

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF CANADIAN-BORN
AND FOREIGN-BORN CHINESE CANADIAN STUDENTS IN NORTHERN
ONTARIO

by
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Abstract

Social and cultural adaptation may be issues of importance to students of Chinese origin in Canada, where both Canadian-born and foreign-born Chinese students often experience many problems of adjustment, including the challenge of cultural difference to a new social context. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to provide an in-depth description of the key factors that contribute to differences in the social experiences of Canadian-born and foreign-born Chinese students, and to disseminate results that could be used by policy makers to enable them to better understand and address the needs, interests, and aspirations of students of Chinese origin in Canada. This study employed a qualitative methodology to uncover and describe the internal meaning of the participants' lived experiences. This study occurred in a North-western Ontario urban community with a Chinese Canadian population of approximately 300. Three Canadian-born and three foreign-born Chinese students were interviewed in this study. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were adopted in this study to allow the participants to express their views on their lives in Northern Ontario, Canada. Four themes emerged: (a) perceptions of ethnic identity; (b) cultural integration; (c) perceptions of academic performance and (d) the effect of Canadian education on career options. The findings of this study indicated that Canadian-born Chinese students differed from their foreign-born counterparts in the following areas: their viewpoints on ethnic identity; their perceptions concerning acculturation; and academic performance. However, both groups of students also shared similarities in their views about Canadian and Chinese educational systems, teaching styles, as well as their career expectations.

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CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Introduction

Unlike America, which claims to be a melting pot, Canada considers itself to be a “vertical mosaic” with great cultural diversity (Lawton, 1993), and Chinese culture is an integral part of this multicultural mosaic.

The first record of Chinese immigrants, in what is known today as Canada, can be dated back to 1788, when British explorer John Meares landed at Nootka Sound on Vancouver Island with 70 Chinese carpenters he brought from the Portuguese colony of Macao. They were the first Chinese to set foot in Canada, and the beginning of a difficult history for Chinese immigrants to Canada. The next wave of Chinese immigrants to North America began in 1858 (Li, 1998), most of those Chinese were “sojourners” in a sense, that most of them planned on returning to their homeland after working in British North America for a period of time. In 1860, others began to arrive in British Columbia directly from China.

The following year, the first Chinese-Canadian baby was born. Chinese-Canadians were finally granted the right to vote in federal elections in 1947. It was only twenty years later, however, after the creation of the point system, that Chinese immigrants were selected using the same criteria that had been used to select other applicants. Since then, many Chinese have come to Canada from Indonesia, Vietnam, Laos, Kampuchea and Latin America. There was a significant influx of wealthy Chinese from Hong Kong in the early and mid-1990s. Vancouver, Richmond, and Toronto were the major destinations of these Chinese (Li, 1998).

Since the mid-20th century, most new Chinese Canadians have immigrated to Canada under a point system which tends to favour wealthy, skilled and educated Chinese. Now, Mainland China has surpassed not only Hong Kong and Taiwan as the largest source of ethnic Chinese immigration, but also other countries in sending the most immigrants to Canada (Statistics Canada census data, 2001). Today, Chinese-Canadians are an integral part of Canada's multicultural society, forging their own cultural identities.

As many Chinese in Canada are permanent residents or Canadian citizens, either by birth or by naturalization, Chinese Canadians refer to Canadians of ethnic Chinese origin (Li, 1998). While there has been research on Canadian Chinese regarding language problems, identity, and second-generation education (Chow, 2001; Dyson, 2001; Kaufman, 2004), there is still a gap in research concerning Canadian Chinese from other national origins. A few studies have explored the differences between immigrant and non-immigrant Chinese students (second- or third-generation) in North America, however, these studies have mainly focused on adolescents at the elementary and secondary school levels (Kaufman, 2004; Lay & Verkuyten, 1999; Ogbu & Simons, 1998), rather than on students of Chinese origin attending post-secondary institutions. In view of the paucity of research on the differences and similarities between Canadian-born and foreign-born Chinese students, this study is intended to fill a gap in the literature by exploring and comparing the lived experiences of Canadian-born and foreign-born Chinese students at a university in Northern Ontario.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to provide an in-depth description of the key factors that contribute to the differences and similarities between the social experiences of Canadian-born and foreign-born Chinese students. This study employed qualitative methods to uncover and describe the internal meanings of lived experience through the analysis of the participants' descriptions. A phenomenological case study using narrative inquiry was employed.

Research Questions

The main research question guiding this study is: What are the differences and similarities between Canadian-born and foreign-born Chinese students in Northern Ontario in their lived experiences as post-secondary students?

The specific questions guiding the study are:

1. What are the differences and similarities between Canadian-born and foreign-born Chinese students with regard to ethnic identity?
2. What are the differences and similarities between Canadian-born and foreign-born Chinese students with regard to their perception of social affiliation and acculturation?
3. What are the differences and similarities between Canadian-born and foreign-born Chinese students with regard to their academic performance/occupational aspirations?
4. What are the differences and similarities between Canadian-born and foreign-born Chinese students with regard to language/communication patterns?

5. What accounts for the differences and similarities in the lived experiences of Canadian-born and foreign-born Chinese students?

Rationale

This study was designed to fill the gap in the literature about the lived experiences of Canadian-born and foreign-born Chinese students. Since there is a dearth of literature about Chinese Canadians from a contextual perspective, this study intended to inquire into the differences and similarities in their perceptions regarding ethnic identity, social affiliations, patterns of language communication, as well as perceptions on school performance between Canadian-born and foreign-born Chinese students. Moreover, notwithstanding that there have been some studies focused on Chinese Canadian students (Chow, 2004; Kaufman, 2004; Li, 2003; Lay & Verkuyten, 1999), the differences and similarities between Canadian-born and foreign-born Chinese students are still understudied and not well understood. Therefore, this research may be a contribution to the advancement of knowledge by providing an in-depth description of participants' different needs, interests, perceptions and aspirations.

Definition of Terms

Chinese Canadians

People of Chinese descent or origin who were born in or immigrated to Canada. they are Canadians by naturalization, but ethnically, their ancestral roots can be traced back to China (Li, 1998).

Canadian-born Chinese

People of Chinese descent or origin who were born in Canada. They are Canadian citizens by birth (Li, 1998). Chinese Canadians of later generations are referred to as “CBC” [Canadian-born Chinese], a parallel to “ABC” [American-born Chinese].

Foreign-born Chinese

People of Chinese descent or origin who have immigrated to Canada. They are either permanent residents or Canadian citizens by naturalization.

Significance

This study provides information on the lived experiences of Canadian-born and foreign-born Chinese students in Northern Ontario, and may enhance awareness and an understanding of the differences and similarities of these experiences. It is crucial to document the experiences of these two groups of students because it may help relevant stakeholders such as policy makers, educators, professors, and parents etc. to recognize and understand the significant differences and similarities in their attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, and perceptions. The research provides useful information for students’ parents, teacher educators, professors, and other stakeholders to effectively address the needs, interests, and aspirations of students in similar contexts, thereby helping them better adapt to life in Northern Ontario, Canada.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The literature review provides a theoretical framework for this study and a review of the relevant literature related to the interpretation of its findings. Three strands of research contribute to the understanding of the lived experiences of Canadian-born and foreign-born Chinese immigrant students in Northern Ontario. The first strand presents theories of the relationship between ethnic identity, cultural capital, culture and social affiliation; the second discusses parents' expectations of either Canadian-born or foreign-born children; and the third strand reviews research on language proficiency, schooling and academic performance.

Theoretical Framework

This study was based on the concepts of ethnic identity, cultural capital, language and acculturation, parental expectations and career aspirations, as well as schooling and academic performance.

Ethnic identity, cultural capital, language, and acculturation are a few important elements which concern Canadian Chinese (Lay & Verkuyten, 1999). Ethnic identity refers to that part of an individual's self-concept that influences how he or she relates to his or her native ethnic group and to other relevant ethnic groups (Phinney, 1990). "Identity is not merely a result of socialization. Rather, identities are formed in social processes and relationship" (Ghosh, 2000, p. 280). In Bourdieu's (1973) terms, cultural capital is a set of values, beliefs, attitudes, and experiences that equip people for their life

in society. Ghosh (2000) also commented that cultural capital refers to “the cultural and linguistic skills, and social values such as modes of thinking and speaking, particular meanings and styles of behaviour acquired from the family through socialization” (p. 280). Cultural capital is thus ways of talking, acting, and socializing as well as language practices and behaviour. Bourdieu’s theory assumes that cultural capital is a means for the transmission of social status, which can be facilitated by formal education. The concept of cultural capital also assumes that “the fundamental role of educational institutions is the distribution of knowledge to students, some of whom are more able to acquire it because of cultural gifts based on their class, race, or gender position.” (Apple, 1995, p.208) Bourdieu (1997) emphasized that the cultural capital transmitted by families to their offspring is reproduced by the hegemonic nature of the official curriculum and the education system. The social reproduction and cultural capital posits that the culture of the dominant class is transmitted and rewarded by the educational system (Bourdieu, 1973). In terms of formal education, cultural capital may be accumulated at school, which attempts to reproduce a general set of dominant cultural values and ideas.

To acquire cultural capital, a student must have the ability to receive and internalize it. Although schools require that students have this ability, they do not provide it for them; rather, the acquisition of cultural capital and consequent access to academic rewards depends on the cultural capital passed down by the family, which, in turn, is largely dependent on social class.

(Dumais, 2002, p. 44)

This study assumed that Canadian-born and foreign-born Chinese students in Canada might have different attitudes and perceptions towards issues of ethnic identity. In terms

of cultural capital and ethnic identity, this study took into account the issues of both language and acculturation on the basis of assumption that language and acculturation problems might be associated with ethnic identity issues.

The role of family or parenting is crucial to both Canadian-born and foreign-born students and their lives (Ying, 1999; Buki, Ma, Strom, & Strom, 2003). According to Bourdieu's cultural capital theory, one of three sub-types (incorporated cultural capital, institutionalized cultural capital and objective cultural capital) is incorporated cultural capital, which it takes a long time to accumulate. The accumulation process takes place during early childhood in the family of origin. Elements of the life-world, such as photos, music, and literature, determine the primary perceptions and development of evaluative and cognitive schemes in the child (Georg, 2004). Traditionally, in Chinese culture, parents play a significant role in the educational lives of their children (Hirschman & Wong, 1986; Peng & Wright, 1994). When both parents and children encounter diverse cultures in Canadian society, there might be some significant differences in perceptions of their ethnic identity and culture between Canadian-born and foreign-born students and their parents. Parents, for example might be concerned that their children are losing their culture and language which may contribute to distancing between parents and children, while their children might worry about being alienated from school due to educators' lack of awareness of their needs and interests (James, 2004).

Language proficiency appears to be a significant factor influencing schooling and academic performance (Chow, 2001). Foreign-born Chinese students, studying in a completely new educational institute in a new cultural environment, have to make great efforts in overcoming language barriers. Given culturally-driven actions and social

environment, it would be interesting to note how they perform in relation with their counterparts in academic settings, because they are from same ethnic origin, but grow up in different social and cultural contexts.

