"Be myself":

Experiences of the post-90s of Chinese International Students in Canadian

Universities

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EXPERIENCES OF THE POST-90S OF CHINESE INTERNATIONAL

STUDENTS IN CANADA UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to understand the experiences of a new generation of Chinese international students in Canadian universities and the role of their identities in shaping such experiences, including their resistance toward stereotypes. Data was collected through semi-structural, in-depth interviews with eight international students who were studying at universities in Southern Ontario, were from mainland China and were born during 1990s. The study leads to several major findings. First, these students did not necessarily internalize stereotypes about Chinese international students, China and Chinese culture from other groups, producing from lack of culture exchange, language barrier, cultural difference and the biased mass media, and that they also made their efforts to change this situation. Second, participants appeared to have different relationships with three groups in Chinese student communities. Third, informal support from individual social network was perceived much more effective than formal services on campus. Fourth, they viewed challenges they had experienced as a process of growth, and advanced technology and globalization also helped them to better adapt to the new environment. Across these findings, there is a dynamic relationship between these students' experiences in Canadian universities and their identities in relation to their national, ethno-cultural, generational and international backgrounds. Although their generally positive and critical thinking on their experiences of studying abroad is related to their generation-related resources, common challenges they collectively encountered also indicate the importance of accessible institutional support.

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CHAPTER 1   INTRODUCTION

At 0.4 million China is now the largest source country of international students throughout the world. Most are in developed Western countries, such the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, France, Australia, and New Zealand (Wang & Miao, 2013, P.15-16). According to Canada's International Education Strategy official document, in 2012, 80,638 Chinese students were studying in Canada, comprising 30.4% of that country's total international student population. They have contributed at least 2.56 billion Canadian dollars through paying for tuition, books, accommodation, meals, and transportation, and on discretionary spending (Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada, 2014). Another provincial official report, published by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, shows that from 2000 to 2012 Canada received 711,548 international students, 252,819 (35%) of whom went to Ontario. The total number of international students in Ontario had increased from 13,357 in 2000 to 32,416 by 2012; 8557 (26.4%) of them were from China (Williams. K., Williams, G., Arbuckle, Walton-Roberts & Hennebry, 2015).

Studies to date of Chinese international students have revealed many of the difficulties they face. With English as their second language, with the pedagogical differences between China and Western countries, and with various cross-cultural challenges, their social interaction is significantly affected, and they are disadvantaged by

inequalities both in controls exercised at the border and in higher education systems (Findlay & Köhler, 2010; Pan, Wong, Chan & Joubert, 2008; Harrison & Peacock, 2010; Yan & Berliner, 2011; Wang et al, 2012; Zhou, Knoke & Sakamoto, 2005; Chen, Liu, Want, Jin & Renae, 2007; Chen, 2012; He & Tang, 2001; Zhang, 2007; Bai, 2008). These issues also affect their identity in environments with which Chinese international students are unfamiliar (Gill, 2007; Noels, 1996; Gu, 2009). In, particularly, social interaction, individuals reinforce and internalize the stereotypical views that other groups have of them (Koehne, 2005; Bonnot & Croizet, 2007), and are ostracized from the host society (Hsieh, 2006).

The current generation of students are referred to as the "millennial generation"; and in China they are almost invariably an only child as a consequence of the long-term restriction to one child per family. Some Chinese believe their millennial generation are typically selfish, emotional, and vulnerable (Han, 2010; Wang, 2015; Zhou, 2013; Lu and Yang, 2011; Shu and Zheng, 2011; Yi, Ribbens & Morgan, 2010). Some have chosen to study in Western countries, and some Chinese international students are being reported in both Chinese and Western media as failing to graduate, or as displaying a tendency to get into trouble through drinking, drug use, bullying, driving dangerously and, even, by committing murders (Bai, 2008). Their advantages, on the other hand, include having learned about Western culture, having learned its languages, and having had the

experience of studying abroad; the means through which they have obtained this knowledge and experience encompass all available sources, such as the media, the Internet, and previous generations of Chinese international students (Han, 2010; Wang, 2015; Zhou, 2013; Lu and Yang, 2011; Shu and Zheng, 2011; Yi, Ribbens & Morgan, 2010).

The topic of Chinese international students' experiences is also relevant to social work, as a profession, and to social justice. In general, as an immigration country, historically Canada has provided a spectrum of social and health services to newcomers. Yet most of those services target skilled immigrants and refugees; the services for international students are often viewed as the responsibility of the host universities. Furthermore, immigration and education policies in Western counties do not benefit international students (Chen, Liu, Want, Jin & Renae, 2007; He & Tang, 2001; Williams. K., Williams, G., Arbuckle, Walton-Roberts & Hennebry, 2015).

Chinese international students who are growing up in the new milieu of rapid development of the economy, advances in science and technology, and globalization in China have different perspectives on their experiences in Canadian universities. Those experiences include difficulties in their studies and their lives, and some of those difficulties affect how they perceive themselves and others. The challenges, as scholars have summarized them, and negative stereotypes on the part of local people disadvantage

Chinese international students, and their own opinions of how they understand and deal with these issues is a question that will be explored in this study. An understanding of how inequalities in the institutions, education system, and cultural differences affect Chinese international students in Canada, and whether current support for them meets their needs will be also discovered. Finally, it is my hope that universities and society will create a more inclusive learning and living environment for future international students, of whom the Chinese are just one group. Therefore, in this study I am interested in exploring the following three interconnected **research questions**:

> a) What are the experiences of a new generation of Chinese international students in Canadian universities?
>
> b) How do their identities, including those new ones in the new environment, affect their experiences?
>
> c) How do their experiences contribute to our understanding and pursuit of the inclusive learning environment for international students in Canadian universities?

This thesis consists of seven chapters. The next chapter presents the theoretical framework in this study, considering both interpretive social science and critical social science. The theories of identity are also adopted to guide this study. In the following chapter I present a review of the literature on Chinese international students' experiences in Western universities, the issues of their identities, and the characteristics of the new generation. I also identify knowledge gaps in the literature. Chapter four focuses on methodology, including the recruitment process, ethical considerations, participants'

demographics, interviews, and data analysis. Then the next chapter presents the findings

reports Chinese international students' experiences in Canadian universities, including

their understanding of and reflections on stereotypes, their relationships with Chinese

student communities, and their access to informal and formal support, as well as their

growth through studying overseas. In chapter six, referring to the main findings I discuss

the relationship between Chinese students' experiences in Canadian universities, their

identities (including new identity formation) and social inequalities. Finally, chapter

seven concludes the results of the findings, and suggests some implications and

directions for future research, as well as limitations of this study.

CHAPTER 2   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The goal of this study is to understand Chinese international students' experiences, including the role in those of their identities, in Canadian universities. Their experiences of, feelings about, attitudes toward, and reflections on a variety of events in a number of situations are, in part, a result of interacting with others through their daily lives. The design of this research project is mainly informed by the theory of Interpretive Social Science (ISS), which is described below:

> [It focuses on a] systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct detailed observation of people in natural settings in order to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds (Neuman, 1997, p. 68).

Interpretive Social Science emphasizes the experience of individuals, and how to assign meaning in shifting conditions, and views the contexts as essential to understand social meaning (Neuman, 1997). It is impossible to understand Chinese international students' experiences if we isolate them from both the individual and institutional contexts in which they take place (such as Canadian universities) and these students' prior experiences in China. The specific situation of their experiences can help us to interpret their social realities in a contextualized way.

As one of the research questions concerns the changes in social and university policies towards international students, the perspective of Critical Social Science (CSS)

was also adopted in this study. Critical social science "goes beyond surface illusions to uncover the real structures in the material world in order to help people change conditions and build a better world for themselves" (Neuman, 1997, p. 74). It states that social reality is shaped by society, politics, cultures, and other factors, but it can change through conflict (Neuman, 1997). It also argues for the coexistence of an observable surface reality and deep structures or unobserved mechanisms (Neuman, 1997). Therefore, the aims of this study are not only to present Chinese international students' understanding of their identities, but also to uncover the social inequalities affecting international students, and create a friendlier and more accessible learning and living environment.

Theories of identity are also useful in this study; in particular, for my second research question. Fook (2012) cites Sands' conceptions of self and identity as "an internal sense of personality integration and continuity that encompasses one's life history, accrued identification and values, and relationships with others" (p.83), and illustrates that there are two aspects of the self - the 'internal' and the 'external'. She also presents some main structural categories in social identities from a social work perspective, such as race, class, gender, life history, ethnicity, age, and health, among others (Fook, 2012). Identity can change under different types of influence, such as early family relationships and cultural and historical contexts, because people interact, or have

the capacity to act back upon and influence each other, and it is out of such things that identities arise (Fook, 2012). The interactions with others make 'I' become 'Me', through individual's notion of the looking-glass self, "claiming that the individual's evaluation of himself is determined by his self-feeling, relating to his perception of other people's evaluations of him", and the differences between "I" and "Me" are: "the 'I' represents the perception of oneself as reflected by shared meanings and values of others", but "the 'Me' representing the incorporated attitudes of generalized others as they are imposed by societal constraints" (Luzio-Lockett, 1998, p,212).

Hall (1996) thinks identities are the product of the marking of difference and exclusion in specific historical and institutional sites, with the play of specific modalities of power. The differences are important in creating the category of the 'other', which they need in order to define and distinguish the groups to which they belong (Fook, 2012). Hsieh (2006) also writes, "we not only produce our identities through the practices we engage in, but we also define ourselves through practices we do not engage in. Our identities are constituted not only by what we are but by what we are not" (p.875).

An outside observer's knowledge, beliefs, and expectancies about a social group can, however, produce stereotypes (Spencer-Rodgers, 2001), and they will limit and direct, in part, individuals' opinions about the group, and the habitual performance of their own identities (Fincher, 2011). Stereotypes structurally reflect differences in ability and

personality traits between groups, and reinforce social inequality toward dominated

groups (Bonnot & Croizet, 2007). It is a process of incorporation of negative social views

in the self-concept, comprising three steps: awareness of outgroup bias, agreement, and

internalization (Bonnot & Croizet, 2007). Haugh's (2008) application of the

communication theory of identity (CTI) to the study of international students' identities is

premised on the assumption that identities are discursively developed through social

interaction.

In addition to the effect of the opinions of "others" on the construction of identity,

the lack of a feeling of familiarity contributes to a crisis for individuals in a new

environment. Anderson (1994) suggested that individuals will incorporate both the old

and the new selves through making the unfamiliar familiar and adapting to the new

environment. Chinese international students, as newcomers in Canadian universities,

need a period in which they can adapt to a new language and a new pedagogical and

social-cultural environment, and this can impact their identities. The communication

theory of identity also asks researchers to integrate "macro" and "micro" level

perspectives on identity by considering identity both in interaction and in institutions or

groups (Haugh, 2008). Fincher (2008) emphasized the importance of understanding

identity formation and presentation as situated in particular contexts in order to see group

or individual characteristics as changeable in response to contexts and settings. Students

are enacting and self-narrating to give their lives coherence in association with their past selves and evolving selves, through selective taking on board of features of these local institutional settings (Fincher, 2008). These ideas will help me understand the role of Chinese international students' identities in their social interaction with others in Canadian universities.

CHAPTER 3   LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter I analyze some main aspects of the related literature to date, and also identify the knowledge gaps. Specifically, I review the literature on three themes: major challenges faced by Chinese international students in the new environment; their identity struggles; and the notion of the millennial generation. The experiences of the "older" generations of Chinese international students are not only relevant to the focus of this project; they also provide a reference to compare the experiences of the new generation. The knowledge of these students' identity struggles sheds light on how individuals know themselves and interact with others in an unfamiliar environment. The literature on the "millennial generation", moreover, can show their characteristics, weaknesses, and strengths, which are integral to the socio-cultural context of the Chinese international students' experiences under study.

Major challenges in the new environment

Scholars from China and Western countries have studied Chinese international students, and analyzed the challenges faced by Chinese international students. The major challenges in the literature are language barriers, a new pedagogical environment, cultural adaption or adjustment, and inequality related issues.

