

North American International Students in China: Language Learning and Identity Negotiation

by

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### **Abstract**

In this study, I critically investigate the language learning experiences of North American Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) international students in China, specifically those related to their investment and identity negotiation in Chinese social networks. Adopting the theoretical core and tools of critical hermeneutics, I focus on the power dynamics that CFL learners encountered in the multi-layered social context of a Northern Chinese city. The research findings show a big gap between participants' vague and idealized understandings of China as imagined communities and the complexity of their actual investment beset by isolation and discrimination. In the target universities and programs, many aspects of the teaching and administrative philosophies, policies and practices were disadvantageous to the social interactions between the participants and local peers. In local communities, certain identity categories of North American CFL learners, such as mother tongue (native English speakers), race and ethnicity, and gender, brought out overt and covert othering practices towards the participants and led to the ambivalence of social privileges and vulnerabilities. Facing differentiated treatments, the participants to different extents took their personal initiative and fought for equal and full social participation. However, without sufficient and sustainable social support, agentive acts are a feeble solution to fulfill their social needs in Chinese homogeneous and hierarchical society.

## Preface

This thesis is an original work by Li Mao. Some part of Chapter 5 of this thesis has been published as Mao, L. (2014). China as an imagined community and its construction in CFL classrooms. In *Proceedings of the 8th Canadian TCSL International Conference* (pp. 45-52). Vancouver, Canada: The Canadian TCSL Association. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “CFL International Students’ Language Learning Experiences in China”, No. Pro00039798, June 21, 2013.

### **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my parents Huizhen Wu and Qingchen Mao, and

my husband Chris Gallant.

Thank you for all your love and support.

### **Acknowledgements**

This dissertation cannot be finished without the people who have given me help. First, I would like to thank my co-supervisors Dr. Jerrold Kachur, Dr. Joe Wu and Dr. Donna Chovanec for their constant guidance, inspiration, and encouragement. I am very grateful to Dr. Jerrold Kachur who “adopted” me halfway of the PhD program after my previous co-supervisor Dr. Donna Chovanec passed away. His full support was a big source of confidence for me to go through the hardest times of this study. Besides, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Joe Wu who has always been behind me during the past seven years. His academic and emotional support was critical to the development of this research, particularly the cultivation of my critical thinking. Moreover, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to late Dr. Donna Chovanec who had been working on the feedback to my writing until the last month of her life. She was not only a mentor full of wisdom and passion but also a close friend embracing me to her family. Additionally, I would like to thank Dr. Olenka Bilash to serve on my supervisory committee with her valuable discussions and suggestions. I am also thankful to Dr. Xiaoting Li and Dr. Lorin Yochim for their time and effort as advisory committee. On top of that, special thanks go to all the participants, informants, and facilitators of this study. Finally, I am highly indebted and grateful to my parents and husband for their endless care and encouragement along the way. Their unconditional love is my biggest driving force.

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

With over 100 million Chinese<sup>1</sup> as a Foreign Language (CFL) speakers and learners worldwide in 2014 (Ostaszewski, 2016, September 9) and 442,773 foreign students in China<sup>2</sup> in 2016 (Ministry of Education of the P. R. China, 2017, March 1), both CFL learning and study abroad in China have reached a significant level and the anticipated major growth is still ahead. However, the sociocultural perspectives of studies on CFL international students' language learning experiences in China are rather limited (H. Du, 2015, p. 250; Duff et al., 2013, p. 12). My dissertation critically investigated North American CFL international students' language learning experiences in China, specifically those related to their investment and identity negotiation in Chinese social networks.

This study is framed by a sociocultural perspective on language learning, which employs the concepts of investment, identity negotiation, and social networks. Although these key concepts will be described fully in Chapter 2, it is important to define them here in order to understand the research focus presented above and the sections before that:

- Investment: In contrast to social-psychologists' focus on language learners' motivation and commitment, investment emphasizes their language learning through socialization in the target language speaking communities with an expectation of gaining wider linguistic, cultural and social capital.
- Identity: one's sense and understanding of oneself and one's relation to the world.

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<sup>1</sup> In this study, Chinese or Chinese language refers to Putonghua, which is often called Modern Standard Mandarin, Mandarin Chinese or Mandarin in everyday English. I will talk more about its evolution and definition in Chapter 4.

<sup>2</sup> In this study, China refers to the Mainland of the People's Republic of China (the P.R.C.).

- Identity negotiation: a process through which “one” and “the others” reach agreements of “who one is” in their social relationships and during their social interaction.
- Social network: a social structure among individuals, activities and the world, which are connected by one or more types of social relationships.

In this introductory chapter, I will first locate myself as a linguistic and cultural minority in Canada and talk about how it inspired me to investigate the language learning experiences of North American CFL international students in China. Then I will put forward the research purpose and question of this study. At last, I will discuss the theoretical, educational and sociocultural signification of this study and show the organization of the whole dissertation.

### **Locating myself as a linguistic and cultural minority in Canada**

According to the tenets of critical hermeneutic research, a researcher should first locate himself or herself historically and socioculturally in the research, which will help to situate the lens of further interpretation (Kinsella, 2006, para. 23). Therefore, in this section, I will introduce my social location in this research based upon my personal reflexivity as a linguistic and cultural minority in Canada. This will provide a basis for understanding why I am interested in this research project and how my cross-cultural experience in Canada had sharpened my eyes and enriched my thinking in conducting this study.

I was born in a Northern Chinese city as the only child in a nuclear family shortly

after the Chinese Economic Reform and Opening-Up.<sup>3</sup> Mandarin has been my mother tongue and the only Chinese dialect I can speak. Under the influence of the Cultural Revolution,<sup>4</sup> neither of my parents had higher education and foreign language learning experiences, but my family has been a *xiaokang zhi jia* (小康之家, middle class family in China) because of a small family business. I began to learn English as a Second Language (ESL)<sup>5</sup> at an early age and French as a Second Foreign Language in my early 20s.<sup>6</sup> I got both my bachelor and master's degrees in English Language and Literature in China, after which I taught English in a Chinese university for three years. Before I came to Canada for my current PhD program, I had neither much contact with English native speakers nor study or living experiences in English speaking countries.

Shortly after my arrival in Canada as an international student and ESL speaker, I realized that it was very frustrating as a newcomer and social outsider to appreciate the cultural values and to figure out the hidden social rules in Canada by myself. For example, I felt strongly of being pressured to think and act more like a “Canadian” and less a “Chinese” in the university classes, such as getting used to the informal teacher-student relationship and the local common sense of good students as active speakers. Besides, while discussing my

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<sup>3</sup> The Chinese Economic Reform and Opening-Up refers to “the program of economic reforms termed ‘Socialism with Chinese characteristics’ in the People's Republic of China (PRC)” since December 1978 by reformists within the Communist Party of China, led by Deng Xiaoping” (Chinese economic reform, 2017, May 1, para. 1).

<sup>4</sup> The Cultural Revolution, in full the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, refers to “the upheaval launched by Chinese Communist Party chairman Mao Zedong during his last decade in power (1966-76) to renew the spirit of the Chinese Revolution. Fearing that China would develop along the lines of the Soviet model and concerned about his own place in history, Mao threw China's cities into turmoil in a monumental effort to reverse the historic processes underway” (Lieberthal, 2009, para. 1).

<sup>5</sup> ESL has been a compulsory course for the majority of the students in Chinese elementary schools since late 1980s and early 1990s.

<sup>6</sup> French as a second foreign language was a compulsory course for my Bachelor and Masters programs in China.



application failures for research assistant positions, a program administrator explicitly pointed out that the Canadian job market, including Canadian universities, tended to interpret my cross-cultural background as the absence of North American experience, unfamiliarity with Western<sup>7</sup> academic culture and incompetent English speaker. With same frankness, she suggested that I should develop social capital through the professors who were willing to compromise my flaws with their interests in China. It made me feel like a low quality product on sale. Meanwhile, I was puzzled by the true meaning of Canadian multiculturalism that we often discussed in the class and program. Worse still, even though my Canadian roommates self-claimed as big fans of Chinese food, they asked me to change culturally inappropriate diet and living style:

Could you please do not cook this Chinese food (sea cucumber) when we are in the kitchen? It looks disgusting! ... Our (dorm) kitchen is not designed for your (Chinese) way of cooking (stirring frying).

I felt hurt by their harsh remarks and I wondered why these advocators of “Don’t judge me!” kept on judging me.

In addition, I noticed that the Canadian universities to certain degrees lacked the sympathy, understanding and support to the international students facing the linguistic, sociocultural, and academic challenges. To illustrate, the university assumed that I was linguistically ready for my academic life in Canada only based upon the scores of my English

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<sup>7</sup> In this study, the West, the Western world and the Occident refer to the area of or (culturally) relating to the countries of North America and Western Europe (Merriam-Webster, 2017).

proficiency tests<sup>8</sup>. My concerns about inadequate English learning supports thereby did not make much sense for some of the university administrators. An international student advisor even challenged me impatiently, “What else do you need? You are already in an English speaking country. You should try your best to learn English well.” After all my efforts and struggles to learn, I felt sad to be considered as a lazybones. Yet, based upon a research project<sup>9</sup> I co-investigated later on, his opinion was rather common among instructors and administrators on campus.

Just as importantly, the way that some ill-structured courses, extracurricular activities and student service programs neglected the informal language learning and cultural integration needs of international students. A good case in point was the insufficiency of logistic, cultural and psychological orientation of my compulsory service-learning program. This mismanaged social outreach opportunity turned out to be a social segregation experience, which made me shed tears in class (See Mao, Servage & Chovanec, 2016). Similarly, I experienced the social isolation on campus due to the passive student services and mainstream sociocultural activities.<sup>10</sup> Apart from my own stories, I also witnessed serious social barriers through other international students. For instance, when I was working as a resident assistant<sup>11</sup>, campus security once forwarded me a desperate phone call from a

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<sup>8</sup> Such as TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) and IELTS (International English Language Testing System).

<sup>9</sup> The research project was about the faculty perspectives on the internationalized classroom in Canada, during which I co-interviewed many instructors about their understandings of ESL international students in their classes.

<sup>10</sup> Activities that mainly catered for the Caucasian or Western students.

<sup>11</sup> A resident assistant (RA) is a trained peer leader in a residence hall, whose responsibilities include social programming, peer counselling, “being a familiar first resource for students with academic or institutional questions, and enforcing residence policies” (Resident assistant, 2017, April 29, paras. 1-2).

Chinese freshman in residence. Before that, she already tried many days to find someone to help her understand exam deferral policies, the readability of which was quite beyond her. “They (her instructors and home department administrators) forwarded me here and there. You are my last hope,” she cried. In my eyes, her English proficiency might be part of the problem but not the critical part of the problem.

Furthermore, what concerns me most as a newcomer in Canada was the difficulty of finding English speaking opportunities. As I wrote in my blog, “I need somebody to speak English with, or I even do not feel that I am in a foreign country. But with whom? It is so hard to speak English with local people for free.” This situation was also demonstrated in an auto-ethnographic study about my first two years of study abroad life in Canada (Mao, 2013). This study showed that my high motivation to get involved in English speaking social networks was not in good proportion to my actual participation. It was coupled with my disillusionment of cultural identification with local people. According to my daily language use logs,<sup>12</sup> I always had two or three days per week speaking no English at all and the majority of my extracurricular activities lasted no more than ten minutes. For many local students, the weekends were the golden social time, but for me, weekends meant more “silence,” since without classes, I had less chances and reasons to speak. I was even suggested by another foreigner student with same problem to use free cell phone customer services to get some English practice.

Last, my limited access to mainstream social networks went hand in hand with

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<sup>12</sup> Daily language use logs are a kind of qualitative survey tracking daily conversations. The design and function of daily language use logs will be fully discussed in Chapter 3.

alienated experience as a linguistic and racial minority. In many social sites, the English native or near native speakers formed small clusters and/or spoke in an extremely fast way, which excluded participation of outsiders like me. This was exactly the case at several Canadian academic conferences I attended. Many presenters tried to speak as fast as possible in order to convey a maximum of ideas; however, the faster they spoke, the less ESL audience could understand. Moreover, local people had little interest in maintaining a conversation with linguistic and visible minorities for time and effort saving purposes. Sometimes, this awkwardness was exacerbated by overt and covert prejudice and discrimination. For instance, my Canadian students always laughed at me due to my “Chinglish” accent and traditional way of thinking. Also working as a teaching assistant at a local LINC<sup>13</sup> program, I was always regarded as a student rather than a staff by the administrators and instructors. It seemed that the symbolic capital of the mainstream English speakers offered them a kind of superiority, which made them quite indifferent to the needs and feelings of ESL speakers. These situations did not change after I got my Canadian permanent resident status, since I still do not sound and look like the dominant majority.

All these experiences made me feel that I was, to a great extent, marginalized in English speaking Canadian social networks. I struggled to change myself linguistically, socially and culturally in order to fit into this society. I have somehow negotiated a new but frustrating understanding of myself through interaction and comparison with other interlocutors. My new experiences with sociocultural values and the socialization

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<sup>13</sup> Language Instruction for the New Comers to Canada.

opportunities as an English learner also helped me to develop a better understanding of language learning and use as socioculturally embedded practices.

A turning point in my ESL socialization and identity negotiation was teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) in Canada. During the instruction, I felt unprecedentedly proud of myself, since my mother tongue, home culture, and identity as a native Chinese speaker were valued by the local Chinese learners. These teaching experiences also became the inception of my doctoral research. Many CFL learners in my classes complained about their previous Chinese learning and study abroad life in China. Their experiences reminded me of my contact with international students in the Chinese university I worked for, who had frequently poured out their frustrations in their Chinese-speaking social practices and identity construction as linguistic minorities in China. Their stories also made more sense when I witnessed my husband's difficulties as a CFL foreigner traveling across my home country. Because of my own cross-cultural experiences, I could understand the challenges these CFL learners encountered in China and I began to be more curious about research related to these issues and experiences.

However, during my literature review on the sociocultural perspective of language learning, I found that, while research on language learning and identity negotiation of linguistic minorities in the English-speaking world is abundant, very little have been done on the experiences of CFL foreigners in China. This was quite out of line with the rise of China on the world stage and the worldwide popularity of Chinese language learning and studying abroad in China. Hence, my cross-cultural experiences in Canada, my curiosity and concern

about CFL learners' cross-cultural experiences in China, and my understanding of the sociocultural perspective of language learning and the identity approach to language acquisition stimulated me to conduct exploratory qualitative research on CFL learners' language learning, social network participation, and identity negotiation in China.

### **Purpose of the study**

In this research, I chose North American CFL international students (specifically those from the United States and Canada)<sup>14</sup> in Chinese universities as my research focus, who have been not only one of the key recruitment targets of Chinese universities but also a fast-growing group of CFL learners underrepresented in related literature. My key research question is: What are North American CFL international students' language learning experiences in China, specifically those related to their investment and identity negotiation in Chinese social networks?

My research objective and key research question are accomplished by addressing the following sub-questions:

1) What kind of investment experiences do North American CFL international students have in China?

2) How these investment experiences reflect the characteristics of the social environment in China (e.g., levels of inclusion and social support, multilingualism, ethnocentricity)?

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<sup>14</sup> In this study, North American international students refer to international students from the U.S. and/or Canada who are native English speakers or near native English speakers. Although there have been sociocultural differences in these two countries, I investigated North American CFL learners as a whole based upon the common classifications of the source regions of foreign students in China which was well reflected in the recruitment strategies of Chinese universities and in related Chinese academic publications.

3) As ethnolinguistic minorities in China, what kind of identity (re)negotiation do these international students experience during their investment in Chinese social networks?

4) What are the power relationships<sup>15</sup> in Chinese social networks related to CFL learners' investment and identity negotiation?

### **Significance of the study**

First, sociolinguists argued that “insight from non-Western communities (especially postcolonial sites) should inform the current efforts for alternate theory building” (Canagarajah, 2007, p. 935; Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 436). This research takes the Western-developed critical identity approach to language learning<sup>16</sup> to China and provides an opportunity to examine such theories in a different culture. It generates new insights into the social positioning of ethnolinguistic minorities in Chinese educational and social context, and benefits the field of foreign language learning in general.

Second, while the popularity of CFL learning and studying abroad in China is growing, there has been a lack of cross-cultural understanding and a lack of consideration of the linguistic and sociocultural needs of CFL international students among the CFL educators, program designers and policy makers, and educational institutions in China. Because my study investigates CFL students' language learning, social participation, and identity

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<sup>15</sup> In this study, I adopted Bourdieu's (1989) conception of symbolic power, which was based upon the possession of symbolic capitals such as “economic capital (in its different forms), cultural capital, social capital, and symbolic capital” (such as language) (p. 17). As he argued, “symbolic relations of power tend to reproduce and to reinforce the power relations that constitute the structure of social space,” including the imposed social classifications (such as gender, race, age, and social status) and the corresponding discriminatory actions and attitudes in a hierarchical society (p. 21). For the CFL learners, power relationships in Chinese social networks is highly related to their accessibility to language learning resources and opportunities and their identification as equal and full social networkers in China.

<sup>16</sup> I will table about the critical identity approach to language learning in Chapter 2.

negotiation in Chinese social networks, it can provide practical insights to the people and institutions working with the CFL international students. It includes to know more about the CFL international students' language learning and cross-cultural experiences in China, to understand their linguistic and sociocultural needs in Chinese social networks, and to think of possible ways to facilitate their investment and identity negotiation experiences in China.

Third, how CFL learners envision China and Chinese people as imagined communities play an important role in their actual investment and identity negotiation in Chinese social networks. This study shares North American CFL learners' perceptions of Chinese people and society before and after their study abroad life, which will help to broaden the sociocultural and ideological horizons of prospective CFL international students. It will also help CFL educators and programs in both China and CFL learners' home countries to better prepare them linguistically, socioculturally and psychologically for their language learning experiences in China.

Fourth, critical perspectives in social research including educational research are still new and controversial in China. However, critical social research is extremely significant to pursue "quality education," to explore both macro and micro social environments with reflexivity and to "forge alternative and less oppressive social arrangements" (Leonardo, 2004, p. 11). As a critical study of current Chinese educational and social environment, my work will promote new understandings of CFL learning, native and foreign Chinese speakers, and China as study abroad destination. In addition, the introduction of critical research methodology might also open up new ways of thinking in this field in China.



## **Organization of the dissertation**

The subsequent chapters begin with a literature review, followed by an introduction to the research methodology and historical context of this study. After that is an analysis of the research findings including North American CFL learners' investment and identity negotiation in China as imagined communities and the social networks in the target city. The dissertation concludes with a discussion on participants' social needs and the power relationships during the fulfillment of their social needs in China.

An overview of each chapter is as follows. In Chapter 2, I review the sociocultural-orientated foreign language learning research and the current literature on the study abroad experiences of North American CFL learners in China. This chapter not only demonstrates the key perspectives and concepts I adopted in this study, but also helps to understand the design and significance of the entire research project.

Chapter 3 introduces the methodology that guided all the stages of research inquiry, analysis, and reporting. First, I ground this study in the theoretical cores of critical hermeneutics. Then, I detail the research procedure in regards to target city and university selection, participant and informant recruitment, data collection, and data analysis. Furthermore, I discuss the credibility and trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and limitations and delimitations of this study.

Chapter 4 shows the historical background of China as a study abroad destination and CFL education in China. It focuses on the development of international and CFL education after the founding of P. R. China in 1949, particularly the Chinese Economic Reform and

Opening-Up since 1978. The review of related policies, reforms, initiatives and concerns provides a good foundation of the forthcoming discussion on the educational and ideo-political context in the target communities.

The analysis of research findings starts in Chapter 5 and continues to Chapter 8. In Chapter 5, I examine North American CFL students' investment in China as imagined communities. I find that all the participants had optimistic presumptions of the role of China and Chinese language in their future life and high expectations to their learning experiences in China. Besides, their choices of the target country, city and programs indicated strategic investment in potential academic, economic and sociocultural rewards. However, despite their great enthusiasm in Chinese culture and markets, the CFL students in this study had limited but idealized knowledge of their study abroad destination and challenges ahead. With a highlight on the gap between imagination and reality, this chapter helps to understand their unpreparedness, disillusionment and social re-identification after arriving in China.

The following three chapters, Chapters 6, 7 and 8, shift the focus from pre-departure beliefs to real-life social networking in the target social networks. In Chapter 6, I explore North American CFL learners' social interactions in the target universities and programs, which turned out to be rather limited in both quantity and quality. More specifically, I talk about the major social concerns in the aspects of orientation, classroom interactions, extracurricular activity design and implementation, accommodations as social spaces, and communication and social support channels. I further argue that certain teaching and administrative philosophies, policies and practices were unfavorable for the participants to

get access to equal and full investment opportunities, which resulted in their physical and social isolation on campus.

Chapter 7 and 8 investigate the multi-faceted identities of the participants and the impact of certain identity categories on their socialization in China. In Chapter 7, I pay more attention to the othering experiences applied to all the participants regarding their identities as native English speakers and as North Americans. I notice that English played an ambivalent role in participants' social engagement with local Chinese. As valuable symbolic capital, it endowed the participants with social privileges, but also brought them undesirable superiority and nonreciprocal language exchange relationships. Besides, I discuss the othering practices towards North American minorities in general. With distinct physical characteristics, the participants draw excessive attention, curiosity, and identity labelling in the target communities. Meanwhile, they frequently encountered doubtful, unsupportive and overly positive feedback towards their ownership of Chinese. Local stereotyping assumptions towards North Americans further located them in unfair positions during daily interactions.

In Chapter 8, I emphasize differentiated treatments towards various groups of North American CFL learners regarding their skin colors and gender. First, I point out the racial and social hierarchy among Caucasian, ethnic Chinese, and dark-skinned participants. Caucasians enjoyed high social popularity in the target city, although their favorable appearance to some degree hindered their identification with local people. Non-Caucasian participants faced constant challenges to their nationality and English proficiency. The ethnic Chinese also struggled to live like strangers at home. Worse still, dark-skinned participants suffered from

severe discrimination due to the attention and resentment to their skin color. In addition to racial identities, I investigate the gendered experiences among female participants. My analysis reveals local homogeneous, patriarchal and biased judgments on foreign women in the aspects of their appearance, social and financial independence, and sexuality.

It is important to note that concurrent with the data analysis mentioned above, I study the role of individual agency during social positioning. Therefore, a theme throughout Chapter 6 to 8 is participants' personal resistance to undesirable treatments. Data show that the CFL learners under study used various strategies to establish respectful and reciprocal social environment, ranging from passive negotiation to active confrontation.

Based upon the literature review and research findings, in Chapter 9, I discuss North American CFL learners' social needs and the power dynamics during their fulfillment of social needs in China. First, I provide a brief summary of this study. Then I resume my reflectivity by examining my new understandings of participants' socialization in China and myself as a cross-cultural researcher. Next, I investigate the conflicts between CFL students' social needs in class and Chinese educational traditions, particularly the hierarchical teacher-student relationship. After that, I talk about the power relationships between the participants and the target programs regarding the neglect of social needs in administrative philosophy, exclusive international student administrative policies, and condescending administrative environment on campus. In addition, I analyze the ambivalent role of English during participants' bi-directional investment, revealing the sociocultural background of English fever in China. Last, I explore the racial and racialized gender otherness that the

participants encountered in the target city. It highlights the racial and social hierarchy in Chinese society that has been under strong influences of post-colonial culture, post-socialist values<sup>17</sup>, ethnocentrism, and patriarchy. Along with the discussion in this chapter, I make suggestions to stakeholders of this study on how to create a more inclusive and supportive study abroad environment for the CFL learners in China. Besides, I provide some recommendations for current and prospective CFL international students. The dissertation ends with my final thoughts on the entire research journey, through which I advocate more open and critical inquiries on the CFL learners and ethnolinguistic minorities in China.

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<sup>17</sup> In this study, post-socialist or contemporary China refers to the Chinese society after the reform and Opening-Up since late 1970s, which features the market-driven economy and the socio-cultural values thereby.

## **Chapter 2 Literature Review**

In this chapter, I will review the sociocultural perspective of foreign language learning and the sociocultural-orientated studies on North American CFL learners in China between 2000 and 2017. First, following the sociocultural theories in foreign language acquisition, I argue that in this study CFL learning should be viewed as a dialogic participation in the communities of practice. Then, with an overview of the critical identity approach to language learning research, I advocate that the CFL learners under study be investigated from the perspective of their investment and identity negotiation in both actual and imagined communities. Furthermore, I summarize the current literature on the language learning and social networking experiences of North American CFL international students in China.

### **Cognitive and sociocultural approaches to language learning research**

Cognitive and sociocultural perspectives of research are two dominant but distinct ways to understand language learning, including CFL learning in China (Zuengler & Miller, 2006). In this section, I will briefly compare these two approaches and point out the sociocultural orientation of this study.

The traditional cognitive theories of language learning, often cited as originating with the work of Saussure (1966), considered language as a specific linguistic system and neutral medium of communication (Lyons, 1981, p. 2). They emphasized that language as signs has its fixed meanings, which “could be found in the function of the linguistic system” (Dei, James, Karumanchery, James-Wilson, & Zine, 2000, p. 98). Accordingly, “each linguistic

community has its own set of signifying practices that give value to the signs in a language” (Norton, 2010, p. 353) and all linguistic communities are “relatively homogeneous and consensual” (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 415). Based upon this view, cognitive language learning research focuses on how “the idealized speakers/hearers use and understand language’s stable patterns and structures” (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 416).

Under the influence of the works of Vygotsky (1978a, 1978b, 1986), Bakhtin (1981, 1986), Bourdieu (1977, 1991), and Lave & Wenger (1991), the sociocultural approach to language learning research achieved much prominence in the late twentieth century. Quite different from the cognitive concentration on the learning of grammatical systems, the sociocultural perspectives of language learning research takes the position that language should be understood as discourse with reference to its social meaning in a frequently inequitable world (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Gee, 1996). Therefore, learning a language “entails mastering complex sets of discursive practices for use in a range of social contexts” (Miller, 2003, pp. 291-292).

Although both cognitive and sociocultural approaches are of great importance to understand the language learning experiences of CFL learners in China, I chose the latter in this research not only because there has been a lack of related studies in the current literature, but also because sociocultural approach was more relevant to the purpose and research question of this study. Adopting the sociocultural orientation, I believed that the CFL learners in this study were people “who need to acquire a range of discursive practices in addition to those already possessed” (Miller, 2003, p. 292). Their acquisition of discourses and

discursive practices happened during their participation in Chinese communities, which was also a process of power struggle, meaning making, and self-formation.

### **Language learning as a dialogic participation in communities of practice**

In this study, I specifically took Bakhtin's dialogic perspective of language learning and Lave and Wenger's notion of situated learning in community of practice into my understanding of CFL learning as a social practice. Here I will talk about them respectively.

To begin with, "utterance" and "dialogicality" are two key concepts of Bakhtin's dialogic perspective of language learning. More specifically, language learning is a process during which learners "appropriate" the language of other interlocutors with whom they interact in a specific social, cultural, historical, and political context (Bakhtin, 1981). Language then is "utterance," "an expression in a living context of exchange" with meaning and evaluative accent (Irvine, 2012, para. 1). Besides, "dialogicality" stresses "the mutual role and participation of speakers and hearers in the construction of utterances and the connectedness of human speech communication in past, present and future exchange of discourses and interactions" (Zuengler & Miller, 2006, p. 42). During the discourse exchange, the accents of one's utterances dialogically interact and negotiate with the others' harmoniously or in conflicts.

From this dialogic view of utterance, the learners gradually "construct utterances of their own purposes from the resources available," to create their own voices during the interaction, and respond to the voices of the others (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 96). This is also how we appreciate the historical moments behind the discourses, join the chain of utterances, relay



the meaning in social context, and engage in the conflict with diverse social interests and power dynamics. Then, in this study, it was by participating in diversified dialogues with the others in Chinese social networks and getting access to varied opportunities to interact with the others there that the CFL learners could have enriched experiences of language learning and use.

Another assumption that is fundamental to the sociocultural approach to language learning is Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice. It conceptualizes learning as situated activities and "locate(s) learning in the increased access of learners to participating roles in expert performances" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 17). Communities of practice (CoPs) are then "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Wenger, 2011, p. 1). The three characteristics of CoPs are "mutual engagement, joint activity involving a collective process, and shared repertoires" (Wenger, 1998, p. 72).

The increasing participation mentioned above starts from legitimate peripheral participation (LPP), which means that "one learns as one enters a community and comes to take part first peripherally, and later more fully in its particular practices" (Kanno, 2003, p. 286). This peripheral participation is achieved through exposure to "mutual engagement with other members, to their actions and their negotiation of the enterprise, and to their repertoire in use" (Wenger, 1998, p. 100). Emphasizing the co-participation of the newcomers and old-timers, LPP in CoPs indicates that the movement towards full participation is supported

by the other members in the community and previous knowledge and experience are passed between old-timers and newcomers (Hanks, 1991, pp. 14-15). In addition, the transition from LPP to full participation is a gradual process of negotiating an identity as full practitioner. Therefore, learning Chinese as a foreign language in China is a process of increasing participation in Chinese social networks. In order to become a full member and proficient Chinese speaker, a CFL learner needs to get access to a wide range of linguistic resources, involve in a variety of social activities, and frequently interact with local Chinese interlocutors.

Above is an overview of two sociocultural theories of foreign language learning and their application in this study. In the following section, I will highlight one of the key areas in sociolinguistics: language and identity.

### **Critical identity approach to language learning research**

Although identity has become somewhat a cliché in applied linguistics over the past decade, “its importance as a theoretical construct in...sociolinguistics and...as an emic category generated by people reflecting on their experiences learning and using other languages cannot be overstated (Duff et al., 2013, p. 107). Based upon the poststructuralist view of identity as subjectivity, I will explore Norton’s conceptualization of language learning as investment and identity negotiation in both actual and imagined communities. Her critical identity approach to foreign language learning research became the backbone of my investigation of North American CFL learners’ language learning and identity negotiation experiences in China.

**Identity as subjectivity.** The increasing concern over identity and L2 learning since the mid-1990s led to a boom of related publications, such as the works of Block (2006, 2007a, 2007b), Cummins (1994, 1996, 2006), Firth and Wagner (1997), Kanno (2003, 2008), Norton (1995, 2000, 2010), Pavlenko (2002, 2003, 2004, 2006), Ricento (2005, 2007), and Toohy (1998, 2000). From a sociocultural perspective, the identity theorists consider our identities shaped by and through our language use in a social context where power relationships “legitimate some identities but devalue others” (Zuengler & Miller, 2006, p. 43). It indicates two major concerns in the identity approach to language learning research: First, individual language learner’s identity and its relationship with the larger social world; and second, power dynamics in the social world and their impact on language learner’s identity negotiation as a full practitioner in the target language speaking community (Firth & Wagner, 1997; Norton & McKinney, 2011).

Poststructuralist feminist scholar Chris Weedon’s (1997) discussion on subjectivity has been central in the field of the identity approach to foreign language acquisition. According to Weedon (1997), subjectivity or identity is “one’s conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions, sense of (himself or) herself, and ways of understanding one’s relation to the world” (p. 32). Identity negotiation then refers to “a process through which perceivers (‘others’) and targets (‘I’) come to agreements regarding the identities that targets are to assume in the interaction” (Swann & William, 2005, p. 69).

Four characteristics of subjectivity are fundamental in helping language researchers to study identity. First, subjectivity is not fixed but is of a “multiple” and “non-unitary” nature,

changing over time and space (Norton, 2010, p. 350; Weedon, 1997, p. 32). Second, identity is socially and historically constructed by others' positioning (Hawkins, 2005, p. 61). Third, subjectivity and language are mutually constituted (Weedon, 1997) and foreign language learning involves the acquisition of a new identity (Liang & Norton, 2006, p. 145). Fourth, identity is a site of power struggle (Miller, 2003, p. 291; Norton, 2010, p. 355). Based upon these characteristics, the issues of language and identity have been widely treated in sociolinguistics, although "they often explore and critique the ways in which the patterning of power relationships can legitimate some identities and forms of participation but devalue others" (Zuengler & Miller, 2006, p. 43). Norton and her investigation of ESL learners' investment and identity negotiation experiences in Canada is a good example of such critical identity approach to language learning research, which substantially inspired my study of CFL learners in China.

#### **Investment and identity negotiation in actual and imagined communities.**

According to Norton (1995, 1997), foreign language learning is a process of investment and identity negotiation in both actual and imagined target communities through which the learners try to get access to the desirable resources and social statuses. Besides, since power relationships in may prevent the learners from full investment, the distribution of power in language learning sites and the empowerment strategies thereby should be studied. Investment, identity, and power dynamics in Chinese social environments in China were, then, the central interests of my research.

*Investment in language and identity.* One concept that was woven into my research is

Norton's (1995, 1997, 2000, 2015) perception of language learning and use as investment, which is also the key notion of her critical identity approach to language learning research. Investment is coined in contrast to the notion of "motivation." As Norton claimed, "High levels of motivation did not necessarily translate into good language learning, and that unequal relations of power between language learners and target language speakers in the language learning context was a common theme in the data" (Norton, 2010, p. 343).

Inspired by Bourdieu's conceptualization of symbolic capital<sup>18</sup> and linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 651; 1991), some scholars, such as Miller (2003), notice "the social, personal, and academic rewards for those who sound similar to the dominant majority," which are "symbolic resources not equally available to all persons, and are heavily endowed with social currencies" (p. 294). Based upon this belief, Norton (1995) introduced the notion of investment in language, where investment "signals the socially and historically constructed relationship of the women (the learners) to the target language and their often ambivalent desire to learn and practice it" (p. 17). Therefore, if language learners invest in the target language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their symbolic capital (Norton, 1997, p. 10). In my study, I then examined what were CFL learners' understandings of the need for investment in a wider range of symbolic and material resources in Chinese social networks as well as how they were situated in achieving such investment.

The notion of investment further presupposes that "when language learners speak,

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<sup>18</sup> Set of actually usable resources and powers such as cultural capital and social capital (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 114).

they are not only exchanging information with target language speakers but they are constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world” (Norton, 1995, p. 18). Thus, an investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner’s identity in the target language speaking community. Then, an investment in the linguistic capital of Chinese language is also an investment in becoming a full and equal social networker in China.

*Investment and identity negotiation in imagined communities.* On top of investment and identity negotiation in the target communities, an extension of the interest in identity and investment concerns the imagined communities that language learners aspire to when they learn a new language (Norton, 2000, 2015). Based upon Anderson’s (1991) view of nations and states as imagined communities and Wenger’s (1998) view of imagination as a form of engagement with communities of practice, the notion of imagined community indicates that “we humans are capable, through our imagination, of perceiving a connection with people beyond our immediate social networks” (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007, p. 590).

For language learners, Norton and some other scholars argued that their imagined communities might have as much impact on their current identities as the actual ones and they may create new identities at the same time (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Norton, 2010; Norton, 2015; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007). Then, “in many language classrooms, the community may be, to some extent, a reconstruction of past communities and historically constituted relationships, but also a community of imagination—a desired community that offers possibilities for an enhanced range of identity options in the future” (Norton, 2010, p.

354). Moreover, the conception of imagined community can help to “explain why language learners and users have different investments in members of the target language community, because the people in whom learners have the greatest investment may be the very people who represent or provide access to the imagined community” (Norton, 2010, p. 354). Accordingly, one chapter (Chapter 5) in this dissertation specifically focuses on North American CFL learners’ investment and identity negotiation in China as imagined communities. It aims to reveal how they understood, chose and prepared themselves for their host country, city and programs.

***Representation and empowerment of linguistic minorities.*** One key target of the critical identity approach to language learning research is to realize social reform and emancipation. In this study, one crucial intention was to facilitate and scaffold CFL learners’ language learning and identity negotiation in China through representation and empowerment.

When examining linguistic memories in English-speaking mainstream environment, Miller (2003) argued that linguistic minorities must “achieve self-representation in the dominant discourse...renegotiate their identities in new places, and accrue the necessary symbolic capital to successfully integrate into school and the wider society” (p. 291). The main methods of achieving representation are giving “voice,” being “audible,” and creating diverse and inclusive social sites, which will favor the development of foreign language competence in a range of discourse (Miller, 2003, p. 295; Norton & Toohey, 2001, p. 314).

Besides, power relationships “rang(ing) from collaborative to coercive” are crucial to

“transforming the situations” of many linguistic minorities (Baker, 2006, p. 415). Empowerment means “the process of acquiring power, or the process of transition from lack of control to the acquisition of control over one’s life and immediate environment” (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991, p. 138). Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba (1991) advocated sociocultural and political dimensions of empowerment be added to the possibilities of empowerment through education. Cummins (1996) further argued, “Empowerment also needs to be realized in legal, social, cultural and particularly economic and political events” (p. 15). Hence, empowerment strategies need to be employed in both formal and informal language learning environment and be fulfilled through different facets of social structural reform. Therefore, an indispensable section of this research was a discussion on the prospective representation and empowerment strategies for North American CFL students in China.

The review above on the sociocultural and critical identity approach to foreign language learning established the theoretical framework of this study and defined the key terms that will be frequently used in the following chapters. In the next section, I will summarize the sociocultural-oriented studies on North American CFL learners in China and reveal the gaps existed in current literature.

### **Sociocultural-orientated research on North American CFL learners in China**

Studies on international and CFL education in China began to emerge in the 1960s’ and have dramatically increased after 2000. Most of them were written in Chinese and published in



Chinese academic journals. Since 2010, the English counterparts<sup>19</sup> started to grow, although the quantity was very limited. This section is a general survey of the sociocultural-oriented research on North American students' language learning and intercultural experiences in China. More specially, I will summarize related Chinese and English publications on North American CFL learners in particular and on foreign students in general but with North American students as part of the target population.

This literature review showed that North American international students were underrepresented in current publications and the critical research on their social networking experiences in China was sparse. Besides, few studies provided an in-depth examination of “the relationship between Chinese learning and their social, cultural and linguistic identities and selves” (Duff et al., 2013, p. 13). Furthermore, the gap between existing literature and my pilot study<sup>20</sup> inspired the design of this research.

**Target population, programs, and cities.** The Chinese and English publications under review were mostly two separate systems that seldom referred to each other. This may partially lie in the differences in their target population. Generally speaking, the related studies on North American CFL international students were limited, which mainly targeted the American CFL learners in the first-tier Chinese cities<sup>21</sup>, such as Beijing and Shanghai (Hu, Wotipka & Wen, 2015, p. 168).

To begin with, most Chinese studies on the study abroad experiences in China chose the

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<sup>19</sup> Related literature written in English and published in Western academic journals.

<sup>20</sup> In order to test the feasibility and logistics of my research design, I did a pilot study between 2012 and 2013 for this research, which I will talk more in Chapter 2.

<sup>21</sup> The first-tier Chinese cities refer to 4 traditional first-tier cities, Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen, and 15 new first-tier cities across China.

students from Asian and African countries as the target population, which to a certain extent neglected the increasing number of foreign students from North America. To illustrate, in the past 10 years, the U.S. had always been the second largest source country of foreign students in China, but American students were seldom the only group of target population in related Chinese literature. Many times, they were investigated with a mix of foreign students from other countries or continents and the research findings somehow caused the dichotomy of Asian and non-Asian international students (or among the students from different cultural backgrounds) rather than provided in-depth analysis of North American CFL learners' lived experiences in China (such as the highly cited book by Yang, 2009).

In contrast to the related Chinese literature, the English counterparts mainly focused on the American international students (as reflected in the state of art articles of Dixon, 2013; Jin, 2016). This was in alignment with the national campaign of CFL learning and study abroad in China by the U.S. government since early 2010s.<sup>22</sup> Among the already limited English publications, few studies focused on the Canadian international students in China, in spite of the groundbreaking book by Duff et al. (2013).

Notably, most Chinese and English publications targeted the CFL and academic programs in the first-tier Chinese cities (Jin, 2016, p. 198). Additionally, most of them only targeted the “white” North American CFL learners with limited explorations of the dark-skinned and heritage North American CFL students. Therefore, there was a lack of comprehensive research on North American CFL learners in different categories of CFL

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<sup>22</sup> I will talk more about it in Chapter 4.

programs, in different types of educational institutions, in the second or lower-tier Chinese cities, and from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Overall, the brief analysis above showed that North Americans CFL international students in China were still underrepresented in the current literature.

**Research methodologies.** In addition to the target population, the related Chinese and English publications adopted very different research methodologies. More specially, among the Chinese studies, there were more quantitative inquiries and personal reflections (based on the personal observations and/or experiences of the researchers) than qualitative or mixed methods research on the lived experiences of North American international students in China (Tien & Lowe, 2014, p. 282). However, the English literature attached more importance to the qualitative research on the lived experiences of North American CFL learners (e.g. Diao, 2014; Jin, 2014; Kinginger, Lee, Wu & Tan, 2014; X. Li, 2015).

Besides, few studies under review adopted the critical and/or poststructuralist perspectives (Jin, 2016, p. 203), let alone critically analyzed the power relationships that North American CFL students experienced in Chinese social networks. Furthermore, the context analysis in the current literature focused more on the micro-level (such as interpersonal and institutional-level) context rather than the macro-level (or state-level) context (Wen, Hu, & Hao, 2017, April 6, p. 9). Therefore, as some scholars argued, there has been an urgent need for more studies adopting both quantitative and qualitative methodologies (particularly longitudinal studies) to present a fuller picture and in-depth contextualized analysis of what is happening in the highly heterogeneous study abroad context in China (Duff et al., 2013, p. 13;

Jin, 2016, pp. 203-204).

**Research findings.** For the purpose of clarity, I reviewed related Chinese and English publications separately regarding their target population and research methodologies. However, in this section, I will take them as a whole and summarize their research findings based upon three topics of interest: general survey of study abroad life in China (motives, expectations, and outcomes), CFL learning in the host programs (classroom dynamics, program design, and program administration), and social experiences in Chinese communities (cross-cultural adaption, social connectedness, and identity negotiation).

*Learning motives, expectations, and outcomes.* The literature review showed that most North American international students came to China to learn Chinese language and culture. Although their expectations to Chinese people and society were rather limited and ideological-oriented, most of them were satisfied with their learning outcomes in China.

Many scholars pointed out that most North American students chose to study abroad in China to learn Chinese language, to understand Chinese society and culture, and to make Chinese friends; accordingly, they preferred CFL programs to academic programs (Chen, 2007, p. 49; Feng, Bu & Li, 2013, p. 114; Hu, Wotipka & Wen, 2015, pp. 163-168; Peng, 2015, p. 22; Yang, 2009, p. 124). For the program selection, visiting and exchange CFL programs between partner universities gained favor with the CFL undergraduates due to mutual credit recognition (Che, 2010, p. 30; Chen, 2007, p. 49; Jiani, 2017, p. 573). As importantly, Diao and Trentment (2016) noticed that study abroad in China helped international students to become “global professionals,” thus most of their focal students had the aspiration to “work in China or

for China-related business” (p. 43). Another typical motive among heritage Chinese learners was to “reconnect with their ancestral and cultural origins” (Maruyama, Weber & Stronza, 2010, p. 7; Wang, 2016, p. 1944; Wang & Xiao, 2017, p. 13). Furthermore, some North American CFL learners felt intense pride and uniqueness by being CFL speakers. For example, Duff et al. (2013) revealed that some Canadians were motivated to learn Chinese in China by the desire to be “different from the mainstream of language learners in Canada” and to be “the conquering hero(s)” of one of the most complex languages in the world (pp. 118-121).

In contrast to their clear goals of study abroad in China, most North American CFL learners had very limited knowledge of China, an exotic other (Tien & Lowe, 2014, p. 281 & 287). Due to the negative reportage of China in the Western media, North American international students had comparatively lower expectations of China than their Asian and African counterparts (Li, 2014, pp. 28-29; Yang, 2009, pp. 126-127). In their eyes, China was mysterious and less developed and Chinese people were completely controlled by their government; consequently, China turned out to be a surprise to many of them because of its modernity and openness (Jiani, 2017, p. 571; Wang, 2014, p. 8; L. Yang, 2012, p. 143 & p. 146). Some scholars drew attention to the ideological interpretations of such surprise, which were mainly grounded on the stereotypes and prejudices rather than the firsthand information and the Chinese people they engaged (Kulacki, 2000, pp. 25-26 & 42-43). To illustration, Yang (2012) noticed that some of her participants decoded the Chinese skyscrapers and fancy buildings as the face projects of Chinese government, “posing for the foreigners” (p. 146). Therefore, some scholars argued that the construction of the imagined communities of China

needs the efforts of both the home and host countries of North American international students (Kulacki, 2000; L. Yang, 2012).