Ethnic Identity, Language and Acculturation

Canadian Chinese Perceptions of Ethnic Identity

Identity is a matter of 'becoming' as well as 'being' and it is "subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power" (Hall, 1990, p. 225). Identity is formed through socialization in the society where it undergoes a process of constant change, modification, adjustment. Ethnicity refers to a specific characteristic of shared unique cultural tradition, and a heritage that persists across generations (Guanipa, 1998). In other words, ethnicity refers to membership in a group with a common cultural tradition or common national origin.

In the light of growing ethnic diversity in Canada, almost every Chinese immigrant has to face cultural discontinuity in multicultural Canada. The issue of changing cultural identity among Canadian-born Chinese has been widely discussed within that community for several decades (Li, 1998). Depending on life experiences and current situations, the salience of ethnicity varies among different generations of Chinese immigrants in Canada.

Among the older generation, some worries have included the fact that younger generations no longer have a solid grasp of Chinese languages, and that certain cultural values --- especially those having to do with family traditions --- are dying out among the younger generations as they increasingly marry people from other cultures (Li, 1998).

Rosenthal and Feldman (1992) found that “the tendency to define oneself as Chinese, to have friendship networks of only Chinese people, to engage in culture-specific behaviour, and to have culture-specific knowledge declined from the first generation to the second generation” (p. 214). While Chinese parents come from varied ethnic Chinese groups of China, Thailand, Malaysia and other East Asian countries, their adolescent children, brought up in North America, have difficulty in identifying themselves ethnically. Confused by their membership, adolescents from various ethnic Chinese groups and members of the mainstream culture(s), face additional problems with identity (Guanipa-Ho & Guanipa, 1998). Thus, the adolescent can feel caught between his/her parents' ethnic beliefs and values, and these of mainstream Canadian society.

For Chinese Canadian students, the complications of identity formation may arise as a product of skin colour, language differences, behavioural patterns, cultural values and norms, social stereotypes, parents' misconceptions and fears (Guanipa-Ho & Guanipa, 1998). However, when it comes to foreign-born Chinese immigrants, Lay and Verkuyten (1999) discovered in their research on Canadian-born and foreign-born Chinese adolescents that ethnicity is more salient for foreign-born Chinese adolescents compared with their Canadian-born counterparts. This implies that there may exist some social or cultural factors concerning perceptions of their identity among Canadian-born and foreign-born Chinese students. Lay and Verkuyten (1999) conclude that these two groups might differ in terms of their life experiences and their views of their situations or contexts.

Interaction Between Ethnic Identity and Language

Language is not merely a vehicle or tool for expressing the thoughts, perceptions, sentiments, and values of a culture, but it also represents a fundamental mode of collective social identity, indicating who is included or excluded (Gudykunst & Schmidt, 1987). Isajiw (1990) maintains that language teaches members of an ethnic group their cultural heritage, and the process of language learning is “the simplest practical way of imprinting ethnic identity”(p. 81). De Vries (1990) states that language retention is a necessary condition for maintaining ethnic identity and survival, and mother tongue loss may imply a loss of associated ethnicity. These two studies reveal an interrelationship between language and ethnic identity, which implies that one of the ways to maintain ethnic identity is to use one’s own language. Of concern, then, is that most second-generation Chinese Canadians begin to lose competence in their first language as they develop fluency in a second, or third language, while their parents are still struggling to learn the second language (Buki, Ma, Strom & Strom, 2003). Due to this communication barrier, parents are less able to “socialize their children in the values, beliefs, and practices that are important to the family and community” (Wong, 1991, p. 6). Sachdev and Bourhis’ (1984) extended research on ethno-linguistic vitality of Chinese immigrants in Canada report that Canadian-born Chinese use Cantonese less in the home and church than first generation Chinese Canadians.

Ghosh (2000) contends that “identities are constantly shifting and renegotiable, and the search for new/modified identities, therefore, is a coping mechanism in the confusion caused by migration and global changes”(p. 279). Ghosh’s argument reveals that identity is no longer static, but formed in social process. Children from varied cultural identities

may integrate different cultures and assume a new form of cultural identity. Their efforts to construct personal identity may redefine the norms of group identity. Hamers and Blanc (1989) note that bicultural children do not develop two cultural identities but integrate both of their cultures into one unique identity. In order for culturally different adolescents to achieve a stable self-identity, they must integrate their various racial or ethnic identities with their personal identity.

Ethnic Identity and Acculturation

Ghosh (2000) views identity as an important factor in integration into society. Integration is not only a personal and individual process; it is also a dialectical one. It involves contradictions [conflicts] in individual self-construction [identity]. It also implies construction and re-construction of social relationships related to an individual's experiences defined by their location in terms of gender, race, culture and class. This process of reconstruction of identity is what has been called 'a process of becoming' and 'being' (p. 279).

On the basis of their experiences, Canadian-born Chinese adolescents may differ from foreign-born Chinese in the "process of becoming" and "being." This is a process of identity construction by which immigrants adapt to a new culture. In this process, Canadian-born Chinese adolescents may "feel more accepted and less like minority group members compared with their foreign-born counterparts," (Lay & Verkuyten, 1999, p. 290) but foreign-born Chinese adolescents are "more likely to perceive themselves as less integrated with the larger Canadian social context" (p. 290).

To immigrant families, the pace of individual acculturation varies among parents and their children. Usually, children adjust more rapidly than parents (Ying, 1999). In other words, parents tend to be less acculturated to the mainstream culture than their children. Buki, Ma, Strom and Strom (2003) point out “intrafamily variance in acculturation introduces conflicts between the traditional values of parents and the new values embraced by their children” (p. 128). These conflicts may lead to intergenerational isolation within Canadian Chinese families, thus posing a threat to “the integrity of a traditionally collectivistic culture, in which the strength of the family rests on the strength of the individual members” (p. 128).

There can be a positive aspect to these conflicts. Ghosh (2000) argues that identity no longer bears a static, unitary trait, and it is now regarded as being formed in a social process because human beings are always in the making. In Canadian Chinese families, bilingual adolescents who do not develop separate cultural identities might be able to shift from one cultural self-concept to another (Ross, Xun & Wilson, 2002). Ross, Xun and Wilson (2002) state that “this facility may allow immigrants to adapt to a new culture without losing the sense of identity associated with their culture of origin” (p. 1049). In this sense, bilingual Canadian Chinese may benefit from valuing both of the cultures rather than choosing one over the other, and those who “experience shortcomings in one cultural context may maintain subjective well-being by shifting to their other cultural identity” (p. 1049).

Parents' Expectations and Career Aspiration

Families from different cultures hold different parental expectations, underlined with different interpretations accordingly (Alexander, Entwisle, & Bedinger, 1994; Sue & Okazaki, 1990). Traditionally, Chinese parents have great expectations of their children, and parents have been identified as the most important contributor to children's education and career development (Li, 2001). Parents from Canadian Chinese families ground their expectations for their children in Chinese tradition and their deeply rooted Chinese cultural heritage. "To understand the expectations of Chinese immigrant parents in Canada, it is essential to contextualize their experiences because their expectations are derived and conditioned by particular social, cultural, historical, and family circumstances" (Li, 2001, p. 478).

Confucianism in China has led to a firm belief that nothing is more important than formal education (Li, 2001; Li, 2003). This influence is fundamental to Chinese at home and abroad. In terms of parenting, Chinese parents stress that a certain amount of pressure will ultimately produce positive outcomes on their children's education (Li, 2001).

Confronted with an entirely new world that can be a far cry from their original expectations, Canadian Chinese parents have to make painful adjustments to Canadian society. Li (2001) argues that "the parents' understanding of Canadian society and their perception that visible minorities are disadvantaged prompted them to form a minority ideology and also to advise their children to pursue science-related careers" (p. 477). In a comparative study of American, Chinese-American and Chinese families, Chen (2001) finds that both Chinese parents and students have more positive attitudes toward science education than their American counterparts. Chinese parents place greater emphasis on

self-improvement, set higher standards, and more often help their children to learn science than do American parents. To avoid competing with mainstream society, Canadian Chinese families encourage their children to excel in science subjects so as to take up professions in engineering and other technical fields (Li, 2001).

Moreover, Chinese immigrant families have to adjust to the differences in the Chinese and Canadian educational systems,

because values advocated in the Canadian educational system may not be consistent with Chinese cultural and educational values, immigrant Chinese parents in Canada may transmit to their children messages about expectations and educational success which differ from the messages their children receive in school. (Zhang, Ollila & Harvey, 1998, p. 182)

Due to weaknesses in home-school communication, Canadian Chinese students feel that the generation gap is widening in the presence of the conflict between the home culture and school culture (Li, 2003).

Selecting a career might be a daunting task for Chinese youths, particularly for those from Canadian Chinese families, because they have to balance their own interests with what is acceptable to their parents (Ma & Yeh, 2005). So family plays an important role in the process of career development of Canadian Chinese youth. "The strong parental influence is associated with more traditionally acceptable career choices, such as engineering, medicine, and computer science" (Ma & Yeh, 2005, p. 337).

Language Proficiency, Schooling and Academic Performance

Most Chinese have a firm belief that quality education is the key to future success. Among Canadian Chinese, such respect for education has been further strengthened rather than weakened (Li, 2003). As new members of Canadian society, they not only risk losing their own ethnic identity in a multicultural context, but many also run short of economic, social and cultural resources (Buki, Ma, Strom & Strom, 2003). As a result, “many immigrants look to education — especially, their academic credentials — to compensate for their limitations and to enable them to procure the resources they need” (James, 2004, p. 43). Canadian education not only broadens their career choices, but also serves as a buffer to integrate into the society. James (2004) claims that “immigrants, themselves, have played an important role in helping to establish an educational system, in which the assimilationist approach and the claim that ‘all students are the same’ gives way to a vision of equitable education based on principles of justice, fairness and respect for difference” (p. 43). With their advocacy and efforts, Canadian Chinese immigrants are changing the educational realities of schooling and managing to create an educational system responsive to their needs, interests and expectations as well.

Although many Canadian Chinese are helping to create a new system, the majority of students and their families still have difficulty adjusting to the cultural context of school. Obviously, “in order to participate fully in the economic, political, educational, and social domains of Canadian society, minority students must strive to attain a high level of English proficiency” (Chow, 2004, p. 321). So language proficiency exerts a strong positive effect on school performance. Because many Canadian Chinese families put a great deal of pressure on their children to excel in school, these children have a high

educational attainment. They are often motivated to succeed academically and provide positive role models for their peers in school (Campey, 2002).

Considering different family and educational backgrounds among Canadian-born Chinese and Foreign-born Chinese students, there might be a difference in their behaviour and perceptions toward schooling. Kaufman (2004) found in her research conducted in the United States that second generation Chinese students appear to value more entertaining, knowledgeable teachers, but are not willing or able to work hard for school success, whereas Chinese immigrant students work very hard, and value demanding teachers, difficult curriculum and more discipline.

