

An Analysis of Mainland Chinese Students' Decision to Choose
Canada as Their Study Destination

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A Thesis
in
The Department
of
Education

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts (Educational Studies) at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

July 2011

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CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

School of Graduate Studies

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ABSTRACT

An Analysis of Mainland Chinese Students' Decision to Choose Canada as Their Study Destination

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China has become the largest source country of foreign students in Canada. For Canadian international education, China is a huge potential market. Unfortunately, we know very little about the motivations and perceptions of Mainland Chinese students when they choose Canada to pursue their higher education. Compared to other studies, this study focuses on pre-departure experiences of Mainland Chinese students. This is a small-scale inquiry and eight Mainland Chinese students were interviewed. The participants' narratives provide rich data to answer the question of why Mainland Chinese students choose to study in Canada. This thesis also examines influential factors that affect Mainland Chinese students' decision-making processes.

The findings illustrate that there were three main factors that motivated the interviewees to study abroad. First, the participants chose to study abroad because of the lack of opportunity to get a high-quality education in China and the fierce competition for admission into top universities. Second, the participating students and their families believed that the high-quality of education in Western countries could bring competitive career advantages. Finally, parental involvement worked as a key factor. This study also demonstrates that parents and study abroad agencies were two main factors that influenced the participants' decision to study in Canada over other countries. This study provides useful data and insights for Canadian institutions to gain a deeper understanding of Mainland Chinese students and enhance their recruitment strategies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis could not have been completed without the support, guidance and cooperation of many people.

Many thanks to my supervisor, Dr. Ayaz Naseem, who has supported me from the beginning of my studies at Concordia University. He shared professional knowledge with me and gave me the motivation to write this thesis. I also appreciate the help of Dr. Arpi Hamalian. She has been giving me continuous support and guidance throughout my studies. I wish to thank Dr. Arshad-Ayaz, who is on my thesis committee and gave me helpful feedback on my thesis.

I would like to thank all the Mainland Chinese students who kindly participated in this study and shared their experiences and opinions. Their ideas inspired me.

Finally, I thank my parents and husband for their love and support.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

According to the statistics from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2010), the People's Republic of China has surpassed Korea and become the largest source country of foreign students in Canada. In 2009, the People's Republic of China supplied 16,375 out of 85,140 foreign students to Canada (see Table 1 and Figure 1). On December 1st of 2009, there were 196,138 foreign students in Canada, of which more than one-fourth had come from Mainland China (see Table 2). Since 1999, the number of Chinese students in Canada increased from 6,465 to 49,905 in 2009. In 1999, only 4,339 Mainland Chinese students entered Canada to pursue their studies; nowadays, the figure is nearly four times than what it was ten years ago. International students are estimated to contribute more than \$6.5 billion to the Canadian economy every year (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010); Chinese international students are the largest contributors.

However, Canada is not the top destination for Mainland Chinese students. According to the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (2010), about 229,300 Chinese students studied abroad in 2009; only 16,375 Chinese students chose Canada as their destination (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010). The United States, Australia and the United Kingdom were the top three destinations where Chinese students preferred to study; Canada was only the fifth choice in the ranking (Aoji Education, 2009).

Table 1

Canada – Total Entries of Foreign Students by Top 10 Source Countries, 2004-2009

Source country	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
China, P.R.	7,461	7,435	8,988	10,035	13,679	16,375
Korea	13,457	13,821	15,599	15,171	13,936	11,048
India	1,823	2,259	2,748	2,694	3,250	5,718
France	4,239	4,409	5,125	4,815	4,676	5,320
Saudi Arabia	643	839	821	1,428	3,526	5,293
United States	5,659	5,605	5,340	5,232	4,643	4,530
Japan	5,712	5,518	4,815	4,309	3,632	3,316
Mexico	2,388	2,619	2,716	2,643	2,588	2,755
Germany	1,903	2,036	2,097	2,344	2,513	2,330
Brazil	835	975	1,203	1,427	1,746	1,736

Note: From Facts and figures 2009, Citizenship and Immigration Canada

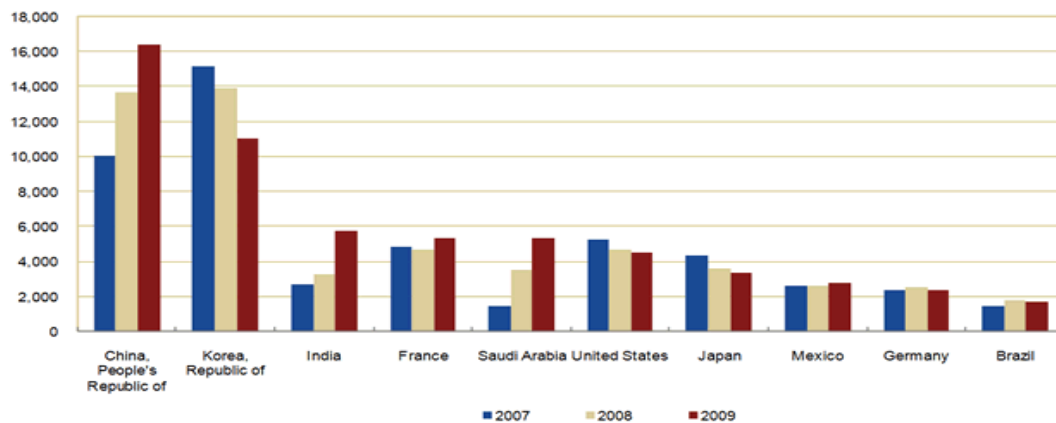


Figure 1.

Canada – Total Entries of Foreign Students by Top 10 Source Countries, 2007-2009

Table 2

Canada –Foreign Students Presented on December 1st 2009 by Top 10 Source Countries, 2004-2009

Source Country	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
China, P.R.	39,265	39,563	39,811	41,063	42,139	49,905
Korea	26,711	27,247	29,029	30,078	27,419	25,871
United States	12,603	12,709	12,417	12,095	11,473	11,275
India	5,759	6,290	6,692	6,930	7,312	9,570
France	6,590	6,736	7,768	8,342	8,540	9,286
Saudi Arabia	1,187	1,467	1,594	2,284	4,674	8,745
Japan	9,445	9,370	8,513	7,791	6,628	6,106
Hong Kong	5,667	5,171	4,762	4,482	4,116	4,092
Mexico	3,388	3,598	3,790	3,824	3,846	4,067
Taiwan	5,276	4,952	4,894	4,731	4,113	3,698

Note: From Facts and figures 2009, Citizenship and Immigration Canada

For Canadian international education, China is a huge potential market. In order to grasp the vast market opportunity, the Canadian Government implemented new policies to attract Chinese students. For example, in September, 2010, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) and the President of the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC) announced that they would apply the Student Partners Program (SPP) to attract more Chinese students (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010). Any marketing plan should be developed based on consumers' demands and expectations; thus,

we need to understand why Mainland Chinese students choose Canada as their destination. Unfortunately, we know very little about Mainland Chinese students' motivations and perceptions. We also need to understand the variables that influence Chinese students' decision-making processes. Most previous research focused on Chinese international students' adjustment to their host countries, and fewer traced their original ideas and pre-departure experiences. Moreover, many studies about Chinese students were carried out in China, Hong Kong and the United States but not in Canada. Thus, this study explores the gap in research relating to the pre-departure experiences of Mainland Chinese students and their motivations.

My personal interest and experience also motivated me to undertake this study. Ten years ago, there was a study abroad trend in Mainland China. My friends took the IELTS test and went to study in different countries, such as Australia, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand. They conveyed positive impressions of their overseas lives and encouraged me to study abroad. I took the IELTS test, prepared all required documents and applied for a master's program at Sydney University, Australia. At that time, Australia was a hot spot for Chinese students. Later, I received a conditional acceptance, but I did not go to study in Australia because I had gotten a job that I was satisfied with and did not want to lose the opportunity. Several years later, I came to Canada as an immigrant. Many friends back home asked me for opinions on studying in Canada because they thought I could provide first-hand information. I did not know how to answer these inquiries. First of all,

I did not have any experience in a Western country. Second, when I recalled my application experience, I realized that my decision to apply to study in Australia was random without clear goals and logical analysis. In my view, studying abroad is a significant decision because it can change people's lives forever. From that time, I always thought about questions like: Do other students have clear goals when they apply to study abroad? Do they understand the effects of this decision? Then, I began my studies at Concordia University, and met many Chinese students. Some students shared their stories with me, and I found that their stories reflected the complexity and diversity of studying abroad. Unfortunately, these voices are seldom heard in academic research. I felt that these voices should be heard and studied because they provide valuable insights, which can help international education providers, researchers, and policy makers gain a deeper understanding of Chinese students' expectations and needs.

The purpose of this study is to explore the factors that influence Mainland Chinese students to choose Canada as their study destination. By identifying and analyzing the underlying factors, this study provides useful data and insights for Canadian institutions to enhance their strategies to recruit more Chinese students.

Research questions:

This study examines the following questions:

1. Why do Mainland Chinese students study abroad: what factors influence their decision?

2. How do Mainland Chinese students choose their study abroad destination?
3. Why do Mainland Chinese students choose Canada as their destination?

In this study, I used narrative inquiry, a qualitative method, to collect data. I conducted open-ended interviews with eight Mainland Chinese students who came to Canada to pursue higher education. The participants' stories and insights provided broader and richer data to answer the question of why Mainland Chinese students choose to study in Canada.

Overview of the Chapters

This thesis is organized in seven chapters. The first chapter introduces the aims and objectives of this study. Chapter two focuses on the background information of study abroad trend in Mainland China. It begins with the explanation of some terms used in this study. Then, it provides a contextual description of higher education in China including information about the National Higher Education Entrance Examination and the industrialization of Higher Education. This part also contains a description about Chinese study abroad agencies. Furthermore, this part gives background information on Canadian visa policy and study permit for Chinese international students.

Chapter three is a literature review exploring previous research on international students' choices to study abroad. This part also reviews previous research focusing on Mainland Chinese students' decision to study abroad and their decision-making processes.

Chapter four explains the methodology applied to this study. It includes the research design, participant recruitment, and the procedures for gathering and analyzing data. The limitations of this study are also included.

In chapter five, narratives of participants' experiences are presented. Chapter six presents the demographic data of participants and the findings of this study. Emergent themes are presented and discussed. The final chapter includes some recommendations for practice and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND

In this chapter, I explain some key concepts used in this study. These include concepts such as Mainland China, and the National Higher Education Entrance Examination in China. I also describe the industrialization of Higher Education in China because it provides a contextual background of Chinese students' decision to study abroad. Moreover, I focus on Chinese study abroad agencies that specialize in helping Chinese students apply for admission and visas in order to study abroad. Finally, some related topics such as Canada's visa policy and study permit are also discussed in this chapter. This chapter aims to help readers gain an understanding of the underlying factors that influence Chinese students' decision to study abroad.

Mainland China

In this study, Mainland China refers to the area under the control of the People's Republic of China but excluding Hong Kong and Macau. In 1949, the Communist Party of China and its People's Liberation Army defeated the Kuomintang as well as its army in the civil war, and set up the People's Republic of China. The Kuomintang had to relocate the Government and institutions of the Republic of China to the island of Taiwan. Although the Communist Party of China declares that the People's Republic of China should be the sole legitimate government of China, the Taiwan and other islands are

under the jurisdiction of the Republic of China. Compared to such islands controlled by the Republic of China, the area controlled by the People’s Republic of China is called “Mainland China” (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Map of Mainland China

Note. From “Map of Mainland China” by The maps for your knowledge: freemap all over the world. http://english.freemap.jp/asia_e/china.html

Higher Education in Mainland China

Each year, millions of Mainland Chinese students graduate from high school. For example, in 2009, there were more than eight million high school graduates (Ministry of Education China, 2010). In China, if high school graduates want to pursue their higher education, their choices are influenced by the particular higher education system. In the system, high school graduates have two choices: taking the National Higher Education Entrance Examination for admission to Chinese institutions, or studying abroad.

National Higher Education Entrance Examination

In China, the National Higher Education Entrance Examination is the only admission examination for entrance into almost all higher education institutions at the undergraduate level. Every year, the Ministry of Education assigns the number of eligible students to each province, and each province announces its admission requirements according to this number.

Initially, the annual National Higher Education Entrance Examination consisted of two major subjects: Arts and Science. Most eligible students had to choose one or the other. Until 1993, there were seven tests in the science examination: Chinese, Mathematics, Foreign Language, Politics, Physics, Chemistry and Biology. There were six tests in the arts examination: Chinese, Mathematics, Foreign Languages, Politics, History and Geography. Some additional tests for early admissions applied to some

particular subjects such as Fine Arts, Foreign Languages, Sports and Military. However, since 2001, provinces have been allowed to customize their own examinations (Ministry of Education China, 2010). The current subjects vary from province to province.

Table 3

Admission Score of the National Higher Education Entrance Examination at Three Levels

Admission Score	Admission for
Top admission score	4-year program at top-ranked universities
General admission score	4-year program at general universities
Minimum admission Score	3-year program at colleges

Although the National Higher Education Entrance Examination is organized by the Ministry of Education, the admission procedures are administrated by each province. Each province announces its own admission requirements for three levels (See table 3), and offers students admissions according to their scores. Due to the imbalance of educational resources and power, there are vast regional differences among different provinces when deciding admission scores. For example, in 2008, the general admission score to enter a bachelor’s program in Arts for applicants from Hainan Province was 597 out of 750; in contrast, the general admission score for applicants from Tibet was only 360 (Chinese Education Online, 2008). In addition, bonus scores and early admission apply to some students. Ethnic minority students, students with high academic performance in high school, ex-serviceman and so on can get additional bonus scores for admission (Ministry of Education, 2008). Now, in some cases some excellent students

can get early admissions without taking the National Higher Education Entrance Examination.

Industrialization of Higher Education

In China, the concept of “industrialization of Education” was introduced by the government in 1999, and an education reform was initiated in order to be consistent with the socialist market economy. The purpose of the industrialization of Education is not to create more learning opportunities for citizens but to stimulate economic development (Li, 2006). As a result, the rates of admission to higher education institutions have increased, and the tuition fees have been increased. The unemployment rate of graduates has also risen.

According to the Almanac of Chinese education (Ministry of Education, 1949-2009), from 1998 to 2009, as table 4 shows, the numbers of admitted students to higher education institutions had increased from 1,083,627 to 6,394,932, while the amount of high school graduates increased from 2,517,845 to 8,237,220. In 1998, only 43.04% of high school graduates were admitted. The admission rate increased in 2003 to 83.42%, a historic high, and was at 77.63% in 2009. Since 1999, there has been a population boom at Chinese institutions. The total enrolment at universities and colleges had increased from 3,408,764 to 21,446,570. However, while the number of students increased, the teaching quality of Chinese universities has been declining (Xia & Feng, 2006). From

1998 to 2006, the student-faculty ratio in Chinese higher education institutions increased from 7.25 to 16.16. It can be seen that although the industrialization of Education policy allowed more access to higher education, the number of teachers has not increased at the same pace.

Table 4

The University and College Enrolment in China (1998-2009)

Year	High School Graduates	Students Admitted	Admission Percentage	Total Enrolment	Number of Faculties	S/F Ratio
1998	2,517,845	1,083,627	43.04%	3,408,764	407,253	8.37
1999	2,629,091	1,548,554	58.90%	4,085,874	425,682	9.60
2000	3,015,089	2,206,072	73.17%	5,560,900	462,772	12.02
2001	3,404,570	2,682,790	78.80%	7,190,658	531,910	13.52
2002	3,837,605	3,037,614	79.15%	8,620,989	618,419	13.94
2003	4,581,235	3,821,701	83.42%	11,085,642	724,658	15.30
2004	5,469,351	4,473,422	81.79%	13,334,969	858,393	15.53
2005	6,615,713	5,044,581	76.25%	15,617,767	965,839	16.17
2006	7,270,693	5,460,530	75.10%	17,388,441	1,075,989	16.16
2007	7,883,143	5,659,194	71.79%	18,848,954	1,168,300	16.13
2008	8,360,593	6,076,612	72.68%	20,210,249	1,237,451	16.33
2009	8,237,220	6,394,932	77.63%	21,446,570	1,295,248	16.56

Note: From Almanac of Chinese education (1949-2010)

Before 1989, higher education in China was financed by the government, and the tuition was free. Moreover, university students could get monthly food subsidies from the government. Starting in 1990, university students were required to pay nominal tuition, which was equal to 200 Chinese Yuan (about 30 CAD) per year. During the industrialization of Education process, all universities and colleges had a shortage of funds for the expansion. Consequently, the Ministry of Education decided to increase the tuition. In 1999, the average yearly university tuition fees increased by 40.3 percent and reached 2,769 Chinese Yuan (about 400 CAD). In 2002, this number was over 5,000 Chinese Yuan (about 680 CAD), and reached a record of 5,500 Chinese Yuan (about 800 CAD) in 2008 (Wang, 2010). Meanwhile, the government gradually reduced and finally abolished the food subsidies for students.

Unfortunately, the increasing number of graduates brought in a high unemployment rate. Before 1998, the government was responsible for allocating jobs for university graduates. The unemployment rate was nearly zero. However, with the industrialization programming, graduates have to look for jobs by themselves. The huge number of graduates makes the human capital market oversupplied. According to the Chinese Academy of Social Science (2009), in 2009, 1.5 million out of 5.6 million graduates did not find a job. The unemployment rate of university graduates reached 12 to 15 percent, which was triple the general unemployment rate in China.

Chinese Study Abroad Agencies

Many Chinese students consider Chinese study abroad agencies as information resources when they plan their studies abroad. According to Peng (2004), 85 percent of Chinese applicants chose study abroad agencies to help them apply to Canadian schools and a Canadian visa.

According to Ning (2011), in China, the trend of studying abroad attracts many intermediary agencies to enter the market. There are 402 certified Chinese study abroad agencies registered under the Ministry of Education (2011). It is not difficult for agencies to get accreditation from the Ministry of Education as long as they can prove enough registered funding and cooperation relations with overseas educational institutions (Ministry of Education, 1999). Study abroad agencies provide information and help their clients fill out and submit application forms in their names (Wu & Mao, 2004). In fact, these agencies do not get accreditation from destination countries. For example, according to the Canadian Embassy in Beijing (2010), an authorized representative must either be an immigration consultant who is a member of the Canadian Society of Immigration Consultants; a lawyer who is a member of a Canadian law society; or a notary who is a member of the Chambre des notaires du Québec. Few Chinese study abroad agencies meet such requirements.

Study abroad agencies' service fees vary from 1,000 CAD to 3,000 CAD. Study abroad agencies get commissions only when their clients are admitted to a Canadian

institution. As a result, some agencies' recommendations are based on how to complete their cases and get commissions as soon as possible. For applicants who do not meet academic institutions' language requirements, many agencies encourage them to take short-term language courses and apply for a Short-Term Student Temporary Resident Visitor Visa. Sometimes some agencies even mislead applicants into believing that a short-term language course is a pre-university program. In some cases, the agency even helps ineligible applicants provide spurious documents in order to gain admission or a visa (Wu & Mao, 2004).

Canadian Visa Policy and Study Permit for Chinese Students

Over the past ten years, more and more Chinese students chose to study abroad. According to the National Bureau of Statistics of China (2010), in 1998 only 17,622 Chinese students left China and studied abroad. In 2009, the number increased more than 16 times as around 293,000. For Chinese students who want to study abroad, besides gaining admission to an institution, they must apply for a student visa or study permit. When students choose Canada as their destination, they need to apply for the study permit from a Citizenship and Immigration Canada office in China before their departure.

Study Permit

According to the Canadian Embassy in Beijing (2010), Chinese students need to

apply for a study permit if their studies last for more than six months. In order to acquire the study permit, the applicants need to meet the requirements of the *Canadian Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and Regulations* as below:

- the applicant must satisfy an officer that she/he will leave Canada at the end of the period of authorized stay;
- the applicant must have been accepted by an educational institution and hold a valid letter of acceptance;
- the applicant must prove that she/he has enough money to support his/her stay in Canada;
- the applicant must produce any documents requested by the officer to establish his/her admissibility;
- the applicant must complete a medical examination.

In addition to filling in the application forms, the applicant needs to provide many supporting documents (See Appendix C). Because the preparation process is complicated, most Chinese applicants consult study abroad agencies to get all of the work done.

Certificat d'acceptation du Québec

If students want to study in Quebec, they also need to obtain a Certificat d'acceptation du Québec (CAQ). The requirements of obtaining a Certificat d'acceptation du Québec are similar to the requirements of the study permit. However, financial

capacity is not a mandatory document for applying for a CAQ (Immigration et Communautés culturelles Québec, 2011). Applicants can complete their application online. The average processing time for an application is four weeks. Once students get their certificate, they need to submit the certificate along with other documents to apply for a study permit.

Short-Term Student Temporary Resident Visitor Visa

If Chinese students' studies last for only six months or less, they need to apply for a Short-Term Student Temporary Resident Visitor Visa instead of a study permit. As table 5 shows, compared to the study permit, the application for a Temporary Resident Visitor Visa is easy, simple and fast.

