour varies with the different sociocultural presuppositions of communicators (Scollon & Scollon, 1981, 1995).

The study provided answers to the research questions, through the observation and in-depth interviews of the study participants, and a questionnaire. The study employed an ethnographic approach and relied on qualitative data; the questionnaire data were collected with the objective of verifying the participants' background information, and thus had an auxiliary function. The collected data revealed the Chinese students' experience of cross-cultural misunderstanding and miscommunication in the following perspectives: (a) cultural disorientation due to social environmental change; (b) the culture gap in their academic subjects when

the students faced new conceptual knowledge relating to sociocultural topics; (c) the culture gap in their social interaction with Canadian professors and Canadian students, as well as their day-to-day encounters; (d) language use in real world settings, and (e) differences in political culture. The data further showed how the students themselves tried to cope with the cultural differences, and how the institution reacted to the problems. The reviewed literature points to the existence of cultural differences as a reason and cause for miscommunication and misunderstanding (Gumperz & Tannen, 1979; Varonis & Gass 1985a, 1985b; Nowak & Dong 1997), but it neither outlines coping strategies of international students, nor does it address institutional strategies to deal with the problems. My study intends to fill this gap.

In the Chinese MBA students' training in Canada, cross-cultural understanding is of fundamental importance for their academic success and for their communication with Canadians. In their adjustment to the new academic and social environment, the students as well as the host institution need to be aware of the sociocultural differences between China and Canada. This cultural adjustment is not restricted to the language classroom, but extends to the socioculturally bound MBA subject area, and to language socialization. For achieving successful communication, the onus is not only on the Chinese MBA students, but also on the host institution through the professors and administrators, as well as on the Canadian students.

The findings of the study contributed to theory in the areas of cross-cultural communication, cultural studies and research methodology. The study has implications for practice for both the international students and the Canadian institutions. It suggests areas for further research, for scholars in higher education who deal with international students.

6.2 Summary of Main Findings and Contribution to Theory

The literature review provided the theoretical background for the present study. The study was conducted on the premise that, in an immersed setting with Canadian students, instances of miscommunication and misunderstanding would occur spontaneously and unpredictably. The incidents themselves usually were elusive and ephemeral. Often the communicators were not even aware that a communication problem existed. Unless immediately isolated and recorded, the instance would be irretrievably lost, because spontaneously occurring phenomena cannot be reliably reproduced. Miscommunication and misunderstanding proved to be irritating for the Chinese students and the Canadians, as illustrated by the examples of Chinese students asking about their Canadian classmates' grades, or the Canadian student calling the Chinese classmate's question "stupid".

The study went beyond a mere verification of the existence of cultural differences, but provided explanations and examined coping strategies of the students and the host institution. Thus, the importance of the present study lies in its

contribution to Chinese/Canadian mutual understanding through cultural explanation and interpretation. The ethnographic approach allows the Chinese students' voices to be heard, and highlights the problems from their emic view.

6.2.1 Miscommunication as a Catalyst for Learning

A major insight provided by the present study was that cross-cultural communication can be beneficial for both sides. Whenever they were accepted as equals, the Chinese MBA students could unfold with confidence, and cross-cultural communication turned out to be a positive experience for Chinese and Canadians alike, such as the dialogues in the restaurant and the attendance at the conference as reported in the data of chapter 4.

The reviewed literature only stressed the existence of cultural differences and presented such phenomena as negative, but it failed to address the potentially positive nature of misunderstanding or miscommunication, as necessary steps to mutual understanding and part of the learning process. It is the ethnographic research approach that made this contribution to the theory of cross-cultural communication and cultural studies possible, through the data collection methods of observation and interviews. The ethnographic approach enabled me to examine the strategies of coping used by the students and the institutions.

Transcending the scope of the reviewed literature, the present study extended the traditional view of miscommunication to include communication suc-

cess. Rather than only seeing the negative aspects of a miscommunication phenomenon, we also have to recognize its positive side. For example, it is through miscommunication that students with a different sociocultural background learn to negotiate understanding with their Canadian peers. Such real-world communication skills cannot be acquired easily in an ESL classroom, due to the difficulty of formulating a set of cultural rules to fit the Chinese students' needs. Therefore, the host institution must make extra efforts, such as in the form of academic counseling (detailed further in 6.3), to ensure that international students entering a program are equipped for interaction with their Canadian professors, students, as well as faculty staff. Converting instances of misunderstanding or miscommunication into stepping stones for understanding and learning is in the interest of both the international students and the host institution.

In the continuum of understanding that stretches between the Canadian and Chinese cultures, at one end of the spectrum are the Westerners who are interested in acquiring awareness of the Chinese culture. at the other end are the Chinese who need to gain understanding of Western political and economic concepts. This view covers cross-cultural awareness from both sides, and acknowledges the value of cultural synergy.

6.2.2 The Significance of Cross-cultural Understanding in International Education

The study contributed to the area of international education, by analyzing the problems of international students in the Canadian university environment. Reaching beyond language communication in casual settings, the study added to the theory in the areas of cross-cultural communication and culture studies, by investigating international students' academic success in Canada. Misunderstanding and miscommunication as experienced by the Chinese MBA students were not confined to the area of everyday English usage, such as "ordering a pizza". It was not a matter of taking them for a sightseeing tour to bridge their "cultural gap", but an issue that has to be considered in context of their MBA curriculum:

It is no longer 'enough' to equip international graduate students with general English skills with which to survive when the need is for a high level of academic and career-specific facility with English, one that will enable them to succeed, both during their campus careers and beyond (Morley, 1991, pp. 144-145).

Morley (1991) emphasized her call for more "academic" and "career-specific" English language skills. D'Arms (1988), the Dean of Graduate School at the University of Michigan, demanded a combination of academic substance and academic style to give the familiar and often discussed subject of communication skills a new meaning, by conceptualizing these skills in more sophisticated, and less egocentric ways. He points out that many of the international students will

play roles in their own societies, not just as professionals, but as policy-makers and in management. He notes further that those roles will require communication skills that extend far beyond the ability to speak and write clearly in English.

The Chinese students in this study described communication difficulties in their MBA work, where they were prone to misunderstanding and miscommunication on the conceptual level. In this respect, the findings of my study corroborated the observations of Robock (1993) and Frazier (1999) in the reviewed literature, as summarized by Liu Gang in an interview:

I feel that there is a culture barrier in my life in Canada everywhere. It appears in my studies, which is the biggest problem. For example, when I write my industry analysis report, I know I do well with grammar, but still my writing is not the same as native speakers'. It's about how to express the ideas and the logic. This could be the reason for low marks in courses requiring a lot of cultural knowledge.