Ogbu and Simons's (1998) study sheds light on the differences in the behaviour and perceptions toward schooling between Canadian-born and foreign-born Chinese students. According to their cultural-ecological theory of minority school performance, Ogbu and Simons classified minority groups into voluntary [immigrant] minorities, those who have more or less willingly moved to a foreign country, and involuntary [non-immigrant] minorities, those who have been conquered, colonized or enslaved. Both voluntary and involuntary minorities "tend to have differing frames of reference, which suggests why they also differ in their attitudes and behaviours" (p. 155). Voluntary minorities, like foreign-born Chinese students, have a positive frame of reference on the basis of their place of origin, and they believe that good education and hard work is the key to success. "Their pragmatic attitude toward school, as well as high parental expectations, allow many of them to succeed even under poor instruction" (p. 159). Ogbu and Simons (1998) offer Mexican immigrants as an example, and comment that in the process of assimilation, the subsequent generations become a part of the involuntary minority group. In this sense,

the descendants of later Chinese generations bear the characteristics of involuntary minorities, which in turn strengthen the point that foreign-born Chinese students, the voluntary group, and Canadian-born Chinese students, the involuntary group may differ in their perceptions of schooling. Canadian-born Chinese students may show a mistrust of schools in terms of quality education and future economic rewards, which might explain their poor school performance in comparison with their foreign-born counterparts (Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This qualitative study aims at investigating the key factors that contribute to the differences and similarities in the lived experiences of Canadian-born and foreign-born Chinese students. In this chapter, I provide a methodological context for the study, which includes my personal and cultural information, research design, limitations of the study, qualitative research and sampling strategy, profile of research site, data collection and analysis procedures, strategies for validating findings, and ethical considerations. My personal and cultural introduction is relevant to this study because I am originally from China and came to Canada as a graduate student to Northern Ontario. Given similarities that exist between me and some of the foreign-born students of Chinese origin, my background may contribute to better mutual understanding and interpretation of the results of the study. Having developed a strong interest in the lives of Canadian-born and foreign-born students of Chinese origin in Northern Ontario, I believe that a case study on these two groups of students will help to enhance awareness and understanding of the differences and similarities of their lived experiences in the larger social context of Canada.

Personal and Cultural Information

I was born in a small town in northern China. Later, I went to a university in northeast China, where I obtained my degree in teaching English as a second language, and became a college English teacher as well. With the knowledge and skills I attained in my studies

and work, I developed a desire to pursue advanced studies in a Canadian educational system. This is largely due to Canada's favourable foreign student policy and openness to foreign educators. While attending Lakehead University in Northern Ontario, Canada, I not only acquainted myself with new concepts and theories in education, broadened my international and interdisciplinary perspective, and gained insights into the field, but also met many students from a variety of cultural backgrounds. In particular, those Chinese Canadian students who were either born in or immigrated to Canada, aroused my special interest. I was curious about their beliefs, behaviours and values, which prompted me to conduct this research.

Limitations

This study was conducted at a university, where there are approximately 80 Chinese students. The participants were drawn from an area with a small number of Chinese Canadian students, and the sample might not be entirely representative of Northern Ontario. The findings in this study thus may not be generalizable, but may be reasonable and transferable in contexts similar to the research site.

The participants in this study are from Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, and in particular, all three Canadian-born participants are from Hong Kong, which might be a limitation in this research given the differences in educational systems and regional culture in the three areas.

The participants in this study were interviewed in English. Given English is the second language to foreign-born participants, there might be a limitation that their

viewpoints could not be conveyed as fully as if they were speaking in their native language.

The participants in this study were volunteers differing in age, gender, immigration and socio-economic status. It is possible that, given the nature of this study, those who volunteered to participate were generally more supportive of the goal of inquiring about the lived experiences of Canadian-born and foreign-born Chinese students in Northern Ontario. Thus, the results of this study may not be representative of Chinese immigrant students in Northern Ontario.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design. “Qualitative methodology refers in the broadest sense to research that produces descriptive data: people’s own written or spoken words and observable behaviour” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 5). This study attempts to understand participant’s lived experiences. “Lived meaning refers to the way that a person experiences and understands his or her world as real and meaningful. Lived meanings describe those aspects of a situation as experienced by the person in it” (van Manen, 1990, p. 183). Thus this study is designed as a qualitative case study, because qualitative research enables researchers to “focus on what people experience and how they interpret the world” (Patton, 2002, p. 70). This study is a case study, “one such research design that can be used to study a phenomenon systematically” (Merriam, 1998, p. 7). A case study is “an examination of a specific phenomenon such as a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group” (Merriam, 1998, p. 9). The decision to choose a case study for this research project depends on consideration of the

nature of the research questions in it. How and why questions are appropriate for case study, history, and experimental designs (Yin, 1984).

Of the diverse qualitative methodologies available, I chose a phenomenological method to get at the meanings of lived experiences of Canadian-born and foreign-born Chinese students. Phenomenology is a systematic method of uncovering and describing the internal meaning of lived experience through the analysis of participant's descriptions. "Phenomenological knowledge is empirical, based on experience, but it is not inductively empirically derived" (van Manen, 1990, p. 22). Phenomenology "reawakens or shows us the lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller or deeper manner" (van Manen, 1990, p. 10). It is inclusive in that when it focuses on meanings, it does not particularize its research, or try to avoid certain variables; rather it encompasses on the broad life-world, with all its significant and everyday moments. Specifically this study employed semi-structured interviews in order to gain insight into the lived experience of Canadian-born and foreign-born students of Chinese origin in northern Ontario.

Sampling Strategy

For qualitative research, non-probability sampling is the most appropriate (Merriam, 1998). Since this study serves to discover, understand, and gain insight, it is appropriate to select a sample from which the most can be learned. Thus I employed purposeful sampling when selecting the participants. To be specific, three Canadian-born and three foreign-born Chinese students were selected. Three participants were male and three were female. All participants in this study were students at post-secondary level who were not

known to each other. I made contact with them through emails, and I recruited them directly upon their agreement.

Profile of Research Site

The setting of this study is one of the largest cities located in the northwest region of Ontario, with a population of over 100,000. This research was conducted in a university in the city, where there are approximately 300 Chinese students composed of both Canadian-born and foreign-born individuals who are pursuing their diplomas or degrees in various fields.

Participant Profiles

I interviewed a total of six participants (three Canadian-born, three foreign-born Chinese students) attending the same university in Northern Ontario. To ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, I used pseudonyms that do not represent the actual names of the participants. I will first present the profiles of the participants in order to provide a background for the interpretation of findings.

Canadian-born Chinese students

Andrew, a male, was born in Toronto, and came from a Hong Kong family. He speaks some Cantonese, and is fluent in English. He attended elementary and secondary school in Toronto, before attending university in Northern Ontario. His childhood aspirations were to become a fireman, but his parents thought it was dangerous for him and encouraged him to study engineering.

Charles, a male, was born in Montreal, and came from a Hong Kong family. He speaks some Cantonese and French, and is fluent in English. He attended French public schools in Montreal, and later a private English school because of bullying in the former school. He obtained his degree in Montreal and came to the university to obtain his BEd.

Tina, a female, was born in Toronto, and came from a Hong Kong family. She speaks a little bit of Cantonese and French, and is fluent in English. Her field is outdoor recreation, because she is fond of travelling. Her ambition is to travel all over the world.

Foreign-born Chinese students

Han, a female, immigrant from Mainland China, studied nursing. She was an undergraduate student in accounting before she landed in Canada as an immigrant. When the Canadian labour market research she carried out pointed to a substantial shortage of nurses, she pursued a degree in nursing. This meant she had to begin anew even though she was already in possession of an undergraduate degree.

Jun, a male, immigrant from Taiwan China, studied electrical engineering. He did not do well in school in Taiwan, so his parents wanted to give him another chance to study in a new environment. First he attended a language school in British Columbia, and then applied to the university in Northern Ontario.

Sun, a female, immigrant from Mainland China, majored in English before she landed as an immigrant in Toronto, where she worked for half a year. Later she applied to university in order to continue her studies in education.

Data Collection Procedures

The primary method for data collection was interviews conducted in English. The qualitative research interview “attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ points of view, to unfold the meaning of people’s experience, to uncover their lived world.... The qualitative research interview is a construction site of knowledge” (Kvale, 1996, pp. 1-2). Each interview lasted around forty-five minutes, mainly focusing on the participant’s lived experience of being a student in Northern Ontario. The semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were employed in this study to allow the participants to express their unique views.

The basic questions in the interview were:

1. With which cultural tradition [Canadian or Chinese] would you more align yourself? Please explain.
2. As a foreign-born/Canadian-born Chinese, how do you see yourself fitting into Canadian society?
3. How does your academic performance at school depend on your place of birth?
4. What would you consider to be differences in your academic performance if you were born in Canada/China?
5. How do you think your education in Canada will affect your future career?
6. How do you find yourself fitting into the social and academic life of the university?

The interview was held in a place mutually agreeable to the participants and the researcher. Before starting the interview, permission to record the interviews with MP3 player was requested. With its small size and practical convenience, MP3 players are

inobtrusive, which created an informal atmosphere conducive to the interviewing process. I transcribed the MP3 player recorded transcripts immediately following the interviews.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data “collection and analysis should be a simultaneous process in qualitative research” (Merriam, 1998, p. 123). I thus analyzed data throughout the research project using constant-comparative approach (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

Commencing with the coding of interview data, I searched and identified regularities and patterns in the transcribed responses of the participants, and extracted keywords and phrases to represent these regularities and patterns (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998), from which I developed the preliminary codes. In particular, I constantly made comparisons between data collected from interviews of Canadian-born and foreign-born Chinese students. After the preliminary codes were modified, I combined and assigned them to form categories, which were clustered around themes, corresponding to the research questions.

Given English is not native language to foreign-born participants, and transcribed interviews are based on spoken English, some transcripts are grammatically incorrect. To keep transcribed data original and authentic, however, I made no corrections on the quotes from responses of the participants.

Strategies for Validating Findings

In this study, the following strategies were used to enhance validity:

1. Member-checking: I sent all transcripts and tentative interpretations via email to the participants, asking them if the transcripts were accurate and the results were

plausible. Two Canadian-born and two foreign-born participants responded with the corrections of the transcripts, while two other participants did not reply my email.

2. Peer examination: I asked one graduate student to review and comment on the themes I identified during data analysis after she had signed a confidentiality form as peer reviewer.

Ethical Considerations

I approached each potential participant personally for this study, and made clear the intent of this study to the participants from the beginning of the research. Additionally, I gave each participant a letter of consent, which outlined what was expected of the participants, such as risks and benefits, and noted that they could withdraw from the study at any time. I also made clear that the participants in this research would remain fully anonymous, and that all documentation and information collected would be kept in a secure location at Lakehead University for seven years (please refer to the Consent Form in Appendix B). The research results will be made available to the participants upon request.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

In this chapter, I present the findings of this study on perceptions of Canadian-born and foreign-born Chinese students of their lived experiences in a Canadian university. Four themes emerged from the analysis of the data: perceptions of ethnic identity; cultural integration; perceptions of academic performance; and the effect of Canadian education on career expectations.