First, language should be a direct tool in communication to obtain information and exchange opinions. Chinese international students, however, viewed speaking English as a barrier to learning and living (Chen, Liu, Want, Jin & Renae, 2007; Chen, 2012; He & Tang, 2001). They reacted to professors' questions more slowly than their English-speaking peers, and had less confidence about speaking out in the classroom (Zhou, Knoke & Sakamoto, 2005). Yan and Berliner (2011) found that language insufficiency impaired the ability of Chinese students in the US to understand ideas and to acquire knowledge, leading to serious stress in their interaction with their professors, and undermining their academic scores.

In addition, for Chinese international students the differences between Chinese and other Western countries' educational institutes in learning, teaching, and testing were an inevitable challenge (He & Tang, 2001; Bai, 2008; Gill, 2007). They were unaccustomed to interacting with professors in English-speaking universities who did not supervise students very strictly (Chen, Liu, Want, Jin & Renae, 2007; Chen, 2012). They had to adapt to Western pedagogical methods that emphasize independence, participation, and an equal relationship between students and teachers, unlike the Chinese styles that expect passive reception and a teacher-centred approach (Zhou, Knoke & Sakamoto, 2005; Yan & Berliner, 2011).

Many studies also revealed a common phenomenon: most Chinese students have

enormous difficulty with acculturation adjustment in Western countries (Findlay & Köhler, 2010; Pan, Wong, Chan & Joubert, 2008; Harrison & Peacock, 2010; Yan & Berliner, 2011; Wang et al, 2012; Zhou, Knoke & Sakamoto, 2005; Chen, Liu, Want, Jin & Renae, 2007; Chen, 2012; He & Tang, 2001; Gill, 2007; Gu, 2009). Chinese international students worry about their cultural adjustment: they are interested in, but unfamiliar with, Western culture, and retain a sense of being part of Chinese culture (Findlay & Köhler, 2010; He & Tang, 2001; Chen, Liu, Want, Jin & Renae, 2007; Chen, 2012). Their daily life can be affected to the point of producing physical and mental health problems (He & Tang, 2001; Pan, Wong, Chan & Joubert, 2008). To adapt, some alter their exterior manner, behaviour, and life style, rather than their interior cultural characteristics, such as religion, racial concepts, and national attitude (Chen, 2012).

Last, the creation of social inequality through the effects of external social systems on Chinese international students has also been noted by scholars. In Australia international students have experienced discrimination in their daily lives, including in their employment, through the immigration system (Chen, Liu, Want, Jin & Renae, 2007); in the UK, they have been asked to register in local police offices and to pay much higher tuition fees than domestic students, and they are denied legal part-time jobs (He and Tang, 2001). In Canada restrictions involving time and work permits for off-campus employment have hampered international students; then, "in June 2014, international

students were permitted to work off-campus for a maximum of 20 hours per week without a specific permit, effectively folding this employment opportunity into the student visa" (Williams. K., Williams, G., Arbuckle, Walton-Roberts & Hennebry, 2015, p.12). The authors of this study, however, failed to reveal the invisible social inequalities and impacts on Chinese international students.

Even though most Chinese international students have to face all of these major challenges, however, they experience variable degrees of difficulties, and have different attitudes, reactions, and ways of coping with them. Research into studying abroad shows a high degree of individual variation:

> In each individual case, biographical, affective, cognitive and circumstantial variables come into play, with students' previous language learning and aptitude impacted upon by their motivation, attitudes, anxiety, learning style and strategies, as well as by unpredictable elements, such as location, type of accommodation, and degree of contact with native speakers (Coleman, 2000, p.844-845).

He and Tang (2001) illustrate that for Chinese international students, the differences in marital status, whether or not they have children, and age and gender differences, all had both material and psychological impacts; and lack of preparation and knowledge of living and learning in Western countries create yet further problems in cultural adjustment; also, students with extroverted personalities can adapt to new environments much more easily.

Identity struggles

For Chinese international students, their perceptions of self or identity change "at the deepest level", as does "how they would like to be perceived by others each time they cross the boundary" (Gu, 2009, p.47). The unfamiliar environment leads directly to loss of the sense of belonging (Anderson, 1994). Meanwhile, through internalization stereotypes about a group's ability, personalities, and behaviours have negative impacts on the individual's identity (Bonnot & Croizet, 2007; Spencer-Rodgers, 2001; Fincher, 2011; Koehne, 2005).

Chinese international students' challenges range from the seemingly simple changes of geography, to social status – from that of a student to that of an international student. They find themselves in a new and unfamiliar environment: not only in classrooms, but also in the broader social context. "Strangeness" is encountered in both the academic and the socio-cultural contexts (Gill, 2007), and makes them become "deficient" in the Western universities (Harrison and Peacock, 2010). Some Chinese international students lack a sense of belonging (Zhou, Knoke & Sakamoto, 2005; Gu, 2009) and feel inferior in the classrooms of Western universities (Zhou, Knoke & Sakamoto, 2005). The challenges of language and cultural shock, and the differences in teaching and learning methods between China and Western countries, often turn Chinese international students

into "listeners", and make them feel isolated (Zhou, Knoke & Sakamoto, 2005; Chen, 2012), particularly when the discussions concern aspects of cultures (Harrison & Peacock, 2010). On one hand, Chinese students know little about Western culture; on the other, local students and teachers have limited knowledge of Chinese culture. In Western socio-cultural contexts, the ethnic identities of Chinese international students are also important. Self-confidence in using English and in engaging in contact with the Canadian or Chinese communities relates to increased identification with the local cultural group and decreased identification with the native ethnic group (Noels, Pon, & Clément, 1996). Some do not want to be treated as foreigners (Gu, 2009), while some identify themselves as a marginal minority in Western countries, although their internal identity is, and will always be, Chinese; they also show their love for China, in rational ways (Han, 2010).

Self-identity is also formed through social interaction with other groups. Members of a group define and distinguish the group to which they belong by identifying the ways in which they differ from other groups, and the characteristics, conversely, that they share with them (Fook, 2012). Although Chinese international students have attempted to interact with locals, it is difficult to break through the barrier of lack of common interests and cultural difference (Koehne, 2005), and English language problems (Hsieh, 2006). The samenesses and differences force international students to see themselves as 'other', and they reinforce the binarism of the division between local and international students

(Koehne, 2005). Then their identity negotiation may become more challenging (Hsieh, 2006). In the eyes of Westerners, Chinese international students have a certain reputation: of being hard working, smart, quiet, submissive, always in the company of other Chinese, friendly, maladjusted, unsociable, and disciplined, among other things, and they are summarized by the mass media and by observation of previous and current Chinese international students (Chalmers & Volet, 1997; Roth & Ritter, 2015; Findlay & Köhler, 2010; Ruble & Zhang, 2013; Shi, 2006; Clark & Gieve, 2006). Although overall attitudes toward international students are positive, the negative stereotypes may contribute to unfavourable intercultural contacts between international and domestic students (Spencer-Rodgers, 2001). Some Americans' assumptions of cultural superiority have rendered international students incompetent in the host society, and they have reconstructed their identities within the frame of exclusion (Hsieh, 2006). Current international students bear much pressure from this kind of reputation which they do not have (Roth & Ritter, 2015). Koehne (2005), moreover, was concerned that stereotyping assumptions may lead to danger in dealing with students as racial groups.

Some studies used the terms "client" or "consumer" to describe international students' identity against the background of globalization and marketization in educational fields (Gill, 2007; Gu, 2009; Harrison & Peacock, 2010). Universities have a new function in addition to education and research: commercialization (Häyrinen-

Alestalo & Peltola, 2006). Market-oriented management has resulted in higher education being re-conceptualized from a social good to a commodity to be bought and sold (Todd et al, 2015). In the UK education is a commodity, and students' problems and needs are regarded as an aspect of after-sale "client care" (Gill, 2007); "international students are a group of key consumers" (Gu, 2009); and higher education views them as academic "tourists" or "consumers" (Harrison & Peacock, 2010). International students reject this, and do not want to be 'customers' of a higher education system (Koehne, 2005).

In previous studies, however, there is an absence of reporting on the integrated real feelings of Chinese international students themselves - their identities in situations that are closely related to their experiences and social interactions with other groups. In my study, I will focus on building the relationship between the identity of Chinese international students and social interaction with "others", and explore their identities in English language and Western pedagogic contexts, as well as social-cultural ones with which they are not familiar.

Millennial generation

A "generation" is viewed as a group of people with a shared birth period, and who, during their formative stage, experience the same significant events and social changes,

such as cultural, political, and economic developments that form their collective identity, including their attitudes, beliefs, personalities, and mindsets (Yi, Ribbens & Morgan, 2010). In some studies the authors define the millennial generation as the group of youth or students who were born between the 1980s and the mid-2000s (Roehiling, Kooi, Dykema, Quisenberry & Bandlen, 2011; Black, 2010). Compared with former generations, in the US this group has the reputation of being easily bored, self-directed, and ethnically diverse, and of expecting variety, having a high level of self-esteem, working collaboratively, and craving interactivity (Roehiling, Kooi, Dykema, Quisenberry & Bandlen, 2011). In addition, millennials have seven other general characteristics: they feel special, they have been sheltered, they are team oriented, confident, pressured, and conventional, and have a strong desire to achieve. These characteristics have many positive consequences for their learning in American universities (Monaco & Martin, 2007; Elam, 2007). For example, class discussions enable them to express their own ideas and demonstrate their confidence, to enhance their knowledge and understanding, to learn the perspectives of others, and to create an egalitarian and active learning environment; the millennial generation therefore enjoy class discussions (Roehiling, Kooi, Dykema, Quisenberry & Bandlen, 2011; Monaco & Martin, 2007). Throughout the world, this generation of students has experienced similar changes in internationalization and globalization, as well as the rapid development of

science and technology. Simultaneously, the millennial generation in China arose in a comparatively particular growing environment that has had both positive and negative influences on their experiences of study abroad and their construction of new identities in Western countries.

For the millennial generation internationalization and globalization, and subsequent changes in the social, economic, and educational environments, are integral to their identity formation. Globalization is drawing ever more non-English-speaking students from around the world into an English-speaking context, such as the US, Canada, Australia, and the UK; international students from Mainland China comprise a large proportion of these (Zhou, Knoke & Sakamoto, 2005). Between 1969 and 2009 in American higher education there were many changes in the demographics and characteristics of students; the most important ones are the "increasing number of immigrants" and the "increasingly diverse cultural, economic, and geographic backgrounds", which have had a great impact on teaching and learning (Black, 2010). As a result, students may have more tolerance for other cultures and races, and be more inclined to dismiss racism and discrimination, than previous generations (Elam, 2007). Globalization contributes to these youths' values, viewpoints, and attitudes, which are profoundly different from those of their parents in China. This group participates in the same Western culture: for example, "Cu" (with the same meaning and nearly the same

pronunciation as "cool") is a term used by Chinese young people, and relates to "individualism", which makes many Chinese youth have thoughts similar to those of Western youth (Moore, 2005).

The youth of the millennial generation are growing up in the era of rapid development of science and technology, and are able to use these high-tech products well: such as cell phones, MP3 players, digital cameras, and the Internet (Godwin-Jones, 2005; Yeap Ai Leen, Thurasamy & Omar, 2012; Black, 2010; Moore, 2005; Yi, Ribbens & Morgan, 2010). They are dependent upon technology, and that is why they are also called "Digital Natives" (Godwin-Jones, 2005; Black, 2010). New technologies are not only used for entertainment, but can also help them learn foreign languages and cultures without geographical limitations (Godwin-Jones, 2005; Yeap Ai Leen, Thurasamy & Omar, 2012; Black, 2010; Moore, 2005). It is common for the Chinese millennial generation to access Western popular culture through film, music, television, and the Internet (Moore, 2005). In short, globalization and advances in technology help the millennial generation in China learn more about Western culture and society, improve their English skills, and make friends.