The Chinese students were puzzled by their low marks, because from their Chinese conceptual point of view their work was good. In other words, applying the concepts they knew from China to their academic work at Eastern Canada University led to discrepancies. As Liu Gang's comment shows, they were strongly affected by the existence of sociocultural inconsistencies in their MBA subject-related work.

In higher education, their different sociocultural background can affect the students' academic work and performance, as shown in the study regarding inter-

action and communication with Canadian professors and Canadian students. The occurrence of misunderstanding and miscommunication is not necessarily to be blamed on the Chinese students, but the onus is also on the institution, a finding that is not addressed in the reviewed literature.

It is a finding of the present study that the interaction of Chinese students with their Canadian environment facilitates learning and promotes understanding. As reported in Chapters 4 and 5, a Chinese MBA student was unable to do his assignments, because he did not know how to describe the concepts of marketing a product. In other words, he missed the knowledge about product promotion based on concepts he did not understand, because they were not part of his Chinese background and training. The study here addresses the role the host institution should assume in providing international students with the conceptual knowledge necessary for succeeding in the Canadian learning environment. In summary, cross-cultural communication of international students in Canada is not only about interaction in casual encounters; more important, the host institution must address and deal with the Canada-specific sociocultural issues the students encounter in their studies.

Through its emic view, the present study also yields information for the sociocultural aspects of international education. The findings provide insights for designing training programs for students from China, and international students of different cultural background in general. The study contributes to cross-cultural

communication theory for academics, educational administrators and business professionals involved in international dealings.

6.3 Practical Implications for Students and Host Institutions

The study also examined the strategies used by the faculty of administration to accommodate the Chinese students. The findings of the study may serve to improve the lives and the academic progress of similar Chinese student groups that are scheduled to come to Canada, and of international students in Canada in general. The Canadian MBA program directly relates to the Canadian sociocultural context, which is in contrast with the Chinese context that formed the students' background suppositions. Differentiating the two sets of social, political and business concepts and locating their differences is of prime importance for the Chinese students' success on the MBA program.

6.3.1 Emphasis on Sociocultural Issues

The results of the present study indicate that culture-specific concepts were essential in the Chinese MBA students' academic performance. In the life and the study of the Chinese students in Canada, sociocultural factors were the main cause of miscommunication. Such factors affected their academic work, specifically the understanding of the MBA lectures and related readings. As graduate students, most of the Chinese MBA students have self-learning ability in English, such as dealing with new vocabulary and English grammatical patterns.

However, differences in cultural background have to be addressed at the conceptual level.

Difficulties in communication were experienced by the students of Cohort 2 during the later part of the MBA program, when they had opportunities to interact with their Canadian peers. The problems the participants faced were manifold. In general, the Chinese MBA students found it difficult to adapt to the Canadian university environment. During the data collection stage of the study, I often heard Chinese students commenting on their Canadian peers, calling them conceited, because they were under the impression that the Canadians did not want to talk to them. The study revealed that the stereotype of the conceited Canadian in the Chinese students' minds was due to their insufficient, or inadequate interaction with Canadians.

For international students, understanding the characteristics of the English/French bilingual Eastern Canada University and the demography of its students is part of their cultural adjustment. The unique status of Eastern Canada University as an officially bilingual university posed a communicative challenge for the YES-Canada MBA students. Canadian students often spoke French with each other, which made the Chinese students feel out of place. Sometimes they would also greet Chinese students in French, and this was not even recognized as a greeting. They were not prepared to function in a francophone environment.

Further, in most of the instances of misunderstanding and miscommunication it became apparent that the Chinese students were not trained to actively repair the problem; they rather would keep quiet. This attitude of resignation could be addressed by the host institution, through introducing cross-cultural problem-solving strategies into the MBA curriculum in form of a cultural orientation program.

Absence of communication was a major problem. The Chinese students of YES-Canada Cohort 2 spent most of their time in the quasi-Chinese environment of their group, both in on- and off-campus settings. They seldom participated in inter-ethnic work groups, and lived with roommates from the same group. Thus, they were prone to collective isolation, which led to absence of communication with Canadians. Under such circumstances, there was little chance for cross-cultural interaction that would enhance the mutual understanding.

It was taken for granted that the Chinese students knew Canadian business and management concepts, and if, for example, they could not write a paper it was automatically blamed on their poor English writing skills, in neglect of the sociocultural and socio-economic dimensions. While English language proficiency may have been a factor, the discrepancies between the students' Chinese background and the Western concepts of the Canadian-designed MBA program emerged as the main cause of misunderstanding and miscommunication. My ethnographic, culture-oriented approach through its "emic" view revealed the stu-

dents' presuppositions as the main communication barrier. This insight may contribute to an ESL program that better suits graduate students from China, by covering political concerns, sociocultural aspects, language socialization, language and technology, and a curriculum with cultural components. The findings of the present study indicate that the socio-political and socio-economic aspects of language communication must be included in an ESL component in order to meet the needs of Chinese graduate students in the Canadian environment.

The Chinese students' cultural background is a crucial factor in their academic and social lives. Neglecting it may aggravate the students' frustration, and lead to complaints of racism. China started to open its doors to the West in 1976. The Chinese graduate students who are coming to study in Canada today have more advanced English-language skills than those who came two decades ago. In those earlier years, many students in China hardly had an opportunity for conversations with English teachers who were native speakers. In contrast, the Chinese students coming to Canada in recent years are much better equipped to communicate in English, since China has been inviting increasing numbers of western professors and language teachers to teach at academic institutions in China. According to Liao (2000), these foreign professors have introduced the communicative language teaching, which for China meant an innovation in English-language teaching. Liao (2000) explains how the communicative language teaching emerged as a new teaching approach in Britain in the 1970s. In 1992, the State

Education Development Commission (SEDC) of China introduced a functional syllabus, in which the communicative teaching aim was set and the communicative functions to be taught were listed. In the same year, the SEDC published a new textbook series, in cooperation with the British publisher Longman. The new syllabus and the textbooks required teachers to teach communicatively in classrooms.

In China, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is a new trend in language teaching methodology that is replacing the traditional methods. By introducing CLT, language teachers in China came to realize that teaching English is not only teaching grammar, and that true mastery of a language involves communicative competence. In view of the language background of the Chinese MBA students, who are at the graduate level, their ESL training in Canada has to transcend the linguistic aspects and include the Canadian academic and social contexts. This includes encouraging them to interact with their Canadian professors and Canadian peers.