Despite the inaccurate construction of China as imagined communities, quite a few studies showed that most of their focal students had an overall positive impression of China and met their goals to increase their Chinese proficiency, culture awareness, and employment potentials in China (Chen, 2007, p. 59 & p. 63; Liu, 2010, pp. 540-541; Tsung & Hooper, 2016, p. 85). For the positive learning outcomes, Yang (2009) argued that Western English-speaking CFL learners improve faster than Asian and African CFL learners, owing to their extravert personalities and easy access to language exchange partners (p. 159). Qi and Lemmer (2014) further compared studying CFL in China to living in an immense language laboratory (p. 418). They believed that except formal study, their participants reaped the benefits of immersion in a natural language environment, which gave rise to both the opportunity and incentive to learn (pp. 418-421).

Positive learning outcomes not necessarily equal to optimal learning experiences. In the following two sections, I will review current research findings on the CFL learning experiences in the host programs and local communities. It was shown that certain educational and social practices in China impeded the socialization and identity negotiation of North American CFL learners.

***CFL learning in host programs.*** Overall, there have been fewer publications on North American students' learning experiences on campus than in local communities off campus. Among the limited studies under review, one common theme is the (dis)engagement of CFL

learners through classroom activities and extracurricular programs.

First, there were contradictory views on the Chinese teaching style in the host programs. To illustrate, Yang (2009) argued that despite bigger cultural distances, her focal Western students (including North American CFL learners) quite enjoyed the Chinese way of teaching because most of them registered for the short term programs and had superficial understandings of Chinese learning culture (pp. 156-157). Similarly, Tien and Lowe (2014) argued that facing new Chinese classroom culture, American students first blamed the Chinese instructors as a means of preserving their self-image, but within five months of study, their understanding and adaptation gradually replaced bewilderment (pp. 287-290). On the contrary, some other scholars showed their concerns about the teacher-centered pedagogies in the CFL programs in China, which “may render students powerless and discourage them from participating” (Dai & Zha, 2013, pp. 135-136; Li, 2014, p. 24; Moloney & Xu, 2016, pp. 6-7; Wang, 2014, p. 7; Zhang, 2016, p. 77). Notably, these concerns were mainly based upon hypotheses and anecdotes. Li (2015) was one of the few studies that explicitly talked about the cultural conflicts between North American students and their instructors. She noticed that one of her participants quit his study in China because he was too “argumentative and aggressive” to adjust himself to the teacher-centered Chinese classrooms (pp. 244-245). Although some studies further highlighted the importance of peer interactions and social networking sites in CFL instruction (Diao, 2014; Jin, 2016, p. 207), more empirical inquiries are needed to explore the learning experiences and power dynamics of North American students in the CFL classrooms in China.

Besides Chinese teaching pedagogies, CFL program administration, particularly the social engagement and support services, also drew researchers' attention. More specifically, it was shown that the differentiated international student management practices (such as exclusive foreign student dormitories) and the lack of program-led social opportunities treated CFL learners as special guests and impeded the social interactions between foreign and native students (Peng, 2015, p. 31; Sumra, 2012, p. 122; Wang, 2014, p. 8; Yang, 2009, pp. 169-170 & pp. 200-201). Therefore, some scholars suggested that the host programs should help CFL students build meaningful relationships with local peers and interlocutors through diverse extracurricular programs, such as language pledge and exchange, practicum and internship, Chinese roommates and homes stays, and community outreach and service learning (Dai & Zha, 2013, pp. 137-138; He & Qin, 2017; Jin, 2016, p. 205; Kinginger, Lee, Wu & Tan, 2014; Kubler, 2002, pp. 115-118). Additionally, similar to students from other continents and areas, North American CFL learners felt unsatisfied with the institutional support services in Chinese universities (Hu, Wotipka, Wen, 2015, pp. 167-168). Their complaints mainly focused on the lack of effective orientations and English/Chinese bilingual services (Sumra, 2012, p. 122; Yang, 2009, p. 158). It was argued that appropriate support and guidance were needed to remove communication gaps for the CFL learners, although few studies provided detailed analysis and recommendations (X. Du, 2015, p. 64; Jin, 2016, p. 205; Peng, 2015, pp. 42-45; Sumra, 2012, p. 127; Wang, 2014, pp. 9-10; Zou, 2014, pp. 69-60).

*CFL learning and social networking in local communities.* Just as the different opinions on the learning experiences in host programs, so did the exiting studies to a certain



extent reveal the complexity of CFL learning in local communities, which indicated the ups and downs of North American CFL learners during their cultural adaptation, social connection, and identity negotiation in China. Yet, all the related publications attached great importance to the informal CFL learning opportunities through authentic and reciprocal contact with local Chinese (Kubler, 2002, p. 118; Tsung & Hooper, 2016, p. 91).

To start with, some of the research findings highlighted the overall positive language learning and social networking experiences in local communities “due to local hospitable environment” (Che, 2010, p. 72; H. Du, 2015, p. 254). For instance, Romines (2008) found that the majority of their American focal students “felt extremely positive about how the Chinese received them as individuals” and “they were treated enthusiastically” in China (p. 80). The participants of Qi and Lemmer (2014) also commented on the willingness of fellow students, service people or even strangers to converse with them in Chinese, which was a huge benefit and adds to enjoyment of language learning (pp. 418-419). Li (2015) further confirmed that as native English speakers, North American CFL learners had the privilege to keep control of “the amount of interaction and the kinds of interaction they wished to have with the local Chinese students, who were ‘on-call’ to practice English” (pp. 249-250). Accordingly, some studies drew the conclusion that European and North American students had more involvement in local communities and less acculturative stress than foreign students from other regions (Yang, 2009, p. 171; Yu et al., 2014, p. 1).

In addition to positive experiences, some research focused on the othering attitudes and practices towards North American CFL students and the corresponding impact on their

socialization in China. First, several studies pointed out that the foreigner identities, particularly the term *laowai* (老外, literally old outsider or foreigner), ascribed to their participants by local residents somehow deprived language learners of their access to rich and higher-level language resources (H. Du, 2015, p. 254; Duff et al., 2013, pp.129-133; Ilnyckyj, 2010; Jin, 2016, p. 200). By the same token, in less internationalized Chinese cities, the physical appearance, mother tongue, and accented Chinese of foreign visible minorities, established the contrast between self and other, which frequently translated into a lot of stares; the reactions of North American students to such obvious otherness ranged from feeling uncomfortable to extremely sad and angry, from feeling like animals in a zoo to enjoying being a movie star” (H. Du, 2015, pp. 254-255; Fu, 2016, pp. 56-57; Yang, 2009, p. 171). Besides, sometimes, it was not easy to build rapport and equality between foreigners and local natives. To illustrate, a recurring complaint among North American students focused on their fear of being overcharged by local vendors or taxi drivers who could easily recognize them as outsiders (H. Du, 2015, p. 254). Another example was that as native English speakers, some North American CFL learners were reluctant to mix with Chinese peers who only wanted to befriend them to polish up their English (X. Li, 2015, p. 249). Also, Diao and Trentman (2016) noticed that their participants sometimes were caught in the tensions between discourses in the West and the non-West and thus encountered self and/or peer censorship when they discussed local policies with Chinese students (p. 37 & pp. 43-44). Furthermore, Ilnyckyj (2010) argued that Chinese people have very low expectations of American CFL learners, hence their Chinese proficiencies, no matter how limited, garnered them praise, which

reflected their experiences as racialized beings in local communities (pp. 70-71). Therefore, some scholars suggested that instead of “Do in Rome as Romans Do,” successful language learning and social networking experiences of CFL learners need the efforts and responsibilities of both foreign students and Chinese natives, particularly the sensitivity to multiculturalism of Chinese institutions, people and societies (Ran, 2009, p. 72; Yang, 2009, p. 203; Zhao, 2011, p. 41).

On top of positive and othering social experiences, the researchers also pinpointed the importance of identity and agency to understanding the socialization of North American CFL learners in local communities. More specifically, Du (2015) pointed out that study abroad in China made her participants more confident and proud Chinese speakers who felt superior not only to those who did not speak Chinese but also to some native Chinese people whose pronunciation of Mandarin was not as standard as theirs (pp. 258-261). Jin (2014) further revealed the dependence of her participants on CFL peer/group interactions in language learning in China and thus regarded this special group identity a transitional phase when they shifted from a mono-cultural identity to a full-fledged bicultural identity (pp. 71-73).

Besides, certain studies explicitly talked about the “anglo-white privilege” in China during socialization and the agentive acts of Canadian CFL learners to refuse to fall into the images of “linguistic imperialists” and “ugly Americans” by learning and speaking Chinese (Duff et al., 2013, pp. 131-132; Ilnyckyj, 2010, pp. 61). Similarly, although some North American CFL learners used the differentiated treatments to anglo-whites to their advantage, some others developed a tight circle of friends with either few foreigners or few English speakers to make

the best of their experiences in China (H. Du, 2015, p. 255; Ilnyckyj, 2010, pp. 61-63; X. Li, 2015, pp. 246).

Additionally, despite the belief that strong ethnic and cultural connections were helpful for the integration of Chinese heritage learners in China, several studies under review reported that Chinese Americans and Canadians needed to “negotiate and redefine who they were and where they belonged” during and after visiting China (Chen, 2006, p. 17; Maruyama, Weber & Stronza, 2010, p. 1; Wang, 2016, pp. 1944-1955; Wang & Xiao, 2017, p. 14). Also, their “Chinese identity is not correlated with making Chinese friends, nor does their recognition of Chinese identity mean the acculturation will be quicker” (Ran, 2009, p. 80). Consequently, similar to the other Americans who did not get used to the Chinese social environment, some Chinese American heritage learners affirmed that their true home was in the U.S. (H. Du, 2015, pp. 256-258; Maruyama, Weber & Stronza, 2010, p. 1). Notably, heritage Chinese learners were the only group of non-white North American CFL learners that somehow drew researchers’ attentions. Thus, more inquiries could be conducted to better understand the heterogeneity of North American CFL learners in China (Belyavina, 2013, p. 9).

Last, three studies under review somehow mentioned the negotiation of gender identity during CFL learning in China. To illustrate, Duff et al. (2013) noticed that their male participants had more opportunities to interact and date with Chinese of opposite sex than their female counterparts (pp. 135-139). Also, through the examination of the usage of Chinese affective sentence-final particles<sup>23</sup> among both male and female American CFL learners, Diao

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<sup>23</sup> Such as 啊(a), 呀(ya), 啦 (la), 嘛(me), 哦 (o), 耶 (ye), and 呃 (e) (Diao, 2014, p. 600).

(2014) argued that CFL learning is gendered practices during which all the participants were being judged gender-appropriated or not. Furthermore, Maruyama, Weber & Stronza (2010) pointed out that their female participants found themselves trapped in the gender and class hierarchy in China due to the stereotypes of family-oriented women and favorable “white” husbands in local communities (pp. 9-10). Obviously, gender issues are far from the focus of current literature, which is out of proportion to the large number of female North American CFL students in China.

In brief, the literature review showed that there has been a need of critical investigation on the lived experiences of a variety of North American CFL learners in both CFL programs and Chinese communities in the second or third tiers of Chinese cities. On top of the studies mentioned above, preliminary data analysis from my pilot study for this research project (Mao, 2014; Mao & Wu, 2014; Mao, Wu & Wu, 2014) further revealed the complexity and ambivalence of the investment and identity negotiation processes that North American CFL learners experienced in China. The key social factors that had influenced their Chinese learning and social networking included: the limited formal and informal language learning opportunities on campus; the superiority and vulnerability of North American CFL learners during social interactions with local Chinese and other subcultural groups; the role of English as a global dominant language in limiting native English speaking CFL learners’ investment in Chinese; and the covert and overt racism against visible and audible minorities in China. Facing all these gaps in the current literature and guided by the research findings from my pilot study, I carried out this critical hermeneutic investigation on a larger scale of North American

international students' language learning experiences in China, specifically those related to their investment and identity negotiation in Chinese social networks. In the following chapter, I will detail the theoretical core of critical hermeneutics and the research design and implementation of this study.

### Chapter 3 Research Methodology and Design

In their state of the art article on identity, language learning and social change, Norton and Toohey (2011) summarized three methodological understandings that identity and language learning scholars frequently rely on and need to consider in their research design: First, the researchers must be reflexive about their own experiences and recognize their conclusions as “situated and partial”; second, they must account for both how social structures and practices place individuals and how individuals struggle to situate themselves; and third, they must seek a better understanding of how political and economic issues interact with language learning, constraining or enabling human action (pp. 426-429). Based upon these three methodological understandings and my research question, I chose critical hermeneutics as the research methodology of this study.

In this chapter, I will first put forward my understandings of the theoretical core and key characteristics of critical hermeneutics. Then, I will describe the participant and informant<sup>24</sup> recruitment procedure in the target city and universities in China. Besides, I will introduce the data collection process, which included three methods of data collection: daily language use logs, semi-structured interviews, and secondary data sources. Furthermore, I will talk about my data analysis framework and process. On top of that, I will discuss the credibility and trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and limitations and delimitations of this study.

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<sup>24</sup> In this study, the participants refer to ten North American CFL students under study. The informants refer to five CFL instructors and/or program administrators in the target universities who helped me have a better understanding of the sociocultural context the participants lived in.

**Methodology: critical hermeneutics**

Dissolving the boundaries between interpretative and critical research traditions, critical hermeneutics has usually been quite distinct (Myers, 1997, p. 280). This methodology is hermeneutics, because it “consists in reconstructing the general grounds for the understanding and interpretation of symbolic expressions”; it is critical, because the hermeneutic interpretation needs to be further linked to social power and requires “a systematic analysis of the nature, structure, and impact of power on the constitution and understanding of meaning” (Kögler, 1999, p. 152). Here, I will first discuss Gadamer’s philosophical view of hermeneutics and Habermas’ incorporation of critical social theory into hermeneutics. Then, I will put forward the methodological core and major characteristics of critical hermeneutics.

**Philosophical hermeneutics: Gadamer.** Hermeneutics is “the art of understanding and the theory of interpretation” (Wildman, 2010, *Hermeneutics: Introduction*, para. 2), which especially explores “how we read, understand, and handle texts, especially those written in another time or in a context of life different from our own” (Thiselton, 2009, p. 1). With an origin as a theological interpretation methodology, it has now developed into a general theory of understanding of both texts and unwritten sources through the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, Jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida (Crotty, 1998, p. 87). Among various schools or branches of hermeneutics, some common characteristics make it different from other approaches to meaning and understanding.



To start with, hermeneutics deals with both the “alienation” (distance) and “commonality” (familiarity or relatedness) relationships between text and reader and “it assumes a link between the two that makes the transmission of meaning feasible” (Crotty, 1998, p. 90). Hence, a hermeneutic researcher needs to control his or her distance with the text in a dialectic “in” and “away” way.

Besides, hermeneutics is historically and culturally located. This feature of hermeneutics has two layers of meaning. First, the interpretation of the text goes through “a sympathetic engagement” with its wider sociocultural context (Gardiner, 1999, p. 63). Second, “texts are considered through the historically and culturally situated lens of the researcher’s perception and experience” (Kinsella, 2006, para. 23).

Furthermore, hermeneutists always gain an understanding of the text that is deeper or goes further than their own understanding through the application of the hermeneutic circle (Crotty, 1998, p. 92). Hermeneutic circle refers to the idea that the understanding of the text as a whole is based upon the understanding of its individual parts and vice versa. “This part/whole dialectics of the hermeneutic circle works for the words and sentences, paragraphs and chapter, chapters and books, as well as the text and its context” (Prasad, 2002, pp. 17-18).

In this research, Gadamer’s perspectives on philosophical hermeneutics serve as the foundation of my understandings of hermeneutics. Three key concepts of his model of interpretation are prejudice, tradition, and the linguisticity of understanding. Here I will explain them respectively.

Gadamer defined the concept of prejudice as prejudgment according to previous

experience and socialization. Although some scholars believed “the way to eradicate prejudice is to maintain objectivity by not considering previous experiences,” Gadamer argued that “to understand each other we cannot shed our past experiences,” therefore, he advocated “continually striving to identify our prejudices” (Byrne, 2001, p. 969). In other words, a good understanding of oneself is the foundation of mutual understanding. To reflect on personal biases is the very starting point of prejudice elimination.

For tradition, Gadamer contended, “The meaningfulness of transmitted texts is determined by the tradition as a whole, just as the tradition as a whole is a unity comprising the meaning of the texts transmitted in it” (Crotty, 1998, p. 104). This requires that the interpreters realize the fusion of present and past horizons and extend the unity of understanding in ever-widening circles by moving from whole to part and from part to whole.

Besides, Gadamer emphasized the the linguisticity of understanding. In his opinion, understanding as a matter of conceptual articulation is linguistically mediated (Malpas, 2016, *The Linguisticity of Understanding*, para.1). Also, since “we are ‘in’ the world through being ‘in’ language”, language always involves the others and the world rather than being private (Malpas, 2016, *The Linguisticity of Understanding*, para.1). Language therefore is not only the instrument and medium of interpretive dialogue but also our ways of being.

Both the common characteristics of hermeneutics and Gadamer’s key concepts of philosophical hermeneutics highlight the dialect relationship among the text, researcher, reader and context. In the next section, I will incorporate the critical social theory into hermeneutics and discuss the role of power relationships in critical hermeneutic studies.

**Incorporating critical social theory into Hermeneutics: Habermas.** One philosopher that is especially responsible for the critical turn of hermeneutics is Jurgen Habermas. Habermas agreed with Heidegger and Gadamer that communicative meaning is understood within tradition, but he also goes further to “judge the tradition within which meaning arises and to supplement what he sees as reflective deficiencies in contemporary hermeneutics and its inability to adequately act as a critique of society” (Porter & Robinson, 2011, p. 13). The basic idea of including critical social theory into hermeneutics is that “acts of interpretation are internally related to forms of power, whereas this reflexive insight can foster practices of critical interpretation within which power practices are unmasked” (Kögler, 1999, p 152).

The purpose of critical social theory is to examine power relationships within society, to identify societal contradictions, to expose hidden power imbalances, to reveal the forces of hegemony and injustice, and to challenge the status quo (Byrne, 2001, p. 968; Crotty, 1998, p. 157). Applying critical social theory to policy analysis, Chalip (1996) provided steps that critical researchers could follow, which include to “critique the assumptive bases of problem definitions”, to “explain why inadequacies of problem definitions persist”, to “suggest how the assumptive bases of problem definitions should be corrected”, and to “identify those facets of social circumstances that require change to redress social problems” (pp. 311-312).

Researchers who incorporate these steps into the critical identity approach to foreign language learning contended that “one must account for relations of power ... in order to gain a fuller understanding of the practices and interactions in which learners participate and thus

of their learning processes” (Zuengler & Miller, 2006, p. 43). Many of them, such as Norton (1995, 1997, 2010), noticed that the marginalized members of a community might have their access to language learning blocked, because they are prevented from participating meaningfully in local social practices.

The majority of the critical studies related to linguistic and cultural minorities chose ESL learners as their target population and mainly focused on understanding inequitable relations that ESL learners have experienced in Western social contexts. However, such research should not stop there. In my study, I applied the critical identity approach to foreign language learners in China, examining the language learning experiences of North American CFL students in a non-Western culture and social environment. For instance, I critically examined how the CFL learners under study struggled in Chinese educational traditions and university administrative environment. Besides, I analyzed how differentiated treatments towards their linguistic, racial and gender identities constrained their social engagement in Chinese society. My investigation of the power imbalances behind CFL learners’ socialization in China will help to provide a wider and more complex range of understandings of foreign language learners’ investment and identity negotiation in target language speaking social networks.

**Methodological core of critical hermeneutics.** In this section, I will put forward my understanding of critical hermeneutics based upon its methodological core and major characteristics. Besides, I will apply this understanding to my current research topic.

Kögler (1999) argued that the methodological core of critical hermeneutics is that:

All explicit or conscious acts of interpretation are essentially grounded in an implicit and un-thematic background understanding. Because this background is linguistically mediated and culturally and socially situated..., the internal orientation of one's focus in interpretive understanding is unavoidably impregnated by social power practices. (p. 154)

In other words, meaning and interpretation locate in the contextualized sociocultural background of the texts or unwritten sources, which involves the negotiation of diverse power relationships.

This theoretical core of critical hermeneutics could be further demonstrated by its major characteristics. They are the close examination of social contexts, rational interpretation through critical reflection in discourse, and critique for social transformation.

First, critical hermeneutics provide “a way to integrate formal methods of textual analysis with an interest in the social context in which the texts occur” ” (Philips, 2004, p. 218). Therefore, “it is concerned not simply with the relationship between language, meaning, and understanding, but with concrete, empirical economic, social, organizational, and political conditions and practices that shape human beings as knowers and as social agents” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 53). As a critical hermeneutic researcher, I closely examined the Chinese social, cultural, political and economic context, in which CFL learning and socialization practices occur. My personal experience of ESL learning in Western social context further sharpened my eyes when examining Chinese social networks in China and helped me develop a new and better understanding of Chinese social networks that I was

once so familiar with and always took for granted.

Second, for critical hermeneutists, rationality is inherent in the critical reflection and judgment of discourse or discursive practices. Hence, they should always subject the traditions and prejudices to critical examination and liberate themselves from distortion and ideologies through critical interpretation (Porter & Robinson, 2011, p. 148). To me, I realized that although I shared some similar cross-cultural experiences with the CFL learners under study, I was still very different from them in regards to our sociocultural and educational backgrounds. I may understand them in certain ways, but the understanding was also based on my history. Our dialogues could be twisted and my interpretations be biased. Besides, although I conducted a study based on Western theories, my Chinese background still heavily influenced me and such influence limited my critical reflections of Chinese social context and prevented me from effectively challenging the power relationships during CFL learning. Therefore, I critically reflected on my own social background and assumptions in order to accomplish my goals in this study.

Third, critical hermeneutics provides “a structured method for examining the sources of texts and the interests of their producers” (Philips, 2004, p. 218), which reveals the power dynamics behind the sources and interests. For this aspect, “it is rather normative,” that is to say, “its critiques of meanings and practices are undertaken for the purposes of transforming society and emancipating individuals from false consciousness such that undistorted communication and non-ideological understandings can be realized” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 53). Thus, for this study, I first unmasked the hidden power relationships that CFL learners got

involved in and struggle with in China (such as through the examination of the social, racial, and gender dominance and discrimination). Then, I put forward educational and social transformation strategies that could facilitate their language learning and scaffold their identity negotiation as CFL learners and ethnolinguistic minorities in China.

Although critical hermeneutics is quite new to the sociocultural-oriented and identity approach to language learning research, I believe that it not only conforms to my research questions and my theoretical framework, but also will provide new insights to apply and expand the understanding of current theories to other cultures and other social contexts. Additionally, in spite of the fact that the critiques of social phenomena, values, traditions, and ideologies are highly encouraged academically in Canada and other Western countries, critical thinking and critical social research about Chinese social issues in China are still new and controversial, and will be a challenge to current Chinese academic appreciation. As a critical hermeneutic study of current Chinese society, this study will promote a new understanding of CFL learning, Chinese native and foreign speakers, and Chinese sociocultural environment.

### **The selection and recruitment of participants and informants**

In this study, I chose a second-tier city in Northern China as the target city and five universities in this city as the target universities. In the target universities, I recruited ten North American CFL students as participants and four administrators and/or instructors as informants. Here, I will first talk about the selection of the target city and universities. Then I will detail the recruitment procedure. On top of that, I will address the power relationships

during the recruitment.

**The selection and recruitment process.** After the approval of the ethics review<sup>25</sup>, I recruited ten participants and five informants from five universities in the target city to participate in my study between 2013 and 2014. I conducted this study in the same Northern Chinese city where I did the pilot study.<sup>26</sup> The major reasons for this decision were: First, the target city has always worked as a major CFL learning center in China, because the local dialect has been considered to be closest to Putonghua<sup>27</sup> (standard Chinese); second, these five universities have been popular destinations for CFL learners in the target city, which could provide the researcher with a large number of international students from diverse backgrounds; third, most of these five universities have offered CFL intensive training programs with a comparatively long history, thus their educational structure and sociocultural environment were more established to be a typical CFL learning context; and fourth, having studied and then taught for more than ten years in several universities in the target city, I already had good access to the CFL program instructors and administrators there who could work as the informants and recruitment facilitators in this study. I included a brief introduction to the geographical, historical and demographical background of the target city in the first section of Chapter 6, where I also talked about the composition of its foreign

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<sup>25</sup> University of Alberta research ethics approval: No. Pro00039798, June 21, 2013.

<sup>26</sup> In order to test the feasibility and logistics of my research design, I did a pilot study between 2012 and 2013 for this research based upon a small research project named “CFL students’ Identity Negotiation and Social Networks in China” (University of Alberta research ethics approval number: Pro00023794, September 26, 2011). The participant selection of the pilot study was carried out in two universities in the target city through purposeful sampling with the help of two facilitators of this study. Four participants were selected, among whom three were from the U.S. and one was a Canadian. All of these four participants had studied Chinese in the target universities over one semester (4 months).

<sup>27</sup> Putonghua is the official language of the P.R.C. and the target language of this study. In Chapter 4, I will explain the definition and evolution of Putonghua, which is simply referred to as Chinese in the most part of this dissertation.



population and foreign student communities.

The recruitment process was composed of participant and informant recruitment. For the participants in this research, I chose North American CFL international students in five universities in the target city (including two universities in the pilot study) as the target population. Besides the participants, in order to have a better understanding of the sociocultural context that CFL students got involved in, I chose the CFL instructors and/or program administrators in the same five universities as the target population of informants. I selected both my participants and informants through maximum variation sampling across a broad spectrum of candidates relating to the topic of study (Teddlie & Yu, 2007, p. 92).

Due to the political environment in China, international students and international education have been sensitive research population and research topic. My attempt to make direct contact with potential participants and informants seemed to be impractical during my pilot study. Hence, in order to avoid any inconvenience to the international students and myself, I continued to use the international student administrators in the target Chinese universities as the recruitment facilitators of this study. I knew the majority of these facilitators through my previous study and work experiences in this city.<sup>28</sup>

I worked with the facilitators in five target universities to identify a sample of six North American international students (the total number of the participants of this study was ten, including four participants from the pilot study) and a sample of five full-time staff in the

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<sup>28</sup> The five facilitators of this study were mainly my previous friends and classmates in the target city. I introduced my research to the majority of them during my pilot study. During the recruitment, data collection and writing of the dissertation, I kept contact with them and asked them for suggestions.

target universities who worked as CFL instructors and/or administrators (See Table 1 & 2). I explicitly asked the facilitators to help me find a group of participants with diverse backgrounds regarding their gender, class, ethnicity, and Chinese proficiency. I also explicitly asked them to suggest informants with various backgrounds in terms of their working positions, teaching experiences, and political stances. To aid in this process, I provided the facilitators with a written research introduction and recruitment instructions, which I developed based upon the literature review and my pilot study (See Appendix A).

Table 1

*Brief introduction to the participants*

Pseudonym	Nationality & Ethnicity	Gender	CFL study before the target programs in the home and/or host countries	CFL study in the target programs	Chinese Proficiency
Sandra	African American	Female	1 semester in the home country (optional)	1 year (intensive)	Beginner
Frank	Caucasian American	Male	1 semester in the home country (optional)	1 year (intensive)	Intermediate
Lolita	Caucasian American	Female	1 year in the home country (optional) & 1 month of study trip in Taiwan (intensive)	1 semester (intensive)	Beginner
Lucy	Caucasian Canadian	Female	1 year in China	2 years (intensive)	Beginner
Nhu	Chinese American	Female	8 years in the home country (weekend school & optional)	1 semester (intensive)	Advanced
Norman	Caucasian American	Male	3 semesters in the home country (optional)	1 semester (intensive)	Intermediate

Table 1 Continued

Pseudonym	Nationality & Ethnicity	Gender	CFL study before the target programs in the home and/or host countries	CFL study in the target programs	Chinese Proficiency
Dennis	Caucasian American	Male	2 semesters in the home country (optional)	1 year (intensive)	Intermediate
Dara	Mexican American	Female	5 years in the home country (minor) & 1 year of study trip in China (intensive)	2 years (Master program majored in Chinese linguistics)	Advanced
Anna	Aboriginal American	Female	No formal learning before	1 year (intensive)	Beginner
Riya	Indian American	Female	No formal learning before	3 semesters (optional)	Beginner

*Note.* The participants were sequenced in the time order of being interviewed. The pseudonyms of certain participants may still contain the ethnic characteristics of their original names. All the information in this table refers to the situation by the interviews. “Optional” means optional course(s). “Intensive” means full-time intensive CFL training.

Table 2

*Brief introduction to the informants*

Pseudonym	Position(s) in the target programs	Working experiences with CFL students	Educational background
Hong	Instructor & administrator	Teaching: 7 years Administration: 8 years	PhD student
Fang	Instructor & administrator	Teaching: 7 years Administration: 7 years	Master
Xue	Instructor & administrator	Teaching: 3 years Administration: 1 year	PhD student
Qiang	Instructor	Teaching: 11 years Administration: 3 years	PhD student
Jun	Administrator	Administration: 4 years	Master

*Note.* The informants were sequenced in the time order of being interviewed. Their pseudonyms still contain the ethnic characteristics of their original names. All the information in this table refers to the situation by the interviews.

For the specific participant and informant selection procedure, I followed these five steps:

Step one: I contacted the five facilitators in these five universities through email with the research introduction and recruitment instructions (See Appendix A). In follow-up phone calls or email correspondences, the facilitators and I discussed and finalized the recruitment instructions before they carried out actual recruitment.

Step two: According to the recruitment instructions, each facilitator tried to find one to three potential participants and one to two potential informants, and then explained the research project to them.

Step three: If the potential participants or informants were interested in this research, they gave the facilitators their contact information (e.g., cell phone numbers and/or email addresses) with verbal permissions to pass them along to me. The facilitators made a note that verified the permission was granted and its related details, such as who, when and how the permission was obtained. The facilitators also passed along the questions that the potential participants or informants had. At the same time, the potential participants and informants also got my contact information, in case they would like to contact me directly.

Step four: I contacted the potential participants and informants directly by phone and/or email, reviewed the research project, answered the questions related to their participation, and provided them with the information letters and consent forms (See Appendix B & C). If requested, I also shared the interview protocols and daily language use

logs<sup>29</sup> (See Appendix D, E & F) with them. Finally, I asked if they were willing to participate in the study. If they were willing, then I asked them to complete the consent forms. If they would like some time to think about it, I contacted them again after their review of the information letters and consent forms, and further explained the specific data collection methods to them and obtained consent. If the participants and informants had no other questions about this study and agreed to proceed, I confirmed the exact dates for data collection.

**Power relationships during recruitment and solutions.** I recognized some ethical issues related to the power relationships among the researcher, participants, and facilitators during the recruitment process of the pilot study. Here, I will discuss three layers of power dynamics I observed and introduce how I addressed them in this study.

First, the most obvious power relationship was the teacher-student relationship between the facilitators and international students in a university context. For this issue, I explicitly clarified the role and duty of the facilitators in the recruitment instructions as neutral coordinators. More specifically, the facilitators must protect the privacy of the potential participants and contact the potential participants individually and confidentially. Besides, they must respect potential participants' autonomy in being interested or not interested in this research. In order to minimize the impact of involving in this research, I did not reveal to the facilitators which international students took part in, refused to take part in, or dropped off this research after the facilitators forwarded their interest in this study and

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<sup>29</sup> Daily language use logs are a kind of qualitative survey tracking daily conversations. The design and function of daily language use logs will be fully discussed in next subsection.

their contact information.

Second, the most salient issue when looking at questionable relationships between researchers and participants was power (Meara & Schmidt, 1991), which to some extent was clarified in the recruitment instructions (See Appendix A). I was also very cautious about my identity as a researcher, native Chinese speaker, previous university teacher, friend or colleague of the facilitators, and the possible influences of these roles on participants and informants during the recruitment. Furthermore, I guaranteed, “the sample (I finally choose) can be justified in terms of inclusiveness and the avoidance of bias” (Hartas, 2010, p. 118) by a close examination of the recruitment instructions (See Appendix A).

Third, the power relationship between the facilitators/informants and the researcher was considered due to the “inside” policies and politics of the target universities. During my contact with the facilitators and informants, I, as the researcher, respected their internal policies and protected their role as staff under the guidance of these policies. I avoided any harm to the facilitators and informants by asking them to carry out “illegal” practices.

During the recruitment, to aware, reflect and balance the power relationships not only provided me with a good access to potential participants and informants, but also helped me to build rapport and trust among all the stakeholders. This laid good foundations for the upcoming data collection, during which I used three different methods.

### **Data collection tools**

For research methods, I had developed a multi-method approach to explore different facets of the research question in order to acquire rich and diverse data (Spicer, 2004, p. 294).

It aimed to ensure that the participants' voices were heard and that the credibility, reliability and validity of this study were guaranteed by using methodological triangulation (Lichtman, 2013, p. 292). I chose three specific qualitative research methods: daily language use logs, semi-structured interviews, and secondary data.

**Daily language use logs.** The first method I used was daily language use logs, a kind of "qualitative survey" (Jansen, 2010). In general methodology, the word survey only covers "quantitative studies that primarily aim at describing numerical distributions of variables in the population" (Jansen, 2010, para. 5). However, with the innovation of qualitative data collection methods, qualitative survey was used to examine the diversity of some topics of interest within a given population. It does not count the number of people with the same characteristic but establishes the meaningful variation within that population" (Jansen, 2010, para. 6). Fink (2003) recommended that the analysis of qualitative survey data should focus on "the meanings that people attach to their experiences" (p. 61).

In this study, I used a pre-structured qualitative survey, i.e., daily language use log (See Appendix F), in which "some main topics, dimensions and categories are defined beforehand and the identification of these matters in the research units is guided by a structured protocol for questioning or observation" (Jansen, 2010, para. 9). Originally, Dr. Olenka Bilash designed this log for students' self-observation of oral language use types in her course "Developing Oral Competency in Second Language" (Bilash, personal communication, October 22, 2010). According to the design of this log, the participants noted every conversation in any language in which they got involved during the whole day with

reference to the length of the talk, the type of the talk, other interlocutors, the site, the language being used. Although in this study, I used the same survey categories as Dr. Bilash's log, their purpose was much broader and more complicated, since I used them to investigate participants' investment in local communities and to demonstrate the characteristics of their investment.

As I mentioned in the recruitment procedure, I provided the participants with a sample daily language use log as soon as they expressed their interests in my research, followed by detailed instructions and explanations before and after their consent. Altogether, I received five set of logs out of ten participants (See Table 3). The majority of these logs were finished between 20 and 30 days out of a month.

Table 3

*Brief introduction to the daily language use log data*

Pseudonym	Log days/30days
Sandra	30
Lucy	23
Lolita	18
Norman	21
Dara	22

Although language use log had not been widely used in sociocultural perspectives of language learning research, it demonstrated its advantages through the auto-ethnographic study of my own investment in English speaking Canadian social networks and in the pilot study. Here I would like to summarize its strengths as follows:

First, for the purposes of this study, daily language use logs were very inclusive data



collection method. It covered the majority of the key points I needed to examine, such as conversation sites, the length and depth of the conversations, the interconnections between CFL learners and other interlocutors, and the diversity of the conversation types. Through the logs, I also had a better understanding of participants' actual daily life without the interference of my personal observation or questioning.

Second, brief but continuous log writing was a good complement to the in-depth but time-limited interviews that I used as the second data collection method. During the pilot study, I found that a draft analysis of the log data helped me redevelop the interview probing questions and tailor the interviews with the specific investment experiences of the participants, which made the interviews more effective.

Third, daily language use logs helped the participants to be more reflective and well prepared during the study. Some participants did point out that the logging experience made them more aware of their investment experience and strategies.

One problem I encountered during the pilot study was the duration of daily language use logs. I found that some participants could not finish the whole process of log writing for a continuous 30 days as I had designed. Hence, in this study, I kept a better balance among accountability, feasibility, and participants' tolerance. I shrank the log entry days from 30 days in a month to around 20 days in a month.

**Semi-structured interviews.** The second data collection method I used was interviewing. Interviews enable the researchers "to explain the meaning of any terms the participant may not understand ... to probe participants' responses in order to gain more

detailed data and... to seek clarification regarding the meaning of particular answers” (Hartas, 2010, p. 227). The specific category of interview I used was semi-structured interview, the main benefit of which is to “ensure coverage of the researcher’s agenda while also providing opportunities for interviewees to talk about what is significant to them, in their own words” (Hartas, 2010, p. 231). Hence, I used semi-structured interviews to achieve both breadth and depth. In this study, I did semi-structured interviews with both participants and informants.

For the participants, I encouraged them to do the semi-structured interviews after they completed or partially completed their daily language use logs. Its purpose was to gain participants’ personal perceptions and reflections upon their investment and identity negotiation experiences in local social networks. Each interview was for about one hour. I chose quiet classrooms in their universities as interview locations, where, according to the pilot study, they felt more familiar, conformable, and safe.

Before the interview, I prepared the interview protocol (See Appendix D) based upon my research questions, literature review, and pilot interviews. In addition, both the items and general comments in daily language use logs were good references for the probing questions. The general question and probing questions covered the following three aspects: first, participants’ demographic backgrounds, their general Chinese language learning experiences, and their expectations to their investment in Chinese-speaking social networks; second, their actual investment experiences in China, the characteristics of Chinese social context, the identity negotiation they have experienced, and the biggest problems and supports during this process; and third, their comparison of real-life experiences to imagined experiences and

social supports.

During my pilot study, I found several problems in the interview design according to the feedback of the participants. In this study, I addressed these issues correspondingly.

First, some participants reported that the interview protocol I used was a bit too abstract and too academic for them. The specific jargon I used, such as investment, identity negotiation, and interlocutors, would lead to a misunderstanding of certain questions. I had revised the protocol based upon their feedback and the research findings of the pilot study.

Second, at the very beginning of the pilot study, I encouraged the participants to use English, their mother tongue, to do data collection. However, during both data transcription and data analysis, I realized that many participants considered participating in this research as a good opportunity to speak and learn Chinese; hence, they felt comfortable using both Chinese and English during the interviews. In this study, I tried to make it flexible by letting them choose to use both their mother tongue (English) and target language of their study (Chinese) as the working languages of this study in order to leave more space and freedom for the participants to express themselves.

Third, during my pilot study, I found that it was not easy to build trust and rapport with the participants during the limited interview time. In order to increase mutual trust and let the participants feel more comfortable when giving critiques of Chinese social context to a Chinese researcher, I gradually tried to include my own personal experiences in Canada into the interviews as probes. This made it easier to establish commonalities among us and encouraged them to reflect on their own experiences in China. This seemed to have rather

positive results in the pilot study. In this study, I used a similar strategy in the interview process. Besides, I was explicit in discussing power relationships, social dominance, gender and racial inequality with the participants when necessary.

Fourth, “the research interview is not a neutral conversation” (Hartas, 2010, p. 228). This situation was even truer when I, as a Chinese native speaker and researcher, tried to do interviews with CFL learners in China. During my pilot study, I found that some participants were reluctant to critically explore their identity negotiation process, especially when talking about the power dynamics they had experienced in China. For this, I paid more attention to confirm the confidentiality of this research and made sure that the interview would not cause any frustration or inconvenience to the participants.

For the informants, the purpose of the interviews was to gain a good understanding of the sociocultural context in which participants’ investment and identity negotiation in China occurred. The interview was for about one hour. All the informants chose Chinese as the interview language. Before the interview, I had prepared the interview protocol (See Appendix E) according to my research questions, literature review, and pilot interviews. The general question and probing questions covered the following three aspects: first, informants’ working experiences with CFL international students and a general survey of the target programs; second, the teaching and administrative philosophies, policies, and practices towards international students in the target universities; and third, informants’ understandings of the biggest social barriers and supports during North American CFL international students’ investment and identity negotiation in local social networks. Since I did not include

informants in my pilot study, I made minor adjustments to the interview protocol after each interview as required.

**Secondary or existing data.** Secondary data are data collected or recorded at an earlier time, usually by a different person and often for an entirely different purpose (Johnson & Christopher, 2012, p. 212). In this study, secondary data were collected to corroborate and supplement the data collected through the previous two methods.

The advantages of using secondary data are as follows. First, using secondary data is “economical,” since the researcher may “save time, energy, money, and other resources” for data collection. Second, secondary data provide “information with breadth across a comparatively longer time, which would hardly be realized through retrospective research” (Boslaugh, 2007, pp. 1-4). Third, since secondary data have always been kept for other purposes, they will not be influenced by the study under discussion and the presence of the researcher (Miller & Brewer, 2003, p. 286).

The secondary data in this study included two personal documents of the participants, one publication of the target programs, and three policy documents of the target universities (See Table 4). During my pilot study, some CFL international students mentioned that they had the habit of writing personal documents like diaries and blogs, which provided detailed information of their daily language use experiences and personal reflections. Hence, in this study, I asked the participants directly during the semi-structured interviews whether they had kept such personal documents in either Chinese or English and whether I could use these documents in my study as secondary data. If they had related documents and confirmed their

participation in the collection of secondary data, I discussed with the participants at the end of the interviews and/or during other appointments how and when I could get access to their personal documents and in which way I could use them.

In addition, according to the facilitators in the pilot study, some target programs had published formal and informal journals and magazines on international students' academic and social life, which mainly based upon their written reflections. With Chinese narrations and colorful pictures, these documents provided a rich description of CFL learners' social engagement in China over years. Additionally, the majority of the target universities had written policies on CFL learning and international student administration. In this study, I included both sources of public documents as secondary data. I directly asked the facilitators and the informants about related publications and I asked for their suggestions on how I could get access to these secondary data. The public secondary data collection was in concurrent with the collection of daily language logs and semi-structured interviews, which helped update the probing questions for the later.

Table 4

*Brief introduction to the secondary data*

Data category	Sources and number of copies
Participants' personal data	2 personal blogs of Nhu and Norman
Target program publications about the life of their students in China	1 copy of magazine
Target university international student administrative documents	3 copies of documents from 2 target universities

During both personal and public secondary data collection, I evaluated the feasibility and appropriateness of secondary data based upon the following criteria: relevance,

authenticity, credibility, and usability. To begin with, I paid attention to the relevance of the secondary data and double-checked their applicability to the research objective<sup>30</sup> (Lix et al., 2012, p. 6; Management study guide, n.d., evaluation of secondary data, para. 2). Then, I examined their authenticity, including authenticity soundness (completeness and reliability) and authorship (Trueman, 2012, Scott identified four criteria, para. 1). Furthermore, I verified their credibility, sincerity, and accuracy (such as the consistency between the secondary data and the primary data) (Trueman, 2012, Scott identified four criteria, para. 2). Finally yet importantly, I confirmed the usability and comprehensibility of the data with the participants and informants (Lix et al., 2012, p. 6). It is important to note that I was not able to get access to many other foreign student administrative documents due to their confidentiality.

In short, the data in this study were composed of five sets of daily language use logs, fifteen interviews, and five copies of personal and public documents. The three data collection methods supplemented each other, providing diverse perspectives towards the questions under study.

### **Data analysis**

Although I was very excited about the rich data I got, I also faced the challenge of managing over 1,000 pages of data in an effective way. That was why I used qualitative data analysis software, Nvivo, and continuously referred to critical hermeneutic data analytic model during data analysis.

**Coding through Nvivo and theme identification.** Data analysis began

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<sup>30</sup> I examined whether they could provide information to answer the research questions, whether they were relevant to the target population and whether they could reflect the timeliness of this study.

simultaneously with data collection. While I was doing data collection, I developed detailed field notes that recorded all my observations and personal reflections on my interactions with both participants and informants. I also did half of the interview transcripts in concurrent with data collection, during which I chunked the transcripts into broad topic areas, wrote summaries of relevant excerpts, and took down memos alongside the transcripts of initial categories and codes. I learned from these analyses and adapted my interview strategies accordingly.

After I finished all the interview transcripts, I imported all of them as well as all the daily language use logs and summaries of secondary data into qualitative data management and analysis software – Nvivo. I chose Nvivo because it could help me work intensively with the rich data I got by using “multiple strategies concurrently-reading, reflecting, coding, annotating, memoing, discussing, linking, and visualizing-with the results of those activities recorded in nodes (or codes), memos, journals and models” (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013, p. 68).

With reference to the preliminary codes I summarized during the first half of the transcription, I started to do the first cycle of coding in Nvivo. I selected the data excerpts related to my investigation, particularly those I believed were “typical,” “interesting,” “rich in the details” and sometimes “contrast(able)” with each other (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013, pp. 69-70), and stored them in the “descriptive nodes/codes (summarizing the primary topic of the excerpts)” (Saldaña, 2012, p. 3). At this level, I also tried to include more “in vivo codes” (direct quotations from the interviewees) (Grbich, 2013, p. 262) which would remind me of the original ideas and expressions of the participants. Node description, memo writing and



linking, and annotations were conducted throughout the entire cycle, which helped to clarify the content and meaning of the nodes and to handle the evolving ideas.