If Chinese students enter Canada to study in a short-term program, i.e. six months or less, they have to leave Canada and apply for a study permit if they want to extend their studies in Canada (Canadian Embassy in Beijing, 2010).

Many Chinese students choose to apply for a Short-Term Student Temporary Resident Visitor Visa to study in a language program first. Later, when they meet the language requirements, they apply for a study permit to extend their studies in Canada.

Table 5

Comparison between Study Permit and Temporary Resident Visa

Requirement	Study Permit	Temporary Resident Visa
Application forms, Valid		
Passport, Photo, Application Fee	✓	✓
Parental Letter of Consent for children under 18	✓	✓
Admission Letter from Canada	✓	✓
Notarized copies of diploma and transcript the applicant has obtained	All universities, colleges and high schools	Only the highest diploma
Medical Examination	✓	
Study Plan	✓	
CAQ (if study in Quebec)	✓	
The original household registration	✓	
No Criminal Activity Certificate	✓	
Proof of Financial Capacity	More documents	Less documents
Income Tax Receipt for parents	✓	
Processing Times	10 business days	5 business days

Note: From Canada Visa Application Centre.

<http://www.vfs-canada.com.cn/applicationforms.aspx>

Summary

To sum up, the unique Chinese education system, Chinese study abroad agencies and Canadian visa policy influence Mainland Chinese students' decision to study in Canada.

The Chinese education system affects Mainland Chinese students' choices of studying abroad. In China, the only way to access higher education is to take and pass the National Higher Education Entrance Examination. If students fail the exam, they lose the opportunity for enrolling in a Chinese university or college. Many students choose to study abroad as an alternative to continue their higher education. In addition, because of the industrialization of Higher Education, the quality of higher education in China has not improved significantly over the past 12 years. Many university graduates face difficulties in finding good jobs. Thus, more and more Chinese students choose to study abroad in order to access good quality higher education.

If Chinese students decide to study in Canada, they need to acquire a study permit and (plus a CAQ if studying in Quebec), in addition to an admission from a Canadian institution. Obtaining a study permit is the final and decisive step in the application process. Since the application process is very complicated, most Chinese applicants consult study abroad agencies to help them complete their applications. Chinese study abroad agencies specialize in providing information and helping students complete their applications, and charge fees.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review begins with studies focusing on why international students choose to study abroad. Then, I review how previous research applied different theories to this topic. In this part, I review the Push-Pull Theory, the College Choice Model, the Human Capital Theory and the Theory of Planned Behaviour. Finally, I outline the literature that analyzes why Mainland Chinese students decide to study abroad and how they choose their destination.

Why Study Abroad?

What attract students to study abroad? What are the major factors influencing students' decision? In some scholars' view, although international students come from different countries and backgrounds, their answers to the above questions are similar. According to Barnick (2006), most Canadian students regarded the experience of studying abroad as a form of investment. They tried to become "global citizens" or internationally competent "knowledge-workers" by experiencing a new culture and learning a foreign language in the host country. American students believe that studying abroad would enhance their future careers (Carlson, Burn, Useem & Yachimowicz, 1990). In addition, European students identified their major motivations to study abroad as the following: learning a foreign language and gaining a deeper understanding of the host

country, developing self-knowledge, talents and potential, improving career prospects, and obtaining an academic experience in another country (Maiworm & Teichler, 1995).

Some scholars find that Asian students hold similar view to Western students. According to Hamrick (2007), Pakistani students believed that through studying abroad they could obtain a higher quality education. They also believed that a degree from a Western country would result in better career prospects. Rizvi (2000) points out that Malaysian students were motivated to pursue their studies abroad in order to increase their competitiveness in global labour markets. In addition, some scholars identify three factors that motivate Mainland Chinese students to study abroad: the possibility of future migration opportunities after graduation; high-quality of education; and competitive lower tuition fees and costs of living (Hung, et al, 2000).

From the previous studies, one can notice that there are two common factors that motivate international students to study in another country: getting high-quality education and enhancing future career prospects.

Push-Pull Theory

Scholars have applied different theories to examine international students' decision-making processes in respect to study abroad. Until now, the Push-Pull study has been the most popular model in that field of research.

In his book, *Comparative Higher Education: Knowledge, the University, and*

Development, Philip G. Altbach (1998) conducted a study to examine push and pull factors, which determine whether or not students from developing countries choose to study in another country. In the Push-Pull study, the push factors refer to factors that push students to seek higher education in countries other than their host or native countries. The pull factors refer to incentives that attract students abroad. The results of Altbach's study are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6

Main Factors Affecting Decision of Student in Developing Nations on Studying Abroad

“Push” Factors in Exporting Countries	“Pull” Factors in Receiving Countries
Receipt of scholarships for studies abroad	Scholarships for students from abroad
Low quality of education	High standard of education
Insufficiency of research facilities	Advanced educational facilities
Lack of corresponding teaching capabilities	Presence of corresponding educational capabilities
Failure to pass examinations for school admission	Financial assistance
Advantages of foreign degrees	Experience of life abroad
Discrimination against ethnic minorities	Suitable social, political, and economic environment
Poor political atmosphere	Suitable political atmosphere

Note. From “Comparative Higher Education: Knowledge, the University, and Development” by Philip G. Altbach, 1998, p. 240.

Scholars define push and pull factors in their studies. Ottinger (2009) indicates that push factors include: the scholarship opportunities to study abroad, the poor condition of educational facilities in the home country, the lack of research institutions, the failure to obtain admission to higher education, the prestige in business and industry of a foreign degree, the discrimination against minorities, and a politically uncongenial environment. On the other hand, Altbach, Kelly and Lulat (1985) point out that international life experiences, scholarship opportunities for international students, the quality of the education and research facilities at the institutions, and a congenial socio-economic and political environment to which the student could eventually migrate are the factors that pull students to other countries.

Some Chinese scholars also apply the Push-Pull Theory to their research. According to Li (2004), the backwardness of China's educational, economic, political, and social conditions are "push factors" that motivate people to go abroad. At the same time, the Western advanced educational, scientific, technological, and economic standards constitute "pull factors" that attract Chinese students. As stated in the studies of Hiu (2001), Hung et al. (2005), Li (2007) and Zhao & Guo (2002), ten common pull factors are identified as factors that influence Mainland Chinese students' choice: (1) Knowledge and awareness of the institution and general knowledge of the destination country, (2) Positive attitude toward supporting international education in the destination country, (3) Recommendations and the influence of relatives, parents and friends, (4)

Tuition fees, living expenses, travel cost and social cost, (5) Environmental considerations including climate, lifestyle, crime, safety and racial discrimination, (6) Geographical proximity to Mainland China, (7) Social or educational links to family or friends living in the destination country, (8) Immigration prospects after graduation, (9) Perceived higher standards of education and employment prospects, and (10) Availability of scholarships for study.

To sum up, the Push-Pull Theory provides rich insights to understand international migration, and it reveals social factors/motivations, economic, and geographical factors that influence international students' decision to study in another country.

College Choice Model

In addition to the Push-Pull Theory, the College Choice Model is widely used to explore how students choose their higher education institutions. Scholars have cited three major college choice models.

In 1982, Jackson (1982) introduced a College Choice Model in his article, *Public Efficiency and Private Choice in Higher Education*. He proposed that students choose higher education institutions in three stages: preference, exclusion and evaluation. During the first stage, a student's educational aspirations are influenced by his or her academic achievement, family background and social context. In the second stage, the student goes through a process of excluding some institutions from the prospective list and forms a

choice set. Tuition fees, location, academic quality and other factors could affect these exclusions. Then, the student evaluates the remaining choice and makes the final decision.

In 1984, Chapman (1984) suggested that student college choices are influenced by a set of student characteristics in combination with a series of external factors in his model. Students' characteristics include socio-economic status and aptitude. The external influences are composed of significant persons, characteristics of the college, and institutions' efforts to communicate with prospective students.

The best-known College Choice Model was introduced by Hanson and Litten (Litten, 1982; Hanson & Litten, 1989). The Hanson and Litten model is also a three-stage model, but it indicates five distinct processes within the three stages that a student passes through: having college aspirations; starting the search process; gathering information; sending applications; and enrolling. During this five-step process, multiple variables may affect students' choice. Some of these variables include: race and family culture, quality and social composition of high school, self-image and personality, economic conditions, availability of financial aid, recruitment activities of colleges, size and programs of colleges.

Although such College Choice models were initially presented for research on domestic college choice among American students, some scholars have applied the model to the general process of considering study abroad (Leerburger 1987; Sullivan 2004; Williamson 2004). These scholars separate the decision-making process into three stages:

the development of the predisposition or intention to study abroad, the search for an appropriate study abroad program, and the selection and departure for a particular location and program. It can be seen that the College Choice Model is helpful when examining all international students' decision-making process.

In short, the College Choice Model is useful for understanding students' decision-making processes at different stages and the variables that influence students' decision.

Human Capital Theory

The economics of education is the study of financial issues relating to education, including the demand for education, the financing and provision of education. According to Blaug (1970) and Checchi (2006), education is a type of investment for people to acquire skills and knowledge that will increase earnings, or provide long term benefits. The Human Capital Theory is the most famous theory of the economics of education. Some scholars have attempted to apply the Human Capital Theory to examine why students decide to enroll in higher education institutions, not only at home, but also in other countries.

Human Capital Theory was proposed by Schultz (1961) and developed by Becker (1964). According to the theory, education or training can enhance the productivity of workers through the acquisition of useful knowledge and skills. Well-educated workers may get a higher income (Becker, 1994). The cost of education or training is regarded as

the investment in human capital. Schultz (1961) points out that being taught in school provides students with information and skills that will be valuable later in life. The purpose of enrolling in an educational institution is to get future return.

For international students, studying abroad constitutes an important part of “life capital” (Barnick, 2006). In some previous research, most study abroad participants considered their overseas experiences as positive. The outcomes include enhancing intellectual growth, personal development, global mindedness, cultural understanding and job skills (Bates, 1997; Thot, 1998). Furthermore, Posey (2003) indicates that studying abroad could lead to positive educational and employment outcomes.

Compared to other theories focusing on the phenomena of studying abroad, the Human Capital Theory analyzes the educational issue through economical models. It emphasizes that accessing higher education is an investment for students’ future careers.

Theory of Planned Behavior

In addition to the Human Capital Theory, the Theory of Planned Behavior, a social psychological theory, is also used to explain why students choose to study abroad. The Theory of Planned Behavior focuses on how students form intentions and perform behaviors while thinking about studying abroad.

Theory of Planned Behavior was proposed by Ajzen (1985) as an extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action. It is a theory about the relationship between attitudes and

behavior. It indicates that beliefs and their corresponding attitudes influence intentions, which drive actual behavior. According to Ajzen (1991), there are three categories of beliefs and attitudes: behavioral beliefs and attitudes, normative beliefs and perceived subjective norms, and control beliefs and perceived behavioral control.

The behavioral beliefs and attitudes refer to an individual's perception that his or her behavior can influence a desired outcome (Ajzen, 1991). In the context of studying abroad, students perceive it as very important in accomplishing career goals (Goel, Jong & Schnusenberg, 2001). Maringe and Carter (2007) find that African students decide to study in England based on the belief that they could get a truly international higher education experience. Relyea, Cocchiara, and Studdard (2008) also indicate that a student's perceived career value increases the motivation to participate in a study abroad program. Goel, Jong and Schnusenberg (2003) conclude that behavioral beliefs regarding studying abroad could be positively related to the intention to participate in all kinds of study opportunities.

Normative beliefs and subjective norms refer to an individual's perception of a particular behavior, as influenced by the judgment of significant others (Ajzen, 1991). Parents, relatives, teachers, and friends may be significant others. Pimpa (2003) finds that family expectations have a strong influence on the decision of undergraduate students to study abroad.

Control beliefs and perceived behavioral control refer to the perceived difficulty in

performing the behavior (Ajzen, 1985, 1991). In the context of studying abroad, tuition fee, living expenses, scholarship opportunities and so on are all control factors (Goel, Jong & Schnusenberg, 2001). Srikatanyoo and Gnoth (2005) indicate that Thai students' study abroad decision is influenced by six attributes: academic and supporting facilities, academic staff performances, environmental conditions, entry requirements, the academic reputation of a country, and the academic reputation of domestic institutions.

To sum up, the Theory of Planned Behavior pays attention to psychological factors and can be used for identifying factors that influence students' motivations to study abroad.

Mainland Chinese Students' Perspectives on Education

Chinese parents are willing to invest in their children's education. According to Wang (2007), in China, education is regarded as being above everything else. The belief that education is the "treasure and beauty within" is deeply rooted into Chinese tradition and culture. A survey conducted in 2001 by China's National Bureau of Statistics showed that more than 60 percent of Chinese families invest one-third of their annual income in their children's education (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002). For Mainland Chinese families, investing in education is ranked as second important after food expenditures. Many Chinese parents are driven by the belief that a good education guarantees a better future (Ashley & Jiang, 2000).

Chinese parents also highly participate in children's decision-making processes. Actually, Chinese parents play a key role. A Chinese student may choose a study destination or career only to please his or her parents instead of following their real interests (Li, 2001). Bodycott (2009) indicates that most Mainland Chinese students' choices to study abroad are not made by the individual but by their families. He also points out that when parents and their children hold different opinions on studying abroad, parental decisions may be the final word.

Some previous research indicates that Push-Pull factors are different for Mainland Chinese students because of their unique cultural background. Ottinger (2009) states that most international students consider the quality of overseas courses as the most important "push-pull" factor, but this doesn't apply to Chinese students. Chinese students consider gaining a better understanding of "Western culture" as the most important factor. In Sanchez, Fornerino and Zhang's research (2006), they point out that the reasons Chinese students wish to study abroad are different from those of Americans and French students. American and French students express the motivation to "improve a professional situation" for studying abroad, whereas the Chinese students consider "search for liberty/pleasure" as the most important factor.

Thus, previous research reveals that Chinese students hold different perspectives from Western students on studying abroad. Furthermore, Chinese parents play a key role in their children's decision-making processes.

Destination Choice

According to the destination choice perspective, when choosing study destination, students go through three stages: deciding to go abroad, selecting a country and seeking an institution (Doorbar, 2001; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Pimpa, 2005). The three stages here are different from the three-stage model in the College Choice Model.

When a Mainland Chinese student decides to study abroad, she or he will collect related information, do the research and choose a destination. In the decision-making processes, some factors can influence Chinese students' choices. According to Hai (2007), the factors influencing Chinese students' decision to study in the United States can be categorized into personal academic achievement, financial aid, English improvement, individual development, personal preference and likeliness of remaining in the host country. Personal academic achievement was rated as the most important factor by Chinese students. Yang (2007) indicates that high-quality of education, future migration opportunity and low cost of living expenses and tuition fees are the top three reasons why Mainland Chinese students choose Australia as their destination. Zheng (2010) indicates that the environment of Canada, the lower costs and good quality of higher education, and the Visa policy are the top three reasons why Chinese students choose to study in Canada.

International students choose destination countries to meet their expectations. From previous studies, we know that compared to other international students, Mainland

Chinese students' choices are influenced by their unique cultural background. For many Mainland Chinese students, Canada is not the top study abroad destination. Few studies focus on why Mainland Chinese students choose or do not choose Canada as their destination. In my research, I will try to look into the factors that attract Mainland Chinese students to Canada.

Conclusion of Literature Review

Considering the literature discussed above, we can see that scholars apply different theories to examine the phenomena of students continuing their higher education in other countries other than their native countries. Among these theories, the Push-Pull Theory emphasizes the logical causality in students' decisions. It analyzes political, economical and social factors that contribute to international migration and variables that influence students' personal choices. The Human Capital Theory mainly examines the economic cost-benefit of education and points out that students consider studying abroad as a life investment. Both the College Choice Model and the Theory of Planned Behavior pay more attention to students' psychological makeup. Some scholars also state that students in different cultural contexts can make choices differently.

The review of the literature helped me gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors motivating international students to study abroad; moreover, it helped me develop a theoretical framework to examine Mainland Chinese students' choice to study in

Canada. The Push-Pull Theory, which explores economic, political, and social reasons for students' international migration, provides the most insights and acts as an umbrella theory for this study. While the Push-Pull Theory focuses on the macro level, the College Choice Model and the Theory of Planned Behavior can be used as complementary theories. These two theories bring in micro-level perspectives to view students' institution choices. The two theories point out that students' institution choices are influenced by outside environment, such as their parents, relatives, friends and significant others. It is important to analyze both macro-level and micro-level factors when examining Mainland Chinese students' decision-making processes.

Furthermore, we can see that there are some influential factors that were widely explored by previous studies. These factors are: quality of education, family involvement, visa and immigration policies as well as financial capacity. In my study, I examined these influential factors in Mainland Chinese students who came to Canada to continue their higher education.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains the methodology that I used for the study. First, I clarify why I decided to use a qualitative, narrative inquiry. Then, I describe how I recruited the participants. Finally, I outline the ethical issues and the limitations of my study.

Research Design

My study aims to explore the question: why do Mainland Chinese students choose Canada to get higher education? The purpose of this study is to understand factors that influence Mainland Chinese students' decisions to study abroad and choose Canada as their destination. In my study, I focus on students' personal experiences. I selected the narrative inquiry, a qualitative method because it provides me with a way to explore the research question by gaining a deeper understanding of people's experiences.

Narrative inquiry is defined as “an experience of the experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.189). Many researchers brought narrative inquiry into their work. Blumenfeld-Jones states that narrative inquiry is used in qualitative research to explore the personal experiences of those who participated in the research (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995). According to Schwandt (2007), narrative inquiry is the interdisciplinary study of the activities involved in generating and analyzing stories of life experiences and reporting that kind of research. Polkinghorne claims that using narrative inquiry can

“retain the complexity of the situation in which an action was undertaken and the emotional and motivation meaning connected with it” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 11).

Riessman defines narrative as “systematic study of personal experiences and meaning: how events have been constructed by active subjects” (Riessman, 1993, p. 70).

Chinese students who leave Mainland China to study in Canada have diverse experiences in the overall process: decision-making, application, landing and adjustment. Narrative inquiry allows me to understand experiences through stories in the present and past. In addition, narrative inquiry reveals hidden information that otherwise might be neglected (Bell, 2002). I believe that narrative inquiry suits my study because it helps me to understand “stories lived and told” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). It also gets me thick descriptions of the experience that these students go through in the process of selecting Canada to pursue higher education.

Participants

In the study, the participants were eight Mainland Chinese students who came to Canada to continue their higher education. The participants were selected by means of a purposive sample. A purposive sample is a form of non-probability sampling in which the researcher select participants based on certain characteristics related to the study (Johnson & Christensen, 2010). Chinese international students study at different Canadian institutions, such as high schools, colleges, and universities. In my study, I only

focused on the Mainland Chinese students who have had higher education experiences at Canadian colleges or universities because this population is the largest target group for Canadian colleges and universities.

In order to get informative participants in terms of social class, ethnicity and gender, I supplemented the purposive sampling with the snowball recruiting method to identify the participants. When I was writing my proposal at the end of 2010, I discussed my research interest with my friends and asked them to recommend potential participants. After my proposal got approved and the ethics certificate had been issued, I began to contact people who were recommended to me. I explained to them the purpose of my research and the method, an in-depth interview, which I would use for my study. Finally, ten students expressed interest in my study and agreed to arrange a time for their interviews. Later, two students withdrew because of personal reasons. Eight Mainland Chinese students participated in the study. Among these students, five have finished their studies at Canadian colleges or universities located in different provinces. Three participants are still studying. These Chinese students are from diverse parts of China and different family backgrounds; moreover, they have higher education experiences in several provinces of Canada. In this way, I ensured a variety of perceptions to examine in the study.

Method

I regarded the open-ended interview as the major data collection method in my study. Many scholars argue that interview is not just a simple conversation between the researcher and the participant focusing on the research topic and questions, but is a purposeful, flexible and cooperative discourse to share experiences and meanings (Mishler, 1986; Bogdan, 2003). Open-ended interviews help researchers understand the views, intentions and feelings of the participants. Personal, face-to-face interviews between participants and the researcher can reduce misunderstanding between both sides and enhance the validity of data collection.

I conducted eight in-person interviews in March and April 2011 in Montreal. All interviews were conducted at the participants' homes, my home or at a café, according to the participants' preference. Six interviews were audio-recorded; this was also determined by preference of the participants. Two interviews were not audio-recorded because those participants expressed that they felt very uncomfortable when knowing the conversation would be audio-recorded.

DeMarrais (2004) describes the interviews as three phases: "get ready phase", "actual focused interview" and "leave phase." At the beginning of each interview, I provided a consent form for the participant to understand the purpose of my study. I assured my participant that he or she had the right to terminate their participation anytime. First, I asked my participants to introduce themselves such as their background

information, age, family status and education experiences in Canada. This part involved a small chat about our lives in Canada. For example, I talked about the weather and shared my experiences living in different cities in Canada because I wanted to make my participant feel relaxed. After collecting demographic information from the participants, I asked an open-ended question: “How would you describe your education experience in China?” This helped the participants warm up and gave them flexibility in answering my question.

