

**The Aftermath of the Pandemic: Exploring Transnational Identity Development among  
Chinese International Students in Canada**

by

Linxiao Wang

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of  
The University of Manitoba

In partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of

**MASTER OF EDUCATION**

Department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg

## **Abstract**

The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted a significant shift in the focus of international student migration (ISM) literature towards understanding and addressing the profound impact of the pandemic on international students. However, the existing literature primarily centers on their lived experiences within the host country, often overlooking the current reality of these students whose lives may transcend traditional geographical borders of nation-states. Despite the transnational nature of their lives enabled by accessible modes of transportation and the rapid development of online media technologies, this aspect remains inadequately acknowledged. To address this gap, adopting a transnational lens that scrutinizes localities in more than one nation-state and replaces dichotomies (home countries versus host countries) with the notions of fluidity can be helpful to illuminate a more nuanced and richer account (Nowicka, 2020; Toukan et al., 2020). Using life history interviews as the primary research method and a transnational lens as the theory, this paper aims to examine 1) the reported lived experiences of Chinese international students in Canada, especially during the pandemic period, and 2) how these lived experiences affect them in terms of their developing transnational identities? The results shed light on the struggles, challenges, and personal growth encountered by Chinese international students within the context of the pandemic, highlighting the complex, dynamic, and in-becoming nature of their transnational identity.

## **Acknowledgement**

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the following people for their invaluable contributions and unwavering support throughout the completion of this thesis.

First and foremost, I am very much indebted to my participants: Forrester, Maverick, Seven, Kevin, Hazel, and Patricia. Their genuine interest and willingness to share their time, life experiences, and perspectives made this research possible. Their invaluable contributions and cooperation are greatly appreciated.

A special thank you goes to my advisor, Dr. Sandra Kouritzin, for her exceptional guidance and support. Her expertise, patience, and encouragement have been instrumental in shaping my study and refining my data interpretation skills.

I would like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to the members of my thesis committee, Dr. Nathalie Piquemal, and Dr. Sreemali Herath, for their valuable insights, constructive criticism, and invaluable suggestions that have greatly enhanced the quality and depth of this work.

I would also like to say thank to my classmates at the University of Manitoba, as well as friends I have made in both China and Canada. In my transnational journey, they have become an essential part of my life, providing valuable ideas and continuous support that have propelled me forward.

Finally, I am most grateful for the support of my family. I owe a deep debt of gratitude to my parents, who have consistently provided both financial and emotional support. I am also grateful to my wife, who has been my pillar of strength, offering love, understanding, and encouragement, particularly during the challenging moments of my thesis.

## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to everyone who has helped me with not only its production but also my personal growth as a learner and a researcher.

I am deeply grateful to my advisor, Dr. Sandra Kouritzin, whose impact on my academic journey has been profound. Through her recognition of my abilities and her teachings on interpretation, she has shaped my perspective and inspired me to strive for excellence. In our countless discussions, Dr. Kouritzin emphasized the distinction between researchers and journalists is that the latter merely describe and summarize yet the former interpret. Her words have transformed my approach to research and instilled in me a deep appreciation for seeking a deeper understanding and contributing meaningfully to my field through interpretation.

I would also like to dedicate this thesis to my parents and my wife. Although they may not have made direct academic contributions, their impact on my journey cannot be overstated. Their unwavering support, high expectations, and relentless emotional encouragement have been my pillars of strength throughout this endeavor. Writing a thesis can be a rollercoaster of emotions, encompassing moments of joy, excitement, and stress. During the challenging times, my parents and my wife have been my rock, providing a nurturing environment where I can thrive academically and emotionally. Their belief in my abilities and their constant motivation have inspired me to persist and overcome obstacles along the way.

To my advisor, to my parents, to my wife, as well as all my committee members and friends who have helped me thrive, I dedicate this thesis with heartfelt appreciation for your endless support and love.