Research Findings

This section presents four themes that emerged in data analysis: perceptions of ethnic identity; cultural integration; perceptions of academic performance; and the effect of Canadian education on career expectations.

Perceptions of Ethnic Identity

The first theme that emerged in the analysis of data was participants' perceptions of their ethnic identity. When responding to the question "which cultural tradition would you more align yourself with, Chinese or Canadian," the participants identified themselves culturally as either Chinese, both Chinese and Canadian, or stated that it did not matter.

Chinese

Four participants, two foreign-born and two Canadian-born Chinese students, stated that they would align themselves more with Chinese culture. Both foreign-born participants immigrated to Canada after finishing their post-secondary education in China. Ethnically, they considered themselves Chinese because they found that their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours showed the imprint of traditional Chinese culture and values, which exerted a great influence over the process of their adjustment to Canadian society. For instance, foreign-born student Han defined herself as Chinese because she believed it was hard to change her Chinese roots. She took an eclectic stance on cultural difference, however, and commented:

I just be myself. I accept something which I like in Canada, but I don't force myself to accept those things that I don't like. (Han)

Another foreign-born student Sun, who came to Canada and said she has been influenced by her university classmates in China, expressed a similar view. She stated that total assimilation to Canadian society would not be accomplished in a short period of time:

For a long time, I think still Chinese thinking, Chinese way of doing things.

And language still plays a dominant role of my life [in Canada]. (Sun)

Both foreign-born students felt that their adapting to mainstream culture in Canada was a time-consuming process, during which their ethnic identity as Chinese could not be easily modified.

Two Canadian-born Chinese students also regarded themselves as Chinese in terms of family background and appearance. Born in a family with a Chinese cultural background

and growing up in Canada, Andrew balanced himself between these two cultural traditions. In response to the interview question, he identified himself as Chinese in light of family lineage, with a hint of ancestor worship in the Chinese cultural tradition. He stated:

I am Chinese because of the blood, but culturally I understand very little. But parents...when I was younger, we did celebrate Chinese New Year. We always ate Chinese food. So more Chinese. And as for Mandarin, usually a little. (Andrew)

Tina considered herself Chinese, on the basis of her appearance rather than her family lineage or language. She believed that language was not an indicator of ethnic identity:

Because I look Chinese. I can speak Cantonese, but Canadians, I don't look Canadian. I don't speak Canadian. There is no Canadian language. (Tina)

The way she defined "Canadian" in a broader sense indicated that she was comfortable with her identity in the multicultural context of Canada. As Chinese, she also preferred associating with Chinese friends, which implied her comfort among and affinity to the Chinese immigrant group. However, culturally she still considered herself more Canadian.

Canadian-born participants' comments indicated that in terms of ethnic identity, they were Chinese, while culturally they were more Canadian, because they were born in families with Chinese cultural background and grew up in mainstream culture in Canada.

Both Chinese and Canadian

One Canadian-born participant, Charles vacillated about offering a direct response as to whether he viewed himself as Chinese or Canadian. Like other two Canadian-born participants, he was brought up in a Chinese family in a wider Canadian society. He favoured the idea of “a little bit both,” a dual identity. He observed:

I follow lots of things that Chinese people do. At the same time, I am also...I am Canadian. I think more Chinese maybe. (Charles)

Apparently, he found it hard to define his own identity. He further stated that he regarded himself as both Chinese and Canadian because he loved the “culture, food, and music” of both countries.

It Did Not Matter

Jun put forward a unique response, entirely different from any other participant. He remarked that it did not matter if he was Chinese or Canadian. He cared more about his career than his ethnic identity. He acknowledged, however, that his friends and classmates viewed him as Chinese although he could speak English without an accent:

They probably see me as Chinese. With less accent, when I speak English. So I think they would still see me as Chinese. Maybe a ‘banana,’ when I say ‘banana,’ like people brown [yellow] outside and white inside. (Jun)

By comparing himself to a “banana”, which is often used as a pejorative to Asians who were born in western countries, he indicated that he had a great command of English and shared more with western culture.

Cultural Integration

The second theme focuses on the different perceptions of Canadian-born and foreign-born Chinese students on their cultural integration into the social and academic life in Northern Ontario. The participants shared their perceptions of how they found fitting into the wider Canadian society as well as the social and academic life of the university.

Perceptions of Fitting into Canadian Society

Data analysis revealed that Canadian-born Chinese students were different from their counterparts in two ways: the acquisition of culture-specific knowledge from their parents, and difficulties at elementary school. However, both groups had one thing in common — a network of Chinese friends.

The acquisition of culture-specific knowledge from parents.

All Canadian-born participants in this study were second-generation Chinese immigrants, who, to some extent, shared similar patterns of beliefs, attitudes and behaviours with their parents when they were young. They have learned, more or less, Cantonese or Mandarin, and acquired a basic knowledge of Chinese culture from their parents.

In his early years, Andrew received the rudimentary Chinese education from his parents, who, typical of many other Chinese immigrant parents, assumed the role of torchbearer of traditional Chinese culture. Andrew thus gained knowledge of Chinese culture and language from his parents. However, as he aged, his learning of Chinese

culture and language waned. Andrew regretted his neglect of his cultural inheritance and stressed the importance of Chinese literacy:

Because it will be very useful for my career, and also my life to know how to communicate with Chinese people, 'cause that's my culture. But I totally ignored that part of my life. (Andrew)

Having been exposed to two entirely different cultures, Andrew had a hard time finding a balance between the majority culture and the culture of his parents' home country. He often felt perplexed, and commented:

And I grew up here. Again I wanted to fit in with the rest of children, right? And being in a Chinese school would separate me from that. That's why I didn't want to go. (Andrew)

The idea of being different from others while living in a Canadian neighbourhood overwhelmed him. However, upon reflecting on both cultures, Andrew came to realize that this difference made him special, and he came to better accept his cultural inheritance.

But again you grow out of it...as you are getting older you realize the differences make you special. Now you look back and I regret a lot that I didn't learn Chinese. (Andrew)

Tina learned to speak Cantonese from her parents as well. Her parents also cared about developing both her English skills to accommodate to Canadian society and Cantonese skills to maintain her Chinese identity. She recalled that her mother required her to remember how to speak Cantonese, which they employed to communicate at home, meanwhile her mother paid great attention to

her English and school education, which would inform her of dominant cultural values and ideas.

Charles not only spoke to his parents in Cantonese at home, but also “follow lots of things that Chinese people do” (Charles). In addition, besides basic knowledge of Chinese culture and language he acquired from his parents, academically, he also benefited from his parent’s home schooling:

He [his father] studies statistics. So I had a very difficult maths teacher in the high school. I guess my father helped pull me through these, these very difficult maths courses. I think the help from my dad allowed me to continue to succeed in science. (Charles)

Canadian-born participants’ comments revealed that they were exposed to Chinese culture in their childhood, earlier than their formal education at Canadian schools, where they were immersed in dominant Canadian culture.

Difficulties in elementary school.

Five out of six participants (not including Jun) found it difficult to some extent to fit into the dominant society, no matter where they were born. The difference was that the Canadian-born students encountered these challenges when they were kids at elementary school, where they were either ridiculed of not being able to speak English or Chinese, or bullied for being Chinese. For example, Andrew recalled that his school life was hard in the beginning when he was a child. Brought up in a traditional Chinese family, he had hard times at school because of his poor language skills. He commented:

Culturally, I came from a Chinese family, very traditional. And when I started going to school, it's kind of difficult to adjust because everyone spoke different language at first, which was very difficult to get through. (Andrew)

Charles found fitting into the society to be “more a problem,” and he addressed his unpleasant experiences at elementary school, where he was bullied by other students. His parents then sent him to a private school, where most the students were from immigrant families. And he recalled and pondered over his unhappy school days:

Yeah, bullying. It's not just related to being Chinese. I guess being Chinese was contributing to it. So coincidence may be the reason. (Charles)

One interesting point revealed by Canadian-born student Tina, was that she was ridiculed by the students at school because she was unable to speak Chinese. She stated:

Sometimes it can be hard, 'cause some people say you don't speak Chinese.

So they go up to you and treat you like [you are] stupid. (Tina)

All Canadian-born participants acknowledged that they had encountered a degree of hardship at the beginning of school, but stated that they had managed to overcome and transcend these difficulties. For example, after a few years at his first school, Andrew found life at school much easier for him, because the experience facilitated his acculturation. As he put it:

Again we were younger. It doesn't matter because you were young. You learn very fast. And you started interacting very readily with other children. You become Canadianized very easily first three years of school. And you integrate in the culture very easily. (Andrew)

All Canadian-born participants found that Canadian education had a big advantage in helping them to socialize into dominant culture because formal education informed them of a general set of dominant cultural values and beliefs, and thus, facilitated them in their adaptation to Canadian culture.

A network of Chinese friends.

Data analysis showed that both Canadian-born and foreign-born Chinese students shared similarities in that they all tended to have a network of Chinese friends. For example, at school, Andrew tended to socialize with Chinese friends rather than Canadians. He acknowledged that being with Chinese friends was more comfortable because they shared many similarities.

My group of friends I hang with in high school were Chinese, because just similarities helped with the connection, very easy. Yeah, to be friends with Chinese people...it's just...it's so easy. There is so much common stuff which friendship was built from there. (Andrew)

So what Andrew meant was that cultural similarities eased his association with those from similar cultural backgrounds.

Tina held a similar viewpoint to Andrew. She favoured Chinese friends too, although she conversed with her friends in English. She indicated that she was more at ease with Chinese friends. She found that it was with her Chinese friends that she would be able to share her hobbies and interests, and talk about Chinese or Canadian TV shows, movies, songs, and singers. Being with her Chinese friends was part of her involvement in Chinese culture.

Charles also had a similar situation after his father pulled him out of the public school and sent him to a private school, where the majority of students were immigrants. As he said:

Many of the students were immigrants. It was a school that catered to immigrants, particularly to those from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. There were some from the Middle East. (Charles)

Among foreign-born Chinese students, two stated that they had difficulties adapting to Canadian society. Unlike their Canadian-born counterparts, foreign-born Chinese students encountered more issues in the process of acculturation. They identified five different factors that influenced their integration into the Canadian society: cultural differences; language barrier; personality; financial situation; and environmental difference.

Cultural difference.

For the two foreign-born Chinese students, cultural differences were identified as an obstacle to their adaptation to Canadian society. While they were keen to make friends with local people, they ended up feeling disheartened and helpless to bridge the gap. Han indicated that in general, local people were friendly to her, but felt it was not easy to develop close or intimate relations because of cultural differences. As she put it:

If there were a chance, I'd love to make friends with them. We cannot, kind of, get to that close relationship, because we have cultural difference. We are interested in different things. We had different opinions on different things. That's too hard to get too close. (Han)

Cultural differences were also of great concern to Sun. She acquired insightful knowledge of cultural differences based on her personal experience while she was working first in China and later in Canada. Under her close observation, Sun found that there was huge difference in attitudes and behaviours between Chinese and Canadians:

For Chinese they don't like to be too aggressive. They just like harmony, balance. They think more about others, sometimes than themselves...But here people just value the individual, you can do whatever you like, and you can say no to whatever you don't like. So quite different from this aspect. Another thing is Chinese people are hard-working. They are modest, and respectful to the elders. But western people seem very open-minded. They are good at accepting new things. (Sun)

The differences Sun identified here hindered her successful integration into Canadian society. She felt that it took time to understand the cultural difference and to learn how to respect it, and then adjust herself to it.