For current Chinese international students who belong to this generation, the dramatic political, social, and cultural changes in China also mean further opportunities and challenges. The millennial generation in China is also called the "post-80s and -90s",

the "me", the "individualistic" and the "one-child generation" (Yi, Ribbens & Morgan, 2010). The reforms at the end of twentieth century in China, particularly of economic policies, have been driving people from collectivism to individualism, and educating the millennial generation about the individualism that has long been widely accepted in Western society (Moore, 2005; Yi, Ribbens & Morgan, 2010). Most post -80s and -90s Chinese are only children because of the one-child policy that was introduced in the 1980s. They have received the undistracted attention of their parents and grandparents as they grew up in relatively rich conditions, and have experienced little failure (Han, 2010; Wang, 2015; Shu and Zheng, 2011; Yi, Ribbens & Morgan, 2010).

In China the stereotypical image of this generation is very bad. The public, as well as social media, are always full of blame for and doubt of them, and portray them negatively, with such words as selfish, lazy, vulnerable, unruly, ungrateful, irresponsible, utilitarian, mammonish, rebellious, and so forth (Han, 2010; Wang, 2015; Zhou, 2013; Lu and Yang, 2011; Shu and Zheng, 2011; Yi, Ribbens & Morgan, 2010). But these kinds of stereotypes are also changing, and the strengths of this generation are increasingly being discovered: such as proficiency in using English, confidence, positivity, erudition, having the courage to challenge authority, and having remarkable abilities of learning and great adaptability in accepting new things (Han, 2010; Wang, 2015; Zhou, 2013; Lu and Yang, 2011; Shu and Zheng, 2011; Yi, Ribbens & Morgan, 2010). Some scholars maintain

positive opinions: the new generation of Chinese international students who have grown up in a society with a market-directed economy have upheld the principle of individualism, and are more independent, and it may be easier for them to adapt to Western culture and to globalization (Zheng and Wang, 2007); studying abroad is full of difficulties, but this is also the way these young people come to know the world, and become mature (Wang, 2015). They are able to use the spiritual and material wealth of their parents as a kind of motivation and pressure to study and work hard (Shu and Zheng, 2011).

Amid the changing economic, social, and cultural contexts, however, inadequate attention has been paid to the experiences of the *new generation* of Chinese international students, whose experiences may differ from those of earlier generations, in Western universities. It is also unclear how this group understand the stereotypes about them and overcome difficulties, and how those stereotypical assumptions about them, and the unfamiliar environment, affect their self-perceptions. Compared with the challenges facing Chinese international students, as well, we know much less about their reflections on and strategies used in Western universities. Based on a qualitative exploratory study of Chinese international students' experiences in Canadian universities, therefore, this study also attends to the interaction between their identities and their social interaction with others, and to their autonomy in making sense of and coping with difficulties in their

new learning and living environment. These explorations will also lay a foundation for me on which I will discuss the relationships among their experiences, their identities, and social justice in the broader contexts of globalizing higher education.

CHAPTER 4   METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research project aims to understand the new generation of Chinese international students' experiences in Canadian universities from their perspectives, and to discuss related implications for an inclusive learning environment for these students. I am also interested in exploring the personal, emotional, social-cultural, and institutional aspects of their experiences in Canadian universities. Guided by interpretive social science and critical social science, the data in this study were collected through individual, semi-structured, in-depth interviews with eight international students studying in universities in southern Ontario, Canada.

Recruitment process

Eligible research participants were international students who come from mainland China, and are older than 18 years; who had finished at least one year of study in a Canadian university; and who belong to the millennial generation. There was no limitation on participants' majors, academic years, or genders. I aimed to pursue a sample with diversity in terms of gender, discipline, and so on.

Participants were recruited, for the sake of convenience, through the sample approach, and through personal referrals from the universities in southern Ontario, a

geographic area that was also convenient for me. Two Chinese-language tools -- a popular phone app named WeChat, and a chat program called QQ -- were used to post the recruitment information. Nearly every Chinese student uses them on phones and computers. I designed an e-poster (Appendix A), including the research topic, criteria for the eligibility of participants, some interview questions, and my contact information, in both English and Chinese. I then I posted it on my personal page on WeChat, and my friends who were also studying in Canadian universities put it on their pages. There are some group conversations on QQ and WeChat for Chinese international students in Canadian universities. Although I am in one such group, I do not know other students' identities, because everyone uses a nickname. I posted the recruitment information in these groups.

On the e-poster I offered multiple contact methods, such as telephone, email, WeChat and QQ; and all participants chose WeChat, which was the most convenient for them. I did not know any of these Chinese international students before recruitment. By the first night after I had posted the recruitment information, I had already received many messages from potential participants. I explained the procedure, their rights, and the main questions in the interview. After that they decided whether they wanted to participate, and made appointments. Permission was given to post the recruitment ad on individuals'

WeChat pages, so potential participants were informed of the details of the study, and could contact me directly.

Ethical considerations

This study was approved by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. Although the risks for participation in this study were minimal, it was possible that participants would feel uncomfortable, because some questions might evoke unhappy memories. Therefore, before the interviews I reminded them that they had the right to refuse to answer any question they did not want to answer or that made them feel uncomfortable. They could decide what and how much they wanted to share. My identity as a Chinese international student helped build trust with them, and made them feel safer about sharing experiences, including negative ones. All participants voluntarily joined this study, and directly contacted me through WeChat: four participants acquired the information from a group on WeChat; two of them saw the post on my friends' WeChat pages; and two were referred by other participants. Following the requirement of the McMaster Research Ethics Board, after the interview I provided a piece of paper with information about free mental health services on their campus and in their communities. Although the research may not benefit participants directly, the results of this study have the potential to contribute to the creation of a more inclusive learning and living environment for the

group of international students.

The small size of the community of Chinese international students means that the participants could be identified by some of the information they have shared. I therefore took action to ensure their anonymity and confidentiality. During the process of recruitment, communications between each potential participant and the researcher on WeChat could not be known by anyone else. The hard-copies of the signed consent form were scanned as e-copies; after that, the original hard-copies were destroyed. All data and e-copies are stored in my password-protected laptop, to which only I have access. The interviews were transcribed and translated by myself. The interview transcripts and other data will not be printed out. In the thesis and all documents with data, I replace their real names with false ones. I have also removed identifiable information, and use vague descriptions. A summary of the findings, rather than of any individual case, is presented. I plan to keep all data, including the participants' information, the recordings, transcripts, and data analysis, after my thesis defence. After that all the data will be deleted.

Research participants

The eight participants are Chinese international students with student visas in Canadian universities in southern Ontario. Despite my intention to recruit participants from the

millennial generation, including post-80s and post-90s, all participants were born during the 1993-1996 (post-90s) period. They grew up in metropolitan cities of the People's Republic of China, such as Wuhan, Guangzhou, Qingdao, and others. Half of them are male, the rest are female. Five went abroad before entering university, and studied in Canadian public or private high schools; one graduated from an international high school in China; one finished secondary education in a Chinese public school, and took the national university entrance examination in China; and one graduated from a Chinese university. When they arrived Canada they were aged from 16 to 22 years old, with an average of 21.8 years. By the time of the interview they had lived in Canada for from nine months to seven years, with an average length of 3.6 years. During that period most of them had gone back China several times for holidays. Except for one graduate student, all are undergraduate students: three participants are freshmen, two are in their second year, and the others are in their third and fourth year, respectively. They come from different faculties, including Social Sciences, Engineering, Business, and Science.

The interviews

Before the interviews all participants read the letter of information/consent form (Appendix B), and had time to ask me details about the study and their participation. They then signed two copies of the form, and kept one of them. The other copy was

brought back by the researcher. The main method of data collection was the individual, face-to-face, interview. To protect students' confidentiality and level of comfort with the interview, the location for the interview was a place of their choosing, such as a study room in the library or teaching building, a cafe, or an apartment. Each interview lasted 1.5-2 hours. Before the meeting I sent them a list of interview questions. Depending on the flow of the interview conversation and the situation of specific participants, some interview questions were second-tier prompts or follow-up questions, in order to cover all of the main questions and focus on the topic. Following the interview guide (Appendix C), they were asked about their experiences of challenges and stereotypes in living and studying, as well as about their feelings, reflections, and coping strategies. In the interview speaking Mandarin, as the native language for both participants and the researcher, helped to develop rapport and to facilitate an in-depth conversation about the research topic, both of which are important for a qualitative interview. Using English as a second language might inhibit them from fully describing and naming their experiences and articulating their thoughts. With their consent, interviews with seven participants were audiotaped. For the other, I took detailed notes by hand. All seven interviews were transcribed verbatim in Chinese for data analysis.

Data analysis

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The Chinese transcripts were analyzed to retain the subtle and rich meanings embedded in the language. In the initial round of reading and coding transcripts, I marked some words that most participants used frequently, such as "being rich", "independence", "not blame", "language", "cultures", "self", "others", "differences", "sameness/similarity" and others. In the second round of my reading, I identified some themes that participants commonly experienced in Canadian universities, including other students' stereotypes about the Chinese, China, and Chinese international students, cooperation with and social interaction among different groups of students, help-seeking, and the use of WeChat. In the third round of reading, "in order to find commonalities, differences, patterns and structures" (Esterberg, 2001, p.158), I compared their experiences across transcripts, classified them based on those identified themes, and paid attention to the similarities and differences of their experiences.

CHAPTER 5   FINDINGS

In eight interviews the participants described their experiences of studying overseas, and explained how they identified themselves in Canadian universities. In presenting their experiences and interpretations of, and actions in response to, stereotypes on the part of non-Chinese about the country of China and Chinese international students, they said that such experiences strengthened their sense of being a Chinese in Canada. Although Chinese international students from mainland China and from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and other regions, as well as Canadian-Born Chinese, were all viewed as Chinese, these participants classified them into three distinct Chinese student communities. Particularly, students from mainland China made up a social circle that was full of gossips, but who were nonetheless supportive. All of these Chinese international students largely depended on their social networks for informal support, including their parents in China, their relatives and their parents' friends in Canada, local students, and instructors. They were not, however, satisfied with the institutional services in Canadian universities. The social-economical context in China informed the post-90s of Chinese international students, and their weaknesses and strengths have had some important consequences for their lives in Canada and, especially, for their independence. Advanced technologies and developing international trade have also made it more convenient for them to study abroad.

Stereotypes: Experiences, interpretations, and actions

All participants in this study mentioned their experiences of various stereotypes - such as those about Chinese international students, Chinese culture, and China - since coming to study in Canada. Their feelings about these stereotypes also varied. In the end, they came up with their own interpretations of the stereotypical assumptions about them, and they also took action to make positive changes.

Experiences of stereotypes

All participants perceived that non-Chinese were under the influence of stereotypes about Chinese international students. They include that Chinese students are rich, like to show off, are at good mathematics (arithmetic), appear "stupid", are rude (by being, for instance, loud in public), look "nerdy", and speak "broken English". All participants encountered the stereotype of "being rich" among Canadian students, because the latter observed that some Chinese international students were able to afford the tuition fees that are three times higher than those for domestic students, to purchase expensive clothes and bags, or to drive Mercedes-Benz and BMW automobiles. Also, their unfamiliarity with things in Canada, four participants observed, led to them being viewed by Canadians as "idiots" who "know nothing", as explained by one participant:

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> They think you know nothing. Sometimes I don't know what I'm supposed to do, or how to do it. If I was in China, I could do it very easily. In Canada, I simply don't know. If they went to China, they would have the same experiences, and be made to feel the same way -- like an idiot. (*Mu*)

Even worse, a freshman reported that a few Canadian students used "FOB" (fresh off the boat) to describe Chinese international students, along with some stereotypical comments: "wearing glasses, boring, doing nothing, just learning". Stereotypes about Chinese students' academic performance are also reported: such as that they are good at science, don't say anything in class, contribute little to group work, and commit plagiarism.