When I conducted my interviews, I reminded myself of the cultural differences to establish a relaxed environment for the participants. For example, when the participants appeared emotional during the interview, I avoided looking into their eyes directly because I knew this would cause them to feel nervous and unsure about their descriptions. When the interview took place at my home, I put pencils and papers on the table in case some participants wanted to hold something in their hands.

DeMarrais addresses the importance of “active listening and probing where appropriate for more elaboration” (DeMarrais 2004, p. 64). During the interviews, I nodded, smiled and listened carefully. I found that once the participants felt their narrative were respected and valued, they became more open to share their experiences and views. Fewer probes were needed. When I heard important parts related to the research questions, I asked the participants to clarify their views. I asked question like: “You mentioned this point several times, could you explain a little bit?” I also

paraphrased to make sure that I understood what the participants described and reflected on.

When applying a narrative inquiry, researchers need to be flexible (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Minichiello & Kottler, 2010). I made an interview questionnaire based on my research questions, and I only used it as a guide during the interviews. I listened and responded to my participants actively. For different participants, interviews varied. For example, most interviews lasted around an hour to two hours, and two lasted for more than two hours. Being flexible allowed me to step away from my own expectations and predictions. This also helped me get descriptive data.

In Clandinin and Connelly's view, narrative inquiry is "relational." When applying a narrative inquiry, researchers become a "dual one" because they are "experiencing the experience and also being part of the experience itself" (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Consequently, researchers face the tension of moving back and forth between full involvement and distance. In my research, I considered the interviewees as collaborators. I found that once the relationship was set up between the researcher and participants, the participants opened up themselves more. Sometimes, I shared my own experiences with my participants to reassure them and encourage them to recall and speak out their experiences. On the other hand, I stayed away from voicing my personal judgment on my participants' perspectives.

Like these Chinese international students, I came from the same social, cultural and

economic circumstances. This gave me a unique angle from which to listen to, retell and analyze the participants' experiences. Having the same cultural background gave me the advantage of "capturing the complexity, specificity, interconnectedness of the phenomenon and with which we deal" (Carter, 1993, p. 6). Following the interviews, I gained a comprehensive understanding of the factors that influenced these students to choose Canada as their destination. I felt that retelling these Chinese international students' stories gave me a way to honour them. On the other hand, my own experiences and views influenced my listening and reflecting. To avoid bringing in my own bias and assumptions into the study, I kept reminding myself to focus on the participants' discourses and not allow my experiences and perspectives to influence my selection of data.

Several participants pointed out that my research provided them with a chance to recall their experiences, which they had never considered seriously before. Reflecting on what had happened and had influenced their lives helped them understand themselves. All participants felt honored that their voices could be recorded in academic research and heard.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data for the study includes interviews, observation, filed notes, narratives and existing literature on the topic.

While conducting the interviews, I offered my participants two language choices: English and Mandarin. All participants chose Mandarin. All my participants finished their middle school in Mainland China, so they can speak and write the official language, Mandarin, fluently. I interviewed my participants in Mandarin, their mother language, to avoid misunderstanding. Then, I translated the records into English.

For each interview, I wrote detailed field notes including the description of the interview setting, the participant's mood, and the reflections of the participants. I also used a separate column to write down my own reflection at certain moments. When applying a narrative inquiry, "researchers need to be aware of where they and their participants are placed at any particular moment—temporally, spatially, and in terms of the personal and the social" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 95). The field notes enrich my data.

I wrote a daily journal on the process of my study and reflections aroused throughout the process. This provided outside data for the analysis process.

When I began my study, I created a folder labeled "Thesis" to contain my data. In this folder, I created several sub-folders to store different types of data. For example, one folder was labeled "Questions and Answers" which contained my question guide and transcriptions of my interviews. Another folder labeled "Journal" was used to store my daily reflection journals.

Kramp (2004) states that participants' "colorful" and "distinctive" words could

reflect “the unique particularities of what the experience is really like” (p. 117). When I retold the participants’ stories, I used my interviewees’ words because the original words reflect the ongoing reinterpretations of their past experience and avoid misunderstanding.

After the interviews, I continued to interact with the participants. I shared my interview transcripts with them and invited them to proofread the narratives written based on the interviews. My participants’ collaboration ensured that the retold stories were representative of their experiences. We also explored the meaning behind their retold stories together. Moreover, by doing this, I avoided placing my own bias on the participants’ stories and reflections.

I followed Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) three-dimensional space narrative model to analyze the participants’ experiences. The participants’ stories were organized and presented according to continuity (past, present, and future), social and personal interaction and the specific situation.

I used “narrative code” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) for my field texts. I used alphanumeric code to identify my participants. I used “China” and “Canada” to indicate whether my participants’ actions happened in China or Canada. In this way, I could identify participants’ experiences over time in different places. When participants described the decision-making process, I used “Parents” and “Students” to identify decisions made by parents or students. When participants mentioned the factors that influenced their study abroad decisions, I coded: C-cost, I- institution, F-family’s choice,

Q-quality of education, W-Western culture.

Clandinin (2007) considers the representation of participants' experience as narrative analysis. Kramp (2004) argues that analysis of narratives can lead researchers to find common connections among stories and come out with themes. Minichiello & Kottler (2010) point out that analyzing qualitative data is challenging because researchers need to immerse themselves in the data until "meaningful themes emerge" (p. 20).

In my case, I coded my data first. While analyzing the data, I referred to my interview transcripts, field notes and interview journals many times. I found connections among the different narratives. Several topics were developed. Meanwhile, I related my findings to the literature review. Finally, I organized the main ideas into themes.

Ethical Issue

In this study, there is no particularly sensitive issue, so it did not place participants at physical, psychological and reputational risks. I provided a consent form that explained the purpose, roles, responsibilities, and ethical concerns in my study to each participant. Participants signed the consent form before they began the interview. The participants were informed that they could stop the interview whenever they wanted to. The participants could reach me by e-mail or phone at any time. I assured them that all the data was confidential, and would not be used for other purposes.

To ensure confidentiality, I labeled my participants by alphanumeric code in my field

texts. When I was writing the narratives, I used a fictitious name to replace the alphanumeric code.

Limitations

There were several limitations to my study. First of all, I only chose eight Mainland Chinese students as the sample. Eight Mainland Chinese students recalled their experiences of choosing Canada as study destination. Their narratives provided rich data to look inside the phenomena of studying abroad trend in China. However, the sample size is small, so the findings cannot be generalized to represent all Mainland Chinese students who came to study in Canada. As Clandinin and Connelly state, “The narrative inquiry does not prescribe general applications and uses but rather creates texts that, when well done, offer readers a place to imagine their own uses and applications” (2000, p. 42). Thus, the findings of this study cannot be generalized beyond the scope of the research. This is both an advantage and a disadvantage of the study.

I chose the participants purposefully. I found the participants mainly through friends’ recommendations. Some participants had education experiences at the same institution. This can lead to a similarity in the narratives. It is possible that some perspectives of the participants appear more common than they are in this study because of the participants’ similarities. I tried to avoid bringing my bias and assumptions into the sample selection; for example, I considered gender, major, institution and other factors when selecting my

participants. Still, my background and own experiences influenced my selection criteria; consequently, the data may reflect my personal perceptions.

In narrative inquiry, both researcher and participants contribute to the topic and content. In my study, narratives came from my participants' experiences. The participants had the power to choose what to share and how to describe it. Consequently, distortion in the data could exist in some descriptions. The representations cannot reflect the real complexity of the participants' experiences. Meanwhile, in this study I experienced several positions: a researcher, an observer, and a Chinese student who had experiences in applying to study abroad and obtaining Western education in Canada. I faced an insider/outsider dilemma in this study. This may have biased my study to some extent.

Narrative researchers also need to detect the difference between the experience of time and the telling of time (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). In my case, I often asked such questions as "what did you think at that time" or "what do you feel now" in order to understand participants' feeling at different times.

Conclusion

This study was designed to explore the question: why do Mainland Chinese students choose Canada to get higher education? Based on the nature of this study, I chose narrative inquiry because it enables me to understand people's lives and their insights. I used purposive sample to recruit participants. I interviewed eight Mainland Chinese

students in order to explore factors that influence these students' decision to study abroad and choose Canada as their destination. In the open-ended interviews, I focused on the participants' narratives and avoided to bring my own bias into interviews and the data selection procedure.

In this study, data came from open-ended interviews, my observation and journal notes, and existing literature on the topic. I coded my data and followed the three-dimensional space model to analyze the data. The participants' narratives provided rich data for me to understand their motivations, expectations and perceptions of choosing Canada as their destination. Several topics emerged from the participants' narratives, and I arranged them into themes.

This study was limited because it relies on the descriptions of a small group of participants and researcher's retell. Consequently, it cannot reflect the real complexity of the phenomena, and the findings may not be representative of the larger population of Mainland Chinese international students in Canada, and cannot be generalized out of this study.

CHAPTER 5: NARRATIVES

This chapter is a presentation of the personal narratives which I got through in-depth interviews. Eight participants' experiences are presented.

Wang

Wang (Not the real name) is from Zhengzhou, a medium-sized city in the middle of China. In 2004, she arrived in Thunder Bay, Ontario to begin her study in Canada. Wang finished her college studies and master's program in Thunder Bay. Two years ago, she moved to Montreal because her husband began his studies at McGill University. Now, Wang is a permanent resident and is running a small business.

In the middle of March, I met Wang on a sunny day in a café near McGill downtown campus. Wang appeared very emotional to recall the past:

It is like a dream. I even cannot imagine that I have been living in Canada for more than six years. At the beginning, I was like a little girl who was just being thrown on a small island. I knew nothing about Canada. I couldn't explain my ideas clearly in English. It was unbelievable that I lived in Thunder Bay for several years. When I came to Canada, I was only 22. Now I am 29. These years were the most difficult but also the most rewarding years for me.

Wang had higher education experiences in China. She took the National Higher Education Entrance Examination in 2000, but did not get a good score as she had expected. As a result, Wang could not go to a top-ranked university located in Beijing or Shanghai. As an excellent student in her high school, Wang felt very disappointed.

Finally, she accepted the offer from Zhengzhou Institute of Aeronautical Industry Management, located in her hometown. Wang chose a major in Accounting based on her mother's suggestion. "My mom told me that I should choose a major which ensures a stable career." Wang was not completely satisfied with her studies, and she explained, "It was passive learning. Most professors just repeated the textbooks. Even if I did not go to classes, I could still get good grades because I could find everything in my textbooks."

In the third year of her university studies, Wang started thinking about studying abroad. At the time, Wang's roommates began to look for jobs, and her professors also reminded Wang and her classmates to be prepared for future competition in the job market. Meanwhile, Wang learned that her high school friends studying at some top-ranked universities in big cities were preparing for the TOEFL or IELTS test in order to study abroad. Wang said, "When I heard my friends' plans, I became a little bit jealous. An inner voice kept asking: You were just as good as them, why couldn't you study abroad?" Entering the fourth year of her studies, Wang's idea of studying abroad became stronger.

When answering the question about her motivations to study abroad, Wang said that she thought about competition in China and advantages in career preparation. "Every year, millions of university graduates compete in the job market. Since the university where I did my undergraduate study is not famous, I did not have a competitive advantage. "

Wang thought that she could gain competitive advantage through studying abroad. “My goal was to obtain a master’s degree from a Western university.”

By coincidence, Wang’s mother had also intended to send Wang to study abroad because her friends’ children were studying in different countries. Wang recalled her mother’s words, “I would like to provide the same opportunity for you, but I am worried that you won’t be able to take care of yourself. If you really want to go, your father and I will do our best to support you.” Wang described it as a “memorable moment” because this decision changed her life. At the time, Wang’s mother’s friends’ children were studying in many countries, such as the United Kingdom, Australia, and France, so Wang got to know these students’ overseas lives. Wang felt that all these students enjoyed their studies in their host countries. “These students speak fluent English, and could get an international qualification after their studies. Furthermore, I felt that they became much more independent than they used to be,” Wang added, “My family believes that studying abroad would be a good opportunity for me to grow up.”

Wang’s first choice was the United Kingdom because she had friends studying there and was knowledgeable about the British educational system. Wang also thought that studying in the United Kingdom was wise decision financially because she could finish a master’s program within a year and a half. Wang consulted with an agency that specialized in helping students get visa from the British Embassy and began to prepare

for applying for British universities. In the spring of 2004, Wang took English classes, wrote the IELTS test and got a 5.5.

I asked Wang why she chose an agency in stead of applying to study in the United Kingdom by herself. Wang explained that she did not have the confidence to prepare all of required documents in English; moreover, she thought it was time-consuming. Wang chose an agency recommended by her mother's friends. "For me, it was a reasonable choice to choose someone specialized in international education. Moreover, my parents believed their friends' recommendation."

With the agency's help, Wang easily obtained admissions from several universities. Unfortunately, Wang's visa application was refused three times by the British Embassy. The agency told Wang that they considered her as an excellent candidate because she had good academic records, enough financial proof and satisfied language fluency proof, and they couldn't explain why she couldn't get the visa. Finally, the agency refunded her service fee, around 1,000 CAD, because they did not want to spoil their reputation.

Wang said that she was very sad when heard the bad news. "It was like you were packing bags for tomorrow's trip, and suddenly you were told that there were no tickets for sale. It was like having cold water poured on you." Wang was determined to study abroad, so she did not want to give up any chance. Wang contacted another agency. "I only focused on getting admitted to a Western university as soon as possible." This time, this agency specialized in applications to Canadian universities. Wang said that Canada

was not on her list, the only reason that she chose Canada was the agency which she worked with. “I did not think too much about the destination and program, and I just wanted to study abroad as soon as possible.”

According to Wang, the agency influenced her destination choice. She was told by the agency that it would be easier to get the visa if she applied to the universities that were not located in big cities. In view of Wang’s unsuccessful experience of visa application, the agency suggested her to apply for a language program offered at Confederation College located in Thunder Bay, Ontario. Wang knew nothing about the school, and she clarified to the agency that she wanted to study in a master’s Program. The agency explained that first Wang needed to get an admission and the visa, and then she could transfer to any program she wanted. Wang accepted the agency’s advice. This time, after handing on all required documents, Wang got a conditional acceptance from Confederation College and got the Canadian visa in the end of 2004. According to the conditions of the admission, Wang had to take a six-month language program before enrolling in the formal program. The agency told Wang that she could apply for a master’s program during the six-month study.

Wang’s family paid 2,000 CAD to the agency which helped her get the admission and Canadian visa. The service fee was double of the other agency that tried to help Wang get the visa from the British Embassy. Wang explained that in 2004, the United Kingdom was a hot spot for Chinese students; in contrast, not many people applied for

Canadian universities or colleges, so the agency specialized in applying for Canadian schools charge more. “My family thought the agency’s service fee was reasonable because the agency did most of the work.”

Wang thought the application procedure was complicated and time-consuming. It took her a year to get all the work done. For most documents, Wang needed to prepare two versions, in Chinese and English. All the translation needed to be done at the designated place. Furthermore, all these translated documents needed to be notarized. Wang explained that many people chose study abroad agencies because agencies provided services including filling out all the application forms, translating all documents, and getting the translated documents notarized.

Wang clarified that her expectations for studying in Canada were to get a master’s degree, to become fluent in English and to learn about Western culture and life style.

On Christmas Eve of 2004, Wang arrived at the Thunder Bay airport. A teacher from Confederation College picked her up and helped her settle down in a hotel. She described it as the most difficult period in her life. Because it was holiday season, the hotel did not provide three meals per day. Wang recalled, “I was totally lost. I could hardly see any Asian face on the street. I felt I was a stranger.” After staying in the hotel for several days, Wang was taken in by a Chinese couple who was operating a Chinese restaurant, and stayed in their home until the new semester. “Up until today, sometimes I ask myself where my courage came from. Before that night, I didn’t know much about Canada. I

even didn't know much about the institution I was going to study in. Now, I attribute it to my passion to study English. ”

During the interview, Wang emphasized the importance of gathering information before departure. Wang said that when she was in China, she did not know there were so many ways to access all kinds of information, such as contacting administration offices of different universities either by phone or email. Consequently, she did not have clear ideas of Canadian universities and their programs. “I just accepted what the agency got for her. This was too passive. If I had tried to find out more before my departure, I could have made better choices to avoid wasting time and money.”

In Wang's view, it is very important to take the language test. First, if Chinese students have a sufficient language proof, they cannot get accepted by any university or college unless they are willing to take the language class before starting a program. As for the length of the language class, it totally depends on what level a student's language capability is. Wang introduced, “It could be as short as a couple months; or it can last for several years. The language courses cost a lot.”

Like most international students, Wang experienced culture shock and homesickness. She stayed with different homestay families. It took her a couple of months to adjust to the new environment. Meanwhile, Wang was very disappointed with her studies. She took her English classes, and found it was not what she expected. During the period of taking language courses, Wang prepared for applying for a master's program. By the time

Wang got clear information on how to apply, she had missed the deadlines. In order to extend her visa, Wang finally registered in the International Business and Trade program at Confederation College and became a college student. Wang recalled:

I learned a lot in the first year. At the beginning, it was so difficult. I could not express myself clearly. Gradually, I solved all problems. I became physically and emotionally strong. Meanwhile, I was lucky to live with a good homestay family, and learned about Canadian culture. My English improved gradually; consequently, I got good marks and became confident.

Wang highly valued her studies at Confederation College because it laid a good foundation for her master's study. In 2007, Wang began her master's study in Economics at Lakehead University. Later, she met her boyfriend who was also a Chinese international student in an undergraduate program.

Wang compared Western education and Chinese education. She thought that university studies are similar in Canada and China because they both focus more on the theoretical aspects. From her college study experience, Wang found that Canadian professors always encourage students to find their own ways. "In some classes, there is no fixed right answer. "

When Wang was studying in Thunder Bay, her tuition fees for university or college were around 10,000 CAN each year, and her living expenses were around 600 CAD every month. Wang thought that compared to other Chinese international students studying in big cities like Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal, her expenses were lower. At the beginning, Wang got all the money from her parents. When Wang began her master's

program, she received 7000 to 8000 CAD scholarship each year from her university.

Wang also worked part-time to support herself.

I asked Wang how she evaluated the costs of her education. Wang answered that at the beginning, the costs was really high because she stayed in homestay family and could not make money. Later, when she had the scholarship and income from her part time, she solved most of her tuition fees and living expenses by herself. Wang thought her studying was a successful investment both for her family and herself. “We cannot only think about the money. Since I came to Canada, I started to solve all the problems on my own. Now, I became more independent than I used to be.” Wang added, “I learned about this country and its people. Now, I am a Canadian permanent resident. Each year, I get tax credit for my paid tuition fees. All of these reward my hard work.”

Wang’s studies in Canada also changed her attitude towards her life. For example, she focuses more on the procedure rather than the result. Wang has a positive attitude towards her life:

Although I couldn’t find a job in my field, I started my own small business. All I own right now has exceeded what I had expected. I really appreciate my parents for their support. When I returned to China, they felt my growth. I never regret my decision to study in Canada because I got to know a new world that is totally different from China. If I had opportunity to start over, I would have made the same choice for sure.

Wang had some suggestions for Mainland Chinese students who are considering studying abroad. First, it is important to pass the language test before coming to Canada. Second, students can choose a small city as their first destination because they could improve their English faster by communicating with local people. Moreover, student

would have more chances to learn about real Canadian life. Wang also gave criteria to choose an institution. “Now, when I chose an institution, I would consider things like academic performance, scholarships, tuition fees and living environment.”

In Wang’s opinion, China is a huge market for Canadian Universities. If Canadian universities want to get a big portion of Chinese students, they need to go to China and let people know more about their programs. If Chinese students know more about Canada’s immigration policy, Canada may become more attractive.

Hong

Hong (Not the real name) is 27 years old. In 2003, he came to Montreal as an international student. In 2008, he got his Accounting Diploma at LaSalle College. Now, Hong operates his Chinese grocery store in downtown Montreal where he used to live and study. Because of his international student background, many Chinese international students go to Hong’s store to look for all kinds of information. Hong always tries to help these students. “I went through what they are experiencing now. It is my honor to offer help.”

I interviewed Hong at his store. Through the interview, I learned that Hong came from Qingdao, a picturesque coastal city that lies on the southern tip of China’s Shandong Peninsula. Hong said with smile, “You know, Qingdao beer has entered into Canada market for several years, so I always introduce myself to local people as coming from

Qingdao Beer's hometown.”

When I asked Hong to recall the moment when he thought about studying abroad, he became emotional. “It was a long time ago. It was around ten years ago, but it feels like it happened yesterday.” Ten years ago, Hong was studying in a private high school. Both Hong's parents were doing business, and they did not have time to keep an eye on him, so they sent him to a boarding school. Compared to public high schools, Hong's private school implemented a Western style education. Hong used English textbooks and had native English speaking teachers from the United Kingdom, Australia and Canada. Hong said:

In the morning, we had academic classes, and in the afternoon we participated in different interest groups. I was very relaxed in my high school. The tuition and accommodation fees for my school were around 15,000 CAD per year, which were higher than ordinary schools. In fact, most students came from business families. Many parents sent their children to this school to avoid severe competition in public schools and to learn English and Western culture.”