Linxiao Wang

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	2
Acknowledgement .....	3
Dedication .....	4
Table of Contents .....	5
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	7
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	11
Context: the COVID-19 Pandemic and its Aftermath.....	11
Internationalization of Higher Education.....	16
The Adjustment and Adaptation of International Students .....	22
Chapter 3: Methodology .....	28
Ontology and Epistemology Frameworks .....	28
Theoretical Lens .....	30
Conceptualizing Transnationalism .....	30
Transnational Identity.....	31
Transnationalism and Telecommunication.....	32
Research Method.....	34
Recruitment and Sampling.....	34
Participants .....	35
Data Collection.....	36
Data Analysis.....	38
Positionality.....	40
Ethical Considerations.....	42
Chapter 4: Life Histories of Chinese International Students.....	44
Forrester .....	44
Maverick.....	52
Seven.....	56
Kevin.....	60
Hazel.....	63
Patricia .....	68
Conclusion.....	74
Chapter 5: Thematic Analysis – Unpacking Lived Experiences and Transnational Identity.....	76
The Lived Experiences.....	76
From Dependent to Independent.....	76

Transnational Relationship –Support, Conflict and Reconciliation .....	78
Challenges and Resilience.....	82
Discrimination, Racism and Bias .....	86
From Disappointment to Satisfaction .....	88
Political Identity Shifts: Changing Attitudes and Performed Apathy.....	89
The Transnational Identity.....	92
Intercultural Competence.....	92
Multiple and Flowing Identities .....	97
Belonging and Localities.....	100
Chapter 6: Discussions .....	107
Unraveling the Profound Impact of the Pandemic.....	107
Travel Restrictions.....	107
Campus Closure and Online Learning .....	108
Online Media.....	111
Racial Microaggression .....	114
Unveiling the Development of Transnational Identity .....	116
The Impact of the Pandemic.....	116
Online Media.....	120
Transnational Negotiations: Managing Changes and Resolving Conflicts .....	122
Local Chinese Community.....	124
Transnational Futures .....	126
Conclusion and Recommendations .....	127
Recommendations for Chinese International Students.....	128
Recommendations for Higher Education Institutions.....	129
Recommendations for Future Research .....	131
References .....	133
Appendix A: Interview Structure.....	168
Appendix B: Recruitment letter .....	171
Appendix C: Consent Form .....	174
Table 1: Overview of Participants .....	37

## Chapter 1: Introduction

While the World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General, on May 5th, 2023, determined that COVID-19 no longer constitutes a public health emergency of international concern (WHO, 2023), it remains an established crisis that continues to spread across borders, races, social classes, genders, ages, and nationalities. With over 765.22 million cases and 6.92 million deaths as of May 3rd, 2023, it stands as one of the deadliest pandemics in history (WHO, 2023). The impact of COVID-19 extends beyond the significant loss of life and strain on healthcare systems. It has also resulted in profound transformations in our daily lives. One area that has been particularly affected on a global scale is higher education, with academic communities facing substantial challenges over the past three years. The pandemic has disrupted traditional learning models, forcing students and educators to adapt to remote and online formats. Simply at the onset of the outbreak, over 1.5 billion students across 190 countries were unable to physically attend school (UNICEF, 2020).

According to UIS (2023), more than 6.36 million students worldwide are pursuing their higher education abroad in 2020, up from 2 million in 2000. For these international students (ISs), moving abroad for higher education represents a means of improving personal and professional development (Calvo et al. 2021). On the other hand, they may face unique impediments to achieving the overall outcome, and the COVID-19 pandemic has only compounded these challenges. Campus closures and transitioning to the online learning, border closures and different handling measures implemented by students' home countries and host countries, the ongoing uncertainty in the waves of the pandemic, as well as the rise in anti-Asian sentiment have exacerbated feelings of isolation and stress that international students may already experience (Hswen et al., 2021; Leal Filho et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2015). Chinese

international students (CISs), in particular, may face additional difficulties and stress due to the pandemic's origins in China that unfortunately led to discrimination by the media, fear of COVID-19, and mixed messages from their social connections, as well as the already existing challenges of adjusting to a new culture and language (Ma & Miller, 2021).

Considering the ongoing pandemic with emerging variants and its significant aftermath, it is essential to gain a comprehensive understanding of the complex lived experiences and challenges faced by international students. This understanding should extend beyond the immediate crisis and encompass the lasting effects the pandemic may have on them in the post-pandemic period. To date, studies concerning ISs' adjustment issues have predominantly focused on the impact of the pandemic, and a handful of studies are interested in some particular group of ISs in Canada (e.g., Chinese ISs, one of the largest inbound student groups in Canadian higher education institutions). Recent studies have drawn attention to ISs' experiences during the initial outbreak when strict lockdown measures were taken and uncertainty for future was extremely high (e.g., Ge, 2021; Wang, 2022). After the first Omicron wave subsided in Canada in early 2022 and with relatively high vaccination coverage, the government made the decision to transition towards a strategy of "learning to live with the virus" (Miller, 2022). Subsequently, gradual easing of public health measures has taken place, leading Canadians towards a "new normal" in which COVID-19 may persist but is managed akin to a seasonal flu. As we embark on this new normal phase in Canada, it becomes crucial to explore how international students have been adapting to these changes and understand the significance of this new normal period for them. Lastly, it should also be noted that while the COVID-19 pandemic remains one of the most important contexts for this study, other factors can also impact the lived experience of ISs.