Language barrier.

Language was another barrier that confronted most foreign-born participants as they tried to acculturate to Canadian society. Both Han and Sun addressed their concerns with their language skills. Han's response revealed that her language proficiency greatly affected her effective communication with the local people:

Because we had language problems. So first thing it will make us shy. Like, even though we want to say something, first what we think about is how we express the idea. Yeah. That thinking just stopped us to speak out. (Han)

What Han meant was that typically Chinese students were not proactive enough to start a conversation because they were concerned that they would not be able to make themselves clear given their restricted language skills.

Sun had a similar concern. She stated that to overcome language problems “needs practice, patience, courage” and “talk with someone” (Sun). Sun also described the hardships and issues she encountered while working in Toronto, where she had a hard time communicating with her customers because of her poor English skills. As she observed:

I got the job at McDonald’s. My English is so poor because I just come here, and especially for the spoken language and listening. It’s really hard. Sometimes I can’t understand customer’s requirements. I feel so bad if the customer said something but I don’t know it. I just feel foolish about myself.
(Sun)

In contrast, Jun was confident about himself in terms of language proficiency, because he had been in Canada for six years. Jun stated that specializing and working in engineering did not relatively require a good command of language skills and cultural knowledge, and to adjust himself to Canadian society would not appear to be a great issue with his actual master of English.

Personality.

Two participants indicated that personality affected acculturation to the Canadian society, and they found that in terms of personality Chinese were not as proactive and straightforward as Canadians. For example, Han considered shyness as one of the

idiosyncrasies of Chinese people, and it hindered their effective communication with the local Canadians. She thus ascribed her failure to acculturate to the Canadian society to her own personality. She stated:

Maybe for Chinese, they are shy. They are not...open like western people...Some people, they are very...they like to take the challenge. So they love to go out and see different things, but for me, no. I am not that kind of person. (Han)

Similarly, Sun believed an active personality would help overcome the difficulties in cultural adaptation.

Personality is also important. If you're talkative person, maybe you can overcome this difficulty much better and faster. (Sun)

Both participants believed that the disposition or quality of being sociable would be a great advantage in the process of adaptation to the wider Canadian society.

Financial situation.

One participant, Han, indicated that her financial situation played a role in her integration into Canadian society. A tight budget deprived her of access to local media, which she felt was important in understanding local culture. She observed:

One more thing is when we came here, we are just poor student. So we don't have the money to pay for the TV cable. We are kind of isolated from the media. That's why when the people talking about something, we don't know what's that, because we are isolated from these media. (Han)

Han found it hard for her to join a conversation with local people, when they were discussing local news and events, to which she had limited access. She also suggested that her financial situation led to prejudice from other students against her:

Yeah, I do feel some people have prejudice to us. They might think we are poor or...I do feel they feel that way. Some students in the university, I think.

(Han)

School versus work environments.

Two participants made a comparison between school and work environment when they were speaking of social adaptation. In order to better fit into Canadian society, Sun decided to go back to school again for her Master's degree and anticipated that a Canadian education would make a difference in her life. She perceived Canadian education would help her to comprehend Canadian society better than the working environment. Under the influence of her classmates and professors, Sun acknowledged that she had changed, to some extent, in her attitudes, beliefs and values. At the work place, however, she was troubled by the complexity and subtlety of interpersonal relations.

I worked in McDonald's, just several months. I think people there are also nice. They can teach what you should do for your work, but not as nice as the people here, like your classmates. Just a quite different feeling, classmates will view you, regard you as more common, more equal. But if you're working in that place, you just have that kind of class, you know, the stratification. (Sun)

Jun was the only participant not so sure about answering the question as to how he viewed himself fitting into Canadian society. His response implied that he felt at ease with adapting to Canadian society.

I worked as a labourer for a month and I worked at a customer service and I can get along well with all my colleagues as well. And if it is in school, I can get along with my classmates pretty well too. So I have no problem with that.

(Jun)

Both participants' comments revealed that there might exist an environmental difference in social adjustment, but it varied individually, since Jun immigrated to Canada much earlier than Sun.

Perceptions of Fitting into the Academic Life of the University

Data analysis revealed that all foreign-born participants in this study had greater problems adjusting to the academic life of university compared to their Canadian-born counterparts, because foreign-born participants' behaviours and attitudes formed under traditional Chinese educational system, which seeks balance and harmony, were challenged at a Canadian university where individualism is cherished. Participants identified three important factors: language; time spent on studies; and social life at school.

Language.

In contrast to Canadian-born Chinese students, language has had an impact on the lives of two foreign-born Chinese students. Overcoming the language barrier was their first challenge after they set foot in Canada to start their new lives.

In terms of cultural integration, Sun felt that because of her poor language skills, adjusting to the academic culture was as difficult as adjusting to the social culture:

I think the university culture is just like the Canadian culture. I think it's really difficult for me to really become integrated in it. You know the language and culture barrier. (Sun)

Still, in comparison to her social life, she reckoned that she was more comfortable with academic life because she was able to handle schoolwork easily. At her work place, however, it was more demanding for her because she found that there was less competition and pressure at school than at work place where she felt anxious, insecure, and helpless.

Han, majoring in nursing, discussed some of the problems concerning her studies at the university. She acknowledged that she focused more on textbooks than class participation, and when the time came for her to do her presentation in class, language became a great concern to her.

Oh, that's hard. I always want to escape from that, because you have to speak out in front of a lot of people. Sometimes your mind just stops working. It's blank and empty. Yes, you can't think about anything, because I am nervous. I think language is a big thing. (Han)

She also had difficulties understanding the lectures. Taking notes in class might help her to understand lectures better, she found, however, that it distracted her from concentration on lectures. Embarrassingly, she felt helpless during her internship placement at the hospital because of her poor English skills. She recalled:

Especially when you pick up the phone, that might be from another department of the hospital or from another hospital. They are kind of, like, speaking, like, blah blah blah,...You just get lost. Where she is from? Sometimes you just catch like the last part of what she is saying and forget the former part. That's hard. (Han)

Both Sun and Han indicated that it was a formidable challenge to study at a Canadian university since English was their second language, and the ability to master the language was really important in adapting to the academic life.

Time spent on studies.

Data analysis indicated that Canadian-born Chinese students also differed from their foreign-born counterparts in the amount of time they spent on their studies. The Canadian-born Chinese students spent less time on their studies than their foreign-born counterparts. Two participants identified this issue and attributed it to differences in their study habits. For example, foreign-born Han indicated that she had to spend more time on her studies than other students. Her comments also hinted at the importance of a typical study technique used by Chinese students, that is, rote learning. She said:

But, you know, for nursing we have a lot of memorizing stuff. So that's what we have. I have to spend most of my time after the class on my textbook.

(Han)

On the other hand, Andrew was fairly confident that he spent less time and achieved more compared to his foreign-born counterparts. He indicated that his academic achievements were largely attributed to differences in study habits between Canadian-born students, who were able to digest and absorb what they have learned for their own use, and Chinese immigrant students who were accustomed to rote learning. He commented:

I guess we study in different ways. They study twelve, ten, twelve hours on materials. I guess they memorize more. Look at all the possible examples, they memorize how to do that. The way I try to study is I try to understand them. And when you understand something, so any kinds of question come out, you understand it. You understand the theories, so you can work out easier. (Andrew)

Social life at school.

Compared with foreign-born Chinese students, the two Canadian-born Chinese students in this study indicated that they had no problem fitting into university life. For example, Charles indicated that he adapted to academic life very well and his origin was not a problem. As he observed:

I don't think there are any difficulties because of my origin. I am much quieter person. I think I have friends I want. (Charles)

Tina, the only participant who lived on campus, stated that it was very easy for her to fit into the academic life of the university. She indicated that sharing personal hobbies helped as it created more opportunities for her to approach local people, which in turn facilitated her adjustment to Canadian society. She explained:

I guess what you do and what you're interested. Yeah, hobbies. Like here in [city], if you were into sports so actively you would fit in so easily... I guess the language and what you're interested in are two main things about how you're going to fit in. (Tina)

Jun had some difficulties when he first came to Canada, not because of language, but because he was not pleased with the university. Later on, he managed to adjust, overcome his bias against the university, and came to like what he was doing. As he said:

If you wanna learn and you can learn it anywhere. If you don't wanna learn, even if you are at a good university you still don't wanna learn it. So I have difficulty when I first came here. And I am happy with what I am doing right now. So it's all right. (Jun)

After Jun realized that learning lay with himself, not the university that he attended, he found that he performed well academically and enjoyed his studies [at university].

Perceptions of Academic Performance

The third theme focused on the perceptions of academic performance, and four categories emerged as important: language proficiency; teaching style; motivation; and educational system.

Language Proficiency

Language proficiency was important in affecting the academic performance of foreign-born Chinese students like Sun and Han, but not Jun. As English major, Sun taught English in China for years before she arrived in Canada as a permanent resident, but found she still had language issues here at the university. Slow reading and superficial comprehension were the weaknesses she identified regarding her reading abilities.

Yeah, I think [language] it's still a great barrier, because for some readings I can read it. I can know the basic superficial meanings of each word, but when they come together, I just feel a little bit difficult to understand exactly the author want to mean. Maybe my superficial understanding is just opposite from what the author is trying to say. (Sun)

Han faced a similar situation. She felt her lack of language proficiency made her just an average student in the class. She attributed her unsatisfactory achievement to the fact that she was unable to understand the professors due to her insufficient language skills:

Yeah, if you cannot understand the professor, what she's talking about, how do you handle the exams? (Han)

Foreign-born students indicated that language proficiency played an important role in their academic performance. It had influence on their reading, understanding of the materials and professors' lectures, and their performance in the exams.

Teaching Style

An interesting point revealed by data analysis was that all foreign-born Chinese students expressed their love for the teaching styles used in Canada. Although they worried a lot about their language skills, they maintained that professors in Canada were quite supportive of their studies, which in turn helped them to build their confidence. Jun provided a good comparison of the professors in both China and Canada. He commented that the Chinese professor “just taught you everything he knows, ...and you just study whatever material he covers in the class” (Jun). As a result, he found that seemingly he did well academically, but actually learned nothing substantially useful. As for the Canadian professor, he commented:

He taught you a certain thing. He just gave you a main point, but he didn't actually go through all the details. Then when he left you an assignment, you need to think of what the details are. (Jun)

Jun's comments indicated that unlike teacher-centred teaching style in China, Canadian teaching was more helpful in cultivating students' creativity and independence in thinking. When he reflected on unhappy experiences at school in Taiwan where he was ignored by the teacher because of his poor academic performance, Jun was filled with indignation:

Yeah, I think the teaching style is one of the most important things. Because if your teacher doesn't care about you, and he treats you like ...trash, something like that, because he doesn't wanna spend time on you. He knew you're useless. Then, well, what can you do? (Jun)

He thus was more pleased with professors in Canada because he found that students in class were encouraged to raise questions and professors were patient, respectful and supportive.