When Hong entered into his second year, he began to think about his future. Under the Chinese educational system, if Hong wanted to get a higher education, he only had two choices: either taking the National Higher Education Entrance Examination or studying abroad. Hong saw so many classmates leaving to study in other countries. Hong did not want to take the National Higher Education Entrance Examination:

I was not an academically outstanding student. I didn't want to take the National Higher Education Entrance Examination. I knew myself. Even if I worked very hard, I still would not be able to enter a good university. I didn't want to compete with others because of my weakness. On the other hand, I didn't think that entering famous universities was the only way to become successful. Instead of wasting money and time, I preferred studying abroad, and broadening my horizons in a Western culture.

Hong described his decision-making process as “simple and smooth.” He shared his idea with his parents:

My parents always wanted me to become an independent person, so they let me make my own choice. Like all Chinese families, my parents value education more than other things. They believe that the best way to learn and grow is to experience, so they were happy to hear my plan. They promised me adequate financial support and gave me total freedom to choose where to go and what to study.

Hong’s parents suggested him to consult with a famous study abroad agency. Hong did some research before meeting the agency. He searched information on the Internet and went to various agencies’ websites. He also looked for advice from friends who had already studied abroad. “It was my choice, so it was up to me to take the initiative.”

Hong used the following criteria: English-speaking country, less Chinese international students, easy to apply to school and for visa, lower tuition fees and less cost to choose his destination. Hong excluded New Zealand and Australia because he thought there were too many Chinese international students there. According to the agency, studying in Europe would cost around 40,000 CAD annually. Hong thought the cost was too high. Combining the agency’s advice, Hong focused to Canada and the United States:

“I got the message from the agency that it was hard to apply for the American visa. I thought that the United States was a good choice for academically outstanding students, but not for students like me. Canada is adjacent to the United States. Once I finish my studies in Canada, I could go to the United States easily. The most attractive part was the low cost. The agency said that an average yearly living expense in Canada was around 10,000 CAD. This amount was less than my high school fees. I chose Canada because of the high-quality of education, the lower cost and the Western lifestyle.

Hong chose to study in Montreal because he thought Montreal was an economical

place to live:

According to the agency, if I went to Vancouver, my parents needed to provide around 75,000 CAD funds. If I went to Montreal, the funds requirement was only around 50,000 CAD. Compared to Vancouver and Toronto, both tuition and living expenses in Montreal were lower. For me, studying abroad was an investment, and I cared about the input and output.

Hong's agency recommended two English universities, Concordia University and McGill University to him, and he chose Concordia University. Hong said that he did not want to make his life too stressed: "I remembered that at all other Chinese students chose language courses at McGill University in order to enter this famous university. For me, I wanted an easy transition in a different country." Hong added, "My purposes were to broaden my world view and improve my English. If I ran into too many difficulties at the beginning, I would become very frustrated. I didn't compare myself to others, and I chose what suited me."

When talking about the visa application process, Hong said, "I didn't have experience in applying for visas for other countries, so I couldn't say it was easy or difficult. I prepared all documents according to the list provided by my agency." Hong even did not take any English classes or tests before his departure. Hong explained there were two reasons. First, the agency said there was no need to learn because Hong would live in an English-speaking country, and his English would improve fast and naturally. Second, Hong thought he was applying for language courses, so he would have plenty time to practice English later.

Hong paid around 1,500 CAD to the agency. Hong explained, "At the time, there

were not many students applying for the Canadian visa, and the agency's service fee was higher than applying for Australia.”

Hong had clear expectations for his studies in Canada. He wanted to finish a program, improve his English and learn more about Western business culture. Before Wang came to Canada, he was thinking about returning to China after his studies.

From consulting the agency until getting his visa, it took Hong a year to get the work done. In 2003, Hong landed in Montreal with other students. Hong's agency arranged a dormitory, which asked for 1,000 CAD per month for him and other students. “The agency bought a house in Montreal and used it as a dormitory. I didn't think that it was worth 1,000 CAD, so I moved out in two months. However, this dormitory ensured me a smooth beginning.” Later, Hong rented an apartment near Concordia's downtown campus.

When recalling his studies at Concordia University, Hong said it was not difficult and intensive as he had expected. Hong was familiar with the teaching style because he experienced a similar style in his high school. As for living in downtown, Hong met many Chinese international students and had a vibrant life. His spare time was occupied with visiting attractions in Montreal and enjoying all kinds of cultural activities. Hong described himself as “a tourist at the time.”

The first year passed quickly. When it came to the time to extend his study permit, Hong became anxious. He felt that his English had not improved significantly. He asked himself, “Is this what I am here for?” He looked at his account balance, and found that he

spent around 30,000 CAD in the first year. This was far beyond his budget. “My parents didn’t say anything, but I felt uneasy. I didn’t want to continue like that. I needed to achieve my goals.” Hong observed that many Chinese international students spent four to five years finishing an undergraduate program at Concordia University. The tuition fee for international student was expensive, around 2,000 CAD for a three-credit class. Hong calculated and found that he at least needed to spend 120,000 CAD to finish an undergraduate program in four years. This number made Hong feel frustrated.

On the other hand, Hong saw some young Chinese international students quit their studies after staying in Montreal for several years. “They wasted their parents’ money and their own time. For me, that was failure.” Hong was under pressure because he wanted to figure out a way to get a degree in an affordable way.

Hong’s friends recommend him to study at LaSalle College because he could finish a degree in three years. Hong considered it as a better choice. He went to the Chinese advisor at LaSalle College and got more information. He said:

The messages were very attractive. After getting the admission, international students could get a three-year studying visa. Most programs last for three years. In the last semester, students could apply for Quebec immigrant status. An immigrant can enroll in academic programs at a very low cost. The advisor described a bright future for me. Finally, I chose to study Accounting at LaSalle College.

In Hong’s description, he was much more focused when studying at LaSalle College. “I still had so many Chinese students, but I separated my study and leisure time because I had a clear goal. I finished my program in accounting in three years.” After finishing his accounting program, Hong applied for immigrant status and got accepted in eight months.

Then, he married his Chinese classmate and had a daughter. Hong appeared calm when describing his years in Canada. Hong said, “I didn’t have unrealistic expectations; consequently, I didn’t feel disappointed.” Hong used a Chinese saying, 知足常乐 (Be happy with what you have) to describe his feeling.

Hong told me that last year he went back to Qingdao; he found studying abroad was still a trend in his hometown. The agency, which processed his case, did not exist anymore; there were so many new agencies. Even Hong’s high school classmates were doing business in this area. “Many families want to send their children to study abroad. Because of the high speed of economic development in China, people don’t care about the cost. They want the best service and schools for their children.”

In Hong’s view, Chinese students should make a rational choice when thinking about studying abroad:

If you can survive in the National Higher Education Entrance Examination and enter a top-ranked university in China, grasp the opportunity and study hard. There is no need to study abroad because opportunities in China are numerous. Nowadays, more and more foreigners go to China to look for opportunities. If you cannot get accepted by a good school and want to broaden horizons, studying in Canada would be a good choice. In my view, the premise is that your family can afford the cost. I don’t advocate borrowing money to send children to study abroad. It should be a pleasant experience instead of a burden for the whole family.

Hong thought that it was very important to collect information in order to make better choices. “Being prepared will save time and money. For example, if I had known about the program at LaSalle College, I would have applied to it before I left China.”

Hong’s story shows that studying abroad has become an alternative for Chinese high

school graduates. Chinese students consider “life experience” as a vital criterion when selecting their study destination.

Yang

Yang (Not the real name) arrived in Canada in 2006. She is 27 years old and the only child in her family. In 2010, Yang finished her undergraduate program at McGill University. Now, Yang is working part time in a survey company in Montreal.

Our conversation began with a general topic: Chinese international students’ lives in Montreal. Yang told me that there were so many Chinese students living in Downtown Montreal, especially from Metro Atwater to McGill campus. When Yang walks on the street, she feels like she is still living in her home town, Shenyang, which is located in Northeastern China and has a similar climate to Montreal. “I don’t feel scared about the winter here. I met many Shenyangers here too.” I asked Yang that if the climate was the reason that she chose to study in Montreal. Yang smiled and replied, “I never thought about this. Maybe I never realized it. Sure, compared to my friends coming from the south of China, I adjusted more easily to the climate and foods here.”

Yang had higher education and work experience in China. She got her bachelor’s degree in Software Engineering from Northeastern University, China in 2004. Yang used “boring” to describe her campus life. “In China, not many girls enroll in engineering programs. I chose this major only because my father wanted me to learn it because he had

some connections in this field, so he could help me find a good job. It was not my interest.” Although Yang did not like her major, she still got good marks in her studies. She repeatedly emphasized that she was trained well in test-taking strategies. “Most Chinese grow up with thousands of tests; they learn the strategies to get right answers even they don’t understand the content.”

Yang worked as an IT analyst in Dalian after her graduation. She said that her life was peaceful and stable, but she still felt something was missing:

Now, when I look back, I will say that it was my passion to learn English in a Western country that motivated me to come to Canada. In fact, my desire to study abroad can be traced back to my university period. English was my strongest subject. When I felt bored with my computer subjects, I would watch English movies or surf on English websites. I read many articles about Western culture and I longed to live in an English-speaking country one day. This passion drove me to leave my comfortable life and begin an unknown adventure. I wanted to study in another culture; however, I had not determined which country to choose at that time.

When we talked about factors that influence Chinese students’ choices to study abroad, Yang disagreed with the point that students left because of the low quality of education in China. In Yang’s view, no matter the quality of the education system, personal effort and characteristics are the most important factors to ensure future success.

Yang chose to study abroad in order to gain a comparative advantage in career competition. Yang said:

In the workplace, I was under pressure all the time because of the competition. Also, I didn’t like my job. The most important factor for me in study abroad was to change my profession to a finance/accounting related area, my interest. Study abroad would bring me competitive advantage in my career.

Yang had a logical analysis when considering the study destination. “The process

was simple. I listed the pros and cons of studying in different countries, and discussed them with my parents. We made the decision together.” Yang thought that the tuition fees in Northern Europe were cheap; however, she did not have relatives there. Her parents were worried about her living alone. Yang had an aunt who finished her studies and stayed in Japan. Yang’s aunt promised to take care of Yang; however, Yang did not want to go to a place having a similar culture. Additionally, she was afraid that after staying in Japan for several years, her English would become weaker:

I really wanted to go to an English- speaking country because English is the most widely used business language. My parents preferred sending me to North America because they recognized the high-quality of higher education in North America. However, I thought the competition in the United States was too severe. Studying in Canada was attractive because Canadian universities have a good reputation and lower tuition fees. The health care service in Canada was more affordable for international students.

Yang’s uncle who was completing a PhD program at McGill University heavily influenced Yang’s choice. He always described his fantastic life in Montreal to Yang through online chatting and encouraged Yang to study in Canada. Yang’s uncle also introduced the Canadian immigration policy to Yang. According to Yang’s uncle, after studying in Canada, international students could apply for immigration status easily. Yang’s parents also wanted her to live in a better environment with less competition and pollution, so they supported Yang’s uncle’s suggestion. Yang said:

My uncle said if I could study and stay in a country like Canada, my children would benefit from it. My uncle’s advice was reasonable. My family thought that my uncle might take care of me. For me, it was a family decision to choose Canada as a study destination.

Yang was proud of her own choice to apply for the accounting program at McGill

University. She recalled:

I asked my uncle and friends who had already studied in Canada about different universities. I focused on the academic reputation, tuition fees, health care system and living expenses. I also checked these universities' websites. Finally, I chose studying in Quebec because it has more favorable policies for international students, such as lower tuition fees, good health care and unique immigration policy. I chose McGill because it has a very good reputation in both academics and in the job market in North America. Compared to Toronto University's Business School, McGill's tuition fees are relatively low. I didn't think about scholarships because I knew it was competitive. My university in China was not famous. I wanted to study in a world-famous university, enjoying the diversity and learning from highly competent professors.

Yang met her goals step by step. She prepared the TOEFL test and got a 630. She consulted an agency in Dalian and decided to use the agency to do the application for both the school and the visa. Yang paid about 3,000 CAD to the agency for applying for school and visa. Yang said, "I knew I could save money if I tried to do it by myself, but I was working at the same time; the agency was more efficient because it has professionals."

Yang applied for an Accounting major at McGill after considering the features of the study area, career path, job opportunities and income after graduation. Yang explained, "Accounting was my interest. In this field, I knew I would be more valuable as I had more experience. I could obtain an international recognized qualification after my studies."

It took Yang a year to prepare all required documents, and to gain admission and a visa. Yang described the waiting time as the most difficult part. "You were expecting things to change, but you didn't know if you could get good news or not. Sometimes, I

was wondering if it was worth giving up all I owned and beginning a new journey.”

Yang and her parents had clear expectations for Yang’s studies in Canada, which could be generalized as follows: getting a better education, enjoying the local culture, launching a good job and applying to immigrate after graduation.

In 2006, Yang got her visa and began her studies at McGill University. Although Yang could get suggestions from her uncle on adjusting to a new environment, Yang still experienced some difficulties at the beginning. In Yang’s opinion, it takes time to deal with culture shock:

I read so many articles on Canada and its Western culture before I came, I still didn’t know how to interact with people. I made some friends on campus, but mainly from Asia because we had similar cultural backgrounds. The campus life was so vibrant, but I didn’t have enough time to enjoy it because I needed to spend too much time finishing my assignments. I got good marks in my classes; however, it was hard to me to find an internship because I didn’t speak French and lacked local work experience.

Yang pointed out that Chinese international students need to adjust to the North American classroom. At the beginning of her studies, Yang was very silent because she did not have the confidence to speak out. She worried about her oral English all the time, and was afraid to be laughed at by others. She said:

In China, we seldom ask questions during class in order to avoid the embarrassment in public. It is rooted in my culture. However, people here tend to speak out their opinions in class freely, and professors like it that way. I learned to speak out and become more open gradually.

Yang gave some aspects of differences between teaching and learning styles in the two educational systems. She said that when she was in China, she got the wrong impression that Western universities don’t require a lot of assignments. During her

studies at McGill, Yang learned that there were much more assignments, far exceeding what Chinese universities require. Yang said, “Here, the studies are demanding. Students really need to do each assignment, group work, midterm and final exams to accumulate a good grade.” Moreover, Yang found that at Canadian universities, students could get many chances to get hands-on experiences, such as doing internship. Yang said:

In China, students learn mainly from textbooks, and seldom do field work. Things may be different in large urban cities, such as Beijing and Shanghai because many international companies are located there. Some big companies could provide internships for undergraduate. When I was studying in China, I never thought about working at the same time. Here in Canada, people tend to work and study at the same time, and it is very attractive to employers. A lot of people go to work after their studies. Then, people return to universities with their experience, so they know what they really like and really want.

Yang highly praised Western education’s focus on networking and social skills. She took some courses to learn social communication skills, and found these courses were useful and interesting.

Yang got financial support from her parents. Each year, Yang’s tuition was about 15,000 CAD, and her living expenses were about 1,000 CAD per month for both accommodation and meal. It took Yang three years to finish her program. Yang said that her parents paid most of her expenses. Because she lived near McGill’s downtown campus, her living expenses were higher than her friends who did not live in downtown. The second year, Yang found a part time job on the campus, but this could not cover her expenses. When I asked Yang’s opinion on her cost in Canada, she responded:

I think the costs are reasonable. Compared with universities in the United States, McGill’s tuition fees are relatively low, but with a good quality education. The living expenses in Montreal are affordable compared to my friends living in Vancouver and

Toronto. I don't feel embarrassed to using my parents' money. My parents have stable income in China, so they can support my studies here. Later, when I find a suitable job, I can provide better living conditions for my parents. I already applied for immigrant status. My long term goal is to sponsor my parents to come to Canada.

Throughout the interview, Yang repeatedly emphasized the positive impacts of studying abroad on her personal life. She said:

I become independent. I realize that life is not easy: no pains no gain. Before coming to Canada, I was childish. Now, I am a strong woman. At the beginning, I only told my parents good news, as I didn't want them to worry about me. Now, I tell them the truth and my way to solve problems. I have less fear of the unknown. My parents learned to use message tools to communicate with me, like MSN, e-mail and QQ. With my friends, I tell them my true feelings and the hardness of my life here. I also shared a lot of my happiness.

According to Yang, it has been a long journey to adjust to the Canadian society. Yang expressed her love for her life in Montreal. "It definitely met my expectations. I got an opportunity to enjoy my desired education in a beautiful and romantic city." Yang liked the academic vibe and dynamics at McGill, and believed that she could find a job soon because Canada is a relatively fair society. She said, "As long as I try my best, as long as I persist, there is always an opportunity for me."

When answering the question, "What are your recommendations for Chinese students who are considering studying abroad?" Yang replied that students who want to study abroad should become intrinsically motivated. They have to have a strong passion to study abroad, not because of their parents' desires. They should improve their English communication skills before their departure. Yang said, "Many students think that their English will be improved quickly once they are abroad; however, that is totally wrong. They have to learn it very well when they are in China. Otherwise, they will face more

difficulties in their studies.” “Passion, passion and passion,” Yang addressed this word many times. Yang pointed out that international students have to face the challenges of studying and living abroad and it is not romantic. She said, “Many times, you need to face loneliness; you need to have passion, from the very beginning. Sometimes, the benefits are hard to see in a short run, however, they will eventually appear as long as you stick to your beliefs.”

When we talked about different stakeholders like universities and the Canadian embassy’s functions in international education, Yang agreed with me that these stakeholders play important roles. According to Yang, Universities can present their education more positively in China:

For example, McGill is not well known in China. They can do more work like attending education fairs, cooperating with agencies or sending representatives to China to increase its reputation. Based on my own experience, it is not hard to apply to McGill. If the university can help more Chinese students know about its programs and facilitate the applications process, it can attract more outstanding students.

In Yang’s view, if the Canadian embassy and universities could introduce local culture and environment to Chinese students before their departure, Chinese international students could make better choices and adapt to the new environment faster. Yang concluded, “Studying in Canada was the most fantastic decision that I have made. If I had the opportunity to start over, I would make the same decision to study in Canada.”

Yang’s story shows the positive impact of sufficient preparation for studying abroad. For students who wish to study abroad, they should consult all people related to potential study destinations to get detailed information, they are more like to know the host

country better before their departure; consequently, they can make better choices and set up realistic goals for their studies. Analyzing personal conditions can also lead to wise choices. Yang's story also shows that international students are more likely to adjust easier when they have a positive attitude towards their lives and studies in host countries.

Yu

Yu (Not the real name) is 26 years old. She is from southern China and has two younger brothers. Yu has been living in Montreal for seven years. In 2004, Yu came to Montreal as an international student. She finished her Accounting Program at LaSalle College three years ago. While studying in Montreal, Yu met her boyfriend, who was an immigrant from Mainland China. After her graduation, she got married to her boyfriend. Now, Yu is settled down in Laval and is a young mother.

In the beginning of the interview, Yu told me that her desire to study abroad was affected by her high school classmate:

My friend went to study in Australia when I was in the first year of high school. Each year, he returned twice to China. He always brought us luxurious gifts, such as handbags, perfumes and sunglasses with famous brand names. In my friend's words, his life constituted traveling, shopping and enjoying social activities. Compared to him, my life was demanding because I had an intensive study schedule beginning from seven in the morning and finishing at ten at night. I needed to do thousands of math problems every day. I admired my friend so much, and dreamed of living the same life. I made a pact with my best friend that we would go to study in Australia together after our high school studies.

In 2003, Yu took the National Higher Education Entrance Examination, and received an admission from a university located in Beijing. "It was not my preferred universities,"

Yu said, “Instead of going to a university I didn’t like, I would rather study abroad.” Then, Yu told her father that she would like to study in Australia.

By coincidence, Yu’s father learned that his business partner already sent her daughter to study in Canada a year ago through an agency. Yu and her father went to see the agency based on her father’s partner’s recommendation. Yang recalled:

I met the agency and told the representative that I would like to go to Australia. Unfortunately, this agency didn’t specialize in Australia, and only worked on applications for Canadian schools. My parents selected this agency to help me apply; consequently, Canada became my only choice.

Yu’s parents did not think there were obvious differences between choosing Canada or Australia as a study destination. In their view, these two countries are peaceful, safe and orderly. Their intention was to give Yu a chance to learn English and broaden her horizons. They would feel reassured if Yu could stay with a person whom they knew.

When I asked Yu to recall her application procedure, she became a little bit embarrassed. “The agency did everything for me, such as filling out forms, buying tickets and arranging a home stay in Montreal. The agency even bought a winter coat for me because in my hometown there was no snow.” Yang said that her parents were satisfied with the agency’s work.

According to Yu, she chose to study at LaSalle College only because her father’s partner’s daughter was studying at LaSalle College. She said, “I met the girl who were studying in Montreal and got some information. She said that Montreal was a fantastic city.” Yang was excited about the new life, and she thought it would be the same life as

her friend who was in Australia. Yu added, “I am used to following my parents’ decisions. I didn’t consider the impacts of studying in Canada. I thought that several years later I would return to China and go back to my normal life.”