In most cases, the pandemic often acts as a contributory factor that amplifies existing challenges and influences their overall educational and life journey.

Transnationalism has been introduced by researchers in various research areas of social science as a useful concept to understand migration and mobility issues, such as language teaching and learning, construction of transnational identity, and social networks (e.g., De Fina, 2016; Lubbers et al., 2020; Park & Lee, 2022). While the definitions vary, it generally centers on cross-border practices and activities, regardless of the types of relationships involved (either social, political, economical or other sorts). This relationship-building is dynamic and continuously evolving, contributing to the construct of individuals' transnational identity and sense of belonging (Tedeschi et al., 2022). Transnationalism has experienced a substantial change of manifestation as technological advancement in telecommunication makes transnational connections much easier. The notion of "online transnationalism" emerges as a subset of relevant study (Starikov et al., 2018). Subsequently, questions like how memberships in multiple communities are formed online, how virtual social spaces affect migrants' identity and practices, and how transnationalism and online media connect and reinforce each other will be worth investigating in depth.

In this research, taking a micro-level transnational lens that focuses on individuals' practices relating to multiple localities (transnationalism from below; Smith & Guarnizo, 1998), I explored Chinese international students' lived experiences after the first few waves of the COVID-19 pandemic and examined how their lived experiences may impact their adjustment and future decisions in Canadian society. My research questions are:

- 1) What are the reported lived experiences of Chinese ISs in Canada during the pandemic period?

- 2) How do these lived experiences affect Chinese ISs in terms of their developing transnational identity?

This study is organized into seven chapters. Chapter 2 provides a brief introduction concerning the history and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic over the past three years. Combined with existing research, I discuss a wide range of challenges that people (including locals, new immigrants, and international students) may encounter during the pandemic in Canada. Following that, I summarize trends and distinct features of Internationalization of Higher Education (IHE) such as student mobility, rationales, and Internationalization at Home. A literature review is carried out to provide a holistic picture of ISs' adjustment and adaptation issues, with a particular focus on the impact of COVID-19 on ISs from the recent literature, including reports in popular media, given the currency and rapidly changing nature of the context.

Chapter 3 introduces the conceptual lens that guides this research – transnationalism. As transnationalism remains a broad concept across different research fields and is continuously confused with other concepts, I narrow it down to its main components that are relevant to ISM literature, such as transnational identity, telecommunication, and imagined community. This chapter also elaborates on the methodology utilized to construct the study and how my two research questions are appropriately answered.

Based on the life history interviews, Chapter 4 provides a summary of each case study regarding the lived experience of six participants, with my focus guided by transnationalism and the impact of the pandemic. Chapter 5 presents the findings of this paper in response to my research questions through a thematic analysis. In the final chapter, I further my discussion and conclude my thesis with recommendations for CISEs, higher education institutions, and future research.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Context: the COVID-19 Pandemic and its Aftermath

On December 31st, 2019, the first coronavirus cluster was reported in the Chinese city of Wuhan, and the WHO China Country Office was promptly informed (WHO, 2020). China then implemented strict lockdown measures in Wuhan in an attempt to contain the virus and prevent its spread to other countries. However, with the fast dispersion of the virus, WHO (2020) declared COVID-19 as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on January 30th, 2020, and officially declared it a pandemic on March 11th, 2020. At the time of writing, specific data regarding COVID-19 pandemic waves after 2023 is not available. However, it is notable that Canada has experienced multiple waves of the pandemic prior to this point: the first wave in March 2020, the second wave in September 2020, the third wave in March 2021, the fourth wave in September 2021, the fifth wave in January 2022, and the sixth wave in April 2022 (Lveitt et al., 2022; Stober, 2022). This study started after the sixth wave, when Omicron replaced Delta as the dominant strain of COVID-19. Compared with Delta, evidence suggests that this variant is more contagious, but the risk of hospitalization or death is lower (Ulloa et al., 2022).