6.3.2 The Necessity of Academic Counseling

In order to improve the circumstances of Chinese MBA students in the Canadian academic and social environment, the institution has to address the issue of bridging the conceptual gap between the students' presuppositions and their Canadian environment. Within the administrative frame of higher education they

felt anonymous, and considered their study arrangements as being too impersonal. Therefore, offering additional programs to the Chinese students, or letting them know the university rules would not be a solution to their problems, since such activities are mostly teacher-centered, rather than student-centered. Trying to teach Canadian cultural knowledge or rules to international students does not target the problems encountered in their real-life academic and social settings, and the institutions have to work out solutions together with the students. For example, the faculty dean, or the program director could meet with the students in informal get-togethers, as an opportunity for mutual information exchange between administrators and international students.

The data reflected three main subject-related areas where a sociocultural gap existed, i.e. human resources, organizational behavior and governance. To close this gap, an academic counselor role is called for, perhaps even a class or two on subjects like capitalist assumptions in business, Canadian political systems, and Canadian corporate management and corporate culture in general. This would be helpful in getting the Chinese students used to Western concepts in their MBA studies. Attending such classes would at the same time allow the students to develop the necessary conceptual understanding. It would further serve to enhance the students' English communication skills within a subject-related context, and at the same time narrow the overall gap in cross-cultural understanding.

Offering counseling classes at the very beginning of their MBA program would enhance the Chinese students' English communication skills in the context of their academic specialization, and also help bridge the existing cultural gap at the conceptual level. The counseling class would provide an overview of the roles of the socio-political organizations in Canadian society and their relationship with, and impact on private sector organizations. The class would cover "Canadian society" and the relationship between socio-political organizations and private sector organizations. Such classes would point their study into the right direction and provide orientation, at the same time introducing the Canadian sociocultural background. The emphasis would be on acquiring new conceptual knowledge, such as on the relationship between the government and private business. For example, attending such a counseling class would help the students re-conceptualize their idea of employment as they know it from China.

In China, as a result of the recent economic reforms, private business is just starting to develop, and many Chinese people have a hard time accepting this trend. After graduating from Eastern Canada University as an MBA, most of the Chinese YES-Canada students will become business managers in China. Therefore, counseling courses would be an ideal basis both for a successful MBA study, and for their future work assignments. At the same time, attending this course would allow the Chinese MBA students to acquire technical terms and new vo-

cabulary in their academic context. instead of learning vocabulary as an isolated task.

6.3.3 Designing Programs According to International Students' Needs

In general, socioculturally relevant topics need to be stressed when training international students from China on MBA programs. First, the major dimensions of the economic, social, legal, political and technological environment of organizations in the Canadian social context should be emphasized. Second, the governmental and bureaucratic structures and the instruments of the State influencing business decisions (subsidies, taxes, regulations etc.) should be explained. Third, the ways and means which private sector organizations and society in general use to modify the socio-political environment and influence government's decisions (lobbying, pressure- and interest groups) should be discussed, including the ethical and technical limits of these interventions.

In regard to re-arranging the sequence of the courses, the Chinese students could first take courses that center on mathematics, such as Statistics, Finance, Accounting, and Economics. During the later part of their program they would take Governance (ADM 5210), Organizational Behavior (ADM 5230) and Strategy and the Role of the General Manager (ADM 5260). The three courses mentioned last demand a high level of communicative competence, and the students'

familiarity with sociocultural factors acquired in the initial courses would be an asset for their successful attendance.

To enhance the Chinese students' English communication skills, IT (Information Technology) could be employed to a larger degree on the MBA program, specifically in the form of reading comprehension software such as on-line dictionaries. Most of the publications relevant to the students' MBA work can be found in an electronic format on the Internet, and are therefore accessible to analysis through such software tools. For example, a Chinese/ English electronic on-line dictionary would completely solve the vocabulary problem, allowing the students to understand and acquire new words instantly in their authentic context. Learning English is a daily process, and besides IT-based readings the Chinese students should get recommendations to watch certain TV programs that can help them understand the Canadian sociocultural background.

When designing training programs for international students, a Canadian institution has to first determine the students' needs. For example, the Chinese students on the Canadian MBA program were content-oriented towards business administration knowledge and skills. They wanted to be better equipped for their future administrative tasks in China. They considered improving their English an ongoing activity, and did not expect to achieve native-like English-language proficiency during their MBA program. Their main goal in Canada was to grasp the concepts of western business, management and administration. Therefore, a re-

search-based, academic subject- and concept-oriented training program is needed, which addresses the needs and expectations of the Chinese students.

Firth & Wagner (1997) call for research that takes place outside the second language classroom and views non-native speakers as language users. According to Firth & Wagner (1997), non-native speakers tend to be taken as language learners rather than language users. Thus, most socially oriented studies relating to language research tend to focus on the second and foreign language classroom, neglecting social factors of emic relevance.

In recent years scholars have increasingly conducted ethnographic studies that either deal with younger language learners, such as Delgado Gaitan's (1990) work, which was concerned with children in grade 2 and grade 3 from Mexican Spanish-speaking families; or they deal with adult immigrants, like Bell's (2001) work on language socialization of unemployed workers from a variety of language backgrounds. Similarly, Peirce's (1993) study involved immigrants with diverse language backgrounds.

The present study adds to the body of research on cross-cultural communication by revealing insights into the underlying cultural presuppositions of international graduate students. With its focus on language use in real-world settings, the scope of this study has been wider than conventional speech act research. Moreover, not only has it highlighted the educational and social implications of miscommunication, but it has provided information that may have useful

lessons for higher education policy *vis à vis* graduate students from China and other foreign countries.

6.4 Areas for Future Research

More research concerning cultural issues of international students is needed in the area of higher education of graduate students studying in Canada. Misunderstanding, miscommunication and misinterpretation can be due to social factors and cultural differences. The ethnographic approach used in the present study has given us the inspiration to consider other sociocultural factors relevant to misunderstanding and miscommunication, in particular ethnocentrism and racism as they have been identified by Stanley (2000; 2001) as strong background forces within the Eurocentric Canadian tradition.

Although issues of racism were not in the focus of this study, they were addressed briefly when they seemed relevant to the research questions. Specifically, in the case of the Chinese MBA students, perceived ethnic and race-related impediments affected their relationship and co-operation with their Canadian peers, by causing them not to perform to their full capacity. In the course of this study, certain ethnic and race-related issues emerged, which were related to the systemic social factors. Often, the Chinese students' lack of confidence in real-life interaction contributed to their misunderstanding and miscommunication in the Canadian social context. They were reluctant, or hesitant, to initiate conversations

or discussions with Canadians, due to their *a priori* assumption that the Canadians would not accept them, and joined activities involving only their fellow Chinese.