Despite the stereotypes about Chinese international students being "rich" and academically "smart", six participants also observed another, co-existing, stereotype: that China is very poor and backward. For example, a female participant was asked by her local Canadian friend: "So you need to take a boat to get home in China?"(From Hong Kong, that is, to her home town beside the Yangtze River.) Seven participants were asked whether Chinese eat dogs. Wei, a female participant who had been in Canada for nearly four years, related more of what she has received from other students in Canada:

> Clearly, most students know little about China. They generally believe that if a Chinese student gets only a B, their parents will hit them. They saw a picture of a building in China on the Internet, but its exterior wall fell off, so they think China must be poor and backward... They believe such things as that the pollution in China is very serious, that Chinese people will eat anything... But we're controlling the pollution, and it isn't everywhere. And not everyone eats dogs. (*Wei*)

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It was the perception of all the participants that it was not only local Canadians who seemed to have unflattering opinions of China and Chinese students, but indeed, students from anywhere except mainland China. Six participants who had, in the course of their life in Canada, encountered many negative stereotypes about Chinese international students and China used words like "sad", "ashamed", "angry", "disappointed", and "shocked" to describe their feelings, and also expressed confusion as to the reasons China and Chinese international students were assumed to have certain characteristics.

Yet such stereotypes are not limited to the level of interpersonal interaction. For example, all participants knew that there was a condition attached to some Chinese international students' study permits, and that it concerned their work permit: "[You are] not valid for employment in businesses related to the sex trade such as strip clubs, massage parlours or escort services". Six participants were confused about the reasons for the condition, as elaborated on below:

> My friends, both male and female, have this condition on their student permits. So do I. I don't know whether international students from other countries are subject to this. I don't understand why they [Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC)] do this, or what they think about us. I go abroad and spend a lot, and for what? To do this kind of thing? (Laugh). (*Yu*)

> My study permit doesn't have this condition, but my friends' do. They all complain about it, and we regard it as a joke. (*Yue*)

Joking about it didn't stop these participants also being annoyed or, even, offended by the condition, in part because it seems to imply, or has the potential to create, a stereotype about Chinese students.

Making sense of the stereotypes

Encountering stereotypes about China and Chinese international students caused all participants to attempt to make sense of them. Rather than blaming individuals, most identified contributing factors on a broader level, including language barriers, cultural differences, lack of cultural exchange, and feeling superior.

All participants attributed the stereotype of the "silent" Chinese international student to the language barrier preventing effective communication and greater participation in the classroom, as explained below.

> Although I often know the answer [to the questions in the class], language is
> a problem. If I were speaking Chinese, I could explain easily. (*Su*)

She also admitted that her limited English vocabulary prevented her from expressing her opinions, as well as from arguing with Canadians about some historical and social problems in China, which she would have liked to do to dispel their misconceptions.

Then again, language – in particular, Chinese monosyllabic words – was also cited by a

second-year student in explaining how Chinese people may have acquired a reputation as

"loud talkers" in public:

> When uttering monosyllabic words in Chinese we emphasize tones, to distinguish one word from another. To them it sounds like we are expressing aggression, and preparing to fight. For example, this happens if I say a word that means, 'Today I ate a particularly delicious food'. They think I want to start a war. Tones are very interesting. (*Qi*)

Three participants who have lived in Canada for more than three years, and who

graduated from Canadian secondary schools, disagreed that the language barrier is the

major factor creating stereotypes; rather, other barriers to communication – such as

cultural ignorance and lack of shared background and experiences – also constrain

mutual understanding, and blind individuals to connections between, and similarities

among, people from different countries. Despite their confidence in their English

language ability, they found that the fact that their Canadian peers and they did not share

interests had prevented them from communicating more and, in turn, stopped them

challenging the stereotypes. Two male participants reported that their unfamiliarity with

Canadian culture, including sports (such as baseball or hockey) and social activities

popular among Canadian students, meant they had never become fully integrated with

local Canadian students. Reinforcement of the stereotypes about Chinese international

students being "unsocial" and "sticking together" may have been a consequence,

exacerbating the feeling among the Chinese of being "outsiders", and isolated from their

Canadian peers:

A student in the class told a joke, and the other students – local students – laughed a great deal. But I didn't. They were curious, and asked me: 'Why didn't you laugh?!' I understood what the student said; I totally understood the sentences. But I didn't get the punchline. (*Ji*)

At a bonfire night on campus, I joined the other students from my dormitory. They sang, danced, and laughed. I felt terrible. I had never heard of the song they were singing, and I didn't dance, either. It was my first week in the university, and I wondered what my life was going to be like for the next four years! I was sad, very sad. (*Yu*)

When it comes to the stereotypes around the limited participation of Chinese

international students in class discussions, seven of the study participants emphasized

that there may be different reasons, including individual personalities and degree of

previous exposure to pedagogical approaches:

I like to talk in class. It's a good opportunity to improve my English. But some Chinese students don't feel the same way. (*Wei*)

Foreigners [i.e., those from outside China] talk too much in class, it's very annoying... Students from China are not like that, they don't feel the need to speak all the time. The others are always saying pointless and irrelevant things. The Chinese take the point of view that there is nothing to say. (*Su*)

While admitting that Chinese international students' unfamiliarity with Canadian

contexts (e.g., culture and pedagogy) does not help break the stereotypes about Chinese international students, some participants also pointed out that their Canadian peers', as well as their professors', ignorance of Chinese contexts sometimes inhibit their capacity to challenge those prejudices. In response to the stereotypes around "rich" Chinese international students who are financially supported by their parents, for example, all participants commented that many people in Canada are unaware of the family-based financial support system in China, as well as of other social, economic, and cultural circumstances (e.g., one-child families, China's rapidly emerging middle class, the notion of family obligation, and the cultural expression of love) in today's Chinese society. Furthermore, in reality, one participant worked in a Chinese restaurant, a participant had a part-time job in a supermarket, and another participant tutored students to earn money.

In addition, some participants observed the lack of cultural exchange between Chinese and their Canadians counterparts. Then again, sources of information available to Canadians – their biased media, and their own uninformed observations of Chinese already in Canada – maintain and reinforce the aforementioned stereotypes. One participant had heard of a Chinese immigrant, a waitress, complaining to her customers about the one-child policy and eunuchs without giving them any social-cultural context into which they could put these issues, which were quite alien to them.

> The Chinese immigrant's radical understanding and strong bias led her to tell
> Canadians about only the less attractive aspects of China and Chinese culture.

The Canadians were shocked, and concluded that the Chinese live amid great danger. (*Su*)

All participants, moreover, held that indeed some Chinese, including Chinese international students and immigrants, help to maintain the stereotypes. For example, they witnessed a few Chinese international students who were "stereotypically" loud in public, including in libraries (which are supposed to be quiet), and disliked the ones who were from rich families, showed off, and did not work hard in university. They described their perceptions thus:

> A hundred thousand dollars means nothing to them. Wearing brand-name clothes, buying luxury goods -- they always spend over a thousand dollars in the shopping mall. (*Ji*)

> I know some who belong to the 'rich second generation' (*fu er dai*). They spend too much money on having fun... A Chinese girl [whom I know] drives a Lamborghini, and does not study hard. Then, when she failed her exams, she was kicked out. (*Shi*)

While some participants blamed those who "ruined" all Chinese international students' reputation, others commented that such behaviour was overgeneralized by some Canadians as the common characteristic of what is really a heterogeneous group. In fact, all of the participants did not identify as a member of the 'rich second generation', and were, rather, from middle-class families whose ideas of consumption were very different.

When it comes to the mass media's influence on the stereotypes, a female participant with many Canadian classmates and friends said, "I can't blame them, [because] they learn these things from the media, websites. They've just heard about China, and most haven't even been there (to see for themselves)". A freshman commented that popular America dramas like *Fresh off The Boat* portrayed Chinese immigrant families and Chinese culture as objects of derision. A female student who has lived in Canada for five years echoed that Western media's depiction of China and Chinese culture is partial for political reasons.

Although cultural exchange is ideally a bidirectional process between two cultures or countries, most participants found that it is not true in practice. All expressed an interest in Western culture, and viewed that as a reason to study abroad. When they tried to explore new things, however, they found it difficult to get involved, in part because of the existence of social cliques among students. One female participant pointed out that people tend to make friends with those who look like themselves, speak the same language, and share a certain culture:

> The whole class went out together. We held a class outside the classroom. There were two students from the same European country, and now they are Canadians. These two always walked together, and others also walked together, using their own language. You could not understand what they were saying... In the classroom, obviously, white students always sit together, Asian students sit together, Chinese students sit in the same area, and brown and black students stay together. (*Wei*)

Three participants in this study observed that Canadian students showed little interest and patience when it came to listening to Chinese international students' experiences and opinions, and it also prevented them learning about China and Chinese international students. This, in turn, discouraged some Chinese international students from sharing their culture and experiences with their Canadian peers, as described by *Yu*:

> I did my best to make friends with Canadian students. In the university dormitory, most are local students. They are nice. I always played billiards with one of them, and we talked a lot, but I felt that he was not interested in what I shared; there was no passion, no enthusiasm. When I talk about something I love, I am full of passion and enthusiasm. But some of my Canadian friends did not show anything like that, and then I lost interest in talking with them.

Without meaningful communication with local students, participants concluded, their ability to break stereotypes through social or interpersonal interaction would be minimal.

Last, six participants also perceived that some Canadians, both on and off campus, felt superior, because they could not believe that China has become a rich and advanced country, and that Chinese international students had more abilities and resources than they did. In other words, some Canadians thought that Chinese and China were supposed to be inferior. That is to say, the affluence gap between Chinese international students and Canadian students, some participants found, caused a few Canadians to become

biased toward Chinese international students, and they did not like all of them. Three

participants provided different opinions on this:

> My parents used my name to buy a house, as investment, and the tenants who lived there looked at me strangely. They couldn't believe that a young Chinese girl could be their landlord. (*Mu*)

> Some Canadians, on and off campus, are very envious of the Chinese because of their wealth. They are very envious of the 'rich second generation' who buy Mercedes Benz and BMW cars. (*Yue*)

> Some Canadians are poor because they do not work hard. They hate the rich, including the rich from China. Psychologically, they cannot accept that Chinese are richer than them... (*Ji*)

Similarly, fraud in academia was very serious among Chinese students, and some

Chinese who were supposed to be working as part of a team did not contribute. Actually,

several participants found it was not an exclusively Chinese problem; students from other

places were also guilty of this bad behaviour, but as they reported this stereotype was still

with Chinese international students:

> Local students, my friends, complained to me that they had this kind of persons [non-Chinese] on their team, who didn't work. (*Wei*)

> There are some people I don't like, the '*shen shou dang*' kind, who ask you, directly, for the answers to the homework. If you don't give them to them, they complain about you. As if I should give them the answer!... Some of them are Canadian. (Yue)

Like '*bao da tui*' (meaning "ride on one's coattails") -- very interesting. It isn't just Chinese international students; Canadian students are the same. When the group was established, someone, a Canadian, said: 'I'm lazy, I don't want to contribute', or, 'My time is tight', or, 'My studying isn't good enough, don't give me too much work'. I saw other groups where a student had committed to preparing the snacks, for others, to make up for their deficient scholarly work. It happens all the time; a third of the people want to be free riders. It's really very interesting. (*Qi*)

Efforts to break stereotypes

Despite their disappointment with the stereotypes, all participants reported trying to make it easier for other groups of students to learn about Chinese students and China. For example, two participants showed images of magnificent natural landscapes and historic architecture in China in class presentations. Six participants were prepared to answer any questions, including stereotypical ones, about China and Chinese culture as a way to encourage curiosity about China and promote cultural exchange. One of them commented:

They learn more, we talk more, and both sides understand each other more and more. This is the way they learn about China and Chinese culture. (*Qi*)

To various extents, all participants viewed themselves as representatives of China, Chinese culture, and Chinese international students, and thus felt they had a

responsibility to present themselves well in Canadian universities. For example, the two

participants below discussed how to present a positive image of Chinese students:

> As much as possible, [we would be mindful] to whisper, to lower our voice
> [in a public space]... Now, looking back, I can say we are changing. (*Qi*)

> [In terms of our suggestions for future Chinese international students], I
> would say that they should try to think of things from the perspectives and
> positions of Canadians. It's better not to let the hostility occupy you from the
> beginning. (*Ji*)

They commonly expressed their faith that if they, as well as other Chinese people in

Canada, could behave well according to Canadian customs, others would change their

views about China and Chinese people. Admitting that China has some social problems,

they also wished that Canadians could understand China, and relate to issues from the

perspective of Chinese history and culture.