A summary of the aftermath of the pandemic is shown as follows. At the beginning of this global pandemic, the direct consequences were strict travel restriction and lockdown measures, followed by massive layoffs and enduring impact on the economy. As a result of the economic crisis, Canada unveiled a full package of financial and social support for people, businesses, and organizations to promote recovery (See for detail in Béland et al, 2021; Department of Finance Canada, 2022). These responses are mainly characterized by the massive use of deficit spending, and when positive effects waned with the end of the fiscal stimulus, problems such as higher inflation started to appear (Azad et al. 2021). According to the two-year

data update on COVID-19 impacts in March 2022 (Statistics Canada, 2022), consumer inflation outpaced wage growth since the spring of 2021 – while the annual price for food and shelter rose by 5.7% and 6.2% respectively, the average hourly wage only saw a 2.4% increase. Hence, the continuous financial insecurity has been an important pandemic-related stressors for many people in Canada.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also created a perfect storm for conspiracy theorists (Joseph & Adam, 2020). Unlike other coronavirus outbreaks such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), the origin of COVID-19 remains unknown and has been constructed as a serious problem (Davey, 2020). The pandemic came at a critical juncture in China's relations with the West, leading to an escalation of tensions (Wang, 2020). Since the outbreak of the pandemic, China has been criticized for its role in the spread of COVID-19. The United States, in particular, blamed China for its mismanagement of public risk communication and lack of transparency during the outbreak. Due to the significant number of deaths in the US, former President Trump attempted to shift the blame onto China through scapegoating. This reached a climax when Trump began referring to COVID-19 as the "Chinese virus" during the early phases of the pandemic in the U.S., using it at least 20 times in tweets, interviews, and news conferences in mid-March 2020 (Costello et al., 2021). In addition, the "Wuhan lab leak" theory was raised in early 2020 and has continuously received renewed attention in today's media landscape (Page et al., 2021). Such discourses through public speaking and social media transformed a public health issue into a political crisis, fueling anti-Asian sentiment in the U.S. and its western allies, and exacerbating discrimination and prejudice against Asian across the world. China, on the other hand, tried to deflect the blame back to the U.S. by launching campaigns in social media to question the origin of COVID, accusing the US

army of bringing the virus to Wuhan and blaming the US government for its missteps and mishandling of the pandemic (Davey, 2020). Neither country provided convincing evidence, though. According to a WHO report in March 2022, after a full investigation of the joint WHO-China mission to Wuhan, four hypothesis was proposed: 1) introduction from an animal species to humans; 2) introduction through an intermediary animal and then to humans; 3) introduction to Wuhan via the (cold) food chain; 4) introduction through a laboratory incident (WHO, 2021). Although no conclusion was drawn in this report and further studies were called for, it indicated that laboratory origin of the pandemic was considered to be extremely unlikely. Despite the efforts of WHO, China-US relations have been significantly impacted by the pandemic, particularly in terms of public opinion towards each other. According to overseas polling agencies, the goodwill of the US public towards China has steadily declined, reaching its lowest point of this century. In contrast, negative views of each other are rapidly increasing, with the majority holding unfavorable opinions (Yuan, 2020).

Canada's practice and policy of multiculturalism have been widely acknowledged, yet this apparent successful record has also undergone challenges, as racial and ethnic conflicts and divisions resurface and proliferate during COVID-19 pandemic (Guo, 2021). Statistics from the Vancouver Police Department showed a 717% rise in hate crimes against East Asians from 2019 to 2020 in Canada. A Statistics Canada report in 2021 also suggested that police-reported hate crimes of all kinds rose sharply to 2,669 in 2020 from 1,951 the year prior (Ibrahim, 2022). Guo and Guo (2021) critically analyzed the incidents reported in Canada concerning racism toward Asians, revealing that the significant rise of reported hate crimes perpetrated against Asian Canadians resulted primarily from ignorance, fear, and misinformation related to the global pandemic. In relation to mental health, Wu et al. (2020) found that the current COVID-19

pandemic has had deleterious mental health impacts on all Canadians, but Chinese and Chinese-looking East Asian Canadians demonstrated a higher level of mental health symptoms as compared to white Canadians, with acute discrimination and rising anti-Asian attacks being proved to be one significant contributor.

