REFLEXIVITY IN THE LEARNING EXPERIENCES

OF CHINESE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN CANADA

by

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A thesis submitted to the

School of Graduate Studies

in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Education

Faculty of Education

Memorial University of Newfoundland

March 2024

St. John's   Newfoundland and Labrador

ABSTRACT

Many studies have found that Chinese international students face numerous challenges while studying in Canada. However, current research on the reasons behind these challenges is not sufficiently in-depth and comprehensive. The perspective of reflexivity can address these shortcomings. Therefore, this study aimed to explore these reasons through the lens of reflexivity. To understand their experiences with reflexivity in education in China and Canada, qualitative research approach was adopted. Six Chinese graduate students at Memorial University of Newfoundland participated in the study. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and written narratives. Following thematic content analysis, the study yielded the following key findings: (1) The emphasis on reflexivity in Canadian education over Chinese education is widely acknowledged. (2) Participants exhibited varying degrees of depth in explaining this difference. (3) All participants expressed a preference for reflexive education. (4) Participants demonstrating higher reflexivity were more adept at the Canadian environment. Additionally, the study clarified three common misconceptions: obedience is not a principle of genuine Confucianism; regime type is likely to influence education potentially; and Canadian universities are not recommended to adopt a Chinese-style teaching approach to accommodate Chinese international students. These offer insights for future research.

Keywords: Chinese international students, challenges, learning behaviors, reflexivity, pseudo-Confucianism

GENERAL SUMMARY

This study employed qualitative research to explore the learning challenges experienced by Chinese international students in Canada, and to examine their learning behaviors through a reflexive lens. It filled a gap in the current literature, which is limited to outlining or superficially explaining these challenges and behaviors. This study claimed that the lack of reflexivity in Chinese education is the root cause of these challenges and behaviors. To understand their experience of reflexivity in education between the two countries, six Chinese graduate students from Memorial University of Newfoundland participated in interviews and shared their stories. The findings indicate: (1) Canadian education tends to value reflexivity more than Chinese education. (2) Participants varied in their interpretations of (1). (3) Participants prefer reflexive education. (4) Those with higher reflexivity are likely to adapt better to the Canadian environment. Additionally, the study clarified three common misconceptions: obedience is not genuine Confucianism; the level of democracy influences education, and Canadian universities are not recommended to adopt Chinese-style teaching to accommodate Chinese international students.

Keywords: Chinese international students, challenges, learning behaviors, reflexivity, pseudo-Confucianism

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Cecile Badenhorst. She provided me with ample research freedom, encouraging me to pursue my research interests. Additionally, she always offered timely and clear professional guidance, helping me successfully complete this study. Importantly, her guidance also serves as a valuable reference for my future research endeavors.

I also want to extend my gratitude to the participants of this study. I appreciate their selfless dedication in sparing their time to participate in the research and their willingness to share their experiences and stories during interviews openly. Without their contributions, I could not have completed this research.

Finally, I want to express special thanks to my husband. Throughout the years, from the inception of this research idea to its final completion, he has been actively supportive, engaging in patient discussions and providing valuable insights that have inspired my research. Without his encouragement and support, I would not have been able to complete this study successfully.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the Research Problem

Over the past two decades, a significant number of international students have opted to pursue their education in Canada, attracted by the high quality of the education system, the country's ethos of equality and inclusivity, and the supportive work policies (CBIE, 2018). In recent years, the proportion of international students has consistently risen by more than 10% annually. By 2023, the number of international students surpassed one million, reaching a historic peak, which represented a 29% increase compared to 2022, a 63% increase compared to five years prior, and a growth of over 200% over the last decade (CBIE, 2023). This trend has led to Canada's total number of international students swiftly rising in global rankings from seventh place in 2015 to third place in 2022 (Government of Canada, 2023).

It is noted that international students have consistently made up a significant portion of the student body across higher education institutions, spanning all levels of study. Since 2015, this ratio has remained consistent, staying at approximately 75% (CBIE, 2018). For instance, in 2023, undergraduate international students constituted 15.4%, master's students 21.3%, and a notable 38.5% of doctoral students (Statistics Canada, 2023).

The impact of international students on Canadian cultural diversity, finance, and the job market is substantial. According to the government of Canada (2019), international students play a pivotal role in driving innovation and fostering international exchange and trade. Take 2018 as an example, international students in Canada made a substantial

contribution of approximately $21.6 billion to the country's GDP. This investment brought by international students has a greater impact on Canada's economy than the export of automotive parts, lumber, or aircraft, and has bolstered nearly 170,000 jobs for Canada's middle class.

1.2 Research Problem

Among all countries, China notably stands as one of the leading sources of international students in Canada. Before 2018, Chinese students surpassed the average levels among all source countries in terms of numbers and the rate of increase (Statistics Canada, 2020b). In 2016, the proportion of Chinese international students reached its peak, with one out of every three international students hailing from China. Although the percentage dropped in recent years, Chinese students remained the second-largest group among all source countries (CBIE, 2023). Additionally, it is noticed that many Chinese international students tend to concentrate their studies on specific disciplines (Statistics Canada, 2020a).

The concentrated choice of majors among Chinese students has drawn the attention of many scholars. Moreover, it has been observed that many Chinese students in Canada tend to face various challenges, including a preference for rote memorization as a study method (Scheele et al., 2011), difficulty in communicating with course instructors (Zhang & Zhou, 2010), social isolation from non-Chinese classmates (Ross & Chen, 2015), and low civic engagement (Yuen, 2013). These behaviors may significantly hinder their academic success and social participation (Christidis, 2021; Spencer-Oatey et al., 2017).

Therefore, exploring and improving the learning experience of Chinese students in

Canada holds significant importance. Firstly, it can enhance Chinese students' learning effectiveness and academic achievements (Zhang & Zhou, 2010). Secondly, the current learning experiences of Chinese international students in Canada would likely affect their retention and subsequent recruitment of international students (Zhang & Zhou, 2010). Given the significant proportion of Chinese international students in Canada, it is crucial for Canadian educational institutions to consider their learning experiences. Last but not least, the experience in Canada can foster modern democratic consciousness among Chinese students (Spencer-Oatey et al., 2017). If a large number of Chinese students can bring back modern democratic consciousness to China, it could potentially catalyze the democratization process in China.

1.3 Knowledge Gap

Current research in this field mainly focuses on describing the challenges faced by Chinese international students and their behaviors, with few studies exploring factors shaping these students' experiences touch only on superficial factors like exam-oriented education (Kipnis, 2011; Ross & Chen, 2015; Zhang, 2016). Indeed, exam-oriented education can explain phenomena, such as students fearing professors and memorizing information. However, it fails to explain why they tend to avoid interacting with non-Chinese peers and exhibit low civic engagement. Apart from its limited explanatory scope, ascribing these behaviors solely to exam-oriented education has two serious flaws: Firstly, if exam-oriented education leads to the aforementioned drawbacks, why is it still widely employed? Secondly, why do Chinese international students tend to maintain their previous study behaviors even

after leaving the rote memorization environment?

These two questions revolve around how a system is formed and what stance individuals should adopt toward the system. These issues fall within the scope of reflexivity, as reflexivity advocates for "question[ing] our own attitudes, thought processes, values, assumptions, prejudices and habitual actions" (Bolton & Delderfield, 2018, p. 13) to comprehend how individuals influence and are influenced by "others, situations, and professional and social structures" (p. 14). Danielewicz (2001) provided a more detailed explanation of reflexivity: it acknowledges the cultural and social historical context in which individuals exist, recognizing that power dynamics, i.e., external systems, profoundly influence one's thoughts, values, and behaviors. By acknowledging and questioning previously accepted values and ideas, individuals can enhance self-awareness, thus gaining a deeper understanding of the relationship between external systems and themselves. In essence, reflexivity advocates for identifying the oppression and obfuscation brought about by the system (Ryan & Walsh, 2018) to gain new perspectives and strategies for problem-solving (Campbell et al., 1991). This necessitates a critical examination of external systems and an enhancement of self-awareness, which precisely addresses the two issues that cannot be solely ascribed to exam-oriented education.

However, Canadian and Chinese education seem to have contrasting attitudes toward critically examining external systems and enhancing self-awareness. Perhaps this divergence in attitude is related to the challenges faced by Chinese international students. As Fei (2008) pointed out, within Chinese educational settings, knowledge is likely to be perceived as indisputable, and teachers are revered as exemplars, fostering an expectation of obedience and

compliance among students to show reverence for both the teacher and the knowledge being transmitted. In contrast, Canadian classrooms tend to promote the notion that knowledge is relative and constructed and thus value individual experiences influenced by specific social, political, and economic backgrounds (Entwistle, 2000). Students are encouraged to connect these experiences with textbook knowledge to create new meanings. Furthermore, Canadian classrooms advocate for a student-centered, democratic, and dialogic relationship (Kek & Huijser, 2011). In such classrooms, students are encouraged to reflect on how external social backgrounds influence personal experiences and knowledge while enhancing self-awareness, thus fostering reflexivity (Dyer & Hurb, 2016). Henceforth, it is evident that Chinese international students may confront starkly contrasting teaching ideologies between China and Canada, and these ideologies likely stem from differing attitudes towards reflexivity. This may manifest as a conflict in their experiences.

1.4 Research Questions and Methodology

This paper took the reflexivity of Chinese international students in their learning experiences in both China and Canada as a starting point, aiming to explore the underlying reasons behind the challenges they face and their learning behaviors, further in order to provide insights for research aimed at enhancing their learning experiences. This research objective can be concretized into the following four research questions:

(1) Did Chinese international students perceive differential attitudes towards reflexivity between Chinese universities and Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN)?

(2) What did they think that shaped the perceived difference?

(3) Which educational approach did they prefer?

(4) Is there a connection between participants' adaptation to Canadian life and their levels of reflexivity?

As this study aimed to explore the unique personal experiences and interpretations of learning experiences among Chinese international students, a qualitative research approach was employed. Specifically, the study used basic qualitative research. Being one of the most widely used types of qualitative research in the humanities and social sciences, basic qualitative research helps in understanding how participants interpret their personal experiences and construct their worldview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To obtain rich data and facilitate data comparison to enhance research credibility, the study employed two data collection methods: semi-structured interviews and written narratives. Then, the data was analyzed using the thematic content analysis method.

The sample for this study was comprised of six graduate students from MUN, and both sample selection and data collection were conducted at the university. MUN was chosen as the research site due to its high domestic and international reputation. For instance, in 2023, MUN ranked 7th out of 15 universities in the Comprehensive category of Maclean's University Rankings (Centre for Institutional Analysis and Planning, 2023). Additionally, it achieved a ranking of 101-200 out of 1591 universities in *The Times Higher Education Impact Rankings* for its comprehensive assessment of research, stewardship, outreach, and teaching (Centre for Institutional Analysis and Planning, 2023). Its renowned global reputation naturally attracts numerous international students from around the world. In fact, at MUN, international students account for one-fifth of the total student body and two-fifths of the

graduate student population (Memorial University of Newfoundland, n.d.). Although I do not

have access to specific data, it can be inferred that there are many Chinese students at MUN,

as they constitute the second largest group of international students in Canada.

Considering these factors, this study aims to shed light on the learning experiences of

Chinese international students, offering valuable insights that are relevant not only to MUN

but also to the broader Canadian academic landscape.

1.5 Overview of Chapters

There are five chapters in this thesis. Specifically, in Chapter Two, this study begins

by reviewing the current literature on Chinese international students' challenges, typical

learning behaviors, and the explanations of these behaviors. Subsequently, I highlight the

limitations of these explanations and propose exploring the divergent teaching philosophies in

Canadian and Chinese classrooms through a lens of reflexivity. Following this, the connection

between the behaviors of Chinese international students and reflexivity is analyzed.

Chapter Three provides an introduction to the selected methodology and its rationale,

including the selected paradigm, research approach, and research design. Additionally,

measures to ensure trustworthiness, researcher reflexivity, and the steps taken to address

ethical concerns are also discussed.

Chapter Four presents the analysis of the data provided by the six participants in semi-

structured interviews and written narratives using thematic content analysis. This chapter

begins by introducing the backgrounds of the six participants, followed by an analysis of the

experiences of Chinese international students in Chinese and Canadian classrooms and their

explanations of these experiences. Finally, an analysis of the themes reflected in the stories shared in the written narratives is conducted.

Chapter Five begins with a review of the research findings, followed by an indication of how these findings address the research questions. Subsequently, a comparative analysis between the research findings and existing literature is conducted to identify similarities and differences. Meta-conclusions are then presented. Finally, the limitations and significance of the study are discussed.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter introduces the research background, problem, purpose, research design, and general structure of the study. It is evident that filling the knowledge gap existing in current research regarding the challenges faced by Chinese international students is one of the primary motivations behind this study, and this gap will be analyzed in the following chapter.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Introduction

As stated above, research indicates that many Chinese international students encounter various challenges when adapting to the markedly different Western education system compared to their experiences in China, including language barriers, academic difficulties, and social integration issues (Jiao, 2006; Liang, 2004; Zhang, 2019; Zhou & Zhang, 2014). At a micro level, these challenges impact their satisfaction with their studies in Canada, their confidence in completing their academic requirements (Zhang & Zhou, 2010), and, subsequently, their sense of belonging to the school (Glass & Westmont, 2014). At a macro level, this also affects "the calibre of education itself and the long-term promotion and marketing prospects of a university and a nation" (British Council, 2014, p. 4).

In order to figure out the challenges that those Chinese international students encounter and the reasons resulting in these challenges, this chapter, through a review of previous studies, first elaborates on the challenges faced by Chinese international students, as well as the unique learning behaviors associated with these challenges. It then points out the current lack of exploration from the perspective of reflexivity to understand the underlying reasons behind these unique learning behaviors. Finally, it notes that despite the widespread appreciation of reflexivity in Canada, the Chinese education system holds a completely different stance, which will be explained in detail in section 2.3.2. This conflict is considered to contribute to the difficulties many Chinese international students face in adapting to the new environment in Canada.

2.1 Challenges and Behaviors of Chinese International Students

Given the significant number of Chinese international students, numerous scholars have engaged in research on the behavioral characteristics and challenges they encounter during their studies abroad. Furthermore, these studies have addressed various aspects of Chinese international students' experiences. This extensive body of prior research has provided ample material for my synthesis efforts. Ultimately, I have identified five major challenges faced by Chinese international students and the corresponding learning behaviors associated with each, which will be discussed in turn:

1. Focused selection of majors - An inclination towards utilitarian choices (Li et al., 2012; Ross & Chen, 2015; Song & Glick, 2004; Stevens, 2012);

2. Mechanistic imitation and low-level cognitive strategies - Opting for memorization over comprehension (Biggs,1996; Holmes, 2004; Jiao, 2006; Preston & Wang, 2017; Scheele et al., 2011; Zhang, 2019; Zhang & Zhou, 2010);

3. Anxiety in teacher-student interaction - Embracing a passive reception of knowledge (Beaver & Tuck, 1998; Biggs,1996; Ross & Chen, 2015; Yildiz & Bichelmeyer, 2003; Zhang & Zhou, 2010);

4. Limited ethnic diversity in choosing friends - A tendency to befriend Chinese peers (Chen, 2017; Jiao, 2006; Ross & Chen, 2015; Spencer-Oatey, 2017; Stevens, 2012; Zhou & Zhang, 2014);

5 Misconceptions of civic engagement - Low civic engagement (Yuen, 2013).

2.1.1 Focused Selection of Majors - An Inclination towards Utilitarian Choices

It is noticeable that compared to other ethnicities, Chinese international students tend to concentrate on a few specific majors that are considered popular. According to Statistics Canada (2020a), in 2017 and 2018, Chinese international students dominated 11 program areas in Canadian universities compared to students from other source countries. Particularly in fields like "Mathematics, Computer and Information Science," over half of the international students were from China. Similar trends were observed in areas such as "Business," "Architecture, Engineering and Related Technologies," and "Agricultural, Natural Resources and Conservation." Even in program areas with fewer international students, such as education, approximately one-third of them were from China. The results were consistent with what Liu et al. (2013) found in their study. Coincidentally, Business Administration was also identified as one of the most popular programs in other studies (Ross & Chen, 2015; Stevens, 2012).

This phenomenon is particularly pronounced within China. A survey encompassing 12,961 high school seniors across seven Chinese cities, all on the verge of undertaking the National College Entrance Examination (*Gaokao*), illuminated the prevailing trend among prospective overseas students (Liu et al., 2013). It disclosed that the most favored academic disciplines for this cohort included Business Administration, Social Sciences, and Engineering.

The observed phenomenon of Chinese international students clustering in certain academic disciplines primarily stems from two primary factors. First, a predominant emphasis on the prospective employability associated with a given major. Second, an excessive

consideration of the level of difficulty in achieving high grades within that specific field of study. In contrast, their counterparts in Western universities might tend to prioritize personal interests and "self-realization" (Ross & Chen, 2015, p. 22),

In the analysis of data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, Song and Glick (2004) discovered that Chinese international students exhibited a greater inclination to choose majors with higher average salaries compared to their white peers. Even after accounting for variables such as individual characteristics, family background, and information sources, the primary motivation behind their choice of majors revolves around expected economic return (Li et al., 2012; Song & Glick, 2004). Furthermore, Li et al. (2012) conducted interviews with nine Chinese graduates from a Canadian university, revealing that half of those who selected their majors primarily for job prospects did so to fulfill their parents' wishes. These parents believed that a foreign university diploma would secure excellent job opportunities for their children (Wang & Zhou, 2021). This further indicates that their choice of majors may not be driven by their own will.

Moreover, many Chinese international students tend to choose easier courses with the goal of securing higher GPAs to ensure smooth graduation and degree attainment (Ross & Chen, 2015). Ross and Chen (2015) observed that when faced with the option between specialized multicultural courses designed for international students and those tailored for local students, many Chinese students often opt for the former in certain business schools. Nevertheless, these courses are commonly referred to as "gut classes" or "watery classes" (Ross & Chen, 2015, p. 29) since they primarily aim to boost students' GPAs with low-quality content, ultimately failing to foster cultural communication and critical thinking skills.

For university students, the process of selecting a major and courses bears substantial significance. The chosen major determines the array of available courses, imparts specific skills and knowledge, and shapes future career prospects and economic returns post-graduation (Quadlin, 2020).

Research indicates that intrinsic learning motivation tends to bring about high cognitive engagement (Zhang et al., 2023) and better learning effectiveness (Zaccone & Pedrini, 2019), while extrinsic motivation often leads to surface cognitive engagement (Shi et al., 2021) or even negative effects (Zaccone & Pedrini, 2019). As mentioned earlier, many Chinese students, whether studying in China or Canada, tend to select majors based on employment prospects and the challenge of achieving high grades rather than personal interests (Li et al., 2012; Ross & Chen, 2015; Song & Glick, 2004; Wang & Zhou, 2021). This suggests a preference for extrinsic motivations over intrinsic ones. This trend in selecting majors and courses could potentially result in a narrow focus on obtaining credentials, leading to a surface-level understanding of the content and a lack of deep involvement with the subject matter; consequently, this may impede their academic progress, personal growth, and increase the risk of dropout (Wang & Zhou, 2021).

Moreover, the disproportionately high representation of Chinese students in these specific majors results in a significant concentration of Chinese peers in a given class (Ross & Chen, 2015). This concentration potentially hampers their ability to enhance English proficiency, adapt to the Western academic environment, and integrate into the local community.

2.1.2 Mechanistic Imitation and Low-Level Cognitive Strategies - Opting for Memorization over Comprehension

When considering Chinese students, the common impression is that they are prone to be quiet in class. Jiao (2006), in interviews with ten Chinese international students at the University of Windsor, observed that these students are easy to feel reticent during class discussions. Some even believed such discussions were inconsequential, leading them to choose silence. They indicated that classroom discussions tended to deviate from the textbook content, rendering them less relevant. Holmes (2004) similarly noted that students became bewildered when instructors departed from the prescribed textbook content, using humor and examples to enhance the learning material. These observations suggest that Chinese international students are inclined to place considerable emphasis on textbooks. Further, Wang (2017) found that Chinese international students enrolled in a Master of Education program in Canada encountered difficulties in paraphrasing arguments and comprehending educational theories.

This indicates that Chinese international students are likely to emphasize the literal information from textbooks but not the underlying content, and this phenomenon is believed to stem from the inclination of Chinese international students to spend more time memorizing textbook knowledge verbatim rather than actively understanding it (Jiao, 2006). In other words, Chinese international students tend to accept textbook knowledge passively without a deep understanding.

Scheele et al. (2011) identified the observed tendency as mechanistic imitation and a low-level cognitive strategy. This approach, lacking in reflection and understanding, neglects

the cultivation of analytical and critical thinking skills. As a result, it potentially hinders students from developing independent thought and forming their own viewpoints. Consequently, this method often leads to suboptimal learning outcomes (Biggs, 1996).

2.1.3 Anxiety in Teacher-Student Interaction - Embracing a Passive Reception of Knowledge

In the Western context, knowledge is cultivated through a collaborative inquiry process and critical evaluation of beliefs (Biggs, 1996). Consequently, students are encouraged to pose questions and even challenge their instructors. However, it is easy to observe that Chinese international students are likely to feel anxious and stressed about interaction with their course instructors (Beaver & Tuck, 1998; Yildiz & Bichelmeyer, 2003). This apprehension does not seem related to their English proficiency, as even students with strong English skills may face this issue (Zhang & Zhou, 2010).

Many Chinese international students tend to accept knowledge imparted in class passively, asking fewer questions or providing fewer responses, let alone challenging their teachers (Biggs, 1996; Ross & Chen, 2015). These students are accustomed to a "one-way, directive communication style between teacher and student" (Holmes, 2004, p. 299). The underlying reason behind this challenge can be ascribed to the tendency of Chinese students to view teachers as supreme and unquestionable while positioning themselves in a subordinate role (Zhang & Zhou, 2010).

Wang and Greenwood (2015) agreed with what Zhang and Zhou (2010) thought by stating that the significant authority and power wielded by teachers in Chinese education contribute to an unequal and tense dynamic in the teacher-student relationship. This dynamic

directly discourages students from questioning knowledge because questioning is frequently perceived as a challenge to the teacher, leading to potential loss of face for both the teacher and the student. Therefore, students tend to accept the content they are taught passively to show respect to the teachers (Zhang & Zhou, 2010). Ross and Chen (2015) found that if the proportion of Chinese students in a class is relatively high, this phenomenon becomes more noticeable; the quiet atmosphere in the classroom may even lead local students to drop the course.

2.1.4 Limited Ethnic Diversity in Choosing Friends - A Tendency to Befriend Chinese Peers

It is also noticed that many Chinese international students seem to face more challenges integrating into non-Chinese circles (Chen, 2017; Jiao, 2006; Ross & Chen, 2015; Spencer-Oatey et al., 2017; Zhou & Zhang, 2014). Specifically, Chen (2017) discovered in a study involving 11 Chinese international students at the University of Ottawa that most interviewees, even after spending a long time in Canada, only maintained superficial relationships with local students, limited to brief greetings before quickly moving away. Jiao's research also confirmed that the relationships between Chinese international students and local peers were "superficial" (2006, p. 59), with the few slightly better relationships often confined to study-related topics.