Reviewing the list of nodes produced by Nvivo and the categories I took down in the memos, I started the second cycle of coding, the goal of which was “to develop a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organization from the array of first cycle codes” (Saldaña, 2012, p. 149). The key task of this cycle was to identify the relationship among the nodes, refine the nodes and categories (such as adding some conceptual codes), and organize them into “a hierarchy in which nodes representing subcategories are placed under higher level or 'parent' nodes” (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013, p. 76) (See Table 5 as an example). At the end of this step, I created all together 19 parent codes and over 100 baby codes.

**Table 5**

*Sample Nvivo node hierarchy*

Name of the parent and baby nodes	Sources	References
Program and university (design, administration and policies)	0	0
Supports from program	5	8
Orientation	9	12
Living environment and policy	0	0
Social and cultural concern	7	12
Moving off campus	3	3
Living standard and condition	6	6
Curfew and registration for outsiders	2	3
Information channels on campus	7	11
Extracurricular activities and social opps	8	21
Cultural program	2	3
Common social space	3	3
Attitudes of the administrative staff and administrative	1	4

*Note:* This is a snapshot of part of the Nvivo node report. Sources refer to the number of participants who contributed to certain node. References refer to the number of excerpts related to certain node.

The tree structure of the nodes helped me with the logic of the codes, conceptual clarity, and pattern identification (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013, pp. 97-98). Based upon the coding results from Nvivo, I started thematic analysis, the purpose of which was to investigate “commonality,” “differences,” and “relationships” among the data (Harding, 2013, p. 99). The specific themes and findings will be fully demonstrated and analyzed in Chapter 5 to Chapter 8.

Above is a brief introduction to the coding and theme identification process I did through Nvivo. However, I did not finish this process randomly but with the guidance of critical hermeneutic data analytic model.

**Critical hermeneutic data analytic model.** Critical hermeneutic data analytic model (See Figure 1)<sup>31</sup> guided my entire data analysis process from initial coding to final theme identification and discussion. I developed this model based upon Prasad’s (2002) discussion on the five foci of contemporary hermeneutics streams: the hermeneutic circle, the historicity of understanding and the hermeneutic horizon, understanding as dialogue and the fusion of horizons, the role of authorial intention in interpretation, and the significance of critique in interpretation (pp. 17-23). Through a synthesis of these five foci in the model, I located three key elements of data analysis, text, context and reflexivity, and emphasized their dialogic relationships. Moreover, the critical perspective underlined the entire framework.

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<sup>31</sup> I acknowledge the contribution of my previous co-supervisor Donna Chovanec and my academic colleagues, Laura Servage, Misty Underwood, Evelyn Hamdon, Ayesha Mian, Ariel Browning, and Brittany Johnson in developing this model.

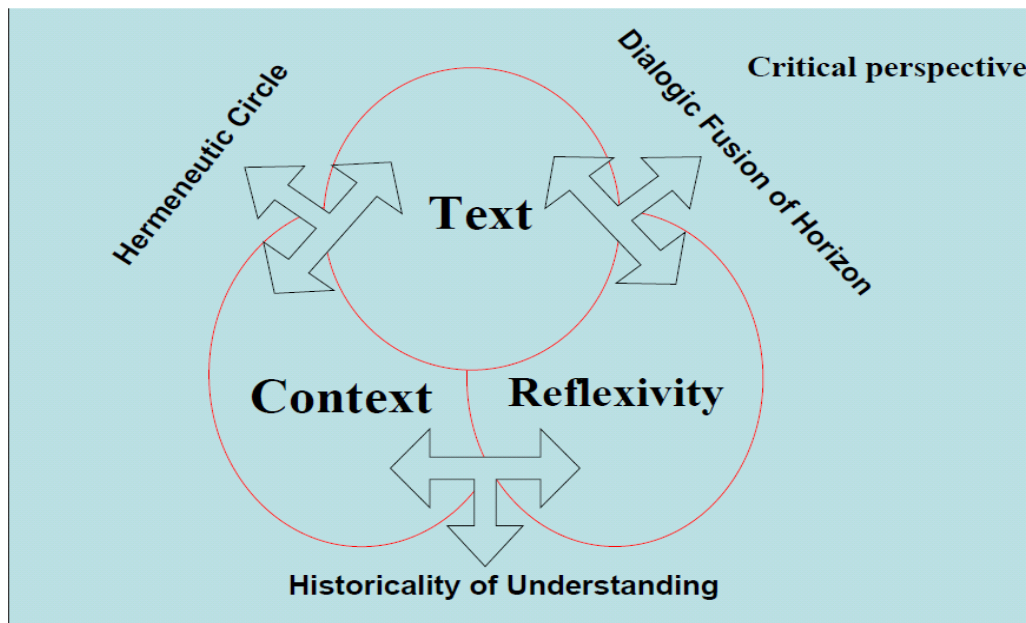
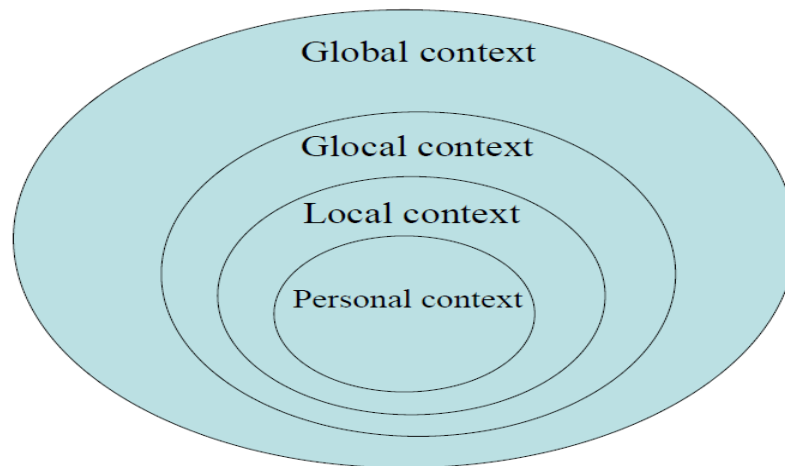


Figure 1. Critical hermeneutic data analytic model

More specifically, in this model, “text” was the data in this study, that is to say, the daily language use logs, semi-structured interviews, and secondary data. “Context” meant the sociocultural context in China where participants’ investment and identity negotiation took place. It was depicted and examined based upon multiple sources, such as the data in this study, literature review, and my personal experiences. The understanding of the multi-layered context was further demonstrated in Figure 2, which included personal social context of the participants, local context of the target city, the “glocal” context where local social environment intersected with international trends, and the global context (Xu, 2009, pp. 181-191). In this study, the analysis usually started from the personal context but attached more importance to the local and “glocal” contexts. From time to time, I compared the characteristics of local context with the global dynamics. “Reflexivity” referred to a circular process in which I examined my assumptions and biases, negotiated the social contexts my

participants and I were embedded in, and uncover the power dynamics within the research relationships (Ellwood, 2006; Finlay, 2002; Kanyangale & Pearse, 2012). I reinforced reflexivity through ongoing self-conversation and self-reference of my pre-understandings of the text and context. Keeping research journals and peer reviewing of the data with my co-supervisors and academic colleagues also helped me to be reflexive. Furthermore, through meta-reflexivity,<sup>32</sup> I had a better understanding on why and how to be self-conscious.



*Figure 2.* Different layers of the “context”

The overlaps and arrows among the text, context and reflexivity indicated either the overlapping of the data and/or the interactivity of their relationships. First, the text overlapped with the context, because they shared the same data, such as participants’ interviews. Besides, the analysis of the text followed the hermeneutic circle. Through the circle, the meaning of individual texts of a give culture can be understood by understanding the meaning of the overall sociocultural context of the text, and vice versa (Prasad, 2002, p.

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<sup>32</sup> Meta-reflexivity means the reflection on one’s reflexivity. Concurrent with this research, I did another study on my reflexivity in the doctoral research (Mao, Akram, Chovanec & Misty, 2016)

17).

Second, the reflexivity overlapped with the text, because “the interpretation had the nature of a dialogue, in which the meaning of a text emerged through a conversation between the interpreter and the text” (Gadamer, 1975, p. 331). Hence, during data analysis and interpretation, I expanded my horizon of prejudice to integrate the horizon of the text.

Third, the context overlapped with the reflexivity in that they shared the same information sources, such as my personal reflections. In addition, the historicity of understanding indicated the “creative role of the interpreter’s historico-cultural context in the process of understanding a text that may belong to a relatively different historical and/or cultural milieu” (Prasad, 2002, p. 18).

Furthermore, just as Figure 1 demonstrates, the model was grounded in a critical framework. This meant the entire data analysis process was done from a critical perspective. It included a critical analysis of the text in an ongoing dialogic hermeneutic circle with the context, a critical interpretation of the context from a dialogic historicity of self-reflection, and a critical understanding of self-reflection with a dialogic fusion of the horizons with the text. Although I explained the dialogic interconnections and critical orientation separately, they occurred simultaneously and synthetically during data analysis.

Briefly, with the help of Nvivo, I managed and analyzed the data through hierarchical coding and theme identification. With the guidance of critical hermeneutic data analytic model, I interpreted the data with a dialogic and critical integration of the text, context and reflexivity. Based upon the previous introduction to the research design and its implementation, I will

examine the credibility, ethicality, and limitations of this study.

### **Credibility and trustworthiness**

The credibility and trustworthiness of this research were built through the following four aspects: methodological triangulation, low-inference descriptors, self-critical journal, and continual review and update of research methods. They were reflected during each stage of the research process.

First, I addressed the research credibility through methodological triangulation. That is to say, during data collection, I used three distinct methods: daily language use logs, semi-structured interviews, and secondary data. They diversified the data sources and perspectives.

Second, I guaranteed the research trustworthiness by using low-inference descriptors. More specifically, I used the description that was phrased very similarly to the accounts of participants and informants and my field notes, and thus, the reader can experience their “actual language, dialect, and personal meanings” (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 267).

Third, I assumed that I had some “a priori biases” about the question under research. I kept this in my mind as I observed and thought about what I learnt (Johnson & Christensen, p. 273). To reinforce reflexivity, I kept a research journal, which documented the data, methods, and decisions made during the research project and analysis and examined these to provide a “self-critical account” of the research process (Seale, 2004, p. 79).

Fourth, I developed the interview protocols through my ongoing review of the literature, discussions with co-supervisors, and reflections on the pilot study. Its main purpose was to help to test and improve the appropriateness of my methods.

### **Ethical considerations**

This research conformed to the University of Alberta human research ethics guidelines. I will address the specific ethical considerations in the following four areas: the risk of harm, autonomy and informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, and fairness and inclusiveness.

To start with, among all the principles of research ethics, it is safe to say that doing no harm to the participants and informants is the cornerstone of ethical conduct (Lichtman, 2013, p. 52). I took care in all stages of this research in order to protect the human subject physically and psychologically. I took all steps to limit any risks, ensuring that participation in this study posed no threat or harm. By the end of this study, no harm was detected according to the feedback of participants, informants, and facilitators.

Besides, as a researcher working with international students from different language and cultural backgrounds, I was attentive to the use of informed consent and their understandings of involving in this research. Due to their bilingual background, I explained the research using meaningful and accessible languages in both personal interactions and written documentation. In order to protect the autonomy of participants and informants, I obtained their informed consent before data collection. I guaranteed that the participants and informants be able to withdraw from the investigation at any point (See Appendix B & C).

Furthermore, I was attentive to the protection of the privacy of participants and informants. Although the identities of participants and informants were not anonymous to the researcher and the facilitators, I protected related information from public disclosure (Neuman, 2011, p. 152). In

the consent form, I indicated that the information about the participants and informants was confidential by using pseudonyms. The information about their names and other details was removed in data recording, processing and publishing. In order to realize the confidentiality, I guaranteed, “No identifying information about the individual should be revealed in written or other communication (Lichtman, 2013, p. 52) and the “codes should always be kept separate from the data to which they apply” (Hartas, 2010, p. 121). I also paid attention to the storage of the data and consent forms. I protected the electronic data with a password, kept other related materials locked in secure cabinets, and restricted the access to data without permission (Hartas, 2010, p. 122).

Last, I respected the inclusiveness, accuracy, and fairness of this research. My research involved a sample of participants with respect for their language, culture, ethnicity, gender, and educational backgrounds. I also asked the facilitators to be as inclusive as possible during participant and informant recruitment. Besides, I provided a fair reflection of the phenomenon under investigation through the design and decisions about the methods; accuracy was further maintained through careful data recording and at any subsequent point of transfer of the data (Hartas, 2010, p. 121). Additionally, reporting itself must be fair. I was “honest and accurate with the interpretations of the data” (Hartas, 2010, p. 122), although there were limitations of any interpretations or representations (Peterson, 1983).

### **Limitations and delimitations**

The limitations of this study resulted from the limited quantity and diversity of the research subject and the disadvantages of qualitative research methods. Here I will specify



how I identified and dealt with these limitations.

In this study, I recruited participants for the specific reasons that were significant based upon the literature review, my own experiences, and the pilot study. Although study abroad in Chinese universities has been an increasingly popular phenomenon for North Americans, in this research I only chose a sample of American and Canadian<sup>33</sup> international students in several Chinese universities in one Northern Chinese city. Compared with the complexity of the whole issue, the diversity of the target population was rather limited<sup>34</sup>. Besides, according to the facilitators, the participants and informants recommended to me were among those who were cooperative with the authorities and who were more willing to share their personal experiences. Thus, the results may be transferable to similar groups, but not generalizable to broader populations that do not share these characteristics. In order to clarify the boundary of this research, I chose specific definitions of several complicated concepts, such as North American international students and Chinese social networks. The application of these definitions helped to keep the research on focus.

There are also limitations inherent in the research methods<sup>35</sup>. Interviews require time and trust building with participants. The semi-structured interviews allowed me to investigate

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<sup>33</sup> Although there was only one Canadian participant in this study, the proportion of American and Canadian students in this study to some degree reflected that in the target city and in China.

<sup>34</sup> During my research trips, I met three more potential participants than the ten participants I finally had. They were a student with hearing loss, a student with English as a second language, and a student growing up in China as a third culture kid. Due to time and logistic limitations, I was not able to explore their stories in this study. However, I noticed the need of investigation on the underrepresented target population in future studies, such as the students with disabilities, sexual minorities, EFL North Americans, and racially mixed heritage learners.

<sup>35</sup> During my pilot study, I once discussed the possibilities of field research with the facilitators but finally gave up due to time constraints. In the future, I would like to spend more time interacting with the participants and examine the areas of inquiry in the natural settings. Since the three data collection tools in this study paid more attention to the input from the participants and informants, I believe participant observation will “reduce the problem of reactivity” and bring new viewpoints of the researcher (Guest, Namey & Mitchell, 2012, p. 80). Ideally, a longitudinal cohort study that observe the same subjects over years will be a good complement to current research.

and prompt the stories and lived experiences of interviewees; however, the interviews were influenced by researcher's own perceptions and interpretations. Peer review with my co-supervisors during data analysis addressed this limitation (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 266). Daily language use logs and secondary data to a certain extent mitigated the disadvantages of semi-structured interviews, since they demonstrated the actual usage of Chinese social networks and personal reflections over an extended time, which provided specific examples for in-depth probing.

To sum up this chapter, with critical hermeneutics as the methodological framework of this study, I recruited ten participants and five informants from five target universities in a Northern Chinese city. After and during the data collection through three separate methods, daily language use logs, semi-structured interviews and secondary data, I did data analysis by using Nvivo and critical hermeneutic data analytic model. Moreover, I was attentive to the credibility, ethicality, and limitations of this study throughout the entire research process. In the following chapter, I will focus on an introduction to one of the three key data analysis elements-context, specifically China as a study abroad destination and the CFL education in China.

## **Chapter 4 China as a Study Abroad Destination and CFL Education in China<sup>36</sup>**

China has a long history as a study abroad destination and so does learning Chinese as a foreign language. In this chapter, I will briefly introduce China, Chinese language, and the development of Chinese international and CFL education. Concurrent with a summary of related educational policies and initiatives<sup>37</sup>, I will talk about the major achievements and concerns during the promotion of study abroad in China and CFL learning worldwide. Focusing on the ideo-political changes behind educational reforms, this chapter will provide a good historical background for the analysis of the educational and sociocultural environment in the target programs, universities, and communities.

### **China and Chinese language**

China, officially the People's Republic of China (P.R.C.), is a sovereign state located in East Asia. It is the world's most populous country, the fourth largest by area, and the second-largest economy (Barboza, 2010, August 15; Liu & Diamond, 2005, p. 1179). As one of the four oldest civilizations in the world, China has more than 4,000 years of recorded history with rich cultural heritage. China has also been a highly diverse and complex country; however, because the great majority of the Chinese population is Han<sup>38</sup>, even though with a wide variety of ethnic groups<sup>39</sup>, "China is often characterized as an ethnically homogeneous country" (China, 2017, June 9, paras. 4-6).

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<sup>36</sup> All the statistics in this chapter refer to those in Mainland China.

<sup>37</sup> For the purpose of clarity, I will only use the English translation of Chinese laws, regulations, and policies in the main text of this chapter. I will provide the corresponding pinyin and Chinese characters in the footnotes. If the documents mentioned in this chapter has been officially translated into English, I will not provide the corresponding pinyin and Chinese characters.

<sup>38</sup> According to the Sixth National Population Census of the P.R.C., 91.51 percent of the Chinese population were Han by November 1, 2010 (Ma, 2012, p. 41).

<sup>39</sup> China has 56 ethnic groups.

Spoken by the Han majority and many other ethnic groups in China, Chinese is a number of genetically related but more or less mutually unintelligible language dialects (Mair, 1991). With six thousand years of history, the written Chinese is the oldest written language in the world; and it is also a common form of communication among the speakers of different Chinese dialects who may not be able to have verbal conversations (Lin, n.d., paras. 1-2).

For political, economic, and social purposes, a lingua franca has always been needed in Modern China, the establishment of which went through more than a century (Liu, 1999, p. 104). In 1955, the P.R.C officially named Putonghua<sup>40</sup> as the standard Chinese and one year later, the Central Working Committee for the Promotion of Putonghua started the promotion of Putonghua across the country (Chu, 2012, p. 110). The status of Putonghua was further strengthened through related laws, such as *Constitution of the People's Republic of China* (1982) and *Law of the People's Republic of China on the Standard Spoken and Written Chinese Language* (2000), although its final popularity hinges on being the official language of Chinese mass media and Chinese educational institutions of all levels (Chu, 2012, p. 110). Putonghua (hereafter refers to as Chinese) is now one of the six official languages of the United Nations. It is considered one of the languages of the future (Tinsley & Board, 2014). It is also the target language of this research.

## **International and CFL Education in China**

**International and CFL education in ancient and modern China.** China has a long

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<sup>40</sup> Putonghua is often called Standard Mandarin, Mandarin Chinese, or Chinese in everyday English. "The phonology of the standard is based on the Beijing dialect, but its vocabulary is drawn from the large and diverse group of Mandarin varieties spoken across northern, central, and southwestern China. The grammar is standardized to the body of modern literary works that define written vernacular Chinese, the colloquial alternative to Classical Chinese developed around the turn of the 20th century" (Shao, 2015, p. 20)

history as a study abroad destination and so does learning Chinese as a foreign language. The earliest international students in China could be traced back to the Sui Dynasty (581-618 AD) for about 2000 years ago and they were overseas students sent by the Japanese Government to learn Chinese culture and language (Dong, 2003, p. 68). The Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD), the highest point and most open age in Chinese ancient civilization and international education, witnessed thousands of international students and the standardization of international education institutions, administrative policies and CFL programs (Liu, 2002; Zhang, 2007). At that time, the international students could enroll in Chinese higher education system for free; and the key international student source countries then included Japan, Korean Peninsula, Nepal, India and Vietnam (Liu, 2002, p. 100).

The ups and downs in the following Chinese dynasties (the Song 960-1279, Yuan 1271-1368, and Ming 1368-1644 Dynasties) never stopped the arrivals of international students. However, as the economy gradually waned and the society became less open up to the outside world, the number of the international students in China decreased. This was especially true in the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing Dynasties (1644-1911, the last imperial dynasty in China) due to their “Closed Door” policy (Li, 2005, p. 1). However, in the Qing Dynasty, China for the first time had international students from Russia studying Tibetan Buddhism classics and Chinese language (Mi & Su, 1994; Xiao, 2007).

In 1840, the British warships invaded China and started the Chinese modern history. “The two Opium wars brought great challenge and humiliation to China” and gradually changed it into a semi-feudal and semi-colonial society; it also forced the Chinese government

to “get access to the Western science and technology” and learned “the enemies strengths in order to defeat them” (Gao, 2009, p. 61). At that time, the Western missionaries played an important role in introducing and translating Western technologies and ideologies to China and into Chinese and thus became a great proportion of the CFL learners at that time (Zheng, 2002).

### **International and CFL education in the People’s Republic of China (1949-1977).**

After the two world wars (1914-1918, 1939-1945) and Chinese civil war (1927-1936, 1946-1950), the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 started the contemporary history of China and a new era of Chinese international and CFL education. However, from 1949 to 1977, their development was comparatively slow due to China’s less developed economy and higher education system, limited source countries with formal diplomatic relationships, and closed economic and sociopolitical environment. Diplomatic strategies and ideo-politics were the main factors of international education policy making at that time, which still have their strong influence until now (Guo & Wang, 2008, p. 141).

The recruitment foci during this period were the students from the other Third World countries with academic interests in science and engineering (Zhang, 2011, p. 20). In 1950, 15 Eastern European exchange students became the first group of international students in the P.R.C. (Zhu, 2011, p. 3). From 1950 to 1965, China accepted all together 7259 international students from 70 countries and all of them enjoyed Chinese Government Scholarships; the key source counties included Asian neighbor countries, Soviet Union and Eastern European People's Democratic countries, and African countries (Cheng, 2009, P. 29).

Although the Chinese Government tried to formalize the international education

policies, the majority of the administrative documents during this period were bilateral agreements between China and source countries (Zhang, 2005, p. 70). It was only until 1962 that the Chinese Ministry of Education clarified the general goal of international education in China and regulated that universities with a large number of foreign students should have specialized international student administrative and teaching agencies and personnel (Cheng, 2009, pp. 12-13; Yu, 2009, p. 24)<sup>41</sup>.

Starting in 1966, the Cultural Revolution brought Chinese educational system, including international education, to a virtual halt until 1972 when the Chinese higher education system resumed enrollment. China restarted to recruit overseas students in 1973 and in 1977 Chinese international education was still in a reviving stage with a total number of 404 foreign students (Chu & Nie, 2008, p. 37; Gao, 2010, p. 85).

Challenges and controversies always went with the development of international education in China. For example, due to limited Chinese proficiency, insufficient academic knowledge base, and misunderstanding of Chinese educational, sociocultural and physical living environment, the drop-out rates of international students (especially African students), were quite high during the early 1960s; some foreign students even expressed their dissatisfaction through classroom boycotts, hunger strikes and direct protestation to the central government (Zhu, 2011, p. 4). Based upon this situation, the Chinese Ministry of Education specified that if the international students could not integrate into Chinese domestic students

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<sup>41</sup> The goal was to educate international students to be the talents with fundamental theories, professional knowledge, and practical skills in specific majors and meanwhile to enjoy good health and friendship in China (Cheng, 2009, pp. 12-13).

through unified teaching plans, there could be separate arrangements to meet their needs (Yu, 2009, p. 22). The “official” tradition of taking “special” care of international students thereby started.

The CFL education in China had also grown with the development of Chinese international education. In 1950, the first specialized agency of CFL training was established in Tsinghua University, whose purpose was to linguistically prepare the foreign students for their future academic study with local students (Lv, 2006, p. 136). In 1952, China sent abroad the first group of CFL teachers (Wang, 2003, p. 9). In 1962, the Higher Preparatory School for Foreign Students (now Beijing Language and Culture University) was founded, which became the first postsecondary institution oriented to foreign students and CFL education (Luo, 2014, p. 340).

In 1963, the Chinese Ministry of Education required that foreign students with deficient Chinese proficiency should take one year of CFL intensive training (two years for students in Liberal Arts); by the end of the study, the students should pass Chinese proficiency tests in order to pursue further study in other majors (Yu, 2009, p. 18). By 1965, the number of Chinese universities offering CFL training had increased to over 20 (Yu, 2009, p. 20).

In addition to the increase of CFL programs, with the emergence of the first group of TCFL pedagogical reflections and discussions in 1950s, TCFL research gradually started in China; however, from 1950 to 1977 there were only approximately 100 related publications (Cheng, 2004, p. 37; Sun, 2009, pp. 46-49). After several years of experiment, the wide



adoption of the “comparative direct CFL teaching method”<sup>42</sup> in the 1960s and the teaching pedagogical renovation in late 1970s (in order to meet the different needs of Western international students) paved the way for contemporary CFL teaching style in China and highly influenced the teaching practices nowadays (Lv, 2006, pp. 136-137).

### **International and CFL education in the People’s Republic of China (post-1978).**

Steady economic growth and opening sociocultural environment are the prerequisites of international education development. The Chinese Economic Reform and Opening-Up initiated by Deng Xiaoping<sup>43</sup> since 1978 has been one of the most important milestones in Chinese contemporary history. Being compared as “the Second Long March” (The Economist, 2008, December 11), this reform has dramatically changed every aspect of China and Chinese people’s life, including accelerating the advancement of Chinese international education and CFL education.

*International education (1978-1997).*<sup>44</sup> Under the influence of the Opening-Up policy, several major educational initiatives changed the structure and nature of Chinese higher and international education. In 1978, 29 French students in a short-term CFL training program became the first cohort of self-financed foreign students in the P.R.C. (Zhang & Zhao, 2016, p. 116). It broke the one-sided funding mode from the Chinese government and made short-term

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<sup>42</sup> Teaching Chinese with no or limited help of translation in English or other foreign languages.

<sup>43</sup> Deng Xiaoping was “a Chinese communist leader” and “the most powerful figure” in the P.R.C. from the late 1970s until his death in 1997; he “abandoned many orthodox communist doctrines and attempted to incorporate elements of the free-enterprise system into the Chinese economy” (Deng Xiaoping, 2016, July 18, para. 1).

<sup>44</sup> In this research, international students in degree programs refer to foreign students registered in undergraduate, master, and PhD degree-granting programs in Chinese post-secondary institutions. International visiting students refer to those who already finished one year of post-secondary study in home counties and registered in 1-2 academic years (or 2-4 semesters) of Chinese non-degree programs. Short-term international students refer to those registered in Chinese non-degree programs for no more than half a year (or one semester).

CFL intensive training programs official in Chinese universities (Luan & Ma, 2011, p. 21). In 1979, the Chinese government set up a goal of increasing the number of international students by six times in six years (Yu, 2009, pp. 62-63)<sup>45</sup>. *Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Academic Degrees* (1980) made this ambitious goal possible through the preliminary standardization and internationalization of Chinese higher education degrees (Yu, 2009, p. 70).

What brought an overall change to Chinese higher and international education was *The Decision on the Education System Reform* launched by Central Committee of the Communist Party of China<sup>46</sup> in 1985. As Chinese economic system shifted from a planned economy to market economy, this reform enabled Chinese higher educational institutions to experience more autonomy in student recruitment, graduation assignment, funding modes, and curriculum design (Yang, 2008). Post-secondary institutions were allowed to organize international exchange programs through fund raising, thus opened up the possibility of direct student recruitment through intercollegiate agreements other than through the Chinese Ministry of Education as before (Zhang, 2005, pp. 73-74). This decentralized educational reform also promoted the socialization of logistic services in Chinese universities, providing more flexibility to the controversial and resource-critical foreign student accommodation services (Fang, 2006; Hou, 2001; Su, 2005). Besides, this reform strived for the advancement of less developed disciplines in social sciences, such as Finance, Economics, and Business, which later on turned out to be the most popular programs among international students (Yu, 2009, p. 66).

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<sup>45</sup> The goal was to increase the number of international students from less than 2,000 in 1979 to 12,000 in 1985.

<sup>46</sup> Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu jiaoyu tizhi gaige de jue ding 中共中央关于教育体制改革的决定.

In late 1980s, more reform policies were issued. They further grow the autonomy of foreign student hosting institutions through direct involvement in self-financed international education market and direct management of overseas students violating school disciplines (Yan & Song, 2014, p. 64; Zhang, 2011, p. 26). Because of a more open social environment, the number of foreign student hosting institutions raised from 30ish in 1978 to over 100 in 1990, and over 300 in 1997; the number of foreign students in China also raised from 1, 200ish in 1978 to over 12,000 in 1990, and over 43,000 in 1997 (Hu, 2000, pp. 32-33; Li, Hu, & Zhou, 2010, p. 52; Zhang, 2000, p. 10). Since 1978, the composition of overseas students in China also went through big changes with more than 60% of international students from developed and medium developed counties in late 1990s; Western developing countries became the major source of self-finance students and among them, the U.S. and Canada were the top one and top five in 1997 (Yu, 2009, p. 91; Zhang, 2011, p. 31).

***International education (1998-2008).*** Since 1998, Chinese international education entered the high-speed development stage. Major educational initiatives, such as “211 Project”<sup>47</sup> (since 1995), “985 Project”<sup>48</sup> (since 1998), higher education enrollment expansion<sup>49</sup> (since 1999), and *2003-2007 Action Plan for Reinvigorating Education* (Ministry

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<sup>47</sup> 211 Project is “a project of National Key Universities and colleges initiated in 1995 by the Ministry of Education of the P.R.C., with the intent of raising the research standards of high-level universities and cultivating strategies for socio-economic development” (Project 211, n.d., para. 1). China has “116 institutions of higher education (about 6 percent) designated as 211 Project institutions” (Project 211, 2017, April 19, para. 2).

<sup>48</sup> 985 Project is “a key program of the Chinese government to create world-class universities and high level research universities”; “The central government invested a total of RMB32.9 billion in special funds for phase I (1999–2001) and phase II (2004–2007) of the project, assisting thirty-nine universities” (Ying, 2011, p. 19).

<sup>49</sup> “In 1999, the Chinese government announced an important policy targeted at expanding tertiary education dramatically to reach an enrollment ratio of 15 percent, a level often defined as “mass higher education” (Yeung, 2013, p. 55). “After the college expansion policy, the college enrollment rate in China rose dramatically to 20.3 percent in 2005, then to 24 percent in 2010” (Yeung, 2013, p. 57).

of Education of the P.R.C., 2004)<sup>50</sup> all emphasized the importance of international education in the development of Chinese higher education and building world-class Chinese universities. Internationalization and globalization indispensably became the hottest concepts of all kinds of educational research projects, funding opportunities, university strategic plans, and matriculation quotas (Hu, 2000, p. 34).

Besides, with the rapid economic growth in China and the emergence of international education as a sunrise industry, investment in international education grow dramatically. One case in point was the increasing scholarships for overseas students, including Chinese Government Scholarships, provincial and municipal government scholarships (gradually established since 2002), and university level scholarships (Jin, 2006; Liu, 2008). For scholarship distribution, a bigger portion (over 60%) of Chinese Government Scholarships were given to the students in degree programs with an expectation of a more balanced student distribution among different international education categories (Chen & Cheng, 2012, p. 43, Cui, 2010, p. 9).

In addition, since 1998, more efforts were made to the standardization and internationalization of international student management. Related policies and regulations were successively issued and amended, including *Regulations on International Student Management in the Institutions of Higher Education*<sup>51</sup> (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Ministry of Public Security of the P.R.C., 2000), *Interim Measures for the Administration of Colleges and Universities Engaged in Overseas Education* (Ministry of

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<sup>50</sup> 2003-2007 nian jiaoyu zhenxing jihua 2003-2007 年教育振兴行动计划.

<sup>51</sup> Gaodeng xuexiao jieshou waiguo liuxuesheng guanli guiding 高等学校接受外国留学生管理规定.

Education of the P.R.C., 2002)<sup>52</sup>, and *Notice on the Establishment of International Student Program and Degree Registration Electronic Database* (Ministry of Education of the P.R.C., 2007)<sup>53</sup>. Although there was a big improvement of international education infrastructure and facilities in early 2000s, limited attention was paid to the cross-cultural adaptation and social engagement of foreign students (Yang, 2009, p. 5).

From 1998 to 2007, the average increase of international students in China was 19.3% per year with the highest point of 42.6% in 2004; in this period, there was a steady increase of international students in all kinds of academic programs and tuition categories (Cui, 2008, p. 75; C. Yang, 2011, pp. 111-113). In 2007, China became the sixth most popular study abroad destination with about 195,500 international students from 188 countries and areas (Zhang & Gong, 2008, September 2, para. 1). In the same year, the U.S. and Canada were still the top one and top five Western source countries of self-financed students (Yu, 2009, p. 118). In 2008, the 30th anniversary of China's Economic Reform, the number of international students in China for the first time exceeded 200,000 (about 223,500) with South Korea, the U.S., and Japan as the top three source countries (Wu & Ding, 2009, March 25, para. 1). This number equals to "180 times the number of international students in 1978, 38 times the number in 1988, and 5 times that in 1998" (Wen, 2012, p. 81).

***International education (since 2010).*** In 2010, Chinese central government issued *National Plan for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020)*

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<sup>52</sup> Gaodeng xuexiao jingwai banxue zanzing guanli banfa 高等学校境外办学暂行管理办法.

<sup>53</sup> Jiaoyubu bangongting guanyu shixing putong gaodeng xuexiao waiguo liuxuesheng xinsheng xueji he waiguo liuxuesheng xueli zhengshu dianzi zhuce de tongzhi 教育部办公厅关于试行普通高等学校外国留学生新生学籍和外国留学生学历证书电子注册的通知.

(The State Council of the P.R.C., 2010)<sup>54</sup>, which highlighted the development focus of Chinese international education in both quantity and quality (Sheng, 2013). Inspired by the national plan, the Chinese Ministry of Education initiated *Study Broad in China Plan* (Ministry of Education of the P.R.C., 2010)<sup>55</sup>. Its major target is to draw 500,000 foreign students to China by 2020 (with 150, 000 of them in degree programs) and make China top study abroad destination in Asia (Wang & Chen, 2015).

Since 2010, there has been a steady increase of 20,000 to 35,000 international students in China per year (Liu, Li & Wu, 2015, p. 54). The development of English and English/Chinese bilingual programs and the issue of related policies regarding foreign student work-study programs and employment after graduation partly contributed to the growth (Liu, Li & Wu, 2015, p. 55; Tian et al., 2005). In 2012, China took 8% share of the global market and ranked after the UK and the U.S. as the third largest international education hosting country (ICEF, 2014, June 11, paras. 2-3). Launched by the Chinese government in 2013, the “Belt and Road”<sup>56</sup> initiative further expands education and culture exchange with over 60 countries in Asia, Europe, and Africa (Wang, 2017, April 16, para. 1). In 2016, China accepted 442,773 foreign students from 205 countries and areas, with South Korea, the U.S., and Thailand as the top three source countries (Ministry of Education of the P.R.C., 2017, March 1, paras. 1-3). In 2017, the update of *Regulations on the Recruitment and Cultivation of International Students*

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<sup>54</sup> Guojia zhongchangqi jiaoyu gaige he fazhan guihua gangyao (2010-2020 nian) 国家中长期教育改革和发展规划纲要 (2010-2020) 年.

<sup>55</sup> Liuxue zhongguo jihua 留学中国计划.

<sup>56</sup> “Announced by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013, ‘One Belt, One Road’ comprises of two routes — the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. The routes link China to Europe by way of Central Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia and Africa” (Crabtree & Mind, 2017, May 22, para. 2).

(Ministry of Education, Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Ministry of Public Security of the P.R.C.)<sup>57</sup> provided the latest legal basis for the management of foreign students in all Chinese educational institutions (Yan, 2017, March 1, para. 6).

Although general statistics showed that China has been right on the way to its ambitious goal by 2020, further investigations indicated some concerns. A joint-study by two major Chinese educational websites, CUCAS<sup>58</sup> and EOL<sup>59</sup>, was a good case in point. Their research findings showed that the increase rates of international student in 2013 (8.58%) and 2014 (5.77%) were way lower than the average increase rate of the past nine years (13.19% between 2005-2014); also, the increase rates of foreign students from developed countries slowed down or became negative since 2009; besides, the growth rate of self-financed students and students in non-degree programs decelerated in recent years; furthermore, despite the rise of overseas students in Chinese second and third-tier cities, the 775 foreign student host institutions in 2014 was only 30.49% of the entire Chinese post-secondary system, thus the development of international education in China has been far from well-balanced (CUCAS & EOL, 2015).

External reasons, such as air pollution, a more competitive employment market for foreigners in China, increasing living expenses in China, and the economic recession in certain major source countries could to some extent lead to the slowing down of international student growth rate (Harney, 2015, March 12; Lu, 2013). However, internal reasons should be the key focus of further research and reform. They included students' dissatisfaction with rigid

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<sup>57</sup> Xuexiao zhaoshou he peiyang guoji xuesheng guanli banfa 学校招收和培养国际学生管理办法.

<sup>58</sup> China's University and College Admission System.

<sup>59</sup> China Education Online.

educational policies and systems, continuous challenge to teaching quality and program diversity, higher expectations to student services and products, and potential needs of high-tech application and registration process (Deng, 2015, April 7; Luan & Ma, 2011, pp. 25-27; Wang, Miao & Zheng, 2015, pp. 38-45). This was why since 2013 the Chinese Ministry of Education attached more importance to the improvement of the quality of international education and the construction of corresponding evaluation system than to the increase of international student enrollment number (Shi & Zhao, 2015, March 20, paras. 7-8).

*CFL education (post-1978): CFL International students and programs.* Facing the rapid increase and diverse needs of CFL learners after 1978, CFL education in China went through big changes in teaching categories and programs. In 1980s, besides the traditional CFL preparatory and visiting programs, short-term CFL programs and Modern Chinese (now Chinese Language) undergraduate programs (for CFL learners only) were also set up. Therefore, CFL education turned into a complete educational system with various degree and non-degree programs (Cui, 2010, p. 5). In 1987, Chinese government set up Chinese National TCFL Leading Group (now National Chinese International Promotion Leading Group) with its steering committee office, Hanban, in the Chinese Ministry of Education, and thus, CFL education and promotion became a critical component of Chinese national strategy.

In the 1990s, the establishment of CFL double majors, such as Business Chinese and Chinese/English bilingual programs diversified the content of CFL education (Wan, 2004; Wu, 2012). The target population of CFL education also shifted from foreign learners with special interest in Chinese language and culture to those who invested in Chinese as a tool for future



employment (Zhang, 2000, p. 52). For foreign students in degree programs, *The Trial Measures for the Degree Conferment to International Students in the Institutions of Higher Education (Draft)* (Academic Degree Commission of the State Council, 1991)<sup>60</sup> stipulated Chinese proficiency expectations to international students in various degree programs; besides, for foreign students in Liberal Arts and Chinese medicine, Chinese should be the language of their thesis and oral defense (Yu, 2009, pp. 84-85). In 2017, *Regulations on the Recruitment and Cultivation of International Students* (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Ministry of Public Security of the P.R.C.)<sup>61</sup> further confirmed that Chinese is the official teaching language and a compulsory course for postsecondary international students in China.

Since 2000s, CFL education in China entered the high-speed development stage. In 2007, CFL was the top one major among all the short-term (81.6 %) and visiting student (over 90%) programs and top two (21.5 %) among degree programs (Yu, 2009, pp. 126-127). In 2012, 53.5% of international students in China choosing the major of Chinese language and literature, although the percentage dropped to 38.2% in 2017 (Liu, 2017, March 1). The interconnected relationship between CFL and international education also became more obvious. According to a survey among overseas students in Shanghai (one of the biggest foreign student accumulation areas in China), 84.8% of participants used Chinese as teaching language; 70.6% of them preferred to use Chinese as teaching language; and 85.4% of them chose Chinese learning as their major reason of study abroad in China (Shanghai Education

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<sup>60</sup> Guanyu putong gaodeng xuexiao shouyu laihua liuxuesheng woguo xuwei de shixing banfa 关于普通高等学校授予来华留学生我国学位的试行办法.

<sup>61</sup> Xuexiao zhaoshou he peiyang guoji xuesheng guanli banfa 学校招收和培养国际学生管理办法.

Scientific Research Institute, 2010, September 8, paras. 4-5). CFL education then turned out to be the center and priority of Chinese international education. More specifically, CFL has been the most popular program for the foreign students from developed countries (CUCAS & EOL, 2015, para. 1-3-1). Besides, although a big proportion of international students from developing countries aiming at other degree programs, the quality of CFL preparatory training determines the possibility and successfulness of their pursuit of further study.

*CFL education (post-1978): TCFL discipline and TCFL research.* The growth of CFL learners in China also challenged traditional CFL teaching methods. Since small size class and individual tutoring would no longer be efficient to a large number of CFL students, Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (TCFL) reform was in need to deal with higher expectations of one-year Chinese intensive training for various degree programs (Yu, 2009, pp. 131-132). The establishment of TCFL as an individual discipline and the preliminary development of TCFL research emerged in response to the needs of times.

In 1983, the first group of TCFL undergraduate programs was set up in China as a sub-discipline within Chinese Linguistics (Yuan & Sun, 2007, p. 90). In late 1980s, Hanban and Chinese Ministry of Education issued several important policies regarding Chinese proficiency benchmarks, HSK<sup>62</sup> test syllabus, and CFL teacher accreditation (Cheng, 2004, p. 44; Zhang, 2005, p. 75). These documents to some degree regulated CFL teaching, Chinese proficiency exams, and CFL program evaluation. In addition, by the end of 1980s, TCFL research gradually developed with over 300 academic articles and over 10 monographs (Lv,

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<sup>62</sup> HSK is the abbreviation of hanyu shuiping kaoshi (汉语水平考试), which is the standardized test of Chinese proficiency for non-native Chinese speakers.

2006, p. 139). However, because scholars in 1980s and early 1990s mainly focused on the introduction of Western linguistic theories (especially ESL teaching pedagogies) to CFL education in China, CFL teaching was not able to reflect the characteristics of Chinese language and culture (Cui, 2005, pp. 64-65; Lv, 2006, pp. 139-141). This still have its great impact on classroom practices nowadays.

In 1993, TCFL became an independent discipline and six years later, the first TCFL PhD program was established indicating the further construction of the discipline; by 2000, over 35 Chinese universities offering TCFL undergraduate programs and the number of CFL instructors nationwide exceeded 6,500 (full-time and part-time instructors in over 300 CFL programs) (Zhang, 2000, pp. 51-53). In 2007, Master of Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages (MTCSOL) was officially set up, with the majority of the graduates as international TCFL volunteers sent by the Chinese government; by 2014, there had been around 380 universities offering TCFL undergraduate programs and over 100 of them offering MTCSOL programs (C. Li, 2015, p. 66).

A major certainty for CFL education and TCFL research during the past two decades has been the assessment of CFL teachers. Despite over 2,700 publications in TCFL research index by 2009, there was not a unanimous and consistent agreement on the qualifications of CFL instructors; the adoption and abolishment of national documents on CFL teaching accreditation in 1990 and 2004 also attested it (Hao, 2010, p. 25; Sun, 2009, pp. 45-49).

***CFL education (post-1978): International CFL promotion and popularity.*** A big breakthrough in CFL education was the international promotion of Chinese language and

culture since late 1990s. In 1999, the Second National TCFL Working Conference put forward two development foci in the new century: the establishment of CFL teaching centers in foreign countries and the active promotion of Chinese language and culture overseas (X. H. Yang, 2012, p. 77). Since early 2000s, Hanban received stronger financial supports from Chinese central government and initiated several influential programs at home and abroad. These programs included Chinese Bridge (Chinese Proficiency Contests), Confucius Institutes/Classrooms<sup>63</sup>, and World Chinese conference and Confucius Institute Conference (Cui, 2010, p. 7). In addition, Hanban has continuously dispatched TCFL volunteers abroad, organized tours of overseas educational administrators, coordinated CFL teacher training, and sponsored CFL curriculum compilation and TCFL research (Qiu, 2010, p. 89).

The most famous brand in CFL international promotion has been Confucius Institute (CI, since 2004), which is considered as an attempt to bolster China's soft power by developing a global network and audiences of linguistic and cultural competence (Gil, 2009; Kluver, 2014, p. 192). By 2014, its tenth anniversary, there were 475 Confucius Institutes and 851 Confucius Classrooms in 126 countries and regions (Meng & Cao, 2014, December 7, para. 1). However, behind the initial success of CI, there have been dissenting opinions to its nature and purpose. Due to its direct financial and educational supports from China<sup>64</sup>, CI has a very sensitive relationship with Chinese central government and Chinese Communist Party (Hubbert, 2014, pp. 331-333). Besides, by choosing a local partner institution rather than being a stand-alone

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<sup>63</sup> Confucius Institutes (in universities and colleges) and Confucius Classrooms (in K-12 schools) are non-profit educational organizations promoting Chinese language and culture outside of China.