The significant social and educational implications of future research about Chinese students in the Canadian academic and social context become apparent in view of the growing numbers of Chinese students attending Canadian universities. According to Statistics Canada (Statistics Canada, August, 2001), during the year of 1999 as many as 2,310 Chinese nationals came to Canada on student visas. While Statistics Canada had no figures available for the year 2000, another source (Zhonghua Daobao, May 25, 2001) states that the number of Chinese students coming to Canada has significantly increased during the year 2000. For example, over the past two years, the international student body at the University of New Brunswick has increased to 350; among these, 300 students are from the People's Republic of China (Zhonghua Daobao, May 4, 2001).

The number of students coming to Canada is likely to increase. Chinese students are attracted to Canada by the comparative difficulty of getting a U.S. student visa, and the high tuition fees and inconsistent standards at U.S. universities. In contrast, Canadian universities have a reputation for educational quality, comparatively low fees, and high social benefits. Canada (along with Australia, New Zealand and Britain) is one of the countries that make it easy for Chinese students to come in large numbers (Zhonghua Daobao, May 25, 2001).

In dealing with MBA students from China we must take into account that business in China has been state-run for half a century, and goods and services are being distributed and controlled by the government. Considering the recent gradual introduction of private business practices in China, the Chinese MBA students are learning the skills and knowledge needed in China.

The social and economic changes that are taking place in China will further increase the need for managers trained in western countries. The good employment prospects for western-trained managers in China are attracting a steadily growing number of Chinese students to Canada for study, especially on MBA programs. The findings of my cross-cultural study may be helpful in administering future Chinese student groups. The study further intends to contribute to a better understanding of cross-cultural communication, and will hopefully be of value for language and business training programs.

After graduating, the Chinese MBA students will take the management knowledge and skills they acquired at Eastern Canada University back to China with them. This will continue to bring more changes to Chinese business administration and practice, and eventually to Chinese society. Economic progress in China will further bring about political reforms.

The participants in the present study were students from Mainland China who attended the MBA program of Eastern Canada University. Considering the sociocultural background of the Chinese and how it affects their lives and studies

in Canada, more research on the adjustment of international students to higher education settings is needed. Such studies need to include tracking students who have gone home, to examine how they benefited from Canadian training and education, and to determine how successful they are in their work in their home country. Further research also needs to examine dropout students who failed and returned home, and their life stories in Canada.

The present study has shown that some students experienced "culture shock" to such a degree that they wanted to leave their programs. Therefore, high priority should be given to research that further examines the adaptation difficulties encountered by international students in Canada. In particular, the focus of such future research should be on the adjustment of international students to settings of higher education as it relates to their ethnic and cultural background, their Canadian peers and their host institutions. Generally speaking, in view of the ongoing trend of Chinese students coming to study in Canada, future research must address the question what can be done to eliminate barriers and facilitate adjustment, and what orientation programs can be provided to equip students from China and other international students for success in the Canadian university environment.

Appendix A: Sample Interview Questions

Background information and experience in China

- Can you describe your communication and interaction with North Americans when you were in China? Specifically, were you confident about your command of English?
- Were sociocultural factors an issue in your communication with North Americans?
- Were there any examples of miscommunication or misunderstanding with North Americans?
- Did you experience any cross-cultural differences in business dealings between the Chinese and North Americans?

The experience at Eastern Canada University

- Is there any need for a Chinese to get adapted to the North American environment?
- Do you communicate with Canadians and Chinese differently or in the same manner?
- What are the key points to which Chinese should pay attention when dealing with Canadians?
- Do you speak differently when speaking with Chinese and Canadians? If so, can you describe it in more detail?

- Have you ever experienced any culture shock in Canada?

Questions on incidents that I observed during my fieldwork

General questions

- Do you think the cultural differences between China and Canada might influence cross-cultural interaction in business settings?
- What advice would you give to someone who just came from China or who is going to China and does not know much about the North American or Chinese culture, or has little experience with North American or Chinese business professionals?
- When the Chinese speak English, do you notice that the Chinese culture is reflected in their speech?
- Is it easy or difficult for a Chinese to get adapted to the Canadian environment? Did you encounter cross-cultural incongruities or gaps in your dealings with Canadians?

Appendix B: Questionnaire

(The Questionnaire was administered on 26 May, 2000, to 42 Chinese MBA students at the Faculty of Administration, University of Ottawa)

Questionnaire to be filled out by the Chinese MBA students at the Faculty of Administration, University of Ottawa

Research Project approved by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board (SSHREB) on January 3rd, 2000 (File 12-99-03)

1. Are you holding a Bachelor's degree?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Other Certificate

2. If yes, what was your major?

.....

3. Did you have an English language basis before coming to Canada?

☐ No ☐ Yes

If yes, when did you start to learn English in China?

☐ Elementary ☐ Middle School ☐ High School ☐ University ☐ Special training

4. Rate your confidence in English communication with Canadians.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
(strong) (weak)

5. I have experienced miscommunication caused by cultural differences.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
(strong) (weak)

6. I need to acquire cross-cultural interaction skills, for a better understanding.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
(strong) (weak)

7. Are your communications skills sufficient for the MBA Program?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
(strong) (weak)

8. Check one of the following:

☐ I still need to take English language courses.

☐ I prefer improving my English through attending the MBA subject-related courses.

9. Real-life language interaction with Canadians

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☐ 5

(important)

(not important)

10. Do you notice cultural differences when exposed to a Canadian environment?

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☐ 5

(very much)

(not at all)

11. Which of the following are more important for your MBA studies? (please check two items)

☐ Academic subject study ☐ ESL counseling ☐ Awareness of cultural differences

12. Did you have any work experience in China?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If yes, how much work experience did you have?

☐ Less than one year ☐ 1-2 years ☐ 2-4 Years ☐ more than 4 years

13. In your prior work experience, did you deal with English-speaking business people?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If yes, was cultural understanding an issue in your English communication?

☐ Yes

☐ No

14. Miscommunication is often due to cultural factors.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☐ 5

(strong)

(weak)

15. Is a Chinese/Canadian cross-cultural seminar necessary throughout the ESL program?

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☐ 5

(strong)

(weak)

16. Adding French in as part of enculturation at the bilingual University of Ottawa.

agement engineering, linguistics, mechanic engineering, civil engineering, mechanical engineering, medicine, advertising, finance, accounting, international trade, information management, architecture, history, polymer science and engineering.