In contrast, Chinese international students are prone to form their own "extracurricular clubs and social programs," drawing them "away from university functions and organizations" (Ross & Chen, 2015, p. 20), indicating their reliance on a "close-knit circle of fellow Chinese peers" (Stevens, 2012, p. 2). Even though research shows that various ethnic

groups of people tend to engage more with their local peers (Bochner, 1986), the phenomenon called "ethnic enclaves" by Ross and Chen (2015, p. 20) seems more severe among Chinese international students. This reliance was evident not only academically, where they seek advice or collaborate with Chinese classmates, for instance, seeking guidance on easy courses or cooperating on assignments, but also in their living arrangements, with most off-campus Chinese students choosing to share accommodation with fellow Chinese peers (Jiao, 2006; Zhang & Zhou, 2010). Additionally, in leisure activities, more than half of the Chinese students opted to spend their free time with Chinese friends, while only 17% socialized with local friends (Zhang & Zhou, 2010).

Although interacting with individuals of the same ethnicity can alleviate feelings of loneliness, provide emotional support, and facilitate information sharing to a certain extent (CBIE, 2015), this tendency toward forming a close circle of Chinese peers can lead local students to perceive Chinese international students as unwilling to engage with them, further exacerbating the dilemma of social isolation. In fact, a higher proportion of Chinese students (45%) reported more social difficulties with other ethnicities compared to their counterparts, often leading to social isolation, loneliness, and mental health issues (Netierman et al., 2022). Interacting positively and frequently with local students and teachers can help reduce social difficulties for international students and promote their language, cultural communication abilities, and adaptability (El Masri & Khan, 2022; Spencer-Oatey et al., 2017).

2.1.5 Misconceptions of Civic Engagement - Low Civic Engagement

Civic engagement describes "how an active citizen participates in the life of a

community in order to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community's future" (Adler & Goggin, 2005, p. 241). It includes volunteering, voting, activism, participating in campaigns, engaging in mutual aid projects, supporting boycotts, and various other socially and politically motivated actions (Hope, 2022). A vital component of civic engagement involves articulating social and political concerns through questioning and challenging entrenched social norms and practices (Ramasubramanian & Albrecht, 2018).

However, it seems that civic engagement has been construed differently in China. In a study on civic perception and civic engagement among Chinese university students, Tu (2011) conducted a questionnaire survey of 1,218 junior students from 12 universities in China and interviews with 34 junior and senior students from three universities. The researcher found that contemporary Chinese university students perceived civic engagement as "a strong sense of patriotism, loyalty to the nation, and adherence to the views articulated by the CCP [Chinese Communist Party] leadership" (Tu, 2011, p. 422), owing to "the long-existing emphasis on placed nationalism and patriotism in the Chinese education system" (Tu, 2011, p. 437). This goes against the essence of authentic civic engagement that bolsters a diverse democracy, emphasizing both active involvement and meaningful discourse, including thoughtful critiques of our existing sociopolitical structures (Hope, 2022). Li (2015) analyzed this distortion with regime type: authoritarian regimes foster citizens characterized by obedience but lacking democratic values, political engagement, and awareness. In contrast, the hybrid regime, like in Hong Kong, cultivates a more diverse citizenry with contested perspectives, a willingness to adhere to laws, participate in voting, and provide suggestions for the government.

When Chinese international students are exposed to a distorted concept of civic engagement and encounter genuine civic engagement abroad, they may persist in adhering to their understanding of the distorted concept in China and find it challenging to comprehend, even resisting the original one.

This was supported by Yuen's research. Yuen (2013) conducted a survey involving 5,574 adolescents from mainland China, Hong Kong, and South Asia in Hong Kong. The results indicated that, compared to the other two groups, students from mainland China exhibited lower levels of engagement in civic society and self-perceptions regarding their future civic engagement in legal protest and electoral involvement. However, in Wang's (2019) study, it was found that 38% of Chinese students expressed a favorable stance toward both the CCP and its political efficacy. In contrast, only 9% of Hong Kong students held a comparable viewpoint.

Concurrently, Jiao's (2006) survey on the frequency of participation in co-curricular activities among Chinese international students revealed that 80% of respondents reported minimal involvement. Even within the 20% who engaged, their participation predominantly centered on academically oriented activities. This pattern echoes the observations of Zhou and Zhang (2014), who identified a participation rate of only 17% among Chinese international students in various initiatives orchestrated by the International Student Center. Notably, this level of involvement proves lower when juxtaposed with students from other ethnic backgrounds (Chen, 2013; Trice, 2007; Zhao et al., 2005).

In this context, Chinese international students are likely to lack the opportunity to engage in authentic civic participation, a crucial aspect during young adulthood—an essential

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developmental phase shaping one's identity, social and political beliefs, and approaches to community involvement (Hope, 2022). To be more specific, early involvement in civic activities is considered to be associated with positive long-term health outcomes. Participation in endeavors such as voting, volunteering, and activism during young adulthood is believed to be associated with improved mental well-being, higher educational attainment, and increased personal and household incomes (Ballard et al., 2019). Consequently, these advantages might remain beyond the reach of Chinese students in this particular context.

Overall, this section has reviewed many challenges faced by Chinese international students during their studies in Canada, encompassing issues related to their choice of majors and courses, interactions with instructors, approaches to knowledge, socialization, and engagement in civic engagement. These challenges are likely to arise from their tendency to carry over habits from China to Canada and might potentially impact their academic performance, academic adaptation, and social integration in the host country.

2.2 The Superficial Reasons Behind Chinese International Students' Behaviors

Regarding the Chinese international students' unique behaviors, numerous scholars analyzed them from China's system of exam-oriented education (Kipnis, 2011; Ross & Chen, 2015; Zhang, 2016), which is a kind of education aiming to facilitate students' success in various exams with high scores to progress to higher educational levels (Zhang, 2016). Further, Kipnis (2011) pointed out that in exam-oriented education, achieving high exam scores often involves accurately and swiftly memorizing information, with students encouraged to recite what they have memorized. Zhang (2016) argued that the curriculum of

exam-oriented education neglects students' genuine learning needs and personal development, emphasizing a superficial grasp of textbook knowledge instead. These can explain why Chinese international students tend to fear teachers and memorize rather than understand. Kipnis (2011) also argued that this examination system can be traced back 1300 years to the ancient imperial examination system (*Keju*). In this system, all candidates had to memorize the same Confucian classics, and passing the exam granted access to government positions, facilitating social mobility, which can explain why Chinese international students choose majors in a utilitarian manner.

However, ascribing reasons solely to exam-oriented education fails to account for the emergence of other types of learning behaviors summarized above: the tendency to befriend Chinese peers and low civic participation. Additionally, this interpretation seems to sidestep the potential exploration of the fundamental causes behind the formation of this system. Moreover, this approach appears inadequate in addressing why, despite the numerous drawbacks of exam-oriented education, there is a lack of introspection about it. More importantly, it does not explain why individuals struggle to break free from their established learning behaviors even after studying abroad.

Therefore, ascribing Chinese international students' behaviors solely to China's existing exam-oriented education system is insufficient, even when considering the system's long-standing history. The true reasons lie in why Chinese individuals opt for this system and why Chinese international students continue to adhere to it abroad. These two questions can be summarized as understanding how the system is formed and individuals' attitudes towards it, while reflexivity highlights individuals' reflexive stance toward external systems (Bolton,

2010; Freshwater & Rolfe, 2001; Loeber et al., 2007; Ryan & Walsh, 2018). However, existing research on the learning behaviors of Chinese international students has not adequately addressed the concept of reflexivity. Hence, this research used this as a foundational point, aiming to explore their learning experiences comprehensively and fill this scholarly gap.

2.3. Different Attitudes Toward Reflexivity in Sino-Canadian Education

The previous section mentioned that reflexivity offers a better perspective on analyzing behavior in Chinese international students. Therefore, this section will first introduce the acceptance level of reflexivity in Canada and China, respectively. Following that, it will analyze how education in both countries reflects the advocacy of reflexivity.

2.3.1 The Reflexivity Movement in Canadian Education

This section will begin by defining reflexivity, followed by an overview of the evolution of this ideology, its key principles, and its manifestations in education. Additionally, it will explore the degree of acceptance of reflexivity in Canada.

Reflexivity, broadly construed, involves an exploration of the dynamic interaction between an individual and their immediate social milieu (Cunliffe, 2016; Holland, 1999). Archer (2007, p. 4) succinctly characterized it as "the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa." Similarly, Ryan and Walsh (2018) expanded on this notion, defining reflexivity as "encompassing a critical assessment of the significance of environment, power, and context as

well as subjectivity in the delineation and construction of knowledge" (p. 1). In other words, reflexivity is a way of thinking that enables individuals to gain insight into their own thoughts and the surrounding environment.

Reflexivity, a concept with deep roots in the English language, has undergone a significant evolution over time. Initially defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as "capable of bending back" (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.), its more pertinent connotation emerged in the 16th century, referring to mental operations turned inward upon the mind itself. This inward focus on self-awareness finds resonance in the writings of Reynolds from 1640, where he delineated reason's dual functions – the outward gaze toward others and the inward reflection upon oneself (Salzman, 2002).

In the realm of modern human studies, reflexivity has been a longstanding concern, particularly underscored by the social psychology of George Herbert Mead (Salzman, 2002). According to Salzman (2002), Mead emphasized the socially constructed nature of human identity, shaped through continual interactions with others. This underscores the notion that self-awareness and identity formation are inherently intertwined with social contexts, suggesting a dynamic interplay between individual cognition and societal influences. Salzman (2002) also proposed that reflexivity plays a role in a shift in paradigms from a scientific, objectivist approach—referred to as scientistic—to an interpretive approach. This transition also involves moving from an objectivist viewpoint to a relativistic, perspectivist perspective and from the concept of value neutrality to embracing emancipatory and normative interests.

This definition suggests that reflexivity transcends mere introspective reflection; it entails an examination of how broader social and political contexts shape normative values,

assumptions, and knowledge (Freshwater & Rolfe, 2001). Consequently, individuals are compelled to critically scrutinize widely accepted knowledge and norms, questioning viewpoints historically accepted as self-evident (Loeber et al., 2007) by considering their relationship with the surrounding social environment (Archer, 2007). They are urged to "attend not just to individually focused reflection, but to site an individual or an activity within the wider context of the systems of which they are a part (Ryan & Walsh, 2018, p. 65) by critically evaluating rules and beliefs that lack clear justification and challenge assumptions that have been historically accepted without question (Loeber et al., 2007).

While questioning existing norms and systems, reflexivity also focuses on one's actions, thoughts, feelings, values, identity, and their impact on others, situations, as well as professional and social structures (Bolton, 2010). Reflexivity emphasizes the cultivation of self-awareness, which is crucial for understanding and navigating one's interactions with the surrounding environment. It involves the ability to recognize personal responses to external stimuli and to utilize this awareness to inform actions, communication, and comprehension (Etherington, 2004). Additionally, reflexivity extends beyond mere introspection, prompting individuals to consider the broader social and political contexts that shape their perceptions and beliefs, thereby challenging previously unquestioned assumptions (Freshwater & Rolfe, 2001). Moreover, reflexivity is viewed as an ongoing cognitive exercise that enables individuals to reflect on their roles within social frameworks and to recognize the reciprocal influence between their actions and their social contexts (Donati & Archer, 2015). It demands the ability to continuously reflect upon, evaluate, and revise one's identity and actions (Beck, 1994).

Simply put, reflexivity is perceived as a process that facilitates an understanding of one's position in the world, contributing to the enhancement of self-awareness (Ng et al., 2019). These perspectives collectively underscore the significance of reflexivity in critical engagement with one's environment and fostering self-awareness.

Reflexivity's advocacy towards critical engagement with one's environment and the cultivation of self-awareness also underscores its profound implications for the field of education. Many scholars appear to suggest that facilitation of reflexivity in general would stimulate learning and innovation (Beers & van Mierlo, 2017; Keen et al., 2005), and reflexivity is crucial for all educators striving for social justice (Ryan & Walsh, 2018). This is because "every context or activity is profoundly effected by its environment – the web of relationships and connections of which it is wittingly or unwittingly part. Examining these wider influences is core to reflexivity" (Ryan & Walsh, 2018, p. 65). Ryan and Walsh (2018) further pointed out that without reflexivity, education merely becomes a conduit for transmitting values and practices deeply rooted in a specific culture, which are closely linked to the assumptions, values, and perpetuation of power by the elite of that society.

Also, reflexivity serves to deepen students' understanding of knowledge, for it involves students drawing upon their personal experiences to generate new meanings for themselves (Entwistle, 2000) and employs assessment techniques that encourage introspection (Bisman, 2011; Gray, 2007). This emphasis on personal experiences and encouragement of introspection are also essential skills for individuals engaged in relational and facilitative tasks (McLeod, 2007). As to the teaching faculties, they need to "monitor their own reactions to the person and to use this information to build a more effective helping relationship"

(McLeod, 2007, p. 132). From this viewpoint, reflexivity requires both students and teachers to "have the ability to think about our thinking and our feeling, to have a feeling about a feeling, to have a desire about a desire, and that this self-awareness flows into action" (Rennie, 2004, p. 183).

Hence, it is recommended that the reflexive teaching approaches not only embed curricula within the socio-political and economic context but also emphasize student-centered, democratic, and dialogic classroom interactions (Kek & Huijser, 2011). In essence, critical engagement with the external environment, as well as fostering self-awareness, remain two fundamental aspects of reflexive education.

Regarding reflexive practice, many Canadian universities explicitly showcase their advocated academic culture on their websites, illustrating how reflexivity is encouraged within the classrooms. For instance, regarding the questioning of the class nature of knowledge, Kwantlen Polytechnic University advocates for students to critically examine and analyze course materials rather than accepting them wholesale (Kwantlen Polytechnic University, n.d.). The University of Alberta notes that instructors offer diverse forms of teaching materials to enable students to approach learning content from multiple perspectives, deepening their understanding and critical abilities (University of Alberta, n.d.).

In terms of critically examining teacher-student relationships, many universities encourage equal exchange where students can challenge and question instructors. The limitations of course instructors' knowledge are acceptable, and the diversity of student knowledge and perspectives is valued (Kwantlen Polytechnic University, n.d.; Lin & Ahmad, 2018; University of Alberta, n.d.; Student Success Office, n.d.).

Additionally, it seems common sense to incorporate students' personal experiences into the knowledge construction. In many Canadian classrooms, students are encouraged to engage in classroom discussions or group work actively, sharing personal viewpoints while listening to others' perspectives, thereby reflecting on how life experiences influence individual values and knowledge (Kwantlen Polytechnic University, n.d.; University of Alberta, n.d.; University of Waterloo, n.d.; Student Success Office, n.d.). These examples manifest the extensive application of reflexivity in Canadian classrooms and its significance in supporting students' learning.

However, it is worth mentioning that the promotion of reflexivity in teaching primarily involves humanities and social sciences rather than natural science disciplines. This is because natural sciences primarily explore universal laws and truths in the natural world, which are considered absolute and objective and unaffected by personal experiences (Cohen et al., 2018). In contrast, humanities and social sciences examine interactions between individuals and societies, often influenced by factors such as social strata, subjective knowledge, values, and assumptions (Salzman, 2002).

2.3.2. The Anti-Reflexivity Movement in Chinese Education: Pseudo-Confucianism

Although reflexivity is widely accepted in Western education, an opposite ideology seems to prevail in China. Coincidentally, this trend also has two main tenets, which starkly contrast with the two tenets of reflexivity: "to be critical of the system" and "to encourage self-awareness." In this section, I will first introduce the historical origins and the two main tenets of the current ideology in China, then describe how these tenets are manifested in

Chinese education.

It is widely believed that Confucianism became the dominant philosophy in China (Ford, 2015; Lee, 2017). Notably, this Confucianism is not authentic but rather a tool used to justify and propagate the legitimacy of Communist party rule (Ford, 2015). Wang (1999) also indicated that this so-called Confucianism functions as a tool of ideological manipulation wielded by the ruling class during the authoritarian era to govern the populace.

Wang (2019) further pointed out that authentic Confucianism and so-called Confucianism are products of the feudal and despotic eras, respectively. Authentic Confucianism emerged during a period marked by a diverse array of philosophical and cultural ideologies, coinciding with Ancient Greek civilizations prior to the despotic era, while today's so-called Confucianism is merely a borrowed moral facade serving the rulers in reality. This idea is consistent with Ford (2015), who argues that what is now referred to as Confucianism is actually the rulers' selective use of Confucian concepts from ancient Chinese history to shape the mainstream discourse in Chinese society, aligning it with the authority of the Party-State.

Therefore, in this thesis, I refer to the so-called "Confucianism" prevalent in contemporary China as pseudo-Confucianism to distinguish it. Before exploring the influence of pseudo-Confucianism in education, there is a need to clarify what pseudo-Confucianism actually entails.

Specifically, authentic-Confucianism, as exemplified by Confucius, the Chinese philosopher and educator of the 6th and 5th centuries BCE, is distilled in the *Analects*. This compilation of dialogues, crafted by his disciples based on their conversations, captures the

essence of his teachings (Lee, 2017). According to the *Analects*, Confucianism primarily revolves around the idea of perfecting social and political orders and shaping individuals to contribute to that perfection (Lee, 2017). However, it does not emphasize educating individuals to meet society's needs. Conversely, it advocates an education aiming to promote personal growth and fulfillment rather than seeking recognition or benefits for oneself or society, and a harmonious society is built upon this education. With its focus on moral development, it acknowledges the potential for an individual to become "a socially responsive and responsible individual" (Lee, 2017, p. 16). Education is deemed meaningful when it actively pursues the ultimate realization of what makes individuals truly human.

In addition to the respect and advocation for personal achievement, Confucius also argued for comprehensive and diverse knowledge, ranging from literary expression, rites, and music to essential military skills. He believed that this "acquisition of the different branches of learning" acknowledges individuals' understanding of nature and helps them become true human beings (Lee, 2017, p. 19). Moreover, he emphasized the significance of revising and rethinking knowledge regularly (Lee, 2017).

Furthermore, similar to the assertions of Socrates, authentic Confucianism establishes a moral standard for interpersonal relationships. It stresses not only the importance of the younger generation's respect for parental and governmental authority but also the necessity for parents and rulers to earn respect and affection from their subordinates by enhancing their moral character and benevolence. This fosters a stable, equitable, and harmonious social order, allowing them to fulfill their duties and contribute to societal well-being (Wang, 2019). Therefore, authentic Confucianism does not advocate for a teacher-student relationship based

on dogmatic obedience. Instead, it perceives the teacher "as a companion, motivator, or dialogue partner and as a role model" in the pursuit of wisdom (Reichenbach & Kwak, 2020, p. 46). Authentic Confucianism views learning as a process facilitated through dialogue and debate (Feng, 2020; Reichenbach & Kwak, 2020) rather than a mere exercise in obedience.

Unlike authentic-Confucianism, which utilized a feudal and familiar political structure for indirect ruling, pseudo-Confucianism advocates strong central authority, where kings strengthen their rule through strict personal control and ideological manipulation (Wang, 2019). Furthermore, Wang (2019) points out that the essence of pseudo-Confucianism lies in emphasizing the obligations of subordinates towards superiors while deliberately disregarding the responsibilities of superiors towards subordinates. Hence, the first perspective of this pseudo-Confucianism revolves around obedience to the system, including superiors and the rules they make.

The other perspective of pseudo-Confucianism is that individuals submit to the collective, which might potentially suppress Chinese students' self-awareness. Within the context of pseudo-Confucianism, Chinese interpersonal relationships tend to prioritize interconnectedness, characterized by a societal emphasis on dependence and "a strong sense of collectivism" (Tang, 1996, p. 183). This idea is considered to emphasize individual dependence and conformity to norms and expectations set by the collective (Triandis, 2001) so that individual personal interests are devalued or forsaken (Frankel et al., 2006). In essence, within this framework of pseudo-Confucianism, individuals' sense of self is likely to be intricately linked to the group, and their significance derives from their membership in a collective (Bond, 1991; Fei, 2008).

From this, it can be seen that reflexivity and pseudo-Confucianism seem to have opposing views on the system and self-awareness, and the two claims of pseudo-Confucianism are reflected in the current educational environment in China.

In contemporary China, the *talent selection system* employed is the National College Entrance Examination (*Gaokao*), which involves a three-day written examination to select high school students for admission to universities based on their scores. It is worth noting that obtaining a university diploma holds a different significance in today's China than in Western countries. As explained by Qian and Liu (2021), *Gaokao* could change a person's life overnight; it is not only a significant turning point in an individual's life but also a decisive moment for millions of families. The decisive role of academic qualifications in determining social status serves as a driving force for people to pursue education (Mayo & Tighe, 2021). Specifically, only university graduates have the possibility of becoming government employees, who enjoy almost the same social welfare benefits as citizens in democratic countries, such as government-sponsored healthcare and retirement benefits (known as rice bowl), while individuals in other social statuses have to bear the costs themselves with little social welfare. This government employee selection system has led to many students prioritizing government positions as their first career choice and has also resulted in the increasing size of rice bowl seekers in China (Mo Gong, 2005).

Du (2023) provided a detailed analysis of the civil service recruitment situation in 2023: the number of candidates for China's national civil service examination exceeded 3 million, yet the availability of recruitment positions was extremely limited. The ratio of applicants to vacancies for certain positions reached 3572 to 1. Furthermore, there was a

notable increase in the academic qualifications required for national civil servants. In the same year, only 56 positions were available for junior college graduates nationwide, marking a reduction of 106 positions compared to the previous year. Conversely, there was a significant increase in the number of positions requiring candidates with master's degrees or above.

From this perspective, it is evident that the privileges enjoyed by government employees in present-day China and the method of selecting them might potentially lead the Chinese people to adopt a compliant and dependent attitude towards the system rather than the critical stance advocated by reflexivity. Moreover, the privileges of government employees and the method of selecting them in contemporary China align with the pseudo-Confucianism that has prevailed for a millennium, which suggests that one should study diligently to obtain government positions (Li, 2017). Ironically, authentic Confucianism advocates that one should not consider a career until after completing the education (Gao, 2016). Of course, throughout that millennium, this system was known as the imperial examination (*Keju*). In that antiquated system, all candidates committed the same Confucian classics to memory in anticipation of the exams, and only the winner could secure a government position (Kipnis, 2011), and the current *Gaokao* is its continuation, with no fundamental differences (Qian & Liu, 2021).