<sup>64</sup> As the headquarters of the CIs, Hanban is responsible for the cooperation between partner institutions in China and abroad, partial funding support (usually half), and teacher supply and teaching material distribution (Hartig, 2015, p. 246).

organization, it has an unusual operation mode from its French (French Alliance), German (the Goethe Institute), and English (the British Council) counterparts (Ngamsang & Walsh, 2013). Some Western scholars and politicians further contended that CI interfered with the academic integrity of its partner institution; it lost the credibility through projecting a “correct” rather than a “real” China; and most importantly, it undertook improper influence on language teaching through disguised political propaganda and cultural infiltration (Hartig, 2015; Paradise, 2009). These concerns have greatly tarnished the international image of CI and China, the long-term survival of which should start with de-politicalized CFL promotion policies and initiatives (Cai & Li, 2013, p. 5).

Except the increasing CFL students in China and CFL programs initiated by the Chinese government, the past two decades also witnessed the rise of CFL learning worldwide. By 2011, more than 3,000 universities and colleges in 109 countries offered CFL courses and in many countries, such as the U.S. and France (Chiu, 2011, para. 1). Besides, by 2014, altogether 5 million CFL learners had completed various kinds of Chinese proficiency tests organized by CI headquarters (Hanban) in 860 exam centers across 114 countries (Hanban, 2014, para. 2). In addition, many countries have considered economic, diplomatic, and educational cooperation with China as national strategies. Some of them have taken tremendous efforts to support their understanding of China through initiating study abroad in China and CFL learning programs. A good case in point was U.S. government’s “100,000 Strong Initiative” since 2009, which successfully increased the number of American students in China to 100, 000 by 2014 (The US-China Strong Foundation, 2014, July 10). In 2015,

President Obama further announced “1 Million Strong Initiative,” designated to grow the number of K-12 students studying Chinese in the US from about 200,000 to 1 million by 2020 (He, 2017, January, 20, paras. 9-10). In 2016, the Canadian government initiated similar program, boosting Canada-China relationships through “youth engagement” strategy and sending 100,000 Canadian students to China (O’Neil, 2016, April 5, para. 2). Also in 2016, six U15 Canadian universities<sup>65</sup> launched “Canada Learning Initiative in China (CLIC)” program to “help Canadian students to gain experience in China as part of their degree program” (Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada, 2016, September 23, para. 29). It aims to send 500 Canadian students to China in 2017 and quadruple the number to 2000 in 2020 (Li, 2016, September 16, para. 6).

Many CFL students, including the majority of the participants in this research, followed the Chinese learning craze and chose to invest in a better educational opportunity through studying in China. However, as a newcomer and social outsider, in many times, they could not fulfill their equal and full participation in Chinese social networks. In the next chapter, I will investigate participants’ understanding of China as imagined communities. An analysis of how they envisioned their experiences in the target communities will make more sense of their disillusionment, re-imagination, and re-negotiation during actual investment.

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<sup>65</sup> U15 is a collective of 15 Canada’s top research-intensive universities.

## **Chapter 5 CFL Learning and Studying Abroad in China as Investment in China as Imagined Communities**

Imagination<sup>66</sup> is an important way of connection and a critical source of community (Wenger, 1998). For language learners, imagined target language speaking communities provided them with imagined identities, which highly influence their social networking in actual communities (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Trentman, 2013). In this chapter, I will first investigate the imagined role of China and Chinese language in participants' future life. Then, I will talk about their presumptions of China, Chinese people, and Chinese social environment. In addition, I will explain their choices of and expectations to the target city and programs. Concurrent with the discussion on China as imagined communities, I will briefly introduce the resemblance and alienation between what the participants envisioned and what they experienced, foreshadowing the foci of the following chapters. The analysis shows that participants' limited and idealized preunderstandings of China made them unprepared for the challenges ahead. This will help to interpret their real life investment and identity negotiation experiences in China, particularly their re-imagination after disillusionment.

### **The role of China and Chinese in future life**

North American CFL learners' presumptions of the role of China and Chinese language in their future life indicated why they wanted to learn Chinese, what drove them to study abroad in China, and what investment rewards they longed for by the end of their CFL programs. In this study, the top three reasons that motivated the participants to choose China

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<sup>66</sup> Imagination is "a process of expanding oneself by transcending our time and space and creating new images of the world and ourselves." (Wenger, 1998, p. 176)

and Chinese language included Chinese speaking and China-related employment opportunities, a shortcut to the academic capitals barely accessible in their home countries, and the affiliation with the ethnic Chinese identity. These reasons suggested that before coming to China, the participants already tried to get access to the Chinese social networks and hoped to identify with the imagined community members, the Chinese people.

**Chinese speaking and China-related employment opportunities.** Witnessing China's extraordinary rise in economic power, political influence, and higher education in the past decade, many international students decided to study abroad in China in order to be part of the rising Chinese market (Jiani, 2017, pp. 569-570; Song & Liu, 2014, p. 36). This was especially true to the participants in this study. Many participants clearly pointed out that the employment-seeking prospects and the economic rewards thereby were the foremost decisive factors for them to choose China. Coming to China then was an investment in the economic, social, and cultural capital they desired. Moreover, they believed that their identities as Chinese learners and speakers would provide them with more favorable career development options. Hence, learning Chinese in China was one of the important means to gain this affiliation.

Noticing the growing importance of China and Chinese language, Frank and Dennis started with the two-year intensive Chinese training but strived for a long-term plan of obtaining Master's degrees (taught in Chinese) in China. For this decision, Dennis explained:

I've travelled a lot...when I've seen the effects of what Chinese are doing, the business they trade, and there are a lot of Chinese all around the world. So I always want to learn a second language...I think China, Chinese is a smart choice.



Similarly, Frank showed his ambition in China and the global community:

I kind of took a broader look at the global scale as who's gonna be coming into some economic power soon ... I think China's gonna be doing very well in the future, so I'll try to put my education towards Chinese...

Both participants argued that their postgraduate education in China and in Chinese would help to realize their career dreams in the field of diplomacy and advertising respectively. Predicting that every high school in the U.S. would start to teach Chinese in five years, Frank was very optimistic about the future that Chinese learning would bring him:

I think... um... learning Chinese is by far the best decision I've probably made as far as an education perspective, as far as the future and jobs that might come about from it. Um I really, I really wish more students, more foreign students as far as English-speaking students ...um ...would come to China just because I think it's gonna open up a whole new bridge for those students ... (Chinese will) really kind of put you out there for the future.

Frank and Dennis were not the only participants who blueprinted Chinese learning in their professional development. Studying or working in the field of science, Sandra and Anna were also very excited about their identity as CFL learners. Sandra believed that her Chinese speaking background and her identification with the well-known Chinese culture would be advantageous for her job-hunting as a translator in the field of biology. In her eyes, learning Chinese should be a long-run investment. She already planned to come to China again after her current CFL exchange program and to study more Chinese with the help of the prestigious

Fulbright scholarship.

Besides, as an electronic engineer in the US, Anna had many cooperation projects with Chinese telecommunications equipment companies (like Huawei and ZTE) and Chinese coworkers. Amazed at the huge Chinese electronic market, Anna noticed the professional benefits China and Chinese language would bring. However, although there were many ESL Chinese professionals in her field, few American electronic experts could communicate in Chinese. Therefore, Anna thought learning Chinese in China would make her identity rather unique among the American professionals, because she no longer needed translators but could read and reply Chinese business emails by herself.

The above four American participants' perceptions of China echoed the strategical investment from their home country in this emerging superpower, which helped to construct a promising image of their study abroad destination. If their home country's slogan was "investing in US-China relations, one student at a time,"<sup>67</sup> these participants' motto then was investing in the Chinese market, one character at a time.

Another participant, Lucy, also strengthened her professional connection with China through Chinese learning. After two years of English teaching in the target province, she quit her job and chose to be a CFL student in a local program. In her opinion, Chinese language would be a useful tool of moneymaking in both China and her home country, Canada:

If I was going to continue working here in China, it was important for me to learn

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<sup>67</sup> This is the slogan of the US-China Strong Foundation. "Established in 2013 as the 100,000 Strong Foundation – and relaunched in 2016 as the US-China Strong Foundation – the organization leads a national movement to ensure the next generation of US leaders is equipped to engage effectively with China"; its three signature campaigns include 1 Million Strong, 100K Strong, and US-China Alumni Ambassador Network (The US-China Strong Foundation, n.d., paras. 1-2).

Chinese (to outstand among the English teachers from Western countries)...So I decided it was necessary for me to focus solely on Chinese...Then I thought on the other hand, it's very useful even if I return to Canada because of the number of Chinese (immigrants and internationals in Canada). That either way I just thought it wouldn't be a waste of time.

Obviously, the increasingly competitive English-teaching market in China and the dynamic people flows between Canada and China inspired Lucy's investment in the Chinese language. Her imagination of serving Chinese people in Canada by learning Chinese in China also reflected her home country's investment in China, particularly through the attraction of "Chinese workers, students and tourists" (Johnson, 2016, August 17).

In addition to those with career plans related to China, some other participants, such as Dara, Dennis, and Lolita, reshaped how they envisioned China and Chinese language from personal interests to prospective ways of making a living. For instance, Dara started to learn Chinese because of her love for Hong Kong Kung Fu movies and Taiwan TV dramas. After several years of learning, she finally decided to be an English/Chinese translator for transnational corporations. Her higher expectation to Chinese proficiency also made her pursue the Master's degree in Chinese Linguistics in the target university.

In brief, the Chinese speaking and China-related employment opportunities were the biggest impetus and rewards for the majority of the participants under discussion. It is important to note that no matter how long they stayed in China and whether they were satisfied with their life in the target city, all the participants still had very optimistic attitudes towards the

role of China and Chinese learning in their future life by the time of this study. This will also be reflected in the following reason of study abroad in China: an easy access to the desirable academic capital.

**A shortcut to the academic capital barely accessible in home country.** Medicine, including both Chinese and Western Medicine, has been one of the most popular majors among international students in China (Huang, 2014, p. 22). It attracted not only foreign students from undeveloped countries with an acute shortage of doctors and medical training programs, but also those from developing countries (Huang, Sheng & Li, 2016, p. 219). Riya, an Indian American student in this study, was a good case in point. She withdrew from her home university in the U.S. after one year of study and restarted in a prestigious clinical medical program in the target city. In her eyes, this shift would be a shortcut to the academic capital barely accessible back home:

In the U.S., you have to first do your bachelors and then pass the MCAT and get into medical school. Here, this is a bachelor of medicine and surgery. So, the only requirement for me to get accepted here was a high school graduation.

Studying abroad in China empowered Riya with easier access to her dream program without severe competition in her home country and shortened her investment time. Actually, the majority of the international students in Praveen's program were Indians, Pakistanis, and Indian and Pakistani Americans. Although Riya herself did not ever think of going to China before, this medical program in the target university was an open secret in the Indian communities of her hometown. Once Riya and her parents heard of this study abroad

opportunity, they quickly made up their mind. Unlike many other participants coming to China with scholarships, Riya needed to pay for the entire tuition and fees by herself. In spite of that, she and her family still felt it was very worthwhile for this highly valued major and degree.

For international medical students in China, their programs were taught either in Chinese (mainly for the programs of Chinese Medicine) or in English but with compulsory CFL courses (mainly for the programs of Western Medicine) (Wu, 2007; Zhang & Bai, 2005). Riya chose the latter and started to learn Chinese from a scratch. This CFL learning experience helped her to imagine the role of China and Chinese language in her future medical practice. As she noted, studying Chinese broadened her job-hunting potentials to hospitals in China and many other Chinese-speaking countries. Moreover, her increasing Chinese proficiency would enable her to serve the growing Chinese-speaking patients in the U.S., which, in her opinion, would be a large market in the U.S. This was exactly why Riya took CFL classes almost as serious as her medical studies.

Although Riya felt very excited about her study in China, the ambiguous recognition of her future medical degree in some provinces in the U.S. made her worried about the possibility of practicing medicine there:

This is one thing actually I'm still confused on. Because, in (my home province), on the (provincial) medical board (this) Medical University is on the list. But I think it's the Chinese medium, not the English medium. So I might to have to go to a different state to work unless (my home province) changed its rules and says that it is allowed then it's different. Then I can go home.

This was another reason that motivated Riya to invest in CFL learning, since it would provide her with the opportunity of taking the Chinese medium program in the future, increasing the competitiveness of her credential.

**The affiliation with the ethnic Chinese identity.** Instead of the economic and academic reasons mentioned above, Nhu, as a heritage Chinese learner from the U.S., longed for the affiliation with her ethnic Chinese identity in China. In agreement with her parents that language is an important aspect of identity, she embarked on her root-seeking journey through the target CFL exchange program.

Like hundreds of other Chinese heritage learners in her hometown, Nhu started to attend weekend Chinese schools since childhood. The parents of these students shared the same understanding of identity and language learning as hers. That was why in spite of the popularity of Chinese language worldwide, they were still more interested in the cultural affiliation that Chinese learning brought them. As far as they are concerned, learning Chinese was also learning to be a Chinese people:

I think why people like my parents do this (sending children to learn Chinese) is not so much because Chinese is super popular... I think what our parents trying to do is more about trying to retain our tradition or culture. Because I think for them if you can't speak Chinese you are not Chinese.

Therefore, for Nhu's family, her study abroad experience in China was an important part of their generational investment in maintaining the Chinese language and culture in the U.S.

Statistics showed that Chinese is the third most widely spoken language in American

and Canadian families (Duff et al., 2013, p. 1). Chinese North Americans are thus one of the most important group of Chinese heritage learners abroad. However, back in China, overseas Chinese are both welcome and vulnerable as “strangers at home” (Barmé, 2010, July 19). Nhu’s investment in being a Chinese through studying Chinese in China turned out to be a loss of belonging. The alienation of being only looking like a Chinese made her think more about what China and Chinese diaspora meant to her and whom she should be. I will further discuss this point in Chapter 8.

### **Pre-understandings of China, Chinese people and Chinese social environment<sup>68</sup>**

North American CFL international students’ imagination of China, Chinese people, and Chinese social environment demonstrated in what kind of communities of practice they desired and prepared themselves to invest. In contrast to participants’ high enthusiasm to Chinese market and Chinese learning, their pre-understandings of their study abroad destination were very limited. The gap between their assumptions and realities led to disillusionment and reconstruction of China as imagined communities.

**Pre-understandings of China.** Imagination is not fantasy but extension and sublimation of reality (Kanno & Norton, 2003, p. 244). According to the participants, their major information sources of China as imagined communities were the reportage of China in North American mass media, Chinese history learned in home country schooling, and the overseas Chinese and Chinese diaspora. However, due to the insufficiency and inaccuracy of

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<sup>68</sup> The participants’ preunderstandings of China, Chinese people and Chinese social environment were not clear-cut but overlapped and mutually explanatory. I discussed them separately for a better structure of this session and for the convenience of discussion.

these information sources, their knowledge of China was superficial and oversimplified. In Norman's word, his understanding of China was quite "hazy."

For their previous impression of China, the participants used the following words to describe this "attractive" and "mysterious" nation: "upcoming," "changing," "strong," "dynamic," "rising power," "energetic," "modern and traditional," "having long history," and "cheap price." Besides, as far as they were concerned, few images highly associated with China were Tai Chi (Chinese shadow boxing) and Chinese Kong Fu, Chinese restaurants in Chinatown, Confucius, Chinese New Year, and Chinese marbled tea eggs.

For the living conditions in China, there were quite different expectations among the participants. For instance, Frank and Norman believed they could get whatever they needed in China, whereas Nhu worried about the undeveloped physical infrastructure and her access to the daily necessities in local communities. Yet Dennis and Dara envisioned China to be less-developed than the U.S. but not overly impoverished. In their study abroad life, all the participants to a certain extent complained about the living conditions on campus, although at the same time, they were surprised at the fast growing material well-being in China. In addition to the physical conditions, other concerns about the living quality included food safety, air pollution, and internet and news outlets censoring. These were also the Chinese social issues frequently reported in Western mass media.

Regardless of their self-proclaimed love of Chinese culture, many participants admitted their minimal experience and knowledge of it. As Dara said:

When I was in ignorant, to be honest, I didn't really know what's the thing, I can



only remember OK, a lot of red, a lot of gold, Beijing, Mao Zedong, that basic little things that we learned in high school history about China, the government system in China versus ours, you know. So, I wasn't too knowledgeable about China as a whole. It didn't hit me until I landed.

Even Nhu, a Chinese heritage learner with access to some information about China through her parents, thought her knowledge of China was far from being well-prepared for the study abroad life. "I think usually people (in the U.S.) don't talk about China a lot... (They do) not know a lot of information about China," she explained.

This was exactly why Dennis recommended prospective international students to familiarize themselves with some knowledge of China before arrival. It included the basic facts of China and the challenges ahead:

I think that should read upon the history of China, (and) read upon the current affairs and know what's going on in China. I also think that they should come with a knowledge that they are gonna have a lot of challenges and difficulties, and they should be prepared to deal with those (challenges)...

He also added that the educational programs from both home and host countries should be responsible for a better exposure to the information about China. In agreement with Denis, I argued that although pre-departure orientation from both sides will be a good start, the construction of China as imagined communities should be a collaboration of a wider range of stakeholders, such as the major information tunnels mentioned above, Chinese language and culture promotion agencies, and Chinese mass media.

**Pre-understandings of Chinese people.** The participants' imagination of Chinese people was as abstract and stereotyped as that of China. Some of their original thoughts turned out to be completely different in real life. Among all the unexpectedness, the othering practices towards CFL foreigners disillusioned the majority of the participants.

According to the participants, the images of Chinese people went hand in hand with the keywords of "black hair," "short," "hard-working," "very motivated," "modest," "smart," "clean and neat," "traditional and conservative," "shy," "pushing parents," and "eating a lot of rice." These descriptions came partially from their limited contact with overseas Chinese, but mainly from the coverage of North American mass media, which always focused on "confirming the existing ideas (about China) rather than breaking new ground" (Griffiths, 2013, p. 5; L. Yang, 2012, p. 173).

On top of the oversimplified judgements on appearances, habits, and personalities, some assumptions on Chinese people's behaviors and attitudes were also inaccurate. For example, Frank once misunderstood Chinese people to be very aggressive when they talked. It turned out to be the sound effect of the harsh rising tone (2<sup>nd</sup> tone) after his learning of Pinyin<sup>69</sup> in the target program. Besides, Sandra previously believed that Chinese people always bow to each other in order to show respect, but her real-life experiences proved it a baseless conjecture. "(It was because) too much TV," she explained.

In other cases, the participants gave up positive expectations to Chinese people due to their inappropriate behaviors, such as littering, jaywalking, and forceful manners towards

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<sup>69</sup> Pinyin is the Romanization system for Standard Chinese in mainland China. It includes four tones: first tone (flat tone), second tone (rising tone), third tone (falling-rising tone), and fourth tone (falling tone).

strangers. Dennis was a good case in point, who somewhat lost his confidence in local people's thoughtfulness. To illustrate, he cited several examples in the target city:

When the bus is coming, everybody will rush to get on to the bus. Everyone wants to get a seat or...When people are opening doors...the door was slashing or in the play grounds...people open a piece of paper and sit on the piece of paper...I viewed people sort of not caring about other people...only caring about themselves and their friends and their own families.

Similarly, Nhu thought Chinese people would be politer. She blamed this disappointment on the common but "stupid" connection of Chinese people with noble Confucians in her home country. Both Dennis and Nhu further admitted that these unexpected practices to a certain extent influenced their social comfort and identification with local people.

More importantly, the majority of the participants presumed that local people would have inclusive and supportive mindsets towards foreigners and CFL learners. Therefore, it was a big disillusionment when they witnessed Chinese people's prejudiced and discriminated remarks and behaviors regarding their different linguistic, racial, and gender backgrounds. This new and painful discovery made their re-access and re-imagination of Chinese imagined communities very frustrating. This will be the focus of discussion in Chapter 7 and 8.

**Pre-understandings of Chinese social environment.** Presumptions related to the ideological conflicts between China and its Western counterparts dominated participants' imagination of Chinese social environment. However, in most cases, these preunderstandings of Chinese social norms and values were outdated. Moreover, several participants maintained

to have no expectations to Chinese social networks because of the absence of information or their preference of an unbiased mind without preconceived notions.

“Imagination at even the most personal level is nonetheless related to social ideologies and hegemonies” (Kanno and Norton, 2003, p. 247). In this study, the participants’ imagination of Chinese social environment highlighted the consistent ideo-political comparison and competition between the West and East, capitalism and communism, and individualism and collectivism. For instance, regarding China and the U.S. as political enemies, Dennis predicted that he would not be welcome in local communities due to his American citizenship. This was why he declared himself an Australian for the first couple of days in China, which he later found out to be unnecessary.

Sharing the same view, Norman, Anna, and Riya previously believed that certain political topics should be social taboos in China since they were the targets of attack from its Western enemy states. These topics included multi-party and one party systems, democracy, human rights and entitlement, the independence of Tibet and Taiwan, and leader selection and voting. They worried that talking about ideological differences would limit their investment or even bring them into trouble. However, they found out with great surprise that most Chinese people they interacted with could talk about these topics “freely and openly,” although they did hear about very different stories of mass protesters and cyber dissidents.

Additionally, some participants, such as Lucy and Dara, considered China as a representative communist country, standing at the exact opposite of Western capitalist societies. As a result, they dreamed about a Chinese social environment only representing

public ownership and collective rights. However, shortly after their arrival, the post-socialist and postcolonial China showed different faces, particularly as a nation in the midst of a consumerist frenzy and social inequality. In the following chapters, I will talk more about the prevailing materialistic and individualist morality in China and its impact on some participants' socialization and self-positioning in China.

Furthermore, there were a small number of participants claiming no expectations to Chinese social environment. Frank was one of them due to the insufficient information of target social networks:

I really wasn't sure about what kind of social networks there was gonna be here in China especially because I wasn't aware of how many foreign students here and how many, and who was American and who was Russian. I just wasn't expecting any kind of social networks ... so I was kind of, not expecting any at all.

Unlike Frank, Lolita and Anna preferred to have no expectations in order to maintain an open mind to the upcoming realities. As Lolita said:

I tried not to hold many preconceived notions...When I was to Japan then the program that I went with advice not to have any expectations, good or bad. And I'm just taking everything as different not bad or good.

Her "no expectations and taking everything" strategy partially explained her personal tolerance and agencies in real life investment. However, no matter what reasons, the social experiences of these three participants in China indicated that "no expectations" did not equate with an absence of disappointment and renegotiation.

After all, the participants' ambiguous and sometimes ambivalent preunderstandings of China, Chinese people, and Chinese social environment showed their limited access to related information sources as well as the unawareness of the importance of Chinese imagined communities among all the stakeholders. Their ignorance of background knowledge about China and their unrealistic imagination of Chinese people and communities resulted in misunderstandings and frustrations in their real-life investment.

### **The choices and presumptions of the target city and programs**

As Jiani (2017) pointed out that study abroad in China is not “a one-step decision process” but the culmination of several steps, which includes the selection of host city and institution (program) (pp. 576-577). The data in this study showed that the participants' choices of the target city and CFL programs strengthened their investment in the imagined communities of China, particularly through getting a better or easier access to the academic, economic, and social capital they desired. Just as their presumptions of the role of Chinese learning in their future life, their expectations to Chinese learning experiences in the target programs were rather optimistic and idealized, even though they did anticipate language barriers as the biggest challenge in their study abroad life.

**The choices of the target city and programs.** According to the participants, the decisive factors of their host city and program selections included academic capital accessibility, financial supports, and learning environment. Home universities, online resources, and previous travel experiences in China were the key information channels of their decisions.

To start with, Frank, Nhu, and Norman looked for widely recognized CFL programs in China. They finally chose the target programs mainly because of the partnership between home and host universities, such as through student exchange programs. In their eyes, the accreditation of home universities was an assurance of smooth liaison and teaching quality. More importantly, credit transfer agreement between universities from both sides added weight to the most valuable aspects of their CFL learning in China.

Besides, many a participant took financial supports into their consideration. For example, scholarship offers were the only reason why Dennis and Dara came to the target city. Consequently, Dennis gave up his opportunity to study in a top university in China:

I originally wanted to study in Beijing at Peking University...but then I was contacted by the Chinese consulates and they told me that they would give me a scholarship if I went to (the target city). So, this is why I came here.

Similarly, tuition and scholarship transfer from home universities as well as direct tuition discount played an important role in Norman and Anna's choices. As Norman explained, "we have other choices, (but) this is an exchange program that is specifically through my university and that means our tuition transfers. So all the scholarships I got home transfers over here which is really nice." However, also as an exchange student, Nhu did not approve of direct tuition transfer due to the big gap between the tuition and fees of American and Chinese universities. As far as she was concerned, the real economic advantage of the target city was its comparatively low living experiences.

Furthermore, several participants preferred the learning environment in the target city.

For instance, local standardized dialect was a key determinant for Frank to consider the target city as the best study abroad destination:

I did research on my own that said (the target city) had the most um standard Chinese and so I thought if I'm gonna learn Chinese, I wanna learn it correctly. Um I know the south is much maybe ...more dialects...

In addition to the linguistic milieu, Anna also attached great importance to the Chinese-speaking social potentials. Having travelled in Chinese first-tier cities, she presumed that a less internationalized metropolis would be more favorable for language learning and social networking, since it would force her to interact with local Chinese rather than give in to the social inertia with other English-speaking foreigners. Yet, after one semester in the target program, she somewhat changed her mind. The reasons will be elaborated in Chapter 7 and 8.

**Presumptions of CFL learning experiences in the target programs.** With a high expectation to their Chinese learning outcomes, the participants were eager for a motivated and engaging learning environment in the target city and programs. They also wished that the cultural and social integration programs initiated by the host programs would help them survive the language barriers with local peers.

Obviously, the participants envisioned having a higher Chinese proficiency after their study. For instance, as a CFL beginner, Lolita hoped that she could speak Chinese naturally in a normal conversation with local people. At a similar Chinese language level, Frank set up a more ambitious standard, "I thought, if I wanna study Chinese, I wanna study it really good. I wanna be perfect...I wanted to be the foreigner who's speaking the Chinese that everyone else



(in China) is speaking.” By the time of this study, all the participants admitted a big progress in the target programs, although not always as big as they expected.

Dreaming of substantial advances in Chinese fluency, the participants also anticipated a motivated and interactive learning environment in the target programs. As Dennis said, “I was thinking a very highly motivated environment and everyone really want to learn Chinese and everyone want to speak Chinese.” Additionally, almost all the participants took it for granted that tremendous friend-making and cultural integration opportunities were waiting for them in the target universities. They drew the blueprint mainly based on the extracurricular social programming in their home universities. The large number of Chinese students on campus, especially Chinese student residents, further exaggerated their imagination. In spite of all the positive assumptions, most participants agreed that language barriers, including the difficulty of Chinese learning, would be their biggest challenge in China. Sandra believed that how the target programs dealt with this challenge would indicate the level of loneliness of international students. Lucy also expected a custom-tailored classroom, which would make her more confident during Chinese learning.

In reality, the target CFL programs and classes did offer an enthusiastic learning context full of determined and industrious students. However, high motivation and dedication was not a guarantee of Chinese-speaking social opportunities. There were still many unexpected problems in program design, teaching philosophies, and administrative policies, which disempowered their learning and limited their investment. These organizational and institutional factors will be the focus of Chapter 6.

To summarize, for North American CFL students, Chinese learning and study abroad in China were their investment in China as imagined communities. Before departure, all the participants had a clear and positive understanding of the role of China and Chinese language in their future life. Their presumptions of China as a study abroad destination and their choices of the target city and programs demonstrated in what kind of imagined communities of China they desired and prepared themselves to invest. However, their limited knowledge of China made them unprepared during daily socialization. When the CFL students finally discovered that the real China was far removed from the ideal, their disappointment was acute. It also led them to re-image and re-assess their access to Chinese learning resources and Chinese social networks. In the following three chapters, I will elaborate participants' investment and identity negotiation after their arrival in the target city with a start of the social tensions and conflicts in target CFL programs.

## **Chapter 6 Investment and Identity Negotiation Experiences in Target CFL Programs**

In their imagined study abroad life, the participants considered the host universities and programs the first and foremost social networks in China, which would serve as a buffer zone of intercultural communication and a bridge to the broader communities. However, the reality was another story. In this chapter, I will have a close examination of participants' investment and identity negotiation experiences in target CFL programs. More specifically, I will cover the major concerns and conflicts regarding orientation, classroom dynamics, extracurricular social engagement, and residence life.

The research findings showed that the target programs to a great extent neglected the social needs of CFL international students. Compared with their high motivation to integrate and the huge population university wide, both the quantity and quality of the interactions between foreign and domestic students were rather limited. In addition, because many aspects of the teaching and administrative philosophies, policies and practices in the target programs were unfavorable for the socialization and identification, many participants felt physically and socially segregated from the lively campus life. The analysis in this chapter highlights the importance of social engagement for both formal and informal Chinese learning. As importantly, it reveals how the hierarchical power relationships in the target programs impeded student participation and satisfaction.

### **Brief introduction to target CFL programs**

Based upon the interviews with the participants and informants, I will briefly introduce the target programs. It will help to have a better understanding of their recruitment criteria,

student composition, program offerings, and personnel background. As top study abroad destinations in the target city and province, all of the five universities under investigation had separate faculties only for CFL education, which hosted the vast majority of the international students on campus<sup>70</sup>. In an effort to attract students of various levels and needs, most target CFL programs set up rather low admission standards. For example, all the short-term and certificate programs had neither entrance exams nor Chinese proficiency requirements. Therefore, with basic application materials, such as the letter of intent and transcripts, the foreign students could get access to the target programs through language placement tests<sup>71</sup>.

Similar to the national statistics, the students from Asian culture sphere dominated the foreign student communities in the target universities and programs. For four comprehensive universities, the key foreign student sources included South Korea, Thailand, Russia, Mongolia, African countries, Japan, and South Asian countries. For the medical university, most of its international students came from Russia, the U.S., and African countries. As primary recruitment focus, Western students, particularly North American short-term students, were the fastest growing population among CFL international students in the target city. Like the participants, most North American CFL learners came through student exchange programs and Chinese government sponsored programs.

Since histories<sup>72</sup> and enrollment numbers<sup>73</sup> differed dramatically, each of the target programs had a big distinction in their offerings. Some of them only had one non-degree CFL

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<sup>70</sup> In the medical university, there was a separate faculty for international programs with compulsory CFL classes.

<sup>71</sup> The only exception was the CFL intensive training programs in the medical university, which sometimes had classes of mixed levels due to the limited number of students.

<sup>72</sup> The histories of the target programs were between 10 and 35 years.

<sup>73</sup> The enrollment numbers of the target programs varied from about 100 to 1,000 per year.

training program, while some others provided a variety of non-degree and degree programs in Chinese Language, Chinese literature, TCSOL,<sup>74</sup> and Business Chinese. As CFL beginners and intermediate learners, most participants in this study registered for short term intensive training programs, which equaled to 20 to 30 hours of CFL classes per week.

All addressed as teachers by the CFL students, three groups of personnel played an important role in participants' socialization on campus: CFL instructors, CFL program administrators, and dormitory administrators or "dorm aunties."<sup>75</sup> With academic ranks of lecturers, associate professors, and professors, CFL instructors usually had Master's degree or PhD in Education, Chinese Language and Literature, or English Language and Literature. Besides faculty, there were specialized administrators in charge of international student admission, academic program management, and campus life<sup>76</sup>. They usually had bachelor or master's degrees in English Language and Literature or Management. Although most of the teaching and administrative staff had study or work abroad experience, many of them did not receive any training in international pedagogies and cross-cultural communication. On top of professionals, there were "dorm aunties" who managed the daily logistics in exclusive residences of foreign students. Unlike the residence coordinators in Western universities, the "dorm aunties" mainly worked as gatekeepers and on-site maintenance liaisons who had very limited formal schooling, let alone foreign language proficiency.

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<sup>74</sup> Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages.

<sup>75</sup> In Chinese universities, most on-site dormitory administrators are middle-aged or elderly females. The students usually call them *suguan dama* (宿管大妈) or *suguan ayi* (宿理阿姨) which literally means "dorm aunties."

<sup>76</sup> Campus life referred to the non-academic initiatives, which included but not limited to student visa, orientation, accommodation assignment, and extracurricular activities.

The above is an introduction to the CFL programs under study. In the following sections of this chapter, I will analyze the social tensions and power dynamics that the participants encountered in the target programs. For the sake of clarity, the analysis will follow the sequence as how the CFL students engaged on campus with a start of the orientation.

### **The uninformative orientation**

As a vulnerable student population, international students always expected initial facilitation from the host universities during their settlement and water-testing (Sherry, Thomas & Chui, 2010). However, in the target programs, both the length and comprehensiveness of the orientation activities were far from preparing the CFL international students for the new academic and living environment. Besides, without composite orientation guidebooks and instructive program websites, the participants did not have much access to the reliable resources for their daily survival. As a result, the deficiency of the transition support not only prolonged participants' cross-cultural adaption but also discouraged their investment as newcomers.

In contrast to the orientation week or month in North American universities, most target programs only offered a half-day walk-around, which was far from accommodating the schedules and needs of all the students. Consequently, many participants ended up being “thrown” into the classroom and campus life without much confirmation of their readiness. For example, Dara was desperate for exposure preparation as soon as she arrived because her Chinese proficiency was not developed for any real conversation. However, what waited for her was complete disillusionment:

My biggest problem in this university is that obviously so far it's just the lack of exposure preparation that they give for newcomers... We flew miles, you know, and we come here and it's not what we expected.

Similarly, Nhu felt extremely stressful during the first week in the target city, even though she regarded herself to be an independent and experienced traveler. With limited contact from the host program until the school started, she spent a long time in figuring out how to get around. In her eyes, it was very "scary" and "stressful" when a stranger and outsider "did not know who to go to." For both Dara and Nhu, their helplessness was further aggravated by the loneliness and homesickness. Instinctively, they turned to the other American or English-speaking students. This gradually resulted in a passive self-help mode among international students of same language and cultural background. In other words, the lack of orientation by some means drove the participants into group segregation.

In addition to the general complaints, some participants particularly questioned the absence of sociocultural and psychological orientation. To illustrate, Norman argued that the orientation he experienced was not intensive enough to be a real orientation since nothing was mentioned about the Chinese culture and local traditions, let alone how to deal with cultural differences. Dennis also pointed out that a briefing of the social environment on campus was in need, including major social events, spaces, and channels. Indeed, it was totally beyond his imagination that the topics of making friends and social networking were excluded from the orientation design. Furthermore, Frank noticed that there was a complete neglect of the psychological preparation in the target program, which put student mental health at risk.

Looking back at his emotional changes in China, he suggested that a pre-understanding of the different stages of culture shock and corresponding remedies would help to overcome the imminent confusion and nervousness. In an effort to survive and integrate, many participants had to research related information by themselves, asked for advice from senior foreign students, or just learned by trial and error. This painstaking and unpredictable process in a substantial way dented their confidence and trust in the target programs.

On top of the orientation activities, the uninformative welcome guidebooks and program websites exacerbated the inconvenience of early settlement. According to Dara and Nhu, although the welcome brochure included bilingual (English/Chinese) university policies and regulations, it did not cover the logistical information that new students always referred to, such as the emergency numbers in China, the closest post office and hospital, and how to check in and out dormitory. My examination of the related secondary data<sup>77</sup> attested their observation. Meanwhile, both participants complained about the content and design of target program websites. On one hand, Dara argued that the English website had way less information than its Chinese counterpart and some of the information was inaccurate, out of date, and misleading. On the other hand, Nhu indicated that the poor navigability of the website frustrated her experience as a CFL visitor and limited her access to the online resources. Like many other participants, they finally gave up using these two information sources, which largely prohibited their self-guided orientation.

It is important to note that all the informants of this study admitted the deficiency of

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<sup>77</sup> Related secondary data were a copy of the guidebook to CFL graduate students and a copy of the handbook to short-term CFL students in one of the target universities.



transition support, although most of them attributed it to the logistic reasons, the heavy workload, and the popularity of English language. For instance, Qiang and Jun blamed jet lag and late registration for the short length of orientation. Besides, Min regarded orientation somehow necessary but not essential. In order to save time for the priorities, he was only in charge of airport picking up, dorm assignment, language screening test, and class schedule notification. Another informant, Hong, further contended that the orientation of North American students was least of her concerns since they can easily make friends and ask for help in English. Although the factors mentioned above did exist, the key decisive factor seemed to lay in the indifferent attitudes towards the settlement challenges and social barriers of the target population. As importantly, the informants overlooked orientation as an important non-academic factor in successful cross-cultural adaptation and socialization (Ding, 2016, 332-333; Yang, 2009, pp. 208-209 & 234-235).

In brief, the uninformative orientation in the target programs failed to create a welcoming and caring start for the CFL newcomers in an effective and proactive way, and thus led to their social anxiety and isolation. Although once the academic program was underway, the participants received more supports from the instructors and gained growing sense of fulfillment during Chinese learning, many of them still felt disempowered due to limited interactive opportunities in CFL classrooms.

### **Limited interactive opportunities in target CFL classrooms**

With 20 to 30 hours of CFL courses per week<sup>78</sup>, all the participants regarded their

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<sup>78</sup> Riya had less than 20 hours of CFL training per week since she was majored in Medicine rather than Chinese language.

formal CFL education as one of the most important means of investment and identity negotiation in China. However, my examination of their learning experiences in the target classrooms revealed disappointing or even opposite facts. More specifically, dominated by rote learning and teacher-centered instruction, the teaching philosophies and practices in the target programs to a great extent impeded and intimidated the communicative interactions in class. Although some informants suggested private tutoring as a complement to their rigid learning environment, such remedies failed to change the social dynamics in class and brought about my concern of unequal learning accessibilities. The participants further pointed out that Chinese educational traditions, big class size, and the conflicting demands in the multicultural classrooms were to blame for their subordinate status in class.

**Rigid and teacher-centered teaching style.** In alignment with the general survey of CFL teaching quality in other Chinese cities, such as Shanghai (Ding, 2016, pp. 329-331), the participants in this study showed low satisfaction with the teaching style in their host programs. Many participants stated that the prevalence of rote learning and teacher-centered instruction in the target classrooms decreased their learning motivation and outcomes, therefore, they asked for more meaningful interactions, particularly speaking opportunities, in class. For instance, as CFL beginners, Anna, Riya, and Lolita were fed up with the repetitions and drills. After a comparison of Chinese and American learning culture, Anna summarized, “There was more repetition (in Chinese classrooms) so it’s a little bit different to me than the American way of learning.” She further emphasized the importance of authenticity in foreign language learning and its application in a CFL classroom via games and simulations. Besides, as shown in the

daily language use logs, there were limited conversations in class and their durations were rather short. Therefore, Riya and Lolita both felt that instead of lectures and monologues, there should be an increase of dialogues and group discussions. Riya also added that language exchange would help to keep the students motivated and involved in the language practice:

We were just given like slides and you need to repeat something. But not actually given dialogue with students...I think these teachers, they should be more interactive. But like some teachers, they read from the PowerPoint and of course the students will be bored.

Likewise, as an intermediate CFL learner, Norman indicated that the lack of authentic dialogues in class led to his limited improvement in Chinese speaking proficiency:

And so we are learning how to say things out loud. We are not so much speaking. We do this actually as she (the instructor) goes around and ask us questions. But we don't have to speak that much. We just have to answer the question and maybe give a little explanation...So I mean it has helped with my listening ability... But it's still my speaking is definitely my weakest.

Considering the deficiency of communicative activities as the biggest problem of the target classrooms, Norman suggested that the prospective CFL international students should be cautious about their program selection, because, in his opinion, language learning without meaningful speaking engagement was “not having a language, (and) not having practice.” Therefore, the rigid teaching practices to some degree threatened student recruitment, satisfaction, and retention.

Overwhelmed by the teacher-centered and textbook-oriented instruction, some participants used individual and group tutoring as an effective supplement. However, such a remedy may give rise to another concern of unequal access to learning opportunities. As a home-schooled student in Canada<sup>79</sup>, Lucy was a good case in point. It was in China that Lucy for the first time went into a classroom. However, her formal schooling experiences in the target program were rather “strange” in that the instructors put a higher value on following the curriculum and textbook than the actual progress of the students. Additionally, the instructors talked the majority of the time in class and seldom stopped to create extra exercises for the students with limited achievements, let alone catered for their personalized needs and interests. Gradually, Lucy realized that her chance to make voice and choice in class was slim and random. Thus, she changed her expectations and turned to a private tutor:

I think I just got used to it except...I think I changed my expectations too. (My original expectation was) that the teacher would kind of custom tailor in class, but I learn if you know you really do have to have a tutor.

Lucy’s experience was similar to another advanced learner, Dara, who chose a private Chinese school to complement her CFL program. As far as Dara was concerned, the small class size, authentic learning materials, and situational speaking activities in the private school were very helpful for her daily communications in China. Because the local price of tutoring was considerably lower than that in North America,<sup>80</sup> some informants considered it as a legitimate solution to the static learning environment in class. However, the interviews with the

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<sup>79</sup> Before coming to China, Lucy finished her elementary to high school education completely at home.

<sup>80</sup> The price of hiring tutors was about 20 to 30 RMB (or 4 to 6 Canadian dollars) per hour.

participants showed that tutoring was not a privilege that everyone enjoyed. For example, Lolita was reluctant to hire a Chinese tutor due to her financial circumstances. Thus, private instruction would not solve the problem in class at its root. Moreover, when taken for granted, tutoring suggestions from the program authorities would exacerbate the disempowerment of CFL students, particularly those with limited budgets. This also to a certain degree indicated that the target programs were insufficient in fulfilling their responsibilities.

**Reasons given by the participants for their passivity in class.** While struggling for more communicative opportunities, the participants came up with three major reasons for their passivity in class, among which Chinese educational traditions were considered the most decisive one. As Dennis and Nhu explained, except for repetition and memorization, the formal distance between instructors and students was the most typical feature of a Chinese classroom. Nhu also contended that this formal relationship largely hindered her social willingness and opportunities in class. Hence, after coming to China, she felt “spoiled by the American system,” because back home students were able to talk to their teachers almost whenever they wanted. Interestingly, some informants shared the same views. For example, Qiang, Hong, and Fang, further confirmed that it was very challenging to achieve the ideal student engagement rate (80% of the class time), since their curriculum and textbooks included few interactive activities. Another informant, Min, admitted that Chinese traditional teaching style was too rigid and conservative for the active and expressive North American students, particularly when it took classroom discipline very seriously and assigned the instructional authority merely to the instructors. He believed that it would take a long time to

establish new teaching methods in such situations since TCFL<sup>81</sup> had a very short history in China and it mainly learned from TESL.<sup>82</sup> Thus, the arguments from both participants and informants reflected a neglect of social needs in the CFL classrooms, which was heavily grounded in Chinese traditional teacher-student relationships (Moloney & Xu, 2016, pp. 6-7).

In addition to Chinese educational traditions, class size also drew participants' attention. As Dennis and Frank said, even though there were some speaking opportunities, class size determined how much interaction time each student could actually get. According to Norman and Nhu, the average of 20 students per class was too big for an intensive language-training course. Nhu also pointed that it was impractical to set up a dialogue with the instructor when he or she only had time to ask you to make up a sentence; and sometimes, because individual presentations had to be delivered on rotation, the supervised group discussions were eliminated. As the high demand for classroom interactions was out of proportion to the class size, some informants, such as Min, suggested that the students should think of other alternatives, such as private tutors, to compensate for the loss of engagement. However, as mentioned above, such recommendations should be carefully dealt with due to the unequal learning accessibilities.

On top of teacher-student ratio, the participants considered cultural diversity as a double-edged sword for their classroom interactions. For example, on one hand, Frank was in favor of a mixed class composition with students of different language and cultural backgrounds since it would force him to speak Chinese, the only language in common. On

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<sup>81</sup> Teaching Chinese as Foreign Language.

<sup>82</sup> Teaching English as a Second Language.

the other hand, he noticed that many students from the East Asian cultural sphere (such as his Korean classmates) were not as comfortable to challenge the teachers and to speak in public. Therefore, he needed to balance being a noisy star against behaving appropriately in front of the others. Likewise, Dennis pointed out that the dominant national groups and their learning culture had a great impact on the actual teaching style in class. He said,

I think again it depends on the nationality. Because the Koreans and the Russians, they tend to stick to themselves. They don't really talk as much to the other nationality groups. And the environment in the, more people were eager to learn (passively) and teacher, I think their teaching style is, it's very much the lecture style, so following after the teacher and dictation...

In agreement with Frank, Qiang, an informant, maintained that the benefits of intercultural exchanges might be compromised by students' distinct preferences of classroom dynamics. Fang, another informant, also emphasized that for regular CFL programs (rather than a short-term customized program for a comparatively homogeneous group), it was impossible to set up classes based upon both Chinese proficiencies and nationalities. As a result, either the dominant cultural group or the more active and demanding group determined the classroom dynamics. Whereas in the target programs, it usually turned out to be the dominant cultural group, i.e. students from Asian cultural sphere. Although the informants considered diversity and engagement as an inextricable dilemma in the target classrooms, I believed that differentiated instruction was worth a try to meet the needs, balance the power relationships, and to evoke the mutual learning among various student groups. I will talk more about it in the

discussion chapter.