The only thing Yu asked the representative of the agency was about the language test. She knew many students took IELTS or TOEFL in order to study abroad, so she asked that representative which test she should take, but the representative answered that there was no need to take part in any test because she could take the test in Canada later. Yu followed his agency’s suggestion.

It took Yu a year to get her visa. In 2004, Yu arrived in Montreal. First, she stayed in a homestay that charged 1,000 CAD per month. One month later, Yu moved to live with her friend because she felt so lonely. Yu’s friend worked in a Chinese restaurant, and she brought Yu with her when she went to work. Yu said, “I didn’t want to stay alone. I was at a loss at the beginning. I used to be an independent person. During that period, I became very dependant. I felt no control over my life. I needed time to figure out how to adjust to the new circumstances. There was no mentor.”

When Yu began her studies at LaSalle College, her life became more regular. Yu took the English test and got a good grade, so she did not need to take a prerequisite language class. She had applied for Business Management when she was in China, but she changed to Accounting and Management Technology Program because she thought that Accounting covered most aspects of the business circle, and she wanted to finish this

program and return to China to aid her father in his business. Yu described her studies at

LaSalle College:

From eight o'clock in the morning to five o'clock in the afternoon, I stayed on campus to attend my classes or do my assignments. At nights, I worked as a cashier in a café. My parents deposited adequate money, and I just wanted to find a way to spend my spare time. On weekends, I went outside with my friends, most of them from Asia.

From her own experiences, Yu thought those Chinese students need to adjust themselves in many aspects to adapt to the new environment:

I had limited education experiences in two countries. I think here in Canada students are very active in class. Professors ask students to bring hands-on experience to class. Chinese students lack experience in group-work. Chinese students need to become more open to participant in group-work. Moreover, here students are more self-disciplined because Canadian teachers act as guides. If you don't do your assignments on time, no one will criticize you, but you will see how it affects your performance and grades. Some of my friends were struggling with their subjects; I thought they needed to use good study strategies, such as discussing with their teachers and local students and making notes of what a teacher emphasizes. Chinese students are used to the memory-repeat model, but it doesn't fit here.

I asked Yu why she did not advance her studies to a higher level. Yu answered there was no role model around her. If anyone around her had chosen to study at a higher level, she would have joined him or her. Yu analyzed that she unconsciously did not want to break her routine at the time.

Throughout the interview, Yu repeatedly emphasized the difficulties of living in another country:

Being alone in another country is not easy. You need to handle everything on your own. That is why you can see so many young Chinese international student couples on the street. At least, you have somebody beside you. My parents are very supportive, but I know I cannot tell them all my life here. I am the oldest, and I don't want my parents to worry about me, so I only share good news with my parents and swallow the bitter part.

I asked Yu, “Did your studies here meet your expectations?” Yu thought for a while and answered:

My answer is yes and no. My English improved and I learned a lot about Western culture. I went through my adolescent growth in another culture. I became an independent woman. On the other hand, life here is less interesting. When I look back, it was really a random choice for me to come to Canada. I didn’t have clear objectives and goals. If I could start over, I might not make the same choice. If I had stayed in China or gone to Australia, maybe I would be living a different life.

After graduation, Yu married her boyfriend and became a mother. Now, her son, David, is a year and a half. Yu thought that her life in Canada is mixed with half happiness and half worry:

I lack sense of belonging. Here, everyone seems busy. We are all trying to integrate into the society. The life here is full of pressure. Most of my friends chose to return to China where they felt that they could control their fate and enjoy a vibrant life. For my friends in China, they couldn’t understand my situation because they lack the living experience here. Despite some difficulties, I believe that Canada is a good place for my son to grow up. Canada is a country with clean air, less competition and equality in most fields.

After staying in Canada for so many years, Yu learned that she could not use ‘good’ or ‘bad’ to judge her life. Yu said, “As a wife and mother, I need to take responsibility.” Now, Yu is thinking about returning to school.

When Yu returned to China to visit her family, many relatives or other people asked her advice on sending their children to study abroad. Yu did not want to give people her advice, and she explained:

Studying abroad, spending several years in another country, and growing up alone, all these can affect people’s life in many ways. The process involves time, money and effort. I think that studying abroad is really a personal choice requiring serious consideration. I didn’t want to give people my opinion because I didn’t want to mislead them. For students who want to study abroad, I would like to tell them that living in Canada is not splendid like what is described in movies or magazines. You

have to face loneliness.

Yu's story shows the impacts of studying abroad on her adolescent growth. Yu lacked advice and support when she experienced the pains of growing up. On the other hand, she gained self-development and became mature. She learned to adjust to different situations. Yu's story also illustrates the importance of involving students in the decision-making process. If students participate in the decision-making process, they will take more responsibility for their studies. Moreover, they are more likely to set up clear objectives and goals.

Mu

Mu (Not the real name) is 26 years old, and came from Hunan province, China. In 2003, Mu arrived in Montreal as an international student. First, she took ESL courses at Concordia University. Then, Mu transferred to LaSalle College. Mu continued language classes at LaSalle College and then obtained a Diploma in 2008. Later, Mu applied and became a permanent resident. Now, she is working part-time in a Chinese travel agency.

When recalling her story, Mu said, "I think my story is a little bit dramatic. If my neighbor hadn't gone to study in Vancouver, I would still remain in Hunan, my hometown." In 2002, Mu finished her high school. She took the National Higher Education Entrance Examination, but she did not have high expectations for the test:

I was an average student in my school, so I didn't have a high expectation for my test. If I couldn't get accepted by any school, I would have gone to work directly. After the test, I was just enjoying the summer. Anyway, after several years hard work, I deserved it.

Mu's life changed one day when she bumped into her neighbor, a boy who just finished high school too. Mu recalled:

My neighbor told me cheerfully that he was going to study in Vancouver. I knew Vancouver from an article, in which Vancouver was described as the best city to live in. I had seen many attractive pictures of Vancouver. I congratulated my neighbor. I was surprised that he could go to study in Vancouver because he was so naughty at that time. In my mind, studying abroad was for excellent students. I was curious what my neighbor's life would be like in Vancouver. Later, I told my mother the news and said that I admired the boy.

Mu's mother took Mu's words seriously. She consulted study abroad agencies without informing Mu. When Mu's mother got enough information, she asked Mu's opinion on studying abroad. Mu did not have a real desire to go to Vancouver deep in her heart. "I just admired that my neighbor had a chance to live in a fresh environment, while my tone of voice made my mother believe that I wanted to study abroad."

According to Mu, her mother perceived Western education as better than Chinese education:

In fact, my mother had made her decision to send me abroad, and her question for me was symbolic. My mother was a university graduate. For her generation, they didn't have the option to study abroad freely, so they had such a complex about sending their children to study abroad. In my mother's view, Western education provides an active teaching and learning environment, and she hoped that I would form independent worldviews through studying abroad.

Mu's mother told Mu that she was considering sending Mu to study in Canada because Canada is a safe and orderly country with a world-recognized high-quality education. She also introduced Mu to the immigration policy in Canada. Mu described:

My mother told me that the Canadian government gave high priority to international students when they apply as immigrants. My mother thought that I could stay in Canada after my studies. I would face less competition and benefit from the good medical care and welfare. It would be a good choice for a girl.

Mu accepted her mother's suggestion and was looking forward to diversifying her life in Canada. At first, Mu wanted to apply for schools in Vancouver. Mu and her mother consulted an agency to looking for detailed information. The agency suggested LaSalle College in Montreal. The agency's justifications were "learning English and French at the same time" and "low living-and studying costs." Both Mu and her mother thought the agency's advice made sense, so they chose Montreal as Mu's destination. Mu said, "My parents were my financial supporters; I would surely follow their arrangement."

Mu wasn't involved in the preparation process. Her parents and the agency handled all work. Mu's family paid the agency 2,500 CAD as the service fee. Mu went to an English training school to improve her English, but she did not take any English tests in China because the agency planned to help her get a visa for English language class.

Mu did not receive admission offers from domestic universities, but after a year's preparation, Mu received her Canadian visa in 2003 and left for her studies in Canada. At the beginning Mu took ESL courses at Concordia University, but she felt bored of her language studies and wanted to enroll in a practical program as soon as possible. Later, Mu saw LaSalle College's advertisement and decided to study at LaSalle College:

I turned to LaSalle College and enrolled in the International School of Fashion, Arts and Design because I loved fashion, and wanted to dig into something I had passion for. I had drawing training in China, so I thought that my studies would be easier. Finally, LaSalle College had a good reputation in the field, and its graduates could easily find a job. I longed for finishing my program and finding a job soon.

Mu experienced difficulties in her studies. She got low marks in her studies, and became sad. Mu explained:

First, it was the language barrier. I knew I was as intelligent as my classmates, but misunderstanding made me look stupid in the class. There were so many hands-on assignments, and I had to stay up late to finish my work. I think that the Western and Eastern cultures have different aesthetic standards. Sometimes, I got stuck because I was unsure of my selection of colors and materials.

Mu said that international students need to find ways to go through difficulties. For Mu, she stays with her Chinese friends because she gets support from her friends. Mu said, “I need someone from the same culture to comfort me when I am weak. We understand each other’s situation, so we encourage each other to face challenges and find solutions.” Mu said that in her school some Canadian students looked upon Chinese students and teased their accents in English. These people criticized that the school accepted too many Chinese students. Mu said, “I think that these Canadian students should think about Chinese international students’ contribution to the local economy. On the other hand, as Chinese students, we should feel proud of ourselves because we enrich the diversity of our campus.”

Mu’s expenses for her studies were higher than students enrolling in other majors because she needed to purchase some materials and tools. Including living expenses and tuition fee, Mu’s yearly costs were around 35,000 CAD. Mu said, “Even though my family had this financial ability, I still felt the costs were a little bit high.”

During Mu’s spare time, she worked in a Chinese restaurant. Each year, Mu returned to China during her summer break to meet friends and enjoy the vibrant life in China. As Mu’s parents expected, after Mu finished her studies, she stayed in Montreal and became a permanent resident. When looking back at her years in Canada, Mu said:

My curiosity brought me here. My desire of studying in Canada was naive. If I could turn time back, I would not choose to study in Canada. To tell the truth, outside China, I realized my Chinese identity. Living here, I understood the huge differences between Western and Eastern cultures, the way of thinking, traditions, and customs and so on. These differences have a tremendous impact on my daily life. For example, I still like drinking soy and eating Chinese dishes. When I am sad, I listen to Chinese folk music. On the other hand, this experience has changed me as a person in many ways. I have turned into a mature, independent woman who feels I could do anything life throws at me. I use a cross-culture view to think about the world. This met my expectations. The grass is always greener.

According to Mu, if Chinese international students are really serious about learning English, they should work hard early. If people's intention is to gain life experience, they will not feel disappointed because studying abroad will enrich their knowledge and broaden their horizons.

Mu's experience reflects the impacts of parents' decision on their children's education and growth. It also shows that when living in a different culture, Chinese international students are more likely to think about their identity seriously. International students' English level also influences their networking and social interaction.

Huang

Huang (Not the real name) is 29 years old, and from Nanjing, China. In 2005, Huang flew to Montreal and began his life as an international student. At the beginning, Huang studied ESL classes at The Centre for Continuing Education, Concordia University. Later, he continued to study in Management Information Systems at the John Molson School of Business, Concordia University. At the end of 2010, Huang's status changed from an

international student to a permanent resident. Now, he is still studying at the John Molson School of Business.

Huang recalled, “In 2005, I came to Montreal with 16 other Chinese international students. Other students were all high school graduates and had a three-year visa. As the oldest, I had a one-year visa, so these younger students made fun of me. They said that I was too old to study in Canada. In fact, I was only 23 years old.” Compared to others, Huang had higher education experience in China. Huang got his undergraduate diploma from Changsha Aeronautical Vocational and Technical College in 2004, and worked for a while after his graduation.

According to Huang, his decision to study in Canada was heavily affected by his relatives. In 2004, When Huang did his internship in Nanjing; he lived with his grandfather’s sister. Huang heard a lot of Canada from his grant aunt. Huang’s uncle immigrated to Canada in 1998 and worked in Toronto, and his great aunt had visited Canada several times. Huang said, “My great aunt praised Canada as the best place to live. In her words, Canada is a beautiful, peaceful and highly civilized country. She encouraged me to continue to study in Canada to develop a world view.”

Huang’s great aunt’s encouragement sparked his wish to study abroad. However, Huang was not very determined because he thought there were many uncertainties in studying abroad. Later, Huang found a job in Nanjing, but he did not have passion for his job. “I was ambitious, while the reality iced my enthusiasm. There was no creativity in

my job, and I was like a screw in a machine. This made me frustrated, and I expected changes.”

An advertisement changed Huang’s life. One day, Huang saw an advertisement of recruitment to Concordia University on the street. The advertisement introduced the John Molson School of Business of Concordia University and its programs. Huang learnt that a well-known agency was responsible for the recruitment. A representative from the Concordia University John Molson School of Business would interview candidates. Qualified students could get admission on the spot. Huang was interested in the major of Management Information Systems (MIS) which he had studied before. This advertisement enhanced Huang’s wish of studying abroad:

I believe that studying abroad is glorious. I think that my view is affected by the social values. In the Chinese perspective, Western culture is more advanced than Chinese culture. There is a national admiration for Western Culture. Students who can pursue their studies in a Western country will be considered as capable or talented. I am not a vain person. At the time, I thought studying abroad could glorify my family and my life.

In Huang’s parents’ view, Canada has developed a first-rate education system with high standards. Through studying in Canada, Huang could obtain an internationally recognized qualification. Moreover, Huang’s parents felt at ease sending Huang to live near his uncle.

According to the brochure, Huang checked the information of Concordia University on the Internet. He went to Concordia’s website and learned that it is a public university. Based on his educational experiences in China, Huang believed in public schools. Huang

recalled, “My English was average, so I checked many websites in Chinese and found that there were many Chinese international students studying at Concordia. The information enhanced my desire to study abroad.”

Later, Huang’s cousin and he went for the interview. Huang said that the interview was not as complicated as he had expected. Huang provided the transcript of his undergraduate studies because the requirement was that candidates must have an average of 75 percent in academic performance. The representative from Concordia University asked some general questions: Why do you want to study in Canada? Do you know Concordia University? Which program do you want to apply for and what are your expectations? There was a translator aiding interviewers, so Huang did not have difficulty in answering the questions. Huang received a conditional admission, which required that he needed to fulfill the English proficiency requirement before his regular program. There were around 30 people attending the interview and most were high school graduates. “It was so simple. For students like me who did not provide English proficiency, they all received conditional admissions.”

Huang recalled that the agency gave students who attended the interview session two choices. One was to pay 300 USD admission fee to the agency and then apply for Canadian visas by themselves. An alternative was to relegate to the agency to apply for visa at a cost of 2,500 CAD. Huang chose the agency because he did not have experience in applying for visas. “I didn’t have confidence in finding all information from different

English resources. Moreover, the agency would work more efficiently.”

According to the agency, Huang’s parents provided a fund proof of 90,000 CAD. Huang explained that the fund was estimated to cover four years of study in Montreal. Later, Huang found out that 90,000 CAD was not enough for four years of study.

Huang applied for the Canadian Visa two times. Because of the delay of his visa, Huang had to postpone his study to the Fall 2005. Huang arrived in Montreal in June 2005. Huang’s cousin arrived earlier, so she helped Huang settle down. Instead of staying in a homestay like other students, Huang rented an apartment in downtown Montreal. A representative from the agency helped Huang and other students register for ESL courses at the Centre for Continuing Education, Concordia University. Huang only studied for two terms. Huang had expected to learn strategies to pass the English Language Proficiency (CELDT) test in a short time in order to begin his regular studies; however, he found that his ESL courses focused on helping students improve their English skills overall step-by-step. Huang said, “I benefited from these courses because I began to speak out instead of keeping silent all the time. However, I really wanted to find a short cut because the cost for ESL classes was high, around 1,500 CAD for three weeks.”

Huang transferred to an English training institute operated by Chinese immigrants. At the same time, he registered as an independent student at Concordia University. He wanted to accelerate his studies. As an independent student, Huang could register for two courses. If he could get a C+ in his course, this course could be transferred to his future

studies. He hoped that he could begin his studies in MIS as soon as possible. Huang learned lessons from his studies. After a semester's hard work, Huang got a "C" for his computer class. He was sad and felt he had been treated unfairly because he had finished all requirements. Huang wrote an email to the professor and asked for a reevaluation. The professor replied that Huang only finished basic requirements and did not use his creativity to add more aspects. Huang was shocked when he received his professor's reply:

I learned the cultural differences. When I studied in China, my professors asked me to follow the instructions strictly. If I added other elements in my work, I could get a lower mark because my professors thought it was unnecessary. Here, professors are more hands-off, and they expect the students to facilitate their studies creatively on their own.

Huang experienced some challenges in his studies. The typical example would be class participation. Huang recalled:

In China, we believe that "silence is golden," which contradicts Western culture that encourages people to be outspoken. I was afraid to participate in class discussions because I was concerned about "losing face." I knew I needed to adjust myself, but it took time.

Meanwhile, Huang considered English as his big obstacle because his English ability significantly reduced his performance in his studies. Huang said, "I began to learn English as a second language from my elementary school, but my studies were test-oriented. I lacked practice." When Hang came to Canada, he found that he had difficulties in communicating with others. "I heard diverse accents. I knew that the best way to improve my English was to communicate with people in English. Meanwhile, I felt nervous when speaking in English. It was contradictory."

Gradually, Huang found ways to improve his studies. He asked other Chinese international students about different professors' teaching styles. If he was unsure about the instructions, he asked the professor directly for clarification. Each term, Huang registered for two or three courses because he wanted to have plenty of time to process what he learned in the classroom.

While studying at Concordia, Huang met his girlfriend. Last year, they applied for the immigrant status. When I asked Huang's view on his life in Canada, he responded:

At the beginning, I was ambitious to finish a degree in three years. I struggled with my studies, and my parents worried. Now, I became less stressed. I told my parents that in Canada it was common to finish a program within several years. People could stop their studies to open their own businesses. I am living here, and I would like to live like a Canadian. I want to finish my program, but I have not set up a timeline. I am thinking about starting my own business because I find there are so many business opportunities. In the future, if I find better opportunities in China, I would like to return to China.

In Huang's view, if a student has the opportunity to study abroad, he or she should seize the chance because it will enrich their experience. Huang considered his studies in Canada as an asset. At the same time, Huang pointed out that whether studying in China or in Canada, Chinese students need to work hard to become successful. "Everyone is the architect of his or her own fortune."

Huang's story illustrates the family's influence on students' decision-making processes. His story also shows the differences of Western and Chinese education styles. One's attitude affects his or her behavior. Chinese students face cultural obstacles, which influence their academic performance.

Chen

Chen (Not the real name) is 21 years old, and from Beijing, China. Chen arrived in Montreal in September, 2010. Now, he is studying in a Grade 12 pre-university program at the Lester B. Pearson School Board in West Island.

According to Chen, his desire to study abroad originated from his dropout experience. Chen was an excellent student in his middle school. He won several municipal mathematics competitions; however, in the last year of his middle school, he decided to drop out because of the pressure. Chen said:

I spent all my spare time on different supplemental classes including mathematics, English, and others. I was tired of this life. My dropout decision shocked my parents, but they respected my decision. I think that my parents wanted me to learn from hardships and difficulties.

After leaving school, Chen found several jobs to make his life busy. During the daytime, he worked in a cafe because he liked to communicate with people. At night, he worked in an Internet cafe. Chen was satisfied with his income, “My income was around 300 CAD per month. I didn’t have time to spend money.” Chen continued his routine for three years, and felt tired again because he realized that he couldn’t live like this forever.

Chen became confused about his future and asked his father for advice. Chen told his father that he would start a start-up in the future. Chen’s father was a successful businessman, and offered Chen a job in his own company. Chen’s father hoped that he would learn from practice. While working for his father, Chen concealed his background from his colleagues because he wanted to prove himself. Chen worked hard and seized

opportunities. Chen made a big sale and received a 30,000 CAD commission. Chen said, “I was proud of what he had done. On the other hand, from my fieldwork, I realized the importance of education. When I talked with my clients, I felt that I lacked knowledge, so I decided to return to school.”

Chen’s parents supported his decision to return to school. Chen felt very uncomfortable in his high school classroom because he had been away from school life for a long time. He did well in his studies although he still did not like the passive learning. Furthermore, Chen felt that although his teachers had theoretical background, they lacked practical applications like what he had gained from his experiences. Chen longed for an open and progressive education.

From his middle school math teacher, Chen learned that some of his middle school classmates were studying abroad in Australia. Chen said:

I began to think about studying abroad. Earlier, my father mentioned sending me to study abroad, but I didn’t have a strong desire. This time, I wanted to study in a system, which encourages creativity and open-mindedness. I believed that Western education was better than what I experienced in China.