The pseudo-Confucian emphasis on "obedience to the system" is evident in China's educational environment above. Similarly, the pseudo-Confucian advocacy for "suppression of self-awareness" is manifested in the following aspects:

Yuan (2011)　summarized that Chinese school education tends to exhibit such a

tendency: emphasizing collectivist education while neglecting the cultivation of self-awareness and prioritizing rules and discipline to constrain students while overlooking the development of individual psychology. In the field of basic education, the long-standing concept of "uniformity" has had a profound impact: standardized syllabi, textbooks, curricula, requirements, examinations, admissions, and so forth. Under the "one-size-fits-all" educational system, educators are accustomed to nurturing and demanding students with the same educational objectives and standards, implementing educational plans using identical models and strategies. The ultimate result is the disregard for students' individuality, potential, interests, talents, and other individual differences, as well as the neglect of the fundamental laws of cognitive development in adolescents. This collective approach, pointed out by Bakken (2000), as a means of control, serves dictatorship, cultivating obedient subjects who follow the government without reflexivity. This stands in stark contrast to Western countries that, after experiencing industrial transformations, strive to cultivate citizens with independent and reflexive abilities, embracing diverse perspectives (Bakken, 2000).

In essence, compliance with the external system and suppression of self-awareness: individuals submit to the collective can be seen as two fundamental aspects within a pseudo-Confucianism education, which seems directly opposed to the principles advocated by reflexive education.

2.3.3. *The Absence of Reflexivity and the Five Typical Behaviors of Chinese International Students*

The previous section has outlined the contrasting trends between the prevailing

reflexivity movement in Canadian education and the pseudo-Confucianism trend in contemporary Chinese education. Reflexive education advocates critical engagement with the environment and fostering self-awareness, while pseudo-Confucianism education tends to emphasize compliance with the system and collective interests over self-awareness. When these two starkly different educational philosophies intersect, conflicts might inevitably arise, with Chinese students studying abroad in the West serving as one of the carriers of this conflict. Specifically, the five challenges they encounter can be considered to represent manifestations of this conflict, and their typical learning behaviors are likely to reflect the principles of pseudo-Confucianism education. Therefore, this section will analyze in detail how these five learning behaviors embody the principles of pseudo-Confucianism education.

An Inclination Towards Utilitarian Choices - Compliance with the System

The behavior of "an inclination towards utilitarian choices" reflects the principle of "compliance with the system" in Pseudo-Confucianism education. The phenomenon of Chinese international students clustering in certain majors discussed in 2.1.1 is an example of this principle. Specifically, many Chinese international students tend to focus on job prospects rather than their own interests and follow the crowd without reflecting on why certain fields of study are more conducive to employment opportunities or whether this trend will continue in the future. These aspects might demonstrate their tendency to obedience to the existing system. However, it should be acknowledged that the systems are primarily designed by those who hold social resources, naturally serving their interests or facilitating their management (Ryan & Walsh, 2018). In a society marked by clear class divisions and low fairness, it is

reasonable for non-privileged students to question established norms and systems. This involves considering the environment, power dynamics, context, and subjectivity in shaping knowledge (Ryan & Walsh, 2018). To discover whether the existing system favors the empowered, students are advised to consciously learn to observe and position themselves within specific cultural and sociohistorical contexts (Allen & Farnsworth, 1993; MacDermid et al., 1992) but not accept the system without critical examination.

Opting for Memorization over Comprehension - Compliance with the system

Taylor and White (2000) argued that knowledge is not simply a tool to utilize in practice; it is a topic worthy of scrutiny. Ryan and Walsh (2018) also pointed out that knowledge embodies authority and carries class limitations, stating the existence of a tendency to disregard the influences that privilege certain types of knowledge over others. Especially in humanities disciplines like history and politics, interpretations are likely to reflect the subjective views of the empowered. Hence, reflecting on the class limitations of knowledge becomes an important criterion for reflexive education. This aligns with the requirement for reflexivity to question how knowledge is generated and, more importantly, how power dynamics influence knowledge creation processes (D'Cruz et al., 2007). In present-day China, the central government has increasingly regarded the curriculum as a deliberate instrument for fostering a cohesive, patriotic, and Party-affiliated national culture, which are important components of *Gaokao* and the civil service examination (Kipnis, 2011).

However, students are not encouraged to criticize this knowledge in China.   In Kipnis's book (Kipnis, 2011), he stated that Confucian texts are considered sacred classics,

which can only be interpreted by those in power, and no one else may criticize them.

Similarly, works on the ideology of the Communist Party and quotations from party and state leaders are also beyond critique. For these uncriticizable course contents, naturally, only rote memorization can be adopted in assessment, and the assessment methods of other courses are also affected. As Dyer and Hurd (2014) suggested, these methods often produce passive learners who struggle to question "wider hegemonic sociopolitical and economic arrangements" (p. 289), essentially the external system.

Embracing a Passive Reception of Knowledge - Compliance with the System

In an environment where critique is encouraged, students are more likely to engage in equal communication with teachers, even questioning them, because knowledge is not considered absolute but rather relative and constructed (Entwistle, 2000). Therefore, students are encouraged to "resist letting others dictate their thinking, speech, and perspectives" (Rich, 1979, p. 231), and their personal experiences and diverse voices are valued as important components of knowledge construction. Conversely, in an environment where critique is not encouraged, students may feel compelled to obey teachers, as obedience is an unquestionable rule.

In contemporary China, the teacher-student relationships significantly deviate from those in the Western context. As Fei (2008) stated, the Chinese-style teacher-student relationship tends to be unequal, where the teacher's primary role is to serve as an example and impart knowledge, while students are expected to be obedient and compliant to demonstrate respect for both the teacher and the knowledge being imparted. Bakken (2000)

noticed that this kind of exemplary education stands as the conceptual cornerstone of Chinese social order, and education serves not only as a method of teaching but also as a method of governance, naturally aligning with this conceptual cornerstone of imitation. Kipnis (2011) agreed with Bakken's (2000) argument and revealed the essence of this exemplary education by saying:

> Teaching through exemplarity can lend support to authoritarian leadership by eliminating the justification for questioning the ways of the teacher. If the student is to learn by imitating the teacher/leader, then debate and questioning become irrelevant. Chinese education reformers, eager to critique what they see as latent authoritarianism in Chinese pedagogy, have often noted this parallel (p. 92).

In particular, schools present various authoritative models: models of thought, political models, model schools, model academics, model teachers, and so on (Mo Gong, 2005). These authoritative models cannot be questioned, criticized, or analyzed; they can only be followed. This type of education seems far from the civic education that a modern society should promote.

For students, "environment" and "system" are broad concepts, whereas the inclination of major and course choices, attitudes towards knowledge, and teacher-student relationships represent three specific aspects of the system in which they are located. Therefore, Chinese international students' behaviors in these three aspects can reveal their attitudes toward the system. On the other hand, the fourth and fifth behaviors of Chinese international students can reflect the harm brought by the pseudo-Confucianism education's advocacy of "Collective interests over self-awareness."

A Tendency to Befriend Chinese Peers – Suppression of Self-awareness: Individuals Submit to the Collective

Scholars argue that collective culture tends to distinguish between groups, defining an in-group and an out-group, marking an internal-external divide (Liu et al., 2019; Triandis, 1995). Unlike the emphasis on in-group and out-group differences in collective cultures, in cultures fostering self-awareness, the primary distinction may lie between the self and others (Iyengar et al., 1999). Triandis (1995) also noted that collectivists perceive a more pronounced disparity between in-groups and out-groups than individualists. This is aligned with what Lee and Ward found in their research. They (1998) found that collectivists tend to exhibit strong positive attitudes towards their in-groups but may express negative sentiments towards out-groups. Consequently, Chinese international students influenced by collectivist tendencies tend to differentiate between Chinese and non-Chinese individuals. In this context, they tend to consider participation in learning activities and social events with Chinese peers as a prerequisite. This can explain why Chinese international students might exhibit reluctance to engage with local students.

Low Civic Engagement - Suppression of Self-awareness: Individuals Submit to the Collective, Compliance with the System

Although it was mentioned earlier that many Chinese students who emphasize collective may be more inclined to interact with Chinese peers, this does not mean there is strong solidarity among members within the group. Surprisingly, Liu et al. (2019) found that Chinese individuals may exhibit more vigilance towards members within their groups, such as

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classmates or colleagues, compared to less collectivist Americans. They pointed out that individuals in collectivist cultures perceive more competition within the collective, leading to more negative and unethical speculations about the behaviors of ingroup members; this distrust is an adaptive feature of collectivist cultures, effectively preparing for potential threats. This suggests that distrust among individuals within the collective may be a side effect of collective culture. This is not contradictory to the earlier mentioned tendency of Chinese students to interact more with fellow Chinese. It can be understood that individuals influenced by collective culture may both reject those outside the collective and remain vigilant when forced to interact with members within the collective. Civic engagement, on the other hand, involves individuals participating in community or societal services with the aim of helping others (Adler & Goggin, 2005). Therefore, the desire to help others and cooperate with them is indispensable, which can be considered to directly oppose the distrust among members within the collective caused by collective culture. Hence, the more severe the influence of collective culture, the less collective culture likely individuals may be to participate in civic activities.

Additionally, as noted by Ramasubramanian and Albrecht (2018), the essence of civic engagement lies in questioning and challenging established social norms and practices, expressing concerns about society and politics, which entails a reflection on the existing system. This stands in opposition to the notion of compliance with the system as mentioned by pseudo-Confucianism. This is a second potential reason why Chinese international students influenced by pseudo-Confucianism may be reluctant to participate in civic activities. Therefore, the reluctance of Chinese international students to engage in civic activities may

likely stem from the aforementioned two reasons.

Overall, these five typical learning behaviors of Chinese international students could be explained by the lack of reflexivity. The utilitarian choices in majors and courses, preference for memorization over comprehension, and embracing a passive reception of knowledge through the unequal teacher-student relationship can be associated with compliance with the system rather than the reflexive education's advocacy of critical engagement with the external environment. The tendency to befriend Chinese peers and low civic engagement can be considered lacking self-awareness, while the latter also indicates the tendency to comply with the system.

2.4 Conclusion

In summary, to explore the learning experiences of Chinese international students in Canada, this chapter first summarized the research on the challenges faced by Chinese international students and their corresponding typical learning behaviors in the existing literature. These include (1) focused selection of majors - an inclination towards utilitarian choices, (2) mechanistic imitation and low-level cognitive strategies - opting for memorization over comprehension, (3) anxiety in teacher-student interaction - embracing a passive reception of knowledge, (4) limited ethnic diversity in choosing friends - a tendency to befriend Chinese peers, (5) misconceptions of civic engagement - low civic engagement. It then pointed out that previous studies ascribed these learning behaviors to exam-oriented education, but exam-oriented education cannot explain all behaviors. Additionally, current studies of the underlying reasons cannot explain why exam-oriented education continues to be

used despite having so many issues, nor can they explain why Chinese students cannot escape its influence even when studying abroad in Canada. The chapter then indicated that these unanswered questions actually involve the attitudes of Chinese international students towards the system, which falls within the realm of reflexivity. Therefore, the chapter proceeded to compare the attitudes of Canada and China towards reflexivity, finding that Canada tends to extensively promote reflexivity while China's promotion of pseudo-Confucian philosophy inhibits the development of reflexivity. Furthermore, through analysis, it is found that all five typical learning behaviors can be associated with a lack of reflexivity.

In order to understand the utilization of reflexivity among Chinese international students studying in Canada and their attitudes towards reflexivity in the learning experiences in both China and Canada, a qualitative research approach was adopted in this study. The methodology of this study, including the rationale for selecting the paradigm, research approach, and research design, will be elaborated on in the following chapter.

Chapter 3. Methodology

Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I conducted a comprehensive review of literature focusing on three aspects: the challenges that many Chinese international students may encounter during their studies in Canada and the behaviors that can be linked to these challenges, utilizing reflexivity as a focal point to examine how Canadian classrooms actively promote reflexivity and how the Chinese education system suppresses reflexivity. Consequently, the conclusion was drawn that the influence of pseudo-Confucianism in Chinese education tends to inhibit the development of reflexivity, making it challenging to foster students' critical perspectives on the external system and self-awareness. This, in turn, was posited as a potential fundamental reason for the distinctive learning behaviors exhibited by many Chinese international students and the challenges they face during their study in Canada.

To understand the learning experiences of Chinese international students both in China and Canada and their perspectives on the widely advocated reflexivity in Canadian classrooms, this study employed a qualitative research approach to delve into their unique personal viewpoints and opinions. Firstly, this chapter will expound on the rationale behind using qualitative research, specifically basic qualitative research. Subsequently, it will provide a detailed discussion of the research design, encompassing data collection methods, procedures, sample selection and recruitment, data analysis methods, processes, and measures taken to ensure trustworthiness. Following this, the researcher's role and relevant strategies for ethical considerations will be elucidated.

3.1 Research Paradigm

This study employed qualitative research, chosen for its appropriateness in addressing the research purpose. Qualitative research is used to gain a thorough and in-depth understanding of people's perspectives, attitudes, and experiences within a specific phenomenon to understand how they make sense of their world (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Cohen et al., 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). It recognizes the active involvement of individuals in constructing their own meanings within distinct contexts, entailing subjective and multiple realities (Cohen et al., 2018). It also emphasizes understanding the phenomenon through the participants' eyes and underscores the importance of considering the broader contexts in which they are immersed to ensure a holistic understanding.

As outlined in Chapter 2, this study aims to explore how Chinese international students perceive and navigate reflexivity in their learning experiences in China and Canada. Therefore, the focus is on understanding students' subjective viewpoints and experiences to deduce whether they are open to reflexivity, and this can be achieved through the collection of "unstructured data (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 287)", such as interviews. Moreover, the study recognizes that these perspectives and experiences may vary due to the specific cultural and social contexts these students inhabit. Therefore, connecting their perspectives with these contexts can uncover underlying issues beneath the surface of observable behaviors (Cohen et al., 2018). Hence, taking these two points into consideration, qualitative research is deemed appropriate.

3.2 Research Design

The specific approach adopted in this study is basic qualitative research. It is probably the most common type of qualitative research in some humanities and social science domains, such as education and social work (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This approach aligns with the fundamental characteristics of qualitative research, emphasizing that individuals shape meanings as they interact with and interpret the world around them. Consequently, researchers employing this approach delve into understanding how individuals interpret their experiences, construct their worldviews, and assign meaning to their encounters (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In relation to this study, basic qualitative research helps me understand how participants interpret their learning experiences in China and Canada, and whether they critically examine their surrounding contexts when constructing their perspectives and values.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

Depending on research purposes, many data collection methods can be used in qualitative research, like observation, interviews, documents, and field notes (Cohen et al., 2018). In this study, in-depth semi-structured interviews and a written narrative approach were deployed to capture participants' subjective perspectives and ideas regarding their learning experiences in China and Canada. The rationales for adopting these data collection methods will be provided below.

Semi-structured interviews occupy a middle ground between structured and unstructured interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), embodying characteristics from both. On the one hand, they feature a more organized section of questions aimed at extracting specific

information from all participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), facilitating the comparison of patterns of the same issues. On the other hand, recognizing the individualistic nature of how people perceive the world, semi-structured interviews employ open-ended, flexible questions with tailored wording and sequencing for each respondent, with the interviewer adapting based on their responses (Cohen et al., 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

According to Cohen et al. (2018), open-ended questions provide a framework for respondents' answers while allowing considerable freedom in the types and expressions of responses. This mode of interaction between researchers and participants not only fosters rapport establishment (Cohen et al., 2018) but also enables the use of prompts and probes (Cohen et al., 2018; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013), which involves seeking additional details, clarification, or examples to delve deeper into emerging worldviews or ideas on the given topics (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). These worldviews or ideas may not be included in pre-determined questions (Cohen et al., 2018). Furthermore, this approach is instrumental in testing participants' knowledge boundaries and assessing their beliefs (Cohen et al., 2018). In general, this approach is conducive for researchers to gain in-depth and authentic perspectives from respondents on specific issues.

In order to address the potential limitations of semi-structured interviews in capturing participants' specific viewpoints (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013), this study incorporated a written narrative approach. This approach involves how researchers conceptualize, capture, and convey individuals' stories and experiences (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). It was chosen because it is argued that stories play a central role in our lives, dialogues are inherently connected to narratives, and individuals construct their lives and derive meaning through

storytelling (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Therefore, Hendry (2007) pointed out that this type of research honors the way individuals make sense of their own lives. In other words, it positions participants at the core of the study, enabling them to share their stories on their own terms (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016).

More importantly, as respondents have the autonomy to narrate events in their own way, a natural occurrence might be brought in, potentially providing researchers with unexpected data (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019) and facilitating rich, detailed descriptions (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Through the collection of narratives, researchers can delve into individuals' interpretations of life experiences, the meanings attached to these experiences, and the values influencing their decision-making (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

The previous text indicates that data from written narratives can compensate for potential limitations in data obtained from semi-structured interviews, resulting in deeper and richer data. Additionally, comparing and cross-checking data from these two different sources is advantageous for enhancing the "credibility and quality" of the research (Patton, 2015, p. 674).

3.4 Participants

3.4.1 Research Context

As the only university in Newfoundland and Labrador, Memorial University (MUN) commands notable standings domestically and globally. Specifically, it has secured a position among Canada's top 20 research universities in 2020, indicative of substantial research funding and resources allocated to its academic faculties and student body (Research

Infosource Inc., 2020). In 2023, MUN rose to the 7th rank within the comprehensive schools category, according to Maclean's magazine, representing an improvement from its 2022 standing (Maclean's Education, 2022). Beyond its competitive standing nationally, MUN has also made an indelible mark on the global stage. In 2024, it obtained a placement within the top 501-600 universities worldwide, as per *The Times Higher Education* (THE) World University Rankings (The Times Higher Education, n.d.). Additionally, it secured the #641-650 position in the QS World University Rankings 2024, with specific subject areas garnering rankings within the #51-100 range (QS Top Universities, n.d.).

The prominence accorded by these international rankings has attracted an influx of international students to MUN, thereby increasing the degree of internationalization. Notably, one in every five students at MUN is of international origin, with approximately 40% of graduate students hailing from over 110 countries (Memorial University of Newfoundland, n.d.). This constitutes the highest proportion of full-time international master's and doctoral students nationally.

The substantial proportion of international student enrollment at MUN contributes to a milieu characterized by diverse ethnicities and cultures. Consequently, students immerse themselves in interactions with peers and educators from varied cultural backgrounds and political systems, engendering a substantial degree of intercultural and geopolitical engagement. Chinese international students, in particular serve as carriers of unique East Asian cultural and political perspectives, underscoring the importance of understanding these aspects for harmonious coexistence. Thus, the findings of this research endeavor are dedicated to promoting the understanding of Chinese students and their specific cultural and political

milieu for individuals of other ethnicities.

3.4.2 Sampling

In this study, a purposeful sampling strategy, notably employing the snowball

sampling method, was implemented to explore the distinctive learning experiences of Chinese

international students within Canadian university classrooms.

Purposeful sampling, particularly apt for qualitative research, acknowledges the

acquisition of profound insights from individuals strategically positioned to contribute such

perspectives (Cohen et al., 2018). Consequently, these individuals, as argued by Patton

(2015), serve as information-rich cases, supplying researchers with pertinent data aligned with

the central objectives of a study.

The initial phase of purposive sampling involves establishing criteria for participant

selection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Aligned with the research objectives, these criteria

provide guidance in identifying information-rich cases. Specifically, in this study, eligible

participants are defined as those enrolled in graduate studies at MUN with a minimum study

duration of six months. The rationale for this criterion is explained below.

The decision to source potential participants from MUN is influenced by the

recognition of the diverse cultural influences in the university context. Furthermore, graduate

students are specifically targeted, excluding undergraduate students. This strategic decision is

grounded in the acknowledgment that the former has received a complete education in China

from kindergarten through undergraduate studies. Hence, their understanding of Chinese

education is likely to be more comprehensive, which might offer richer perspectives for the

research. A further criterion for participant selection is a minimum study duration of at least six months in a Canadian educational setting. This criterion acknowledges that understanding reflexivity necessitates prolonged exposure to a Canadian classroom environment.

To ensure the collection of robust data and mitigate the potential pitfalls of insufficient depth or breadth, as well as the risk of either excessive or superficial data, a judicious sample size of approximately six individuals was considered appropriate.

Concerning the specific form of purposeful sampling employed in this study, the snowball sampling method was utilized. Snowball sampling, also denoted as network sampling, entails the identification of new participants who satisfy the established criteria by soliciting referrals from early participants (Cohen et al., 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This method proves particularly advantageous when gaining access to potential participants is challenging due to sensitive subject matter, potential skepticism toward researchers, or difficulties in establishing initial contact (Cohen et al., 2018). By leveraging the social networks of initial participants, snowball sampling facilitates the inclusion of participants who may otherwise be challenging to engage. This approach holds the potential to "reduce or even dissolve asymmetrical power relations between researcher and participants" (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 221), as relationships can be built on friendship and peer group membership.

Through the implementation of purposeful sampling in this research, particularly employing the snowball sampling method, rich and in-depth information about the learning experiences of Chinese international students within the Canadian learning environment was gathered.

3.4.3 Recruitment

The recruitment of participants commenced only subsequent to seeking approval from the Institutional Ethical Committee on Human Research (ICEHR). Adhering to ethical principles, I ethically disseminated the recruitment information and awaited responses, refraining from direct outreach to potential participants. Consequently, the recruitment strategy involved the distribution of the recruitment poster (see Appendix A) through various channels, including my social media platforms and bulletin boards located in the MUN center and the Faculty of Education.

Upon expressing interest in the study, prospective participants were encouraged to share the recruitment posters with other eligible Chinese international students, facilitating a voluntary and self-driven contact process. This approach aligns with the principles of snowball sampling, enhancing the potential participant pool.

Upon identification of potential participants, I furnished an informed consent form (see Appendix B), delineating pertinent details such as my background, study objectives, participant responsibilities, anticipated benefits, potential risks, and participant rights throughout the research process. Participants were actively encouraged to seek clarification on any queries, and I addressed such inquiries in a timely manner. Subsequent to the receipt of signed informed consent forms, interviews were scheduled at the participants' convenience, ensuring a considerate and participant-centric approach to the research process.

Regarding the sample selection, six graduate students took part in the study. Among them, three were around 25 years old, while the remaining three were in their 30s. The sample displayed diversity in academic disciplines, covering Engineering, Business, Education and

Computer Science. Additionally, only one participant had been studying in Canada for six months, while the others for over two years. It is also worth noting that four participants had completed their master's studies, while two were still in the process of finishing their degrees. Out of the four graduates, all except one, who returned to China after graduation, were employed in Canada at the time of the interview.

As for the recruitment sources of these participants, four were enlisted through recruitment posters, while two participants referred the remainder. Within the cohort of earlier participants, one was recruited via the poster displayed in a MUN online discussion group, another through the poster situated in the Faculty of Education, and the remaining two through the poster at the MUN center.

3.5 Data Collection Process

Given that the research site is inherently intertwined with the construction of meaning in research endeavors, its selection holds the potential to significantly impact the undertaken study (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Consequently, in this study, to ensure an environment conducive to uninhibited self-expression, the optimal research sites are those where participants feel a sense of familiarity and comfort. In alignment with this principle, the interview sites were exclusively determined based on the convenience and comfort of the participants.