As far as the participants were concerned, the Chinese educational traditions, big class size, and conflicting needs in the multicultural classrooms resulted in the lack of social interactions in their CFL classrooms. However, the rigid and artificial teaching practices were only a prelude to the dissociated social environment in the target programs. In the following sections, I will shift the focus from the classroom dynamics to the extracurricular life on campus, starting with an inquiry about the quantity, quality, and information channels of the program-led social activities.

### **Lack of program-led social engagement**

As important as formal schooling, informal language acquisition provides unstructured but extensive learning opportunities through interactions with native/near-native speakers or other authentic input, such as internet-mediated communications (Bahrani & Sim, 2012, p. 142; Tsung & Hooper, 2016, pp. 91-92). In this section, I will examine participants' investment and identity negotiation experiences through program-led extracurricular activities. The data showed that the quantity, quality, and information channels of the social programs under discussion were rather disappointing. More specifically, all the participants criticized the low frequency of their interactions with local peers. Additionally, the problematic program design and organization impeded their social motivation and involvement. Furthermore, with bulletin board posters and oral notifications as key communication channels, some participants felt ill informed or uninformed of both face-to-face and online social options. Therefore, it is safe to say that the target programs largely



ignored participants' extracurricular social needs and failed to facilitate their informal language learning by creating a social milieu with equity, inclusivity, and authenticity. Moreover, the indifferent and condescending attitudes of the program authorities disempowered the CFL students by excluding their voices and choices in the social program design, administration, and participation.

**The low frequency of program-led social engagement.** In spite of their differences in program categories and lengths, all the participants without exception complained about the low frequency of program-led social activities. They eagerly requested more supports for their engagement with the locals, particularly through regular events that would bring about long-term friendships and language exchange opportunities.

During the interviews with the participants, "No regular events" were the most typical comments for their spare time on campus. As Norman said, "I haven't really noticed them (program-led social functions)." In fact, he only made one Chinese friend through the program who was a volunteer during orientation. At the end of his beginner level class, Norman was quite tired of accidental Chinese-speaking opportunities with random neighbors in the university cafeterias. He contended that it was a bottleneck of his Chinese learning, which the target program had to deal with. Sandra also commented that without any help, a dialogue with domestic students was a luxury that CFL beginners like her could not afford, the consequence of which was a paradoxical dilemma between Chinese fluency and socialization. Dennis agreed with Sandra and further argued that it was very challenging to make friends by himself, but the target program cared little about what happened after class.

In his opinion, some of the very few social occasions for both foreign and domestic students actually made the segregation more prominent. He further explained,

There is nothing. There is no sort of meetings. There is no effort to have sort of you know local sports teams or local events. There is very little information about these things...And once a year, they have a sports competition, but nothing that really gets you integrated with other Chinese students... There is a big distance, I think, between myself and other Chinese students.

Identically, Nhu explicitly used the word “segregation” to describe her social environment on campus, since her host program only sponsored one social event during the entire semester and that was to hang out with one of her classmate. Due to limited program-led social programs, most participants were confined to the foreign student communities where authentic language input was minimal.

Contrary to the arguments of the participants, the informants were neither interested in nor concerned about the social engagement between foreign and domestic students. As an illustration, Min believed that North American students should not feel segregated because they would automatically get many friend requests and English teaching jobs. Such statement indicated that the service providers ignored the social barriers and took the social integration for granted during participants’ investment and identification. In addition, many other informants claimed that personality was the decisive factor for making friends. According to Qiang, “It was the introvert students who have the problem...They need to rely on themselves.” Likewise, in Hong’s opinion, the CFL learners with more social requests were

just “lazy.” Consequently, the program inaction on social mix further put international students with less communicative competence and higher social needs in a very disadvantageous position.

Above was an analysis of the quantity of program-led social engagement. It showed that the low frequency of extracurricular social activities hindered participants’ Chinese learning and friend-making opportunities. Meanwhile, the judgmental administrative philosophies in the target program marginalized the CFL learners with various social requests. Besides quantity, I will further explore the quality of target social initiatives with a focus on the program design and organization.

**Ineffective social program design and administrative support.** If the frequency of extracurricular social functions was the focus of complaints for all, the criticism of their quality just worsened the situation. First, several participants challenged the excessive formality of the program-led activities and asked for a natural and flexible social milieu. Besides, after a comparison of their imagined and real-life social experiences, many participants questioned the lack of social programming related to Chinese culture and local life. In addition, there was an advocacy of the reciprocal social networks with a mix of students from diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, the absence of student autonomy in social program participation and management gave rise to a discussion on social obedience and inequality in Chinese educational system.

**Excessive social formality.** Some participants argued that the excessive social formality of the program-led events discouraged their participation. To illustrate, “It’s not

natural” and “It seems very weird” were how Nhu described her experience in the social occasions on campus. She also cited an example of a formal friend-making meeting for CFL learners and local students, which was totally out of her comfort zone. In her words,

They (the program administrators) set up this but it's really awkward...It's like a party but not really. It's more like those who speak Chinese talk to each other. It's really awkward...So I don't think I can make friends...I think it's better just meet and run in some people, take time make friends with them or people introduce me...They should find a way to make it easy for us to interact. And more naturally not stupid meeting. Oh, my God, it's not comfortable.

Nhu further argued that social engagement should not always be on a large scale or be attentive to short-term effect. In fact, casual programming with voluntary participation had a better effect on breaking down social segregation and embarrassment. Nhu’s opinion was coupled with Sandra’s favorite Chinese-speaking time after class. According to Sandra, the highlight of her extracurricular life was a five-hour girl talk at an informal get-together on campus about cultural differences in dating. As she explained, “It's more like heart-to-heart talk among friends.” However, such relax and deep conversations never happened in the program-led activities, thus her social motivation to some extent waned. The social formality in the extracurricular activities largely resembled the formal social distance in CFL classrooms. It showed the unbalanced positions between the event organizers and goers. That is to say, the CFL program administrators set the tone of the social functions in accordance to their authoritative status.

*The lack of social programs about Chinese culture and local life.* Besides events with high formality, the lack of social programs about Chinese culture and local life also bred discontent. For instance, fascinated with Chinese martial arts and cooking, Lolita was very disappointed about her limited exposure to traditional Chinese culture. In her eyes, culture was a perfect social theme to kill two birds with one stone: on one hand, it would arouse the curiosity of CFL learners who already showed keen interest in vernacular traditions; on the other hand, it would provide stress-free language-learning opportunities. Likewise, Nhu contended that the Chinese culture program she fully enjoyed should be available for all the international students as extracurricular activities. Thanks to this class, she was able to go around the city and learn about “a little bit everything” of Chinese history and society. However, only few students in certain customized exchange programs were eligible for its registration. In other words, unless requested by the partner programs or universities, the target programs paid little attention to the interdependence between language and culture.

As important to the advocacy of cultural programs, some participants longed for social activities “down to earth,” i.e., activities close to the daily life of local people. As Lolita pointed out, the differences between her ideal and actual events were like those between shopping in Chinese supermarkets and morning markets<sup>83</sup>. Sandra further added that “doing something uniquely Chinese” helped to identify more with the Chinese:

I don't know what is uniquely Chinese...I mean we as foreigners kind of end up

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<sup>83</sup> The morning markets in China were everyday street markets before regular working hours where local farmers and vendors sold breakfast, food, vegetables, and other daily necessities. They were mainly located in communities with high density of population. The prices in the morning markets were usually much lower than those in the supermarkets.

as foreigners. I don't know what we do every day is different than what Chinese people do. How do Chinese play and what do they usually play in their off time?

Similarly, Frank asserted that CFL international students should be organized to join what domestic students normally do. For instance, he was one of the only four foreigners who took part in the 90th anniversary celebration concert of the Communist Party of China (CPC) which, from his perspective, was an amazing opportunity to learn about Chinese history and culture. However, for such a large-scale social occasion with hundreds of Chinese participants, there was no program-led involvement at all. In fact, Frank almost missed it until he accidentally saw a notice in Chinese far away from his classroom and dorm. He reckoned that the target program ignored the event because it was too Chinese or politically sensitive to appeal to the foreigners. That is to say, the exclusion of the participants from local political life indicated certain ideological concerns in the target programs.

It is easy to tell that the lack of social programming rooted in vernacular traditions impeded participants' investment and identification. Besides, the neglect of authenticity in language learning disconnected the participants from real-life context and native Chinese speakers. Indeed, some informants openly disfavored the social programming on Chinese culture and local life. In their opinion, it was irrelevant to the academic studies and only for fun. This further revealed that the target programs disregarded language learning as "culturally embedded and socially mediated progresses" (Scarino & Liddicoat, 2009, p. 26).

***The neglect of reciprocal social events.*** While the participants showed their concerns about the lack of activities with cultural authenticity, they also drew attention to the

reciprocity of social program design. To illustrate, as a strong supporter of language partnership, Frank insisted on more facilitation for language exchange activities:

I'm sure there are hundreds of Chinese students who would be willing and wanting to help foreign students learn. It's maybe it's um first you learn English for an hour, 30 minutes, and then you study Chinese for 30 minutes. I really wish the university would pick up something like that. That's something I really think.

In agreement with Frank, Riya was keen on the ideas of Chinese corner, i.e., a language exchange group set up by one of her Chinese teachers. However, without much help from the her host program, there was no guarantee of its consistency. "But we don't have it any more and something that would be very good for the students," she sighed. Moreover, Norman, Lolita, and Frank stated that an ideal reciprocal network for language learners went hand in hand with cultural diversity. In Frank's eyes, the ultimate reciprocity meant a mix of all, which should enrich everyone involved. As he explained,

Um I think my favorite social network kinda mix of Chinese students, Korean students, and Russian...It's all together, who speak Chinese...So I think that's a nice um it's a nice variety of different people and of different cultures, not just of Chinese people but of also different countries.

Interestingly, some informants were also aware of the benefits of multilingual and multicultural social engagement. According to Min, "It will help them to learn Chinese or an extra language." Nevertheless, he and the other administrators were only supposed to

facilitate one-on-one language exchange partnership if the students turned to them first as go-betweens. Again, the administrative priorities and practices exaggerated the agentic acts of CFL learners and deprived the participants of their favorable learning resources.

In addition to the language and culture exchange, Lucy and Sandra also mentioned the teaching and learning reciprocity between CFL students and TCFL<sup>84</sup> interns. Yet, this was another relationship of mutual benefits far from being taken full advantage of. As Sandra recalled, the few contacts she had with the TCFL master students were through their trial lectures. Sometimes, the instructors asked the interns to leave their phone numbers in case of tutoring requests. Beyond that, there were barely program-led interactions between these two groups of learners who could be perfect match in practice. Lucy added that in her host university, the CFL learners were located on a different campus from the TCFL students. Such arrangement further inconvenienced and marginalized the CFL students with low mobility, particularly the CFL newcomers.

Reciprocity is of critical importance to social connections and intercultural friendships (Williams & Johnson, 2011, p. 43). However, the target programs failed to make full use of the social needs among various student groups to establish learning and emotional mutuality. This substantially decreased participants' learning motivation and investment outcomes. As the social tensions and conflicts grew, the participants no longer just hinted about the power imbalance but directly challenged their subordinate position in social program participation and organization. This was particularly true when they talked about the absence of student

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<sup>84</sup> Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language.



autonomy in the program-led social functions. I will further elaborate it in the following subsection.

*The absence of student autonomy in program-led social activities.* According to the participants, the absence of their autonomy reflected in both social program participation and administration. More specifically, the program authorities occasionally mandated the participation of foreign students in the publicity-orientated events, which evoked a challenge to the social freedom in the target programs. Besides, the lack of student involvement in social program administration marginalized the voices of CFL learners and thus brought about an advocacy of student self-governance. The analysis below aims to reveal the disempowerment of CFL international students in the program-led social activities and the hierarchical administrative environment in Chinese educational system.

To begin with, the participants questioned their mandatory participation in the publicity-oriented activities. This started with the concern about their selective exposure to the social potentials on campus. As participants and informants both confirmed, sports competitions and artistic performances accounted for almost 100% of the social functions that the CFL learners got access to. It is arguable that these two kinds of activities were widely advertised in the foreign student communities due to their low requirements of Chinese proficiency. However, certain participants noticed the intention of publicity when their involvement was strongly encouraged or required. Even some informants did not deny the face-saving or showing-off elements when they purposefully and symbolically included international students in some large-scale entertainment activities. Good cases in point were

Riya's participation in the university etiquette team based upon a request from an international student administrator and the mandatory foreign student performance in the anniversary celebration of Anna's target university. Then, it was an open secret that the foreign faces would make the events and universities look fancier, particularly when the foreign competitors or performers could more or less express themselves in Chinese.

In many cases, the participants chose to do a favor for their administrators and programs. However, there was a big dispute when they declined the official decisions. The informants, such as Min and Jun, believed that social obedience was a symbol of collectiveness and harmoniousness. Thus, in their eyes, North American CFL learners were self-centered troublemakers with a strong sense of entitlement. Whereas, the participants took forceful views that as independent adults, it was their freedom to refuse to participate. By way of illustration, Dennis was furious at "being babied" and disciplined as minors (Moreno, 2009, p. 61). According to his observation, it was the title of "teacher" rather than any other factors, such as age, that authorized such condescending commands. In other words, unlike Western universities "where students are sometimes treated as costumers and where 'customer is always right,' "Chinese universities are the parent figures in the parent-child Confucian dyad," which indicated the loyalty and deference of students (McAloon, 2014, pp. 116-117 & pp. 135-136). Fang, an informant, also confirmed Dennis' opinion. He argued that the indifferent and oversimplified way of administration was sometimes coupled with the other social ills in China like non-transparency and *yao renqing* (要人情, credit or favor owing). Such a dispute demonstrated the social inequality between service providers and

recipients, which mirrored the power dynamics in the CFL classrooms. In the discussion chapter, I will further analyze the absolute authority of two kinds of teachers (instructors and administrators) under discussion and its reflection of the relational hierarchy in Chinese educational traditions.

In addition to their mandatory participation in the publicity-orientated social activities, the participants also took issue with the lack of student involvement in social program administration. By way of illustration, Sandra maintained that foreign students should make their voices heard in social programming. She further suggested her host program to sponsor the student-led events as an alternative:

I think it would be good if the students did it to take the initiative and be the leaders ... f(F)or example if I wanted to go to \*\*\*(a museum)... I would present this idea to the office and then the office could say you know you get all these people together and get everybody registered and we'll get the bus for you and that could be good.

With regard to the extracurricular programs catered for student priority and preference, Lucy and Riya both insisted on the establishment of an international student union and its self-governance in social facilitation. Riya also recommended the employment of student staff as a means to de-marginalize the CFL learners in event organization. Indeed, both proposals highlighted the importance of staff-student equity and partnership.

In short, the lack of program-led extracurricular activities with informality, cultural authenticity, social reciprocity, and student autonomy discomforted and discouraged

participants' investment and identification. Moreover, the hierarchical administrative practices in the target programs failed to authorize students' perspectives in social program organization and thus hindered their informal language learning. On top of quantity and quality, another important factor of social engagement programs was information channels. However, as the ears and eyes of the participants, the available information channels were too old-fashioned and tardy to inform them of the already limited social potentials. This will be fully elaborated in the following subsection.

**The insufficiency and mismanagement of information channels.** International students need to find a considerable amount of information about their study abroad destination to build new social networks (Sin & Kim, 2013, p. 107). In this subsection, I will investigate the information channels in the target programs and their effectiveness in social facilitation. The data demonstrated that as critical information disseminators, the target programs failed to employ diverse channels to apprise the participants of engaging activities. Besides, the absence of web-based platforms made the CFL learners lag behind the local communication trends and divorced them from an extensive range of online communities. Yet, the inept and dilatory notification management hampered participants' full investment in social potentials. With limited information accessibility, the CFL students were further isolated from their local peers and the social life on campus.

Both participants and informants confirmed that traditional notification methods, especially bulletin board postings and oral announcements, dominated the information delivery in the target programs. For example, Sandra counted on the bulletin board beside her

dorm elevator as the only information source, apart from some random oral notices from her instructors. With regard to the paper posters, many participants believed that these posters were social barriers rather than boosters. On one hand, Lucy argued that the posters distributed merely within a physical space designated for international students naturally eliminated the domestic counterparts; on the other hand, Riya and Norman questioned the monolingual poster design for both program-led and university-wide activities since it was barely comprehensible for CFL beginners. Additionally, Norman specified, "...how we get the majority of our information is our teachers come and say 'if you kids are interested, they are doing this at this time'." The only alternative for emergent situations was phone calls. Whereas, according to Dara, the unavailability of international student service numbers hindered her willingness to answer the phones since it could be just from a random Chinese person. No matter through posters, oral notices, or phone calls, the information channels between target programs and CFL learners were one-sided, irregular, and old-fashioned. Therefore, the CFL learners were in a very passive and vulnerable position during information exchanges.

The prevalence of traditional notification methods also signified the neglect of web-based communication methods. Thus, there was a strong advocacy of program-wide usage of emails and listservs. As illustration, Riya was the only participant who received regular email messages from her host program, although they were mainly about exam schedules. Other participants were only approached electronically during their application process. Accordingly, Nhu said that in spite of strong email communication nowadays, "Here

(In the target programs), everything is paper.” Feeling lost at what was going on, many participants asserted their rights for better ways of notifications. Norman, in particular, recommended the adoption of listserv through which he could get access to all kinds of events on campus. In his words, “I think if I knew more about things going on, I would go to more things.” Similarly, Frank used the case of his home university and indicated the easy implementation of listservs in the target university. As he said,

I really wish that um the campus here had more of like an email list...I think it'd be something really easy for this campus...and I think it would really help the foreign students get involved with the campus.

For the majority of the participants, it was beyond their understanding of why such practical and free communicative tools were not widely adopted in local educational programs which were full of computer and digital-literate students. In other words, the information channels in the target programs did not reflect the needs and capacities of North American CFL learners as information seekers.

Besides emails and listservs, there was also a challenge to the absence of information channels with higher interactivity and sociality. According to the participants, despite the popularity of Chinese social websites and apps on campus, web 2.0 and web 3.0 had nothing to do with their program-led social functions, let alone their Western counterparts that were completely blocked in China due to severe censorship. Again, as the only participant with program-led online international student social group (QQ group), Riya thought highly of the peer support and information sharing network it constructed, especially the help from the

Chinese volunteers. This attested that web-based interactions were important sources of informational, social, and acculturative stress reduction support for international students (Wang, Hong, & Pi, 2015, pp. 117-118; Ye, 2006, pp. 866-867). However, no other participants enjoyed the same convenience. In order to strengthen their internet-based linkages, many participants appealed to the target programs to make full use of Chinese social network sites (SNSs), social media apps, and cross-platform messaging services. WeChat<sup>85</sup>, Weibo<sup>86</sup>, QQ, and Youku<sup>87</sup> were then the most frequently mentioned examples. In my opinion, the urgency of such appeals not only lies in keeping up with current communication trends and getting access to on/off-line social capital (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007), but also lies in establishing information platforms with CFL learners as equal content users and creators.

In addition to the diversity of informational channels, the inattentive and tardy communication management also irritated the participants who were used to advance notices. In fact, Dara felt scared of being notified last minute for important occasions such as commencement ceremonies:

...people suffer by graduation because they don't even tell you when your date is. You have to wait for them to call you last minute, *suibian* (随便, casual, random). You will be sleeping one day. Come to \*\*\* (another campus). We are having a ceremony in two hours... I've asked people we are graduate, "Do you know when you are graduating yet?" No, it's July. It's almost July (the

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<sup>85</sup> WeChat is a cross-platform instant messaging service in China, which is similar to a combination of WhatsApp, Facebook, and Snapchat.

<sup>86</sup> Weibo is a microblogging in China with Twitter as one of its Western counterparts.

<sup>87</sup> Youku is a video hosting service in China with YouTube as one of its Western counterparts.

graduation season) ... They still haven't let me know anything.

Likewise, Dennis believed that his host program did not take informing students seriously. To put it in his way, the mismanagement of international channels indicated how the “bureaucracy works” at the target university: slow and perfunctory. Sometimes, the delayed and fragmental notices did not prepare him but rather confuse him for the upcoming events. At first, he complained about the situation to the other foreign students. Later on, he complained to the instructors and administrators who only replied, “This is the way it is.” Lost hope in the program authorities, Dennis had no choice but to rely on the information from the other international students. This, to certain degree, explained why he and many other participants ended up being desperate social outsiders on campus.

The limited, outdated, and mismanaged information channels on campus discouraged the participants from both face-to-face and online investment. The indifferent administrative attitudes towards their information sharing requests and complaints also impeded further communication between CFL learners and program personnel. If this section was a general investigation of the segregated extracurricular social environment on target campuses, the following section will be its epitome within a specific context: foreign student accommodations.

### **Solitary and inaccessible accommodations**

According to the informants, the overwhelming majority of the foreign students in the target universities and in other postsecondary institutions nationwide lived at exclusive dormitories. Although the living conditions of such accommodations were considerably



better off than those of the domestic students (An & Chiang, 2015, p. 664; McAloon, 2014, p. 113), the participants still advocated administrative alternatives with more social freedom and facilitation. More specifically, they challenged their physical segregation from local residents and the social restrictions of visitors. Besides, there were concerns about the neglect of language learning reciprocity during roommate assignment and the lack of social connections within the dorms through program-led activities. Overall, the solitary and inaccessible accommodations to a great degree jeopardized participants' informal language learning and social engagement (Ding, 2016, p. 333). They also put CFL students into a special position on campus with an indication of ideo-political control and othering.

**Physical and social isolation from local peers.** To begin with, many participants argued that without any Chinese resident, their living environment was too foreign and isolated to interact with local peers in their spare time. For instance, Norman pointed out that the physical segregation of international and Chinese students was a big mistake. In his opinion, a real immersion program required a local roommate, with whom he had to speak Chinese the entire time. Lucy and Lolita also added that a mixed demographic composition among the residents was in desperate need for the purposes of language learning and cultural exchanges. Nhu further complained that her international teaching, living, and dining all-in-one building was a disguised “prison.” Under such circumstances, although the informants kept on emphasizing the privileged physical conditions of international student accommodations, many participants still cared nothing about their “five star hotels (in Dara’s words)” with single or double rooms and applied to transfer to the six or eight-bed domestic

dorms sometimes with blackout. However, the program authorities denied these requests. The only choice they had then was to live off campus, which included a big hassle of registration at both local police stations and target universities.

In addition to physical segregation, the curfew (from 10pm to 6am) and visitor registration requirements inconvenienced the participants during social networking with outsiders. “It’s so strange” and “I feel like there is not much freedom,” Norman said. In his eyes, only the most conservative American universities had similar requisitions. Whereas, in China, it was common practices. Some participants also argued that these demanding regulations made their connections with any Chinese person more difficult. These “connections” included my visits to their dorm buildings during the interviews. I personally experienced this checking system and I had to leave my ID card as a deposit as well as fill out the visitor log with a signature, contact information, and arrival time. The participants had to pick me up at the front gate. For certain extreme occasions, the “dorm aunties” mandated identity confirming phone calls from the facilitators of this study. Accordingly, Dennis maintained that alternative practices should be adopted to improve the accessibility of visitors. However, the program authorities also turned down such suggestions for the purposes of safety and security.

The participants were unsure about the official explanations for their social restrictions. As an illustration, Dennis and Norman contended that the monitoring of sexual relationship was the major reason. Min, an informant, confirmed this opinion. He indicated that sexual relationships were too sensitive to register on papers, so it was usually

discouraged through daily communications and informal suggestions. Norman also noticed that local students had to follow “extra” policies, which forbade any males from visiting female students in their dorms. Obviously, looser restrictions did not satisfy the international students in general. However, at the same time, he did not want to be overly special since “you are trying to get a sense of what it’s like to be in China and to live there.” In addition, Dara believed that the avoidance of missionary interactions partly accounted for both physical and social separation, which was somewhat an open secret:

There is, you don’t want to discuss that you can’t discuss, the government feel strongly about for example, religion. Yes, China is not open to religion, but you don’t want to be doing the missionary work here: spreading the word or whatever you believe in.

Such restrictive policies on visitors and outsiders signified an ideological supervision over CFL international students regarding certain political and cultural values. The sensitivity of such kind of control directly led to the obscure expressions of the dominant and homogeneous social codes in China.

**The lack of reciprocal learning and social facilitation in the dorms.** On top of physical and social isolation, the participants called into question the neglect of reciprocal roommate assignment. To illustrate, Norman and another American student were designated as roommates. Both as native English speakers, they seldom spoke Chinese to each other and mainly hung out with other Westerners. Similarly, it took Sandra and her English-speaking Russian roommate quite a long time to communicate in Chinese. As she explained,

It was really hard. You've already become accustomed to speaking to them in English, so don't speak English and find a (non-English speaking) foreign friend, even if you don't wanna find a Chinese. Because the thing about the foreign people is, especially your classmate, they know almost exactly what you know, so they're not gonna use any big words that you don't know (so you can improve).

Moreover, Nhu and her roommate barely chatted due to the lack of a common language:

Because her English is poor and my Japanese is not existent and our Chinese is in different levels as well. So mostly if we have to, we communicate in a mixture of Chinese and English...but we don't talk often. It's hard.

Among all the participants, Riya was the only one that considered her roommate as a language exchange partner. However, in her opinion, it was out of luck rather than program arrangement. Despite different reasons of mismatching, all these examples showed that the administration of target residences ignored the learning and social mutuality among CFL students.

Besides, a couple of students drew attention to the limited program-led social activities within their dorms. A good case in point was Anna's observation about her fellow residents: "...so like in the summer now, what are they doing? They are just sitting downstairs (of the dormitory) there, and talking, so they have no organized (events)." As a strong proponent for the resident assistant<sup>88</sup> (RA) positions, she believed that the employment of

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<sup>88</sup> A resident assistant (RA) is "a trained peer leader who supervises those living in a residence hall or group housing facility"; the responsibilities of RAs include "building a residential community through programming, acting as a para-counselor for students, being a familiar first resource for students with academic or institutional questions, and enforcing residence policies" (Resident assistant, 2017, April 29, paras. 1-2).

student staff dedicated to activity planning would change the dynamics in the dormitories:

So I think that would enrich the foreign students, they would stop hanging only the Russians, only the Thais, so that would force them see more people, in every floor, or some ways, organize something. So that you pull everybody together...Then, weekly, or every so often, there is a guarantee activity for students. They have something to do.

Anna's proposal came back to the previous discussion on student autonomy, which could hardly be realized without the administrative decentralization in the target programs. In fact, with social connections as her biggest concern, Anna had to make a choice between living off-campus and staying in the dorm because "in the off-campus (accommodation) there would be all Chinese neighbors. But in the dorm there would be international students." In her eyes, the target program was to blame for this dilemma. After a serious consideration, she planned to sacrifice the later. This further revealed the correlation between social engagement and student retention in residence.

As shown in this section, the target programs disregarded student accommodations as an important informal language-learning context where the residents and their visitors formed a community of practice. On one hand, the differentiated residence administrative policies drew a clear line between international and domestic students. On the other hand, the absence of reciprocal roommate assignment and engaging activities in the dormitories reduced the social connections among CFL residents. Consequently, instead of an extension and complement to formal academic study, residence life was disconnected from the target CFL immersion

program and the social needs of North American CFL students.

To summarize this chapter, there was a fundamental neglect of participants' social needs in the target programs, which limited their investment in orientation, CFL classrooms, extracurricular activities, and student residences. Meanwhile, the indifferent, othering, and condescending teaching and administrative philosophies, policies and practices inhibited participants' identity construction as equal and capable social networkers on campus. In order to increase both formal and informal language learning opportunities, the CFL instructors and administrators should attach more importance to the program-wide social facilitation and the assimilative administration between CFL and local students.

In the next two chapters, I broaden the contextual horizon in this chapter and look beyond the target programs to the general Chinese social networks that underpin them. More specifically, I will analyze participants' investment experiences based upon three distinct but interrelated identity categories: native English speakers, race and ethnicity (North Americans in general and the subgroups among North American participants), and gender.

## **Chapter 7 Investment and Identity Negotiation Experiences as Native English Speakers and North American CFL learners in China**

Attitudes towards and social practices related to various identity categories<sup>89</sup> in a local culture shape how a particular language learner is received and how the learner chooses to adopt or reject the identity projected by the local culture, which is well reflected in language use (Jin, 2016, p. 200). In second language learning studies, the most widely studied identity categories are race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, age, and social class (such as the works of Bernstein, 2013; Davis & Skilton-Sylvester, 2004; Flege, Yeni-Komshian & Liu, 1999; Kubota & Lin, 2009). Although in an individual study, the researcher could only focus on a limited number of identity categories and discussed them respectively for the purposes of clarity, the multiple facets of language learners' selves are inseparable and highly interacted (Pavlenko, 2001, p. 326). In the following two chapters, I will examine the multiplicity of participants' identities with an emphasis on three of their identity categories: mother tongue (native English speakers), race, and gender.

Generally applied to all the participants in this research, this chapter explores their investment and identity negotiation experiences as native English speakers and North Americans in China. The data showed that English played an ambivalent role in anglophone CFL learners' socialization in the target city. On one hand, English empowered the participants with desirable symbolic capitals; on the other hand, it resulted in an intense

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<sup>89</sup> Identity categories (or social categories) are parts of a structured society in which individuals place themselves; "they exist only in relation to other contrasting categories (for example, black vs. white)" and "each has more or less power, prestige, status, and so on" (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 225).

competition between North American CFL learners and Chinese ESL learners in language learning opportunities. In addition, the participants encountered othering practices in China, such as staring, excessive curiosity, and foreign identity labelling. Local communities also denied their identity as eligible and equal Chinese-speaking social networkers, which was exacerbated by the prevailing prejudices towards North Americans. The analysis in this chapter reveals the bi-directional and multi-layered power dynamics during participants' language learning and social identification in China. It will help to understand North American CFL learners' superiorities and vulnerabilities under the conflictive impact of English and against the unfair treatments towards racial minorities in China.

### **Investment and identity negotiation as native English speakers**

English, as a lingua franca, dominates the communications in all the fields around the world (Pennycook, 1996, p. 65). It has been a language of power and prestige in many countries, particularly in those under the strong influence of post-colonization and globalization (Jenkins & Leung, 2014). It has also been a symbolic capital people in many countries long for, including the huge number of English learners in China (Jin & Cortazzi, 2002, p. 53). This section investigates how the power of English interacts and conflicts with the rising Chinese, which is reflected in the role of English in native English speakers' CFL learning and identity negotiation in China.

The interviews and daily language use logs showed that English was a double-edged sword during participants' investment experiences. More specifically, all the participants, to different extents, enjoyed the academic, sociocultural and economic capital that English



granted them in local communities. However, simultaneously, they found their popularity as English native speakers could be troublesome. First, they were more or less taken advantage of as “English speaking tools” while making friends with local Chinese. In addition, the specialty of their mother tongue sometimes hindered their identification with local people and other international students. Furthermore, the overwhelming English learning requests limited their Chinese learning opportunities. Facing this contradictory situation, many participants showed their resistance to unfavorable social positions and tried to establish reciprocity during their bi-directional investment with local Chinese. Here, I will discuss the benefits and pitfalls that English brought about respectively.

**Complement to Chinese deficiency in and out of CFL classroom.** English provided North American CFL students with a universal communication medium in China. Many participants found that English made their life in and out of the CFL classroom more convenient. This was especially true when their Chinese proficiency was rather limited.

With a huge number of ESL learners and speakers on and off campus, North American CFL learners were able to take part in social activities as soon as they arrived even as newcomers and outsiders of local community of practice. For instance, Dennis felt very lucky to have been born with English owing to the sense of safety it brought him in China:

In worst case scenario that if you are in a big city (in China) and you need help and you cannot get a message across. There would usually be someone around you who can maybe understand what you are trying to say. And they can translate it in English.

He also admitted that this was an advantage that non-English-speaking international students hardly bore comparison.

For intermediate and advanced CFL learners, English was also beneficial to their socialization in China. Norman, who had studied Chinese for one year and half, said that although English gradually played a less role as his Chinese improved, sometimes he still preferred to speak a little English since it helped him convey his ideas with more accuracy and sophistication. Norman further explained that he used his mother tongue more frequently in heart-to-heart conversations, which was critical for his social engagement and identification in the target communities.

Besides daily communication, English could also work as an intermediate language in target CFL programs and help the participants with their investment in academic capital. Frank said that although his classes were mainly taught in Chinese, the majority of his teachers could speak English; hence, he was able to ask the teachers to clarify in English if he did not understand the Chinese instruction. Then, for his classmates who had difficulties in understanding both the Chinese instruction and English clarification by the instructors, Frank could further explain to them “in a mix of English and Chinese to make it understandable” because he was more fluent in English. In this case, English empowered Frank to be “a more capable peer” in the classroom who was able to support his classmates (Vygotsky, 1978b, p. 86). However, for CFL beginners with low English proficiency, Riya noted that their study life could be very challenging and they needed to take a much longer way to achieve same understanding as her. She thus felt blessed to be a native English speaker in China, indicating

the frustration and jealousy of other foreign students.

Obviously, English is not the official instructional language but the language of power in CFL classrooms. Just as the long lasting debate on the usage of English as lingua franca and the accommodation of foreign language learners of various backgrounds, the target programs and instructors should be cautious about the hierarchical access to academic capital in class and the social tensions thereby (Wang, 2013b, p. 71-72). In disagreement with some informants who advocated reshaping the classroom with homogeneous student source, I believed that differentiated instructional strategies would be a better solution to meet the diverse needs of a mixed student population. I will further discuss this in Chapter 9.

**“Valuable population” with social and economic capital in China.** Besides a complement to Chinese deficiency, English also granted the participants with social and economic capital in China. The Chinese people had very positive attitudes towards English, the representative Western language, even though some of them had ambivalent sentiments towards Westerners due to Western powers’ invasions in China in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the ideological conflicts between China and Western countries (Barmé, 1995). Therefore, North American native English speakers were always admired and approached by local people.

Facing the enthusiastic responses to their English proficiency, all the participants in this study had a clear understanding of the social value behind their mother tongue. As Dara mentioned, because the majority of the foreigners in the target city were Russians and Koreans, English-speaking population was small and therefore of great value. Some participants could also feel the difference of their popularity from the other international

students in China. For instance, Lucy found that non-English-speaking foreign students also envied North American international students since English was just so natural for them.

Like a magnet, English attracted local people to invest. The participants thus became favorable social networkers, which in return gifted them with Chinese learning resources and opportunities (McAloon, 2014, pp. 149-150). This privilege was mainly demonstrated through voluntary friend making and language exchange. According to the daily language use logs, the majority of their Chinese-speaking social networks were constructed through local English learners. Moreover, language exchange and English teaching activities were the key sources of off-campus social interactions.

When talking about her friend-making experiences in China, Nhu summarized, “some of them (Chinese people) sought me out. They sought out, they looked for me because I speak English and they want to practice English...I think it gives me some privileges because it's really easy to find language partners.” Dara and Frank also mentioned that English tutoring was one of the most important opportunities to visit local families and see their daily life. Riya, Anna, and Norman felt blessed because many Chinese wanted to make friends with them in order to improve their English, including Chinese children. The parents of these children were always well educated and of higher social status. Some of them had study or work abroad experiences. Most of these parents managed to make connections to target CFL programs for English tutors. Therefore, English not only provided North American international students with Chinese social opportunities, but also enabled them to get access to the privileged population in China.

In addition to the social opportunities, English also endowed the participants with economic capital. Whatever their educational backgrounds and social statuses were in their home countries, all the participants in this study got English teaching offers and did related part-time jobs in China. English teaching thus became an important financial support for their study in China. As Dennis explained, teaching English provided him with decent income and valuable working experiences. Norman and Anna further argued that although it was in English, the teaching process, especially those with Chinese high school and university students, turned out to be “double profits.” Because on top of the economic rewards, it also helped them have a better understanding of Chinese people and vernacular traditions, which was of great significance to their social integration.

It is important to note that the social and economic capital that English brought about did not have an even distribution among all the participants. Due to local stereotyping of “white” English<sup>90</sup>, the non-Caucasian participants encountered constant challenges to their ownership of English language. This issue was more relevant to the racial identity of certain subgroups of North American CFL learners, thus, I will talk about it separately in the following chapter.

**Undesirable superiority and social pitfalls.** Some identity positions “may offer enhanced sets of possibilities for social interaction and human agency,” but others may limit them (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 414). However, being a native English speaker in China was an identity position of possibilities and limitations at the same time. While entertaining

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<sup>90</sup> In other words, local people assumed that all the native English speakers were Caucasians.

the luxury as valuable population in the target city, some participants questioned the privileges English brought them. Their reasoning indicated that being advantaged did not necessarily mean being positioned as they wanted. Their ascribed superior social status might on the contrary disempowered their investment and identity negotiation in the target communities.

Some participants did not want to be special due to their inequity with the others. For example, Sandra sometimes felt as an unnecessary extra in her classes since many other classmates could not understand the English clarification by the instructors. Her better access to academic capital made her identity as a CFL learner superior to the other students. In her opinion, this unfavorable difference distinguished her from who she wanted to identify with.

Out of classroom, the differentiated treatments towards native English speakers also resulted in social pitfalls. For instance, Frank was reluctant to reveal his identity as a native English speaker in order to hide his citizenship and to avoid the stereotyping assumption of “arrogant Americans.” As he said,

I think there's the idea that Americans think they're kind of better than everyone so...I didn't want to broadcast that I was American and I am here in China. So I was always careful about, if they asked me, of course I would tell them. If they didn't want to ask me, of course I didn't want to tell them well I'm American and I speak English.

Frank's choice indicated that English was not always a symbol of social superiority. Sometimes, it could be in correlation with another identity of negative connotation in the

target communities. In this case, to keep a low profile was in favor of his social identification with local people. Similarly to Frank, Sandra every so often felt awkward to be addressed as a native English speaker. As she cited, “We have one guy who is, basically every other sentence, he’ll say it in Chinese and then say the same thing in English...and like I don’t like that. Just speak to me in Chinese. I don’t wanna feel special.” Her claim of “(speaking) to me in Chinese” showed an aspiration of fair treatment during social engagement. This Chinese person’s eagerness to speak in English and to show off his English (especially in Sandra’s words “broken Chinglish”) did not support their communication but challenged Sandra’s identity as an equal and capable Chinese-speaking interlocutor. Therefore, the undesired specialty in this case led to social inferiority, let alone her loss of Chinese learning opportunities.

**Distrust while making friends with Chinese interlocutors.** On top of inequity and negative assumptions, many participants felt bad about their popularity as native English speakers in that it may change the authenticity of their friendship with local people. In other words, they wondered, “Chinese people approached me because they like me or like my English only?”

For instance, Dennis noticed the “ulterior intention(s)” of some friend-making offers. As he explained, “Some Chinese people want to be friends with you only because maybe you can help them with English or maybe because you are a foreigner or you are a Westerner, or maybe it makes them look cool.” “Real” friends in deed, as Dennis added, should be those who help each other in need. Likewise, both Nhu and Sandra expressed their aversion to

being an “English speaking tool.” Nhu also considered those who made friends only for the sake of her English proficiency to be “selfish.” They argued that what they wanted was “actual” relationships and “normal” friends, and if there were Chinese learning opportunities, it would be better.

Worse still, certain participants changed their self-perceptions after being taken advantage of. For example, the lowest point during Dara’s study abroad experience was when the so-called friends flung her around as a free English tutor. To cite an example of a “practical” Chinese girl, she said, “This girl...I tried contacting her (to) go to lunch (together). She never returned my call. We never meet out of any of the English...speaking sections that we set up. But this happens a lot.” Additionally, a more deceptive way to make use of native English speakers was to invite them as “foreign eye candy” and “anglophone ear candy” in various parties to give face to the hosts (McAloon, 2014, p. 153). In other words, local people used their friendship with anglophones to be popular social targets. According to Dara, the only thing she got out of such kind of relationships was only free drinks.

Feeling as a “gullible Western person,” Dara lost her esteem and hated to be manipulated. Sometimes, she even felt too sad to stay. As she said, “...it’s just sad. I’m sad that I’m let this affect me on that level but ... it’s just made me so tired. I want to go back to the Western atmosphere.” Her “futile” investment in friendship also made her more cautious during social networking. She finally chose to focus only on paid tutor jobs and reciprocal language exchanges. In her words, the trick happened but she would not let it happen again.

Friend making played an important role in the foreign language learning of both



North American CFL learners and ESL learners in China. However, since friends are those with whom one has a bond of mutual affection and identification, some Chinese people's "English only" investment strategy violated the basic principle of friendship, i.e., mutual respect, trust, and benefits. Furthermore, the over-instrumentalization of native English speakers devalued the other identity facets of North Americans, which indirectly caused a sense of inferiority. The negative social position as a "tool" or "being gullible" also caused mental and social stresses among the participants, which led to their detainment and withdrawal from certain Chinese social networkers and interlocutors.

**Overwhelming English help requests during Chinese learning.** As distrust in friend making, the imbalanced investment between North American CFL learners and local ESL learners impeded participants' daily social engagement. As Nhu contended, the overwhelming English help requests were one of the biggest barriers that constrained her from full investment in Chinese-speaking social practices. To illustrate, the following questions and requests dominated her life in the city:

"How do you say this in English?" "Could you help me with my English exams?" "I need to practice English so I can apply for a higher position. Then could you..." "My kid needs an English tutor. Could you come over one hour every day?" "Can you help me proofread my English paper?" "I have an English interview next week, so could you...?"

Helplessly, she sighed, "I'm like if I'm helping you, you can't be asking for an hour every day. It's a lot of my time" and "I'm here to study Chinese." Facing some "weird" requests, she was

rather shocked. For instance, her dentist once asked her to help with his English research paper while filling her teeth. At such moments, she could only be “speechless.”

Nhu’s story was not an exception. The majority of the other participants had similar experiences. For Anna, due to the high attention to her English proficiency, she could only rely her Chinese learning on reading rather than face-to-face interaction. Her passive change of learning strategies thus drew focus away from Chinese speaking and listening capacities. This showed that the superior English could at the same time lead to inferior and marginalized position during CFL learning and socialization.

Moreover, Sandra questioned the inequality she needed to face:

I get a lot of, how do you say this in English... And I wish I would say, you know I wanna learn a foreign language...I feel like they’re learning Chinese and English and I wanna learn, you know? Can I ask you how to say this in Russian? How do you say this in Vietnamese?

When English learners in China (including both Chinese ESL learners and international students who want to learn English) enthusiastically invested in English, they overlooked North American CFL students’ needs and wishes to learn Chinese. Sandra’s remark might indicate another issue. Considering English as the more powerful and valuable language in the world, local Chinese and other international students might not even think or believe that their mother tongues were worthwhile to be invested in by native English speakers.

“While identities or positions are often given by social structures or ascribed by others, they can also be negotiated by agents who wish to position themselves” (Norton & Toohey,

2011, p. 418). Facing the demanding English help requests, North American CFL students resisted the inequitable social positions in different ways. Some participants fought for their rights to learn and speak Chinese by direct avoidance of English speakers and learners. They chose to interact and identify with Chinese interlocutors who could not speak English at all in order to create Chinese-speaking environment. As Lolita persisted, “If a Chinese person approaches me specifically asking me to practice English, I will usually tell them I just want to speak Chinese.” Likewise, Norman explained that the reason he chose the target city was a deliberate decision to avoid having too many English speakers around like in first-tier Chinese cities.

Instead of complete avoidance, some other participants were active agents and kept a balance between the investment from both sides. In other words, they used their identity as native English speakers to establish reciprocal relationships (McAloon, 2014, pp. 266-267). For Dara, the best way to protect herself was to control the English teaching time and at the same time to strike an economic balance. In other words, she would only teach English in a limited amount of time that would not influence her Chinese learning. Besides, each time she helped the others with their English, she guaranteed a reasonable payment. However, most participants looking for an equal investment (like Riya, Nhu, Norman, and Sandra), would rather do language exchange than merely English teaching. They would also directly let local people know their preference beforehand. Furthermore, with higher Chinese proficiency and social skills, Frank controlled his English speaking time by steering the conversation language from English to Chinese:

Maybe they would start the conversation in English or Chinese and slowly work it's way around to English. So at first, I didn't mind it. But as I came to, as my Chinese got better and better and I was able to have full conversations with people, um, I always tried to steer the conversation back into Chinese.

In daily life, the adoption of social strategies was not clear-cut but mixed and situation-oriented. Whatever the participants chose, they aimed to appropriate identities that were more desirable and to get a better access to Chinese learning opportunities.