3. All of them had an English-language basis before coming to Canada. 57% of the Chinese MBA students had started learning English while in Middle School (grade 6 or 7); 41% of the Chinese MBA students had started learning English while in elementary school, and 2% had started learning English while in high school.
4. On a scale of five, 9% chose to be very confident, 9% chose the second scale, 57% chose the third scale, 25% chose the fourth scale. This confirms that the Chinese students need more real-life practice in communication.
5. Miscommunication due to cultural differences: 5% chose the first scale, 33% chose the second scale, 52% chose the middle scale, and 10% chose the fourth scale. This result complies with the students' complaints about their isolation.
6. Regarding the acquiring cross-cultural interaction skills, it seems that a quarter of the students strongly advocate acquiring such skills: 24% chose the first scale, 19% chose the second scale, 35% chose the middle scale, and 21% chose the fourth scale. It seems

that a quarter of the students are for acquiring communication skills.

7. Sufficient communication skills for MBA program: 31% chose sufficient, 61% chose the second scale, and 8% chose the third scale. The majority consider their communication skills as basically sufficient.
8. In answering questionnaire # 8, only 5% wanted to take English language courses, and 95% prefer learning English within their MBA courses.
9. The questionnaire data show that most of the Chinese MBA students (93% of them chose the first scale) want to have access to real-life language interaction with Canadians; in other words, they want to have English language interaction within a real-life peer relationship inside and outside the classroom, not a student/teacher relationship.

Based on their experience, the Chinese students agreed that their Canadian peers were advantaged in their studies through their familiarity with the Canadian social context. For example, discussing Canada bonds, the Canadian students could easily understand and explain the concepts of capital gain and capital loss, because of their Canadian free-market-economy background. For the Chinese

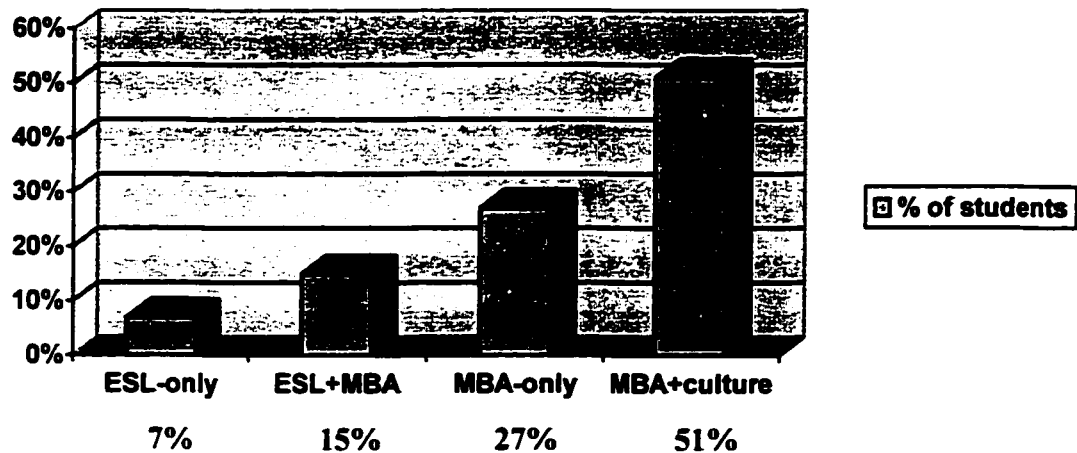
students who came from a society with a different economic structure, these concepts were intrinsically alien and abstract. When the professor wrote formulas on the blackboard to demonstrate how to calculate capital gain and loss, with interest rates, length of investment and investment amount, the Chinese students actively participated and followed closely.

Once the Chinese students had a firm grip on the meaning of a concept introduced in the lecture, they were able to put their ideas in writing. The questionnaire data show that most of the Chinese MBA students want to have access to real-life language interaction with Canadians: in other words, they want to have English language interaction within a real-life peer relationship inside and outside the classroom, not within the limited frame of a student/teacher relationship. They knew that the students of the previous group, who had been immersed with Canadian students, had gained easier access to Canadian society and Canadian background knowledge, which directly or indirectly enhanced their academic progress.

10. Awareness of cultural differences: 61% chose the first scale, and 39% chose the second scale.

11. According to my questionnaire data, only 7% of the Chinese MBA students thought ESL session was important, 15% wanted to combine their academic subject study with ESL counseling, 27% wanted to concentrate only on their academic work, and 51% thought the combination of academic study with awareness of cultural differences was important.

Figure 6: Relative Importance of the ESL, MBA and Cultural Awareness Components in the Students' Opinion

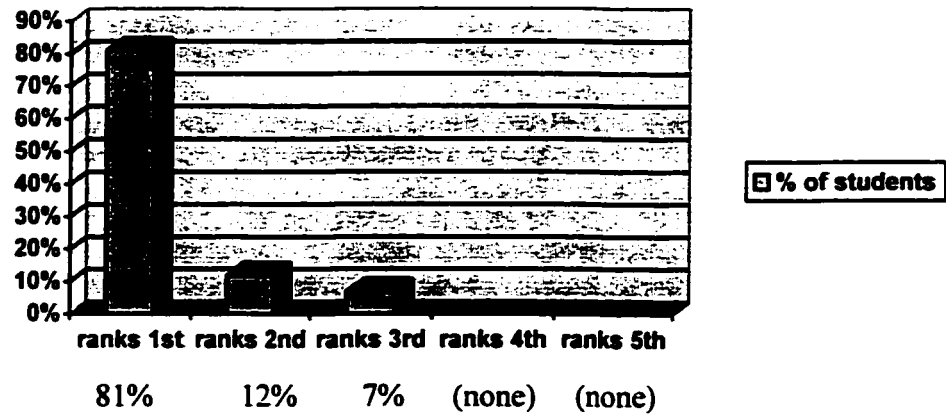


12. 98% had worked in China after graduating from university. Among those, 56% had more than four years of working experience in China. 10% had 1-2 years working experience in China, 19% had 2-4 years working experience in China, 13% had less than one year of working experience in China.

13. 66% had dealt with English-speaking business people in China and they acknowledge that cultural understanding was an important issue; 34% had not dealt with English-speaking business people in China and they either marked "No" or left blank spaces.
14. During my field study, I found out that the Chinese students regarded such miscommunication as being due to personal factors, which is reflected in #14 of the questionnaire; when asked if miscommunication is often due to cultural factors, only 5% indicated a strong positive answer by marking the first scale. 25% marked the second scale, and 12% marked the third scale. This indicates the elusive nature of cross-cultural miscommunication (in interviews, miscommunication was blamed on personal factors, such as the westerners being too stubborn). However, the majority of the Chinese students claimed to be aware of cultural differences.
15. Cultural seminars were rated as important. 19% chose the first scale, 35% chose the second scale, 24% chose the third scale, 10% chose the fourth scale, 12% chose the last scale.
16. Adding French as part of acculturation at the university: 47% chose the first scale, 28% chose the second scale, and 25% chose the third. Most of them think it is the right thing to do.