Notably, two participants opted for face-to-face interviews within the serene confines of the Queen Elizabeth II Library at MUN, as they found the quiet study room to be particularly accommodating. In contrast, the remaining four participants engaged in

synchronous online interviews from the comfort of their respective locations, facilitated by computer-mediated communication tools or social media platforms. This approach was particularly pertinent given the capacity of online interviews to surmount geographical constraints (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), a crucial consideration, especially when participants were situated in disparate cities or countries relative to me. Two of these online interviews were conducted via Zoom, while the remaining two took place on WeChat, a Chinese social media platform that is analogous to Facebook.

In terms of the temporal dimension of the interviews, the data collection period spanned three weeks, extending from early February to the end of February. Concerning the time allocated by participants, the average duration for the first part of the interview was 52 minutes, with a minimum duration of 35 minutes and a maximum of 71 minutes, while the second part, the written narratives, was 25 minutes on average.

Interview Procedure: The initiation of interviews hinged upon participants' completion of the informed consent form, duly signed and returned to me. The participants and I collaboratively established the interview schedule. Preceding each interview, I would access the research site or online communication tools at least 30 minutes in advance to acclimate to the environment and ensure the readiness and functionality of equipment (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

Upon meeting participants, several strategies were employed to foster rapport and trust, encompassing courteous greetings, affable smiles, self-introductions, and the provision of preliminary, pivotal information about the study (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Additionally, I addressed any queries posed by participants. It is noteworthy that the entire

interview was conducted in Mandarin, which not only facilitates communication between both sides but also reduces the potential for misunderstandings due to language proficiency differences.

Subsequently, after obtaining the approval of the participants to record, I used the computer recording function to capture the audio. Then, the interview commenced according to the interview questions guide (see Appendix D). Before progressing to the formal interview, preliminary inquiries delved into participants' backgrounds, such as their tenure in Canada and academic majors. The initial segment of interview questions comprised four key areas: motivations for studying in Canada, considerations regarding the chosen major and courses, experiences within both Chinese and Canadian classrooms, and post-class learning experiences in both educational contexts, along with non-academic activities (see Appendix D).

It is noteworthy that interviews incorporated open-ended questions alongside prompts and probes. As expounded earlier in this chapter, the strategic deployment of open-ended questions affords researchers the flexibility to capture participants' unique perspectives while minimizing inherent bias (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Concurrently, prompts and probes facilitated me in exploring participants' evolving ideas on specific topics. In addition, I maintained a predominantly listener-oriented approach throughout the entirety of the interviews, demonstrating a commitment to respecting participants' autonomy in expressing their perspectives (McGrath et al., 2019). Furthermore, there was a deliberate emphasis on appropriately reiterating and confirming participants' contributions to ensure precise comprehension.

In the latter part of the interview, participants were tasked with crafting a narrative encapsulating their quintessential experiences in Canada (see Appendix D). Face-to-face interviewees were provided with paper and pens, while their online counterparts were prompted to prepare these materials in advance. Participants were afforded solitary time to articulate their narratives, ensuring a tranquil environment. Online interviewees conveyed their narratives by photographing the written content, whereas face-to-face interviewees handed over their narratives directly to me.

At the conclusion of each section, I consistently sought input from the participants, inviting them to provide any additional insights or pose questions. Efforts were made to address these inquiries comprehensively, demonstrating a commitment to fostering open communication and accommodating participants' informational needs.

When the formal interview phase concluded, I expressed gratitude to the participants for dedicating time to the interviews. Participants were given high regard for the intrinsic value of their perspectives and insights shared during the interviews. Furthermore, I conveyed a willingness to proactively dispatch a link to the published thesis to express appreciation after its publication.

3.6 Data Analysis

3.6.1 Data Analysis Process

As the interviews were conducted in Chinese, the initial procedural step preceding data analysis involved transcribing the verbal content into written text with computer software for subsequent reading and analysis (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). After the transcription

process, the text materials were subjected to member-checking by the interviewees. They could make changes if they felt the text did not capture their words accurately or if they wanted to add more details. Once the verification process was completed, the text materials underwent translation into English, marking the initiation of the data analysis phase.

The chosen analytical approach for both the in-depth interviews and written narratives was inductive thematic content analysis. This approach is commonly deployed in qualitative research, particularly in scenarios where the emergent structures derive directly from the analyzed data (Burnard et al., 2008). Furthermore, it entails a streamlined organizational process and provides a comprehensive and detailed depiction of the dataset, coupled with the interpretation of various facets pertaining to the research topic (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 79). The sequential steps integral to this approach are delineated below.

Step One: Initially, the researcher engages in a meticulous and iterative reading process to familiarize oneself with the text materials, aiming to acquire a "general sense of the data" (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 243). The coding unit is defined at the paragraph level, focusing on extracting and highlighting substantive information relevant to coding (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

Step Two: Open coding is initiated across all textual data. Particular emphasis is placed on identifying salient information in the data set (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013), encompassing attitudes, challenges, strategies, interactions, meanings, events, and cognitive frameworks. Subsequently, codes encapsulating the essence of each data unit are applied (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Consistent codes are assigned to data units conveying similar meanings, fostering the facilitation of data extraction, classification, and identification of

frequencies and patterns, as well as facilitating comparisons (Cohen et al., 2018; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

Step Three: Subsequently, the researcher categorizes these individual codes into broader clusters, commonly known as themes or categories. Themes, as defined by Creswell and Guetterman (2019), are "similar codes aggregated together to form a major idea in the database" (p. 245). Each theme encapsulates significant information in the data that is closely aligned with the research question and embodies a recurring pattern in responses or meanings within the dataset (Braun & Clark, 2006; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The process then involves refining and consolidating any overlapping themes or categories.

Step four: Following the identification and refinement of themes, the researcher revisits the textual data, implementing a color-coded system based on distinct themes or categories (Burnard et al., 2008). Relevant sections of the text are extracted and organized into a separate document according to their assigned categories.

Step Five: In the concluding phase, the researcher systematically identifies and summarizes patterns and generalizations derived from the identified themes, emphasizing any unexpected or unusual observations that surface during the analysis (Burnard et al., 2008).

In summary, the meticulous implementation of this data analysis method helped effectively synthesize patterns related to both the similarities and differences in attitudes toward and experiences of the five learning behaviors expounded in Chapter Two. Furthermore, it yielded a comprehensive summary of the corresponding experiences among Chinese international students in the application of reflexivity.

3.6.2 Trustworthiness

Quality in qualitative research has generated diverse perspectives among scholars, leading to numerous specialized terms such as truth value, trustworthiness, and authenticity, among others (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Within these, trustworthiness stands out prominently, having been introduced by Lincoln and Guba in 1985. It encapsulates the evaluative dimensions of credibility and reliability concerning the findings and interpretations of a study (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The proponents of this conceptual framework posit the establishment of four primary criteria to systematically address trustworthiness concerns: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility refers to the degree to which research results reflect reality (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). In qualitative research, acknowledging the inherent challenge of directly apprehending reality due to the co-construction of data with participants, researchers interpret co-constructed data rather than reality itself (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). However, researchers bear the responsibility of enhancing the alignment between research and the real world through judiciously selected strategies (Wolcott, 2005).

Transferability, synonymous with generalizability in similar situations, extends the applicability of study results to other research contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). In qualitative research, generalizability is contingent upon readers or users, requiring researchers to furnish detailed descriptions of the study's context, methods, and findings (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

Dependability in qualitative research concerns the consistency, stability, and reliability of findings across time and researchers or contexts (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Achieving

dependability necessitates a transparent and well-documented research process, facilitating

replication by other researchers and result verification over time. Confirmability, the final

criterion, centers on whether the interpretation can be confirmed or corroborated by others in

the field (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

To fulfill these criteria, this study employs several strategies, encompassing two data

sources: member-checking, researcher reflexivity, and the provision of rich descriptions.

The corroboration of evidence from different sources, theoretical frameworks,

investigators, and data collection methods can affirm the richness of data (Creswell &

Guetterman, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). In the context of

this study, two distinct data collection methods, namely, in-depth semi-structured interviews

and written narratives, were integrated. This methodological approach empowers participants

to engage with predetermined yet adaptable questions, providing deeper insights beyond the

interview prompts. Consequently, it enriches the understanding of participants' perspectives

(Creswell & Guetterman, 2019), while also facilitating cross-verification (Merriam & Tisdell,

2016). By integrating these two sets of data, the study's credibility and reliability can be

increased (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

Another strategy to increase the credibility and dependability of the study is member

checking (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Savin-Baden & Major,

2013). It is noteworthy that this approach also contributes to the confirmability of the study as

well. As delineated in the data analysis methods section, the transcribed textual materials were

sent back to participants for validation, affording them the opportunity to propose

modifications for further clarification. The data analysis proceeded upon obtaining their

concurrence (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Member checking served the purpose of validating my comprehension of participants' responses (McGrath et al., 2019).

Examining the researcher's role is also important for the credibility and dependability of the study. This is because qualitative research is value-laden, whereby researchers' values and beliefs, influenced by political stance, religious faith, gender, sexuality, and social class, can shape their position and subsequent choices in a given research study (Cohen et al., 2018; Holmes, 2020; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Therefore, the later section incorporates reflexivity of my role to mitigate bias, convey the level of transparency, and enable readers to evaluate the credibility and dependability of the study (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

In the pursuit of enhancing transferability, the use of rich, thick descriptions emerges as a strategy in qualitative research (Cohen et al., 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). This approach entails providing an exhaustive account of the research context, participants, employed methodologies, and findings, accompanied by ample supporting evidence in the form of participant quotes and document excerpts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Consequently, readers can assess the transferability of findings by judging their resemblance to the study and its context (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

As delineated earlier, a multitude of strategies, including triangulation, member checking, positionality and thick description, have been employed to bolster the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of this study, thereby improving its overall trustworthiness.

3.7 Role of The Researcher

Qualitative research is inherently non-neutral, as the researchers' worldviews, beliefs, and biases invariably shape various facets of the research process (Cohen et al., 2018; Holmes, 2020; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). This influence extends from the selection of topics and formulation of research questions to the design, data collection, analysis, and reporting of findings. Recognizing the potential impact of these predispositions on the credibility of the research, it is advocated that qualitative researchers engage in reflexivity regarding the personal backgrounds that may affect their research and publicly disclose these considerations to enhance the transparency of the study. Consequently, this section will elucidate my biographical and personal connections to the present study and explicate steps taken to mitigate potential biases in the research.

The current research is closely intertwined with my unique experiences. Several family members of mine hold positions related to the security of the Communist Party regime in China. Aside from having extensive teaching experience in a Chinese college, I have served as a secretary for the Communist Party administrative leadership as well.

Consequently, I possess a profound understanding and firsthand experience of Chinese teaching methods, learning behaviours, and the robust intervention of the Communist Party in Chinese education. This inclination leads me to adopt a stance that interprets Chinese teaching methods and learning behaviours from the perspective of ruling interests, which serves as the foundation of this study.

While scholars have extensively studied Chinese teaching methods and learning behaviors, it is noteworthy, as emphasized in Chapter Two, that most research tends to

interpret these educational phenomena from the standpoint of Chinese cultural traditions. For instance, some scholars argue that the current prevalence of written examinations derived from the ancient imperial examination system, yet I have personally heard state security officials at provincial-level education system conferences explicitly request increased exam arrangements during certain political commemorative events to divert students' attention. Hence, my past experiences have given me insight into how China's current education system serves the ruling class's interests. Unfortunately, Chinese authorities do not wish for their intentions to be transparent to the populace. Consequently, this study cannot be conducted within China.

Given this stance, I tend to view the adaptation of Chinese students to teaching methods and learning behaviors as directly or indirectly determined by rulers aiming to safeguard their own interests rather than fostering the comprehensive development of students. This inclination might introduce a potential bias in my approach to the study. To address potential biases in the research, I have implemented several measures. Firstly, the design of interview questions was tailored to minimize the likelihood of biased responses (Shivanee, 2019). This involved structuring the sequence of questions in a manner that prevents earlier responses from unduly influencing subsequent ones. To achieve this, I employed a strategic arrangement, beginning with broad inquiries before progressing to more specific ones. Moreover, the use of open-ended questions was favored over leading questions or those containing wording biases, aiming to prevent participants from aligning their responses with preconceived assumptions.

During interviews, participants were actively prompted to articulate their perceptions

of learning experiences in China and Canada, with an emphasis on encouraging a nuanced

analysis of the underlying reasons. Throughout this process, I maintained an objective stance,

refraining from introducing personal judgments (Cohen et al., 2018).

Secondly, a consistently neutral attitude towards the learning behaviors of Chinese

international students is upheld throughout the study. Recognizing that governmental

intervention is not the exclusive determinant, I acknowledge the influence of innate factors on

individual learning behaviors. Accordingly, an ethos of respect and non-interference is

adopted towards those students with natural inclinations, such as a propensity for obedience

and memorization.

In the realm of data analysis, a commitment to impartiality was sustained. I adopted a

clear and unbiased mindset, diligently revisiting the data to prevent any inadvertent favoritism

towards outcomes aligned with my hypotheses or assumptions (Shivanee, 2019).

3.8 Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations are widely acknowledged as playing a crucial role in social

science research (Creswell & Guetterman, 2014). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016),

the credibility of a study is intricately tied to the ethical conduct of researchers, emphasizing

the need for a thoughtful and rigorous approach to all aspects of research. This not only

involves addressing the primary objective of contributing "valid, relevant, worthwhile, and

significant knowledge" to the field (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 121) but also attending to

procedural matters, including rights and duties regulated by ethical committees. Therefore,

this section will delve into how I tackle ethical concerns, focusing particularly on the latter

aspect. This includes exploring ethical considerations related to informed consent, beneficence, privacy, disclosure and reporting.

Savin-Baden and Major (2013) argue that ethical research is supposed to contribute to knowledge, for example, by exploring new concepts or ideas. This is exactly one of the research goals of this study. As illustrated in the earlier chapter, this study aims to fill existing research gaps by examining the attitudes and viewpoints of Chinese international students toward reflexivity. The research also pays attention to the political factors influencing the learning experiences of Chinese students, which have been ignored intentionally or unintentionally. Therefore, it can be said that the contributions to the academic community are evident in this study.

This effectiveness of knowledge production, as Cohen et al. (2018) highlight, hinges on the methodological basis. This encompasses ensuring that the chosen paradigm, methodology, and research design align with the research purpose and questions. The transparency of the research process and the validity of the study's findings are equally crucial components. They caution that subpar studies may lead to wasting time and resources, raising ethical concerns. Building on these considerations, the present study intentionally selected a research paradigm, methodology, and design aligning with its specific research goals. The rationale for these choices has been expounded upon in earlier sections. Moving forward, the forthcoming discussion will allocate more emphasis to the ethical dimensions surrounding procedural matters.

I recognized that initiating the study hinged on approval from the ICEHR at MUN due to ethical considerations for potential participants. Before submitting the application, I

completed the Course on Research Ethics based on the Tri-Council Policy Statement: *Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2: CORE 2022)*. The application outlined how the study aligns with the policy statement and addresses ethical concerns. Fortunately, the study was granted full ethics clearance for one year by ICEHR (see Appendix C). Upon obtaining approval, the study was implemented exactly as outlined in the application.

Informed consent is fundamental to ethical conduct, empowering potential participants with information for their "right to freedom and self-determination" (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 122). The information is supposed to be related and comprehensive, providing details about the nature of the research, risks, benefits, and participant rights. To adhere to this, I crafted the informed consent using the ICEHR-recommended template. It clearly outlined the study's purpose, participants' tasks, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality measures, data handling procedures, etc. The language was kept plain and clear, tailored to the reading level of Chinese international students, ensuring they could comprehend the content. It was then sent to potential participants at least one week in advance, allowing ample time for decision-making, and I remained open to answering any questions. The interviews were conducted after the participants signed the form and sent it back to me.

Another ethical consideration involves potential harm to participants, encompassing physical, emotional, and psychological aspects (Cohen et al., 2018). Hammersley and Traianou (2012) posit that completely avoiding risk in research is improbable, placing the responsibility on researchers to mitigate it. To fulfill this obligation, researchers carefully assess the repercussions of the research on participants and implement measures to minimize potential harm; this can include incorporating informed consent procedures and safeguarding

participants' privacy (Cohen et al., 2018).

Fortunately, ICEHR has determined that the study poses a low risk to participants. In addition, the study holds substantial benefits for both individuals and society. As delineated in the informed consent, participant-centric benefits involve acknowledging and valuing their perspectives on navigating reflexivity within Canadian learning environments, addressing a noticeable void in prior research, while societal benefits include fostering a deeper understanding of the Chinese international students' experiences. This, in turn, aims to enhance their social engagement, promote mutual understanding among diverse racial groups, and contribute to the creation of a more inclusive and supportive society. The research outcome will be achieved at Memorial University's Queen Elizabeth II library and accessible to everyone who needs it.

Furthermore, I recognize the importance of respecting privacy as a fundamental human need. Given that qualitative research has the potential to intrude on privacy across various aspects, specific measures are recommended to safeguard participants' privacy (Cohen et al., 2018). These measures encompass obtaining informed consent and ensuring anonymity and confidentiality.

Acknowledging this, in addition to the adoption of informed consent, as mentioned above, I eliminated any identifying information of participants to secure their anonymity (Cohen et al., 2018). This involves collecting only essential personally identifiable information, such as names on consent forms. If participants express concerns about audio recordings compromising their anonymity, alternative methods like using paper records are adopted. Anonymity is further ensured by assigning a code to audio recordings, with a

separate key linking names to codes. This key had been securely stored, and after participants

reviewed the transcripts, it was destroyed, maintaining the confidentiality of participant

identities.

Confidentiality is another crucial aspect of privacy protection (Cohen et al., 2018;

Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). It entails the researcher's commitment not to disclose or discuss

participants' information to prevent their identification. Recognizing the trust placed in those

who assisted in the study, access to the data is limited, as outlined in the informed consent,

restricted to me and my supervisor only. The data is securely stored in inaccessible locations,

such as a password-protected laptop, encrypted flash drive, or a secure locker. In the thesis,

pseudonyms are employed to represent participants, contributing to the anonymization of

data.

Overall, ethical concerns regarding the contribution of research results to the

knowledge community and respecting participants were addressed through the

implementation of the above measures to enhance the credibility of a study.

3.9 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter illustrated the methodology and research design used in this

study. A basic qualitative approach was deployed to explore and understand how Chinese

international graduate students perceive and view reflexivity in Canadian classrooms

compared to their experiences in China. The incorporation of word and text data obtained

from in-depth semi-structured interviews and a written narrative approach separately

facilitated understanding of their experience dimensionally. The adoption of thematic content

analysis for data collected helped me to capture and analyze the patterns and unexpected or

unusual observations of their experience of being reflexive (Cohen et al., 2018). To ensure the

research's trustworthiness, two sources of data, member checking, the reflexivity of my

positionality and a rich description were employed. Acknowledging the bias that comes from

my personal background might impact the study, I implemented several measures to address

it, including the design of the interview questions, inquiry strategies and the attitude of the

whole research. In the next chapter, the analysis and findings of the study will be presented.

Chapter 4 Findings

Introduction

The previous chapter primarily discussed the research methodology employed in this study, encompassing the rationale for the selected paradigm and research method, research design, considerations of research quality, and ethics. This chapter presents the research results derived from the analysis of collected data using the thematic content analysis method. First, a brief overview of the backgrounds of the six participants is presented. This serves to enable readers to comprehend the participants' perspectives and allows for speculation on their overall adaptation to Canadian society based on their current life situations.

The second section includes the participants' reflections on challenges encountered during their study abroad experience and a retrospective examination of their learning behaviors. Specifically, it investigates whether participants engaged in any typical behaviors during their education in China, as mentioned in Chapter 2. Additionally, it explores whether these behaviors persisted during their studies in Canada and, if not, how these behaviors manifested differently in the Canadian context. Furthermore, it examines any changes in behavior between the two countries and probes participants' inclinations in such instances. The inquiry extends to understanding the reasons behind any alterations in corresponding behaviors during Canadian studies. By eliciting responses from participants, the examination aims to discern whether there exist disparities in the attitudes of Canadian and Chinese education systems towards being critical of the external system and advocating for self-awareness. Consequently, it facilitates an inference regarding which educational system,

Canadian or Chinese, places a greater emphasis on cultivating reflexivity.

The third section involves the narratives by participants that best exemplify the different experiences between Canada and China. Similar to the approach in the second section, I analyzed the content of these narratives to identify specific typical behaviors and challenges faced by Chinese international students. By doing so, the aim was to ultimately uncover how these stories illustrate the divergent attitudes towards reflexivity in both countries.

4.1 Participants' Profiles

The participant profiles present information regarding each individual's field of study in Canada, denoted by their pseudonyms derived from their respective academic disciplines. This includes the duration of their residency in Canada, their current immigration status, pre-arrival professional and educational experiences, and, notably, the political standing of their families in China. The latter holds particular significance given China's highly hierarchical society, wherein each stratum enjoys distinct social resources. Importantly, it is considered that the primary criterion for distinguishing these social strata is not economic status but rather the inheritance of political standing from one's forebears—a notable departure from Western societal norms. I posit that these aforementioned factors collectively constitute the backdrop of individual growth, playing a crucial role in shaping cognitive frameworks and value systems.

Participant One, referred to as "Programmer," has been residing in Canada for two years, having obtained a Master's degree in computer science a year ago. Currently,

Programmer has commenced full-time employment and secured permanent residency status. Prior to pursuing studies abroad, Programmer attained a Master's degree in the same field in China and accumulated over six months of programming experience in a private multinational enterprise. Politically, Programmer holds an ordinary position in China, which might represent the majority of Chinese students. Specifically, residing in a small county town, Programmer's family members are not affiliated with the political system, and their economic status is likely to fall within the middle class or below.

Programmer can be characterized as a beneficiary of *Gaokao*, having attained academic qualifications through individual effort. Consequently, it can be assumed that Programmer has secured a job with a societal standing and income surpassing that of the parents. At the outset of the interview, the participant exhibited a reserved demeanor, consistently attempting to avoid negative descriptions. When discussing unfavorable experiences, Programmer tended to gloss over them. Following the completion of all questions, I reiterated the privacy protection measures for the participant, prompting Programmer to provide more details and clarification for the initially mentioned negative experiences.

Participant Two, referred to as "Accountant," has been residing in Canada for eight years and has acquired Canadian citizenship. Having obtained a Master's degree in Business six years ago, Accountant has a full-time job. Prior to studying abroad, Accountant had recently completed a bachelor's degree in the same discipline in China and had not worked professionally in China. It is believed that politically, Accountant holds a relatively high position in China, belonging to the lower echelons of the ruling class, residing in a major

urban center where both parents are affiliated with the political system. The family's economic status can be categorized as middle-class, and this participant has already purchased a property in Canada.