Briefly, as native English speakers, North American CFL learners were torn between popularity and over-instrumentalization of their English proficiency. Except the symbolic capitals and the superiority thereby, English also brought to the participants social pitfalls and tensions with both Chinese ESL learners and other foreign students. Similar to mother tongue, the identity category of race and ethnicity played an important role in participants' language learning and social identification in China. In the next section, I will discuss the othering practices towards North Americans as racial minorities and the stereotyped misconception between race and citizenship in the target communities.

### **General racialized othering practices against North American CFL learners**

Race and ethnicity<sup>91</sup> have long been recognized as connected to identity construction and language learning (Norton & Toohey, 2011, pp. 424-425). Considering race as “socially constructed” rather than “biologically determined” (Kubota & Lin, 2006, pp. 473-476), many

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<sup>91</sup> Here, it is important to address the debate on the use of racial classifications in population profiling and in academic studies. In spite of “the paradox of race and ethnicity” due to their hybrid and indefinable nature (Martin, 2005, p. 78), I believed that the deployment of certain racial categories was the only way to describe and challenge the social inequality under study. In order to clarify the applicability of the research findings, I detailed the connotation of each racial or ethnic group with specific examples in the vernacular settings.

scholars, particularly ESL sociolinguists (such as Bashir-Ali, 2006; Ibrahim, 1999; Kubota & Lin, 2009; McKay & Wong, 1996; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004), examined how the sociocultural environment of the target language speaking community and its discourse of race marginalized racial minorities and affected their language learning. However, academic publications on racial issues in China, no matter about foreigners in general or international students in particular, were limited, let alone those especially on CFL learners. Many recent studies on foreign ethnic minorities in China focused on Africans (such as Bodomo, 2012; Castillo, 2016; Cheng, 2011; Feng, 2014; Liu, 2012; Yun, 2013). The target racial varieties were still quite narrow.

In this section, I will critically investigate how racial identities influenced the investment and identity negotiation of North American CFL learners in general, following the sequence of how social engagement develops from greeting or getting attention to deeper communications and conflicts. In other words, I will discuss the racialized othering practices that applied to all the participants with the Chinese race as “I or we” and the foreign or North American races as the “others.” The data showed that the racial border, particularly the biological indicators of racial identifications, decided that they were inarguably the social outsiders in the target communities. First, othering practices towards foreigners commonly existed, which included staring, over curiosity, and foreign identity labeling. Besides, many Chinese people did not expect and were not prepared to deal with visual or audible minorities as Chinese-speaking interlocutors. Moreover, local stereotyping assumptions towards North Americans strengthened the discrimination and marginalization against the participants.

**Instant othering actions: staring, excessive curiosity, and foreign identity labelling.** Othering (or exclusionary othering) is often defined as a “process which serves to mark and name those thought to be different from oneself (Weis, 1995, p. 18). It “leads people to a widespread tendency to differentiate in-group from out-group” (Dervin, 2012, p. 191), which is “often influenced by the visibility of the one’s otherness” (Canales, 2000, p. 22). The consequences of such kind of othering experiences are often alienation, marginalization, decreased opportunities, internalized oppression, and exclusion (Canales, 2000, pp. 16-18). As soon as arriving in China, many participants immediately experienced the othering actions by local people who perceived and pointed out their physical differences from the dominant majority and Chinese societal norm. These actions always demonstrated by over-attention, extreme curiosity, and foreign identity labelling to a foreign-looking person.

For instance, “a lot of staring,” “a lot of attention,” and “nerve-wrecking” were how Dennis described his first impression of being a foreigner in China. In his opinion, he drew people’s attention due to his height,<sup>92</sup> foreign appearance, and alleged American fashion style in a homogeneous society. Similarly, the othering stares were very “intense” for Dara:

That’s what I was feeling and I’m really intense, like physically intense, not just mentally...I just want to go someplace and be left alone, why do I, why I go shopping, I have to be stared at. And people talking about me while I’m still here... But it’s still affects you even when you leave here because you

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<sup>92</sup> Dennis was over 190cm tall, which was much taller than the average male height in China.

still expect people to stare at you.

Due to such othering stares, Dara felt reluctant to present herself in public. The avoidance of the fixing and identity-shaping gaze from Chinese onlookers became one of her most frustrating moments in the target city. It further changed her expectations of Chinese social environment.

In addition to over-attention, excessive and sometimes offensive curiosity was another frequently mentioned othering reaction from Chinese people. For instance, Frank got many questions on campus: “They’re (Chinese students are) all interested in you because they see, they’re like, Oh, there’s a foreigner here, let’s go talk to him and see what he thinks or why he came.” For Anna and Nhu, they both felt local people were curious about them because they were so “different” from the majority. However, the curiosity was demonstrated in different ways. As a visible minority, Anna got many photo requests. As an audible minority<sup>93</sup>, Nhu got shocking expressions and/or inquiries into her origin whenever she spoke Chinese. In both cases, the participants were novelties under exploration.

Furthermore, the most overt othering behavior in the target communities was direct foreign identity labeling through language and gestures. As Min, one of the informants, said the international students all knew that local people called them *laowai* (老外, literally old outsider or foreigner) and it usually made them feel funny, uncomfortable or disrespected. Like many other participants, Norman was at a loss by being called “a foreigner”:

I just I keep getting identified as a foreigner, which is fine, but a lot of

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<sup>93</sup> An audible minority refers to an ethnic Chinese or overseas Chinese who looks similar but sounds differently from the local Chinese.

passerby... say *waiguo ren* (外国人, a foreigner) ...which is in the US, that's a kind of rude thing to be doing. It doesn't really bother me that much. But at the same time I don't really know how to react, do I like say "oh, *zhongguo ren* (中国人, a Chinese) (laugh)...

Sometimes, the Chinese people would specify their labelling by naming the ethnics, nationalities or continents. To illustrate, Riya was being constantly called *yindu ren* (印度人, an Eastern Indian) due to her Indian look. Participants with darker skin colors, like Sandra, Anna, and Dara, were openly identified as *feizhou ren* (非洲人, Africans). Caucasians were taken for granted as *elusi ren* 俄罗斯人 (Russians). The seemingly random but tenuously linked labeling indicated a prevalent confusion between racial identity and citizenship in the target communities.

Comparing the target city with other bigger cities in China, such as Beijing and Shanghai, many participants believed that the lack of diversified foreign population partially resulted in the othering identifications. These offensive practices further revealed the vernacular mindset, which spontaneously treated foreigners as outsiders without further confirmation.

**CFL learners as inequitable Chinese-speaking interlocutors.** As the communication developed, more othering practices emerged, especially when the participants started to enthusiastically test their learning outcomes and expected to gain higher Chinese proficiency in local communities. Although many participants described Chinese natives as "nice," "helpful," and "patient," they still got frequent questioning and unfair judgments



about their ownership of Chinese language.

Most of the time, the local people did not expect visible minorities as Chinese speakers. Shock and surprise were always their first response. For instance, Frank was considered very special when speaking Chinese in a local restaurant:

She kind of stepped back: “Oh, you speak Chinese?” And I think it’s still maybe the understanding that...foreigners or someone who looks like me...maybe not...accustomed to speaking Chinese or...maybe not a lot but very seldom people who look like me are speaking Chinese.

Similar to Frank’s indication of “a foreigner” and “who looks like me,” Lolita and Dara further specified the relations between Chinese people’s astonishment with their skin color as being “white” and “dark-skinned.”

This unexpectedness also affected the language choice during communication. Norman noticed that as he did not suppose all the Chinese could speak English and tried to speak the local language, the Chinese people usually made the opposite assumption and used English. In another example of Frank, even he responded to the question of his nationality in Chinese, the local taxi driver insisted on talking to other Chinese passengers assuming his Chinese was not good enough to continue the conversation. In consequence, some participants became more passive in using Chinese unless they deliberately initiated a conversation in Chinese or switched the language with further proof of their Chinese proficiency.

For CFL learners in China, daily socialization was a critical context of informal

education with authentic and incidental Chinese learning opportunities. However, while the participants were eager to learn, local social networkers were not always ready to support.

After about one year in China, Sandra still felt embarrassed to speak Chinese in public:

...because sometimes you hear little kids mock you in the street. Like if you say something and they'll say it after you like, you know like when you said something wrong or you said it in a funny way, or sometimes you know I just don't wanna speak to people because I have this thick accent ...

Moreover, she wished Chinese native speakers could correct her in a supportive way, but it seldom happened. Facing the same problem, Dara used "ignorance" to describe the hostile attitudes towards CFL speakers:

So if they heard me speaking Chinese, maybe they will make fun of me from my accent, or they will look at me and be like "Wow, you're speaking Chinese!" You must be right off campus, I'm like you know I'm a normal student here, you see a bunch of foreigners, obviously we are gonna speak Chinese.

With much longer time of local involvement, Lucy shared the same frustration when she studied many hours a day in order to improve a little bit but some Chinese native speakers did not even try to understand with some patience. So did Lolita, who argued that "Maybe it didn't occur to them that because Chinese come so easily to them. They might not realize it that I have no idea what they are saying...then I was just like OK and walk away." These alienated and indifferent responses considerably influenced participants' self-identification as

eligible and capable Chinese speakers. For a more welcoming social environment, Frank, Anna, and Lolita suggested that local people should try to understand CFL learners and give them confidence by speaking Chinese in a more considerate way (such as speaking more clearly, slowly, and without big words or abstract concepts).

In contrast to the indifference and discouragement mentioned above, another widely existing response to CFL learners was the exaggeration of their Chinese proficiency by saying “Your Chinese is very good.” Although all the participants took this “over-positive” attitude as a differentiated treatment, they reacted with various interpretations and investment strategies. To illustrate, Frank considered it as a “boost” for his study rather than a lie:

It was like keep praising me because they kept saying, “oh your Chinese is so good”, “you’re doing so well”... at first I was like, oh it is kinda getting better. But then I realized that the Chinese people really like to encourage. If you know only one or two sentences and they could’ve been really bad the way you said it. But they’ll tell you, oh your Chinese is so good.

All the other participants shared a more negative opinion and regarded it as a boring routine. As Sandra said, “(It is) too fake positive. It’s unnatural. It doesn’t feel natural. It just doesn’t feel (as) natural (as) like two human beings are talking...”

Facing the untrustworthy compliments, the participants had different understandings of investment with best rewards. For example, Noman chose “not to talk to them (local Chinese) that much.” Whereas, Anna preferred to talk to young children because unlike adults, “kids were open, strict and honest” teachers who helped to correct her mistakes. Nhu,

as an ethnic Chinese rather than a visible minority, got similar praises when she made herself “audible.” She interpreted it as a Chinese tradition of being “nice” and “humble” regardless of actual expertise and thus decided not to believe these comments. Also considering native Chinese as unreliable judges, Lucy and Dennis thought that Chinese people were “happy” that foreigners could speak their mother tongue, and in return, they would exaggerate the language performance to make CFL learners “feel good.” In other words, they considered CFL learners to be so different, so no matter what their Chinese language levels were, it was good enough for the outsiders. These outsiders then were not evaluated as real members of their own culture and society.

The ambivalent and sometimes manipulative responses towards participants’ ownership of Chinese language indicated the unpreparedness of local people for the Chinese craze and the inequality between CFL learners and Chinese native speakers. However, they were only part of the differentiated treatments towards CFL racial minorities in China. On top of instant othering actions and judgmental discourses on Chinese proficiency, local stereotyping assumptions against North Americans also led to misunderstandings and offensiveness among the participants.

**Stereotypes and unfair treatments**<sup>94</sup>. Without much interactional experiences with foreigners, the Chinese people often relied on “stereotypical representations of those perceived as different, further perpetuating the separation between self and Other” (Canales,

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<sup>94</sup> In this study, unfair treatments refer to the unequal and discriminatory attitudes, remarks, and behaviors towards North American CFL students in China, especially on the grounds of their linguistic backgrounds, race, and gender.

2000, p. 21). Here, I will analyze how the target communities discriminatorily positioned the participants through their neutral, positive and negative stereotypes towards North Americans. The data showed that the stereotypes (especially hetero-stereotypes) under discussion were mainly fixed, one-sided and superficial understandings based upon Western and Chinese mass media. Besides, these over-generalized assumptions to different extents resulted in the social barriers and conflicts between North American CFL learners and local social networkers.

To begin with, the stereotypes towards North Americans decided local people's expectations towards CFL international students wherefrom and their choices of conversation topics, locations, and attitudes (McAloon, 2014, pp. 144-146). Here are some examples. With the popularity of NBA in China, Dennis was expected to be very good at playing basketball, thus, NBA teams became the most popular topic. Norman was supposed to have a gun at home and got many questions about firearms ownership in North America. Nhu was always asked to meet at KFC because her Chinese friends took it for granted that all Americans loved fried chicken. Riya heard over and over again that "Americans are very great," although she preferred to have a discussion from both views rather than one-sided flattering. Dara constantly got aggressive drinking offers at local bars due to the misunderstanding that all North Americans were good drinkers and they loved to get drunk.

Many participants also complained about the stereotyping questions that they frequently got, such as "What do Americans like to eat?" and "What do Americans do in free time?," which sometimes made them reluctant to take part in the conversation. As Nhu said,

“Like I don't know how to answer for all Americans... Just like in China, each region has its own things... You cannot be the general answer to such kind of question.” Sandra even felt bored about the stereotyping cliché and longed for regular topics:

Talk to us about random subjects...Just you know maybe like what did you learn in class today? What was interesting in class? We talked about UFOs, what about UFOs, and what about stars. Just something different!

Although most of the stereotypes mentioned above were comparatively neutral, in order to deal with the judgmental treatments therefrom, the participants still needed to take their agency to resist, which even could change their personality. This was exactly what happened to Dara when she tried to get away the annoying *ganbei* (干杯, Cheers and bottom up!) from the pushy locals:

You have to come and go nuts to get them away from you, which I had to do...It's really...dangerous but I'm like if I don't go crazy. They are not gonna leave me alone which I've gone crazy and they don't know what to do and they walk away. I mean I get a few *maren* (骂人, curses)... I'm not this kind of person, but it's like, in this way it will change you...You got to protect yourself.

To curse and to go crazy in public challenged Dara's social boundaries of being a nice and respectful person, which she could never imagine in her home country. However, for the sake of self-defense, she pushed her limits so much as going to a local CFL weekend school to learn and practice how to swear colloquially. Learning Chinese then became a weapon of

Dara to guard her safety and dignity. I will further analyze this experience in the following chapter.

In addition to overgeneralization, stereotypes could also be the causes of unfair treatments even when they were seemingly positive. For instance, due to the stereotype that “all Americans or North Americans are rich” (as Nhu summarized), all the participants in this study to a certain extent experienced overcharging and pushy shopping in the target communities. It happened not only during daily grocery shopping but also at public service sectors such as hospitals. For self-protection, Riya asked her Chinese friends to help to bargain since she still felt too awkward to negotiate the price by herself. Whereas, feeling cheated by the local vendors, Dennis chose to fight back by himself:

I will have to feel mentally prepared to sort of you know fight back and say “Oh, no, no, no, this should be cheaper!” and you know “what are you doing?” So at first, it was very negative feeling that I have to be on the defensive and I have to sort of attack and but gradually I realize that it’s just the circumstances.

Similar to Dara, Dennis needed to step out of his comfort zone and repositioned himself for social equity. His precaution against overcharging and readiness to “attack” also indicated that when local people inflated the price due to the stereotype, Dennis also renegotiated his understanding of China as imagined communities.

Furthermore, many other negative stereotypes led to severe discrimination and social isolation. A good case in point was the frequently mentioned comment that North Americans

are *kaifang* (开放, sexually open or loose). Nhu was extremely angry by being labelled as an “open” girl by her Chinese peers:

They always say, “Oh, you are very open.” I really can't follow or stuff, but I'm like you don't know anything about me you know...” I think open in English is a very positive word. But I think in Chinese it has like a negative connotation attached to it... Like the meaning is sort of change. It's just frustrating.

Although Nhu argued that she was very traditional, some of her male Chinese friends still stopped hanging out with her because their girlfriends worried that they would be seduced by the American tramp. This ridiculous experience made Nhu feel deeply hurt. Gradually, she became more cautious about friend making with Chinese males.

An extended meaning of being sexually open in China was being irresponsible partners, because of which Dennis faced many oppositions when he dated a Chinese girl:

Because there is a conception (in the target city), you know, American foreigner is just after sex or that... or that they just want to be with someone and they are going to leave you and so there is no future...but they also took no effort to find out. They just sort of they didn't get to know; they didn't want to know me at all.

Dennis argued that although some Western foreigners abused their situation in China and did not end up well with their Chinese partners, it happened everywhere. It should not be him who paid for the mistakes caused by the others. However, no matter how hard he tried to



convince his girlfriend's family and friends, they did not want to listen. Consequently, this fake and blind conception turned out to be an impregnable wall against their communication and mutual trust. Dennis thus lost his opportunity as an eligible and favorable partner during the social identification of dating and marriage. Feeling extremely stressful, he even considered this discriminated incident as "sort of anti-foreigner (depicting foreigners as "bad" and "negative)." Although Dennis and his girlfriend continued to date regardless of the offensive judgment and finally got the permission from the girl's family, he still thought himself as the powerless one in this relationship and his struggles were far from over.

These stereotypes and unfair treatments showed how local perceptions of North America as imagined communities negatively influenced the social positioning of North American CFL learners. As many participants pointed out, the mass media and political propaganda in both home and host countries played an important part in the construction of ethnic clichés, particularly the postcolonial otherness, in China. In fact, the most widely existed stereotype towards the participants was "white" North Americans, that is to say that North Americans should look, in Anna's words, "like Europeans, white and blonde." Since it is more relevant to the discriminations based upon skin colors, I will further elaborate it in the following chapter when discussing the racial and social hierarchy among the subgroups of North American CFL learners.

To sum up this chapter, all the participants in this study to various degrees experienced the differentiated treatments as native English speakers and as racial minorities in China. The bi-directional investment between anglophone CFL learners and local ESL

learners revealed the uncertainty and relativity between social privileges and pitfalls. Moreover, the overt and covert othering practices towards visible and audible minorities strengthened the racial border between Chinese people and foreigners. They further devalued participants' identity as legitimate Chinese-speaking interlocutors. It is important to note that although some people, such as Anna, regarded studying abroad as a process of learning during which one should be prepared to understand, accept, and incorporate into the target culture, most participants insisted on and took agentive acts for a bottom line of mutual respect and trust.

On top of an analysis of the othering practices applied to the participants in general, I will explore the differentiated treatments against different subgroups of North American CFL learners. More specifically, I will focus on the distinct and discriminatory treatments with respect to their skin colors and gender.

## **Chapter 8 Distinct Patterns of Discriminations towards Various Subgroups of North**

### **American CFL Learners**

Most research on foreign students and CFL learners in China took the target population from one source country or area as a whole and thus paid little attention to the diverse experiences among different groups of students of same origin. In this chapter, I will examine the distinct patterns of discriminations towards certain subgroups of North American CFL learners regarding their skin colors and gender.

The research findings showed that the social experiences varied among Caucasians, ethnic Chinese, and other skin-colored North Americans. To begin with, although Caucasians were the most popular race in China, their favorable outlook somehow made them hard to fit in the target communities. Besides, both ethnic Chinese and dark-skinned participants faced the questioning about their citizenship and English proficiency. For the former, the denial of her claim of being Chinese disillusioned her “Chinese Dream” and brought her struggle of belonging to nowhere; for the later, overt racial discrimination, such as negative skin-tone comments and social resentment, made them further marginalized.

On top of the differentiated treatments based upon skin colors, this chapter will explore how certain participants suffered from gendered discriminations. More specifically, local homogeneous and patriarchal judgements on female physical appearance and social independence impeded their engagement with Chinese people. Moreover, the racialized gender stereotype of erotic Western women endangered female CFL students as target of sexual harassment and assault.

The analysis here reveals the social hierarchy among various subgroups of the North American CFL learners. Moreover, I highlight the importance to refine the identity categories during the study of ethnolinguistic minorities in the target communities and the power relationships thereby.

### **Differentiated racial treatments towards Caucasian CFL learners**

Some scholar “described being white (Caucasian) as akin to walking down the street with money being put into your pant pocket without your knowledge” (Leonardo, 2004, p. 138). This is somewhat true in this study. The “money” here refers to all kinds of priorities and symbolic capitals that Caucasian CFL learners enjoyed in China. They included compliments of physical appearance, natural proof of citizenship and English proficiency, and having more social opportunities than the non-Caucasian participants. However, their favorable appearance also to a certain degree made them feel hard to fit in local communities, where visible minorities were always social outsiders regardless of their Chinese proficiencies. Besides, Caucasian North Americans were always mistaken as Russians due to the target city’s vicinity to Russia. This brought about not only social pressures, but also their re-imagination of a desirable host city.

**Outsiders with favorable outlook.** Being Caucasian in China is being handsome, beautiful, and attractive. White skin color is one of the most obvious physical characteristics of being Caucasian. Some other perceived features, such as being tall and blonde and having blue eyes, double eyelid<sup>95</sup>, and high nose bridge, also contributed to the so-called typical

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<sup>95</sup> A double eyelid eye is an eye born with an upper eyelid crease.

Western look and became the focus of attention. As Caucasian females, Lolita and Lucy draw a lot of admiration from local people. Whenever they passed by, they always got compliments like *piaoliang* (漂亮, pretty) and *haokan* (好看, good-looking). As a male Caucasian, Dennis also admitted that he was a very popular target in local communities:

Yeah, I think ... in certain parts of China, if you if you are tall and white, you are very popular target...You know people are, I can always hear them talking that he is very tall or they might call me handsome or you know very flattering words... and I think that I, I think generally positive.

In addition to the positive comments to their outlook, some Caucasian participants also pointed out that local Chinese were obsessed with the Westernization of their appearance. As Dara argued, the favorable Caucasian outlook indicated wealth and high social status because of the long-lasting stereotype of “fair-skinned landowners” and “dark-skinned farmers” in Chinese feudal agricultural society. It also demonstrated superiority and prosperity due to the impact of Caucasian Westerners during semi-colonial and postcolonial ages in China. Therefore, this favorable outlook, especially the fair skin tone, became an important aesthetic standard in China. According to Dara’s observation, Chinese market was highly influenced by this standard. For instance, she noticed that the mannequins in Chinese department stores were mainly white and blonde since it would attract more customers. The Westernization of physical appearance thus became an industry with extravagant profits. Many local females were willing to change their outlook through doing plastic surgeries, dyeing their hair, using whitening cosmetic products, applying double eyelid glues or tapes,

and wearing cosmetic contact lens<sup>96</sup>.

Although Dara described such kind of investment in appearance changes as being “sick” and “ridiculous,” she did recognize the huge social rewards that Caucasian North Americans had in China. Due to the stereotyped assumptions of “white” North Americans and “white” English, Caucasian participants were taken for granted as favorable social networkers and native English speakers. The superiority of their outlook and the identity affiliated to this outlook turned out to be sociocultural and economic capitals exclusive to their race. This will be further discussed in the following sections when I talk about the racial discriminations against non-Caucasian participants in China.

Ironically, while Chinese people tried to look Westernized, some Caucasian CFL learners considered their favorable outlook as a barrier to their social integration in China, since no matter what they wear or say, they cannot “disguise” their foreign appearance and identity (H. Du, 2015, p. 251). This was exactly why Norman felt lack of sense of belonging in Chinese communities. As he said, “I am clearly different...They treat me differently, although not necessarily badly.” Similarly, Frank was labelled as an outsider before he spoke:

No matter how hard I try, I’m never going to fit perfectly into the Chinese culture as far as I’ll never look Chinese. Maybe one day I’ll speak perfect Chinese but still you’ll look at me and you’ll say he’s a foreigner...I want them to judge me on the way that I speak and not the way I look, but sometimes I think you look foreign so your Chinese can be just so-so.

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<sup>96</sup> Contact lens that change the color and size of one’s irises.

Feeling treated unequally with local interlocutors, both Norman and Frank preferred a similar look to a favorable look. They further considered Asian Americans and Korean CFL learners had inherent advantages during their social networking in China. They can fly under the radar and fit into the Chinese culture once they speak Chinese perfectly.

The identity as Caucasian was a double-edged sword for the CFL learners under study. On one hand, their popular outlook provided them with certain social advantages; on the other hand, their sidelined outlook disillusioned their dream of social identification with Chinese people through Chinese learning and speaking. However, Caucasian North Americans were only a small portion of the Caucasian population in the target city. Their identity negotiation had also been influenced by the dominant Caucasian group in the target city, Russians.

**Being mistaken as Russian.** Due to geographical, political and historical reasons, there were a large number of Russian international students and immigrants in the target city, the majority of which had light skin color. As the dominant foreign population and culture in local communities, the Russian Diaspora had a great impact on local presumptions of foreigners in general and Caucasians in particular. It also influenced the social positioning and identity negotiation of other foreign groups, such as the Caucasian participants in this study. With similar Caucasian appearance, the Caucasian participants were always mistaken as Russians due to the stereotyping assumption that all the Caucasian people in the target city were from Russia. In Lolita's words, "Except Russians, everyone thinks I'm Russian." Therefore, in this specific social environment, skin color and outlook were supposed to be the

indicator of race, and then race was further associated with nationality.

In daily communications, all the Caucasian participants have the experiences of being mistaken as Russian. Sometimes, it was demonstrated through being pointed out in public. For instance, Lucy noticed that when she walked by, “they (local Chinese people) will just have often times, they will tell their young children “Russian.” Some other times, it was shown by direct questions like “Are you Russian?” especially when the participants spoke Chinese. Almost as common as the previous two ways of misidentification, the Caucasian participants would also be approached in Russian. As Dara observed, “If you are a white foreigner from the Western world, they (local Chinese people) are gonna, they are like ‘хорошо’ (good in Russian).” Lucy further emphasized that the frequency of such mistakes could be several times a day.

Except Lolita who had Russian blood in her veins and did not care about being mistaken as a Russian, all the other Caucasian participants felt awkward and stressful about this over-generalization. To begin with, when being judged at the first glance, the Caucasian participants were always in a very passive and powerless situation to prove themselves, because the situation would not change unless they voluntarily spoke English (indicating their identity as English speaker) or confirmed their citizenship. This was why some participants such as Frank felt uncomfortable by being called Russian. “At first, I was kind of like upset, I was like I’m not Russian! I’m American!” As a non-Caucasian participant, Dara also expressed her sympathy and confusion, “They think you are Russian and that’s stressful, because I’m like they... they are all like wait a minute, you don’t even look Russian.”



In the target city, the negative impression of Russians widely existed and had certain impact on local people's attitudes towards Caucasian foreigners. As Norman and Lucy explained, Russian international students and immigrants had bad reputations of being lazy at school and work, going to bars all the nighttime, and escaping military duties by studying abroad in China. Once being mistaken as Russian, the participants had to face the same stereotyped assumptions that Russian did. For example, Norman learned through his experiences, some taxi drivers refused to pick him up because they considered him as a Russian with a high possibility of taxi fare evasion. He argued that it was unfair to him to suffer from these unfavorable images totally irrelevant to his background. It caused not only inconvenience in his daily life but also troubles in building rapport with local people. He commented:

I'm offended. I will, I am a little bit offended because... my impressions of Russian are just like not super nice people...So, when they are assuming that I'm Russian, I got a feeling that's a bad thing... I say "I'm an American".

Finally yet importantly, being constantly mistaken as Russians changed participants' perceptions of the target city. After travelling in many other major cities in China, Lucy realized that only in the target city would she be considered as a Russian. In her opinion, besides close proximity to Russia, the large population of Russians in local communities was the key reason to this situation. Similarly, Norman summarized,

I think everybody thinks that, other people that I've talked to had the same idea that (the target city) is a little bit less international than Beijing is. At least,

at least with a lot of different nationalities. The target city does have a lot of Russians.

Facing the pressure of being Caucasian North Americans in the target city, several participants thought of moving to other more internationalized cities in China. Their previous investment priorities, such as standard Chinese accent, scholarships, and credit transfer, gradually lost their appeals. Instead, they looked for a more welcoming and inclusive social environment. Such kind of re-assessment and re-imagination of the host city not only applied to the Caucasian participants, but also had a huge impact on the non-Caucasian participants. In this following sections, I will discuss the disillusionment and identity renegotiation of ethnic Chinese and dark-skinned participants respectively.

### **Differentiated racial treatments towards ethnic Chinese CFL learner**

As an ethnic Chinese born in Vietnam and brought up in the U.S., Nhu was the only heritage language learner in this study. Due to her Asian-looking face and foreign accented Chinese, Nhu's identity as an American citizen and Chinese descent was constantly challenged by local people. Being considered as an immigrant in the U.S. and outsider in China, she felt belonging to nowhere. Although Nhu kept on thinking about identity since her childhood and believed herself very sensitive to issues of cultural adaptation, she still hoped that her fused identity could be understood and accepted in the target communities. With an awareness of the big difference between diasporic Chinese culture in the U.S. and Chinese culture in contemporary mainland China, she started to re-examine her root-tracing journey and the meaning of being Chinese and Chinese learning for ethnic Chinese abroad.

**Challenges to citizenship, English ownership and Chinese origin.** Due to local stereotyping assumption of the U.S. as a racially homogeneous (Caucasian only) society, Nhu continuously faced the challenges to the authenticity of her American citizenship. It started as early as the day she arrived in the target city when she was excluded as an international student by the volunteer to pick her up at the airport:

When I first got picked up I walked toward a lady and she had the like help welcomes you sign, “××× University welcomes you.” So it's like oh I'm Nhu. I'm here to go to school and she just looked at me, she's like she's like she's been shocked. And then she and I had to speak to her in Chinese you know and she was just like oh, and then she just walked and later on she was like, oh you know, I was expecting like a tall girl like blonde like blue eyes.

The shocking expression of the volunteer surprised Nhu. She began to realize the limited knowledge local people had of her home country and the lack of professional volunteer training in the target university. She further argued that there was no such a thing called “American appearance.” Physical characteristics were far from the most meaningful indicators of citizenship in an immigrant country. However, such opinion was hardly accepted by local Chinese who considered blood and lineage as the key ethnic and civic markers (Maruyama, Weber & Stronza, 2010, p. 8).

Worse still, the suspicions of her nationality made her look like a liar, which impeded her trust building with local Chinese and eventually discouraged her social networking. Nhu's experience resonated with Dara's observation of second generation Chinese Americans

in China. With nearly native Chinese pronunciation, they were taken for granted as Chinese citizens even it was their first time in China. “They get called, when they tell people that they are American,” as Dara said. For those who finally recognized Nhu’s citizenship, they still considered her a very rare case in the U.S. “They don’t really get it. They believe it but I think they think I’m an exception,” she emphasized. In order to help local Chinese to have a better understanding of her background, Nhu made great efforts to introduce the demographic diversity of her home country. She always cited the statistics of Asian American population, the fastest growing racial group in the U.S., as an example. However, as far as she was concerned, this should have been a common sense in a globalized world and in a city willing to welcome increasing international population.

After settling down, Nhu noticed that she got far fewer friend-making requests and social opportunities than her Caucasian counterparts. “I think if I look more Westerner they (Chinese people) will talk to me more,” Nhu added. This even happened among some international students who regarded her as Asian and excluded her from their social circle. Nhu believed these differentiated racial treatments were, to a certain extent, because of the stereotype of “white” English, which was part of the domino effect of “white” Americans. This is to say, the non-Caucasian participants were eliminated from local people’s imagined communities of native English speakers. Consequently, Nhu was ineligible to the symbolic capitals that English represented or the recognition of her eligibility was postponed and minimized during her investment. She was thus situated in an inferior position of the social hierarchy in China just in the time of a glance.

In addition to the challenges to her identity as an American and native English speaker, Nhu was also disturbed by all kinds of assumptions of her nationality. As she complained, “They are like always asking me over and over again because I look Chinese or I look Vietnamese or I look Korean, so they will tell me.” However, when told who she should be, being Chinese was seldom an option. Nhu thought it was because her “Chinese was not strong enough to be Chinese.” She wondered why the local people highlighted her identity as an audible minority rather than her Chinese appearance this time. With native accent as the passport to the Chinese origin, Nhu was further marginalized from who she was and who she wanted to identify with. This further indicated the appearance, language, and race confusion in local communities regarding pan-ethnic categories.

**Belonging to nowhere and the denial of the fused identity.** The denial of her citizenship, English proficiency, and Chinese ethnicity positioned Nhu in the middle of nowhere. Looking back at her experiences in the U.S. and in China, she regarded herself an outsider at both places:

I think in the States Asians are always perceived to be immigrants...I think the point is no matter whether you are in the U.S or in China, you are still not considered, em, you don't belong to the people you identify with.

This sense of loss and disorientation was deepened by the denial of her fused identity, particularly when people only saw one side or tried to compare the two sides of her integrated self. In her words, “I don’t know where I am. It’s like (they are talking about) another person.” For instance, some CFL instructors considered Nhu more approachable than

Caucasian North Americans simply because of the genetic similarities. However, her Russian friends thought that she was just a Westerner. Besides, in order to make sense of her belonging, the local Chinese always asked her to make a choice between being American and being Chinese. Feeling awkward, Nhu insisted on being identified as both. As she explained, “(I am from a diverse background) but not two separated backgrounds. Because you (I) grew up learning both and so it's really one thing.” As a result, the self-discovery journey of Nhu turned out to be an on-going struggle for social acceptance. In other words, instead of enjoying “the benefits of in-betweenness”, Nhu was “continuously contested and often alienated” as she visited her “home” (Maruyama, Weber & Stronza, 2010, p. 11; Wang, 2016).

Notably, when her fused identity became the focus of argumentation, Nhu showed more calmness than helplessness. For the reason, she said, “I think the only thing is ... I feel like I'm not a typical exchange student.” As an immigrant, she had always been asked “where are you from?” in the U.S., so identity reflection was nothing academic but part of her daily life. As a frequent traveler, she was confident about cross-cultural adaptation. Nevertheless, her maturity in identity topics did not mean she did not care how people perceived her. She still hoped her hybrid identity could be widely accepted and respected in the target communities:

I think I wish people understood better but I think because I've gone through this process even in the States. I'm pretty comfortable with who I am. It's more like I wish others other people would understand it better.

Furthermore, Nhu showed deep concern about the identity construction of the international students with less exposure to different cultures and viewpoints than her. As she suggested, more social supports were in need for the CFL learners with higher vulnerabilities in this closed and biased society. This in a certain way generalized her challenges to many other ethnolinguistic minorities in China. On top of the neither-nor and either-or identity dilemma mentioned above, the big distinctions between diasporic Chinese culture in the U.S. and contemporary Chinese culture in China also reduced Nhu's sense of attachment to China and Chinese people.

**Diasporic Chinese culture and contemporary Chinese culture in China.** In the U.S., Nhu's family regarded Chinese culture inheritance as the key indicator of their ethnic Chinese identity. As Nhu reflected, in a society dominated by the others (the Caucasian Americans), you would always try to cling onto what you identified with. Like other older generations in the Chinese Diasporas in the U.S., her parents chose Chinese learning as a means of understanding Chinese traditions and showing ethnic solidarity. This was why Nhu was sent to a weekend Chinese school for years with hundreds of other heritage language learners. However, it was only until Nhu came to China that she started to think about what it actually meant by Chinese culture.

What surprised Nhu most was the big difference between the diasporic Chinese culture and the culture in the target city. Instead of seamless assimilation and acceptance, she experienced rather conflicted, messy, and contradictory cultural integration. To begin with, the variety and complexity of Chinese culture was beyond Nhu's imagination. With

increasing interactions with Chinese people across the country, Nhu gradually realized that “Chinese culture is never a singular culture”, which was displayed “in different forms with different traditions, habits, cuisine, and festivities in each different region” (X. Li, 2015, p. 251). Through observation and comparison, Nhu noticed that no matter in the aspects of diets, manners, conversation topics, or ways of thinking, she had more in common with the southerners, especially those from Cantonese-speaking areas. It explained why in a Northern city, her favorite friends were mainly from the South. It also motivated her to think about how to position herself in this multicultural country. In order to identify with a variety of Chinese population, she must be more open-minded with different manifestations and interpretations of Chinese culture. Similarly, if her previous perceptions of Chinese culture were one-sided, then she needed to diversify her information sources of China as imagined communities rather than only relied on her experiences in Chinese American diaspora.

In addition to the breadth and depth of Chinese culture, Nhu was also amazed at its dramatic changes over generations. With an emphasis on her ethnic background in the U.S., her way of thinking seemed to be rather outdated in contemporary China. She started to wonder the generational category of her diasporic culture:

When I came, I realized the way Chinese people act and the way Chinese Americans act are completely different. And like Chinese people (in contemporary Mainland China) they are very different now from they were a hundred years ago. And ... some of my dad’s family settled in the U.S. about two hundred years ago, they try to hold onto this (Chinese tradition) really,



really, tightly. But the way they think and act is more like two hundred years ago China I think...It's more like really old China and not the modern China.

Standing in between old-fashioned and current Chinese values, Nhu had many questions about the relationship between diasporic and mainland Chinese culture. After blogging her sociocultural conflicts with local people for months, she even doubted whether learning contemporary Chinese culture was really what her parents wanted and whether modern China should be that meaningful to the overseas Chinese. Taking the analogy of a fish in the water, she realized it was only until she jumped out of the bowl (home country) that she learned how much she identified with American values. As she summarized shortly before going back to the U.S., "I think I realized I was less, I was less Chinese than I thought I was." This was not a rare case among the American students in China (H. Du, 2015, pp. 256-258; Maruyama, Weber & Stronza, 2010, pp.10-11).

It is easy to tell that studying abroad in China was not a stop to Nhu's long-time reflection on her origin and belonging. On the contrary, it brought her new challenges to the identity (re)construction and social acceptance in both home and host countries. Although her understanding of Chinese people was enriched, their relationship turned out to be more sophisticated and conflictive. Through the simultaneous social integration and exclusion in China, Nhu also had a better chance to examine not only Chinese culture but also American values. Overall, her experiences attested that there was no significant correlation between valuing Chinese identity and easier investment and identity negotiation processes in China (Ran, 2009, p. 72).

### **Differentiated racial treatments towards dark-skinned CFL learners**

While Nhu felt as a stranger at home, the dark-skinned participants experienced similar marginalized social status in China as they used to be and has been in North America (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Satzewich, 2011). However, unlike implicit “aversive racial discrimination” (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005) they get in North America nowadays, they could directly see, hear, and experience racial prejudices in China. To begin with, racist behaviors such as staring, identity labelling, and whitening suggestions abounded in their daily lives, which was coupled with overt social marginalization. Besides, as was in the case of Nhu, the dark-skinned participants faced constant challenges to their citizenship and English proficiency. Blaming the closed mindset of local people, certain participants confined themselves to hanging out with other international students and dark-skinned Chinese ethnic minorities. Furthermore, with an expectation of a more inclusive social environment, the participants took their agency and came up with distinct social strategies from unconditional open mind, cultural introduction through English teaching, to direct confrontation and argumentation.

**Racist behaviors and social marginalization.** The dark-skinned participants always drew huge attention in the target city, which was accompanied by some other racist behaviors such as staring, touching, pointing out, and identity labeling. For instance, Sandra was extremely uncomfortable when the local people pointed at her in the street and called her African. Sometimes, the adult passers-by would purposefully ask their kids to look at her. As novelties, she and Anna were also touched in public by strangers or new acquaintances at

their forehead, body, or hair. Having similar experiences, Riya and Dara had to use umbrellas and earphones to avoid the stares and identity labelling. Overwhelmed by the discriminated behaviors, Sandra questioned, “When you look at me, who doesn’t know that I’m brown-skinned? Why do you need to say it?” She further argued that the way she was looked at indicated alienation and ostracization.

Additionally, local obsession with fair skin color resulted in a vicious comparison between dark-skinned female participants and Caucasian Russian “Barbies.” When travelling together, Sandra and her Russian roommate were considered to be “an odd couple” with an emphasis on their skin color differences. She explicitly used the word “racism” to describe this unfair treatment:

Chinese people like the fair-skinned look ... Fair and light skin and you know they always talk about how Russians are so pretty and stuff like and I dunno. I’ve talked to a few Africans too and the Africans really feel like Chinese are racist against them. And lots of my friends who are Chinese are racist against them.

Sometimes, even some CFL instructors openly discussed their skin tone preference in class. Dara once called out her instructor who depreciated the dark-skinned population from both China and foreign countries by saying “They (the Chinese southerners) cheat you. Oh, they are so dark.” and “Oh no, your skin is not very good. I like this Russian white girl. I like this kind of skin here.” She forcefully pointed out the ethno-cultural diversity in North America and in local international communities. Although Dara could not sue the instructor about her

racist remarks in China as in the U.S., she insisted on a withdrawal from her class if it happened again.

Another indirect way of skin color discrimination was whitening suggestions. For example, Anna was recommended to use umbrellas and sunscreens by her Chinese peers. Likewise, Dara was always approached by whitening product fliers in the street. Feeling funny and offended, they both advocated the genetic nature of their skin color, which was unchangeable and had nothing to do with getting suntanned. Moreover, Dara contended that her skin color was part of her identity. To change or whiten her skin color meant a denial of her identity in this society.

Worse still, the discrimination towards dark-skinned participants resulted in overt social exclusion. Riya believed that it was because of the prevalent prejudice of “scary” dark-skinned people that the taxi drivers refused to stop for her and her Somali friends, even though the car was vacant. She further explained that dark-skinned and hairy male foreigners had the worst situation in the target city. In spite of their identity as native English speakers, they were marginalized in local English schools since they often frightened local children into tears. From time to time, the children directly pointed at them and asked their parents, “What is that?” Riya’s Chinese friends also indicated their reluctance to talk to the other foreigners as long as they were darker than her.

Due to the racist behaviors and social separation mentioned above, some participants confined themselves to foreign student communities regardless of the huge number of Chinese native speakers on and off campus. According to Dara, it was a sense of mutual

respect and belonging that kept them together:

You could still use Chinese, Chinese with them (other international students) because even though a lot of people understand English...You could still use Chinese among foreigners and you can use that foreign accent if you have one too. There are other people suffering with you, that's another thing, so remember that you are not alone.

For the same reason, the majority of the non-Caucasian participants identified more with dark-skinned Chinese people, especially dark-skinned Chinese ethnic minorities. Among people of similar skin tone, they felt accepted and welcomed. As Sandra said, "They're happy to see me [laughs], I am dark." With an indication of fictive kinship, Anna added, "So they are like, 'Oh, cousin'. We try to communicate." Dara argued that she was very delighted to hang out with Chinese ethnic and religious minorities, even if they could not speak fluent or standardized Chinese. She confirmed that it was the same social isolation that enabled them to build rapport during social networking:

*Buyi zu* (布依族, Bouyei), *menggu zu* (蒙古族, Mongol), *xinjiang weiwu'er zu* (新疆维吾尔族, Uygur)...(are) really nice people and they are different from, I guess most of the Chinese people I've been exposed to like *Han* (汉, Han) descent, the majority...There are different ethnic minorities all stuck together and primarily in this one city or at least one district. Yes, they are sticking together because yeah the outside world, the outside majority may not accept them.

This statement further pointed to the homogeneity of Chinese society, which largely underpinned the discriminations towards both foreign and native ethnic minorities. That is to say, othering applies to all the people that physically and/or socioculturally outstand the Han majority. Besides racist behaviors and the social marginalization thereby, the denial of American citizenship and English ownership also resulted in the subordinate position of dark-skinned participants in the racial and social hierarchy in China. I will elaborate it in the following subsection.

**The denial of citizenship and English ownership.** The denial of citizenship and English ownership was a grave challenge that all non-Caucasian participants in this study had experienced. The only difference, as Anna argued, was that the darker one's skin color was, the bigger this challenge would be. Besides, according to Dara, such a judgement was only made at a glance based upon one's skin color without any further observation of native language, clothing, and behaviors.

During daily citizenship guessing game, Riya was considered to be an Indian. Anna and Sandra was taken for granted as Africans. Dara was given more than four nationalities:

At first because I've been called, when I first got here, I was African. It is not one big country, it's a continent, of course. I have been Pakistani, Thai, what else, Filipino. Oh, man! I've been even called a Vietnamese person. I pretty much had anything but America until my hair turned red.

Sandra and Dara both contended that it was very stressful to be randomly labelled with ethnic backgrounds and countries of origin, particularly when they did not fit for local standards of

Western people. They felt more offended by the unprovoked questions and comments about life in Africa, such as “Do you wear shoes in Africa?” and “It must be really hot where you come from.” During her years of study in the target city, there was only one local hair stylist who regarded Dara as a Westerner because of her thin eyebrow. She was thrilled at the recognition and considered it as the highpoint of her life in China.