Chinese student communities: Connection and separation

Chinese student communities consisted of three different groups: Chinese international

students from mainland China; Chinese from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and other regions; and

Canada-Born Chinese (CBC). Although all of these groups of students were often

referred to as "Chinese students" by mainstream society, most participants observed the

diversity within them, and the variety of their interactions. The complexity of the "Chinese student community" also affected their own sense of identity and belonging.

Peer students and friends from mainland China

Seven participants found it easier to make friends with other Chinese international students than with Canadians, because they had had similar experiences and were of similar cultures, and there was a large number of Chinese international students in their universities. For example, a participant had many Chinese classmates, and shared a room with another Chinese international student at the campus dormitory.

> Although we come from different cities, there is no distance between us. We talked a lot that night. Unlike with Canadian students. Many topics. (*Yu*)

Most participants admitted, however, that they had a few friends from mainland China, in part because they wished to be able to make friends with more local friends. For most of them, they usually knew others from courses. Five studying business and engineering knew more Chinese international students than others, because of the larger cohort of Chinese students in those disciplines. Joining a campus association for Chinese students, one participant made friends in it, and another who worked in a Chinese tutoring company knew many Chinese students. Five participants did not like the

relationships among the Chinese, and wanted to socialize with the locals, because the Chinese international student community from mainland China perpetuated the Chinese customs of social interaction, and was full of gossips.

> I may have never even seen a person, but the people around you tell you too much about him or her. The first time I see them, I know who they are, from the talk of others. There are too many gossips. (*Wei*)

> You may know some people, but if you aren't interested in what they're doing, or are busy with your own stuff, they'll gossip about you. You are 'antisocial'. It goes on a lot, this gossiping. So I don't like to keep company with too many people. (*Mu*)

Apart from word of mouth, the new technologies encourage gossip; for instance, WeChat, a social medium that is one of the platforms popular among Chinese international students. The Internet has electronically accelerated the dissemination of gossips through electronic means. One participant suffered an abominable period: some people he did not know came to him and cursed him, because another Chinese international student bad abused him on WeChat, and others believed it. Most participants understood the power of gossip, and decided to keep their distance from others they did not know well. For example, most participants did not join in the biggest student club for Chinese, as one explained:

> The organization is full of cliques and intrigue. It's very bureaucratic. Like in China. They attack each other... They flatter the host. It's very complicated.

(*Ji*)

The only participant who was in this association agreed with the aforementioned observations and critique. He emphasized that they wanted, and worked hard to create, a friendly environment for the group of Chinese in the university, but the association's size meant it was difficult to control all of the approximately 70 Chinese international students with different duties in different departments.

While the larger social circle is full of gossips, members of the smaller circles support each other. Five participants thought that the support from other Chinese international students in these smaller circles might be better than anywhere else. Some learned not only how to settle down in Canada, but also how to choose courses, and get news and information about activities on campus, and information about flights, immigration, and examinations. In some groups of Chinese international students on QQ (an instant messaging software service in China) and WeChat, participants asked questions of, and obtained suggestions from, seniors with much knowledge of use to Chinese international students.

> There is a group on QQ. Even before I arrived I learned a lot from them, such as about renting, getting picked up at the airport... (*Su*)

They also presented how they supported other Chinese international students. For

example, one participant created an official account on WeChat to provide useful information to Chinese international students; another helped others move out and in. The cooperative relationship was different in group projects, however. At first, some participants thought that it might be easy to support each other by speaking Chinese and using WeChat in the teams; but they realized that supporting others in this way would create problems for themselves. Three participants said that if a student was a "*Xue ba*" (good student), some Chinese international students would request an opportunity to do a group project with him or her, in order to get good marks without having to contribute much. For example,

> Because I have good grades, other students want to be my partner. In fact, I do more, but they don't realize it. I know my ability and their abilities, so I don't care if they get a free ride. I'll get higher marks if I finish by myself. I don't mind. Unfortunately, the academic pressure suddenly increased, and I did all the work – the work of two or more students. And my energy is limited. (*Qi*)

Most participants did not like to support other students, whether Chinese or Canadian, too much in the group projects, because they thought it was unfair for someone who does less work to get the same grade, and they hoped to work with students with similar levels of ability.

<u>Students from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and other places</u>

Two participants did not know any of the Chinese students from Taiwan, Hong Kong, or other regions, and some found it challenging to communicate with them because of the unspoken tension surrounding some political issues involving the relationships between China and both Taiwan and Hong Kong. Four participants reported that they expressed dislike for them by using terms like, 'Your Chinese', 'Your China', 'Our Hong Kong', and so on, thereby implying that the person they were addressing did not really belong to China, and was not really Chinese.

> In the group, a student from Taiwan asked my friend and me, 'Does your textbook say that Taiwan is part of China?' I didn't know why he was asking me this. We didn't answer. We're partners. What kind of answer did he want? (*Mu*)

> I'm not politically aware. Why should we argue about that?... At first, I couldn't get used to it. We're in a personal relationship. Why should we talk about politics? Will whether Taiwan is part of China affect our relationship? I don't know. (*Yue*)

Most participants thought the number of international students from Hong Kong and Taiwan was small, and they had their own groups, which were not open to students from other places, and whose members were different from the students from mainland China, even though they looked the same and were of similar culture. For example, one participant wanted to join a debate club of Chinese students, and he was rejected because:

They used Cantonese, but I don't. [laugh] Have you ever heard of an international debate being conducted in Cantonese? They always use Mandarin! (*Shi*)

Two participants from Guangdong province did not have such problems, because they spoke both Cantonese and Mandarin. Language was a barrier to other students who wanted to get involved in such groups. In fact, Cantonese is widely spoken not only in Canadian universities, but throughout Canadian society, and has been integral to Chinese immigration throughout its history.

Canadian-Born Chinese (CBC) students

Some participants had also experiences with CBC (Canadian-Born Chinese), who were, in important ways, unlike Chinese international students. They used a popular expression to refer to this group of people: they were "bananas", with yellow skin, and white on the inside. A participant shared his experiences:

Although CBC have the same ethnic roots as us, their way of thinking has more in common with Canadians and Western culture. Their Chinese is not good. Some CBC want you to validate them. They really want to fit in, and have a special sense of their ethnic identity: 'My parents are Chinese, I love China, my roots are in China'. But the problem is, they watch you and listen to you while you're talking with others in Chinese, [and don't understand what you're saying]. Their curiosity [about China and Chinese culture] is considerable. They ask the same questions that Canadians do, about voting in China, daily life there, and so on. (*Qi*)

CBC have their own social circle, as a participant perceived, "CBC did not make friends from China or Canadians". She also observed that the stereotypes held by some CBC about Chinese international students might be even stronger than those of some Canadian students, and she gave an example:

> CBC do not like students from mainland China; like my cousins, they are CBC... About rich Chinese, they hold this idea much more intensely than the white people do: Chinese international students have money, bags with famous brand labels. My cousins believe that Chinese people are very luxurious, and pursue brand names... (*Mu*)

The experiences of three participants led them to think that the reason CBC had such opinions and attitudes toward Chinese, China, and Chinese international students might have something to do with their own struggle for an identity.

Access to support: Informal and formal resources

All participants experienced some difficulties in living and studying, and sometimes they got help from both informal social networks and formal institutional services. Informal social networks, including parents back in China, relatives, and family friends in Canada, Chinese international students, local students, and instructors worked well in meeting their various needs in financial, learning, living, and spiritual aspects. Family based support was identified as one of the most important sources by all participants. Support

from Chinese international students has already been addressed in the section on Chinese student communities. Local students and instructors support Chinese international students a great deal, but that support is largely confined to learning and language factors. Meanwhile, all participants believed that formal institutional services on the part of the universities were ineffective in supporting them, because of barriers to access.

<u>Family-based support from China and in Canada</u>

Family based support from parents in China and family relatives and friends in Canada is perceived by participants in this study as one of the most important sources of social support; but this kind of support is limited and unstable. What most Chinese families could do was in the range of financial and spiritual elements, because of national borders; and how much parents could do depended on particular domestic circumstances.

During the interview all participants voluntarily talked about their parents and their effects on them. In addition to providing financial support for their study and living in Canadian universities, parents were also viewed by them as a spiritual crutch. A 20-year-old participant reported that she always felt happy and relaxed when talking with her parents via video-call on the phone; and another female participant believed that "if I cannot get support in other ways, no matter where I am, my parents will be there and

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protect me". Interestingly, most participants did not think that going abroad erected

barriers between them and their parents; on the contrary, the number and the quality of

their communications with their parents increased during that time, and the topics

between them included their daily lives in Canada, some big decisions (i.e., transferring

their major or changing university), interesting experiences, suggestions, and complaints.

> Since going abroad, the communication with parents is more than before... It is very easy. A video call with my mom, when I'm not busy, every day. But with my dad, it is a little less... I like to listen to their suggestions. Before, I didn't [when I was in China]. (*Mu*)

The distance of China and their parents' resources, however, meant that the role of

Chinese parents in supporting Chinese international students was perceived as limited.

For instance, one female student moved several times, and her parents in China were

unable to help, except for the one occasion when her father happened to be in Canada.

Some participants presented that their parents could not give them suggestions regarding

their studying and living abroad, such as how to choose a university and a major, how to

study, and how to build relationships with others, because they did not know Canadian

society well enough. It is also difficult for an individual family to cope with emergencies

overseas, and this made their support unreliable. A male participant experienced two hard

periods during his three years in Canada: he paid the unexpected costs, and then lacked

money, as his mother could not transfer any to him quickly enough; he had to get a part-

time job, and borrowed money from Chinese friends. Meanwhile, none of the participants wanted their parents to worry, so they kept their problems and difficulties from their families, or only told them after coping with them. Two took their parents' feelings into consideration, as they commented below:

> There are some news about Chinese international students showing off and getting into troubles. My parents know. I think I should be careful. For example, I did not buy an expensive car, like a BMW, Mercedes Benz, Audi, and so on, deliberately; my clothing is also just like that of the local students, not expensive brand-name clothing. In fact, I could afford those things. I did not do, for my parents feel alright, and don't worry about me. I will not get into trouble for showing off. (*Ji*)

> I didn't tell them. They couldn't help me. How could I tell them? And it would make them worry about me. I took care of it by myself. (*Shi*)

Two of the eight participants had close relatives who were able to help them in Canada, and they lived together for a long time, when they were in secondary school. Their relatives provided not only a safe place for them to live, but also some suggestions for their studying and living in Canada.

> Sometimes I ask my aunt and my cousins for suggestions, like about how to choose a university and a major. They know these things much better than I or my parents. They have lived here for a long time. (*Ji*)

> They help me a lot. I'm too young to keep a large amount of money, like a tuition fee. My mum transfers it to my aunt, and she goes to the bank, and pays it. In the bank, I don't read any of the documents I need to sign. I trust her... My cousin suggested that I record what the instructor says in the class, so that I can listen to it carefully later. (*Mu*)

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These two participants appreciated the support, but they did not want to bother them too much, and even tried to help them. *Mu* further explained:

> My aunt is busy, with a restaurant and her own children... I help her with housework, and after class I work in her restaurant. We talk a lot, and I can understand her worries about my cousins. I want to be independent, and don't get into trouble. (*Mu*)

Another participant had made the acquaintance of a few parents who had limited capacity to help, and some responsibility for her. When she arrived in Canada, she just got a ride from the airport to this home-stay family, and after that she had no further contact with them, except that she sent them her good wishes by phone at festival time. The rest knew nobody at all when they arrived.

Support from peer students and professors

Social networks with Canadian students and professors were mainly built on their formal relationships: between classmates, and between teachers and students. Seven participants considered themselves fortunate, because most local students and instructors on campus were nice and friendly. Most of their support related to language and studying. For instance, a freshman found that an instructor spoke so fast she could not follow him and

take notes at the same time; then a Canadian student loaned her his notes. Most

participants said that when they had a language problem, whether in group projects,

personal communication, or class presentations, Canadian students were courteous, and

helped them improve.