17. However, the majority was not motivated to learn French. 14% chose the first scale, 10% chose the second scale, 14% chose the third, 29% chose the fourth, and 33% chose the last scale. This complies with the interviews, in which the students said they did not have enough time to learn French.
18. When asked if bicultural sessions were as important as ESL sessions, 6% strongly agreed, and 94% chose the second scale.
19. 61% think so and chose the second scale.
20. Only 6% were willing to learn French, and most of them chose the middle scale.
21. In the questionnaire, on a scale of 5 points regarding the importance of real-life interaction, 81% of the Chinese MBA students consider interacting with Canadians in naturalistic settings as very important, 12% consider it second in importance, and 7% consider it third in importance.

Figure 7: Importance of Real-Life Interaction, Ranked from the Questionnaire Data



Appendix C: Sample Letter of Informed Consent

Principal Investigator: Senquan Zhang
Affiliation: Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa
Telephone no.: 613-562-5800, ext. 4892

Whenever a research project is undertaken with human participants, the written consent of the participants must be obtained. This does not imply, of course, that the project in question necessarily involves a risk. In view of the respect owed the participants, the University of Ottawa and the research funding agencies have made this type of agreement mandatory.

The purpose of the study is: to investigate the impact of cultural differences on professional and business face-to-face communication.

If I agree to participate, I will

- ☐ attend ____ sessions, which have been scheduled from _____ to _____.
☐ fill out the enclosed questionnaire.

I will also be asked to answer interview questions. I understand that the contents will be used only for research purposes and that my confidentiality will be respected.

I understand that since this activity deals with very personal information, it may include emotional reactions which may, at times, be negative. I have received assurance from the researchers that every effort will be made to minimize these occurrences.

I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, before or during an interview, refuse to participate, and refuse to answer questions without negative consequences.

I have received assurance from the researchers that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I, in turn, assure other participants that I will treat in the same confidential manner any information I may obtain in the context of this project.

Any information requests or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project may be addressed to the Secretariat of the Ethics Committee (613-562-5800, ext. 4892). If I have any questions, I may contact Professor Richard Maclure, Tel.: 613-562-5800, ext. 4036. There are two copies of the consent form, one of which I may keep.

Participant's signature

Date

Researcher's signature

Date

Thesis Director

Date

I, _____, am interested in collaborating in the study "Sociocultural Factors in the Communication between Chinese and Canadian Professionals" conducted by Professor Maclure of the Faculty of Education of the University of Ottawa, and his assistants.

Optional: I wish to receive a summary of the findings of this study which will be available on 15 January, 2001 at the following address:

Appendix D: Example of Verbal Cross-cultural Communication

... one summer morning I met a professor with whom I had taken a course in the previous semester. I had not seen him for quite a while. As customary in my culture, I greeted him to express my friendliness. He used to look pale, but that day he really looked well with a radiant face, I said to him: "Hello, Prof. X. You are looking much better today." This professor looked at me and asked : "Am I? In what ways?" I was at a loss as to what to say, for I did know whether it was appropriate to tell him that he used to look pale as I observed it. After a moment's silence, he asked again: "Do you mean I am formally dressed?" It was a fact that he used to dress casually and today he was formally dressed. But in my culture, it was very inappropriate for a junior or subordinate (such as a student) to comment on the dress of a senior or superior (such as a teacher). I was really embarrassed by this misunderstanding. In order to get over the embarrassment, I replied: "Your face is glowing with radiance." The laughter from the secretary made me realize that I had gone from bad to worse in my effort to make the communication a success.

Yu. L. (1990). The Comprehensible Output Hypothesis and self-directed learning; A learner's perspective. *TESL Canada Journal*, 8(1), 9-26.

Appendix E: Example of Non-Verbal Cross-cultural Communication

The story is told of a teen-age Puerto Rican girl in a New York high school who was taken with a number of other girls to the principal for suspected smoking. Although there was no proof of any wrongdoing and although she had a good record, the principal decided she was guilty and suspended her. "There was something sly and suspicious about her," he said in his report. "She just wouldn't meet my eye. She wouldn't look at me."

When she was questioned by the principal it was true that she kept staring at the floor and refused to meet his eye. And in English there is a saying "Don't trust anyone who won't look you in the eye."

It so happened that one of the teachers had a Latin American background and knew about Puerto Rican culture. After talking with the girl's parents he went to the principal and explained that according to Puerto Rican culture, a good girl "does not meet the eyes of an adult." Such behavior, he explained, "is a sign of respect and obedience".

Fortunately, the principal accepted the explanation, admitted his mistake and the matter was settled properly. This difference in interpreting a simple eye gesture was a lesson in cultural diversity that he would not easily forget.

Deng, Y. & Liu, R. (1989). *Language & Culture*. Beijing: Language Teaching and Research Press. P. 145.

Appendix F: Example of Day-to-Day Cross-Cultural Communication

An American teacher in her early fifties was invited to the home of a young Chinese colleague for dinner. When she arrived, the 4-year old daughter of the hostess was presented to her. "Hello, Auntie," the little girl chirped in English. This was how her mother had taught her to greet grown-up women.

"No, no, not Auntie," the mother hurriedly corrected. "Say Granny!"

"No, no, not Granny, please. Just call me Auntie."

"But that's not polite for her. You're so much older than I am."

The American woman's face flushed a second, then she smiled and said, "Just have her call me Auntie: I'd prefer that."

Deng, Y. & Liu, R. (1989). *Language & Culture*. Beijing: Language Teaching and Research Press. P. 94.