When the dark-skinned participants revealed their identities as North Americans, the first response they got was always “surprise.” Besides, they were frequently asked for further clarifications. For instance, Riya was supposed to be too Indian to be an American and thus the origins of her parents were under question. Anna and her Caucasian African friend completely confused the other passengers on a local bus and they spent the whole journey in explaining the American and African history. Dara was confronted with doubts such as “No. It can’t be. You don’t look like (an American).” in local convenient stores and cafes. She had to cite her Asian American friend from New York to verify the ethnic complexity of American society. However, their efforts did not always get understandings in return. Sometimes, a heated debate was not even as persuasive as changing her hair color for effect. Sometimes, after dozens of minutes of explanation, they only got minimal feedback. “No *buhao yisi* (不好意思, embarrassment). No sorry. No, nothing. It’s...just like giggle, giggle,” as Dara said.

The long-time contempt and denial of her identification brought about severe impacts on Dara’s health: an unintentional ten-kilo weight loss and damaged auditory nerves. The pressure of public social networking also exacerbated as her Chinese proficiency improved,

in that the more she understood, the more she felt discriminated. When the local Chinese uttered insulting remarks, Dara could not help but remind them of her identity as a CFL learner and big fan of Chinese culture which in her opinion could not be denied but only be respected. As she argued, “I can understand you. Don’t think I’m just a foreigner. I can understand you, this is why I’m here for.” Besides, Dara experienced extreme loneliness due to the small number of dark-skinned American CFL learners in the target programs. Longing for peer sharing, she envied the African student social networks on campus which was more supportive than what she got from her fellow Caucasian Americans. For her future study in China, Dara called on to be treated as an equal interlocutor as local Chinese:

So I’m just saying, when you address a foreigner, talk to them almost like you talk to Chinese people like human being, you treat all like humans...At least here barely but you know say hello ... it’s no problem...But don’t be impolite, we have no reasons to lie about where we come from really.

However, as was in the case of Nhu, the denial of citizenship was only one side effect of the stereotype of “white” North Americans. The biased assumption of “white English” also challenged the English ownership of dark-skinned participants. According to Dennis and Sandra, local people refused to regard dark-skinned North Americans as native English speakers. Moreover, both local schools and learners preferred Caucasian English-speaking teachers in that the “colored” English was supposed to be non-standard. For example, after the first class of Dara’s teaching in a local English school, some parents of her students directly asked the principal to change for a “real” teacher, since they were suspicious of her



English proficiency. Some other parents complained about her skin color and appearance, which became a traumatic experience for Dara:

It's just really sad. You get rich, so-called educated Chinese people who won't listen, who don't like me teach their kids because this kind of person give my kid nightmare. I've heard this one too, "I don't want darker teachers or black teachers teaching my son or daughter."

Similar situation also happened to Riya and her Indian American friends. Although Riya went through it easier because of her comparatively light brown skin color, her darker-skinned male friends must get themselves well shaved and dressed in order to get an English teaching job since they looked "scary."

Furthermore, unlike the friend-making and language exchange requests that Caucasian participants got at the very beginning of their involvement in Chinese communities, non-Caucasian participants needed to be "verified" as "real" native English speakers in order to get similar treatment. In Dara's words, she needed to be "heard":

They got to hear it because they already have a basis in English, they are gonna to need you. It's happened to me several times. No matter how you look any more, like wait a minute, this person sounds like what I'm studying. I don't care what they look like, but I'm going to go (make friend with them).

This sudden change of mind also made Dara uncomfortable, because although she might finally get language exchange and English teaching opportunities, she was still not treated equally with Caucasian North Americans but considered as a second-class anglophone.

**Reasons given by the participants for the racism in China.** While talking about the differentiated treatments towards dark-skinned CFL learners, some participants shared their understandings of the reasons behind racism. Ignorance and closed mindset were considered the major causes. The impact of Chinese and Western mass media in the postcolonial world and the local association between skin tone and social status were also discussed.

Ignorance was the most frequently used word in reason analysis. Dara, Dennis, and Anna all agreed that the lack of education and cross-cultural experiences resulted in the blindness to the dark-skinned foreigners in China. According to Dara, questions like “Are there dark (-skinned) people in the U.S.?” and “Do you speak African?” indicated the uninformed judgments of multiculturalism and multilingualism in both North America and Africa. She also pointed out that there was an absence of common sense that could usually get access via mass media or formal schooling, such as Obama as the dark-skinned president in the U.S., the dark-skinned NBA players, the American railroads built by early Chinese immigrants, and various American aboriginal groups. Dennis and Anna further contended that despite the increasing inbound and outbound population in China, the majority of the Chinese people, especially the underclass, did not have personal interactions with foreigners. Therefore, their perceptions of North America as imagined communities were mainly constructed through second-hand information.

Additionally, as far as Anna was concerned, the closed social environment in local communities led to a closed mindset rather than an international way of thinking. It was worsened by the homogeneous foreign diasporas (Russian Diasporas) in the target city, as

Sandra added. Similarly, Dara believed that the ethnocentric Chinese society was another key factor of her social marginalization since the beauty of diversity was not widely appreciated in the target communities.

Moreover, Dennis and Anna argued that the misconceptions of North America were to some degree due to the stereotyping coverage in Western and Chinese mass media. On one hand, Anna emphasized the enormous influence of the “white-dominated” Hollywood movies and American TV dramas in the postcolonial world; on the other hand, Dennis pointed out the limited and partial representation of domestic and non-Caucasian foreign population in Chinese news reportage.

Finally yet importantly, Dara noticed the local association between skin tone and social hierarchy, that is to say, the dark-skinned color indicated lower social and economic status. It was especially true in Chinese agricultural communities and undeveloped regions where dark-skinned colors stood for the identities of outdoor laborers (such as farmers) and impoverished origins (McAloon, 2014, p. 144).

As the participants summarized, the racial discourse in China was ascribed to various reasons with a complex of domestic and international factors. Facing different racist treatments, they advocated an inclusive and open Chinese social environment and an improved understanding of North America as imagined communities. Many of them also took their initiative and strived for their full and equal social participation.

**Personal agency and resistance.** Norton (2013) argued that “while the social constraints ... position learners in undesirable ways, learners, with human agency, can resist

these positions, in innovative and unexpected ways...” (p. 21). It was exactly the case in this study. Except the either passive or active strategies sporadically mentioned in previous sessions (such as using umbrella and earphones to avoid over attention and insulting comments, home culture introduction, and direct confrontation), Anna and Dara also came up with distinctive solutions attaching importance to long term effects. They included unconditional tolerance, multicultural infiltration in English teaching classrooms, dispute capacity enhancement through the mastery of curse and swear, and experience sharing with Chinese and home authorities.

With a belief in the imperceptible but impactful power of tolerance, Anna exerted herself being a model of broad and impartial mind and insisted on being unoffended by local discriminated behaviors. Open mindset, in her view, was the key determinant of peaceful and beneficial interactions with local people:

Some of the Africans are offended. Sometimes they say all the Chinese don't like Africans. I say I had no problem. We have to try to understand... So they think it's the color type, maybe they are darker. They think maybe that's why Chinese treat me better. I say I don't think so. They say Ok maybe because you speak English and they sometimes they speak French. They have a dialect. So I say I don't know, I think it's your mind.

Instead of complaints and indignation, she tried to make sense of the vernacular way of thinking. She argued that her reflection on the causes of racism enabled her to ignore individual misconducts and focused on a bigger picture of the historical backgrounds and

social structures in China.

Since English teaching was one of the most effective means for them to be heard, some participants took advantage of this educational context to advocate diversity and inclusivity. This was how Anna introduced American Thanksgiving and Native American people:

I got them feathers from the Native Americans. I am part of the Native Americans... so I gave them some Native American Culture. So most people think of America from the time Christopher Columbus came ... (but it is) much longer than that... so it's different, so they just didn't expose them to those things.

Similarly, Dara made great efforts to cultivate the understanding and acceptance of ethnic mosaic in her English classrooms, particularly with Chinese children and youngsters:

A lot of us who are teaching English as jobs to these children. We have got to put in the diversity point of view because some of the kids are gonna end up over there, they don't need to be shocked. They come from here and go over there and got shocked when they see a bunch of other people, not just white people.

She believed that her presence in local English classrooms as a North American and dark-skinned native English speaker, her selection of multicultural teaching materials and pedagogies, and her sharing of daily life in the U.S. were the most effective ways to resist racist treatments and to create a welcoming social environment for the dark-skinned

foreigners in China. In her words, once the words and experiences spread, changes would follow, which was an award more meaningful and long lasting than personal economic incomes.

Unlike Anna's apathetic attitude, Dara sometimes adopted a more forceful approach. "You can only take so much," she explained. Confronted with negative enforcement, she chose to confront negatively. Freaked out by certain bigoted remarks, she undertook a radical backlash through cursing. Ironically, to swear motivated her to learn slang words and expressions. In order to fully express herself in a colloquial way, she attended a private Chinese cramming school:

I really want to improve my Chinese, because I was like, I can't let people judge me and get away with it anymore. That was my main goal. It wasn't just, it wasn't any more like "I'm excited about Chinese." I put that aside. I need to defend myself and I go doing it...And if you get called out, you can tell this person this is not OK, because I understand what you are saying. I picked up on that too. So now what these people say on outside if I do hear you, I can call you out.

Even if not all the people Dara blew off with figured out or admitted their mistakes, she still maintained the importance of harsh argumentation:

But here is the thing, the next time I went in there, and the next person who tried to figure out where I came from, she (the person she quarreled with) stuck up for me, she told him where I came from, so she learned either way.

In a more radical way, Dara called on other stakeholders to stick together, take actions, and defended each other. For example, she shared her experiences with her home institute and persuaded other CFL international students to step out of the target city unless they were able to handle the ignorance. She also planned to contact the Confucius Institute in her hometown and related authorities in Beijing for their support. Furthermore, she encouraged more dark-skinned international students to disseminate their stories through personal communications and public presentations to attract increasing attention to the dark-skinned CFL learners in China.

Despite various strategies to change their racist situation, the dark-skinned participants remained at the bottom of the racial and social hierarchy in China. Although the three subgroups of CFL learners received different kinds of racial treatments, their discriminated social experiences reflected the same social reality: a long history of homogeneity of Chinese society with very little understanding of the multicultural nature of contemporary North American societies. This led to certain biased assumptions, such as the stereotype of North Americans as Caucasians and the equivalence of skin color to race and nationality. In addition to skin tones, gender, especially racialized gender, was another important indicator of differentiated treatments. However, unlike racial identities, gender identity did not arouse wide resonance among all the participants.

### **Gender and Racialized Gender Issues during CFL Investment**

In most cases, the participants considered gender discrimination the least problematic issue during their investment in China and quickly skipped the topic. For instance, Anna

stated that women in China had a lot more freedom to choose their destinies than their counterparts did in Japan and Korea. Also as a strong and dominant career woman, she felt there was no big difference in how she behaved and how she was positioned in her home country and in China. However, the few participants (such as Dara, Sandra, and Nhu) who further shared their gendered experiences argued that although they were very impressed by the tough and independent female images in Chinese labor market, sexism had a profound influence on their social networking with both Chinese men and women. First, the judgmental discourse on female physical appearance imposed rigorous and homogeneous aesthetic standards on foreign females in China. Moreover, the pervasive appreciation of “obedient women” and the commodification of women and marriage to some extents became the social barriers between certain participants and the local interlocutors. Finally, due to the prejudice of permissive Western women, some participants suffered from sexual harassment and assault. It seriously influenced their sense of security and motivation of public social networking.

**Judgmental discourse on female physical appearance.** Ideal feminine appearance, like a social epidemic, dominated the daily gendered discourse in China. Skinny body shape, fair skin color, long hair, big eyes with double eyelids, these “socially constructed, narrow definitions of beauty and, thereby sexuality” controlled the self-esteem, lifestyle and social values of Chinese women (Travis, Meginnis & Bardari, 2000, p. 237). The female CFL learners in China underwent same discriminations, particularly through fat talk, cosmetic surgery suggestions, and whitening product marketing.



With the strongest responses to the topic under discussion, Dara was fed up with *meinü* (美女, beauty) this, *meinü* that”:

What a female should be like (in China), yes, that’s very strong, a woman a *meinü*, a beautiful woman...She must be really skinny. She must be white skin.

If the sun is out, we are under umbrella...I have to look this way, do the white face look in a certain way...

It was disappointing for her to see Chinese females were so much into this imposed patriarchal gender ideology with an emphasis of “erotic-aesthetic functions” (J. Yang, 2011, p. 336). However, female foreigners were also judged by the same standards. In Dara’s words, “they judge their own people” and “they (Chinese people) are ... picky about foreigners’ appearance.”

According to Dara, “I need to eat less and I am getting too fat” was the most common cliché even among those who were stick-thin. Whenever she heard it, she would talk to herself, “It’s sick. It’s so sick.” Also, she was quite shocked by the endless fat talk in her classroom initiated by a well-educated female instructor with some study abroad experience:

Every day she came into that class, “Do you think I’m fat, do you think I’m fat?” Honestly, we are foreigners, the way you look to us, we don’t think you are fat. No, I think you are a small Asian woman.

Nonetheless, the most irritating conduct for Dara was the judgmental overweight comments to her and other foreigners. The local politics of ideal body shape made her feel that “there was something wrong with this city.” In similar situations, Sandra largely empathized with

her Chinese friend who was openly labelled as a fat girl by Chinese men. She wondered why it was always females facing such kind of offences, revealing “the gendered nature of weight bias” (Fikkan & Rothblum, 2012).

While Sandra did not know how to help her friend with “a fat accepting space” (Colls, 2012), Dara sharply denounced the weight-based discriminations to her. It started with her defenses against the “unrealistic,” “singular,” and “oppressive” aesthetic norms (MarKula, 2001, p. 158):

I’m like I can’t judge these people on what their standards of beauty is...But leave me out of this because I’m a foreigner, I have nothing to do with it...Where I come from how I look is acceptable and where I come from, there is more than one size. It’s just what your genes are. Or you know we eat differently as well, we are just naturally bigger...

Sometimes when the amount of stress built up, she could only curse out. For example, she could not help yelling “Get away from me” at the weight loss flier distributors when they approached her by saying “I think you are a little fat” in English.

Besides, Dara showed great antipathy for the instructor mentioned above who purposefully mentioned a weight loss product to a comparatively “big” female international student in class. “That’s cruel, it’s rude. I couldn’t believe it happened,” she sighed. It resulted in her direct confrontation with this ill-behaved teacher: “I got so mad, I did tell this teacher what was on my mind” because “the student goes to this school, this girl that you are (she is) talking about that you don’t (she doesn’t) want to be as fat as her.” Although the

instructor did apologize after Dara shared her worries, she still felt it was unacceptable in an internationalized program and community.

In addition to slim figure and fair skin (discussed in the previous session), other “beauty ideals borrowed from the West” also “set up dichotomies of Otherness and power hierarchies between Women,” including double-eyelid eyes (Western eyes), high-nose bridge, and large breasts. (Davis, 1995, p. 51; Hua, 2013, pp. 167-177; Luo, 2012, pp. 84-85). This was partially why both as non-Caucasian participants, Riya (with big eyes and a more 3D face contour) was considered to be a beauty but Nhu (with comparatively smaller eyes and flat nose) was approached by local people with cosmetic surgery fliers.

As a witness of the overwhelming beautification products and plastic surgeries in the target city, Dara felt quite confused:

It’s ridiculous...People from the States will say, Oh why you hurt yourself?

We don’t focus, really focus on our eyes really. You know what I’m saying.

It’s just only like the Asians focus on the eyes...

She further argued that although increasing Chinese women tried to change their genetic features in order to change their identity, “the European eyes wouldn’t make you not Asian.” With a strong resistance to reproduce the Western forms of hegemony, she encouraged both Chinese and Western women to have a better awareness of the objectification<sup>97</sup> and commercialization of female body that perpetuate gender inequality (Luo, 2012, p. 89;

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<sup>97</sup> Sexual objectification occurs when a woman’s body or body parts are singled out and separated from her as a person and she is viewed primarily as a physical object of male sexual desire (Bartky, 1990, as cited in Szymanski, Moffitt & Carr, 2011, p. 8).

Szymanski, Moffitt, & Carr, 2011).

Briefly, the standardization and Westernization of female appearance in China put some female participants, especially those without slim bodies and/or fair skin, into a disadvantage. This was an evidence of the oppressive female status in Chinese patriarchal and postcolonial society. However, judgmental discourse on physical attractiveness was only a start of female participants' gendered social barriers with local people. They were further subject to the imposed and self-identified materialistic and obedient female images in China.

**The materialistic and obedient Chinese women and related social barriers.** In accordance with the prevalent standards of outstanding females in China: *bai* (白, fair skin), *fu* (富, rich), and *mei* (美, beautiful), *youqian ren* (有钱人, the rich) was another hot topic among Chinese females, only second to *meinü* (美女, beauty). Regardless of her educational and working background, to marry a rich husband was widely accepted as the best result for a woman, thus emerged the common saying of *gan/xue de hao buru jia de hao* (干/学得好不如嫁得好, To do/study well is not as important as to marry well) (Li, 2004; Liang, 2006). Noticing the financially submissive and socially obedient female status in China, Dara said, "even though there is some equality in the workforce, the man is still at the top of food chain." She believed this explained people's shock when she confronted Chinese male authorities such as her male professors. In addition, overwhelmed by the commodification of women and marriage in China, both Frank and Dara felt very stressful to interact with the local people who had different life foci and values.

"It's sad," as Dara said, when cars and houses dominated her daily conversations with

Chinese females, when the love of fashion and luxuries far outweighed dreams and visions of the future, and when people no longer *gan yihang ai yihang* (干一行爱一行, love what you do) but *zhengqian gongzuo* (挣钱工作, work to make money). Totally surprised at Chinese “materialistic values” and “conspicuous consumption (Podoshen, Li & Zhang, 2011),” Lucy felt China was no longer the socialist country in her imagined communities. Also, disillusioned by the local philosophy of happiness based upon money and possessions, Dara found it was very challenging for her to make friends with people of different values:

And that’s the thing, that’s why you know it’s hard for you or even someone like me to make friends with a lot of people around here because...I’m like there are more things to worry about than this, what about current events...and society.

In post-socialist Chinese society dominated by materialism and consumerism, marriage and family were also “materially oriented” relations (Min, 2013, p. 403). On one hand, the expenses and cost sharing of condominiums, interior decoration and furnishing, vehicles, wedding ceremonies, and betrothal gifts were the major concerns of husband hunting and marriage negotiation. Hence, men with tight budget and limited intergenerational wealth flow were disadvantageous in Chinese marriage market (Ma, 2016, February 25, p. 2). On the other hand, women and marriage were, to some extent, considered as commodities that only the rich could afford, reinforcing both gender inequality and social hierarchy.

Witnessing the high pressure of Chinese men, Frank felt “bad” for the Chinese women and their families who “want(ed) something to hold onto” in order to have the sense

of security. By referring to the popular Chinese TV drama (on material deficiency and marital strife thereof), *Naked Wedding* (or *Naked Marriage*)<sup>98</sup>, he indicated that the cost of tying knots in China was also a financial and psychological burden to the foreigners wishing to date and marry Chinese females. To illustrate, he cited an example of his friends, an American boy and his Chinese fiancé, who even dared not watch *Naked Wedding* together due to their huge ideological conflicts. For the Chinese “material girls,” Frank further pointed out that happiness should be the cornerstone of marriage, “If we don’t have a car and we don’t have a house, no worries because we’re happy.” Similar to Frank, Dara was in favor of the love philosophy of Bouyei ethnic group<sup>99</sup>. She was moved by how they date:

I love that. I got to see that in a village, and I...I cried because it touched me.  
Guys and girls like they stand in the road. This is how they choose their mate.  
They sing to each other, whoever has the best voice, that’s who they want to  
be with... (and) it’s not about ... whether they have a car.

When marriage became a business, so did romance and extramarital relationship. Dara was also very uncomfortable with the heated debates in China on *xiaosan* (小三, home wrecker), *bao ernai* (包二奶, patronage of mistress), and *hun wai lian* (婚外恋, extramarital love), which kept reverting to the social mobility of women in bottom class, “masculinities” and “power in gender relationship” (Zhang, 2008, pp. 69-72). Moreover, she was heartbroken to see some Chinese female university students around her to work as evil “gold diggers.”

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<sup>98</sup> A naked marriage is a marriage without material basis such as no house, no car, no ring, and no wedding ceremony.

<sup>99</sup> Bouyei is an ethnic group living in southern mainland China, especially Guizhou province.

Struggling to hang out with a domestic student who openly showed off her rich and powerful married lover, Dara sighed:

I've tried to become acquainted with people here on a closer level. But it was, it wasn't possible because I can't deal with the, what they focus on and they don't understand what I focus on...what's making it hard for us is, foreigners interact more with these people and trust them, is the fact that they are so ignorant towards us.

Dara further argued that the financially subordinate status of Chinese women decided the social expectation of their obedience. She noticed that Chinese men could tell women how they should look and behave, which sometimes also applied to foreign female friends or even strangers. For instance, Dara was told in public not to drink certain kind of beer in a local bar because "you (she) is only a woman." Burning with anger at this discriminatory suggestion, she fought back by saying "You can't control me. And I don't live here, so leave me alone." "In America, you (he) can't get away with that, a woman will slap you (him)," she added.

After years of observation, Dara found that it was very hard to challenge the male authorities in Chinese patriarchal society, including her well-educated male professors with study abroad experiences in Western countries. Although bathing in supercilious looks and taunts, she insisted on being treated as an equal adult. It was just as she reflected after confronting with a male instructor in the target program:

He just couldn't believe that somebody will confront him ... and I know

because it's because I'm a woman. They know that I'm American, so it was a culture shock for him, but I'm like you are gonna get some time because you are wrong and I'm sick of it and all over this school, the professors, it is this way. So we got to get it straight.

In Dara's opinion, having female voices be heard was the first step of women's liberation, however, her efforts did not receive much support from local communities.

In short, the prevailing materialistic moralities in contemporary China and Chinese women's subservient positions in marriage and other social relationships caused severe ideological conflicts and social barriers between the participants and local people. Facing the expectations to compliant foreign women, certain female participants in this study refused imposed inferiority and spoke up for equal gender treatments. If the previous two sessions talked about the gender-based prejudices that both foreign and local females have experienced in their daily life, the following section is to examine the sexual stereotyping and harassment that only targeted at Western females, including North American female CFL learners.

**Racialized sexual stereotype and harassment.** Cho (1997), a critical race feminist, contended that the converging gender and racial stereotypes of Asian Pacific American women help constitute what she referred to as "racialized sexual harassment" in the U.S. (p. 350). She further advocated an investigation of racialized sexual stereotype and harassment of female minority groups in other cross-cultural contexts. The following discussion on North American females in China will be a good application and extension of her study.



As discussed in Chapter 7, due to the prevalent stereotype of “open” (开放 sexual-liberated) Westerners, both Nhu and Norman were subjected to differentiated treatments during their socialization with Chinese of the opposite sex. However, with a closer examination, “open” was interpreted differently between the two genders in China: “flirtatious” for the female and “irresponsible” for the male. In other words, whatever the results, Western females were seducers and executors of immoral conducts, but Western males would only be blamed if there were any unethical consequence<sup>100</sup>. Therefore, as Nhu and Dara pointed out, being taken for granted as women of easy virtue and troublemakers, female Westerners suffered greater gender-based (male-to-female) harassment exposure in China. Moreover, the open secret of Russian sex workers in the target city and the local biased assumption of Caucasian foreigners as Russians worsened the situation of white North American females.

Street harassment<sup>101</sup> was the dominated form of sexual violence against Western females in the target city. From time to time, Dara and Nhu noticed male gazes in the streets, heard sexual teases and insults at restaurants and pubs, and experienced unsolicited sexual touches in the bazaars. Dara also witnessed her Russian friends being asked “how much” by drunk Chinese men. These daily incidents seriously violated their “right to walk down the street unmolested and without constantly being reminded of men’s position of privilege” (Sullivan, Lord & McHugh, 2010, p. 237). Meanwhile, the international student communities

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<sup>100</sup> Such as premarital sex and pregnancy before marriage.

<sup>101</sup> Street harassment is a kind of harassment of women in public places by men who are strangers to them (Bowmen, 1993, p. 519).

were haunted by the alarming rumors of stalking, sexual assault, and rape cases with Western females as victims. It significantly reduced their sense of security and motivation of public social networking.

In order to get rid of their false image of being exotic, sexy and easy, Dara and her foreign student friends chose to cover their standout skin as much as possible:

I was attempted to cover myself in that hot summer because I was shopping and some guy tried to, you know, he didn't try, he succeeded to touch me... Some girls don't even want to wear shorts; they wear dresses because they are scared of being touched.

Although sexists always used dress style to blame women under attack, some scholars argued that the connection of sex-specific appearance stereotypes and sexual crimes reinforced the common practice of victim blaming and “affirm(ed) gender distinctions that devalue women” (Beiner, 2007, p. 148; Zalesne, 2007, pp. 536-537). Dara thus seemed to have fallen into a pitfall of self-accusation and believed dressing differently or appropriately might avoid the harm (Beiner, 2007, p. 148).

The unresponsive bystanders in local communities aggravated Dara's fear and anxiety. In her words, although the majority of the offences occurred in crowded spots and in broad daylight, she still felt “you are on your own.” Additionally, due to language barriers, the foreign victims could only use exaggerated voices and moves to show their assertiveness. Even worse, the ambiguous attitudes of local police officers towards cases involving both natives and foreigners strengthened the vulnerability of the Western females. Therefore, for

the sake of self-defense, Dara had no choice but to scare the harassers away by screaming and cursing in whatever possible languages:

I got him (the guy who touched her) in English and Chinese...because you get scared. I just I hate that I have to put fear on people, I don't feel good about it. But I'm like, I'm protecting myself here. Now you know you want to be careful with that foreigner you touch because she might go crazy. Oh she might kill you, I don't know.

After personal changes in dress code, social style, and personality, Dara was no longer who she was before coming to China. As a more defensive and aggressive woman, she sometimes needed to react in a way she felt ashamed and uneasy. However, she got up her courage to share these experiences to advocate a social environment with more freedom and equality for the prospective North American female students in the target city.

Ting-Toomey (2005) suggested that an indispensable outcome of successful investment and identity negotiation is the “feelings of being understood, respected, and affirmatively valued” (p. 218). However, my research has shown that positive valuation is not the whole story. There are complexities and contradictions within language learning and beyond to the social order and relationships of rank, class status, and marginality. More specifically, the North American CFL learners under study to various extents experienced differentiated treatments regarding their skin colors and gender. Besides, the dichotomy of black and white<sup>102</sup>, West and East, and man and woman dominated the racial and gender

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<sup>102</sup> The dark-skinned and Caucasian participants.

discourse in China and led to the discrimination and exclusion of the others. Some participants took their initiative to analyze the causes of their racist and sexist treatments and to change their social positions. However, personal endeavors were a feeble solution in Chinese homogeneous and hierarchical society.

In Chapter 9, I will further discuss the social needs of North American CFL learners in China and the power relationships during the fulfillment of their social needs. Meanwhile, I will put forward suggestions to a wide range of stakeholders to empower the target population, retain the CFL learners in the target communities, and attract more international students to China.

## **Chapter 9 Discussion and Conclusion**

This chapter discusses the social needs of North American CFL learners and the power dynamics during their language learning in China. After a brief summary of this study, I examine my self-positioning in this discussion through a reflection on my initial ill-conceived assumptions and my identity as a cross-cultural researcher. Then, I further analyze the social tensions and conflicts in the CFL classrooms, target programs, and local communities. Meanwhile, I elaborate the multilayered context behind the unbalanced power relationships. Based upon the research findings, I put forward suggestions and recommendations to empower North American CFL learners during their investment and identity negotiation in China. With an emphasis on Chinese social hierarchy, I aim to raise awareness of North American CFL learners' social needs and their complex feelings towards the imposed differentiated treatments. Moreover, I call on the stakeholders to create a more supportive and sustainable environment for the linguistic and cultural minorities under study.

### **Summary of the study**

Out of proportion to the rapid development of CFL and international education in China, sociocultural perspectives of research on CFL students in Chinese study abroad context was sparse. In this study, I investigated North American CFL students' language learning experiences in China, through which I would like to draw attention to their unequal social positions and unfulfilled social needs during investment and identity negotiation in Chinese social networks.

With the help of local liaisons, I recruited 10 participants and 5 informants from 5

universities in a Northern Chinese city. Through semi-structured interviews, daily language use logs, and secondary data collection, I was able to have a good understanding of participants' lived experiences and the social environment in the target communities. Grounded in the tenets of critical hermeneutics, I focused on an in-depth examination of the power dynamics that the participants encountered during their socialization and identification. Besides, I highlighted the complexity and ambivalence of the social milieu where the participants struggled as ethnolinguistic minorities. Moreover, my personal reflection ran through the entire research, which analyzed my evolving understandings of the participants, research questions, and myself.

The research findings showed that in contrary to participants' high motivation and commitment to CFL learning and social integration, the hierarchical power relationships and homogeneous social environment in the target classrooms, programs, and communities to a great extent jeopardized participants' investment and identity negotiation as capable Chinese interlocutors and equal social networkers in China. Therefore, their language learning experiences and outcomes were far from optimal. Although many participants in various ways showed their personal agency, I argue that sufficient and sustainable social supports from all the stakeholders were of utmost importance to empower the CFL learners under study.

### **Introspection revisited**

Critical researchers are expected to actively engage in self-reflection throughout the entire research process. At the beginning of the introductory chapter, I located myself as a linguistic and cultural minority in Canada and introduced how my cross-cultural experiences

inspired this study on North American CFL learners' investment and identity negotiation in China. Here, I will continue my introspection through a comparison of my preconceived ideas and new understandings of the research questions. Additionally, I will look into my fused, yet at times conflicting, identity as a Chinese national and Canadian scholar. Both aspects of the reflexivity are of great importance to my self-positioning in the following discussion.

**Presumptions and new understandings.** Based upon some of the available research literature and my limited contact with international students in Chinese universities, I presumed that the language learning experiences of North American CFL learners in China would be less challenging than those of ESL learners in North America. Two determinants of my positive supposition were the popularity of North Americans in China and the stereotyped image of gregarious North Americans with high cross-cultural competence. To elaborate, as an English learner and teacher, I witnessed the English fever and the prevalence of American dreams in China. Therefore, I assumed that North Americans would enjoy a high social status in China owing to their English proficiency and cultural capital. Besides, most of my North American friends were extroverted and open-minded, so, I believed that the participants would share similar personalities and social characteristics, which would have a favorable impact on their social interactions with Chinese people during CFL learning. However, shortly after I embarked on my research trip, I was surprised to find that despite my optimistic predictions, the educational, sociocultural, and ideo-political environment in China did not make their investment an easier task. Moreover, the multiplex self-identification and self-presentation during their study abroad life demonstrated different power dynamics from those of ESL

learners in Western countries.

A further reflection on my prejudgments was critical to my awareness of their restrictive influence on my understanding. The inquiries about the invalidity of my hypothesis came up with four major reasons. They were the less informative literature, the overgeneralization of certain individual learners' social success, the emerging popularity of CFL learning in China, and my blindness to certain social issues in China.

First, the current literature I could reach was not informative enough to provide a full picture. On one hand, the quantity of literature written outside China was rather limited to have a comprehensive coverage of the topic; on the other hand, the Chinese literature lacked the critical perspectives that would expose the sophisticated socio-ideological and political issues involved. Second, even though I adopted the sociocultural perspective of language acquisition in this study, I still over-estimated the power of individual's personal traits in social networking. In fact, the findings of this study proved that personal motivations and social skills might not be translated into agentive acts without necessary social supports. Third, I overlooked the fact that CFL in China was still very new and a supporting organism has yet to be developed. I have become accustomed to the attention and assistance that ESL minorities in Canada have been given, so, I somewhat took for granted that the same should have happened in China for CFL learners. Therefore, that Chinese educational and social services might have failed to keep pace with the dramatic increase of CFL learners in China should be considered. Fourth, as a result of my own educational history in China, I was not able to notice certain social inequalities in China until I saw them through the study abroad experiences of CFL



international students. Just like Nhu's analogy of fish and water,<sup>103</sup> I had cognitive and cultural inertia that to a certain extent impeded my critical examination of the social context in which I grew up. Instead of rushing to judgement, I needed to approach Chinese social phenomena from different angles in order to broaden and enrich my understandings.

**Locating myself as a cross-cultural researcher in the third space**<sup>104</sup>. In addition to my presumptions, my identity as a Chinese immigrant in Canada also raised concerns. Most of the time, local Chinese, including the facilitators and informants of this study, highlighted my study abroad and immigration experiences in Canada and saw me as a Westernized scholar. They implicitly sounded out whether what I was doing would betray the nation's interest and hurt the country's image, since nationalist education in China focused more on community loyalty rather than constructive criticism. Also, as in the case of Nhu, I was asked to take sides between the two facets of my fused identity, although I personally enjoyed living in the third space with the coexistence of both.

In order to gain the trust and understanding of local people as well as to keep a balanced position in this study, I had to resolve my seemingly conflicting identity. In the position of being an academic educated in Canada using English language and Western theories, values, and standards to critically examine the educational and sociocultural practices of China, I questioned myself: Am I practicing Western cultural hegemony against Chinese culture? More publications in Western journals were found engaging self-criticism of the superiority of

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<sup>103</sup> Nhu used the analogy of "Fish do not know they are in water until they get out of it" to describe her new understanding of American culture and renegotiation of her identity as American citizen.

<sup>104</sup> In this section, the third space refers to the social and cultural in-betweenness.

English language power and Western cultural dominance. In the eyes of my fellow Chinese, I could also be seen as becoming Westernized for being critical of China. However, while social sciences can never be ideologically neutral, they should never be morally and ethically blind nor a servant of propaganda. I see the value of this work and the positive role I play as a researcher in the third space that widely exists in today's world where cultural interaction and hybridity have become somewhat normalized and mutual understanding is possible. In the area of CFL education in China, it is particularly important for Chinese educational institutes and Chinese society in general to hear from the CFL learners and to understand their cultural perspectives. More research in this nature is needed not only to support CFL learners, but also to support China to meet its goals to promote its language and culture in the world, which is the soft power that China tries hard to gain. It would be naïve to assume otherwise; yet, disingenuous to ignore.

It is also important to note that I to some extent compromised my research to meet the needs of different audience in the home and host countries of the target CFL learners. More specifically, I, to a great degree, revealed the power dynamics that the participants experienced in China and the corresponding characteristics of Chinese educational and sociocultural context. My critical analysis was not compromised, however, because I knew that this was unfamiliar territory of most Chinese audience, I limited the scope, depth, and detail of my discussions of power more than I would like for a purely North American audience. Part of the originality of this research includes a hope to open up more conversations about these kinds of power dynamics in the future. This has been an ongoing negotiation of my identity as a

cross-cultural researcher embracing different inter-operations of academic freedom.

Shortly, I constantly bore my ill-conceived presumptions in mind during the research process, the reflection on which also gave guidance to the following discussion on the social needs of North American CFL international students and the power relationships during the fulfillment of their social needs in the target communities. Besides, my identity as a cross-cultural researcher also reminded me to situate myself and this study as a crosscurrent of understandings in the “middle ground” (Moloney & Xu, 2016, p. 8).

### **The communicative needs in class**

The conflict between the social requests from North American CFL learners and the prevalence of chalk and talk teaching in the target programs dominated the classroom dynamics of this study. Drawing perspectives from Chinese culture of learning, the Westernization of Chinese foreign language teaching, and local CFL teaching practices, this section is to discuss the influence of Chinese traditional teacher-student relationship on the fulfillment of participants’ communicative needs in class.

For investment and identity negotiation in the CFL classrooms in China, the research findings of this study were not as optimistic as those in the literature review. No matter adopting cognitive or social-oriented perspectives, most recent studies on CFL education hold a positive view on Chinese immersion programs<sup>105</sup> which significantly improved Western learners’ Chinese proficiency, especially Chinese oral skills (Du, 2013; Kim et al., 2015; Liu, 2010; Winke & Teng, 2010; Wright & Zhang, 2014; Yu, 2010). However, this study has shown

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<sup>105</sup> In this study, Chinese immersion programs refer to the CFL programs in Mainland China with Chinese as the official teaching language.

that in spite of the overall benefits, the tedious and rigid rote learning in the target programs contradicted participants' educational background and jeopardized their learning motivation and investment in communicative competence; thus, their learning process and outcomes were far from optimal.

The participants were obviously in favor of the student-centered instruction, particularly, the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach. Rising to prominence in Europe and the U.S. since the 1970s, CLT considers genuine communication as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language (Hiep, 2007, p. 193; Spada, 2007, p. 272). Interestingly, even though the neglect of communicative needs was the biggest concern in the target classrooms, CLT is not new in China. With the globalization of English language and the pervasiveness of CLT in the West, the pedagogical import of CLT was an important part of a top down English language teaching reform in China since the 1980s (Nunan, 2003, p. 595; Liao, 2004, p. 270). It also pioneered the CFL teaching reform and Chinese Quality Education Reform<sup>106</sup> since the 1990s (Wang, 2011, p. 158; Zhong, 2006, pp. 378-379). Theoretically speaking, CLT has been the leading foreign language teaching approach in China. Perhaps, this was why most informants<sup>107</sup> considered it as their pedagogical choice in that it was officially the right answer to any scholastic questions. Then why did the teaching practices in the target programs betray their self-claimed teaching philosophy and approach? The data of this study indicated that the answer lies in the conflictive power structures of Chinese traditional

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<sup>106</sup> Quality Education Reform (素质教育改革) has been a large-scale student-centered and inquiry-based educational reform in China.

<sup>107</sup> This refers to the four informants who were both CFL program administrators and CFL instructors.

classroom and communication-oriented classroom. This attests the hypothesis of some scholars about the negative impact of Chinese learning culture on CFL teaching (such as Moloney & Xu, 2016, p. 6; Wright & Zhang, 2014, pp. 287-290).

More specifically, with Confucius thinking as the core tenets, Chinese educational traditions consider the teacher as the “fount of knowledge,” who enjoys absolute authority in the classroom (Rao, 2006, p. 495). Accordingly, the teacher dominates both what to learn by selecting “points of knowledge from authoritative sources” and how to learn by imparting the “correct” interpretations and answers (Hu, 2002, p. 98). Thus, the students are positioned as the passive recipients of the knowledge, from whom any interruption and challenge are neither expected nor welcome. With a focus on memorizing what the teacher imparts, Chinese traditional learning process is rather individualistic and silent. This is in alignment with participants’ description of the target classrooms, such as obedience, silence, formality, repetition, and textbook-oriented instruction. Contrary to the hierarchical teacher-student relationship mentioned above, CLT “proposes more democratic and egalitarian views of education,” which encourages authentic discussions and free expression of personal opinions (Weimer, 2002, p. 10). It not only regards the teacher and students as the co-constructors of knowledge, but also emphasizes the collaborative meaning making among the students, such as through pair or group work. Instead of rote memorization and drills, the learning process in a communication-orientated classroom gives priority to student motivation and participation. Therefore, the role of a teacher is more of a facilitator and advisor or even an observer (Liao, 2000, p. 8).

During the interviews, many informants blamed their limited employment of CLT on class type, class size, and student composition. That is to say, as far as they were concerned, the interactive activities were only feasible in Chinese speaking rather than Chinese reading and writing classes, in small rather than large (over 30 students) classes, and in homogeneous rather than heterogeneous classes (regarding source countries). Although every factor more or less matters, such understanding of CLT was rather restrictive and superficial. Based upon the previous comparison of the power structures in both kinds of classrooms, I argue that to fully adopt CLT, the instructors should have a better appreciation of the ideological and social relational conceptions behind it. Similarly, rather than the excessive pursuit of ideal oral engagement rate, Chinese educational reform should start with an awareness of the sociocultural resistance to students' equal and full participation in the classroom. After all, to fulfill the communicative needs in class signifies the reconstruction of teacher-student relationship and the renegotiation of their identities.

It is worth mentioning that in the target classrooms, the Chinese traditional teaching practices were further strengthened by the preference of the most massive cultural group, namely, the CFL students from the Asian cultural sphere. Unlike North American CFL students, they were used to the teacher-centered instruction and grammar-translation approach. Although it is a challenge for the instructors to work with students with conflicting interests, diverse student needs could be fulfilled with differentiated instruction (Zhang, 2016, p. 78). That is to say, the instructors could provide a differentiated learning “context” (what to teach), “process” (how to teach), and “product” (how to assess) among various cultural groups (Blaz,

2013, pp. 9-12). Additionally, differentiated instruction shows the advantageous learning outcomes of pedagogical alternatives and thus bring about changes and hybridity. Hence, North American CFL students and CFL students from the Asian cultural sphere can learn from each other and benefit from their co-existence in the same class. Inevitably, differentiated instruction has higher demands on the instructors; however, in my opinion, having an open mind to the multicultural classroom is first step.

In the target classrooms, the unequal teacher-student relationship discouraged and disempowered North American CFL students from participating. Therefore, as Zhang (2016) argued, the CFL instructors “should consider using activities that incorporate different modes of teacher-student interaction, small group discussion, and large group discussion to share the floor with students” (p. 77). Although I attached more importance to the communicative needs of CFL learners in this study, it does not mean that Chinese learning culture is useless or China should completely Westernize its educational philosophy. Instead, I suggest some reflection on the compatibility of North American CFL learners and Chinese educational environment, which also applies to the following discussion on the social conflicts and power relationships during CFL program administration.

### **The power relationships in program administration**

In her overview of recent studies on CFL learning in study abroad context, Jin (2014) argued that both the quantity and quality of language contact that the learners have in local communities shape their language development, advocating systematic investigation on the learning processes and outcomes in the CFL programs in China (p. 204). In this study, I paid

special attention to participants' establishment of language contact via the target programs. Similar to my stereotyped understandings, the informants considered North American CFL international students the least of their worries in the aspect of socialization because of their outgoing personality, outstanding communicative skills, strong intercultural adaptation capacities, and the popularity of their mother tongue. However, this study suggests a different conclusion, which strongly disagrees with these assumptions.

The research findings showed that the participants needed a safe, comfortable and welcoming social milieu, but the target programs failed to provide a "sheltered" (H. Du, 2015, p. 262) environment on campus through sufficient and sustainable social coordination and support. Both the orientation and daily interactive events organized by the target programs were under severe questioning. No matter from the perspective of social frequency, activity design, or information channels, the participants felt isolated from local peers. The bureaucratic and indifferent administrative management further worsened the situation. Feeling discouraged and disempowered, many participants had to rely on self-help in foreign student communities.

Here, I will discuss the power dynamics between North American CFL students and target programs from three different aspects. They are the administrative philosophies of the target programs, the international student administrative policies in China, and the condescending administrative environment in Chinese universities.

To start with, the administrators in the target programs hold indifferent attitudes towards their role in the extracurricular investment of North American CFL learners.



According to their administrative philosophy, each individual CFL student was responsible for his or her social life after class. Indeed, there was a prevailing belief among the informants that the success of social engagement totally depended on personal characteristics and efforts rather than external facilitation. Under this promise, the student service providers not only neglected the design and implementation of social programs, but also regarded the CFL learners with limited access to social opportunities as unfavorable introverts and “lazybones”. Besides, many informants contended that social interactions would happen naturally once the international and domestic students presented themselves at public social spaces on campus. In other words, the target programs already took the establishment of social contact for granted. Therefore, any further requests from the participants were considered as unnecessary, troublemaking, or picky. It further marginalized the CFL students with a higher demand for social supports. On top of that, some informants pointed out that it was very challenging to organize social events catering to the diverse needs among CFL learners; thus, it was up to the students themselves to make friends or find social events. This was similar to the situation in target CFL classrooms. Instead of taking advantage of the multicultural and multilingual student population who can become rich resources for each other, the target programs only considered diversity as a disadvantage for teaching and social interaction.

The uncaring administrative philosophy of extracurricular social needs not only explained the insufficient language contact the participants established on campus, but also to some extent accounted for the unsatisfactory social experiences they had during the social functions initiated by the target programs. As importantly, the irresponsibility resulted in the

absence of the evaluation of social needs and supports. This was why the adoption of administrative philosophy was mainly based on assumptions and anecdotes. In alignment with Zhu (2010), I argue that the quality assurance system for international education in China should go beyond teaching evaluation and develop all-round student satisfaction survey, including the assessment of student services and social supports.

In addition to the neglect of social needs in the administrative philosophy, the exclusive international student administrative policies and practices to a certain degree impeded the social interactions between international and domestic students. Under the guidance of international student management regulations co-issued by Ministry of Education, Foreign Affairs, and Public Security of the P.R.C. in 2000 and 2017, Chinese foreign student administrative policies of various levels differentiated the management of domestic and international students, placing the later into a “special” position on campus. It was further reinforced by classified interior policies and unwritten hidden rules, revealing the sensitive political nature of international student administration. Sometimes, this special treatment was explained as a social privilege (An & Chiang, 2015, p. 672). For example, when talking about the regulations of international student residences, the informants emphasized the higher standard of their safety and living conditions. However, the price of such kind of privilege should not be ignored. Many participants regarded their solitary and inaccessible five star dorms as a symbol of otherness and marginalization. Being special, therefore, indicated a sacrifice of social needs, let alone their identification with local peers.