For this participant, *Gaokao* did not play a determining role in social class advancement. Accountant had the opportunity to pursue international education under parental arrangements, ultimately returning to China for a profession aligned with the family's social status.

This participant exhibited a strong inclination toward expressing the experiences and eagerly shared insights. Consequently, vibrant and personalized responses were provided for all questions.

Participant Three, identified as "Educator," has been living in Canada for only six months and is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Education. Several years ago, Educator obtained a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration in China and subsequently engaged in training work within the private sector for numerous years. The participant did not disclose their political standing within China.

Throughout the entire interview, Educator maintained a cautious demeanor and displayed limited interest in the topic at hand. The fundamental attitude conveyed was one of circumspection, acknowledging the strengths of both the Chinese and Canadian education systems while avoiding any explicit criticisms. The participant rarely delved into negative aspects of the experiences in either China or Canada, maintaining a neutral stance.

Participant Four, known as "Mechanic," has been residing in Canada for two years, having obtained a Master's degree in Engineering last year. Currently employed full-time and

holding permanent residency, Mechanic had previously acquired a Master's degree in Engineering in China and worked for several years in a relevant capacity within a multinational corporation. Similar to Accountant, politically, Mechanic holds a high position in China, belonging to the lower echelons of the ruling class, residing in a major urban center where both parents are affiliated with the political system. The family's economic status can be categorized as middle-class, and this participant has already purchased property in Canada.

For this participant, the *Gaokao* did not significantly influence social class advancement. Mechanic had the opportunity to pursue international education under parental arrangements, ultimately returning to China for a profession aligned with the family's social status.

Mechanic possessed a profound and comprehensive understanding of the political history in both China and the West. Consequently, the participant provided insightful and sincere responses to all questions, delving into China's historical political system and the resulting societal norms.

Participant Five, identified as "Technician," resided in Canada for two years and returned to China three months ago after obtaining a Master's degree in computer science. Technician was undergoing an internship in a private enterprise and was expected to transition to a formal employee one month after the interview. Prior to studying abroad, Technician obtained a Bachelor's degree in the same field in China but lacked work experience, making the current internship the inaugural job. The participant did not disclose the political standing in China.

Technician provided candid responses to all questions, particularly concerning

negative experiences. However, the responses primarily remained at the descriptive and summary levels, lacking in-depth understanding. This tendency may stem from Technician's limited professional experience, as it represented the first foray into the workforce.

Participant Six, identified as "Manager," has been living in Canada for two and a half years and was pursuing a Master's degree. Prior to studying abroad, Manager had recently obtained a Bachelor's degree in Engineering in China without any prior work experience in China. It is inferred that the participant holds a high political status in China, residing in a major urban center where both parents are leaders within the political system. The family's economic situation is considered affluent, falling within the realm of upper-middle-class because the participant did not need to work during the study abroad period to cover living expenses.

Similar to Accountant and Mechanic, for Manager, *Gaokao* did not significantly impact social class advancement. Manager had the opportunity to pursue international education under parental arrangements, ultimately returning to China for a profession aligned with the family's social status.

Manager displayed a positive attitude towards the interview, exhibiting a notable interest in the topic. The participant sincerely expressed opinions on all questions, providing in-depth analyses that extended to the Chinese education system.

4.2 Analysis of Five Challenges and Learning Behaviors

All participants in this interview responded to their experiences with the five challenges and behaviors summarized in Chapter 2: focused selection of majors: an

inclination towards utilitarian choices; difficulties in summarization and analysis: choosing

memorization over comprehension; anxiety in teacher-student interaction; embracing a

passive reception of knowledge; limited ethnic diversity in choosing friends: a tendency to

befriend Chinese individuals; low civic engagement: mainly focused on academic activities.

The interview questions encompassed a) whether they encountered these five challenges in

Canada, b) whether they engaged in these five learning behaviors in both China and Canada,

and if there were differences between the two countries, c) the reasons behind differences in

these behaviors between the two nations, and d) their preferences for situations in China and

Canada.

4.2.1 Motivations for Studying Abroad, Choosing Canada, Programs, and Courses

a. Motivations for Studying Abroad

In terms of reasons for studying abroad, Technician stands out as the only participant

who went abroad under parental arrangements, making the case unique. Among the remaining

five participants, three had negative work experiences in China before pursuing their

international studies, serving as a driving force for their decision to study abroad. Accountant

and Manager, while lacking work experience in China, were well aware of the challenging

work environment. Moreover, their reluctance to participate in the Chinese graduate entrance

examination further contributed to their decision to study abroad. Additionally, aside from

Mechanic and Technician, the other four participants expressed intentions to return to China

for better job opportunities after graduation, reflecting their willingness to conform to the

current *talent selection system* in China. The *talent selection system*, as mentioned in Chapter

Two, refers to the ancient and contemporary Chinese practice where the most reliable way to secure a guaranteed livelihood is by passing written exams through rote memorization.

Specifically, Programmer expressed a dislike for the prevalent overtime culture in China, believing that only certain positions within the system, such as university professors, are exempt from excessive overtime. Programmer acknowledged that obtaining a Master's or Ph.D. degree abroad increases the likelihood of securing such jobs in China. Another motivating factor for studying abroad was to gain firsthand experience of the foreign environment.

> In China, many industries have serious issues with long working hours. Even foreign companies, once they come to China, often require their employees to work overtime without pay, just like local companies. After I finish work, I can get a call from my boss at any time, even late at night or during holidays. The tasks assigned are usually last-minute, and I have to complete them immediately, or there's a risk of being fired. The company's way of operating is that each employee is responsible for a specific task, and if someone doesn't do their job, it affects the progress of the next task. So, the next colleague also gets penalized, creating a lot of stress. This method of assigning tasks is called an 'on-call job,' and it's written in the contract, so there's no overtime pay. This practice goes against labor laws, and some employees have complained, but the relevant government departments never address it. (Programmer)

Accountant also studied abroad due to concerns about the employment environment in China.

> I have always had poor exam results since I was young. In my first mock college entrance exam, my score was only enough for a vocational college. Although I got into a second-tier university, it was not until my junior year that I didn't consider taking the postgraduate entrance exam. But most classmates started preparing from their freshman year. I was worried about starting late, and I didn't want to start working, so I decided to study abroad for my postgraduate studies. (Accountant)

Educator's decision to study abroad was also driven by dissatisfaction with the previous industry Educator were engaged in in China.

> I started off in international trade, but I didn't like it. Then, by chance, I got a teaching qualification. During my undergraduate studies, I developed an interest in education. I hope to work in a local school after graduating. Even if that doesn't work out, I won't

go to public schools back home. I might consider working in an international school because I really don't like the strict rules and constraints of public schools. They're too limiting and lack freedom. (Educator)

According to Mechanic, two primary motivations for studying abroad can be identified: firstly, a reluctance to endure the strict hierarchical system and meaningless internal competition and overwork prevalent in China; and secondly, an aspiration for the cultural atmosphere and social system of the free world.

Technician's decision to study at MUN was entirely orchestrated by their parents, who believed that only a higher degree could secure a good job in China.

The manager's decision to go abroad stemmed from the challenging job market during the pandemic after graduation from the undergraduate program. Moreover, Manager had not initially planned to pursue graduate studies. Additionally, the undergraduate major involved international collaboration, providing students with a degree of familiarity with Western educational approaches.

I studied Exploration Technology and Engineering for my undergraduate degree, which was part of a collaborative project with a foreign university. This made me interested in studying abroad. After graduating, with the job market being tough due to the pandemic and my family not wanting me to pursue postgraduate studies, I decided to study abroad. (Manager)

b. The Motivations to Study in Canada

The reasons for choosing Canada varied among the participants. For Programmer, it was a coincidence, while Technician had relatives in Canada. Educator expressed being drawn to Canada due to its suitable study duration, tuition fees, high-quality, and safe educational environment by stating:

When deciding to study in Canada, I ruled out other countries. Studying in the UK was too short, only one year, and I couldn't experience Western lifestyle and culture

properly. The USA had safety concerns, with violent incidents constantly reported by the domestic media. Canada is less commercialized and not always focused on making money. They have higher standards for international students, filtering out those who are just trying to pass the time, and the tuition fees don't increase. (Educator)

The remaining three individuals chose Canada primarily because of its lenient immigration policies. In particular, Mechanic, in response to the inquiries, articulated the choice by stating: "I picked Canada because of its good immigration policy, low population density, beautiful scenery, and great for photography. The competition in the USA is more intense."

c. The Motivation for Selecting Programs

In terms of program selection, Programmer indicated alignment with the undergraduate studies, while Mechanic was motivated by personal interests that "come from confusion in my past work experience". Educator's decision was based on economic considerations and personal interest, while the remaining three individuals chose their programs solely based on the perceived employment prospects. It can be known from what Accountant and Manager said:

> I chose accounting because it's the most popular and challenging major in business, even though I'm more interested in human resources. With the help of an agent, I completed the entire study abroad process within one semester. I also considered the difficulty of employment when choosing my undergraduate major. Although I've had an interest in chemistry since I was young, my father, who works in the field of chemistry, advised me against studying it as a woman, stating there would be limited opportunities. (Accountant)
> Now, I'm studying supply chain management, which falls under the business category. I switched majors because this field has a lower learning difficulty than before, making it easier to maintain a high GPA and find employment. (Manager)

Additionally, Technician adhered to parental advice when selecting their major. The choice of popular programs that are easier to excel in also reflects the participants' compliance

with the current *talent selection system*.

However, the realization that the outcomes differ from expectations suggests a

recognition of the potential inaccuracies in parental advice.

> At that time, I heard that MUN's computer science program was strong and relatively
> easy to find a job. However, I didn't conduct in-depth research myself. Later, I
> discovered that this degree wasn't as useful for finding a job in China. The entire
> internet industry was on a decline, with too many job seekers and not enough internet
> companies in China to accommodate them. People were lowering their salary
> expectations, and some were even taking jobs completely unrelated to their field just
> to make a living. After graduating, I couldn't find a job in Canada related to my major.
> I questioned the significance of all the years of studying. That's why I returned to
> China, only to find a similar situation here. (Technician)

d. The Motivations for Selecting Courses

Course selection is often confined to elective courses. Regarding their motivation for

choosing courses, Programmer, Mechanic, and Educator express that their choices were

driven by personal interest. In contrast, Technician and Manager explicitly stated that their

motivation is to achieve high GPAs. Accountant's major, however, did not include elective

courses. Opting for courses that are easier to excel in also reflects the participants' compliance

with the current *talent selection system*.

Mechanic believed that MUN's diverse range of elective courses satisfied one's interests.

In contrast, Mechanic pointed out that Chinese universities have fewer elective courses, and

most courses are mandatory.

> My interests lie in the industry and the products themselves, including
> thermodynamics, fluid dynamics, and internal combustion engine emissions, rather
> than business management and marketing. (In Canada), only two courses were not of
> my choice. In Chinese universities, there are very few elective courses, and most of
> them are unrelated to my major, such as courses on ideology, ethics, and the legal
> system, which feel like indoctrination because China lacks a genuine legal system.
> Additionally, courses like Mao Zedong Thought are also indoctrination. How can a

political leader's manipulative tactics be a mandatory course in university? Moreover, many people are unaware of how his rule directly or indirectly led to the abnormal deaths of nearly a hundred million people. (Mechanic)

Mechanic further emphasized that the purpose of education in China is to foster obedience and homogenization, discouraging any inclination towards resistance, rather than promoting comprehensive individual development by saying, "They just want to have some technical slaves, not citizens who can think independently."

Programmer's response also indicated that a diverse range of elective courses could satisfy the interests.

Clearly, it can be observed from the responses of Technician and Manager that their primary consideration leaned towards achieving high GPAs. Technician responded with the following answer: "Of course, I chose courses that are easy to score well in because a high GPA is essential to finding a good job. Everyone thinks the same way", while Manager stated:

> I also took additional courses related to environmental protection because they are related to my undergraduate background. I can understand them more easily, and it's my advantage, so I should make use of it. It's not so much about interest. (Manager)

4.2.2 The Attitudes Towards Knowledge

In this regard, participants unanimously agreed that the learning and assessment methods in China lean towards mechanical memorization. They expressed collective disapproval of this approach, preferring the Canadian learning style, which emphasizes understanding and application in assessments. However, their understanding of the reasons causing the differences between the two approaches varied.

Programmer succinctly summarized that in China, learning primarily involves memorizing key points and problem-solving strategies, whereas at MUN, the emphasis is on

understanding and application rather than memorization.

> In China, before exams, everyone stays overnight in the study room to memorize vocabulary. We memorize questions and answers to remember key points and problem-solving approaches. Even though the exams don't use the exact questions from the question bank, the patterns are similar. There's a lot of testing on memorizing specific points. At MUN, the final exams involve applying knowledge points to specific questions instead of just repeating memorized information. I prefer not having to memorize. (Programmer)
> Basic formulas and algorithms are allowed in the exam, but the focus is on how to apply them. In China, whether you can recite a formula is really important; here in Canada the emphasis is on practical application. So, in China, it's mainly about practicing and memorizing, like solving many practice and real exam questions, remembering formulas, and other memorization-required content. (Programmer)

Initially, Programmer held the belief that the absence of memorization in MUN was ascribed to the examination requirements set by schools, not a deliberate choice to exclude rote learning. Towards the end of the interview, the participant added a reflective perspective on the Chinese education system. This participant asserted that the essence of education in China is geared towards fostering obedience rather than cultivating independent thinking and critical abilities.

> In Chinese schools, it seems like they make things unnecessarily difficult by focusing on formalities. They just want to train obedient students, emphasizing memorization, doing lots of practice, and remembering answers without encouraging critical thinking. This can lead most people to lose their ability to think independently. In this kind of environment, most people might only solve problems in a set way, and only smart people can really understand the underlying principles. (Programmer)
> For example, in Chinese labs, students have to write very long lab reports. This not only helps the school have evidence to shift blame in case of accidents but also adds extra burden on students, draining their energy. Here, they claim to be truly nurturing talents, so they encourage independent thinking. (Programmer)

Similarly, Accountant also perceived that learning in China primarily revolves around memorization, but the participant also pointed out that many of the courses being undertaken in Canada followed a memorization-centric approach. The participant expressed strong discontent with this learning model, citing its lack of practical applicability in real work

scenarios post-graduation. According to Accountant, the predominant use of memorization in the current field was ascribed to the substantial computational content that necessitates the memorization of formulas. Additionally, the participant noted the prevalence of Chinese students in the field as a contributing factor to this approach.

> Before exams, everyone heads to the library to do a bunch of practice questions because the final exam questions are usually adapted from those question banks. Professors set the range we need to memorize, focusing on testing our memory of the textbook content. What I need for my job is how to choose algorithms and formulas, not just memorize them. There's also a language issue – the English we learn in class is different from what we use in actual work. I think Canadian professors adopt a Chinese teaching style maybe because of the nature of the profession; there's a lot of calculation involved. Additionally, around 60% of the students in the class are Chinese, so that might play a role too. (Accountant)

Educator shared a similar viewpoint, asserting that the predominant learning method in China revolves around memorization, given that exams primarily evaluate the ability to reproduce textbook content. The participant noted a lack of assessments on day-to-day performance, with final exam scores often carrying significant weight. Despite expressing dissatisfaction with this model, the participant acknowledged its applicability in a highly competitive environment.

> In Chinese universities, there isn't a clear grading system for day-to-day performance; your final score is mostly determined by the end-of-term exams, so you have to prepare well for those. The exam content is all from the textbooks, leaving little room for creativity – just reciting what's written in the book can get you points. But in Canada, there's more room for personal initiative in learning. We have daily assessments, so it's not about cramming right before the exam. Also, exams aren't just about repeating information; they require a deeper understanding. Of course, in China, with such intense competition, relying on final exam scores simplifies the selection process and makes sense. It's only when the competition eases up that people can develop interests and pursue what they really want to do. (Educator)

Mechanic similarly concluded that learning in China had primarily revolved around rote memorization because exams exclusively assessed this skill. Moreover, the artificially elevated importance of exams, coupled with the public announcement of rank-based results,

intentionally fostered unnecessary competition. This competitive environment consumed

students' time and energy, ultimately stifling their creativity and critical thinking. In contrast,

the participant observed a stark difference in Canada, where the emphasis was not solely on

exam performance. Daily homework contributed significantly, alleviating the need for a

purely exam-oriented learning approach.

> In China, I studied linear algebra, which was quite challenging. However, it wasn't a necessity for my major; its role was limited to reducing computation time, but the required study time was extensive. Additionally, there were almost no homework assignments; everything depended on the mid-term and final exams. On the other hand, MUN didn't offer such a course. Regular grades held more weight, and they focused on research rather than formalities. You couldn't just rely on online searches. For example, in the course "Offshore Patrolling Geology," you had to research the percentage of oil production and various compounds in the by-products, and there were no ready-made answers. Furthermore, exams allowed the use of an equation sheet, eliminating the need for rote memorization. The emphasis was on understanding, and grades were kept confidential. (Mechanic)
>
> In China, they emphasize exam-oriented education, promoting memorization. In reality, it's to reinforce a hierarchical mindset, reduce a sense of equality, and intentionally create overly intense competition. Climbing the pyramid is the only way to access limited resources, and this approach is evident in the specific practice of competitive exams. It seems like the education system is more focused on achieving exam results than genuinely providing education for students. (Mechanic)

Technician also acknowledged that during their learning experience at MUN, there

was less emphasis on rote memorization compared to the approach in China. However, the

participant noted that there was also less opportunity for post-class discussions due to not

residing on campus at MUN. The participant did not link this observation to a specific cause.

> During my time in China, I usually prepared for exams by studying with classmates in the library and memorizing the materials outlined by the professor. In Model United Nations (MUN), exam preparation was different – no need for rote memorization. My usual review process involved going through lecture slides first. If I couldn't understand something, I would search for relevant information online and discuss it with classmates. Since we all lived in dorms in China, there was more natural interaction and discussion. However, in foreign countries, we didn't live together, so after class, everyone went their separate ways, and we didn't get to see each other as much. (Technician)

In China, Manager primarily relied on memorization and extensive practice of

simulated questions for exam preparation. The high-stakes nature of mid-term and final

exams, coupled with a lower weighting of day-to-day performance, resulted in significant

pressure during these assessment periods. In contrast, Manager observed at MUN that a

higher proportion of grades was allocated to day-to-day performance, making it easier to

achieve high scores with consistently good performance. Additionally, the participant stated

that the implementation of exam-oriented education in China is due to the assessment

methods, teacher preferences, and class size considerations. Manager responded to the

questions by stating:

> In China, the primary approach to studying is memorization and solving a large
> number of practice questions. Getting a high score relies on understanding the
> question patterns rather than comprehension, even in subjects like mathematics.
> Students preparing for postgraduate entrance exams, for instance, focus on daily
> practice, mastering question banks. In China, achieving high scores is more about
> understanding exam patterns than truly mastering the knowledge. Regular grades in
> Chinese universities have a limited weight, typically 20-30%, with the main focus on
> mid-term and final exams, for which the scope is provided in advance. If one fails to
> grasp or perform well, there is heightened concern about potential failure, even if
> daily academic performance has been strong. (Manager)
> In contrast, at MUN, the dynamics are different. Daily assessments carry more weight,
> requiring 2-3 days per week to complete the necessary assignments. Excelling in
> Daily homework contributes significantly to achieving a high GPA, making it easier
> for me. (Manager)
> The exam-oriented education system in China is characterized by teachers being
> unwilling to break down assessment criteria due to increased workload, a resistance to
> change ingrained in the teachers' habits, and limited influence teachers have over the
> established assessment methods. However, at MUN, where class sizes are smaller,
> teachers have the capacity to provide more detailed assessments. The large population
> in China makes it challenging to cater to individual needs, leading to an unfair
> screening process. Some students may not be suited to the prevalent method of
> intense, exam-focused learning. (Manager)

It is evident that all participants uniformly conveyed that the Chinese learning

approach primarily involves the memorization of knowledge points and the derivation of

problem-solving strategies through extensive practice. This approach is characterized by a lack of encouragement for critical engagement with the acquired knowledge. In contrast, Canadian education is highlighted for its emphasis on understanding and application, actively promoting a critical approach to knowledge. While all participants expressed a negative disposition towards the Chinese learning methodology, it is particularly surprising that the Accountant, within the Canadian educational context, also adhered to the Chinese learning style.

Regarding the rationale behind the learning approach, all participants were aware that it hinges on the assessment methods. China's lack of emphasis on day-to-day performance and its predominant reliance on direct examination of memorized knowledge points were identified as contributing factors leading to the formation of the prevalent learning style. However, Programmer and Mechanic delved into deeper insights, recognizing that the Chinese assessment methodology served as a proximate cause, with the fundamental reason residing in the ruling class's intention to diminish the potential for resistance from the governed class through school education. Educator and Manager posited that the exam-oriented approach in China arose from the intense competition fueled by a large population, presenting it as a pragmatic and necessary choice. Nevertheless, Manager expressed skepticism about this system. Accountant, in contrast, perceived China's educational approach as a matter of fact, refraining from conducting an in-depth analysis of the Chinese assessment methodology. Technician, however, lacked awareness of any analysis of the reason related to the Chinese assessment method.

4.2.3 The Attitudes Towards Authorities

Similar to the previous section, in this aspect, the opinions of all participants are also highly consistent, pointing out that Chinese classrooms indeed require obedience to the teachers. The teacher-student relationship is hierarchical, in stark contrast to the egalitarian relationships in Canada. All participants expressed a negative attitude towards the Chinese-style teacher-student dynamic. In terms of the factors that shaped the learning approach, there were still variations in the depth of understanding among the participants.

Programmer indicated that there is minimal interaction in Chinese university classrooms, while there is more interaction at MUN. The participant stated the reason lies in the different assessment methods with varying weights on regular performance by saying:

> When I was studying in China, we didn't really interact with the teachers in class. Actually, nobody really did. The teachers just kept talking, and they had everything memorized, so they would finish everything in one go. You didn't have to pay too much attention in class. Sometimes, I even skipped classes because you could cram for exams at the last minute, and it didn't really matter how you did in regular classes. The important thing was to focus during the class before the exam when the teacher went over the topics and questions that might appear in the exams. After that, I would go through the question banks and memorize to get a good grade. (Programmer)
> But at MUN, it's different. I often sit in the front row, and if the teacher allows, I try to ask as many questions as possible. There's more interaction because your overall grade includes participation. So, you have to study seriously during regular classes, perform well in each session, and leave a good impression on the teacher. (Programmer)

Educator also recognized the significant difference in teacher-student relationships between Chinese universities and MUN. In China, professors tend to provide very specific requirements, leaving little room for creativity. On the other hand, MUN professors typically present a vision and expect students to devise specific approaches to achieve the goals independently.