Appendix G: Endnotes

1. Due to cross-cultural differences, Western teaching materials were misinterpreted by Chinese students as containing some mistakes - the "mistakes" were in reality unfamiliar cultural schemata and were simply disregarded, in favor of linguistic aspects such as variety of expression, paraphrase etc. In many cases, the Chinese students would simply ignore the sociocultural issues, but focus on linguistic analysis, such as grammatical analysis; the misunderstanding of the context due to cultural differences was ascribed to a printing error.
2. The English speakers working at the university in China where I worked were English native speakers from North America, England and Australia; English was the language of communication between them and their Chinese students and colleagues. Although the English spoken by the Chinese interlocutors was virtually perfect on the linguistic level, misunderstandings, miscommunication and communication breakdown still occurred. Such cross-cultural instances were mistakenly blamed by the Chinese on the "weird foreigners"; the English speakers on the other hand complained that their Chinese counterparts were "bossy and rude".
3. Later, when I worked for Canadian business entities, miscommunication issues between Chinese and Canadian professional communicators were often raised and discussed among the Canadians and the Chinese involved. In

1994, the economic relations between Canada and China were especially intense. Several Canadian government-led delegations visited China to enhance business relations and economic co-operation between the two countries. I participated in three of these missions. One of these occasions was a trade mission organized by the Canadian Minister of International Trade, consisting of approximately 50 Canadian business executives and government officials. On another occasion I attended business negotiations in China for a Canadian software company; a third one was a mission for the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, attending an international trade conference in China, and my conversations and discussions with Canadian business people and other fellow travelers naturally involved communication issues. The Canadian business people have offered valuable insights for the present study.

4. O'Konek, an American manager working in a Chinese environment with Chinese employees and colleagues, encountered communication problems that were not due to language, but to culture. Chinese culture makes it hard for western managers to work with the Chinese because the Chinese do not utter critical opinions or come forward with new ideas: the Chinese culture respects seniority and further gives guests an honoured status, and foreign managers are automatically classified as both. Establishing good personal relations for doing business with each other is a characteristic of Chinese corporate culture (The Economist, 1999).

5. A lawyer from Toronto returned from a trip to China, and he asked me an interesting question: “In Shanghai, when I told people I worked as a lawyer, why was nobody getting excited?” – When I attended an event in China or the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the Chinese side assigned an assistant to me during my ten days stay in China. The assistant was a graduate from a Chinese “University of Politics and Law”, but preferred to work for the government as a nine to five rather than as an independent lawyer, although in China it is now possible to set up a private law firm.
6. I myself was involved in a business negotiation as a translator, when the Chinese side, after the contract had been signed, demanded to change the deal, which would amount to a loss for the Canadian company. Of course the Canadian company insisted on the signed agreement. Since Chinese companies are virtually all sponsored by the Chinese government, Chinese business people do not realize the direct impact of financial losses on the company itself.
7. One of my former Chinese university colleagues who had worked as the students’ mentor, was posted for four years to the Chinese embassy in Ottawa. During that time, he and his wife got to know the people with whom I associated. We frequently met and telephoned each other. Once, an English speaking Canadian asked me what was wrong with my Chinese colleague because when he called, he would start the conversation as “Can you guess who I am?” When the guess was right, my colleague was very happy. The percep-

tion of the Canadian was that my Chinese colleague was joking in a funny way, or just did not know how to properly talk on the phone. I was in similar situations before, when I picked up the phone, and one of my Chinese friends asked me the same thing - asked me to guess who the caller was. I once did not guess right since we had not spoken for some time, and the caller was disappointed complaining that I had forgotten a good friend.

8. Developing cross-cultural awareness is essential for ESL teaching staff as well, for accurately interpreting the students' problems in understanding as being due to cultural differences. When I worked as a research assistant on the teacher training program offered by the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa, I noticed two courses offered that were similar to the coursework suggested by Sauvé (1996): one on the topic of multiculturalism, the other one on the topic of racism. Therefore I completely understand and agree with Sauvé (1996). It is an important finding of the present study that such courses should be mandatory for ESL teacher training.
9. The first wave of certificates was issued to the YES-Canada graduates in June, 2000. I was invited to their graduation ceremony as a "photographer", and could see that they had achieved their demand: "YES-Canada" was not mentioned in their MBA certificates. Several students asked me to take pictures, and to make sure that the writing on the certificate would be visible.

10. Regarding the dean, many students thought he was very considerate, because now and then he would come to the lecture room and ask the professor to let him speak to the Chinese students for a few minutes. The dean would advise them not to spend days and nights only working on their papers, and not to get upset about low marks. The important goal of their studies, he said, was acquiring knowledge, not just a high mark. The Chinese students felt the dean was concerned about them, but did not expect too much care and attention from the dean, as they knew from their background at Chinese university that a dean is a very busy person.
11. This is confirmed by an article in the Chinese newspaper Shijie Ribao (22 May, 2001), where an editor admires the North American school environments when he writes "My apartment is beside a high school. Everyday when I open my window, I can see the neat classroom building, and a sportsground as big as a soccer field...the sports ground is open to public, the gates are open day and night, the residents can enter at any time to play ball games, go skating, jogging, since I live so closely to the school. I go in every morning to do Taiji ... " (p. E1).
12. A recent article explains the lobbying situation in China as follows: When China was ruled by emperors, a lobbyist, if such a person existed, would probably have been put to death. It would have been a proper punishment for a mere mortal who dared to suggest policy to the Son of Heaven. Lobbying,

if no longer a capital offence, is still a tricky affair for the many foreign companies trying to make their way in China (The Economist, 2001).

13. While metaphors from western literature formed an obstacle to understanding, the Chinese MBA students were well informed about the U.S. economy: they knew it was “overheated,” it was going “too fast”, and they were aware of the inflation in the U.S., although they had not been there. When I returned from a three-day trip from New York, one of the students asked me if I had noticed any inflation indicating that the economy was “too hot” in the U.S. Obviously, through attending the MBA program, the Chinese students were better informed about the U.S. economy than I, who just had returned from a trip to the U.S. I had to admit “Ah, now I know why everything seemed so expensive to me”; I noticed that I had not linked the high prices in New York with the overall situation of the U.S. economy. One of the Chinese students commented that this was part of their studies, and they therefore paid close attention to international business and economics.
14. In context of this instance of cross-cultural communication, the following background observation from my own experience may illustrate how the age/generation concept is viewed in China: during my elementary school years in China, one day a classmate who was considered a “bad” and troublesome boy came to class late, after the classroom door had already been blocked by the teacher; the boy could not push the door open, so he yelled

through the glass window of the closed door at the teacher "Why don't you open the door for your uncle!" This was clearly addressing the teacher, because the students were not allowed to leave their desks, and the only person who could open the door was the teacher. It was a real insult to the teacher - it would be an insult for anyone in the teacher's situation. The teacher got angry and devoted a lengthy period of time to criticize him publicly, presenting his behaviour as a negative example to the class, and later informed his parents of his abusive and rude behavior. His "rudeness" did not lie in his yelling at the teacher, but in referring to himself as the teacher's uncle

15. The YES-Canada students celebrated Chinese New Year in an "unconventional" manner:

The Chinese New Year Party took place off campus, in a downtown Ottawa location at the "Air Force Officers' Mess". The Chinese MBA students' class monitor had asked me to join them but was concerned that I would not find the place, so he called me at home to describe the location. He offered to buy a ticket for me in order to tell me indirectly that the party arranged by the YES-Canada organizers cost an entrance fee; I thanked him for his information, but told him I could take care of everything myself.