Several people in Chen’s family had international education experiences. His grandfather had studied in the former Soviet Union as a government sponsored international student. His aunt had studied in Japan. Chen’s father wanted to study abroad in his twenties, but he did not have the chance. Chen explained, “At the time, my aunt was studying in Japan, and my grandfather couldn’t afford sending two children to study abroad at the same time. My father felt it was a pity that he couldn’t study abroad. He

expected me to experience a different life like the one he had dreamed of.”

In March 2010, Chen visited 2010 International Education Expo with his parents. Chen and his parents trusted the credibility of the exhibition because it was officially approved by the Ministry of Education and sponsored by the China Education Association for International Exchange. Both Chen and his parents thought that they could get quality information through face-to-face communication. Chen described his feeling as “overwhelmed” when seeing 16 national group participations and representatives from domestic agencies and training institutions.

Finally, Chen decided on Canada. Chen wanted to study in an English-speaking country with high-quality education at a lower cost, and Canadian schools met his requirements. Chen said:

I didn’t choose Australia because it is crowded with Chinese students. I considered that I could study in Canada and then transfer to the United States. I longed to study in the United States, but I knew that I couldn’t get accepted by any American school because I didn’t have English proficiency.

An agency introduced Chen to the Grade 12 pre-university program at the Lester B. Pearson School Board. The agency recommended the program to Chen because it did not require English Proficiency. Chinese students could learn English in the first year, and then apply for any college or university located in Canada or the United States. According to the agency, the tuition fees and residence fees of this program were around 23,000 CAD per year, and were lower than other programs. This program attracted Chen. Chen said, “The Lester B. Pearson School Board is a public English school board, and my

parents believed in the quality of education in public schools.”

With the agency’s help, Chen got his one-year Canadian visa smoothly. In September 2010, Chen began to attend classes at Riverdale High School of the Lester B, Pearson School Board.

As an international student, Chen lived in a dormitory residence, where six students share a unit. Chen has dormitory supervisors who are responsible for preparing meals and helping international students do laundry. Chen is satisfied with his dormitory because he did not need to cook. “Cooking is a challenge for me,” Chen said.

After studying for a while, Chen knew more about the education system in Quebec. At the beginning, he felt strange that there were no local students in his class. Later, he learned that in Quebec, there is no grade 12. After finishing their grade 11, high school students will apply for colleges to take vocational programs or pre-university programs. Chen admires Canadian students because they have many ways to continue their studies at universities when they want.

Chen’s life is routine. His classes begin from ten o’clock in the morning and finish at four o’clock in the afternoon. His textbooks are for grade 12 students in Ontario. According to Chen, the first half year, he only has mathematics and English classes. Chen said that he had difficulty understanding his math teacher, but he could still get good marks. “My English is not good, but I am confident in my math class because I found the math class easier than what I learned in China.” Chen does not have clear idea of his

classes in the following half year.

Chen has around 50 classmates, and all students are Chinese international students except for several Vietnamese. Chen said:

It is not like what I expected in China. Sometimes, I feel that I am still studying in China. I hoped after one year study, I could apply for a highly recognized university. If I continue like this, I don't think any university can accept me. I received the message that after finishing all required courses, we could get admission from Bishop University, but this is not what I expected.

Chen had applied for ESL courses at Concordia University, and is waiting for the response.

Chen is an outgoing person, and he has already made Canadian friends at his school. Chen said that even though they couldn't communicate well in English, they still understand each other. "Globalization makes the world smaller. We play the same games and listen to the same music. My friends bring me to visit interesting places in the West Island." Chen observed that Canadian high school students are open and confident when interacting with people. He attributed this to the environment in which Canadian students grow. "There is less competition in Canada, so people are not under pressure."

Chen's short-term goal is to reach the requirements to study Actuarial Mathematics at Concordia. He clarified that this major ensured a good job both in China and North America. Chen's long-term goal is to become a successful businessman.

In Chen's view, education is paramount. He said that after his studies, he would like to return to China because China is the biggest market in the world. Furthermore, he thinks that the life in Canada is less interesting and not as comfortable as in China.

Chen's story shows that many Chinese families believe in public education in Western countries. It also shows that the International Education Expo has become a platform for Chinese students to get information about overseas schools.

Guo

Guo (Not the real name) is 22 years old, and from Qingdao, China. In September 2010, Guo, with her thirty-three classmates from Shandong University of Finance (SUF), began her studies at Dalhousie University, Halifax. Guo is studying Economics in the Department of Economics at Dalhousie University. As a cooperative program student, Guo's studies last for two years in Canada. When Guo finishes the required 60 credits, she will receive bachelor degrees both from Dalhousie University and Shandong University of Finance (SUF).

In 2008, as a high school graduate, Guo attended the National University Entrance Test. After the test, Guo read a guidebook about different universities to fill out her application forms for her favorite universities. While reading the guide, both Guo and her parents noticed an international co-op program at Shandong University of Finance, which is located in the city of Jinan in Shandong province. Guo recalled:

I learned that the Shandong University of Finance and the Canadian university Dalhousie were recruiting students for their 2+2 joint program. The program looked attractive because after studying in China for two years, qualified students could advance their studies in Canada. Students can get diplomas from both universities.

Guo's parents encouraged her to apply for the co-op program because they thought it

was a good opportunity for her to have an international study experience and develop a world view. Guo introduced that in the 1990's, her father had chance to study in New Zealand for two years. He often fondly recalled his studies in New Zealand and shared his experiences with Guo. In Guo's father's view, he benefited from the Western education, which focuses on supporting students to develop self-learning skills and use their creativity in their studies; moreover, he knew the world outside China and developed a global view through studying abroad. Guo's encourage Guo to experience Western culture in a global economy. Guo's mother was reassured of the quality of co-op program. Guo said, "SUF has a good reputation in academics and the workforce, and Dalhousie University is a well-recognized Canadian public university. My mother thought that I could benefit from the joint program. "

Guo thought that studying abroad is a good way to experience a new life and a culture different from her own. She said, "As it is well known, China has opened its gates for more than 20 years, and so many students went to study abroad. Studying abroad has become a common choice for many Chinese students. " Guo got positive feedback about studying abroad both from her relatives and classmates. Guo's aunt is studying in Montreal, and she also encouraged Guo to study in Canada to obtain an international qualification.

However, the co-op program at SUF was not Guo's favorite choice. She wanted to finish her undergraduate studies at a famous Chinese university, such as Beijing

University or Tsinghua University. Guo said, “I thought that after my undergraduate studies in China, I would have liked to pursue my graduate studies in a Western country because I would know my real interests at that time.”

The reality was that Guo only got admitted to SUF. In the Fall of 2008, Guo began her studies in Economics at the School of International Education, at SUF. From the coordinator of Dalhousie University, Guo learned more information about the cooperative program. In 2008, Shandong University of Finance and Dalhousie University signed an academic cooperation agreement to develop a joint program in Economics. SUF is in charge of recruiting qualified high school graduates in China. Students will finish their first two years at SUF. Then, qualified students advance their studies in the Department of Economics, Dalhousie University. In 2008, along with Guo, there were 200 first year students enrolling in the co-op program.

In Guo’s first semester, she was informed that 50 students could get the chance to study at Dalhousie University in their third year. The selection would be based on students’ academic performance and competence in English. It was an option for students. If students had the desire to study in Canada, they needed to study hard to meet the requirements. If students did not want to study in Canada or reach the requirements, they could finish their studies at SUF. Guo introduced that after she entered the program, her department conducted a survey which showed that around 80 first year students wished to advance their studies at Dalhousie.

In Guo's description, her studies at SUF were regular. She lived in the dormitory regulated by SUF. Like all Chinese university students, Guo followed the study plan designed according to her major. The first semester, Guo registered in general courses, such as Mathematics, Fundamentals of the Computer, and Marxist Philosophy. In her second semester, Guo had core courses like Microeconomics and Macroeconomics given by Chinese professors in Chinese. Guo took Microeconomics and Macroeconomics three times. In her third semester, Guo retook these two courses offered by select Chinese professors in English. Then, in the fourth semester, professors from Dalhousie University taught these two courses in English. Guo said:

I think this design aimed to help Chinese students get ready for studies in English. Some students thought it was boring to have the same classes three times. I didn't agree with them. Each time, I learned something new. My Chinese professors helped me understand the contents, so I was less stressed and had a better understanding when listening to Dalhousie professors.

Guo addressed the positive impacts of active teaching methods. She recalled that not all of her Chinese professors had an international education background. Some professors had studied in Western countries, such as the United Kingdom, Germany, and Australia, but their classes were boring because they repeated the textbooks. In contrast, some teachers who had never studied or taught in a Western county implemented active teaching methods in their classes. They used multi-media teaching tools and brought hands-on experiences. Guo described:

Some professors asked us to participate in group work, do presentations and small projects. Their classes were so interesting and informative. These professors used a similar assessment method to that of the professors of Dalhousie University. All these helped me adapt to classes taught by Dalhousie professors.

In Guo's fourth semester, three Dalhousie professors taught courses to Chinese students at SUF. At the beginning, Guo had difficulty in understanding his professors because they spoke very fast. Guo was frustrated and her father encouraged her to be patient. Guo said, "My father said that I couldn't expect my English to improve in a day. The best way was to face the difficulties and find out ways to overcome the challenges."

Guo spent a lot of time reading textbooks and discussing with her professors:

My Canadian professors were very strict with our studies, and they didn't like Chinese students to copy each other's answers. However, they were patient in answering students' questions. When I was confused, I asked questions. There was no shortcut to learn English, and I think the best way is to devote oneself to the learning process.

Compared to regular programs at SUF, Guo's program's tuition fees and accommodation fees were higher. The tuition fees and accommodation fees for regular programs were 700 CAD per year, while the fees for co-op program were 6,000 CAD for the two years of domestic studies. For the two years of study in Canada, students were informed that their cost would be around 45,000 CAD. Guo's parents thought the cost was affordable. Guo thought that the costs were higher but reasonable because she had courses given by Canadian professors. Guo said, "Throughout my studied at SUF, my English improved, and I had a deeper understanding of the Canadian teaching style. Moreover, the co-op program offered me an option to study in a recognized Canadian university."

In order to take advantage of the co-op programs, candidates must be fluent in English and maintain good academic records, an average of 75 percent for all courses.

The co-op students need to get a mark higher than 6 on the IELTS test. From her first year at SUF, Guo began to prepare for the IELTS test. Because many students in Guo's program wanted to study abroad, so her department negotiated with a well-known training institution to give English classes on campus at a lower price. Compared to her friends who rushed to take supplementary English classes in different places, Guo saved money and time. Guo thought that this is an advantage of her co-op program. She said, "In China, once you belong to an organization, you can have some advantages. The organization will assist its members in reaching their goals." Guo took the IELTS test three times and got a 6.5 finally.

At the end of her third semester, Guo got the good news that she met all the requirements and could go to study in Canada. I asked Guo how she felt when she got the good news. She replied, "I was very excited because I stepped forward toward my goal. At the same time, I knew the challenging part had not yet come." Guo's classmates who continued to study at SUF could receive a certificate from Dalhousie showing that they finished courses offered by professors from Dalhousie University. "This will be an advantage for them when facing the keen competition in the workforce."

During her last semester at SUF, Guo began to apply for the Canadian visa. Guo had two choices: either doing it by herself or use an agency recommended by her department. Guo chose the agency and paid a 650 CAD service fee. "Some students chose to do it all by themselves, and they all did it. For me, I didn't have confidence in my English, so I

chose the agency.”

In September 2010, Guo arrived at Dalhousie University. As a co-op program student, Guo did not experience difficulties in finding a place to live because Dalhousie provided dormitories for Chinese students in the joint program. Guo felt a warm welcome from the university. Guo attended academic workshops, librarian information sessions and met student mentors. These orientation activities helped her adapt to the new life in Canada at Dalhousie. Guo introduced that the coordinator in the Department of Economics is from Taiwan, so she could communicate with the coordinator in Chinese, and this makes her lives easier. Guo said, “Compared to other international students, the only difference was that I lived with my Chinese classmates and took part in activities with them.”

All Chinese students were integrated into the regular program. In two years, these students need to finish 20 courses, 60 credits. Guo felt the differences of two educational systems:

In China, once students choose their majors, they have to follow prescribed courses. At Dalhousie, academic advisers helped me register for courses based on my background and needs. I could choose my electives from a hundred courses. When I studied at SUF, we were randomly divided into four groups. Each group had a fixed classroom. At Dalhousie, I go to different places to take my classes and meet students from different countries.

Guo liked the diversity of her studies. She registered for Guitar and French courses for the coming summer term. “I chose these two courses according to my interests. In China, a guitar class can not be considered as a credit class.”

When recalling her studies at the two universities, Guo said that there are some

differences under two education systems. First, the application systems are different. Most Chinese students have to face the severe competition in the National Entrance Exam, which makes their high school life stressful. Guo described high school students as ‘study machines’ because they have to spend all their time preparing for the National Entrance Exam, which can change one’s fate forever. Once Chinese students enter their university studies, they have a less stressed life and things go smoothly. In Canada, students apply for universities based on their high school performance, which means they need to study hard from the beginning. On the other hand, Canadian students have many opportunities to continue their higher education. They can go to work first, and then return to school. They have many opportunities to study at their favorite universities.”

Guo pointed out that the assessment method used at Dalhousie pushed Chinese students to work hard. In China, Guo only had two main tests, the midterm and the final. In Canada, Guo’s final grade consists of a participation grade, quizzes, assignments, group work, essay and final tests. Guo said, “I have to spend more time on studying; consequently, I learned more.” Guo also addressed the different functions of advisors. Canadian academic advisors focus on supporting students’ studies, while Chinese advisors focus on students’ daily lives, such as keeping the dormitory tidy and socializing.

Before coming to Canada, Guo had the impression that Western university students have a more vibrant social life, and she expected an interesting and diversified campus life at Dalhousie. After she began her studies at Dalhousie, Guo found that there are so

many clubs and parties, but she did not have time to enjoy them. Guo said, “Like most Chinese students, I spend a lot of time on studying. Moreover, I live with other Chinese students, and if other students do not participate in different activities, I will not go by myself.” Guo said that the language barrier and cultural differences also influenced her participation in campus activities. “In Canada, alcohol is allowed in university activities. After drinking, some students act crazy. I grew up in China, and I am not used to the atmosphere.”

Guo had some challenges in her daily life. First, she had to learn to make her budget, go shopping and cook. Guo said, “The dormitory is good, but I need to prepare meals on my own. I cannot buy many Chinese vegetables in Halifax. This is challenging for me.”

Guo kept emphasizing the importance of learning English and time management:

It is better to learn English well when you are still in China. In China, students do not spend time on preparing food and doing housework, so they can focus on their studies. In Canada, it is important to use time efficiently because we have to study and deal with daily tasks at the same time.

On graduating next year, Guo said she was “really quite concerned” about what to do next. Most Guo’s Chinese classmates planned to return to China because they thought they would have more opportunities in China. Guo is thinking about pursuing her studies at a higher level. Guo said, “In a global economy, opportunities are everywhere, and competition exists everywhere too. Whether I am in Canada or in China, everything depends on my effort.”

In Guo’s view, her studies at Dalhousie met her expectations. She experiences a new

life in a modern Western metropolis and learns to interact with people in a multicultural environment. “I think that I have become more out-going and open-minded,” Guo thought that Canada is a good study destination for Chinese students because “Canada is good place both for studying and living.”

Guo’s story shows that Chinese students expect to become more competitive through their international studies. Her story also illustrates that Chinese students can benefit from international collaboration between Chinese universities and Canadian universities.

CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS

This study is conducted to explore the factors that influence Mainland Chinese students to choose Canada as their study destination. It provides a small sample of the experiences and perceptions of Mainland Chinese students. These students' experiences provide lenses for people to understand Chinese students' motivations, selection criteria and expectations.

Overview of Participants

Initially, ten Mainland Chinese students expressed their interest in this study. I contacted these potential participants, and they all agreed to take part in the study. Later, two of them withdrew because of personal reasons.

Five female students and three male students, from seven different cities, participated in the study. Their demographic information is shown in Table 5 and Figure 3. Their ages range from 21 to 29 years old. Half of the participants studied abroad after high school graduation; the others received undergraduate education at Chinese universities before coming to Canada.

Table 7

Demographic Data of Participants

Name	Gender	Age	Original City	Education in China	Education in Canada
Chen	M	21	Beijing	High School	Pre-University (Riverdale)
Guo	F	22	Qingdao	Undergraduate	Undergraduate (Dalhousie)
Hong	M	27	Qingdao	High School	Pre-University (Concordia) College (LaSalle)
Huang	M	29	Nanjing	Undergraduate	Pre-University (Concordia) Undergraduate (Concordia)
Mu	F	26	Changsha	High School	Pre-University (Concordia) College (LaSalle)
Wang	F	29	Zhengzhou	Undergraduate	College (Confederation) Graduate (Lakehead)
Yang	F	27	Shenyang	Undergraduate	Undergraduate (McGill)
Yu	F	26	Shantou	High School	College (LaSalle)



Figure 3. Demographic Map of Participants

Analysis and Reflections

In this study, eight Mainland Chinese students' experiences were studied through in-depth interviews. I asked the participants open-ended questions (see Appendix A) to learn about their experiences and perceptions. I transcribed and coded the interviews. Then, I compared and analyzed the field texts to identify common elements in different stories (see table 7). I discovered there were some particular factors that influenced the participants' decisions. My findings were based on the participants' narratives and

reflections. I divided my findings into seven themes in the order of importance: (1) quality of education, (2) family involvement, (3) Chinese study abroad agencies, (4) visa and immigration policies, (5) life investment, (6) financial issues, and (7) life experiences.

Table 8

The Factors that Affected the Participants to Chose Canada as Their Study Destination

	Why study abroad				Why Choose Canada						
	NQ	QW	P	L	QC	P	V	I	F	A	C
Chen	✓	✓	✓			✓				●	
Guo		✓	✓		✓	✓				✓	✓
Hong	●	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	
Huang	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				●	✓
Mu	●	✓	●			●		✓		✓	✓
Wang	●	✓	✓				●			●	
Yang	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	
Yu	●	✓	●			●				●	

NQ: No opportunity to get high-quality of education in China

QC: High-quality of education in Canada

P: Parental involvement

L Life investment

V: Visa policy

I: Immigration opportunity

F: Financial factors

A: Agency

C: Canada is his/her first choice

✓ The factor influenced his/her decision

● The most important factor that influenced his/her decision

Quality of Education

The existing literature regards low quality education at home as an important “push factor” that pushes students to study abroad; a high standard of education in the destination country is also considered a key “pull factor” to attract students (Altbach, 1998; Li, 2004; Ottinger, 2009; Rao, 1979). I tried to measure such factors by asking open-ended questions. I asked the participants’ opinions on different systems of education. My questions were: “How would you describe your educational experiences in China?” and “How would you describe your education in Canada?” When I asked the question, “What motivated you the most to study abroad?,” many participants mentioned the lack of opportunity to access high-quality education in China. Throughout the interviews, all participants addressed the fact that there are good Chinese universities offering high-quality education, but because they could not enter top-tier Chinese institutions, they chose to study abroad as an alternative. This study shows that the difficulty of accessing high-quality education in Mainland China was a “push factor” for the participants. On the other hand, the high-quality of education in Canada was not a significant “pull factor.” Most participants stated that when they considered study destinations, they did not consider the quality of education in Canada as more advanced than other Western countries.

According to the participants, Chinese students can only get high-quality education at top-ranked universities, such as Beijing University and Tsinghua University. Studying at

a top-ranked university in China opens the gate to success in academics and in the job market. For Chinese high school graduates, the only way to enter top-tier institutions is by achieving high scores on the National Higher Education Entrance Examination. As discussed in chapter two, the competition in the National Higher Education Entrance Examination is fierce. Even though many students get relatively good grades on their tests, they still cannot get accepted because of the limited acceptances. This study reflects the phenomena. Six participants took the National Entrance Examination but did not satisfy their favourite institutions' requirements. For example, Wang and Yang took the test but failed to obtain high admission scores to enter their favourite universities. During their undergraduate studies in China, Wang and Yang were not satisfied with their studies and felt bored with their campus lives. Hong did not even attempt the National Higher Education Entrance Examination because he did not trust his ability. Furthermore, he considered studying at an ordinary public university as "a waste of time and money." Yu held the same opinion, so she refused acceptance from a university. Several participants emphasized that only famous Chinese universities have adequate resources to ensure high-quality education.

In this study, all participants hold the view that the average quality of education in Western countries is superior to Chinese education. Some participants broaden this opinion to all Western institutions, no matter their locations or what kinds of programs they offer. This was a pull factor that motivated the participants to choose to study abroad.

Some participants explained that they learned this from Chinese educational system itself. When these students studied in high school, their teachers taught them that Western education is more advanced. This idea is pervasive in China. As Huang said, “There is a national admiration for Western Culture in China. Parents feel so proud if their children can study in a Western country.”