> My English was not very good at first, but they tried to understand me. If I did not understand them, I would ask them to repeat themselves. I felt sorry for them. But they told me, 'Your English is pretty good, and we can understand you'. I don't know. They're so nice, and they comfort me, and encourage me. Maybe they admire us because we can speak another language so well. (*Wei*)

> My English was not very good, when trying to communicate, obviously, and I was slow at writing and reading. They knew that in order to speed up, we had to adjust. In writing and speaking, I mean, in speech, they instinctively wanted to help me, because they knew I lacked language skills. (*Qi*)

> My roommate is Canadian, and very nice. She told me, 'If you have any questions, like about writing English, let me know, I can help you'. She checked my writing, word by word, although she needed to change her schedule. (*Mu*)

One participant told how Canadian students appreciated his contribution, and this

increased his confidence in his studies, and encouraged him.

> The Canadians said, 'We finished it together, we all did a lot, thank you. Also, I'm happy to have worked with you. We got a very high score, thank you'. Everybody did this. (*Qi*)

> Six participants, moreover, went out with local students for fun in their spare time.

They found some topics that the Canadian and Chinese students were both more or less interested in, such as American dramas, movies, make-up, exercise, and so on. Their loneliness was thus alleviated. Concerning his daily life, only one freshman mentioned the significant support he received from his Canadian roommate: "He helps a lot, such as with how to pay, clubs, classes, campus".

Language differences nevertheless undermined the support the participants received from Canadian students and, consequently, their relationship. A graduate participant was doubted and treated unequally by a peer in a group project, because the peer thought that the language barrier would impair her own performance.

> There is a girl on the team. Her English is very good. She knows that the Chinese students' English is not good. When she was in a group discussion, she put forward a point, and she believed she was right. I thought there was a problem, and I pointed it out. I asked questions, but she maintained that I had not heard her clearly, and did not understand what she was saying. She spoke again, at great length. But she didn't address my criticism... Finally, I told her, 'I understand, you don't need to explain. I just don't agree with you'. She looked very hurt, and said, 'I just want to help you'... She knows you have a language disadvantage, and she understands your weakness very well. You don't have equal status in the group. They have a sense of superiority. (*Su*)

One participant thought the cultural differences between China and Canada would make the support from Canadian students unreliable, because they could not understand his meaning or his circumstances. There were some issues Canadian students were not informed about, such as immigration, and Chinese culture and products.

In addition, five participants thought that instructors in Canadian universities treated them just like the other students, and would not take their language difficulties into account when marking. A participant complained that she felt disappointed, when her instructor gave her a not good enough grade, because her answer was right, but lacked of details. Most participants did not have this problem, because they used numbers and codes to answer questions and the requirement of their English was not such high. Three participants were happy with their instructors.

> The professor would come and ask me, 'Do you know what you should do next?', or, 'Is there a problem?' They take the initiative to ask you. They observe the professional ethics of equality toward all students. (*Qi*)

> Once I forgot my assignment, and the instructor told me, don't worry, bring it tomorrow... An instructor also arranged for international students to present during lunch time, so that there were fewer listeners, and I wasn't so nervous. (*Mu*)

> A professor from my department was interested in Chinese culture, and talked with me a lot. (*Su*)

Formal support and resources: lack of information and services

At these two universities there were some services for both international students and Canadian students, and a department especially for international students. Only half of participants were sure of the location of that office on their campus, however. The other

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four had only a vague idea that there were some services they were eligible to use, but did not know the details. For example, although two of them joined in different programs for international students, they did not know which department delivered these programs. Six participants, moreover, admitted that they did not know the system of university services well. Some participants did not know they were eligible to use some services, and they lost their benefits. For instance, all international students in Ontario have to pay for UHIP (University Health Insurance Plan), which can cover some costs of health care services and medical treatments. A few participants who had graduated from Canadian high schools were aware, but the others did not know, and did not make good use of it.

> I didn't know about UHIP until two years ago. I wasted a two-year insurance fee. I just knew that I had paid the tuition. That included health insurance, but I didn't use it in the first or second year. (*Wei*)

> I just know that I paid for health insurance, but I don't know... What kinds of services are covered by it? Do I need student ID or something else? I should figure it out... Including dental problems? Sounds great! (*Su*)

Most participants thought universities should be responsible for telling international students about these services, and clearly showing their positions. Four participants did not notice that the emails they received before their arrival and at the beginning of the first semester were from an official department of services to international students, rather than from a student club. As universities failed to let students know their rights and

accessible services, most participants obtained information about formal support in informal ways. One participant took a senior's advice that she joined an English program; some knew about VISA services from accounts run by Chinese international students on WeChat.

Two participants positively evaluated the services they had used. One was the mentor program: the mentor is current upper year students and can communicate with freshmen in both English and their mother tongue; they can support four students and answer their questions to help them adapt as quickly as possible to learning and living at university. Universities also organize activities to help new students get to know the community and the city in which they are living. At a university this service is available to all students; at the other it is only for international ones.

All participants, however, indicated they were not satisfied with the services from both universities and communities. When it came to support and services, six mentioned that their enrollment and tuition fees were different from those for local students. Two said that lowering requirements for English and working experience might appear to be good news for Chinese international students; but in fact, universities just wanted their money, without considering these students' real needs.

> Universities made offers with some conditions, like taking a one-year program in English as a Second Language (ESL), and students had to pay high tuition fees. They just want your money. (*Ji*)

A graduate participant complained that her program was good for students with some working experience, but this was not shown in the introduction; also, there was no support for international students in finding employment. Another participant wondered:

> On the one hand, without citizenship, the social status of international students restricts us to using social welfare and paying higher tuition fees; on the other hand, as we have paid much more than Canadian students, we should get more support to meet our special needs. Considering the tuition fees, the services, right now, are not good. (*Yu*)

Four participants pointed out that 'most services serve students in general'. Following the University Research Ethics Board requirements, I provided a list of available services from universities and communities to all participants; but they did not trust these services, for common services could not meet their needs, and they overcame the most difficult period of adaptation by themselves or with informal support.

To remedy such deficiencies, some students created their own organizations: an after-school tutoring service designed for Chinese international students, for instance, a participant with one such organization said that the learning problems were a matter of both professional knowledge and language. As professors and TA could not teach in Chinese, and the low salaries didn't inspire them to work hard in after-school tutoring, they set up a company, and taught Chinese students in both Chinese and English. In

several Canadian universities senior Chinese international students started companies like this, and helped others with the money they made. The company would promise that all tutors were capable of helping their "clients" get good scores. The main problem, in truth, was that Canadian universities do not take responsibility for educating their students, so that some Chinese international students have to spend more on after-school mentoring, even though they have already paid a great deal to those universities.

A Chinese student association also provided some services for the Chinese community, holding indoor and outdoor activities for them, such as professional tax-report services, games, sports, freshmen meetings and freshmen barbecues, spring festival celebrations, travel, and so on. Except for one member of this association, however, only three participants had joined in any such activities, because they did not think they had been organized well.

Three participants who were scheduled to graduate in a year considered the service helping international students find employment was inadequate. A senior student observed that most of the students who worked on the campus were Canadian, although international students were allowed to hold part-time jobs without a work permit. It was her belief that work opportunities were given to students from poor families because international students, who it is assumed can easily afford the high tuition fees, don't need part-time jobs. She also found that recruitment of interns and volunteers was restricted

because they are not Canadian citizens or permanent residents. Without work experience, it would be hard for her to find a job in Canada after graduation, and her program included no international graduates who might have been able to share their experiences of employment with her. Similarly, a graduate student said that her master's program would not be useful in job-hunting, and the university provided no support in that regard.

All the aforementioned services were on campus; in the community, there was even less support for Chinese international students. Except for one participant, who received some brochures and cards about mental health services outside of the campus during the first semester, no one was aware of any social services, and they did not seek them out.

The new generation: Growth in a bigger world

Most current international students were born after 1990, and continue to be significantly influenced by their experiences in China even as they study in Canada. Although the Chinese mass media and previous generations make stereotypical comments about them, all participants viewed themselves positively, and self-identified their strength. The experience of studying abroad, in particular, gave them a chance to be independent. It was possible for Chinese international students to stay connected with family and friends in China through technology, and international trade provides them with conveniences

for use in their daily lives.

Vulnerability and independence

Belonging to the post-90s generation means they were born and grew up at a time when China has been growing wealthy as a result of economic reforms and the "one-child" policy in force since the 1980s. Only one participant had a younger sibling; the rest are only children. They could list many of what other generations in Chinese society consider their faults, such as that they are "rich", "selfish", addicted to the Internet, and dependent on their parents. None of the participants cared about these kind of negative comments, and ignored them. As far as they are concerned these stereotypes are inevitable wherever there is a generation gap, and it was to be expected that other generations would be unable to understand them. Moreover, most of them thought it rude and ridiculous to label an entire group of people according to their generation. All gave the same clear answer to these stereotypes: "I don't care", and, "I'm just being myself".

Not only do these negative stereotypes not disturb these participants, but also all participants took their advantages of their generation. One believed that most current Chinese international students were adept with technologies, and that this skill can help them in their studies and their lives in Canada. Also, sometimes, the disadvantages can

become advantages. For instance, as the generation of the only child, growing up alone is always related to being selfish; but they thought that it taught them how to build social networks and to accustom to being alone. One shared her thoughts about her childhood and its impact on her life in Canada.

> If you had brothers and sisters, you could play at home (with them). As the only child at home, your parents were busy; no one kept you company or played with you. When I saw there were other kids in the community, I would go out and play with them. We were all only children. Everyone needed to go out and play with the other kids. So this forced us to make friends outside the home. I'm not afraid of meeting new people in Canada. (*Wei*)

In addition, most participants accepted the criticisms about selfishness and self-centredness, but did not see them as faults, because they help them adapt to new environments quickly and effectively. A female graduate student believed that it was difficult to beat her or make her frustrated. All participants admitted that the financial situations of most current Chinese international students were better than those of the previous generation. It was not their "fault" or their "sin", of course, so they could enjoy it, and put it to good use.

> My friend, whose family has a private business, is not studious. He learned from his father about their business, benefiting from the experiences of the previous generation. I study the same thing that my father did, so he asked me to oversee his projects. It's like 'standing on the shoulders of giants'. (*Yu*)

Meanwhile, all participants thought that studying abroad was an opportunity for them to grow up, and moving from dependence to independence was the most widely shared development among them. When they lived with their parents in China, when necessary their parents could take over all house work. Now, most of them spent much of their time on buying daily necessities, cooking, laundry, and cleaning their room -- they may not be very good at cooking and housekeeping, but they can take care of themselves well enough. Independence is reflected not only in daily life, but, more important, also in one's way of thinking. Some participants prided themselves on being able to make their own decisions, and thoroughly understood the consequences of the options open to them.

Three factors, in fact, contributed to their independence. First, all participants thought they could not rely on anyone else. Invariably they used a Chinese word, '*bi*' (meaning force, compulsion, necessity) to describe the situation when they were adjusting to their new life in Canada. In many cases where they did not make a decision of their own accord, the environment obliged them to do something, however reluctantly. For example, not having a Chinese international student as a peer in her program 'drove' one to ask for support from Canadian students; a participant 'had to' accept that her English writing level lowered her academic score; another got sick after minimally invasive surgery, and discovered that he had to take care of himself, because 'nobody can do that, except yourself'. Further, some participants did not want to be indebted to

anyone. One accepted help from Canadian friends, and then tried to do something for them in return. Another participant spoke of his dislike of a mutually helpful relationship. If they could cope with something by themselves, they preferred not to bother anyone else. Finally, their inexperience meant that most knew little of how to go about finding formal and professional support. Some participants, consequently, tended to attempt to solve problems first by themselves; if that didn't work, they would ask for help from Chinese or Canadians in their social networks; and only as a last resort would they seek formal support. One admitted that she had never encountered a difficulty she could not solve by herself or with the help of friends. Two participants believed that self-sufficiency was a lesson everyone should learn, and studying abroad just accelerated that maturing process.

The benefits from technologies and globalization

The post-90s of Chinese international students experienced a period of rapid development in China's economy, and witnessed the era of equally speedy growth in science and technology innovation. They believe that technology and globalization should be viewed as resources for material support and information transmission. All participants mentioned the impacts of high-tech and information technology on their lives in Canada.