On New Year's Eve, when I arrived at the address where the party was scheduled to take place, it looked like the side entrance of an apartment building. I verified the address, but still hesitated to enter, waiting to ask

someone if this was the right place. After entering, I saw a man sitting in the hallway selling tickets; beside him on a chair there was a full mug of beer and tickets he was selling at \$5.00 each; there was another man behind a counter who told me to leave my coat with him; he put it on a hanger on a clothes rack. for \$2.00.

The following conversation between myself and the person in charge of selling tickets shows the confused situation. Before buying a ticket, I asked the ticket-seller "Where is the Chinese party?" He thumbed over his shoulder; all I saw there was a dark room with tables and chairs, like a dining hall. Since I did not see any decorations or similar sign of a Chinese New Year's party. I thought he probably made a mistake; murmuring "But it doesn't look like a party" I turned away. ready to continue looking for the right room. The man quickly said "It is the party room, you buy a ticket and have a beer". I then pointed at the mug of beer on the chair beside him and asked "Is this beer for me?" He laughed and, lifting the mug, said "this is my beer, you go in and get yours at the counter". To me, this improvised setup was quite confusing.

I bought a ticket. After entering the door, I found myself in a dining hall where only a few Chinese students were present, sitting together with the ESL instructor; most of them had not arrived yet. After I had greeted everyone, we started chatting. We went to the bar and ordered drinks; beer and

juice were available for a couple of dollars each; we each bought a drink and returned to our seats. Rock music was playing.

One of the Chinese students sitting next to the ESL instructor suggested going together to the bar to buy another drink. Waiting in line to pay, she said to me:

"I wonder why we had to come so far in the biting cold, we could have gone to the university bar on campus! There is nothing here related to Chinese New Year, it is just like a nightclub in Guangzhou."

I wanted to find an answer to this comment and went to the coat clerk, a friendly elderly black man; I asked him "Was this place rented for the party?" He answered yes, and I continued "For what purpose do people choose this place?" He then explained that the place was not expensive to rent, and the drinks were cheaper than in bars.

A couple of Chinese female students had come in traditional Chinese dresses, and one of them expressed her surprise about the setting as follows:

"I came here in this (Chinese) dress which was tailor-made for the Chinese New Year's celebration. Had I known it's like this, I would have put on my jeans, not this dress. I did not expect to dance disco in a tight Chinese dress."

When another female student was invited to dance, she said:

“How can I dance in such a dress! Only a few steps would tear it and wreck it completely.”

The neat traditional Chinese dresses are made from silk and very delicate. The students put on the dress for a special occasion, but not for dancing in a nightclub-like setting.

The event was intended to make the Chinese students feel at home; however, the party was like spending any evening with friends, with lots of beer. One of the Chinese students at the party did not think it was anything special:

“I often went to places like this with my friends after work. This is like a regular nightclub in Shenzhen. Nowadays, nightclubs are getting common in China.”

Further happenings on the same evening showed that the atmosphere in a Chinese-Canadian church was more acceptable for a Chinese New Year's party than a beer-bar. A number of Chinese students arrived late at the party. One of them had had interviews with me before, and she had always been optimistic about her future in China. She looked forward to working in China after graduation, and thought she would have better opportunities in a trading company in China than in Canada, because “business is faster in China.” When she entered the bar, she saw me with the other Chinese students, came over and told me in a happy and excited voice:

"I had a wonderful time in our Chinese church celebrating Chinese New Year. We (she and other Chinese students) went to New Year's dinner at a Chinese church. It was so much fun. you should have come to have dinner with us."

I asked her: "What did you have for dinner?" As I expected, they had been served "Sweet dumplings", which are a typical snack on New Year's Eve in southern China. I joked "but I am a Northerner!" Northerners traditionally have salty meat dumplings for New Year's dinner, instead of the Southerners' sweet dumplings. The student who had had dinner at the Chinese church answered quickly, "You would also find Northerners' food there." Her happy remarks show the importance of Chinese church as a social institution - without it the Chinese students would have been deprived of their traditional Chinese New Year's celebration.

During the New Year's party at the Air Force Officer's Mess. I had noticed a new face among the Chinese party attendees. He turned out to be a student from another faculty. During our conversation, he started reminiscing about a Chinese New Year's party held two years earlier: This previous party had been arranged and prepared by the Chinese Students' Organization at Eastern Canada University, and it took place in the university cafeteria on campus; the Education Attaché of the Chinese embassy in Ottawa had also been invited to join the celebration. The event was in walking distance for

students at Eastern Canada University, and had a Chinese New Year's atmosphere through the music, games, performances and snacks. In contrast, the New Year's party in the Air Force Officers' Mess might look like a New Year's party from a Canadian point of view, with music and beer, but in the eyes of the Chinese students attending, the New Year's component was absent.

The instance of the Chinese New Year's party indicates how cultural barriers can sometimes be reinforced accidentally, despite the good intentions of the organizers. Whenever this happened, the Chinese students had to look for security and solidarity elsewhere, and some of them found it within the Chinese-Canadian sector of society, in church. Without the active role of the Chinese-Canadian church organizations, the Chinese MBA students would have nowhere to turn for consolation. At the same time, the availability of the Chinese-Canadian church to the Chinese MBA students was only available due to Canadian multiculturalism.

In this particular instance of Chinese New Year's celebration, the cultural expectations of the students had not been taken into account. In the social context of a Chinese New Year's party the cross-cultural conflict was not as serious as it could be in other, more crucial situations. However, the instance corroborates how cultural incongruities in the Chinese MBA students'

academic context, if not identified as conceptual issues, could lead to the wrong impression that the Chinese students were not performing well.

16. I myself have been to English-Canadian churches, together with a Canadian colleague. On one occasion when we arrived at the church, the priest was standing at the church door and shook hands with each visitor who went in. At the end of his sermon, he dedicated a few words of welcome to my Canadian colleague who had returned from China, and also to me as a newcomer. I remember this was a very nice experience.

A recent instance from my own experience shows that the Chinese student's worry not to be "accepted" was unnecessary: in a house in the North of Québec, close to St. Jérôme, where there were few Chinese, but only French speaking Québécois. My doorbell rang; an elderly man introduced himself as representing a local church and handed me a calendar with biblical pictures. Of course he noticed my Asian ethnic appearance and my non native like French, but this did not prevent him from inviting me to join the activities of his church: he pointed at several addresses printed in the calendar, telling me where to go.

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