According to the results of this study, when Chinese students compare different study destination countries, they consider the higher education in the United States to be better than the higher education in Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. The participants did not mention the high-quality education in Canada as the most important factor. Furthermore, most participants did not consider Canada as their first choice. For example, both Hong and Yang would have liked to study in the United States; they changed their minds because it was difficult to apply for an American visa. Wang desired to study in the United Kingdom and received several acceptances from British universities, but she could not obtain a British visa, so she tried to find an alternative. She chose Canada only because the new agency she selected specialised in helping students apply to Canadian institutions. In order to achieve the dream of studying abroad, Wang said, “I was willing to accept any program in any city as long as I could go to study in Canada as soon as possible.” Yu’s first choice was Australia, but she chose Canada because the agency that her parents selected focused on applying to Canadian schools. Chen considered Canada as a transition to his future studies in the United States. Yang decided to study in Canada

only because her uncle lived in Montreal.

Hai (2007) states that Chinese students who pursue their Master studies in the United States consider institutions' academic reputations as a vital criterion. However, in this study, some participants, especially less academically gifted students, were not overly concerned about their institutions' academic reputations when choosing their study destinations.

Overall, the lack of access to high-quality education and the fierce competition in Mainland China were key push factors that motivated the participants to study abroad. The high-quality of education in Western countries worked as a pull factor, but it was not a central reason for the participants to choose Canada as their destination.

Family's Involvement

Chapman and Ajzen point out that students' higher education institution choices are influenced by parents, relatives and significant others (Chapman, 1984; Ajzen, 1991). The data from my study emphasizes this point. The participants' experiences confirm that Chinese student' parents highly influence their children's decision-making processes regarding studying abroad (Boycott, 2009; Li, 2001). All participants in my study said that their decision to study in Canada was heavily influenced by their families. Lu points out that Chinese parents do not wait for their children's approval when considering sending them to study abroad. However, their children must get permission from them

when they wish to do so (Lu, 2006). In several cases, the parents were the decisive decision makers, and these participants just followed their parents' choices.

Chinese parents play a key role in their children's decision to study abroad. The traditional Chinese perspective on children's education and students' economic dependence on parents contributes to this phenomenon. Influenced by Confucianism, Chinese parents play the role of advisors and supporters of children's education (Lee, Wong & Brown 1996; Shek, 2006). Chinese parents take the responsibility to make decisions for their children and believe that they can make the best choice based on their experiences. Several participants mentioned that their parents treated them like young children even when they were adults. Because Chinese students must obey parental authority, even though they are mature, they are accustomed to following their parents' suggestions rather than voicing their own opinions. Mu and Yu stated that they only played the role of decision-executors with regard to their study abroad decisions.

Chinese parents are their children's financial sponsors. It is a tradition that Chinese parents pay for all costs of their children's education, and Chinese students only focus on their studies and not on financial aspects. Most Chinese students become financially independent only after they finish their higher education and find jobs. Few Chinese students can afford the high costs of studying abroad on their own. As a result, without parental support and approval, Chinese students who desire to study abroad cannot turn their dreams into reality.

This study shows that most participants' parents did not have clear ideas of their preferred education for their children. For example, Yang's parents chose Canada as her destination because Yang's uncle was in Montreal. Yu's father preferred Canada to Australia since his friend's child was studying in Canada. Some participants' stories show that the families with members having overseas educational backgrounds had stronger desire to send their children to study abroad.

To sum up, Chinese parents play an important role in their children's decision to study abroad. Without parental permission and guidance, Chinese students cannot accomplish their dreams. In this study, participants' parents heavily influenced their children's decision-making processes. On the other hand, these parents' opinions were influenced by the social network around them, such as friends, relatives, colleagues, and study abroad agencies.

Study Abroad Agencies

This study illustrates a new influential factor, Chinese study abroad agencies, which have not been explored in previous research. The participants' experiences shows that Chinese study abroad agencies have a significant influence on students' decision-making and preparation processes. All participants in this study accomplished their goals to study abroad through agencies. Some participants polished their desire of studying abroad and chose Canadian institutions based on their agencies' recommendations.

All participants and their families considered study abroad agencies as vital and important information sources. Most students and their families lacked information about Western countries' educational systems and visa application procedures; as a result, they chose to consult study abroad agencies. The participants' families paid an average 2,000 CAD service fee to their agencies after they got the acceptance and Canadian visa. Most participants thought that the service fees were reasonable because their agencies provided professional information and services.

Study abroad agencies influenced the participants' decisions in many aspects. Mu and Chen mentioned that their agencies made their desire to study abroad more concrete. Many students' choices were based on the information and suggestions provided by their agencies. For example, Yu and Wang chose Canada because their agencies only specialized in applying for Canadian schools. These agencies convinced their clients that studying in Canada had more advantages than studying in other countries. As Yu said, "if the agency had specialized in the United Kingdom, I would have changed my destination to the United Kingdom." Many applicants reflected that before they came to Canada they had not realized that their decisions had been influenced by their agencies.

According to the participants, study abroad agencies were useful but not accountable. All participants believed in the agencies' capability at the beginning because they thought the agencies had many specialists and could provide high-quality services. Guo and Yang knew some information about their target countries, but they still chose agencies because

they did not have the confidence to complete all the paperwork in English by themselves. On the other hand, study abroad agencies are profit-seeking companies, and they could provide filtered, incomplete and misleading information to their clients. Chen recalled that the representative from his agency claimed that he would make the best plan for him. The representative promised that Chen could apply to any Canadian or American university after his pre-university program. After Chen came to Canada, he realized that his agency overstated the benefits of studying in a pre-university program.

Agencies could also mislead their clients. Students who did not have proof of English proficiency were suggested to apply for language courses or pre-university programs instead of preparing for required English tests before their departures. Several participants asserted that they got the wrong idea from their agencies that there was no need to prepare for English tests. As a result, these students had to spend extra time and money on language courses after they arrived in Canada. Yu explained, “By doing this, an agency could finish a student’s case and get the service fee in a short time.” In order to complete a case faster, some agencies persuaded their clients to apply for schools whose application processes are easier. For example, Wang, who wanted to apply for a master’s program, was advised to apply for a college program since she could easily be accepted.

This study shows that Chinese study abroad agencies work as information providers and advisors for students who desire to study in Canada; consequently, they influence these students’ decisions in many aspects.

Visa & Immigration policies

This study shows that Mainland Chinese students' choices of their study destination were influenced by the host country's visa policy. The participants stated that during the preparation process, they were concerned about how to obtain a visa smoothly. A country with a favorable visa policy for international students can attract more Chinese students. On the other hand, Canada's immigration policy was not a key consideration factor for the participants.

Different countries' visa policies influence Chinese students' destination choices. For example, Wang got several offers from British universities, but she could not go to study in the United Kingdom because she could not obtain a British visa. As an alternative, Wang applied for a Canadian institution. Huang and Yang chose Canada since they believed it was easier to apply for a Canadian visa than an American one. For Chinese students, obtaining a visa is the final and decisive step in the whole application process. If there is no chance to get a visa from the country where they aim to study, Chinese students will choose another country. Some participants chose Canada as their destination simply because at the time it was easier to apply for a Canadian visa.

Immigration opportunity is considered as an important "pull" factor for Western countries to attract international students from developing countries (Hamrick, 2007). However, I found that it did not apply to the sample group in my study. The opportunity to settle down as a permanent resident after graduation was not a "pull" factor for the

participants. Among the participants, only Mu and Yang considered the opportunity of immigration after graduation before they came to Canada. Other participants and their parents did not even know the immigration policy of Canada when they compared the different destination countries. All participants, except for Mu and Yang, planned to return to China after graduation. Meanwhile, these students' parents, the real decision-makers, expected their children to return to China after finishing their studies in Canada. This study demonstrates that after studying in Canada, many students chose to apply for immigrant status because they consider it as a more economical way to continue their studies in Canada; moreover, they view Canada as a good place to live.

To sum up, visa policy is an important factor that influences Chinese students' choices of study destination. In this study, Chinese Students chose Canada over other countries because it had a more favorable visa policy at the time. The Canadian immigration policy was not a key concern for Chinese students.

Life Investment

Some scholars find that students regard studying abroad as an investment for their future career; they believe that their overseas experience could lead to positive employment outcomes (Barnick, 2006; Bates, 1997; Posey, 2003; Thot, 1998). This study shows that career prospects motivated Mainland Chinese students to study in Canada. The participants asserted that an overseas educational background would make them

more competitive in the job market.

As discussed in chapter two, the industrialization of Higher Education in China pushes many Chinese students to study abroad. The industrialization of Higher Education in China has led to a high unemployment rate of university graduates. As Hong said, “If you do not graduate from a top-ranked university, you cannot find a good job in China.” Many participants decided to study abroad because they could not get admitted to a top-ranked university. Furthermore, they recognized that spending four years at an average university was “a waste of time and money”.

Chinese students perceive overseas qualifications as an asset when competing in the job market. According to the participants, some international corporations even only hire people who graduated from Western universities. In China, people use the word “海归” to name Chinese students who finished their higher education in Western countries and then returned to China. Although all participants thought the costs of studying abroad were high, they considered it as “a worthwhile investment” both for themselves and their families.

When Chinese students select their majors, they view future income as an important element. Several participants in my study applied for accounting programs because they thought that they could find a well paid job after their studies. As Yang said, “This major ensures a stable and well-paid career”. Yu transferred to accounting program after she studied in Canada for a while because she perceived that she could easily find a job either

in Canada or China. Chinese students enrolled in accounting programs believed that their qualifications from Canadian institutions make them more competitive.

The study demonstrates that the participants have a positive attitude towards their studies in Canada. The participants developed language skills, communication skills, intercultural learning skills and worldviews throughout their studies in Canada. For example, Yang and Wang stated that they learned about different cultures and skills to work in a multicultural environment. Throughout the interviews, the participants repeatedly emphasized that Western education focuses on combining theory and practice, and this helps students gain field experiences. As Wang said, “Canadian institutions bring “hands-on work” into the classroom and offer opportunities like internships to students. All these really help students get ready for the job market.”

As discussed above, the participants believed that they could benefit from their overseas educational experiences, and they viewed career prospects as an important criterion when choosing their study destination and major.

Financial Issues

When examining the phenomena of studying abroad, many researchers regard study abroad costs such as tuition fees, living expenses and financial assistance as the decisive factor that influences students’ decision on choosing the higher education institution or destination (Altbach, 1998; Chapman, 1984; Goel, Jong & Schnusenberg, 2001; Hamrick,

2007). However, this study shows that all participants compared the costs of studying in Canada to other countries and found that the costs were lower than in some countries, such as the United States and some European countries. They did not perceive the costs as a crucial factor which affected their decisions.

This study shows that studying abroad costs are no longer a key factor influencing Mainland Chinese students' decisions. For Chinese students and their families, studying abroad is costly. According to the participants, whether they chose the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia or Canada, their annual costs would be around 20,000 CAD. Some participants compared the costs in different countries and stated that they thought the studying and living costs in Canada were lower than in the United States and some European countries. All participants stated that their families could afford their study abroad costs. With the rapid economic development in China, families' financial ability has increased significantly, and many families can afford sending their children to study abroad (White, 2011). If Chinese families perceive an education as the best choice, their decisions will not be affected by costs. For example, several participants explained that although the tuition fees and living expenses of studying in Canada were lower than in the United States, their families still preferred to send them to the United States if they could obtain an American visa.

Chinese families' financial ability has improved significantly in recent years. Self-financed students have become the majority of Chinese international students. According

to People's Daily (2009), in 2008, 90 percent of the 179,800 Chinese international students were financed by their families. Most Chinese families only need to support one child because of the one child policy. With China's economic development, more and more Chinese middle-class families are advancing economically and can afford the costs of studying abroad. Chinese families may invest most of their savings in their children's education (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002). Several participants mentioned after their parents decided to send them abroad, they drew up a budget and prepared enough money to cover their children's tuitions and living expenses for several years. In this study, all participants got full financial support from their families. Although some participants got a part-time job in Canada, they did not stop receiving money from their parents.

To sum up, this study shows that financial constraint was not a key factor that influenced the participants' decision to study in Canada.

Life Experience

There is one interesting finding that emerged from the participants' stories. A deep desire to know about the Western culture was a motivating factor for Chinese students to study abroad.

This study confirms Ottinger's (2009) finding that Chinese students long for a deep understanding of Western culture throughout their overseas studies. All participants wished to experience Western culture in an English-speaking country, and Canada meets

their requirement. In the Chinese educational system, English is a mandatory subject for all students. Chinese students begin to learn English in primary school and continue in their academic studies. English is a mandatory subject in the National Higher Education Entrance Examination, and many Chinese students have a strong interest in English and Western culture. Several participants stated that their passion for English and Western culture drove them to study in Canada.

All participants experienced “culture shock” after they arrived in Canada. Some participants mentioned that they had assumptions about Western culture before coming to Canada, and they had a chance to re-examine their views during their stay in Canada. For example, several students thought that life in Canada was not as vibrant as they had expected. Also, language was a key obstacle for Chinese students when trying to adapt to the local culture. The participants emphasized the importance of improving English before coming to Canada. The study shows that Chinese students who had clear goals and objectives before their departure adapted faster to their studies after they had arrived in Canada.

Furthermore, Chinese students develop self-awareness throughout their studies in Canada. Through interactions with people from different cultural backgrounds, the participants developed a sense of identity. Yang felt that Chinese international students were viewed as a group instead of as individuals. For example, Yang’s Canadian classmates thought that all Chinese girls are shy and serious. Yang helped her classmates

understand that, as Canadian girls, Chinese girls have diverse personalities. As Mu said, “When I am here, I realize that I am Chinese.” After living in Canada, she realized her Chinese identity and felt proud of her cultural background.

This study shows that studying abroad experiences have important impacts on Chinese students’ personalities. All participants revealed that they grew up into independent individuals by living in Canada. Yu, Yang, Mu, Wang explained that they had to deal with their studies and lives all by themselves; consequently, they developed problem-solving skills. They learned to manage their time, make their budget, cook, and even date. Most participants claimed that they needed full financial support from their parents, but they obtained more freedom when there was no parental supervision. This finding corresponds with Sanchez, Fornerino and Zhang’s (2006) research that Chinese students “search for liberty/pleasure” through their overseas lives.

Summary

This study illustrates three main factors that influenced the participants to choose Canada as their destination. First, the fierce competition for admission into top-ranked universities and the lack of opportunity to get a high-quality education in China motivated them to choose studying abroad as an alternative. Second, the participants and their families believed that the high-quality of education in Western countries could bring a competitive advantage in their career. Finally, parental involvement appeared as a key

factor affecting the participants' decision-making processes.

This study also demonstrates that parents and study abroad agencies were two main factors that influenced the participants' choice of Canada.

The Canadian visa policy was an important factor that attracted the participants to apply to Canadian institutions over other countries. The Canadian immigration policy was not a key concern for these students.

There are other various findings. Because of increasing family financial ability, costs were not a limiting factor when the participants were considering their study destination. The strong desire for learning and experiencing Western culture motivated them to study in Canada. These Mainland Chinese students have a positive attitude towards their stay in Canada and regarded self-development as a significant outcome.

CHAPTER 7: RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study is to explore the factors that influence Mainland Chinese students' decision to choose Canada as their study destination. Due to the limitation of time, scope and space, this study cannot reflect all issues related to the topic; however, the participants' experiences provide information which could help Canadian institutions understand Chinese students and their families' perceptions and motivations. This study offers Canadian institutions a unique angle to examine their recruitment strategies. Here are some recommendations for practice.

Information Support

This study calls for information support for Chinese students who desire to study in Canada. Chinese students and their parents felt that it is difficult to get accurate and updated information. First, most Chinese parents cannot read in English. Second, they don't know where to look for information such as Canadian universities' admission requirements and application procedures, and Canadian visa application information. Furthermore, some Chinese students know some information resources, but they cannot use them effectively because of the language barrier. This study illustrates that Chinese students' choice of their study destination is highly influenced by the information they get. For example, several participants relied on their study abroad agencies because they

believed that these agencies could provide accurate information. However, some agencies provided misleading information to their clients. If these Chinese students had access to more detailed information, they could have made a better choice when selecting their institutions and majors. For Canadian institutions, it is necessary and valuable to provide informational support because this could improve institutions' reputations and attract more Chinese students. Furthermore, Chinese students could benefit from this support and acquire clear ideas about different schools and programs. There are several ways to implement this information support.

On-line information in Chinese

Chinese families believe in the accuracy of official websites, so Canadian institutions could upload Chinese pages on their official websites to introduce academic programs, admission requirements and application procedures. Furthermore, some subpages could be used to show Chinese international students' campus lives. An online chat room could be set up to provide a platform for perspective Chinese students to consult information from current students. These pages could help Chinese students who desire to study in Canada learn about Canadian campus life and make them feel welcomed.

There is another alternative. Canadian institutions could cooperate to set up a joint website to present information about them and answer students' questions. This website could be presented both in English and Chinese. Such a website could help Chinese

students find all kinds of information easily. Moreover, Chinese students could compare different schools to make a better choice. This joint website could be implemented in several ways. Canadian institutions could authorize a third party to operate by charging membership fees. The website could also be funded by the Canadian government.

In conclusion, if Canadian institutions consider Chinese students' needs and provide information support effectively, they could attract more Chinese students.

China Office & Representatives

Opening a China office is a useful strategy for Canadian institutions to recruit more Chinese students. Some Canadian institutions have opened their offices in China. For example, Queen's University and Wilfred Laurier University have offices in China. The Lester B. Pearson School Board has also set up a Beijing office. There are several advantages of setting up offices in China. First, Canadian institutions could gather and analyze information on the international education market, local policies and Chinese students' needs. Consequently, these Canadian institutions could adjust their recruitment strategies to compete with international education providers from other countries. Second, having representatives in China is an efficient way to recruit qualified Chinese students because representatives could issue an acceptance to a qualified student after a face-to-face interview. In this study, Huang got his conditional acceptance after meeting a representative from Concordia University in China. Furthermore, China offices could

help Canadian institutions cooperate with Chinese parties involved in the international education market, such as Chinese institutions, study abroad agencies and the Chinese government.

Attending education fairs in China is another way to improve Canadian institutions' reputation and recruit Chinese students. International education fairs are highly recognized by Chinese families because they believe in the authority of representatives from overseas schools. If Canadian schools present themselves in different Chinese education fairs regularly, they could become well-known in a short time. This gives them a competitive advantage in recruiting Chinese students.

Co-op Programs

Developing international cooperation programs with Chinese universities could be an economical and efficient way for Canadian institutions to expand their influence and recruit more top-ranked students. Chinese students who want to enroll in international co-op programs usually have a strong desire to study abroad. Furthermore, these students have to meet language requirements and maintain good academic performances in order to become qualified to study in Canada. This ensures that Canadian institutions get high-quality students. The students who have the chance to study in Canada could function as messengers because they could share their experiences with their friends or relatives. As a result, more Chinese students could know about the Canadian institution that implements

the co-op program.

Chinese students could also benefit from international co-op programs. In this study, Guo was accepted by a co-op program offered by Dalhousie University and SFU. When Guo studied in China, she had the chance to take courses given by Canadian professors. This laid a good foundation for Guo's later studies in Canada. Guo improved her English and learned about Canadian teaching style before she came to Canada. As a result, Guo had a smooth transition when she began her studies at Dalhousie University. Moreover, Guo developed clear objectives for her studies in Canada.

Pre-departure Training

In this study, all participants emphasized the importance of learning English well before coming to Canada because their English skills greatly affected their studies. Chinese students who want to study abroad need to fulfill language requirements such as taking the IELTS or TOEFL. In China, many training companies provide English classes for preparing for these two tests, but most courses are test-oriented. Consequently, when Chinese students begin their studies in Canada, they often find that even though they got a good mark on the English test, they still have trouble with their studies. On the other hand, some students who do not fulfill the English requirements need to spend a long time in their ESL courses, which makes them feel frustrated. Seeing this problem, Canadian institutions could put ESL courses in place for Chinese students before their

departure.

There are several ways to offer ESL courses to Chinese students. First, Canadian universities could open on-line programs for Chinese students. Second, Canadian universities could cooperate with Chinese universities or high-quality English training agencies to launch ESL classes. These courses would help Chinese students improve their English skills and learn about the Canadian education style. Furthermore, these courses could enhance some students' desire to study in Canada because they experience a different teaching environment when they are still in China.

Life Skills Support

When thinking about sending their children to study abroad, Chinese parents have a concern that their children cannot live on their own in Western countries. Many Chinese students also lack basic problem-solving skills in their daily lives. When Canadian institutions target the Chinese market, they should pay attention to these aspects. Canadian institutions could upload information on their websites to help Chinese families learn about Canadian campus life and international student services. Institutions could provide an on-line guidebook, which is written in English and Chinese, to help students develop life skills before their departure. When presenting at international education fairs in China, besides introducing academic programs, Canadian institutions could distribute brochures to their audience to introduce campus life. Canadian institutions could also set

up information sessions for parents to answer their questions. This study shows that Chinese parents participate actively in their children's decision-making processes; thus, an institution that would provide support to Chinese parents would stand out among the others.

Future Research

In this study, some relevant topics were presented; however, this study is a small-scale inquiry, and it could not explore these issues deeply. Here are some suggestions for future research.

This study shows that the participants' ideas were influenced by their friends or classmates. Peer influence came up in the narratives, but has not been deeply explored. This could be examined in future research.