Both Han and Sun had the same perceptions of professors in Canada. They thought highly of Canadian approach, and found the professor-student relationship at Canadian university to be very congenial. As Han put it:

My professors are nice, I think. They don't push us away actually. If we need some help from them, they are always there and help you. They are supportive.

(Han)

All foreign-born participants thought highly of the Canadian teaching style, because it was more geared to students. They unanimously commented that the traditional "spoon-fed" education in China disheartened their independence and creativity, which they were able to retrieve here at a Canadian university.

Motivation

In contrast to foreign-born Chinese students whose biggest problem was language, motivation played the most important role in the academic performance of Canadian-born Chinese students like Tina, Andrew and Charles.

Tina felt that her motivation or drive was not as strong as students from Hong Kong. Because she disliked school, she did not have the drive for her studies at all. She believed the motivation other students had might be because of the pressure from their parents. She stated:

Compared to the Chinese people from Hong Kong, who came to Canada later than I did, they were doing a lot better...they had a stronger drive. Their parents... make them or force them to do better. But I didn't. I'm just getting Cs, Bs... I didn't have the drive to do that well at school at all. I didn't like school. (Tina)

Andrew had a similar opinion. He motivated himself to work hard only at the beginning of elementary school, because getting recognized for his good achievement in school made him feel good. It was the small souvenirs, prizes and encouraging compliments from his teachers that motivated him in his studies. Later on, Andrew slacked in his studies as did his friends and did not devote himself much to his school work:

The way, the habits of Canadian I guess. Like myself and my lots of friends were born in Canada. They don't tend to do homework. Yeah, like myself, I haven't done homework, like, from kindergarten to maybe, oh I see, to a high school ... open a book. (Andrew)

However, he still performed academically well at school, but he ascribed his good achievements to his birth in Canada.

Charles indicated that incentives from the teacher were of great importance to him, especially, when he disliked a subject:

You're studying, like, what subject you enjoy. If it's not the subject you enjoy, at least you have a teacher who can motivate you to study. I think rewards and recommendation would too. (Charles)

Data analysis revealed that unlike immigrant students, whose parents impelled them much in their studies, Canadian-born participants were motivated more by schoolteachers who tended to provide them with incentives for their achievements.

Educational System

The Canadian and Chinese educational systems were perceived to be quite different by the participants. Data analysis revealed that all foreign-born Chinese students preferred the Canadian educational system to the Chinese system, because they found the Chinese system to be strict and somewhat didactic. For example, Han liked the Canadian system more because it emphasizes creative thinking more than dependence on teachers:

In Canada, you have to do something by yourself, like research. The teachers, they don't teach you too much. They're just trying to give you a way that you can find the information from the internet, library, something like. But in China, you don't have to do these things. You just sit in the classroom and the teacher will teach you everything. So you can just be lazy. (Han)

Han thought that unlike Chinese educational system under which students were passive knowledge acceptors from teachers, Canadian education left more space for students to think and act independently.

Having experienced the traditional Chinese educational system as both a student and teacher, Sun rendered a vivid description of her perceptions of the differences, and of the Canadian educational system. She found that under the Chinese educational system, teachers were authorities, and students were not encouraged to question the teacher. While under Canadian educational system, teachers were more of a guide than an

instructor, and students were more encouraged and respected for their independence and creativity. As Sun commented:

My traditional learning style, teaching style is more like doctrine. Students just learn what they told you without asking many questions, just give the right answer on these exams and you will get high marks and you will get everything you want. But here people emphasize on independent thinking, critical thinking and contextual thinking... So it's really different. I think here people are more practical and they emphasize on fact. (Sun)

It is in the Canadian educational system that she thought she would make a great difference in her life.

Canadian-born students also had opinions about the Chinese education system because of what their foreign-born counterparts or parents have told them. For example, Tina, one of the Canadian-born Chinese students, figured that she would prefer the Canadian system because it would be easier for her. She suspected, however, that she would be smarter if she were a student in a Hong Kong school:

I think I would be a lot smarter, because Hong Kong education, like the maths, they learn like multiplication when they were in Grade Three already. It's a lot harder. Probably I would know a lot more already, and when I came to Canada, I've already learned that stuff. So I guess I would be smarter that way, 'cause I've known. Yeah, the teaching style is totally different. (Tina)

What Tina meant is that curricula in Hong Kong were basically much harder compared to those at the same grade in Canada, so she would have learned more and appeared smarter.

Likewise, Charles imagined that it would be harder for him to study in Hong Kong, not because of the difference in the educational systems but because of language issues and teaching methods. He assumed that to study general sciences in Chinese would be a great challenge to him because it might be difficult to master the technical terms in Chinese:

I might imagine it [school in Hong Kong] would be a little bit more difficult, because it's in a Chinese language. Some subjects like chemistry and physics might be very hard giving instruction in Chinese language. Lots of terms....like English, we can pronounce by words, so if you learn a new word in chemistry or biology, you just learn by how it sounds. So the language might have an influence. (Charles)

Andrew found education in Canada to be pretty relaxing at primary and high school, and hardly did he spend more time on his school work than on TV or video games. At college, he found that curriculum became unexpectedly more difficult and he had to work harder to achieve satisfying marks. He stated:

We never did go home and open a book and do homework. From Grade One to Grade Six, all we did is watch [TV]... It's hard for me to start studying, especially when I got to college... Like materials start getting more difficult and you have to put more time to it and do homework. And homework has to be marks, right, and marks, kind of for something, because you pay for education, and your mind is just different. You have to sit down and focus on one thing for a long time. Start getting difficult, right? (Andrew)

Amazed by his Chinese friends' self-disciplined devotion to study, Andrew assumed that it would be harder for him to study in China. In his understanding, the strict teaching style in China was the contributing factor in foreign-born Chinese students' unique and industrious working habits. He also felt that much homework and overwhelming pressure were the major cause of tragedies like suicide, which he believed would never happen in Canada. As he put it:

So you heard students, like, they didn't make it from high school through universities. Like, they study so hard, but they couldn't pass or couldn't make it. They committed suicide, right? Because they are so pressured. That's kind of bad. That's, I guess, a negativity... You've never heard a kid in Canada like, failing a course and then killing themselves, because failing a course is not a word here. (Andrew)

The Effect of Canadian Education on Career Expectations

The fourth theme that emerged is the perceived effects of a Canadian education on career expectations. All six participants are at university studying in their respective fields. While they may have different intentions and expectations for their future, all of them, no matter where they were born, were quite positive about the effect the Canadian educational system would have on their career prospects.

Change of Life

Two foreign-born Chinese students spoke highly of their Canadian educational experience, which, they believed, would change their lives. For example, Jun was content

with his education in Canada. He concluded that if he were in Taiwan, he would probably end up working as a cheap labourer rather than having a good education.

Well, I would say the education in Canada gives me a new life. If I were still in Taiwan, I would probably go to a cramming school. Once you graduated from high school, you couldn't get accepted by any university. (Jun)

He felt uncertain about what his life would be like if he had the opportunity to go to a university in Taiwan, however, he was content with choice he made to study in Canada.

Sun had a similar opinion as Jun, but she figured that her educational experiences in Canada would reap more rewards if she returned to China:

I think this Canadian education experience will promote me to get a higher ladder back in China, not only in finding a job, I mean the social status, economic benefit, something like that. I can get a better job. But here in Canada, also the education experience will help me to get a job, compared to, without this education experience. (Sun)

As well, she held that learning in the Canadian system would help with her language acquisition and acculturation to Canada.

I think still it helps me understand Canadian culture a lot. Although it doesn't mean I am totally integrated into their culture, but at least the understanding of the Canadian culture would help me getting along well with the Canadians. So I think that is the advantage too. After these two years, I think I can get used to the weather, the living styles and know more about Canada. (Sun)

Participants' comments indicated that as immigrant students, Canadian education acted as a transition, because it not only created more opportunities for them to compete in a local labour market, but also mitigated the adverse effect of cultural difference.

Job Offer

A majority of the participants believed that the Canadian educational system would be conducive to job hunting, however, two of them wondered about their ability to secure a job in their respective fields. Han reckoned that it was important to have a Canadian degree or diploma in order to obtain a job in Canada.

It will help me to find a job, because if we want to find a job, I mean in Canada, I think we have to have degree or diploma from a Canadian school.

(Han)

Andrew indicated that developing a network of friends, which he built up at school, would help him find a job. Indeed, he pinned great hopes on his network of friends or connections:

I think being born here, it's lots of easier because I have a big basic network of friends. I know I can ask [them]. I went to college. At college, I made a lot of friends. Everybody knew me. So I have a lot of friends I can ask... So they tend to pass their words to their bosses and it's networking. In Canadian society, networking, where 80% people find their job through networks. Not through newspapers, not through anything like that. (Andrew)

Tina was in outdoor recreation because she liked travel and wanted to be a trip leader or work outdoors, but she was not sure about her job prospects: "I'll get a good job, I

don't know." Still, she hoped that the Canadian educational system might be helpful in obtaining what she wanted.

Charles expected to become a general science teacher. He commented that the Canadian system "kind of allows me a lot of choice to choose which area I wanna to study," but he was not sure if he would find a job:

It'll probably [be easier to find a job]. It was, but it probably still is. It probably will. It probably has fewer choices in terms of where you wanna and where you can teach. (Charles)

Through analysis of data collected from both Canadian-born and foreign-born students, this chapter identified four themes: first, perceptions of ethnic identity, which revealed how Canadian-born and foreign-born students viewed themselves ethnically. Second, cultural integration, which discussed barriers and issues encountered by the participants in the process of integration into both the wider Canadian society and the academic life of the university. Third, perceptions of academic performance, which probed into differences and similarities in study attitudes and behaviours between Canadian-born and foreign-born students. Fourth, the effect of Canadian education on career options, which focused on how participants perceived the expected effect of Canadian education on their future life. Each of the themes were analyzed by constantly comparing data collected from both groups so as to reveal differences and similarities in perceptions of the lived experience between Canadian-born and foreign-born students of Chinese origin in Northern Ontario.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I provide a summary of the study, a detailed discussion of the results, and identify implications arising from the study. Finally, I draw conclusions, and present suggestions for further research.

Summary of the Study

The objective of this research was to provide an in-depth description of the key factors that contribute to the differences and similarities in the social experiences of Canadian-born and foreign-born Chinese students, and to disseminate results that could be used by policy makers to enable them to better understand and address the needs, interests, and aspirations of Chinese Canadian students in Canada.

This study employed a qualitative method to uncover the meanings of the lived experiences of Chinese Canadian students in Northern Ontario. Qualitative data were collected from the interviews of six participants. Four themes were identified in data analysis: perceptions of ethnic identity; cultural integration; perceptions of academic performance; and the effect of Canadian education on career options.