When I arrived Canada, in 2013, I did not use WeChat or the Internet much. WeChat wasn't popular. I used a calling card to contact my parents. My mum always went to my grandparents' apartment, where there is no wifi. A phone call worked well. Now, WeChat is very convenient, and wifi is everywhere. (*Yu*)

I went to high school in another city in China, and was far from home. I called them every week. Then, at Chinese university, I had video calls with my parents... And now, via WeChat, and on phone... (*Su*)

They also used computers and the Internet to study:

My computer is used for learning, for homework. You don't know the answer, you Google and find it. But there is also other knowledge, such as about cars. Before buying one, I learned a lot on the Internet... (*Yu*)

I don't like lectures or tutorials. They're boring. I just learn by myself, from slides. Twenty minutes is enough to learn it. Why do I need to go there and sit in a classroom for 40 or 50 minutes? (*Shi*)

Chinese partners can use WeChat to connect. We build a group and post information about when and where to meet. (*Qi*)

Western Internet resources, like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, popular among Canadian students, also served Chinese international students well in building relationships and getting information. Most learned some Western culture from social medium on the Internet, and were aware of the many difficulties in language, culture, and learning posted on the Internet by previous generations of Chinese international students.

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Reviewing that material benefited their preparation, both spiritual and material, for their lives and studies in Canada.

The globalization of the education industry and the international economic system also favoured their activities in Canada. Highly developed worldwide trade has helped Chinese international students adapt to their new environment in Canada; many participants mentioned that they could buy Chinese products and food easily, and did not need to bring them from China.

> At the university -- not my current university, but my previous one-- there is just a small store that sells Chinese products. And the restaurants in that area aren't good. The food isn't very appetizing. It's a very small community. The university I attend now is better, with Chinese supermarkets and restaurants. You can find goods that you used in China. (*Ji*)

> I suggest to future students that the first time you come to Canada, don't bring a lot of stuff. You can buy it here, nearly everything. It's a bit expensive, but very convenient. (*Qi*)

As a result, for these Chinese international students, they were not living and studying in a totally unfamiliar environment. Technologies and globalization made them lives in Canadian universities as similar as in China.

CHAPTER 6   DISCUSSION

The findings illustrate how Chinese international students who are of the post-90s generation show their understanding of their experiences in Canadian universities. Their identity is significant in shaping their experiences and understanding of those experiences, through social interaction with other groups of students and adjustment to a social-cultural context with which they are unfamiliar.

In both the research literature and their own experiences, Chinese international students are often identified, and identify themselves, as a singular group because of their difference, or perceived difference, from other groups in the host universities (Ruble & Zhang, 2013; Spencer-Rodgers, 2001). There is, however, a difference: Chinese international students perceive the heterogeneity in the group; other groups just see the homogeneity. Meanwhile, some differences – in personality, culture, and thinking – from other groups have generated a kind of stereotype about Chinese international students. Indeed, students in the study present a collective awareness of both their group identity and the negative stereotypes they receive about China, and about themselves as Chinese international students. Most of the stereotypes that they have heard do not, however, reflect their actual lives or situations. Stereotypes lead to "prejudice against members of outgroups and preferential treatment toward members of the ingroup" (Power, Murphy & Coover, 1996). For example, participants learned that although Chinese international

students and students from other groups do similar things (e.g. less contribution in group works), only Chinese international students got bad reputations, because of biases toward Chinese students.

Some studies have shown that individuals internalize negative stereotypes about themselves (Bonnot & Croizet, 2007; Spencer-Rodgers, 2001; Fincher, 2011; Koehne, 2005); stereotypes may also limit individuals' freedom, and constrain their lives through prejudice and discrimination (Fiske, 1993). Although the literature to date has widely documented the common and negative effects of stereotypes on Chinese international students (Hsieh, 2006; Noels, Pon, & Clément, 1996), participants in this study reported varied effects of these stereotypes on them, including on their emotional or mental health and self-perceptions. Instead of blaming individuals with whom they interacted in Canada for the stereotypes, they understood the issue as a result of larger problems, such as biased reporting by mass media and lack of cultural exchange between countries. Their own inadequate English proficiency and their Canadian peers' lack of interest also, however, inhibited them from effectively explaining Chinese culture and social issues. The vicious circle of lack of interest, lack of knowledge, and lack of further communication is recognized by some participants.

Participants in this study tried to take action to change stereotypes, but it is a difficult and complex process. The factors at work in the formation of these stereotypes are also

the barriers to changing them. In particular, participants showed limited abilities to change the attitude of and stereotypes in the mass media, which have indeed produced solid stereotypes about the Chinese and China in the minds of the public. Then again, a stereotype can be changed through repeated exposure of counteracting stereotypes (Power, Murphy & Coover, 1996). In fact, the social circles that are formed by cultural differences reduce opportunities to exchange opinions and to discover counter stereotypes. As "power affects stereotyping through attention (or a lack of the right kind of attention) and stereotyping controls those who are stereotypes" (Fiske, 1993, p.621), Chinese international students as a minority group are subject to the power of dominant groups and institutions; and this is a profound reason for the lack of interest of most students from other groups in Chinese culture, and their failure to learn the truth about China. The power is produced through organizational structures that can either solve the problem, or make it worse (Fiske, 1993), but participants found that student organizations, universities, and Canadian society do not take responsibility to address the problem.

Participants in this study classified Chinese students in Canadian universities into three groups: from mainland China; from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other regions; and from Canada. Individuals construct their subjectivity through differences, as well as through shared experiences and sameness (Koehne, 2005). Although they have similar appearances, their interests, opinions, and experiences, even their cultures and languages,

are different. Although the research literature tended to treat Chinese students in Western universities as a homogenous group, the cultures, policies and education in these places contribute to the heterogeneity and diversity of Chinese students. For the same reason, Chinese student community on campus is not necessary a reliable source of social support for Chinese international students.

As newcomers to Canada, the students in this study appear to have access to many resources to support their studies and their lives in that country, although most of the resources belong to the category of informal support at personal and interpersonal levels. For instance, they commonly have received financial and emotional support from their middle-class families back home, and social support from their family friends and peer Chinese students in Canada. Although some also received social support and academic assistance – such as in language instruction and other cultural learning – from local Canadian students, by comparison the support they have received from other Chinese international students was perceived as more constant and significant. This finding is also consistent with that of the study of adjustment patterns among Chinese international students by Wang and her peers (2012). Such informal support is neither reliable nor stable, because it mainly depends on individuals and their families, or others around them, who cannot promise to supply whatever they need, whenever they need it. Despite the availability of some student services at universities, their lack of information about the

services and their doubt regarding the services' quality means they rarely used them. Despite their expressed needs for various services, furthermore, Chinese international students' unfamiliarity with the students and the social service systems at the universities also made the limited institutional resources hardly accessible for them. Moreover, as reported in this study, student unions and clubs do not always take responsibility for facilitating cultural exchange between Chinese students and local student groups or communities. In the context of ongoing international student recruitment at both provincial and university levels in Canada, it is also worth mentioning that some policies concerning this student group, such as those about student visas and work permits, and post-graduation immigration, have changed for the better, with fewer restrictions and qualification requirements (Williams. K., Williams, G., Arbuckle, Walton-Roberts & Hennebry, 2015). All international students, however, not just Chinese international students, are still excluded from the social welfare systems in Canada, and thus do not have access to social or health services outside the university. These barriers make these students yet more vulnerable, given the limited institutional resources within and outside universities.

Similar to the findings of two studies, one by Spencer-Oatey and Xiong (2006), and the other by Wang and her peers (2012), Chinese international students do not necessarily experience significant difficulties in social-cultural adjustment, in part because their

shared generational characteristics, such as sociableness, enthusiasm, confidence, open-mindedness, and tech-savvy, have contributed to their more positive experiences. The assumed weaknesses of the post-90s generation seems to have had few negative impacts on their lives and studies in Canada, and some students have indeed "grown", or matured, during their studies abroad. Concurring with Hsieh's (2006) argument that identity development is restricted by, and also influences, ethnic cultural background, the post-90s Chinese international students are growing up in a social-cultural context where the Western value of individualism is more influential than the Chinese tradition of collectivism. They consequently show much greater adaptability and stronger coping skills in the process of studying abroad than did previous generations, as presented in other studies (Moore, 2005; Yi, Ribbens & Morgan, 2010; Zheng and Wang, 2007). Their resources in China have enabled them to overcome difficulties and to maintain their faith in the possibility of changing their disadvantaged situation, including unfair stereotypes. Technology and globalization also contribute to their adaptation in Canadian universities, because they enable them to keep close connections with their families and friends in China, and to get Chinese information and products easily. They learn much from the previous generations of Chinese international students' experiences, and that inspires them to prepare in both the material and the subjective senses. Given their prior exposure in China to Western popular culture and English as a second language since

elementary school, to some extent they are not learning and living in a completely new or unfamiliar environment. For them, the process of their identity struggles in Canada is interwoven with their personal growth and intercultural adaptation, which is not necessarily a process that would negatively affect their self-esteem or self-perception, but is certainly a process of self-reflection and self-actualization.

The identities of these students have played multiple and dynamic roles in their experiences, including their interactions with others, their understanding of their experiences, and their attempts or strategies to change less-than-ideal situations (including stereotypes). In their social interactions with other groups, they identified themselves as a member of the group known as Chinese international students; and, facing the stereotypes about that group, and about Chinese culture and China, they also saw their diversity and heterogeneity, and their own personality in the group. Meanwhile, they understood stereotypes within a larger context: both China and Canada should take responsibility for this result. Being enthusiastic about change, they also took action to make it happen when they saw potential for it. Although some of their experiences in Canada reinforce their awareness of being Chinese, their understanding of their experiences and themselves also "grow". All of these experiences, including difficulties and negative interactions, were viewed as parts of a process of self-growth by these students.

Although Chinese international students in this study positively viewed their experiences of social interaction as a process of self-growth, their "official" identity, which is institutionally defined by universities and the Canadian government, creates further social inequalities for them. Based on students' nationality, universities and the Canadian government distinguish the group of international students from local students from bureaucratic and management perspectives (Fincher, 2008); and, as participants presented, the binarism of local and international students renders international students vulnerable to exploitation through much higher tuition fees and limited social services. The lack of institutional support reduces their sense of belonging to the society they live in and to their university, and strengthens their sense of powerlessness to changing this predicament. Despite the continuing increase of the number of international students in Canadian or western universities, what is worse, as universities and local government do not devised effective ways to promote cross-cultural interaction within their diverse student bodies and provide accessible services, the gap between international and Canadian students is growing, and extending farther into the future.

Their experiences of social interaction and adaptation in Canadian universities have significant influences on Chinese international students' self-perceptions. Although as members of the post-90s generation these students did not think they are very different from their counterparts in Canada, their interactions with others in Canada have also

reinforced their sense of their national identity (i.e., being Chinese): an identity of which they are not aware before going abroad. For instance, the negative assumptions about Chinese people (not limited to Chinese students) that are conveyed through stereotypes, daily interactions, and discriminative border control policies also serve as a reminder of their difference, and motivate them to be more actively aware of their relationship with China and other Chinese people in Canada. Some students in this study felt obliged to 'represent' China well in public or in front of Canadians, in part as a way to correct stereotypes and prevent their reinforcement.

CHAPTER 7   CONCLUSION

The findings of this study illustrate that the post-90s generation of Chinese international students have had both positive and negative experiences in Canadian universities. Students in this study also face various challenges in the new pedagogical environment -- such as language barriers, cultural shock, and different learning styles -- as often described in the previous studies on Chinese international students (Findlay & Köhler, 2010; Pan, Wong, Chan & Joubert, 2008; Harrison & Peacock, 2010; Yan & Berliner, 2011; Wang et al, 2012; Zhou, Knoke & Sakamoto, 2005; Chen, Liu, Want, Jin & Renae, 2007; Chen, 2012; He & Tang, 2001; Zhang, 2007; Bai, 2008). Yet, as demonstrated in the chapters presenting findings and discussion, they are also a generation of students who have access to more resources, especially from family, than earlier generations, and are able to cope with these issues.