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In Chinese universities, professors are very specific. If you follow their instructions and thoughts, you'll get the correct answer. You just need to write down the defined answers from the textbooks, and you'll get a good grade. But in Canada, it's different. Because you always need to search or find more resources beyond what the teacher instructs, because professors don't talk as much or provide a lot of explanatory content. Instead, they mainly teach and assess through tasks. Research results, presentations, and discussions contribute significantly to the overall grade, and you have to express your thoughts on new knowledge every week. Overall, Canada is more open, and there's no fixed right answer. (Educator)

Mechanic, from the perspective of equality, discussed the differences in teacher-student relationships between China and Canada. This participant noted that in China, the hierarchy is strict, creating an absolute distinction between superiors and subordinates. In contrast, at MUN, the relationship is characterized by equality. Mechanic provided the following sharp analysis regarding the reasons behind these differences.

Certainly, at MUN, there's a lot of interaction between students and professors, and you can have equal conversations and even challenge the professors. I've pointed out professors' mistakes many times, and they would engage in friendly and equal discussions. Ironically, this reflects the wisdom of ancient Chinese philosophers like Confucius, which is hard to find in China. In Chinese classrooms, you always have to be submissive to professors, and what your mentor says is considered as if it's a decree. This difference is due to policies, as China's education system is a product of authoritarian politics, which has been prevalent throughout its history. Hence, the so-called traditional Chinese culture has always served authoritarian rule. (Mechanic) What's even more frustrating is that, in Chinese history, due to skillful deception and ruling tactics, most oppressed individuals might not even realize they are oppressed. They often attribute unfairness to their own lack of effort, leading them to fight among themselves for survival instead of uniting for resistance. Sporadic individual resistance is easily suppressed. The slogan "where there is oppression, there is resistance" is often manipulated by new ruling classes to incite the masses to overthrow the existing regime. Once the new ruling class takes power, this slogan is banned. Moreover, this slogan stems from Communist Party brainwashing and does not represent true traditional Chinese culture. (Mechanic)

In China, Manager also engaged minimally with professors, whereas at MUN, there was a greater degree of interaction. Additionally, the participant has provided an explaination from a student psychology perspective regarding this phenomenon.

Certainly, in China, there's less interaction. In my undergraduate program, we had

over 200 students in two classes, and classes were often mixed, making it hard to find a good spot and resulting in lower-quality lectures. Professors also didn't have a good experience since, to maintain the pace of the lecture, they could only answer questions from a few students. Students preferred to avoid interacting with teachers as much as possible due to the pressure from classmates and fear of punishment from professors (like copying or writing penalties) if they couldn't answer questions. (Manager)

At MUN, the class size is much smaller, around 34 students, and teachers encourage questions and are happy to answer, even basic ones. The class environment allows interruptions, and students feel comfortable speaking up and asking questions. There's no stigma around asking questions, and class discussions are frequent, encouraging communication and expressing opinions on open/critical issues. I think this difference is due to the different education styles. In China, the emphasis on exam-oriented education pushes students to memorize and conform quickly, and those who don't conform easily face exclusion. (Manager)

Accountant's experience is rather unique. This participant's undergraduate program in China involved international collaboration, leading to a highly globalized teaching approach. However, despite this international exposure, the participant had experienced the traditional Chinese teacher-student relationship from elementary to high school. Conversely, in Canadian classrooms, the participant encountered a teaching style reminiscent of the Chinese approach. The participant linked this fundamental similarity to the specificity of the academic discipline and the significant presence of Chinese students, echoing the rationale discussed in the preceding section.

During my college years in China, I studied international trade as part of a collaboration between Chinese and foreign institutions. The program allowed graduates to go abroad directly for a master's degree, making the teaching style quite international. However, in regular Chinese university classes, there wasn't much interaction; it was more like high school, where professors told you what to do, and you had to follow. (Accountant)

When I got to Canada, the classes were somewhat similar to regular Chinese university ones, with not much interaction. The exception was a finance class where they brought in a CFO from a famous car brand to teach. His class was lively, interesting, and involved a lot of interaction. I didn't interact with professors much; if I didn't understand something, my first choice was to figure it out on my own, then ask Chinese classmates, and finally approach the professor. Professors would set the exam scope in advance, focusing mostly on textbook content. (Accountant)

This kind of teaching, similar to the Chinese style, might be because there are a lot of

Chinese students, around 60% on average. It's likely tailored to the learning preferences of Chinese students. Also, the accounting major is mostly about individual math calculations, with less room for creativity and application, so there isn't much need for extensive interaction between teachers and students. (Accountant)

The experiences of Technician and Accountant are analogous, mirroring the similarity in the teacher-student dynamics between MUN and Chinese universities. Interaction is minimal in both settings, primarily results from the assessment methods wherein achieving high scores does not necessitate extensive day-to-day engagement.

MUN is even more focused on exams than China. They don't assess your everyday performance, but instead, it's all about midterms and finals (40-60%), with a few quizzes in between (2-3 times), making exams count for a total of 80-90%. This seems unfair because even if you work hard during regular classes, if you don't do well on the final, it's challenging to get a good grade. Since everyday interaction doesn't contribute to the grade, there's not much need to interact with professors. I've taken a total of 12 courses, and most of them involved the teachers just lecturing, with very few providing opportunities for interaction. (Technician)

Overall, all six participants have acknowledged the reduced level of interaction in Chinese-style classrooms, where students have limited opportunities to question the teachers. Importantly, all participants expressed a negative attitude towards this form of classroom organization. With the exception of the accountant and technician, the remaining participants have experienced increased classroom interaction in Canada and generally preferred more interactive classroom settings. Notably, the accountant, educator, and mechanic further described the lack of interaction as unilateral obedience to the professor's instructions, highlighting an unequal teacher-student dynamic.

Mechanic provided a profound analysis of the factors that shaped the classroom dynamic, delving into the rulers' definition of educational purposes and their propaganda tactics. Manager emphasized the psychological impact of publicly asking questions to Chinese students. Other participants linked this difference to the assessment methods,

suggesting that the lack of interaction stems from the belief that participation does not contribute to scoring.

4.2.4 The Preferences Towards Making Friends

In this regard, the responses of the six participants exhibited significant inconsistency, reflecting diverse inclinations toward forming friendships. Programmer demonstrated a preference for associating with Chinese individuals, while Accountant's social circle was predominantly comprised of individuals of Chinese descent, though Accountant did not perceive this as a positive aspect. Educator and Technician had a relatively limited number of friends, with Educator already sensing greater friendliness among Canadians, albeit with insufficient time spent in the country to establish friendships. Manager did not exhibit a discernible preference based on cultural or ethnic groups. Conversely, Mechanic deliberately fostered connections with local individuals due to a fondness for the local cultural traditions.

Programmer actively initiated friendships with Chinese individuals, while acquaintances from other ethnicities were more passively encountered in academic and professional settings. Notably, this participant only developed friendships with three individuals of Pakistani origin during the mid-term, and the frequency of contact decreased after the conclusion of academic and work-related commitments.

> Here, I have three friends from Pakistan. We do activities like hiking and celebrate birthdays together. They like going to bars to dance, but I never join them. We met during classes or work at MUN. Of course, I also know local people and people from Africa, but we haven't become friends. Now that I've graduated and have a full-time job, I don't keep in touch with them as much. Currently, my three roommates are from Bangladesh, and we get along well. These friendships happened by chance. The friends I actively chose are from China, and we often have meals together or go on road trips. (Programmer)

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Accountant's friends were predominantly of Chinese descent, although this was not an intentional preference.

> I hardly have any local friends; all my friends are immigrants from China. I don't get many chances to meet local people, and I'm not really interested in socializing. During school, the project groups were mostly made up of Chinese students, around sixty to seventy percent, with very few local students. The Chinese students tended to stick together. However, this isn't ideal because everyone thinks alike, making it challenging to come up with new ideas and difficult to make progress. (Accountant)

Educator has not been in the area for long and has yet to establish many friendships, but has already perceived a friendly disposition among the local residents.

> Currently, I mostly meet people through school activities, so I don't know many people, and they can't exactly be called new friends. These activities are mostly recreational, like visiting attractions and celebrating local festivals. Of course, I also celebrate Chinese festivals with my Chinese classmates. There are only a few local students at school, and I have even fewer interactions with people outside of school. I can handle the challenges in daily life on my own. However, I've noticed that Canadians are friendlier. They show more respect to others compared to Chinese people, and there's a greater level of trust and willingness to help strangers. (Educator)

Mechanic consciously made an effort to build connections with local individuals, noting a preference for the local culture over the Chinese culture. As a result, Mechanic found it easier to align with the values of local people, leading to the formation of friendships.

> Most of my friends are locals, mainly of Celtic descent, with a few Germanic friends. I met them through volunteering and working, and we became friends because our values align. I came here because I genuinely prefer the cultural traditions here, so it's natural for me to integrate into this culture. Before coming here, I travelled to many countries, gaining some understanding of various cultures. I was sure I liked it here, so I hardly experienced any discomfort. I don't feel like a foreigner; in fact, I've never quite adapted to the environment in China. (Mechanic)
> I believe that the premise of immigration is to appreciate the culture of the destination. It's crucial not to go to a place you don't like to avoid conflicts. New immigrants should respect and preserve the local culture, which is a basic moral principle. (Mechanic)

Manager's circle of friends exhibited a diverse ethnic distribution, encompassing individuals from various ethnicities. Moreover, the proportions of each ethnic group within the friend circle were relatively balanced, and these friendships were primarily founded on

shared interests.

> I haven't had a job before. I usually meet friends when we hang out together or through introductions from friends. I frequently go skiing, host parties, play games, and also volunteer. Currently, my friends include people from Vietnam, Brazil, Turkey, as well as locals and Chinese. The ratios are pretty balanced. (Manager)

> Technician, during the two-year tenure here, seemed not to forge any friendships.

Despite interacting with many individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds through classes and part-time work, these connections did not evolve into friendships.

> I don't have much free time outside of classes, mainly because I spend it on my part-time job. Most of my colleagues there are of Indian descent. We only communicate about work and don't really keep in touch privately. In class, I've also met mostly students of Indian descent, making up more than 50%. Chinese students account for 20-30%, and there are very few white students. It seems like they rarely choose to pursue graduate studies, and even fewer opt for STEM fields; it appears they might not be interested in them. (Technician)

4.2.5 The Attitudes Towards Civic Engagement

This section explored the attitudes of the six participants towards civic engagement, along with the reasons behind their perspectives and their experiences in involvement. Despite all of them expressing never having participated in similar activities, their attitudes varied significantly.

Specifically, Mechanic expressed a desire to engage in all local political activities aligning with their principles:

> I hope to participate in political activities, but currently, there aren't any I strongly support. For example, the protest against reducing master's tuition fees – I didn't participate because I believe master's, being a privilege, shouldn't have reduced tuition, while undergraduate tuition could be reduced. (Mechanic)

> Programmer indicated a willingness to engage in local political activities under safe conditions but emphasized a reluctance to involve themselves in activities related to China:

> I haven't participated in protests yet, but I appreciate actions advocating for rights. I would like to participate in protests that directly affect my interests, such as strikes for

higher wages. Here, I can engage in local public affairs but still avoid discussing domestic politics. I would participate in local politics as long as there are no adverse consequences. (Programmer)

Manager expressed a willingness to participate in public affairs aligned with Manager's own interests: "I might participate if it aligns with my interests. I remain neutral about protest, I would consider them as a normal means to express one's demands and viewpoints."

Educator indicated a willingness to participate in local non-political public affairs, stating, "I might join environmental protests as they are meaningful, but I have no interest in others."

Accountant expressed a lack of interest in all public affairs, stating, "I rarely participate in group activities; I dislike anything with a large crowd." Technician simply stated that have never participated in similar activities and did not provide further details.

For the reasons behind their attitudes, five participants provided explanations. Programmer, in particular, expressed a lingering fear of China's long-arm jurisdiction by stating:

I still have some fear of public affairs like protests because, in China, you can never mention public affairs, especially politics. Discussing people with higher authority than you is strictly forbidden. The tolerance for such discussions in the country is low, and most people have become accustomed to it. So, I still worry about being betrayed by those around me. Moreover, the situation is worse now, and I dare not get involved. (Programmer)

In contrast, Mechanic primarily considered alignment with the principles and the associated costs when participating in political activities: "Involvement in political activities depends on whether it aligns with my principles and the costs involved. If it's too far away, I won't go." This viewpoint aligned with that of Manager. Accountant believed that "these public affairs are ineffective for socializing and have no meaning." Educator expressed a

complete lack of interest in politics, aligning with the accountant's perspective.

In Section 4.2, the six participants responded affirmatively to the five challenges frequently encountered by Chinese international students. Overall, half of the participants indicated that their choice of major was driven by considerations of future employment rather than personal interest. Similarly, half expressed a tendency to opt for courses with higher GPAs. This inclination to select majors and courses reflects compliance with China's *talent selection system*. All six participants acknowledged that China's learning and teaching methods demand obedience to knowledge and authority, albeit without personal preference. Concerning ethnic affiliations in friendship circles, no participant admitted a specific inclination toward associating with individuals of Chinese descent; however, two participants acknowledged that a majority of their friends were of Chinese descent. In terms of civic engagement, none of the participants had direct involvement, but four expressed an interest. These descriptions collectively suggest a potential absence of reflexivity among many Chinese students and within China's educational system.

Notably, participants conducted a comparative analysis between China and Canada in two aspects: compliance with knowledge and authority. It is found that Canadian classrooms tend to demonstrate more reflexivity in these dimensions. As the selection of MUN majors occurred in China, a direct comparison in this regard is unfeasible. Regarding the issue of ethnic preferences in friendship, only the inclinations of the participants were drawn from the interviews. However, in the subsequent written narratives, data regarding the attitudes of locals towards making friends were obtained.

Furthermore, participants linked the observed differences between China and Canada

in the aforementioned three aspects to governance styles, power distribution, and the resultant

cultural traditions. Some participants conducted profound analyses at the levels of ruling

mechanisms, power allocation, and ensuing cultural traditions to elucidate the reasons for

China's perceived lack of reflexivity compared to Canada.

4.3 Analysis of the Written Narratives

In this section, participants were asked to write a story that best represents contrasting

experiences between Canada and China and explain how and why this story profoundly

impacted them. In the stories they shared, four out of the six participants recounted

experiences highlighting the distinctions in interpersonal relationships between Canada and

China. Specifically, Educator narrated interactions with professors, while the remaining three

shared stories related to extracurricular interpersonal dynamics. The fifth participant focused

on differences in freedom of speech, and the sixth participant highlighted variations in

lifestyle. The narratives of the first five participants directly align with the challenges

commonly faced by many Chinese international students, as discussed in Chapter Two.

Conversely, the story shared by the sixth participant delves into the premise and outcome of

self-awareness advocated by reflexivity. The overarching themes reflected in these narratives

encompass attitudes toward the system, the authorities, in-group and out-group dynamics, and

self-awareness. Subsequent sections will expound upon each of these themes in detail.

4.3.1 The Attitude Toward the System

Mechanic's shared narrative revolves around the attitude toward the prevailing system,

aligning with Challenge one, compliance to the current system through selecting majors and

courses. During the COVID lockdown period in China, the participant utilized both Chinese

and non-Chinese social media platforms to disseminate videos expressing people's

dissatisfaction with the lockdown. Remarkably, these videos circulated freely on non-Chinese

platforms, while Mechanic's account on Chinese platforms faced permanent suspension.

Consequently, Mechanic ascribed the reluctance of Chinese individuals to criticize the

existing system to the perceived greater potency of China's current system compared to

systems in other nations. Mechanic enumerated reasons underlying the difficulty for the

governed to mount resistance in such a coercive environment.

> In 2022, due to strict risk controls over the past three years, some Chinese university students, who were on the edge of awakening, took to the streets to protest. I got my WeChat account permanently banned because I shared some videos of their protests on WeChat. However, I could still post on Twitter and Facebook without any issues. Many people, pressured by public opinion, the need to survive, and the constraints of the system, choose not to resist. For example, in northern China, one household may have several individuals, not necessarily from the core family, but at least someone in the extended family might be working for the system. So, for them, resisting comes with too high a cost. It's not that they don't want to resist, but they feel they can't. It's like boiling a frog slowly in water - at first, it might not seem like a big deal, but as time goes on, more and more things become acceptable. When you finally realize what's happening, it's too late to change anything. (Mechanic)

4.3.2 The Attitude Toward Authorities

Three respondents, namely Educator, Accountant, and Technician, shared narratives

that elucidate their attitudes towards authorities. Insights drawn from the stories of Educator

and Accountant highlight stark differences in the perception and handling of hierarchical

relationships between China and Canada, with a tendency among the respondents to prefer the

Canadian approach. In particular, Educator expressed that Canadian professors adjust teaching

methods based on students' individual circumstances, a practice not observed in China. This

disparity underscores a more egalitarian teacher-student relationship in Canada, whereas

China tends to emphasize student obedience to professors. Educator wrote down the

following story:

> I feel like the atmosphere here is pretty chill. It's not because there's less work or
> fewer things to do, but it seems like a lot of things can be discussed as long as you
> have a good reason. Course instructors during class might adjust tasks or grading
> based on your actual situation. For example, they might say at the beginning of the
> class that if you're not feeling well or have other reasons for not being able to submit
> an assignment on time, you can talk to the instructors, and it's okay to submit it later.
> Some instructors also consider that some students don't speak English as their first
> language, so they might not participate in class as much. They might slightly lower the
> weight of daily performance grades. This means they adjust the grading criteria to fit
> individual situations, making people feel more comfortable. What I wanted to say is
> that instructors measure students' performance from various angles, not just rigidly
> focusing on one aspect. This is probably because there are fewer students in the class,
> making it easier to coordinate. In contrast, in China, if the higher-ups have set
> something, it's usually followed without easily making changes. (Educator)

> Following Accountant's narrative on the greater respect for individuals in Canada

compared to China's emphasis on collective interests, the respondent proceeded to express the

following opinions. From the discourse of this respondent, it is discernible that these two

countries exhibit differing attitudes towards authority.

> In China, kids show respect to their parents in a certain way. How about in foreign
> countries? In China, our education and growing up background usually involve
> teachers, parents, guidance counselors, and class teachers telling us what kind of
> person they want us to become. Growing up in this environment, we end up listening
> to what our leaders say later on. It's different overseas – kids express what they want,
> and parents listen to them. When kids grow up, they can live their lives according to
> their own ideas. (Accountant)

> Contrastingly, Technician seemed to adopt a somewhat distinct attitude towards

authorities compared to the previous two respondents. The story shared by this participant

revolves around a Chinese boss showing disrespect while treating individuals from other

ethnicities with entirely different attitudes and work expectations. In response, Technician's

stance was one of compliance, as evident from the expressions used in the narrative.

> It feels like there's no room for resistance. How can you resist? Because just one
> statement from the boss might make you leave, unless you've already found another
> job or have different plans. The white coworkers are locals; they have homes and cars
> here, and they can easily quit if they want to. But if you're an international student, it's
> different – changing jobs takes time. The discrimination from the boss might be
> because of the Chinese notion of respecting the "white boss." The "white boss" is
> supposed to be respected, and everything else is secondary. Moreover, as an outsider
> without local connections, it's even easier to be manipulated. (Technician)

4.3.3 The Attitude Toward the In-Group and Out-Group

As mentioned in Chapter Two, under the influence of pseudo-Confucian collective

culture, many Chinese people's attitudes towards others depend on whether those others

belong to the same group as themselves. People are likely to hold positive attitudes towards

those belonging to the same group, while holding negative attitudes towards those outside of

the group. Among these six participants, two individuals shared stories that highlight the

divergent perspectives of individuals within and outside the collectives they belong to in

China and Canada. Programmer recounted an incident involving a stranger, a white person,

offering her a ride home. In this scenario, the white person did not avoid Programmer based

on her non-white ethnicity; rather, the decision to offer help depended on Programmer's

individual need for assistance, rather than whether Programmer belonged to the same

collective. However, in China, trust is typically reserved for individuals within the same

group. This discrepancy illustrates the difference in self-awareness arising from reflexivity

and the distinction between internal and external perspectives stemming from a preference for

group interests.

> The people here are really kind, and I feel it deeply. When I first arrived, and even
> now, there are often situations where I'm carrying a lot of groceries, walking in the
> rain. Two or a few times, middle-aged women stopped their cars and asked if I needed

a ride. The first time, I actually let one of them give me a ride. I remember one time when I first came, I didn't know how much to buy. My thought was to buy more since I was already going to the store, but it was too heavy. Picture this: I'm bending over, holding things with both hands, and carrying them on my back. Because there was no bus for that stretch, and it was raining, it was tough. I'd carry it for a bit, put it down to rest, and then a kind person would come along. She gave me a ride home. No one has ever helped me like this back in my home country, and I wouldn't dare to get in a stranger's car. If someone sees me helping a fallen stranger, I might get blamed and accused of causing the fall. (Programmer)

Technician shared a story of experiencing racial discrimination from a Chinese boss during their time in Canada. The Chinese boss treated white employees like a "white daddy," showed no hostility towards South Asian staff, but engaged in verbal bullying towards Chinese employees. This phenomenon aligns with the narrative shared by Programmer and underscores the distinction between internal and external perspectives resulting from a preference for group interests. From the account provided by this participant, it becomes apparent that the Chinese boss comprehended the concept of respecting individuals but selectively chose not to extend that respect to Chinese employees.

I feel like the ones bullying me are all Chinese, fellow countrymen, who seem nice on the surface. Especially Chinese bosses, they really exploit people, always making you do more work and enjoying bullying others. Among the employees, besides Chinese, there are also Indian people, who are relatively bullied less. They like to treat white people as their "daddy," like a white daddy. My last part-time job before returning to China was as a waiter in a restaurant, and the contrast was evident. There was a white waiter; he always left on time and didn't have to greet anyone. But if you were Chinese, that wouldn't be possible. The boss would make you stay for a much longer time, make you do more work. If I left on time, I would definitely be criticized, maybe even be scolded. The boss doesn't care about white people; even if they leave a minute after their shift ends, they won't be made to stay longer. (Technician)

4.3.4 The Attitude Toward Self-awareness

Accountant shared two stories illustrating Canada's greater emphasis on self-awareness compared to China. In the first narrative, the participant expressed that refusing

others in Canada does not carry psychological pressure, whereas, in China, it is challenging to articulate one's true thoughts. The second story highlighted that taking sick leave in Canada is considered reasonable, while in China, it might be perceived as a manifestation of indulgence. The participant contended that both stories underscore Canada's greater respect for individuality. In China, individual interests are supposed to conform to collective interests, as personal reasons can not impede collective operations. This can be linked to the contrasting attitudes of Canada and China towards self-awareness. In China, where group interests are paramount, individuals are regarded merely as components of the collective. The participant's narratives corresponded to the reasons behind the challenges faced by many Chinese international students outlined in Challenge Four – the prioritization of collective interests over self-awareness.