The findings of this study indicated that Canadian-born Chinese students differed from their foreign-born counterparts in a variety of ways, including their viewpoints on ethnic identity, their perceptions of acculturation, and academic performance. Both groups of students also shared some similarities, including their views about the Canadian and Chinese educational systems, teaching styles, as well as their expectations for their respective future careers.

Perceptions of Ethnic Identity

Rosenthal and Feldman (1992) found that Chinese adolescents living in Australia and the United States had a tendency to define themselves as Chinese. As for Chinese students at post-secondary level, I had assumed that foreign-born Chinese students would be more likely to label themselves as Chinese than their Canadian-born counterparts. I was surprised to note that two Canadian-born and two foreign-born participants felt more aligned with Chinese culture. Although they immersed themselves in the dominant English or French Canadian culture, they viewed themselves as separate from the wider Canadian context due to the culture differences they encounter. The foreign-born participants in this study were born in and grew up in China, and arrived in Canada as permanent residents. Within the mainstream Canadian culture, they still retained the behaviours, beliefs, and values of the Chinese culture, which they found not only constantly clashed in various ways with western culture, but also enhanced their awareness of their ethnic identity. In a sense, they were more preoccupied with the idea of how to acculturate into the new society than how to construct their identities within the Canadian social framework.

In contrast, two of the Canadian-born counterparts were more fluid when it came to relating to two different cultures and ethnic identities. They viewed themselves as Chinese in terms of ethnicity, but felt embarrassed by or even guilty of their paucity of Chinese cultural heritage and knowledge. The Canadian-born Chinese students were creating culture in a new context, by using one portion of their parents' culture while simultaneously adopting the dominant culture. This process of the reconstruction of identity is what Hall (1990) calls a process of "becoming and being." It is a social

process where people search for new meanings of identity and redefine norms of identity at the individual level (Ghosh, 2000).

On the other hand, for Canadian-born students of Chinese origin, being exposed to more than one culture may lead to identity conflicts and confusion (Ghosh, 2000). They may seek reconciliation in the process of identity construction by integrating two different cultures and creating a mixture of cultures on an individual basis. This was the case of Charles in this study. He held that culturally, he was little bit of both. By inheriting Chinese culture from his parents, he built up a connection to the collective identities to which his parents belong, while through Canadian culture, he opened a door to wider Canadian society as well. Thus, he unintentionally created a space for himself by assuming a dual identity. This dual identity in turn lent to a further interpretation on his struggle over identity construction. This finding provides clear support for Ghosh's (2000) argument that "strong ethnic identification with one's own ethnic culture as well as with the dominant culture is the ideal way to integrate because one needs to know where one is coming from in order to know where one is going" (p. 279).

One interesting finding in this study is that, with regard to his ethnic identity, foreign-born Chinese student Jun stated that he did not really care whether he was Canadian or Chinese. This finding is consistent with Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine and Broadnax's (1994) argument that the salience of ethnicity varies in accordance with life experiences and current situations. Jun's personal experience at school in Taiwan, his parents' expectations and his migration to Canada appear to have exerted a subtle influence on his viewpoints towards ethnic identity. Further research is suggested to delve deeper into this phenomenon.

The findings in this study suggested that in their search for new or modified identities, both foreign-born and Canadian-born Chinese students seek a balance between their Chinese cultural heritage and mainstream Canadian culture. Foreign-born Chinese students were highly aware that their deeply rooted cultural values, beliefs, and behaviours were an indelible indicator of their identity, yet they were also concerned more with how to adjust to Canadian society than how to become Canadians, while their Canadian-born counterparts were struggling over identity in a larger Canadian society from the day they were born.

Cultural Integration

In this study, cultural integration is discussed in terms of two findings: perceptions of fitting into the society and perceptions of fitting into the academic life of the university.

Perceptions of Fitting into the Society

In terms of cultural integration into society, the Canadian-born Chinese students differ from their foreign-born counterparts in two aspects: culture-specific knowledge from parents, and difficulties experienced at the beginning of school. They also were similar in one area, the importance of a network of Chinese friends.

All the Canadian-born participants in this study are second-generation Canadians whose parents were immigrants. They acquired their formal education in Canada. Their parents, who retain traditional Chinese knowledge were their source of information of traditional Chinese culture. The second generation differs from their parents in that they have minimal knowledge of Chinese culture and minimal Chinese language skills. Their

cultural norms are different from those of their parents because of their adapting English or French Canadian cultures. This supports previous observations of immigrant families that the pace of individual acculturation varies, with second generation usually adjusting more rapidly than their parents (Garcia Coll, Meyer, & Brillon, 1995; Ying, 1999; Buki, Ma, Strom and Strom, 2003).

Cultural integration requires a high level of involvement in the native ethnic group (Lanca, Alksnis, Roese and Gardner, 1994). Both Canadian-born and foreign-born students deemed the acquisition of Canadian education as an expedient accommodation to Canadian society. Supposedly, Canadian-born Chinese students should be in a better situation to easily adjust themselves to the local culture since they have been exposed to it since childhood (Buki, Ma, Strom and Strom, 2003). Nevertheless, all Canadian-born Chinese students found it difficult to acclimatize themselves at the beginning of their formal schooling. Prior to school attendance, second-generation Chinese learned primary Chinese, a tool only employed to communicate with their parents at home, and to acquire traditional attitudes, values and behaviours inherited culturally from their Chinese parents. With increasing contact with other ethnic group members within their neighbourhood or at school, they became aware of differences in various aspects of life. Their perplexity and curiosity about mainstream culture mingled with their longing to be part of it. They believed that receiving a local school education would minimize their difference and enhance their social status (James, 2004). Canadian-born Chinese students were able to integrate in Canadian society quite easily, thanks to their early exposure to the dominant English language as well as mainstream culture. This finding lends support to Chow's (2001) argument that, "Proficiency in English is undoubtedly a prime consideration in the

rapidity and ease with which immigrants adapt to an English-language-dominated milieu” (p. 191).

This study found that both Canadian-born and foreign-born Chinese students have a tendency to associate with other Chinese students. This is consistent with Rosenthal and Feldman (1992), who found similar result. It is understandable that foreign-born Chinese students may feel more comfortable with other Chinese students. However, why Canadian-born Chinese students were inclined to associate only with other Chinese is interesting, and requires further investigation.

In comparison with their Canadian-born counterparts, foreign-born Chinese students experienced more difficulties in adapting to Canadian society. Their difficulties were related to cultural difference, language barriers, personality, financial situation, and different social environments.

Geertz (1973) defines culture as “a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men [sic] communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and their attitudes toward life” (p. 89). Engrained with cultural attitudes, beliefs, and values, foreign-born students found it hard to modify and alter their way of thinking, feeling, valuing, and acting when confronted with a different set of social standards and norms. They did not necessarily share interests, opinions, or values with local people. Difficulty communicating further discouraged their attempt to approach and befriend local people, and maximize the possibility of acculturation. Such finding supports Lay and Verkuyten’s (1999) earlier research that foreign-born students tend to feel less accepted and more like minority group members compared with their Canadian-born counterparts.

Second language proficiency is related to acculturation (Lanca, Roese, Alksnis, & Gardner, 1994), because language is the primary requirement for communication and acquisition of information about the new society. In this study, two foreign-born participants were troubled by their poor language skills. To communicate, they have to learn how to listen, and then how to convey their meaning accurately (Campey, 2002), and thus, unfortunately, was a significant challenge for foreign-born Chinese students. Good mastery of language is a priority for foreign-born students to get acclimatized to Canadian society. This finding is consistent with Mesch (2003), who indicated that “the acquisition of the local language by immigrants is also important in terms of the social reaction to them” (p. 42).

In relation to second language acquisition, one foreign-born student pointed out that personality also plays a role in language learning and social adaptation. Specifically, an active or affirmative personality may contribute more positively to second language acquisition than a passive and taciturn one. Attributes of shyness among Chinese students may hinder their language attainment and social adjustment. So far, many studies have been conducted on second language acquisition and acculturation (Young & Gardner, 1990; Lanca, Roese, Alksnis, & Gardner, 1994; Noels, Pon & Clement, 1996), however there is dearth of research discussing the effect of personality on second language acquisition. This, too, could be an area for further research.

One interesting point revealed by foreign-born participants is that their financial situation hampered their social integration. Without any steady income, foreign-born students generally led a frugal life. Their tight budget restricted them from access to the local media and involvement in social life, which in turn minimized their likelihood of

social adaptation. This finding echoes Cole's (1998) argument that the acculturation process is impacted by several factors, one of which is post-migration stressors related to poverty or socioeconomic status. In what way does socioeconomic status of immigrant students affect acculturation? Further research is suggested to probe into this area.

Different social environments may have different effects on acculturation. Two foreign-born participants worked before they pursued their degrees at school, and provided insightful perceptions of the different social contexts. Language proficiency was important in both contexts (Chiswick & Miller, 1998), but participant Sun acknowledged that it was much easier to associate with classmates at school than with work colleagues. Her statement indicates that interpersonal relationships in the workplace versus school may differ and that Canadian education may help to facilitate cultural adaptation. This supports James's (2004) argument that many immigrants look to Canadian education to compensate for their limitations. Jun, who immigrated to Canada earlier than the other two stated that he could "fit in the society pretty well", which supports the argument that the longer the exposure to the local language, the stronger the language proficiency (Mesch, 2003).

Perceptions of Fitting into the Academic Life of the University

All foreign-born participants found it difficult to adjust to academic life. To foreign-born Chinese students, language still posed an obstacle, both in and out of the classroom, which made their studies more demanding and time-consuming in comparison to their Canadian-born counterparts. This finding is consistent with Kaufman's (2004) report that immigrant Chinese students are motivated to work harder than their second-generation

Chinese peers. As for the university social life, Canadian-born Chinese students were more socially active than foreign-born students. However, at university, both groups had one thing in common, the tendency to associate with Chinese friends. This result again supports Kaufman's (2004) and Lay and Verkuyten's (1999) findings that both immigrant and non-immigrant Chinese students manage to develop an intimate community among Chinese students, but non-immigrant students may be more active mixing with a diverse population of students.

Perceptions of Academic Performance

My discussion of the academic performance of both Canadian-born and foreign-born Chinese students focuses on four factors: language proficiency; teaching style; motivation; and educational systems.

Language issues seem ubiquitous in the lives of the foreign-born participants. Except for Jun, who had a good mastery of the English language, the other two foreign-born Chinese students indicated that their academic performance largely depended on their language proficiency. This finding is similar to earlier studies, which demonstrated that language proficiency is associated with higher academic achievement among minority immigrant students (Chow, 2000; Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Vernez & Abrahamse, 1996).

Familiar with a traditional teacher-centered educational background in China, all foreign-born Chinese students enjoyed the new teaching styles encountered at the Canadian university. In China, hard-working, demanding teachers, and difficult curriculum are highly valued at schools (Kaufman, 2004). "The educational systems

emphasize rote memorization rather than skill development and problem solving; self-expression may be actively discouraged” (Campey, 2002, p. 44). Here in Canada, professors are more supportive and helpful. The participants’ particular preference for a student-centered educational model illustrates benefits of this pedagogical approach.