Language barriers, pedagogical and cultural differences, and social inequalities also influence their identity. Unfamiliarity with Canadian pedagogy and culture and the English language environment, indeed, makes them feel like outsiders. In this study we can see that not only are Chinese international students' experiences in Canadian universities important to their self-perception, but also that their experiences in China continue to affect it. For instance, the one-child policy in China has shaped their pattern in social interaction; social changes in China and the characteristics, especially positive

and critical thinking, of the post-90s generation have given them more resources and courage with which to challenge difficulties, including stereotypes.

However, social inequalities in institutions and policies directly and structurally exclude them, because their social status is that of international students. Although international students are paying higher tuition fees than domestically students, though this does not mean they have same rights. Universities and government also understand the difficulties this group will have, yet the services on campus are limited, and do not meet their needs, and the information about them is inaccessible. On one hand, the lack of services in the society and support from government welfare cannot increase their awareness of the social inequalities that disadvantage them and their group; on the other hand, their social status does not give them the right or the responsibility to challenge those inequalities, as citizens and permanent residents can.

Implications for social justice and suggestions for practice

This study relates to the social work profession from a social justice perspective, and Canada, as a host country for Chinese international students, should take the responsibility to support them. Hsieh (2006) has suggested that colleges and teachers can help international students negotiate a positive identity, and government should take

responsibility for promoting language and cultural diversity, instead of adhering to the Western (American) ideology of cultural homogeneity. The support system is missing a layer in society -- services from social organizations and agencies outside universities, and cooperation between social agencies and university departments. Services from universities and social agencies are different.

Universities now focus on service delivery and on solving some routine problems involving immigration, study, and health. Lack of access to information and services means that Chinese international students do not get enough support. University departments should clearly show their official position and the students' rights. International students' needs, moreover, should be taken into consideration: for instance, mental health issues and employment relate to culture and social status, but the present services are too general to support international students. In particular, language barriers cam prevent Chinese international students clearly explaining in English their problems with service providers. Different departments, such as the international student centre, student unions and clubs, faculties, graduate schools, and others, need close connections and cooperation in order to better share information and resources.

Basic language courses are not what social agencies need, but participants may be interested in information about employment, immigration, and the society in which they are living. Social workers can help them learn more and better about Western culture,

policies, and society, in order to increase their awareness of social inequalities and human rights. Compared with staff in the universities, social workers have more professional knowledge and skills to help international students, particularly those who have had such experiences of study abroad, or who know both Chinese and mainstream cultures in Canada well.

As cultural exchanges among groups of students are limited, and many students have little interest in other cultures, they maintain the stereotypes and bias toward each other. Universities and social agencies can provide more opportunities for all groups of students to learn about other cultures, and to know students in a variety of ways. For instance, some Asian countries celebrate Chinese Spring Festival; service deliverers can provide some funding and venues for international students to showcase their cultures, with traditional clothing, national dishes, and customs.

The participants wanted CIC (Citizenship and Immigration Canada) to explain why the condition, "Not valid for employment in businesses related to the sex trade such as strip clubs, massage parlours or escort services", has appeared on their student permit, and how CIC decides who should be restricted by this. Social policy makers also need to consider the effects of policy beyond their own nations.

Directions for future research

The study focused on the experiences of Chinese international students in Canadian universities, their understanding of stereotypes, and their support system. It is interesting to explore the social interactions among different groups of students -- including Chinese students from mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, CBC, Canadian students, and international students from other countries -- as well as the patterns of cultural exchange in certain social-cultural contexts. Opinions expressed by other groups will reveal whether these stereotypes correspond to Chinese international students' understandings. In addition, WeChat, as a social media and platform, is worthy of study to see how it works in Chinese student communities in Western countries. Last, attention should be given to the human rights of international students and social services off-campus, in order to create a more inclusive system for them, and in pursuit of social justice.

Limitations of the study

It is difficult to avoid problems of some kind in a qualitative study. With restrictions on time and funding, I was able to recruit only eight participants, who were from two Canadian universities in southern Ontario. Although I tried to pursue diversity, seven of the eight are from undergraduate programs. This study discovered elements of the

difference in experience between undergraduate and graduate students. Chinese

international students from wealthy families or with a low level of academic achievement,

moreover, were not interested, and might have different views of stereotypes and the

support system. The characteristics and the number of the sampling might, therefore,

represent only a part of Chinese international students' experiences and understanding in

Canadian universities in southern Ontario. Consisting as they do of many groups of

students and staff, university communities are diverse and complicated. The data did not

include information about international students from other countries.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Poster

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR
RESEARCH WITH *Chinese International Students*

一项关于 80 后、90 后中国留学生的经历研究招募志愿者参加

I am looking for volunteers to take part in a study on the
experiences of the millennial generation of Chinese international students. You must be
between the age of 18-30 from mainland China and currently studying in a Canadian
university. There is no limitation about participants' genders and majors.

您的年龄在 18-30 岁，来自中国大陆，正在加拿大的大学就读。没有性别和专业的
限制。

In the interview you will be asked about your experiences of studying in a university,
your understanding of yourself in Canada, and your suggestions for a more inclusive and
supportive environment, from perspective of the millennial generation. The interview
will take place at a site of your choice, such as cafe or library in Chinese (mandarin) and
it will take 1-2 hours, during April and May, 2016.

希望您在访谈中，能够从 80 后、90 后的视野，谈谈您的大学留学经历，对自己在
加拿大生活学习的认识，对更包容、更具支持性环境的建议。您可以选择访谈地
点，中文访谈，持续 1-2 小时，2016 年 4 月和 5 月进行。

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study,
please contact: 需要任何相关信息或报名，请联系

Nan Ma 马楠	School of Social Work	社会工作学院
289 887 8026	Email: nanm@mcmaster.ca	
QQ: 1531202473	Wechat（微信）: Aprilmn	
	scan the two-dimension	
	code 请扫二维码	

**This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance
by the McMaster Research Ethics Board.**

Appendix B: LETTER OF INFORMATION / CONSENT

A Study on the Experiences of Chinese International Students in Canadian Universities

Student Investigator:	**Faculty Supervisor:**
Nan Ma	Dr. Y. Rachel Zhou
School of Social work	School of Social work
McMaster University Hamilton, Ontario, Canada	McMaster University Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
Tel: (289) 8878 026	Tel: (905) 526 9140 ext.23787
E-mail: nanm@mcmaster.ca	E-mail: zhoura@mcmaster.ca

Purpose of the Study:

You are invited to take part in a study on the experiences of a new generation (post-80s and -90s) Chinese international students in Canadian universities. This study aim to explore your experiences of studying in a Canadian university and the impacts of such experiences on your understanding of yourself. I am also interested in hearing your perspectives on how to create a more inclusive learning environment in the university. I am conducting this research project for my thesis of Master degree in Social work at McMaster University.

Procedures involved in the Research:

The data will be collected through face-to-face, individual, in-depth interview at a place of your choice. The interview will be conducted in mandarin/Chinese and will take 1-2 hours. When you contact me to express your interest to participate in the study, I will explain the purpose and process of the interview and answer any questions that you may have. The interview will take place at a place that is of your choice. Before the interview, I will provide you the hard-copies of LOI/Consent form. After you have a chance to read the LOI and ask questions, you will be asked to sign the consent form. Both you and I will keep a copy of the signed consent form. With your consent, the interview will be audiotaped. If you do not want the interview audiotaped, I will take detailed notes of the interview.

At the beginning of the interview, I will first ask you some background information like your age and educational background. After that, I will ask questions about your experiences of studying in a Canadian university, your thoughts about yourself in the new environment, and your suggestions on related resources at university.

Potential Harms, Risks or Discomforts:

The risks for your participation in this study are minimal. Given that I will be asking you about your experiences as an international student from China, including what struggles you have faced while you've been here, you might become upset if your experiences have been difficult. Please be assured that you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer, that we can take a break at any time, and that we can stop the interview altogether if you so wish. I will also provide you with a list of counselling resources should you need to talk to someone after the interview.

Potential Benefits:

The research will not benefit you directly. I hope that the research findings of this study will help us to better understand Chinese international students' experiences and their needs in Canadian universities. This might also help future Chinese international students to better prepare for their study in Canadian universities. The recommendations generated by this study may also help Canadian universities to provide better support for international students. I will summarize the research findings and send to the offices, such as international student services and International Graduate Student Advisory Group, after my defense, in order to disseminate the results and to improve the quality of services toward international students.

Confidentiality:

Your participation in this study is completely confidential. I will not use your name or any information that would make you to be identified. You should be aware, however, that we can sometimes be identified by the stories we tell; please keep this in mind when answering my questions. The interview will be transcribed and translated by myself. The hard-copies of data will be scanned as e-copies, after that, the original hard-copies will be destroyed. And I will store the data in my password-protected laptop, to which only I have access. No one but me will know whether you were in the study unless you choose to tell others. I will keep all data, including the information of participants, the recordings, transcripts and data analysis, for six months, and after my thesis defense, all the data will be deleted.

Participation and Withdrawal:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. It is your choice to be part of the study or not. You can withdraw at any time up until **May 30th, 2016**, when I expect to submit my thesis. If you decide to withdraw, there will be no consequences to you. In cases of withdrawal, any data you have provided will be destroyed unless you indicate otherwise.

Information about the Study Results:

I expect to that the data analysis of this project will be completed by **June 30th, 2016**. If you would

like a brief summary of the results in both Chinese and English, please let me know how you would like it sent to you after the data analysis.

Questions about the Study:

If you have questions or need more information about the study itself, please contact me (Email:nanm@McMaster.ca; Tel: 289 887 8026).

This study has been reviewed by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board and received ethics clearance. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Secretariat
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
C/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support
E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

CONSENT

- I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Nan Ma of McMaster University.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested.
- I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time or up until May 30th , 2016.
- I have been given a copy of this form.
- I agree to participate in the study.

Signature: _____Date: _____
Name of Participant (Printed) _____

1. I agree that the interview can be audio recorded.
… Yes.
… No.
2. …Yes, I would like to receive a summary of the study's results (in both English and Chinese).
Please send them to me at this email address _____
Or to this mailing address: _____

_____
_____
… No, I do not want to receive a summary of the study's results.

Depending on the flow of the interview conversation and the situation of specific participants, some interview questions are the second-tier prompts or follow-up questions. During the interview, I will focus on the major, first-tier questions and might explore second-tier questions if time allows.

Section 1: Background

a. Basic information: age, major, hometown, how long have you studied in Canada?

b. Why did you make a decision to study abroad, to choose Canada, this university and this program, respectively?

  - *Prompts:* Before you came to Canada, how did you imagine living here? How did you prepare to study abroad (improve language skills, learn western culture/history, communicate with previous students, buy necessities, respectively)?

Section 2: Experiences

c. What is your life (both academic and social life) like in the university?

  - *Prompts:* What are the major changes, compared to your life in China? Are there successful stories? What are the major challenges? How do you deal with them?

d. Do you know or use any services for international students in your university when you need help? How did the services work? Do you have any suggestion for improving these?

e. Are you a member of the Chinese international student group in your university? If so, what is your experience with the group like? If not, how come you did not join it?

Section 3: Identity

f. Since you belong to the millennial generation and also the only-child generation back in China, do you observe there are any collective characteristics (e.g., strengths and weaknesses) of Chinese international students who belong to this group/generation? What about you? Does this generational identity or label have any influences on your life and study in Canada? How?

g. Based on your observation, what do your Canadian peer students, professors and other people in the university think about Chinese international students?

  - *Follow-ups:* Do you think their views about this group fair? Why or Why not? If you do not like the ways they think about Chinese international students, have you tried to change their thoughts about Chinese international students? If so, what did you do?

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h. Have your idea about who you are changed after coming to Canada? If so, what is the changes? Why do you think such a change happened?

-   *Follow-ups:* Have you ever had a struggle to sort out who you are in Canada? What is the struggle? What have you done or tried to tackle it?

Section 4: The future

i. What is your plan after graduation? Why do you have such a plan?

j. What are your suggestions for future Chinese international students to better study in a Canadian university and live in Canada?

k. Is there anything that I have not asked but you think it is important to share?