> One thing I really appreciate about Canada, and it's what makes me want to stay here instead of going back to China, is the way people interact. No one uses socializing to create unnecessary mental stress. In other words, unlike in China, if a colleague here asks for help, it's okay to say no if you don't want to. Canadians are more direct. I know in some big companies, people might speak more indirectly, but in my work environment, we are all pretty straightforward. If we're not happy with something or think it's not going well, we just say it. That's something I really like. (Accountant)
> Another thing is, in Canada, holidays are truly holidays. If you're sick, you're sick. It's not like in China, where people might question why you're taking a sick day for a cold. Here, if you're sick, they ask, "Why are you even here?" In China, people might think, "It's just a cold; why aren't you coming to work?" But in Canada, they understand that if you have a cold, you won't be 100% productive, and you might even spread it to your colleagues. So, they treat you like a human being. (Accountant)
> Why has China developed so fast in recent years? People in the country tend to be in a mentally tight state, constantly fantasizing about an ideal future. Also, there's a kind of, how should I put it, putting on a happy face on the surface, but feeling frustrated inside. This is caused by deep cultural differences. In China, the prevailing belief is that one person's delay affects everyone, while in Canada, individuals prioritize themselves. The idea is that I come first, and I need to respect myself to respect my work. The level of respect you receive is also different. (Accountant)

> Manager's story primarily described the ease of life for local Canadians, which the

participant linked to the lower levels of life stress. I contend that the lesser pressure from

competition and the emphasis on self-awareness are mutually causal and complementary. As

life stress increases, individuals tend to be more occupied with livelihood, paying less

attention to their own feelings. Conversely, in a lower-stress environment, individuals have

more time and energy to focus on themselves. The more individuals pay attention to their

feelings, the more they advocate for their rights, prompting the government to cede some

benefits to the public in the form of social welfare. This, in turn, reduces the life stress for

ordinary people, creating a positive feedback loop.

> When I first came to Canada and arrived in Newfoundland, I hadn't fully adapted from my roles back in China. I found it quite surprising that restaurants here open later, unlike in China where they usually open around 5 or 6, or even later. It seemed like the bosses here don't face much pressure, and opening at noon is not a problem. The atmosphere felt less hectic, much more relaxed compared to China. Many people go fishing, and some even invited me to join. I was amazed, wondering if people really have that much free time to go fishing. However, participating in such activities is genuinely relaxing. There are various reasons for this, one being the different cultural atmosphere. With a smaller population and less life stress, combined with a higher aging population, people here prefer this lifestyle. (Manager)

Overall, in Section 4.3, among the six participants, Mechanic's narrative manifests the

participant's critique of the prevailing Chinese existing system and the prevalent conformity

exhibited by the majority of Chinese individuals. The stories of Educator and Accountant

indicate their inclination towards a more egalitarian hierarchical relationship, concurrently

reflecting the trend of egalitarianism in the Canadian hierarchical dynamics, unlike the

Chinese-style submissive relationships. Programmer's account suggests that in Canada, there

is less emphasis on distinctions between in and out groups, prioritizing individual self-

awareness equally. Conversely, Technician's narrative, albeit in a negative light, supports this

viewpoint, illustrating that some Chinese individuals in Canada still adhere to a mindset of

obedience to superiors and emphasize collective interests, resembling Chinese norms. However, these individuals adopt a perspective emphasizing respect for self-awareness when dealing with people from other ethnic backgrounds, further accentuating the dichotomy between in and out groups.

Additionally, Accountant's story underscores the participant's appreciation for Canada's emphasis on individual interests, contrasting with a dislike for the Chinese cultural tradition that prioritizes collective interests over personal interests. The emphasis on personal interests is seen as conducive to the development of self-awareness. Manager's narrative portrays a low level of life stress, serving as both a precondition and a consequence of the cultivation of self-awareness. It is noteworthy that the stories shared by the Programmer, Technician, and Accountant indicate the attitudes of locals towards making friends. In Chapter Five, this will be contrasted and analyzed alongside the attitudes towards friendship revealed by the participants.

4.4 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter primarily analyzed data obtained through semi-structured interviews and written narratives. The results of the analysis indicate the following four key findings. Firstly, Canadian classrooms tend to endorse a teaching and learning approach emphasizing reflexivity more than Chinese classrooms. Secondly, as participants delved into the reasons behind their varied experiences in the two countries, differences in their capacity for in-depth analysis were noted. Thirdly, all participants expressed a preference for Canadian classrooms over Chinese classrooms. Lastly, among the six participants, those who

demonstrated a greater ability to analyze issues at a deeper level, considering factors such as

political system, power distribution, and cultural traditions, seem to exhibit a stronger

capacity for reflexivity. This enhanced reflexivity may correlate with higher adaptation to the

Canadian context. Each of the findings will be elaborated below.

Finding #1: Based on the aforementioned data, it is evident that Canadian universities

provide students with a significantly wider array of options regarding course selection

compared to Chinese universities. Students in Canada tend to find it easier to discover courses

aligned with their interests, and the educational landscape does not involve ideological control

to the extent observed in China. Regarding the perception of knowledge, Canadian classrooms

are more likely to encourage students to reconstruct, supplement, understand, and apply

knowledge through various means, such as researching materials and engaging in group

discussions. In contrast, Chinese classrooms tend to require students to memorize textbook

knowledge and question banks without critical analysis to attain high scores.

In terms of attitudes toward teachers, Canada is more likely to foster an equal teacher-

student relationship, encouraging students to challenge teachers during class. Teachers may

also adjust assessment methods and criteria based on students' individual circumstances. In

China, the status of teachers seems unassailable and unquestionable, with students

discouraged from asking questions and expressing their opinions, let alone challenging their

instructors. In essence, Canadian classrooms are more likely to encourage a critical

perspective on the educational system, knowledge, and authority—referred to collectively as

the external environment. Throughout this process, individual concepts would be reinforced,

and the interconnection and mutual influence between individuals and the external

environment become clearer, thereby strengthening self-awareness. Consequently, it can be asserted that Canadian classrooms are more inclined to emphasize and cultivate students' reflexivity capabilities compared to their Chinese counterparts.

Finding #2: Participants varied in the depth of their understanding of factors influencing their different experiences in China and Canada. Both Mechanic and Programmer asserted that China's educational system is designed to foster obedience rather than critical thinking. Meanwhile, Educator and Manager suggested that China's exam-oriented education system is adapted to a highly competitive environment. Educator did not delve into the reasons, while Manager discussed relatively superficial reasons such as assessment methods, and teacher willingness, and questioned the legitimacy of exam-oriented education. Accountant did not discuss the reasons, and the Technician did not demonstrate awareness of China's unique approaches in these aspects.

Finding #3: Interestingly, all participants explicitly expressed their dislike for the Chinese-style educational approach, which includes its utilitarian nature, emphasis on exams, rote memorization, minimal classroom interaction, hierarchical teacher-student relationships, and low civic engagement. It is worth noting that despite two participants experiencing a more Chinese-style educational approach in their studies at MUN, one linked this to an overload of Chinese International Students in the classroom. Moreover, the participant stated that this approach was detrimental to the transfer of knowledge post-graduation and hindered the development of skills needed to adapt to the Canadian work environment.

Finding #4: From the depth of participants' analysis of their experiences, their level of reflexivity can be inferred. According to the definition of reflexivity, analysis that

demonstrates critical reflection on the social environment, such as power distribution and social norms, and self-awareness tend to indicate a higher level of reflexivity.

Specifically, both Mechanic and Programmer indicated that the current educational system in China restricts people from engaging in discussions on political topics because the rulers aim to cultivate obedience rather than critical thinking. Accountant demonstrated a deeper reflexivity on cultural traditions, such as individual interests, collective interests, and hierarchical relationships, to compare behavioral tendencies in Canadian and Chinese societies. All three participants displayed a reflexive perspective on existing systems during their explanations of their experiences, demonstrating strong self-awareness. This suggests that they possessed a higher level of reflexivity.

Although Manager questioned the exam-oriented education system's ability to foster independence and critical thinking, this participant failed to mention the deeper external factors that contribute to this system. This deficiency is also evident in the Manager's explanations of different life experiences in Canada and China, indicating that the Manager's reflexivity might not be as high as that of the first three participants. Educator tended to believe that China's implementation of exam-oriented education is necessary, albeit regrettable, without reflecting on the deeper external reasons. This suggests that Educator's reflexivity may be relatively low. Technician showed no willingness to refer to the underlying reasons of the Chinese teaching style. Additionally, considering this participant's compliant attitude towards unfair treatment from superiors, it can be inferred that the participant's reflexivity may also be low.

At the time of the interviews, Programmer, Accountant, and Mechanic had all found

full-time jobs in Canada and obtained Permanent Residency, indicating a higher level of

adaptation to Canadian life. This could be understood as a reflection of their high adaptability

to Canadian society. Manager and Educator had not yet completed their master's degrees,

indicating that they might still be in the process of adapting to the Canadian environment.

Technician returned to China because the participant could not find a job in Canada,

suggesting Technician might struggle to adapt to the Canadian environment. Interestingly,

there appears to be a positive connection between participants' level of adaptation to Canada

and their demonstrated reflexivity during the interviews. In the next chapter, these findings

will be discussed, and broader conclusions will be presented.

Chapter 5 Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

This study aimed to investigate how reflexivity posed challenges for Chinese international students studying in Canada. Consequently, the study first described common challenges faced by Chinese international students in their overseas studies, categorizing them into five distinct types. Subsequently, an analysis revealed that behind each of these challenges lay a set of typical Chinese learning behaviors characterized by a lack of reflexivity. To obtain the personal experiences and perspectives of Chinese international students, six participants, each with prior academic experiences in universities in China and at MUN, were interviewed.

The responses provided by these six participants served as primary data for exploring the association between the absence of reflexivity and Chinese learning behaviors. Furthermore, through an examination of participants' explanations of their experiences and their current circumstances in Canada, insights into their individual levels of reflexivity were gleaned, shedding light on the connection between reflexivity and the adjustment of Chinese international students to Canadian academic settings.

As the focus of this study was to explore the personal learning experiences and unique perspectives of Chinese international students, a qualitative research approach was employed, specifically adopting a basic qualitative approach. To obtain in-depth and rich data from six Chinese master's students at MUN, data collection was conducted using semi-structured interviews and a written narrative approach. Subsequently, the thematic content analysis

method was applied to analyze the gathered data.

Specifically, this chapter will start with a systematic summary of the interview findings, and then the findings will be matched with the research questions proposed in Chapter 1 to find answers. Additionally, these findings will be compared with the viewpoints summarized in Chapter 2 from existing literature, with explanations provided for any discrepancies. Building on this foundation, the chapter will delve deeper into the analysis and propose meta-conclusions for improving current teaching practices for international students. Following this, the chapter will outline the limitations of this study. Finally, the chapter will discuss this study's significance and implications for future research.

5.1 Summary of the Key Findings

Based on the analysis of the collected data, four key findings can be drawn: (1) all participants perceived that education in Canada emphasizes more reflexivity than in China; (2) participants varied in the depth of their understanding regarding this difference; (3) participants expressed a preference for the Canadian educational approach; (4) participants demonstrating higher levels of reflexivity overlapped significantly with those who adapted well to the Canadian environment.

Key Finding #1

Throughout the entire interview, participants expressed that MUN has more elective courses available than their universities in China. Moreover, they emphasized that at MUN, the focus is more on continuous assessment rather than final exams, with assessments prioritizing understanding and application rather than rote memorization. Participants also

noted that the student-teacher relationship is more egalitarian, with greater classroom interaction. Overall, they perceived interpersonal relationships to be more egalitarian at MUN, with more opportunities for civic engagement.

Regarding elective courses, two participants highlighted that the range of elective courses at MUN is significantly broader than at their domestic universities. Furthermore, they noted that these elective courses are not ideologically driven, allowing them to freely choose courses based on their interests.

In terms of assessment methods, all five participants explicitly noted differences between the assessment approaches at MUN and Chinese universities. In China, the primary form of assessment is through written exams, with students' grades mainly determined by mid-term and final exam scores, with minimal consideration given to students' daily learning performance. Exams primarily assess memorization of textbook knowledge rather than comprehension or application. However, at MUN, in addition to final exams, students' daily learning performance is also factored into their overall grades. Furthermore, final exams primarily assess understanding and application of knowledge rather than rote memorization, and students are even allowed to bring an equation sheet into the exam hall, which contrasts sharply with the assessment practices in China.

The differences in assessment methods have led to distinct learning approaches between students from the two countries. All participants indicated that in China, learning often involves mechanical memorization of textbook content, aimed at achieving high scores in exams. As a result, teachers typically outline potential exam topics in pre-exam classes, and students do not need to study diligently during regular classes; instead, they focus on

memorizing questions from question banks before exams to attain high scores easily. In contrast, at MUN, there is an emphasis on understanding and applying learned knowledge. To achieve a deeper understanding of the material, students tend to engage in self-study and discussions with classmates after classes. Moreover, as daily performance is factored into assessment, students prioritize learning during regular classes, leading to increased participation and discussion.

In terms of teacher-student relationships, all participants unequivocally stated that the hierarchical nature of teacher-student relationships in China results in limited interaction between teachers and students, with little room for deviation from established rules by teachers. Many students refrain from interacting with teachers out of fear of losing face if they cannot answer questions. Additionally, the absence of consideration for daily performance in assessments diminishes students' motivation for interaction. However, in Canada, classrooms tend to be more democratic and open, encouraging students to ask questions and even challenge instructors. Instructors have the flexibility to adjust assessment criteria based on students' individual circumstances, allowing for a more comprehensive and equitable assessment of students' actual abilities.

In terms of racial dynamics in interpersonal relationships, three participants, during the written narrative, expressed that Canada is more egalitarian than China. They perceived more respect and observed less discrimination against foreigners compared to China. Conversely, during the question and answer session, two participants mentioned having predominantly Chinese friends, although none of the participants explicitly stated a preference for associating with Chinese individuals.

Furthermore, none of the participants had any experience or willingness to engage in civic activities in China. However, four participants expressed a newfound interest in civic engagement during their studies at MUN. They indicated a desire to participate in public affairs relevant to their interests in Canada, which would be severely restricted in China.

Therefore, based on the differences mentioned by the participants, it can be observed that Canadian classrooms prioritize students' self-awareness more than Chinese classrooms. They encourage critical thinking about existing systems, knowledge, and authority rather than blind conformity, indicating that Canadian classrooms promote reflexivity more than Chinese classrooms. These distinct experiences correspond to the summary of the five challenges and typical learning behaviors of Chinese international students in chapter 2, specifically the second, third, fourth, and fifth challenges: mechanistic imitation and low-level cognitive strategies: opting for memorization over comprehension, anxiety in teacher-student interaction: embracing a passive reception of knowledge, limited ethnic diversity in choosing friends: a tendency to befriend Chinese peers, and misconceptions of civic engagement: low civic engagement. While the first challenge, focused selection of majors: an inclination towards utilitarian choices, cannot be directly compared between China and Canada in a cross-sectional manner, it still finds resonance in the interviews. Specifically, four participants intended to obtain foreign degrees to secure jobs within China's institutional system, while three participants opted for majors that offer better employment prospects in China. This indicates their supportive stance toward China's *talent selection system*.

Key Finding #2

During the entire interview process, including both the semi-structured interviews and

the written narratives, participants examined the disparities between China and Canada across various factors. Some participants, particularly Programmer and Mechanic, provided insightful analyses into why China lacks reflexivity compared to Canada, delving into the nature of the Chinese government, power distribution, and resulting cultural traditions.

Programmer and Mechanic's analyses were particularly profound, touching on the rulers' definition of educational purposes and their propaganda rhetoric. They recognized that the fundamental reason for China's unique approach in these aspects lies in the ruling class's desire to reduce the potential for resistance from the ruled class through school education.

Accountant and Manager also acknowledged the irrationality of the Chinese education system but did not deeply analyze its causes. Manager, however, proposed an analysis from the perspective of the psychological impact on Chinese students.

On the other hand, Educator believed that China's unique approach in these aspects stems from the intense competition caused by its large population, viewing it as a necessary and inevitable choice rather than questioning the rationality of the system. Technician did not demonstrate an awareness of examining China's unique approach in these aspects.

Key Finding #3

All participants explicitly expressed their dislike for the Chinese educational system, including its utilitarian nature, emphasis on exams, memorization-based learning, limited classroom interaction, hierarchical teacher-student relationships, and low civic engagement. It is worth noting that although two participants experienced a leaning towards the Chinese educational approach during their studies at MUN, one linked this to the presence of a large number of Chinese international students in the classroom. The participant also expressed that

this approach was not conducive to knowledge transfer after graduation and hindered the development of adaptability to the Canadian work environment.

Key Finding #4

From the depth of participants' explanations of their experiences in their responses, we can infer their level of reflexivity. According to the definition of reflexivity, explanations that critically analyze the social environment (such as power distribution and social norms) and demonstrate self-awareness tend to reflect higher levels of reflexivity.

Specifically, both Mechanic and Programmer indicated that the current educational system in China, which limits people's participation in discussions on political topics, is intended to cultivate obedience rather than critical thinking among students. Accountant was able to reflect on the different behavioral tendencies in Canadian and Chinese societies from deeper cultural traditions, such as individual versus collective interests and hierarchical relationships. These three participants demonstrated a critical perspective on existing systems in the analysis of their experiences, showing strong self-awareness and indicating a higher level of reflexivity.

Although Manager questioned the role of exam-oriented education in fostering independence and critical thinking, the participant failed to refer to deeper external factors contributing to this system. This lack of depth is also evident in Manager's explanations of different life experiences in Canada and China, indicating a lower level of reflexivity compared to the first three participants. Educator tended to view the implementation of rote education in China as necessary but did not reflect on deeper external factors, suggesting a potentially lower level of reflexivity. Technician showed no willingness to refer to the

underlying reasons for the Chinese teaching style. Additionally, considering the submissive attitude towards unfair treatment from superiors, it can be inferred that Technician's level of reflexivity may also be lower.

During the interviews, it was noted that Programmer, Accountant, and Mechanic had all secured full-time jobs in Canada and obtained permanent residency (PR), while Manager and Educators had not yet completed their master's degrees. Unfortunately, Technician had to return to China due to the inability to find employment. The conclusion can be drawn that the interviewees who demonstrated higher levels of reflexivity, i.e., Programmer, Accountant, and Mechanic, are leading more stable and satisfying lives in Canada. In contrast, the Technician, who exhibited lower levels of reflexivity, failed to find employment and establish a life in Canada.

5.2 Answering Research Questions

To explore the reflexivity in Chinese international students' learning experiences in both China and Canada, the four following research questions were designed, and it is evident that they align well with the four key findings introduced in the preceding subsection.

(1) Did participants perceive differential attitudes towards reflexivity between Chinese universities and MUN?

(2) What did they think that shaped the perceived difference?

(3) Which educational approach did they prefer?

(4) Is there any connection between participants' adaptation to Canadian academic life and their levels of reflexivity?

Answer to research question #1: All participants affirmed that MUN indeed places greater emphasis on reflexivity compared to universities in China. This is evidenced by factors such as a wider range of elective courses, greater emphasis on continuous assessment over final examinations, assessments that prioritize understanding and application rather than rote memorization, more equitable teacher-student relationships, increased classroom interaction, greater overall equality in interpersonal relations, and enhanced opportunities for civic engagement.

Answer to research question 2: The five participants analyzed their varied experiences with different factors, albeit with varying degrees of depth. Some pairs of participants exhibited a greater depth in their analysis, particularly in critiquing the Chinese educational system from the perspectives of regime type (e.g., "democracy, hybrid regime, authoritarian regime" (Li, 2015, p. 3)) and power distribution. This discrepancy also reflects the differing levels of reflexivity among the participants themselves.

Answer to research question 3: All participants expressed a preference for the Canadian educational approach over the Chinese one, indicating a general dissatisfaction with the educational methods employed in China.

Answer to research question 4: The three participants who demonstrated a higher level of reflexivity in their analysis of their experiences have obtained permanent residency (PR) status and full-time employment, suggesting a greater degree of adaptation to the Canadian environment. Conversely, the remaining three participants did not achieve similar outcomes.

5.3 The Comparison between the Findings and Literature

As mentioned above, this study has yielded rich results. These research findings show both similarities and discrepancies with existing literature.

The teaching and learning methods identified in key finding #1 bear a striking resemblance to those documented in the existing literature. Specifically, half of the participants cited employment prospects as the primary factor influencing their major choices, echoing the conclusions drawn by researchers (Li et al., 2012; Song & Glick, 2004). Additionally, two participants explicitly emphasized selecting courses based on their potential for securing high GPAs, aligning closely with the findings of Ross and Chen (2015). Moreover, the study uncovered that Chinese classrooms emphasize rote memorization over comprehension and application, a trend observed by numerous scholars (Biggs, 1996; Holmes, 2004; Jiao, 2006; Wang, 2017; Scheele et al., 2011). Furthermore, the hierarchical nature of teacher-student relationships in Chinese classrooms, where students adhere to authority without questioning, mirrors the observations made by various researchers (Beaver & Tuck, 1998; Biggs, 1996; Ross & Chen, 2015; Zhang & Zhou, 2010; Yildiz & Bichelmeyer, 2003). The study also noted a preference among some participants for socializing with Chinese peers, a phenomenon consistently reported in studies (Chen, 2017; Jiao, 2006; Ross & Chen, 2015; Spencer-Oatey et al., 2017; Zhou & Zhang, 2014). All participants indicated a lack of engagement in civic activities in China, which was verified by the findings of scholars (Li, 2015; Jiao, 2006; Zhou & Zhang, 2014).

In terms of how the teaching methods in Canadian classrooms reflect reflexivity, this study's findings also align or bear similarities with previous research. The study found that in

Canadian universities, course instructors take into account students' personal experiences when assessing their learning outcomes to ensure fair and equitable evaluations, a practice similar to the suggestions of some scholars (Bisman, 2011; Entwistle, 2000; Gray, 2007) who advocate for reflexive educational assessment strategies to consider the role of students' personal experiences in the knowledge construction process. Additionally, the study also found that many Canadian classrooms promote an environment of equality, openness, and student-centeredness, where students are encouraged to question the instructor, echoing the viewpoints of some scholars. These scholars (Kek & Huijser, 2011; Lin & Ahmad, 2018) advocate that the limitations of teachers' knowledge can be acknowledged, and similarly, the diversity of student perspectives deserves recognition, fostering such a classroom atmosphere conducive to learning.

When explaining the teaching and learning methods in Chinese classrooms, some participants believe that this is a result of the exam-oriented education system, which aligns with the perspectives of some scholars (Kipnis, 2011; Ross & Chen, 2015; Zhang, 2016). Additionally, some participants believe that the current rulers in China view education as a tool for controlling the people. This is similar to the views of some scholars, such as Ford (2015) and Wang (1999), who argue that the current rulers in China are implementing ideological control over the people to maintain their rule.

It is noteworthy that the experiences of Accountant, Technician, and Mechanic suggest that the discipline type and the promotion of reflexivity may not necessarily have a direct connection. Specifically, the teaching methods, learning styles, and assessment methods experienced by Accountant and Technician tend to be more aligned with the Chinese style.