Both interviews and chitchats with the participants and informants showed that

diplomatic and ideo-political concerns were the major reasons behind local differentiated treatments towards international students. Sometimes, foreign students were still considered as foreign guests; *waishi wu xiaoshi* (外事无小事, no trifle in foreign affairs) was also a frequently quoted principle (Qiao, 2014, pp. 13-14 & p. 17; Yin, 2009, p. 181). As some informants pointed out, the significant diplomatic and political consequences of the accidents involving foreign students rationalized their exceptional scrupulousness. Physical and social segregation was a critical measure to avoid related mishaps (Peng & Li, 2012, pp. 242-244). Similarly, the obscure application of ideological education to foreign student communities was a barrier to the investment of North American CFL learners. Chinese universities have always been of critical importance to the speech and thought control in China to prevent unwanted social changes by the authorities. This was especially true after the student-led Tiananmen Square protests in 1989. Since then, the Chinese central government strengthened the homogeneous ideological and political education in Chinese universities. The sensitive nature of ideological supervision over international students resulted in the avoidance of open discussion on certain socio-political issues and cultural values. To illustrate, the control of doing missionary work via visitor registration and curfew policies was an open secret among international students. However, the target programs were reluctant to discuss these tricky administrative measures and figure out alternative social arrangements. Instead, the social demands of some participants were often interpreted as undisciplined.

In spite of the slow-moving decentralization of Chinese international student administrative policies over the years, the flexibility of foreign student management at

university or program level was still limited due to certain ideo-political considerations. A major part of foreign student administration, therefore, was to implement the top-down regulations and to track the mobility of international students with the help of local public security bureaus. It signified a strong sense of protection and control rather than social facilitation and integration. It is necessary to mention that I am not suggesting that the target programs should completely adopt the paradigms in North American universities. My advocacy is to de-politicize foreign student administration regulations and give the target programs more space to fulfill the social needs of CFL learners under discussion. In other words, for the sake of a favorable investment environment, the educational authorities at different levels should grant the universities with higher autonomy and help to promote administrative convergence between domestic and foreign students (Peng & Li, 2012; Yang, 2009, p.p. 235-237; Yin, 2009, p. 180).

Furthermore, the condescending administrative environment in Chinese universities also discouraged and frustrated the investment of North American CFL learners on campus. In my opinion, three factors decided the subordinate position of students, including CFL international students, in university management: the absolute authorities of administrators, university students as minors, and *baomu shi guanli* (保姆式管, nanny managerial style).

First, as an epitome of Chinese relational hierarchy and conservative traditions, the administrative staff, who are also called “teachers,” enjoyed absolute authoritative status in daily administration (Lu & Wan, 2012, pp. 56-57). Direct consequences of their dominant role in student services were the formalization of casual social occasions, the neglect of bottom-up

social initiatives, and the obedience to administrative commands. With a strong sense of entitlement, North American CFL international students were sometimes considered inharmonious; therefore, their voices and needs could not be heard and discussed.

Second, unlike treating postsecondary students as adults or quasi-adults in many Western countries, Chinese universities still regarded undergraduate students as minors who need to be managed and disciplined. This to some extent granted Chinese administrators the right to intervene in students' personal life, such as sexual relationships. It also explained why some participants complained of being treated as children rather than equal and capable social networkers. Although similar control also happened to local students, it was applied to CFL learners with additional purposes, i.e., to minimize the contacts and connections with outsiders. It was a form of control but also a way of othering.

Third, taking complete charge of both administrative design and operation, the "nanny" managerial style in Chinese universities restrained the motivation, engagement, and autonomy of CFL international students in student service programs; similar to Chinese cramming or spoon feeding education, it neglected the diversity of student needs and emphasized the subservient status of students in administrative relations (Zhan, 2010, p. 82). In line with the suggestions of some scholars, such as Yin (2016), I suggest that the administrative environment in Chinese universities should leave some space for the self-governance of CFL students through the advocacy of international student unions and interest groups as well as the active involvement of CFL student staff. In other words, to empower the CFL students in social program design and organization is an important precondition of meeting their social needs.

In brief, certain indifferent and manipulative administrative philosophies, policies, and relationships in the target programs severely jeopardized the social interactions between North American CFL learners and local peers. No matter in a form of suggestion, complaint, or protestation, the agentive acts among the participants were mainly ignored or rejected by local administrative authorities. Even though assimilation, autonomy, and service-oriented management have become popular topics of foreign student administration in China, most related publications were reflexive writings rather than investigations on the lived experiences of foreign students in China. That is to say, there is a lack of first hand feedback from the disempowered, which, in my opinion, is indispensable for the social equity and integration of CFL international students on campus.

### **The ambivalent role of English**

Besides the hierarchical power relationships with the target programs, the native English-speaking participants also experienced the privileges and pitfalls that English brought them in China. To different degrees, English complemented their Chinese deficiency and provided them with symbolic capitals in China. Alternatively, their investment in Chinese language was always conflicted with and compromised by the English learning requests in China. As a result, from time to time they were not able to establish mutual trust and communicative reciprocity with local interlocutors. Here, I will first discuss the ambivalent role of English in and out of CFL classrooms. Then, I will analyze the English fever in China, which resulted in the bi-directional investment model in the target communities. Furthermore, I will compare the investment experiences between North American CFL learners in China and

ESL learners in North America, identifying the dilemmas for both groups of foreign language learners.

The usage of English as an instructional medium in the CFL classrooms in China has always been controversial. The research findings of this study are a good example. Under the prevailing Chinese-only policy in the CFL immersion programs in China, some scholars preferred monolingual teaching strategy for the benefits of students from non-English speaking countries, the cultivation of Sinophone identity, and the promotion of international status of Chinese (Fan, 2013; Liang, 1998; Wang, 2007). On the contrary, some other scholars recognized the important role of English as a lingua franca (ELF) in CFL learning and advocated a multilingual approach in CFL classrooms, particularly at beginner's level (Wang, 2013a, 2013b; Xu, 2008). For example, in her comprehensive book on the "English-in-Chinese-class" phenomenon in China, Wang (2013b) argued that, without public acknowledgement (but widely found in CFL teaching), English is a medium of instruction accepted both by teachers and students for the sake of its explanatory, managerial, and interactive functions; hence, ELF pedagogy should be considered as an optimal model in the context of CFL teaching and learning (p. 141, pp. 160-164 & pp. 209-210).

This study witnessed the critical role of English as a secondary instructional language in the target immersion programs; however, it also noticed the unbalanced power relationships among CFL learners with various English proficiencies. When the participants enjoyed the bilingual instruction and worked as capable peers to support other classmates, their identity as native English speakers also made them feel unfavorably superior, highlighted the frustration

of students with limited English competence, and incurred jealousy from fellow international students. In other words, with supplementary English translation and clarification, CFL instruction in the target programs was not designed and delivered to provide comprehensible input equally to every learner in class. While some felt privileged, others felt disempowered, indicating the hierarchical access to academic capital in class. Therefore, although in disagreement with the monolingual teaching strategy that ignores the communicative barriers in absolute Chinese immersion environment, I argue that the accommodation of EFL has important consequences for all the learners, which needed to be carefully dealt with.

In addition to the usage of English in CFL classrooms, the role of English during participants' social interactions with local Chinese was also paradoxical. In this research, I provided a detailed investigation of the privileges that native English speakers were endowed with in China as well as the social tensions and power struggles over foreign language investment between North American CFL learners and Chinese ESL learners. The fused yet confused identity of native English speaker and CFL learner was also briefly discussed by some other studies, such as the dilemma between the coveted social capital and the reinforcement of linguistic imperialism (Duff et al., 2013, pp. 131-132) or the "ugly" American stereotype through speaking and teaching English in China (Illyckyj, 2010, pp. 59-61). Although these issues were somewhat covered by Sandra and Frank's concern of their undesired specialty in the target communities, the major challenge among the participants was the over-instrumentalization of native English speakers during friend making and language exchange.



No matter in CFL classrooms or local communities, the benefits and pitfalls that English brought about were because of the “English fever” in China over the past 30 years, which has witnessed both national and personal investment in English. At the national level, English and English learning were tied to an imagined place for China and Chinese people in the world and its self-identity (Lo Bianco, 2009, pp. 12-15). The Chinese government's emphasis on the strategic role of English in national economic development, modernization, and globalization motivated English to be taught as a compulsory course since Grade 3 in elementary schools to all grades in postsecondary institutions (Du, 2001, p. 126). To pass College English Test (CET)-Band 4 and/or 6 is necessary for undergraduate degrees and a gatekeeper of job hunting in China (Cheng, 2008, pp. 18-19). At the personal level, English has acted as a powerful tool for self-sufficiency and success (Johnson, 2009, p. 133). The English learning environment in China pushed a “conscious adoption” of the language which “separates the Haves from the Have Nots” and “leaves those who do not speak it behind” (Johnson, 2009, p. 133). For the sake of the material resources and symbolic capitals that English may bring, many parents have invested in English tutoring or English courses for their children (Du, 2001, pp. 128-130). The 5<sup>th</sup> national census of the P.R.C. in 2000 put the number of English learners in China at 390.16 million, roughly one third of Chinese population (Wei & Su, 2012, p. 11).

In spite of the popularity of English in China, most Chinese people do not have a chance to go abroad or get access to English native speakers in daily life. Besides, foreign English teachers were a luxurious resource only a small portion of Chinese people could afford.

This has been particularly true in less internationalized areas in China (e.g. the target city). North American international students, therefore, were free “valuable treasures” nobody wanted to miss, which often overwhelmed their crucial needs and equal rights to speak Chinese. Social networking then turned out to be a fight over investment opportunities from both sides. This bi-directional investment model differed from the complete subordinate status of most ESL minorities in North America. It broke the dichotomy between newcomers and older timers or privileged native speakers and disempowered foreign language learners. The power dynamics between North American CFL learners and English learners in China revealed the complexity and diversity of foreign language learning experiences in different sociocultural contexts.

To further discuss the ambivalent role of English during participants’ CFL learning in China, I did a comparison of the investment experiences between North American CFL learners in China and ESL learners in North America (See Table 6). In the comparison, I identified three major factors that may influence the dynamics among the mother tongue, the target language, and the investment experiences in the target communities. They were the symbolic capital of the mother tongue, the preferable language by local interlocutors, and the reciprocity between language learners and local interlocutors.

To pinpoint the problematic factors for these two groups of foreign language learners (the CFL learners in China and the ESL learners in North America), I also listed the ideal investment experiences (based upon the same three factors) for any foreign language learner. By comparing the real-life investment to the ideal language learning process in the target

communities, I found that both groups of the foreign language learners were far from having satisfactory experiences, although their problems varied.

**Table 6**

*A comparison of the investment experiences between CFL and ESL learners in the target communities*

Language learners	The symbolic capital of the mother tongue	The preferable language by local interlocutors	The reciprocity between language learners and local interlocutors
North American CFL learners in China	Yes	Mother tongue	Yes, but unbalanced
ESL learners in North America	No	Target language	No
Ideal learning environment	Yes	Target language	Yes

More specifically, the ESL learners did not have much choice in the alleged multilingual North American societies, since the target language, English, was much more valued or to a certain extent was the only language valued by local interlocutors.<sup>108</sup> Seemingly ideal, English-only social networks also indicated the inferior status of linguistic minorities' mother tongues; therefore, the reciprocity between ESL learners and native English speakers was hardly established. This was why most studies found North American ESL minorities struggling with investment opportunities and developing a positive self-identity, such as shown in the works of Block (2006, 2007a, 2007b), Cummins (1994, 1996, 2006), Norton (1995, 2000), Ricento (2005, 2007) and Toohey (1998, 2000).

In contrast, owing to the popularity of English language, anglophone North American

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<sup>108</sup> It only refers to the English speaking provinces in Canada.

CFL learners were “blessed” with this symbolic capital in China. The mutual interest in each other’s mother tongue made it possible to have bi-directional investment between North American CFL learners and native Chinese speakers. However, the overwhelming English help requests in the target communities neglected the learning needs of North American CFL learners and jeopardized their equitable social participation. Thus, the bi-directional investment was unbalanced. In this sense, the power of English does not bring them that much needed social capital in the aspect of winning true friendship and gaining respect as linguistic and cultural minorities, which is hard earned instead of being an entitlement. After all, the two groups of foreign language learners might be in a similar situation since their feelings of helplessness and their needs for empowerment could virtually be the same.

It is arguable that North American CFL learners do have the choice to decline or to avoid the excessive requests for English help and invest in the social networks of the mainstream Chinese society where people do not speak much English. However, this study showed that there were three different types of agentive actions among the participants ranging from complete avoidance of the usage of English, to English social networking with compensation, and to strategically steering the communication language. To a certain degree, the choice of investment strategy depended on the personality and social skills of the individual participant without showing a pattern of absolute favorable investment outcomes. Besides, North American CFL learners usually had difficulties participating in Chinese-only social networks due to their limited Chinese proficiency, potential cultural barriers (such as the lack of common knowledge and interest), and the fear of being rejected, let alone the discriminative

challenges towards non-Caucasian North Americans.

It is also necessary to emphasize that this does not mean that none of the ESL learners in China were interested in establishing trusted relationships. Nor am I saying North American CFL learners cannot take advantage of their English skills to establish genuine friendships and to create ideal Chinese learning environments. The purpose of my discussion is to bring awareness of the social needs of North American CFL learners, and their complex feelings of being assigned a special social status and treated differently, particularly when it is related to their identity as English native speakers. While people notice the attention and privileges that North American CFL learners have received in China, their feelings and special needs can be easily neglected.

On top of the contradictory role of English in and out of CFL classrooms, it is noteworthy that the English fever in China was only an epitome of ethnocentric, postcolonial and post-socialist Chinese society. I will further talk about these social phenomena in the next section on racial and racialized gender otherness towards North American CFL learners in China.

### **Racial and racialized gender otherness**

It is often assumed that racism can only be a “white” phenomenon against the “coloured” (Dikötter, 2015, p. xiii). However, in this study, North American CFL international students of all skin colors experienced different degrees and forms of differentiated racial treatments in China based upon their physical characteristics. Othering practices towards visible minorities commonly existed in the target city, which were always coupled with

stereotyping assumptions and judgemental discourse. Similar to the research findings in Du (2015), Duff et al. (2013), and Ilnyckyj (2010), the racial border shaped who belonged in China, thus, North American CFL learners were always considered as outsiders regardless of their Chinese proficiency and high motivation to identify with Chinese people.

North America CFL students are not a homogeneous group. Current literature mainly focused on Caucasian and ethnic Chinese North American CFL learners, who were also my initially anticipated targets of participant recruitment. However, the diversity of CFL students in the target city was beyond my imagination, particularly the emergence of dark-skinned North American CFL students. Therefore, in this research, I investigated a variety of racisms in local communities based upon the distinct otherness to participants of different skin colors.

First, *chongyang meiwai* (崇洋媚外, xenophile) only applied to North American Caucasians. The so-called Caucasian or Western appearance gained huge admiration and popularity in local communities. It also worked as a natural proof of the identity as native English speakers and North Americans. Hence, for the Caucasian participants, opportunities to make friends and to find language exchange partners were out of question. Yet, the favorable outlook and symbolic capital that Caucasian North Americans enjoyed could also be barriers during social identification, especially when the Caucasians from another country, Russia, dominated the international population. It further proved that sometimes superiority might not be equal to investment advantages.

Besides, as a “foreigner at home,” Nhu, the only ethnic Chinese participant in this study, found a denial of her fused identity in China. While she was reluctant to embrace the

contemporary Chinese culture, which was rather different from the diasporic Chinese culture in the U.S., local Chinese kept on challenging her legitimate ownership of English and American citizenship. With a loss of belonging, her root-seeking journey led “not to active engagement with the local but to recoiling into a discourse of American superiority” (Block, 2007a, p. 185).

Moreover, the dark-skinned participants encountered severe social marginalization. In addition to the same challenge to citizenship and mother tongue, they also suffered from overt discrimination against their skin color. Over-attention, constant comparison with the Caucasians, and whitening suggestions illustrated resentment and dis-identification during their daily socialization. These racist encounters resembled the research findings in other studies on African international students and immigrants in China. In his study on popular racism of China, Dikötter (2015) argued that “since the country has become more familiar with the outside world after decades of Maoism, racist incidents have increased, rather than decreased;” the “Kill the black devils” slogan during the violent clashes between Chinese and African students in the 1980s had today expanded general discrimination to all the Africans in China, particularly the African immigrants and refugees in the “chocolate city” of Guangzhou (South of China) (pp. 134-135). Dark-skinned population stayed at the very bottom of the racial and social hierarchy in China. However, it is worthwhile to notice that the multifaceted identity of dark-skinned North American CFL learners, such as the symbolic capital affiliated to their citizenship and native language, also brought about complicated and sometimes ambivalent power dynamics in local social networks.

In addition to the social engagement with local people in mainstream social networks, other subcultural groups also played important roles in North American CFL international students' investment and identity negotiation in China. Although the participants hold somewhat negative views towards the Russians, Russian international students were key gatekeepers and gateways of the social interactions (particularly as the main event organizers in international student communities) among the foreign population in the target city, with whom the consistent misidentification and connection brought about both social tensions and interdependence. Also, there were certain social barriers between CFL students from North America and those from the Asian cultural sphere (e.g. Koreans). The latter preferred to hang out together as a group and stay within their cultural comfort zone, automatically positioning the former as social outsiders. The easier fit of Korean students in Chinese communities also highlighted the alienation towards North American CFL learners due to their distinct appearance and more cultural differences. Moreover, the non-Caucasian participants showed strong identification with ethnic minorities in China due to similar social exclusion experiences. It indicated that sometimes, mutual respect and acceptance was the most important factor of successful investment rather than standard accent and dominant culture. This reminded me of a conversation with an international student administrator from Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region of the P.R.C. She argued that similar racism seldom happened in her university since local people had a better understanding of multiculturalism and the struggles of Chinese ethnic minorities. In other words, the Chinese ethnocentric mainstream society was the root of problem under discussion.



On top of the unfair treatments based upon skin colors, female participants experienced general and racialized gender otherness. With seemingly equal status in Chinese workforce, women, including foreign women, were still in a subordinate position in Chinese patriarchal society. Certain achievements of women's liberation during the early age of the founding of the P.R.C. have gradually disappeared in the post-socialist China (Diao, 2014, p. 602). However, only a couple of studies paid attention to the gender issues of North American CFL learners in China. Similar to Duff et al. (2013), one of the few studies I found with explicit discussion on different gendered experiences between male and female American CFL learners in China, this study noticed that racialized gender stereotypes, particularly the open and permissive Western female image, had a great impact on female participants' social networking with Chinese peers of the same and opposite sex.

However, this research also investigated more alarming cases such as sexual harassment and assault, which seriously threatened female participants' sense of security and motivation of public social networking. Moreover, I argue that the commercialization of women's body and marriage in China has imposed homogeneous aesthetic standards on the appropriateness of foreign females' physical appearance and social behaviors. These sexist practices not only resulted in hierarchical social acceptance and popularity among females but also caused huge ideological conflicts between the participants and local Chinese, which hindered their social engagement. It is noteworthy that foreign females in China as a group of distinct population were almost invisible in Chinese social studies, let alone the research specific on the social experiences of female CFL learners in China (Zhang, 2013). Up to now,

the relevant written materials were mainly personal memoirs and anecdotes rather than academic publications. This gap needs the attention from both Chinese and Western scholars.

While racism still widely exists, overt racial and racialized gender discrimination is less and less tolerated in most parts of the world. Discrimination based on peoples' looks and backgrounds can still be seen in China. Undoubtedly, many Chinese people had little exposure to the outside world and different people, which led to their ignorance of the ethnic diversity in North American countries. However, I believe that the deeper reason lies in the racial and gender hierarchy in Chinese society, which is under strong influence of ethnocentrism, patriarchal traditions, postcolonial culture, and post-socialist values.

To begin with, "Races do not exist, they are imagined" (Dikötter, 2015, p. vii). The racism and racialized sexism towards North American CFL learners also reflected local Chinese people's imagination of favorable social networks and easier access to social mobility. In the past three decades, Chinese society has gone through explosive social transformation moving from the communist ideology of anti-materialist egalitarianism and the reality of extreme poverty to one of the world's highest levels of social stratification in material distribution (Wildau & Mitchell, 2016, January 14). Many Chinese people just had a fresh taste of the suddenly improved life and quickly found they were already falling far behind others while the gap is quickly widened. Such urge of choosing to sink or swim may serve as the nation's economic engine to bring tens if not hundreds of millions into a fanatic race. With the materialism train running at full speed, competitiveness quickly replaced the traditional social values and personal relationships despite of the government's slogan of

“developing a harmonious society” (Yang & Stening, 2012). Such competition is particularly fierce among people’s investment and identification with the appearance and language of Western developed countries, particularly North American countries. One American participant of this study, Anna, argued that just as shown in the movie *American Dreams in China*,<sup>109</sup> Chinese people loved Americans and English native speakers because of their longing for a better life in North America or the life style represented by these countries. This also explains one reason for Chinese people’s choice of U.S. and Canada as top study abroad and immigration destinations.

As importantly, in China, the imagined “heaven” is also closely related to the race of the “white,” partly because of the legacy of the colonial history of the British Empire and the popular Yankee image of America repeatedly reinforced by the mass media. The imagined native English speakers in many Chinese people’s minds are Caucasians. Such imaginations of “white” North Americans and “white” English made non-Caucasian CFL learners in China lose their ownership of English language and citizenship. I heard Canadian born Chinese complaining about being asked “Where are you from and how come you speak English so ‘good (well)’?” by some fellow Canadians when their ignorance led them to assume they must be immigrants just because of their Chinese face. These very same Chinese Canadians could feel as bad or even worse when Chinese people do not believe they can be Canadians and they speak English well. In such power dynamics, it is not only difficult for these groups of CFL

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<sup>109</sup> *American Dreams in China* directed by Peter Chen was a box office hit in China in 2013. It was based upon the real story of New Oriental Education and Technology Group, a Chinese training company, which has been famous for its cramming programs for various English proficiency tests.

learners to achieve reciprocity in their language exchanges but their identity and self-esteem are also violated.

Furthermore, as Anna correctly pointed out that darker skin color is partially related to some Chinese people's discriminatory attitudes towards Chinese farmers and people of physical labors who have rougher and darker skins because of their hard life. The introduction of capitalist market system in the process of globalization and the stratification of the Chinese society made the poor and uneducated, ethnic minorities, and other disadvantaged social groups subject to more discriminatory treatments.

As the reason of racism and racialized sexism comprised a mix of factors, the participants adopted a wide range of strategies to renegotiate their disadvantageous racial and social positions. These strategies varied from complete tolerance to direct confrontation, from tactical balance to self-isolation, and from aiming at short-term benefits to wishing for long-term effects. During their struggles for a more favorable investment environment, some participants changed their personalities and social styles in more aggressive and protective ways. Meanwhile, they gradually developed different understandings of themselves, Chinese people, and Chinese society. In the worst scenario, certain participants started to reassess the target communities and reconsider their choice of the study abroad destination.

At the end of this discussion, I would like to argue that the power imbalances in the target classrooms, programs, and communities neglected the social needs of North American CFL learners and jeopardized their equal and full investment in China. CFL learning in China is a zone of third space where different cultures and ways of thinking often contradict.

However, mutual understandings do not come naturally but through experience, efforts, and education. While the country is opening up to the world and the boundary of borders are crossed more and more frequently, the education of social equality among Chinese people has to be conducted seriously. The Chinese government set up tens of millions of funds to promote CFL and to develop its soft power in the world. This study may suggest that the sustainable development of such power must go hand in hand with the increasing awareness of the social needs of CFL learners in China. This requires long-term efforts and supports from all the stakeholders, including CFL instructors and administrators, Chinese educational authorities and policy makers, and Chinese social networkers.

### **Recommendations for CFL international students**

Although this study mainly focuses on the sociocultural milieu of CFL learning in China, I think it will be helpful to provide some recommendations for current and prospective CFL international students, specifically based upon participants' suggestions and my analysis of their agentive actions. More specifically, I encourage CFL students to have proactive and accurate construction of China as imagined communities, to maximize their exposure to Chinese people and society with an open mind, and to actively reflect on their study abroad experiences in China.

To begin with, to have proactive and accurate construction of China as imagined communities will help CFL students be prepared for the ups and downs in their study abroad life and become aware of their potential social positions in Chinese social networks. As Frank suggested, a better understanding of China as a study abroad destination includes both a

general survey of Chinese history and current affairs of Chinese society and the knowledge of upcoming challenges and difficulties during CFL learning in China. Potential information sources to this purpose could be the mass media, the host and home programs, and the experiences, reflections, and studies of other foreign students in China.

Besides, several participants stressed the role of personal agency to maximize their exposure to Chinese people and society with an open mind. On one hand, CFL students should be open to talk to Chinese people of various backgrounds and to involve in local daily life. On the other hand, some participants suggested avoiding native English speakers and only making Chinese friends in order to have a complete Chinese immersion environment. Although I believe there could be a wide range of strategies based upon personal needs other than direct avoidance, it will be beneficial to be aware of the role of English and other subcultural groups in CFL learning in China.

Furthermore, in alignment with Jin (2016), I encourage CFL students to actively reflect on their language learning experiences in and out of the classroom, which helps to turn implicit learning into explicit learning, to further their awareness of differentiated learning opportunities, and to understand their identities in the local community (p. 207). Anna, one participant of this study, also added that to see and reflect cultural differences in the study abroad context was a critical step for cross-cultural adaptation and identity negotiation. This reflection process could happen in both formal and informal learning contexts by learners themselves, with CFL instructors and administrators, and with peers and family in both home and host countries. Since some participants considered their participation in this study as a

useful method of self-reflection, CFL students may refer to the data collection tools in this study for their personal reflexivity, such as using daily language use logs and writing personal blogs.

The suggestions above highlighted different stages of study abroad and language learning experiences in China, including pre-departure preparation, investment in local communities, and ongoing reflection. Through these suggestions, I wish current and prospective CFL international students to have a better understanding of the role of their agentive actions and make great efforts to be seen and heard in Chinese social networks.

### **Final thoughts**

At the end of my dissertation writing, I facilitated and audited a series of professional development workshops in Canada for a group of foreign student administrators from China. One day, a Canadian presenter showed us a video named *What It's Like Being Black in China* (Mamahuhu, 2015, January 26), which discussed the Chinese racism against “black” foreigners in a funny and sarcastic way. When the presenter asked the audience how this video informed their daily work, many administrators admitted that although such phenomenon was an open secret in China, none of their universities took any initiative to empower dark-skinned international students. However, very few of them came up with the specific reasons. Instead, they were more interested in the recommendations from Canadian universities. Sitting there with mixed feelings, I related my study and myself to this scenario.

Looking back at my research journey, I knew the efforts and time it would take to come out of the ideological comfort zone, which could hardly be successful without critical moments,

supportive environment, and “authentic thinking” (Freire, 2000, p. 77). To begin with, to examine Chinese social issues with fresh eyes, I experienced many critical moments that worked as the stepping-stones to deeper insights. They included but not limited to the epiphanies after provocative cross-cultural encounters, extensive reading on diverse perspectives, and exchanges of views with other scholars. Similarly, the administrators at the workshops and all the stakeholders of this study need to have exposure to such moments. They could happen such as when watching a thought-provoking video, travelling abroad as an ESL speaker, or facing the agentive actions of ethnolinguistic minorities in China. Ideally, big social events and reforms will work as the stimuli for the critical moments among the public.

Besides, once the critical moment occurs, there should be a supportive environment for further reflection. As the administrators in the workshops, I was used to the top-down hierarchy and lost the momentum to ask why and how. Only when I was immersed in the passion of equity and social justice in the Canadian classroom and society that I gradually appreciated the value of critical thinking and critical studies. Likewise, from a narrow sense, the presenter in the workshop needs to create a buffer zone and encourage the audience to break the silence. More importantly, from a broader sense, the Chinese educational and social environment should be open to the reflexive discussions and the evolution of new understandings.

Furthermore, authentic thinking is of great importance for the comprehensive examination of the CFL learners in China. It is understandable that from time to time we need to learn from the other countries just as what the administrators did in this case. However, I believe, in the long term, genuine and internalized thinking will help to figure out alternative



understandings and practices that work better for Chinese educational and social context. Even though North American CFL learners were the target population of this study, it does not mean I am advocating the Westernization of Chinese educational system. While drawing attention to participants' social needs, I attached more importance to the role of social networking and social positioning in CFL learning, which will more or less be applicable to the other ethnolinguistic minorities in China.

CFL and international education in China have always been a space of conflicts, negotiations, and (re)imaginings that call for the attention, reflection, and innovation of all the stakeholders. I wish this study could intrigue some sort of critical moments, supportive environment, and authentic thinking for CFL learners' reciprocal and sustainable intercultural experiences in China.

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Appendix A  
Research Introduction and Recruitment Instructions (Facilitators)

**Research Title:** Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) International Students' Language Learning Experiences in China

**Researcher:** Li Mao  
PhD student, Department of Educational Policy Studies  
Faculty of Education, University of Alberta, Canada

My name is Li Mao. I am a PhD student from University of Alberta in Canada. I am doing the study described in this letter for my doctoral dissertation. Thank you for your interest in this study.

My area of study is adult education, particularly how adults learn a foreign language during their participation in foreign language speaking activities. The purpose of this study is to understand CFL North American international students' Chinese language learning experiences in China.

I would like your assistance in finding participants for this study. I am looking for North American international students (participants) and CFL instructors and/or international student administrators (informants) in your university to participate in this study.

Thank you in advance for taking the time to help me with the recruitment. The basic requirements of participant and informant selection in your university could be seen in the following table (See Table A1).

Table A1

*The basic requirements of participant and informant selection*

	Who	Number	Basic requirements	Data collection methods
Participants	North American international students (from Canada or the United States)	1-3	1. Minimum one semester (4 months) of CFL learning in China; 2. Being able to speak English and/or Mandarin in the interview	1. Daily language use log (20 days in one month, 5 minutes per day); 2. Interview (around one hour); 3. Personal writings about study abroad life in China (such as blogs, diaries, and Twitter messages)
Informants	CFL instructors and/or international student administrators	1-2	Having working experiences in the field of CFL instruction and/or international student administration for at least one semester (4 months)	Interview (around one hour)

The recruitment process is as follows and the steps that you will directly get involved in are step one to three:

Step one: I will first contact you through email with the research introduction and recruitment instructions. You and I will discuss and finalize the recruitment instructions.

Step two: According to the recruitment instructions in your university, you will try to find one to three potential participants and one to two potential informants and explain the research project to them.

Step three: If the potential participants or informants are interested in this research, they will give you their contact information (e.g., cell phone numbers and/or email addresses) with a verbal permission to pass them along to me. You will make a note that verifies the permission is granted and its related details, such as who, when and how the permission was obtained. You might also pass along any questions that the potential participants or informants may have. At the same time, the potential participants and informants will also get my contact information, in case they would like to contact me directly.

Step four: I will contact the potential participants and informants directly by phone or email, review the research project again, answer any question related to their participation and provide them with the information letter and consent form. If requested, I will also share the interview protocol with them. Finally, I will ask if the participant is willing to participate in the study. If they are willing, then I will ask them to complete the consent form. If they would like some time to think about it, I will contact them again after their review of the information letter and consent form and will further explain the specific data collection methods to them and obtain consent. If the participants and informants have no other questions about this study, I will confirm them with the exact dates for data collection.

In order to protect the facilitators, participants and informants of this study, please carry out the recruitment according to the following:

1. Please protect the participants and informants physically and psychologically and double check no harm has been made on them.
2. Please pay attention to the autonomy of the participants and informants, which enable them to withdraw from this study at any point of this research, including the recruitment process.
3. Please prevent the privacy of the participants and informant and their involvement in this research from public disclosure.
4. Please be as inclusive as possible during the recruitment, with respect for the language, culture, ethnicity, gender and educational background of the participants and informants. Also, please avoid any bias towards the personal backgrounds of the participants and informants.
5. Please guarantee that potential participants' involvement in this research will not influence their normal study and extracurricular life in your university.
6. Please be very cautious that your personal and working relationship with the researcher and informants will not influence the recruitment process. Please avoid recruiting participants and informants who have direct power relationships with you.
7. During the recruitment, please respect the related policies of your university.

If you have questions or concerns about the participant and informant recruitment or the research project as a whole, please contact me at 01186-13664509304, 001-7807166050 or by email at [lmao1@ualberta.ca](mailto:lmao1@ualberta.ca), my co-supervisor Dr. Donna M. Chovanec by email at [chovanec@ualberta.ca](mailto:chovanec@ualberta.ca) or my co-supervisor Joe Wu by email at [jwu@ualberta.ca](mailto:jwu@ualberta.ca).

Appendix B  
Information Letter and Consent Form (Participants)

**Research Title:** Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) International Students' Language Learning Experiences in China

**Research Investigator:**

Name: Li Mao  
Address: 7-104 Education North,  
University of Alberta  
Edmonton, AB, T6G 2G5  
Email: lmao1@ualberta.ca  
Phone number: 001-780-7166050

**Supervisor:**

Name: Dr. Donna Chovanec  
Address: 7-144, Education North  
University of Alberta  
Edmonton, AB, T6G 2G5  
Email: chovanec@ualberta.ca  
Phone number: 001-780-4923690

Background

My name is Li Mao. I am a PhD student from the University of Alberta (Canada). I am doing the study described in this letter for my doctoral dissertation. Thank you for your interest in this study. Thank you for providing me with your contact information through the international student administrator of your university. I will use the information that you provide in my dissertation. I may also use it in journal articles and conference presentations.

Purpose

My area of study is adult education. I am particularly interested in how adults learn a foreign language through foreign language speaking activities. The purpose of this study is to understand your experiences as a North American international student learning the Chinese language in China. I am particularly interested in where, when and how you have taken part in Chinese-speaking activities in China. I am also interested in how your understanding of yourself may have changed during your participation in Chinese-speaking activities. The research findings will help the CFL educators and Chinese universities know more about the needs of CFL learners in China. It will also help to create a more inclusive learning and living environments for them.

Study Procedures

If you agree to participate in this study, I invite you to take part in the following three activities:

First, I invite you to fill in a daily language use log in your spare time at any place you feel comfortable. In this log, you will record very briefly all your conversations for around 20 days. It will take you about 5 minutes per day to complete the log. I will provide you with a sample log. I will also explain how to complete the log.

Second, I will do one individual interview with you in your university (such as in a classroom or your dorm), which will take about one hour. If you agree, I will audiotape the interview and transcribe it. If you like, I could provide you with a list of sample interview questions before the interview.

Third, after the interview, I will invite you to share with me your personal writings related to your study abroad life in China such as diaries, blogs, twitter messages, personal emails, etc. I will discuss this with you at the end of the interview or in another appointment, including how

and when I could get access to these personal writings and to what extent I could use them in the study.

### Benefits

This research will give you an opportunity to think more about your CFL learning experiences in China. It will also help you to reflect about your social relationships with other people in China. In addition, it will help you to find out any changes in yourself in China. This may be helpful to your future study life in China and your effective participation in Chinese-speaking activities.

More generally, this research will help CFL educators, programs and Chinese universities to know more about CFL international students' language learning and study abroad experiences in China. Besides, it will help to understand international students' social needs in China. In addition, it will help to think of possible ways to help them learn Chinese and take part in Chinese-speaking activities more effectively. Furthermore, this study will contribute to the foreign language learning theory, which is mainly based on English as a foreign language (EFL) learners in English-speaking countries.

### Risk

There are minimal risks to being in this study, although you might have an emotional experience when you talk about your cross-cultural experiences and the cultural shocks you encounter in China.

### Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Even after you have agreed to participate in the study, you can withdraw at any point of this study. You also have the right, at any time during the study, to NOT fill in the daily language use logs or answer questions or give me your personal writings, or to end the interview.

You may withdraw your information from the study at any point for up to two weeks following the completion of each activity (e.g., handing in your daily language use log, completing the interview and handing in your personal writings). If you choose to withdraw, I will not use the information you have given me.

### Confidentiality & Anonymity

I will use the information that you give me in my dissertation. I may also use it in journal articles and conference presentations. However, I will never use your real name or identity.

No one except me, Dr. Donna Chovanec and Dr. Joe Wu (my co-supervisors), and the University of Alberta Research Ethics Committee will be able to see the information you give me.

I will keep the written information, such as your consent form, daily language use log, personal writings, and any written notes from this research in a locked cabinet in my home. I will keep all the electronic information, such as the audiotaped interview (mp3 version), the transcript of the interview and your contact information in password-protected files in a password-protected computer. Five years after completion of this research, I will destroy all the information. I will shred all the written information and delete all the electronic information including your contact information.

Further Information

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions related to participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the University of Alberta Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact:

principal researcher: Li Mao via [lmao1@ualberta.ca](mailto:lmao1@ualberta.ca) or at 001-780-7166050 and/or

co-supervisor Dr. Joe Wu via [jwu@ualberta.ca](mailto:jwu@ualberta.ca) and/or

co-supervisor Dr. Donna Chovanec via [chovanec@ualberta.ca](mailto:chovanec@ualberta.ca) .

## Consent Statement

I have read this form and the researcher has explained the research study to me. She has also given me the opportunity to ask questions and she has answered my questions. If I have other questions, she has told me whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above. I will receive a copy of this consent form after I sign it.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Name (printed) and Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name (printed) and Signature of researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Please initial below any additional items to which you agree:

I agree that the researcher can contact me for the follow-up research. \_\_\_\_\_

I agree that the researcher can audiotape the interview. \_\_\_\_\_

I agree that the researcher can use any parts of my daily language use logs, interview and personal writings in publications/presentations without using my real name or identity. \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix C  
Information Letter and Consent Form (Informants)

**Research Title:** Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) International Students' Language Learning Experiences in China

**Research Investigator:**

Name: Li Mao

Address: 7-104 Education North,

University of Alberta

Edmonton, AB, T6G 2G5

Email: lmao1@ualberta.ca

Phone number: 001-780-7166050

**Supervisor:**

Name: Dr. Donna Chovanec

Address: 7-144, Education North

University of Alberta

Edmonton, AB, T6G 2G5

Email: chovanec@ualberta.ca

Phone number: 001-780-4923690

Background

My name is Li Mao. I am a PhD student from the University of Alberta (Canada). I am doing the study described in this letter for my doctoral dissertation. Thank you for your interest in this study. Thank you for providing me with your contact information through the international student administrator of your university. I will use the information that you provide in my dissertation. I may also use it in journal articles and conference presentations.

Purpose

My area of study is adult education. I am particularly interested in how adults learn a foreign language through foreign language speaking activities. The purpose of this study is to understand North American international students' Chinese learning experiences in China. I am particularly interested in where, when and how they have taken part in Chinese speaking activities in China. I am also interested in how their understanding of themselves may have changed during their participation in Chinese speaking activities. The information you provide will help me to understand the social and educational context where international students' language learning and social experiences in China take place. The research findings will help CFL educators and Chinese universities know more about the needs of CFL learners in China. It will also help to create a more inclusive learning and living environment for them.

Study Procedures

If you agree to participate in this study, I will do one individual interview with you in your university (such as in your office or in a classroom), which will take about one hour. If you agree, I will audiotape the interview and transcribe it. If you like, I could provide you with a list of sample interview questions before the interview.

Benefits

Since international students are the major focus of your work, this research will give you an opportunity to think more about CFL international students' language learning experiences in China. It will help you to reflect about the social and educational context where their language learning and social experiences take place. This may be helpful to your future work in CFL teaching and/or international education. It will also help you to think more about how to create an inclusive environment for the CFL international students both on and off campus.



More generally, this research will help Chinese educators, programs and universities to know more about CFL international students' language learning and study abroad experiences in China. It will help to understand international students' social needs in China. It will help to think of possible ways to help them learn Chinese and take part in Chinese-speaking activities more effectively. Besides, this study will contribute to the foreign language learning theory, which is mainly based on English as a foreign language (EFL) learners in English-speaking countries.

#### Risk

There are minimal risks to being in this study, although there might be vague social risk when you try to do critiques of the Chinese institutions and social environment international student study in.

#### Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Even after you have agreed to participate in the study, you can withdraw at any point of this study. You also have the right, at any time during the study, to NOT answer questions or to end the interview.

You may withdraw your information from the study at any point for up to two weeks following the completion the interview. If you choose to withdraw, I will not use the information you have given me.

#### Confidentiality & Anonymity

I will use the information that you give me in my dissertation. I may also use it in journal articles and conference presentations. However, I will never use your real name or identity.

No one except me, Dr. Donna Chovanec and Dr. Joe Wu (my co-supervisors), and the University of Alberta Research Ethics Committee will be able to see the information you give me.

I will keep the written information, such as your consent form and any written notes from this research in a locked cabinet in my home. I will keep all the electronic information, such as the audiotaped interview (mp3 version), the transcript of the interview, and your contact information in password-protected files in a password-protected computer. Five years after the completion of this research, I will destroy all the information. I will shred all the written information and delete all the electronic information including your contact information.

#### Further Information

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions related to participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the University of Alberta Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact:

principal researcher: Li Mao via [lmao1@ualberta.ca](mailto:lmao1@ualberta.ca) or at 001-780-7166050 and/or  
co-supervisor Dr. Joe Wu via [jwu@ualberta.ca](mailto:jwu@ualberta.ca) and /or  
co-supervisor Dr. Donna Chovanec via [chovanec@ualberta.ca](mailto:chovanec@ualberta.ca).

**Consent Statement**

I have read this form and the researcher has explained the research study to me. She has also given me the opportunity to ask questions and she has answered my questions. If I have other questions, she has told me whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above. I will receive a copy of this consent form after I sign it.

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Participant's Name (printed) and Signature

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Date

---

Name (printed) and Signature of researcher

---

Date

Please initial below any additional items to which you agree:

I agree that the researcher can contact me for the follow-up research. \_\_\_\_\_

I agree that the researcher can audiotape the interview. \_\_\_\_\_

I agree that the researcher can use any parts of my interview in publications/presentations without using my real name or identity. \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix D  
Sample Interview Protocol (Participants)

**Research Title:** Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) International Students' Language Learning Experiences in China

**Researcher:** Li Mao

PhD student, Department of Educational Policy Studies  
Faculty of Education, University of Alberta, Canada

**A. Demographics:** nationality, language learning experiences and language environment in your home country, previous exposure to Chinese-speaking environment, international education experiences, etc.

**B. Interview questions:**

**General question:** What are your language learning and social experiences in China?

**Probing questions:**

1. Please tell me about your current CFL program in China and your learning and living environment in China.
2. For your CFL learning experiences in China, what were your expectations and preparations before coming to China?
3. What was your first impression of your CFL learning environment in China? What were your social experiences with native Chinese speakers when you arrived in China? Did this impression change later? If so, why did it change?
4. How, where and when have you participated in Chinese-speaking activities (in class, extracurricular, on campus, and off campus) in China?
5. If you look back to your study abroad life in China, has your understanding of who you are changed in any way? If so, how has it changed?
6. What role have "others" had in relation to these "identity" changes, such as people's attitudes towards you or responses when talking to you? What is your understanding of these changes?
7. What are your expectations to future supports for your CFL learning and your participation in Chinese social networks?
8. Is there anything else that you would like to add or tell me?
9. What did you learn from participating in this study?

Appendix E  
Sample Interview Protocol (Informants)

**Research Title:** Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) International Students' Language Learning Experiences in China

**Researcher:** Li Mao

PhD student, Department of Educational Policy Studies  
Faculty of Education, University of Alberta, Canada

**Background information:** working experiences with international students and in the field of international education, a general survey of your university's CFL programs and international education programs, etc.

**B. Interview questions:**

**General question:** What is your understanding of the Chinese-speaking environment that highly influences CFL international students' language learning, social participation and self-identity formation in China?

**Sub-questions:**

1. What are the teaching philosophies of the CFL programs in your university?
2. What are the international student administrative policies (regarding recruitment, accommodation, socialization, etc.) in your university?
3. What kind of language learning environment and opportunities do the CFL international students have on and off campus?
4. According to your own experiences and understanding, how, where and when have the CFL international students participated in the Chinese-speaking activities (in class, extracurricular, on campus and off campus) in China?
5. How do you think the Chinese social environment will influence CFL international students' understandings of themselves? According to your experiences, what are native Chinese people and other cultural groups' attitudes towards them?
6. What do you think are the biggest problems and main supports during CFL international students' language learning and study abroad life in China?
7. For the language learning and social experiences of the CFL students, what are the major improvements that could be made through the design and practices of the CFL programs, international education departments, Chinese universities, and the entire sociocultural environment in China?
8. Is there anything else that you would like to add or tell me?