One participant's experiences shows that international cooperation programs can motivate Chinese students to study in Canada. The growing cooperation between Chinese and Canadian institutions enables Canadian institutions to recruit more Chinese students. In future research, we could explore this phenomenon in more details.

Chinese parents play an important role in their children's decision-making processes. Unfortunately, I could not set up interviews and communicate with such parents to understand their opinions. Future research could regard Chinese parents as participants to explore their role in their children's decision-making processes.

In addition, the role of study abroad agencies needs to be explored in future research. In this study, the participants' choices were heavily influenced by their agencies. What is the function of a study abroad agency? What is the relationship between a representative and his or her student clients? These questions need be answered in future research.

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN AN ANALYSIS OF MAINLAND CHINESE STUDENTS' DECISION TO CHOOSE CANADA AS THEIR STUDY DESTINATION

This is to state that I agree to participate in a program of research being conducted by Rui Ji of the Department of Education of Concordia University.

PURPOSE

I have been informed that the purpose of the research is to explore the factors that influence mainland Chinese students' decision to choose Canada as their study destination.

PROCEDURES

The research will be conducted through interview and the interview conversation will be recorded. The interview should last about one hour and will be conducted in person. I understand that fictitious initials will be used for me and anyone I name.

RISKS

I understand that there are no hidden motives or risks in this study.

CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at anytime without negative consequences.

I understand that my participation in this study is confidential.

I understand that the data from this study may be published.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

NAME (please print)

SIGNATURE

If at any time you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Adela Reid, Research Ethics and Compliance Officer, Concordia University, at (514) 848-2424 x7481 or by email at areid@alcor.concordia.ca.

APPENDIX B

Sample Interview Protocol

- Please give some information about yourself (sex, age, family condition, where you come from, and so on).
- Please describe your previous educational experience in China.
- When did you have the idea to study abroad? Where did this idea originally come from?
- What were the main reasons that you wanted to study in another country? Please choose the following reasons that apply to you and explain.
 - ✓ Low quality of education in China
 - ✓ Competition in China
 - ✓ Advantages in career preparation
 - ✓ Opportunity for future immigration
 - ✓ Understanding Western culture
 - ✓ Learning languages
 - ✓ Family's decision
 - ✓ Others
- Did your family, friends or a third party (such as a Study Abroad Agency) influence your decision?
- Have you ever considered about other countries? And why did you finally choose Canada?
- Please describe your decision-making process to choose Canada as your study destination. How long did it take for you to make the final decision, and how did you go through this process?
- What were the criteria that made you choose your study institution? Please choose the following criteria that apply to you and explain.

- ✓ Low tuition fees and the cost of living
 - ✓ Scholarship
 - ✓ High-quality of education
 - ✓ Opportunity for immigration after graduation
 - ✓ Job opportunity after graduation
 - ✓ New policies
 - ✓ Others
- Have you and your family members ever had any living or studying experience abroad before coming to Canada?
 - What did you and your family expect from studying in Canada?
 - If you came from a co-op program between Chinese and Canadian universities, please describe the program and give some details.
 - How did you collect all needed information?
 - Please describe the preparation process (taking language tests, applying for school and visa, ordering tickets). How do you evaluate the preparation process?
 - Did you do the application by yourself or through an agency? If you used a study abroad agency, how much did you pay? What do you think about the cost?
 - Before you came to Canada, did you know this country and your institution?
 - Have you experienced culture shock and other difficulties at the beginning of your studies?
 - Please describe your studies in Canada. What did/do you study?
 - In your opinion, what are the main differences between Western education and Chinese education?
 - How do you evaluate your studies and life in Canada? Does it meet your expectations?

- How much were your tuition fees and living expenses? What were your financial sources (parents' support, scholarships, and so on)?
- Does studying abroad affect your personal life and personality?
- During your studies, how did you share information about your studies and life in Canada with your family and friends?
- Would you do the same choice if you had the opportunity to start over?
- Do you have any recommendations for Chinese students who are considering studying abroad?
- In your opinion, how can different stakeholders, such as Chinese study abroad agencies, Canadian institutions, Canada embassy and so on, improve their services?

APPENDIX C

Application Kit for a Study Permit



Government of Canada
Embassy of Canada

Gouvernement du Canada
Ambassade du Canada

Visa Section
19 Dongzhimenwai Dajie
Chaoyang District
Beijing, PRC 100600

加拿大使馆移民处
朝阳区东直门外大街 19 号
中国·北京 100600

Application Kit for a Study Permit Canadian Embassy, Beijing

Please read this kit carefully before submitting your application. The documentation you provide with your application is necessary to establish that your entry to Canada would not be contrary to the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*. Failure to provide complete, truthful, and accurate materials may result in your application being refused.

All Study Permit applications will be assessed based on the documents you submit. Please ensure that you submit all relevant documents as outlined in this application kit.

All documents must be submitted at the same time as your application and processing fee. Only documents in English or French will be accepted. All documents in Chinese must be accompanied by an English or French translation.

Application kits are free of charge and can be downloaded from the internet address: www.beijing.gc.ca

Warning: Providing fraudulent documentation or false information is a grave offence. If you or someone acting on your behalf directly or indirectly misrepresents facts relating to your application for a Study Permit:

- your application will be refused;
- the circumstances of your refusal will be entered into Canada's global immigration database; and
- you could become inadmissible to Canada for two (2) years under section 40 (2) of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*.

1. Requirements for a Canadian Study Permit

You must show the officer that you meet the requirements of the Canadian *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* and *Regulations* and that you will be in Canada for a temporary stay. You must also:

- satisfy an officer that you will leave Canada at the end of your period of authorized stay;
- have been accepted by an educational institution and hold a valid letter of acceptance;
- prove that you have enough money to support your stay in Canada;
- produce any documents requested by the officer to establish your admissibility; and,
- complete a medical examination

A study permit is not required if the course or study program has a duration of six months or less.

2. Agents and Representatives

If you do not wish to prepare and submit your application yourself, you may retain the assistance of an individual who provides such services for free (family members, friends, non-governmental and religious organizations, etc.), or you may decide to hire an authorized representative. An authorized representative must be either an immigration consultant who is a member of the Canadian Society of Immigration Consultants; a lawyer who is a member of a Canadian law society; or a notary who is a member of the *Chambre des notaires du Québec*. All applications are treated equally regardless of who prepares and submits them. Please remember that only you, as the applicant, are responsible for all information submitted. Please be sure to review all the information on your application form and ensure that all questions are answered truthfully before signing and dating the forms.

If you are authorizing the release of your file information to another person this person must be identified on the Use of Representative form (IMM 5476E). Please note that all persons who assist in the preparation of applications must be identified on this form.

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3. Financial Support

You must prove that you have enough money during your stay in Canada to pay for tuition fees, return transportation for yourself and accompanying family members and living expenses for yourself and accompanying family members. According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada guidelines, you will require approximately \$10,000 CAD per year, not including tuition fees, to cover your living expenses.

In order to establish financial ability to support your studies, family banking records must be submitted for funds that show a history of at least twelve (12) months. In order to demonstrate this, we require the following:

- original Certificates of Deposit dated within the last two (2) months showing current funds available; and
- original deposit slips and/or original bank passbooks;
- a written explanation as to the source of funds.

Documents pertaining to other types of assets such as stock market accounts, business transactions and real estate transactions may be included, although these should not be used to replace the documents requested above. If you have been awarded a scholarship, please provide related original documentation, including an original letter from the funding body detailing the full amount you are to receive during each year of proposed study.

4. Study Plan

You must attach a study plan to the application, written by you. It will normally be 1 page in length. It should address the following issues:

- Why you wish to come to Canada to study at the school and in the program for which you have been accepted;
- Your overall educational goal; and
- How this Canadian diploma/degree will increase your employment chances.

5. Studying in Québec

If you plan to study in the province of Québec, you **must** submit a *Certificat d'acceptation du Québec* (CAQ) along with your application. The school that has accepted you should provide you with an application form and all necessary information.

6. Steps in applying for a Study Permit

Step 1: Take the Medical Examination

You may take the Medical Examination **before** submitting your Study Permit application by visiting one of the Designated Medical Practitioners for China and Mongolia listed on this website: www.cic.gc.ca/dmp-md/medical.aspx

When visiting the Designated Medical Practitioner, you must bring the following documents:

- 4 passport pictures;
- your original passport; and
- a photocopy of your passport biodata page.

After the completion of your Medical Examination, the Designated Medical Practitioner will provide you with one copy of your medical examination form. This form must be submitted together with your Study Permit application. Submission of this form does not guarantee approval of your application. Do not make commitments until your Study Permit application has been approved. All costs for medical exams are payable by the applicant and are non-refundable.

Important: It is NOT mandatory to complete a medical examination prior to submission of your Study Permit application. However, doing so will result in faster processing. Once you have submitted your application, you may not complete a medical examination until requested by the Visa Office to do so.

Step 2: Gather the Required Supporting Documents

This kit contains an application, other forms which must be completed and a Document Checklist. This Document Checklist will assist you in determining which forms and documents must be submitted, and which special requirements may apply.

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Step 3: Submit your Application

To submit your application, please visit one of the following Visa Application Centres operating in China.

Beijing: 7th floor, West Area, Grand Rock Plaza, No.13 Xinzhong Xili Dongcheng District, Beijing 100027

Shanghai: 2nd floor, Guangdong Development Bank Building, No.555 Xujiahui Road, Shanghai 200023

Guangzhou: 3rd Floor, Cheng Jian Mansion, 189 Ti Yu Road West, Tianhe District, Guangzhou 510620

Chongqing: 3U-6, J.W. Marriott International Trade Centre, 77 Qingnian Road, Yuzhong Dist., Chongqing, 400010

The Visa Application Centres are open from Monday to Friday (excluding Embassy holidays), from 8am to 3pm. A **fee** will be charged for the use of the Visa Application Centre. Further details are available at www.vfs-canada.com.cn.

You may also submit your application **by mail** to the Visa Section of the Canadian Embassy, 19 Dongzhimerwai Dajie, Chaoyang District, Beijing, PRC 100600. The processing fee must be submitted in the acceptable format (refer to the Fee Schedule).

7. When Should I Apply?

To avoid disappointment, you should submit your application at least three (3) months before the first day of classes.

Document Checklist

If any of the required documents are missing, your application form may be returned to you.

REQUIRED DOCUMENTS	✓
All documents in Chinese must be accompanied by an English or French translation	
Completed "Application for a Study Permit" (IMM 1294). If your spouse or common-law partner and/or children are planning to accompany you, they will need to complete their own application using the appropriate application form.	
Completed "Family Composition Information and Details of Education and Employment" form for the applicant, completed in English or French AND Chinese.	
Completed "Family Composition Information and Details of Education and Employment" form for the applicant's mother and father , completed in English or French AND Chinese.	
Two (2) photos. All photos must meet the requirements of the Photo Specifications Appendix. On the back of one photo in each set, write the name and date of birth of the person appearing in the photo.	
Your valid passport. There must be one completely blank page other than the last page, available in the passport and the passport must be valid for at least six (6) months prior to travel.	
Two (2) self-addressed adhesive labels with your current address in Chinese characters (no envelope).	
The correct processing fee in the acceptable format (refer to the Fee Schedule). Fee is non-refundable.	
A copy of the medical examination form given to you by the Designated Medical Practitioner (If a medical examination has been completed).	
A copy of the Letter of Acceptance from the Admissions/Registrar's Office of a Canadian school, showing the exact amount of tuition fees you are required to pay, the anticipated starting and finishing dates, the latest date you may register.	
A Study Plan as described in the kit above	
The "Use of representative" form (IMM 5476B) if someone has assisted you in making this application	

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Custodianship Declaration from your parent(s) and from the custodian in Canada if you are under 18 years of age (for schools in Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, Québec and Saskatchewan) or under 19 years of age (for schools in British Columbia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, North West Territories, Nunavut and the Yukon). The Custodianship Declaration can be obtained at www.cic.gc.ca/english/pdf/pub/custodian-parent.pdf	
If studying in Québec, evidence of a valid <i>Certificat d'acceptation du Québec (CAQ)</i> .	
Your original household registration (<i>hukou</i>).	
A notarized copy of any University or College Diploma granted, plus transcripts for any program for which you are currently enrolled. If you have not yet graduated, please indicate your expected date of graduation and whether you will receive a degree, diploma or certificate.	
A notarized copy of your Senior Middle School Graduation Certificate and Transcripts with the chop of your school's Registrar's Office.	
A notarized copy of your No Criminal Activity Certificate. You must obtain a police certificate from each country or territory where you have lived for six consecutive months or longer since reaching the age of 18.	
PROOF OF FUNDS All documents in Chinese must be accompanied by an English or French translation	✓
Evidence of accumulated funds that show a history of at least twelve (12) months . In order to demonstrate this, we require all of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • original Certificates of Deposit, dated within the last two (2) months showing current funds available; • original deposit slips and/or original bank passbooks; and • a written explanation as to the source of funds. Documents pertaining to other types of assets such as stock market accounts, business transactions and real estate transactions may be included, although these should not be used to replace the documents requested above. If no clear documentary evidence is available, applicant may provide a written explanation.	
Evidence of your parents' income/employment. In order to demonstrate this, we require the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Original letters of employment from the current employer of each parent including: full name, address and telephone number of the parent's employer; parent's length of service, position, salary for the last two years, any bonuses and additional income. If you are being supported by a person other than your parents, the same information is required for them; and/or • Original of each parent's Income Tax Receipts issued by the local Tax Bureau for the past twelve (12) months indicating the amount of income tax paid under the individual's name. 	
If either or both of your parents own a business or part of a business, submit: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A notarized copy of the business registration • Recent tax receipts • Audited financial statements and capital verification reports for the most recent fiscal year. 	
If you are employed, submit: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Original letter of employment including: full name, address and telephone number of the employer; length of service, position, salary for the last two years, any bonuses and additional income. 	
If you are receiving any funding from a school in Canada or other organisation; submit: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Original letter containing details of the funding you are to receive during each year of your proposed course of study. 	

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Family Composition and Details of Education/Employment
家属表及教育和就业细节表

APPLICANT

Please complete all items in both English or French AND Chinese characters
所有内容请用中文及英文，或中文及法文填写

RELATIONSHIP 关系	NAME 姓名	DATE & PLACE OF BIRTH 出生日期及地点	PRESENT ADDRESS 现行地址	PRESENT OCCUPATION 现行职业
Visa Applicant 签证申请人		DD MM YYYY		
Spouse 申请人配偶		DD MM YYYY		
Mother 申请人之母亲		DD MM YYYY		
Father 申请人之父亲		DD MM YYYY		

Children: (Including all sons and daughters plus adopted and step children regardless of age or place of residence)
申请人之子女 (包括所有子女及收养、继养之子女，无论年龄大小或居住地在何处均须填写)

NAME 姓名	RELATION & SEX 关系及性别	MARITAL STATUS 婚姻状况	DATE & PLACE OF BIRTH 出生日期及地点 DD / MM / YYYY	PRESENT ADDRESS 现行地址	PRESENT OCCUPATION 现行职业

Brothers and Sisters: (Including half and step brothers and sisters)
申请人之兄弟姊妹 (包括同父异母及同母异父之兄弟姊妹)

NAME 姓名	RELATION & SEX 关系及性别	MARITAL STATUS 婚姻状况	DATE OF BIRTH 出生日期 DD / MM / YYYY	PRESENT ADDRESS 现行地址	PRESENT OCCUPATION 现行职业

APPLICANT

Please complete all items in both English or French AND Chinese characters
 所有内容请用中文及英文，或中文及法文填写

DATE 日期		NAME & ADDRESS OF SCHOOL 学校的名称及地址	DIPLOMA/ DEGREE 学历/学位	TYPE OF COURSE 课程类别
FROM 从	TO 到			

FROM 从	TO 到	NAME & ADDRESS OF WORK UNIT/COMPANY 单位/公司的名称及地址	POSITION 职位	TYPE OF BUSINESS 业务类别

Is this your first time travelling outside of China? If no, please provide a summary of your travel history for the past five years including countries travelled to and dates of travel.
 此次是否是你的第一次出境旅行？若不是，请提供过去五年中所有出境旅行概况、包括目的地国家及旅行起始日期。

If you are a member of a business delegation, can you confirm the identity and stated profession of those travelling with you? If no, please provide an explanation:
 如果你是某商务团组之成员，你是否能确认与你同行人士的身份及职业？若不能，请提供解释：

I hereby certify that all information listed on this form is true and complete. I understand that if this information is found to be untrue or incomplete my application will be refused.
 我谨声明，本表中所填各项内容均真实详尽。我明白：所列内容如被发现不实或不详，我的申请将被拒签。

Date (日期) **Print Name in Pinyin** (印刷体拼音姓名) **Signature of Applicant in Chinese** (申请人签字)



Family Composition and Details of Education/Employment
家属表及教育和就业细节表

FATHER

Please complete all items in both English or French AND Chinese characters
所有内容请用中文及英文，或中文及法文填写

DATE 日期		NAME & ADDRESS OF SCHOOL 学校的名称及地址	DIPLOMA/ DEGREE 学历 / 学位	TYPE OF COURSE 课程类别
FROM 从	TO 到			

FROM 从	TO 到	NAME & ADDRESS OF WORK UNIT/COMPANY 单位/公司的名称及地址	POSITION 职位	TYPE OF BUSINESS 业务类别

Brothers and Sisters: (Including half and step brothers and sisters)
申请人父亲之兄弟姐妹(包括同父异母及同母异父之兄弟姐妹)

NAME 姓名	RELATION & SEX 关系及性别	MARITAL STATUS 婚姻状况	DATE OF BIRTH 出生日期 DD / MM / YYYY	PRESENT ADDRESS 现行地址	PRESENT OCCUPATION 现行职业

Date (日期)

Signature of Applicant's Father (父亲签字)

MOTHER

Please complete all items in both English or French AND Chinese characters
 所有内容请用中文及英文，或中文及法文填写

DATE 日期		NAME & ADDRESS OF SCHOOL 学校的名称及地址	DIPLOMA/ DEGREE 学历 / 学位	TYPE OF COURSE 课程类别
FROM 从	TO 到			

FROM 从	TO 到	NAME & ADDRESS OF WORK UNIT/COMPANY 单位/公司的名称及地址	POSITION 职位	TYPE OF BUSINESS 业务类别

Brothers and Sisters: (Including half and step brothers and sisters)
 申请人母亲之兄弟姐妹(包括同父异母及同母异父之兄弟姐妹)

NAME 姓名	RELATION & SEX 关系及性别	MARITAL STATUS 婚姻状况	DATE OF BIRTH 出生日期 DD / MM / YYYY	PRESENT ADDRESS 现行地址	PRESENT OCCUPATION 现行职业

 Date (日期)

 Signature of Applicant's Mother (母亲签字)

Photograph Specifications

TAKE THIS WITH YOU TO THE PHOTOGRAPHER
See Chinese version below

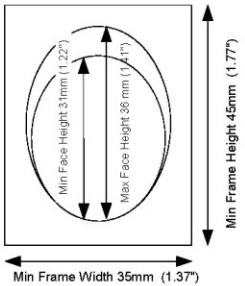
Requirements:

You must provide two (2) photos with your application. It is imperative that your photos be compliant with the following specifications otherwise they will be rejected. You will be required to provide new photos before your application can be processed.

To avoid delays, please ensure that the photos provided with your application meet these requirements.

Photograph specifications:

- Two (2) identical photos, black and white or colour, taken within the last 6 months.
- Must be clear and well defined, taken against a plain white or light coloured background. Digital photos must not be altered in any way.
- The face must be square to the camera with a neutral expression, neither frowning nor smiling, with the mouth closed.
- Tinted prescription glasses may be worn as long as the eyes are clearly visible and the frame is not covering any part of the eyes. Sunglasses are not acceptable.
- False hairpieces or other cosmetic devices are acceptable if they do not disguise the natural appearance of the bearer.
- Photos in which the applicant is wearing a hat or head covering worn for religious reasons are acceptable if the full facial features are not obscured.

Photo and Head Size Specification	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The frame size must be 35mm X 45mm (1.37" X 1.77"). • Must show the full front view of the head, with the face in the middle of the photo and include the top of the shoulders. • Size of the head, chin to crown*, must be between 31mm (1.22") and 36mm (1.41") <p>* Crown: top of the head, or (if obscured by hair or headwear), where the top of the head/skull would be if it could be seen.</p>

Photos which do not meet these specifications will not be accepted.

APPENDIX D

Statistics: Chinese Students Study Abroad (1978-2008)

Year	Number of Students Who Study Abroad
1978	860
1980	2124
1985	4888
1986	4676
1987	4703
1988	3786
1989	3329
1990	2950
1991	2900
1992	6540
1993	10742
1994	19071
1995	20381
1996	20905
1997	22410
1998	17622
1999	23749
2000	38989
2001	83973
2002	125179
2003	117307
2004	114682
2005	118515
2006	134000
2007	144000
2008	179800
2009	229300

Note. From China Statistical Yearbook 2010, National Bureau of Statistics of China