Technician, situated in the field of computer science, which falls under STEM disciplines, may not emphasize reflexivity to the same extent as humanities and social sciences, a finding supported by Salzman's research (2002). However, Mechanic, despite being in the field of engineering, often has the opportunity to challenge professors, which appears contradictory to Salzman's (2002) findings. Additionally, while Accountant is situated in the field of Business, which falls under humanities and social sciences, the experience does not align with Salzman's (2002) research findings either. This suggests that the discipline type and the promotion of reflexivity may not necessarily be inherently linked. Furthermore, Accountant linking the Chinese-style experience to the high proportion of Chinese students in the class corresponds to the literature cited in the preceding section.

5.4 Meta-conclusions

The present study primarily focuses on how the differential attitudes towards reflexivity in education between China and Canada contribute to variations in learning behaviors among students from these two countries. Through interviews, the study has yielded the four key findings mentioned above. Summarizing these four key findings further allows for the derivation of the following more overarching conclusions.

Based on key findings #1 and #4, differences in attitudes towards reflexivity in teaching methods and learning approaches exist between China and Canada. Moreover, participants with higher reflexivity tend to adapt better to the overall environment in Canada. Thus, reflexivity holds a dual significance for Chinese international students regarding their academic performance and future adaptation. Hence, it is advisable to focus on fostering

reflexivity among Chinese international students before they begin their studies in Canada. At the very least, they should be informed about the importance of reflexivity in Canadian education to better equip themselves for their academic journey and life experiences in Canada. In practical terms, Canadian universities are recommended to provide comprehensive guidance and support services for incoming students, such as pre-arrival orientation services, soft-landing programs, and first-year-experience programs, which encompass mentors and counselling services for academic or mental health (Yan & Sendall, 2016). These programs and services aim to deepen students' understanding of the Western education system and cultures, enhance their awareness of school resources, and facilitate academic success and intercultural communication. The concept of reflexivity should be integrated into these practices.

Additionally, the participants' rejection of the Chinese education system in this study suggests that even in classes and programs with a high proportion of Chinese international students, course instructors are encouraged to consider avoiding adopting a Chinese teaching or assessment approach. Instead, they might consider employing methods that emphasize reflexivity. This further conclusion was drawn from key finding #3, indicating that Chinese international students may aspire to experience authentic Canadian education rather than subjecting peers of other ethnicities to Chinese-style education.

Furthermore, based on key finding #2, some participants pointed out that in non-democratic countries, education tends to serve as a tool for the ruling class to instill ideology, primarily serving the ruling class's interests rather than fostering independent and reflexive-thinking individuals. Therefore, it can be further suggested that the five challenges faced by

many Chinese international students may also be prevalent among students from other non-democratic countries. Consequently, fostering reflexivity among international students from non-democratic countries could be considered as a concern for Canadian universities.

5.5 Limitations

There are two aspects of this study that merit further elaboration. Firstly, due to the constraints of time and scope inherent in a master's-level study, there was limited opportunity to recruit additional participants or conduct longitudinal research on the evolving learning behaviors of participants from enrollment to graduation. Secondly, constrained by time and scope, this study could not delve deeper into how reflexivity in education is influenced by regime type. These limitations are regrettable, and it is anticipated that these issues will be addressed in future research endeavors. Particularly noteworthy is the second point, as I eagerly anticipate its exploration becoming a new direction in future comparative studies of Western and Chinese education.

5.6 Significance of the Research

In addition to the four key findings outlined in section 5.1, this study holds further significance:

Firstly, this study sheds light on the distinction between Confucianism and pseudo-Confucianism from a historical and class perspective. The prevalent notion of "Confucian tradition" in contemporary China is, in fact, a product of the pseudo-Confucianism that emerged gradually after China entered a despotism regime. Authentic Confucianism, on the

other hand, originated in feudal China before this period. Pseudo-Confucianism selectively interprets Confucian texts, emphasizing only the sections that promote the respect of rulers by the ruled while disregarding passages that advocate for rulers to consider the interests of the ruled. Authentic Confucianism has had a widespread and positive influence globally, serving as a synonym for traditional Chinese culture. Therefore, if contemporary Chinese rulers defend their actions under the guise of authentic Confucianism, they undermine the legitimacy of criticism against them. This is particularly concerning for foreign scholars, who risk being labeled as disrespectful of Chinese culture or even accused of racial discrimination. Thus, clarifying these concepts is essential to enable ordinary individuals to critique the actions of current Chinese rulers.

Moreover, this study delved into the analysis of education from the perspective of regime type, which offered a more nuanced and essential understanding compared to the superficial interpretation of unique learning behaviors to institutional and cultural factors that have predominantly characterized existing research on Chinese international students. I posit that regime type provides a more novel and closer-to-reality angle, which can fill the current research gap. Furthermore, this perspective holds significant applicability and can be extended to international students from other non-democratic countries. Considering that nearly 2 billion individuals worldwide reside under despotism, totalitarian, or authoritarian regimes, they represent potential subjects of study and beneficiaries of services related to this research. Specifically, pseudo-Confucianism, as a tool serving non-democratic regimes, extends beyond China and influences several democratic countries in Asia, including Japan and South Korea. Moreover, similar pseudo-Confucian ideologies may exist in other non-

democratic regimes. This underscores the undeniable influence of non-democratic education, which may rival that of democratic education. Given the context of educational internationalization, the inevitable clash and integration of these two educational paradigms highlight the increasing importance of comparative studies between them.

Furthermore, this study has unexpectedly shed light on the perceptions of Chinese international students toward Canadian education, challenging prevalent assumptions. Existing research has seldom explored this aspect, with most advocating for Canadian universities to accommodate Chinese international students by aligning with the Chinese educational approach to provide a welcoming experience. However, it is noteworthy that all participants in this study expressed reservations about the Chinese teaching style and a preference for Western teaching methods. This suggests a potential bias in current research regarding the attitudes of Chinese international students toward Canadian education, which this study has sought to address.

5.7 Conclusion

In summary, this study, through a review of existing literature, has identified the lack of reflexivity in Chinese education as a fundamental cause of the unique learning behaviors and challenges faced by Chinese international students. Subsequently, participants in the interviews also acknowledged the absence of reflexivity in Chinese education, with some analyzing this deficiency with the nature of the political regime. Additionally, the study further revealed that all participants expressed a reluctance to continue experiencing Chinese-style education in Canada, and it was observed during the interviews that participants with

higher levels of reflexivity also demonstrated greater adaptation to the Canadian environment.

It is my belief that the most significant finding of this study is the difficulty educational

environments under non-democratic regimes have in fostering reflexivity development.

Therefore, special attention is recommended to be given to cultivating reflexivity among

international students from non-democratic regimes, as this could potentially facilitate their

adaptation to the Canadian environment.

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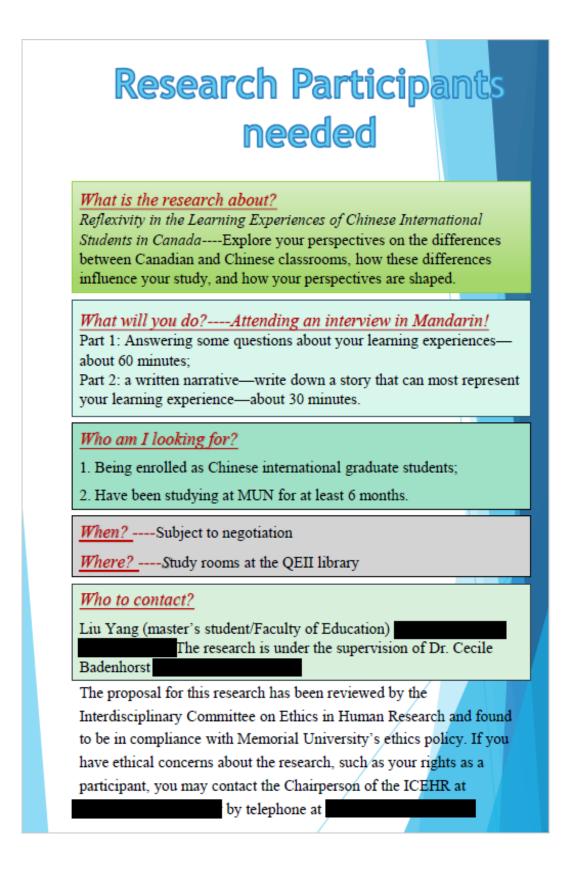
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Appendix A: The Recruitment Poster

Research Participants needed

What is the research about?
Reflexivity in the Learning Experiences of Chinese International Students in Canada----Explore your perspectives on the differences between Canadian and Chinese classrooms, how these differences influence your study, and how your perspectives are shaped.

What will you do?----Attending an interview in Mandarin!
Part 1: Answering some questions about your learning experiences—about 60 minutes;
Part 2: a written narrative—write down a story that can most represent your learning experience—about 30 minutes.

Who am I looking for?

1. Being enrolled as Chinese international graduate students;

2. Have been studying at MUN for at least 6 months.

When? ----Subject to negotiation

Where? ----Study rooms at the QEII library

Who to contact?

Liu Yang (master's student/Faculty of Education) ███████
████████████ The research is under the supervision of Dr. Cecile Badenhorst ████████████

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at ███████████████ by telephone at ████████████

Appendix B: The Informed Consent Form

Title: *Reflexivity in the Learning Experiences of Chinese International Students in Canada*

Researcher(s):   Liu Yang, Faculty of Education, lyang21@mun.ca

Supervisor(s):   Dr. Cecile Badenhorst, Professor, Faculty of Education, cbadenhorst@mun.ca

You are invited to take part in a research project entitled *"Reflexivity in the Learning Experiences of Chinese International Students in Canada."*

This form is part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. It also describes your right to withdraw from the study. In order to decide whether you wish to participate in this research study, you should understand enough about its risks and benefits to be able to make an informed decision. This is the informed consent process. Take time to read this carefully and to understand the information given to you. Please contact the researcher, Liu Yang, if you have any questions about the study or would like more information before you consent.

It is entirely up to you to decide whether to take part in this research. If you choose not to take part in this research or if you decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you, now or in the future.

Introduction:

My name is Liu Yang, and I am a master's student in the Faculty of Education at MUN. As part of my master's thesis, I am conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Cecile Badenhorst.

Purpose of Study:

The main aim of this study is to examine how Chinese graduate students studying abroad in Canada view and deal with the concept of reflexivity in Canadian classrooms. Reflexivity, in this context, involves scrutinizing and understanding the complex interactions between our own knowledge, beliefs, values, and the broader cultural, social, economic, and political

environments to recognize any oppressive or hidden elements that these contexts might bring about. While Canadian classrooms encourage it, it is discouraged in China. Hence, Chinese students studying in Canada may face significant hurdles in adjusting to the new classroom environment.

In this study, the eligible participants will be Chinese graduate students studying at MUN for at least six months, as it is believed that students can truly experience reflexivity in the Canadian teaching and learning environment after studying here for a certain period.

By delving into their perspectives and strategies regarding reflexivity in the Canadian classroom context, we can gain a deeper understanding of the obstacles they encounter, which can help us devise more effective and practical approaches in future research to facilitate their engagement in this new learning environment.

What You Will Do in this Study:
You will be invited to join a face-to-face interview if you agree to take part in the research. In the interview, you will answer some questions about your learning experiences in Canada, and then write down a story that can most represent your learning experiences.

Length of Time:
The interview will be estimated to last 90 minutes in total. While the first part will take about 60 minutes, the second part (written narratives) will last approximately 30 minutes.

Withdrawal from the Study:
After conducting the interviews, I will transcribe the words and send you the texts via email within two weeks. You will have a week to review and give feedback. You can make changes if you feel the text doesn't capture your words accurately or want to add more details. If you decide to withdraw, please do so within three days after this review week, which means no later than ten days from receiving the email requesting text feedback.

After this deadline, withdrawals will not be possible as the data will be anonymized. Please let me know your decision to withdraw before that deadline, using any convenient method like email, phone call, or messaging. Once I am informed, I will send a confirmation email to acknowledge your decision and express my gratitude. Meanwhile, the data collected up to that point will be deleted or permanently destroyed, including audio recordings and paper materials.

Possible Benefits:

a) Benefits to participants: Current research has a noticeable gap in understanding how Chinese international students perceive and use reflexivity, a vital part of critical teaching in Canadian classrooms. By exploring this, we can better grasp your learning experiences and the challenges you face while studying abroad. This study prioritizes your perspective, allowing you to express your thoughts and ensuring your voices are heard.

b) Benefits to the academic community: First, it fills a critical gap in current research by investigating the attitudes and viewpoints of Chinese international students toward reflexivity. This helps us better understand their learning experiences. Second, the study uncovers flaws in existing research that mainly focuses on cultural factors and overlooks political factors in shaping student experiences. Delving into comprehensive reasons can help us gain a deeper understanding of their learning experiences and the challenges they face, and better strategies are more likely to be developed to enhance their learning.

c) Benefits to society: This study encourages a greater understanding of Chinese students among other racial groups, encompassing their learning experiences and the factors that shape them. With Chinese international students constituting the second-largest group among foreign students in Canada, a deeper understanding of their experiences will facilitate their better social engagement and mutual understanding between different racial groups, and contribute to a more inclusive and supportive society.

Possible Risks:

While some of you might think sharing your experiences may make you emotional, the likelihood of such reactions is minimal. Additionally, some of you may feel that discussing the variances between Chinese and Canadian teaching approaches, particularly in the context of political considerations, is a sensitive matter, especially since it is restricted in China.

To further address your concerns, you have full control over what you disclose during interviews and to what extent you wish to delve into specific topics. You can skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. Moreover, any personally identifiable information will be excluded during interviews to enhance privacy and security. For some of you who may experience emotional distress or anxiety during the study, I can provide you with resources for support, including the contact information of the MUN counselling center (as shown below).

Memorial University's Student Wellness and Counselling Centre (UC5000) -- (709) 864-8874
General (NL): Mental Health Crisis Line, 24 hour Toll Free -- 1-888-737-4668

Confidentiality:
The ethical duty of confidentiality includes safeguarding participants' identities, personal

information, and data from unauthorized access, use, or disclosure.

Several measures will be diligently implemented to ensure your confidentiality. Specifically, all personal information and data will be securely stored on my password-protected computer or in a secure location (for hardcopy data), ensuring that it remains inaccessible to others. Besides, I understand and agree that sharing any information you provide is strictly prohibited, both during and after the study's completion.

Anonymity:
Anonymity refers to protecting participants' identifying characteristics, such as name or description of physical appearance.

I fully recognize the importance of safeguarding your privacy. I will only gather the bare minimum of personally identifiable information to ensure this. Specifically, your name will appear just once on the consent form. No other personal information, such as date of birth or ID, will be used throughout the study.

Additionally, I will use paper records as an alternative if you have concerns about audio recordings compromising your anonymity. The audio recording will be labelled with a code and a key linking your name with the code will be stored separately from any of your data. Further, your consent forms will be kept in a secure locker separate from your data. Once you review your transcript, the key linking your name with the data will be destroyed. Audio recordings and transcripts will be stored on my password-protected laptop during the study. Once the study concludes, the recording and transcripts will be transferred to a password-protected flash drive, which will also be stored in a separate locker from the consent form.

All collected data will be securely stored and not shared with anyone, except my supervisor and me. In the final report, a pseudonym will be used to represent you to ensure anonymized data. As per Memorial University's Policy on Integrity in Scholarly Research, I will retain the data for at least five years, after which it will be completely disposed of.

Recording of Data:
During the semi-structured interviews, the audio recording will be conducted with my password-protected laptop to record your answers. This will help me get all the details right and ensure as much accuracy of data transcription and analysis as possible in the following steps. However, if you disagree with being audio-recorded, I will take notes alternatively. Please indicate your preferences for data recording in the following checkboxes. The data collection will be based on your preferences.

Use, Access, Ownership, and Storage of Data:
Data Storage: All the electronic data (audio recording and transcripts) will be kept in my password-protected laptop during the study, while the hardcopy materials (written narratives, paper recordings if you are concerned about the voice recordings) will be kept in a locker.

Once the study is done, I will move the electronic data to an encrypted USB stick and store it securely with the hardcopy materials.

Access to the Data: Access to this data will be limited to my research supervisor and me, as my supervisor will need to ensure the project is progressing appropriately, to offer guidance. As the project is not collaborative or sponsored, access to the data from other organizations or project members is not allowed.

Data Retention and Disposal: Data will be kept for a minimum of five years, as required by Memorial University's policy on Integrity in Scholarly Research. Following a five-year retention period, I will ensure the complete deletion of electronic data by securely wiping the flash drive. Additionally, the hardcopy materials and consent forms will be destroyed.

Reporting of Results:

Upon completion, my thesis will be available at Memorial University's Queen Elizabeth II library, and can be accessed online at: http://collections.mun.ca/cdm/search/collection/theses.

To better support the arguments in my thesis, direct quotations will be used. However, to ensure your anonymity, all personal information will be anonymized. However, because the sample is small, there's a chance that you might be identifiable to informed readers based on your words, especially if they're direct quotes. If you are concerned about this, please indicate your preferences for direct quotes in the following checkboxes. The use of direct quotes will be based on your preferences.

Sharing of Results with Participants:

All the research results will be presented in the thesis and will be shared with you by being achieved at Memorial University's Queen Elizabeth II library. The results will include your attitudes toward reflexivity and how your attitudes are embraced in your learning experiences.

Questions:

You are welcome to ask questions before, during, or after your participation in this research. If you would like more information about this study, please contact: Liu Yang (the researcher), 7093250896, lyang21@mun.ca; Dr. Cecile Badenhorst (supervisor), cbadenhorst@mun.ca

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

Consent:

Your signature on this form means that:

- You have read the information about the research.
- You have been able to ask questions about this study.
- You are satisfied with the answers to all your questions.
- You understand what the study is about and what you will be doing.
- You understand that you are free to withdraw participation in the study without having to give a reason, and that doing so will not affect you now or in the future.
- You understand that if you choose to end participation during data collection, any data collected from you up to that point will be destroyed.
- You understand that if you choose to withdraw after data collection has ended, your data can be removed from the study up to three days after you have the transcribed data checked.

Please indicate your preference on the following items, the study will be conducted based on your preference.

I agree to be audio-recorded. ☐ Yes ☐ No
I agree with the use of direct quotations. ☐ Yes ☐ No

By signing this form, you do not give up your legal rights and do not release the researchers from their professional responsibilities.

Your Signature Confirms:

☐ I have read what this study is about and understood the risks and benefits. I have had adequate time to think about this and had the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered.

☐ I agree to participate in the research project understanding the risks and contributions of my participation, that my participation is voluntary, and that I may end my participation.

☐ A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

Signature of Participant   Date

Researcher's Signature:

I have explained this study to the best of my ability. I invited questions and gave answers. I believe that the participant fully understands what is involved in being in the study, any potential risks of the study and that he or she has freely chosen to be in the study.

_____   _____

Signature of Principal Investigator   Date

Appendix C: Approval Letter From ICEHR

ICEHR Number:	**20241121-ED**
Approval Period:	January 15, 2024 – January 31, 2025
Funding Source:	
Responsible Faculty:	Dr. Cecile Badenhorst Faculty of Education
Title of Project:	*Reflexivity in the Learning Experiences of Chinese International Students in Canada*

MEMORIAL
UNIVERSITY

Interdisciplinary Committee on
Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR)

St. John's, NL Canada A1C 5S7

www.mun.ca/research/ethics/humans/icehr

January 15, 2024

Ms. Liu Yang
Faculty of Education
Memorial University

Dear Ms. Yang:

Thank you for your correspondence addressing the issues raised by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) for the above-named research project. ICEHR has re-examined the proposal with the clarifications and revisions submitted, and is satisfied that the concerns raised by the Committee have been adequately addressed. In accordance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2)*, the project has been granted *full ethics clearance* for **one year**. ICEHR approval applies to the ethical acceptability of the research, as per Article 6.3 of the *TCPS2*. Researchers are responsible for adherence to any other relevant University policies and/or funded or non-funded agreements that may be associated with the project. If funding is obtained subsequent to ethics approval, you must submit a Funding and/or Partner Change Request to ICEHR so that this ethics clearance can be linked to your award.

The *TCPS2* requires that you **strictly adhere to the protocol and documents as last reviewed by** ICEHR. If you need to make additions and/or modifications, you must submit an Amendment Request with a description of these changes, for the Committee's review of potential ethical concerns, before they may be implemented. Submit a Personnel Change Form to add or remove project team members and/or research staff. Also, to inform ICEHR of any unanticipated occurrences, an Adverse Event Report must be submitted with an indication of how the unexpected event may affect the continuation of the project.

The *TCPS2* requires that you submit an Annual Update to ICEHR before **January 31, 2025**. If you plan to continue the project, you need to request renewal of your ethics clearance and include a brief summary on the progress of your research. When the project no longer involves contact with human participants, is completed and/or terminated, you are required to provide an annual update with a brief final summary and your file will be closed. All post-approval ICEHR event forms noted above must be submitted by selecting the *Applications: Post-Review* link on your Researcher Portal homepage. We wish you success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Alyson Byrne, Ph.D.
Vice-Chair, Interdisciplinary Committee on
Ethics in Human Research

AB/bc

cc: Supervisor – Dr. Cecile Badenhorst, Faculty of Education

Appendix D: The Guide of Interview Questions

Part 1

General questions:

1. What motivated you to apply for a master's degree, and why in Canada?

2. Why did you choose your major or your courses?

3. Who would you consult with when you need academic advice?

In the classroom learning experience:

1. Are Canada's test and learning methods different from those in China, how do they differ?

2. Do you ask questions in class?   How often?   What kinds of questions?

How is this different/the same as in the Chinese classrooms?

3. What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages if other students ask instructors

questions in classrooms?

4. What would you do if you did not understand or did not agree with the teachers at MUN?

Did you do the same thing in the Chinese classrooms?

5. How much notetaking do you do?   For example, do you transcribe as much as possible of

what the instructor says?

6. How is the group discussion in your classroom? What do you and your classmates do in

group discussion? How do you see the difference if you don't behave like them?

After-class learning experiences:

1. What would you do if you felt the assignments were too difficult or too much?

Did you do the same thing in the Chinese classroom?

2.   What would you do if you felt your grades were unfair? Did you do the same thing in the Chinese classrooms?

3.   How is testing organized in China and Canada?   What do you think of the two systems?

4.   Do you memorize when you study in Canada?   How does this compare to your studies in China? Which system is better, do you think?

5.   Reflexivity is…. Do you think you engage in reflexivity in your learning in Canada?   How, can you provide an example?   How different is this from learning in China?

Non-academic activities:

1.   Do you attend any social activities outside of the classroom? If yes, Please describe three social activities you participate in most frequently and their themes.

2.   Among those you interact with most, where do they come from?

Part 2   **Written Narrative**

Could you share a story about a learning experience in Canada that deeply impacted you and challenged your previous understanding? Please describe what happened in the story and how it made you feel.