Data analysis also revealed that there is a discrepancy between foreign-born and Canadian-born Chinese students in terms of their academic behaviour. Canadian-born Chinese students indicated that motivation played an important role in their studies and they appreciated the more entertaining teachers. To some extent, they were unwilling or unable to work diligently to succeed at high academic levels, while their foreign-born counterparts believed in working hard to accomplish success. This result is consistent with findings reported by Ogbu and Simons (1998), who in their cultural-ecological theory of minority school performance, note that voluntary minorities’ attitudes toward schools are influenced by the “back home” comparison, and many tend to believe hard work will lead to success.

Being exposed to two entirely different educational systems, foreign-born participants appeared to embrace the Canadian educational system, where creativity and independent thinking are highly encouraged. Canadian-born Chinese students enjoyed the Canadian educational system as well. However, they differ from their foreign-born counterparts in that they like the system not because of the creativity or the independent thinking teachers encourage, but because of the perceived ease of school programs and relaxed school atmosphere. They thought they were lucky not to be in Chinese schools where their teachers would push them to an unreasonable degree. This finding is consistent with Kaufman’s (2004) reports that the second-generation students talk of wanting more

entertaining, knowledgeable professors while not willing or able to work as hard for school success.

The Effect of Canadian Education on Career Expectation

Foreign-born students had much clearer educational and career expectations, and their choice of school speciality as well as career expectation was affected more by their parents' opinions or consideration of the employment market than personal preferences. Moreover, they placed great emphasis on the importance of a Canadian university education because they regarded it as a key to open doors in their new life in Canada, even if they were not sure what their future career options would entail. This finding again supports James' (2004) argument that "as new members of the society, they frequently lack economic, social and cultural resources, many immigrants look to education - specifically, their academic credentials - to compensate for their limitations and to enable them to procure the resources they need" (p. 43).

Implications of the Study

The results of this study have implications for a variety of stakeholders, such as policymakers, professors, prospective students and their parents, and the communities. Knowledge of the differences and similarities between Canadian-born and foreign-born Chinese students in the multicultural context of Canada will enable stakeholders to better understand needs, interests and aspirations of these Chinese Canadian students so as to assist them to accommodate themselves into Canadian society.

The study implies that it is necessary for educators and school policymakers to build an understanding of these Chinese Canadian students' needs and interests as well as their difficulties. Educational policies should vary towards Canadian-born and foreign-born students of Chinese origin so as to cater to their respective needs and interests in their post-secondary education. In view of differences and similarities in values, beliefs, behaviours and attitudes due to their birth of place and exposure to different cultures, organizations and entities that provide immigrant services would also benefit from understanding the differences and similarities between these two groups of Chinese Canadian students. These organizations can utilize these results as background information that might inform or help to implement educational and governmental policies.

Another implication that arises from the study is that university professors should take into account different study habits, behaviours, and attitudes of these two groups of Chinese Canadian students. This difference may require a radically different approach to how they instruct these students.

The findings showed that all foreign-born Chinese students experienced a degree of culture shock and a painstaking struggle for accommodation. Prospective immigrant students should thus build up their knowledge of Canadian culture, geography and history while they strive to improve their language skills. Moreover, education for these foreign-born Chinese students should not only involve teachers and professors, but also the wider Chinese and Canadian communities. These communities should provide special services such as cultural orientation sessions to the newly arrived immigrant students, and assist them to ease their concerns and facilitate their accommodation in Canada.

With respect to Canadian-born students' schooling within the context of multicultural Canadian society, a fine balance between the preservation of Chinese cultural and linguistic heritage and the initiation and introduction of Canadian education is of great importance to both parents and community members (Buki, Ma, Strom and Strom, 2003). It is necessary for parents and community members to explore possible approaches such as bilingual education to encourage these students to appropriately face the cultural difference in the larger social arena.

Conclusion

This study identified four elements that contribute to the differences and similarities in the lived experiences of Canadian-born and foreign-born students. These include perceptions of ethnic identity, cultural integration, perceptions of academic performance, and the effect of Canadian education on career options.

The study highlights the importance of language acquisition and use among foreign-born Chinese students for both cultural integration and school performance. This finding confirmed Mesch's (1991) argument that "how and why immigrants acquire language proficiency and use the local language is an important issue in countries that receive large waves of migration" (p. 42). Without a doubt, foreign-born Chinese students must attain a high level of English or French proficiency to allow them to fully participate in the social and educational domains of Canadian society. They also face the added challenge of language problems and of cultural integration, often struggling with a dynamic and complex array of traditional, cultural, and educational values. Here then, in Canada, they enter a new dimension of opportunity, the Canadian educational system.

The narratives of foreign-born students further reflect their deeply rooted cultural values, their aspirations for a promising life, their striving for excellence and their struggle to become visible in this new multicultural society. The problem remains, however, that despite their strenuous efforts to adjust to the contemporary Canadian culture, their second language attainment and Chinese cultural tradition still creates borders around mainstream culture in Canada. To break through the borders calls for proper language training and instructions as well as appropriate cultural orientation into local communities for foreign-born Chinese students (Kaufman, 2004).

The results of this study also provided insights into the determinants of acculturation among Canadian-born students of Chinese origin within a multicultural setting. Canadian-born Chinese students do not seem to be bound to the Canadian culture, and they do not characterize themselves in terms of the culture of their language choice. This finding contradicts the hypothesis of Lanca, Roese, Alksnis, and Gardner (1994) that “language choice can be seen as a major index of ethnic identity” (p. 328). The Canadian-born Chinese students, who have been exposed to both Chinese and Canadian cultures since the day they were born, tend to define themselves as Chinese in terms of ethnic identity, but culturally they modified their ethnic identity in various ways in response to social norms. They are more confident in their English or French abilities than their Chinese.

In addition, this study contributed to the understanding of school performance of Canadian-born Chinese students as well. The results of the study shed light on how Canadian-born Chinese students develop their beliefs and attitudes about school education. In contrast with their foreign-born counterparts, who were more disciplined in

their studies, Canadian-born Chinese students did not favour restrictive classroom environments. Canadian-born participants were motivated more by personal interests and preferences, and felt they were challenged rather weakly intellectually.

By and large, this study revealed the concerns and issues which hindered some participants' attempts at second language acquisition and cultural integration to Canadian society, and also illustrated anticipations and aspirations which motivated the participants' further efforts towards their future life and career in Canada. Although both groups were of Chinese origin, the difference in perceptions of their lives varied between Canadian-born and foreign-born Chinese students. Awareness of the difference is particularly important given the social context of Canada, where rights and needs of each minority group are equally cherished under the official Multicultural Act (Bill C-93-Canada, 1998).

Suggestions for Further Research

This comparative study focused on the differences and similarities between the lived experiences of Canadian-born and foreign-born Chinese students. More research is recommended to further the advancement of our knowledge of these issues. The advancement of our knowledge can be accomplished by providing an in-depth description of needs, interests, perceptions and life aspirations of the students from different perspectives.

The following research recommendations are provided to expand upon the findings of this study:

1. Because Canadian-born Chinese students were second-generation Chinese immigrants, it would be interesting to know how third generation Chinese view their ethnic identity.
2. Some participants indicated that personality and financial situations are contributing factors affecting acculturation. In what ways do personality and financial situations affect the acculturation of immigrants?
3. In what way do different study habits, behaviours and attitudes of Canadian-born and foreign-born Chinese students contribute to their academic success?
4. In what way does a Canadian education or Canadian degree/diploma assist foreign-born Chinese students in seeking employment in Canada? What will the difference be among those who have a Canadian education, and those who have a Chinese education?

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APPENDIX A

219 Secord Street
Thunder Bay, P7B 3E6
Email: fwang12@lakeheadu.ca
Supervisor: Dr. Seth Agbo
Email: sagbo@lakeheadu.ca

November 17, 005

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario. I am currently conducting a research study, entitled a *Comparative Study of the Lived Experiences of Canadian-born and Foreign-born Chinese Students in Northern Ontario*. My research is being supervised by Dr. Seth Agbo, Faculty of Education, Lakehead University. You are being invited to participate in this study to be conducted from November to December 2005.

All the participants who voluntarily participate in the study are assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Responses to this study will be held in strictest confidence. All data collected in the study will be used only for the purpose, which this study is intended. All the transcription records will be marked numerically to assure the anonymity of participants. The primary data will be stored at Lakehead University for seven years and then be destroyed.

I would be grateful if you could participate in my research. I will also be glad if you would grant me any further request for follow-up information during my research.

Thank you for your assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Wang Fei

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

My signature on this form indicates that I have agreed to participate in this study by Wang Fei on *A comparative study on lived experiences of Canadian-born and Foreign-born Chinese students in Northern Ontario*.

I have read and understood the research study and its purpose. I also understand that

1. I am a volunteer and can withdraw from the study at any time.
2. The information I provide will remain confidential.
3. There is no danger of physical or psychological harm.
4. I will receive a copy of the results upon request following the completion of the research.
5. The interview will be audio-taped and the transcription records will be marked numerically to assure the anonymity of participants.
6. The data will be securely stored at Lakehead University for seven years and then be destroyed.
7. A copy of the completed will be available for consultation in the Lakehead University Paterson Library and the Education Library.

Signature of Participant

Date

APPENDIX C

Confidentiality Letter

I, the below signed, agree that I will be the peer reviewer for Mr. Fei Wang, a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay Ontario, on his research study, entitled a Comparative Study of the Lived Experiences of Canadian-born and Foreign-born Chinese Students in Northern Ontario. Mr. Fei Wang will likely disclose certain confidential information to me while discussing his transcribed interviews and thesis draft, and requiring my comments on themes for his Masters thesis.

“Confidential Information” means all information disclosed by Mr. Fei Wang concerning Mr. Fei Wang’s study, which may include, but is not limited to, transcribed interviews, data analysis and thesis draft.

I agree to retain in confidence all Confidential Information disclosed to me by Mr. Fei Wang. I further agree to use the Confidential Information as a peer reviewer to give my comments and suggestions on Mr. Fei Wang’s data analysis and that I will not use or disclose to any third party, nor permit the use or disclosure to any third party, of any Confidential Information unless expressly authorized in writing by Mr. Fei Wang in advance. I agree to return, delete, or destroy all emails, electronic files, transcripts, thesis draft containing Confidential Information immediately upon request of Mr. Fei Wang.

I acknowledge that all Confidential Information disclosed by Mr. Fei Wang to me is significant, confidential and materially affects the successful completion of Mr. Fei Wang's Masters thesis. I agree to the terms of this letter agreement this 28 day of December, 2005.

Signature: _____

APPENDIX D

General Interview Guide

1. With which cultural tradition (Canadian or Chinese) would you more align yourself? Please explain.
2. As a foreign-born/Canadian-born Chinese, how do you see yourself fitting into the Canadian society?
3. How does your academic performance at school depend on your place of birth?
4. What do you consider would be differences in your academic performance if you were born in Canada/China?
5. How do you think your education in Canada would affect your future career?
6. How do you find yourself fitting into the social and academic life of the university?

APPENDIX E

Research Ethics' Introductory Tutorial Certificate