The pandemic has also exerted a significant impact on higher education. There is no doubt that international student mobility has taken a massive hit amid the pandemic. Specifically, for Chinese students who had plans to study abroad in the future, concerns and challenges emerged immediately—a major shift came to the decisions of Chinese students and their destination choices of studying abroad. In a survey of over 10,000 Chinese students by the British Council (Durnin, 2020), a majority of respondents reported that they were very concerned about health & wellbeing (79%) and personal safety (87%), with 22% being likely or very likely to cancel their study plans and 39% undecided. These concerns may be directly related to the threat of COVID-19 pandemic but can also be the consequence of narrative battles (Davey, 2020) between China and the West, as well as the increasing number of racial abuses reported by both international media (e.g., Guo, 2020) and Chinese media (e.g., China Daily; Li, 2021). Furthermore, the pandemic not only decreased the international student mobility but also disturbed the mobility of Chinese international students. In a study examining Chinese students' overseas study plans during the pandemic, Mok et al. (2021) found most English-speaking nations are witnessing a drop in terms of the most popular post-COVID study destinations, whereas their East Asian counterparts are expecting an increase—although the US and UK still remained the most popular study destinations, their Anglophone brothers Australia, Canada, and New Zealand were replaced by Hongkong, Japan, and Taiwan in this study.

To tackle the pandemic, nations took two different strategies – Living with COVID-19 strategies and (dynamic) Zero-COVID policy. The former strategy viewed viral spread as inevitable, seeking to either mitigate the most acute and severe health impacts or allow controlled spread until some degree of herd immunity is achieved (e.g., the US, the UK to be the first), while the latter prioritised, to varying degrees, the containment and elimination of the COVID-19 Virus – for example China, South Korea, New Zealand, and Vietnam (Llupia et al, 2020). Since late 2021, most countries have phased out the Zero-COVID policy and gradually removed their public health measures due to their improved vaccination coverage and the increased transmissibility of the COVID-19 Virus such as Delta and Omicron. With its announcement of 20 optimized anti-pandemic measures in November 2022 and the 10-point notice to further ease countrywide COVID-19 quarantine measures in early December 2022, China was arguably the last country that called off the Zero-COVID policy (Tu, 2022). For most of the year 2022, China walked an opposite path to other countries, with nearly all measures tightened to prevent the viral spread. For example, strict Flight Circuit Breaker Measures continued to be taken by the Civil Aviation Administration of China— if 5 arriving passengers in a flight were found positive in their nucleic acid tests after arrival, the airline’s operation on that specific route was be suspended for 2 weeks (CAAC, 2020). In January 2022 alone, 142 inbound flights were suspended due to the cases of COVID-19 on the flight (Niewenhuis, 2022). Besides, all passengers arriving from overseas including inbound Chinese citizens had to undergo a minimum of 14-day centralized quarantine in a government-designated hotel on arrival, and an additional seven days (or more) of health monitoring might still be required (Huld, 2022). Within China's borders, strict lockdown measures were imposed whenever a certain number of COVID-19 cases were reported. For example, during the outbreak in Shanghai from February 28 to

August 7, 2022 (Liu, 2022), along with 2-month strict lockdown (mandatory quarantine at own residence), the use of *Fangcang* hospital (turning residential buildings, schools, convention center, hotels into quarantine centers), mass testing (every resident within every 24 or 48 hours, depending on the requirements) was also implemented (Xu, 2022). Urumqi, the capital city of Xinjiang Province, was under lockdown and mass testing for more than 100 days since August 2022 (Chen, 2022).

It is apparent that cross-border travel for Chinese international students became particularly difficult because of exhausting quarantine requirements, frequent flight curtailment and city lockdowns, but they were not the only obstacles they needed to overcome. According to Hu et al. (2020), CISs returning home were constantly described as “irresponsible virus carriers” on social media platforms such as Weibo. Yu (2021) pointed out that public discourses attacking students quickly gained popularity in the Chinese cyberspace. Some examples are: “You were not here when we were developing the motherland, but you are the fastest to fly back thousands of miles to poison the Chinese here” (家乡建设你不在, 万里投毒你最快) or “The motherland treated you as a child, but you treated the motherland as a fool” (祖国拿你当亲人, 你把祖国当冤大头). As a result, CIS are caught in the middle of politics and the pandemic when they travel and live across borders, being racialized in their host country and labeled as out-group members in their home country. Therefore, exploring how CISs view their different identities across nations and cope with this marginalization by both their home country and the host country during pandemic, and how these perceptions may affect their decision-making process are important topics to explore for this and future research.

### **Internationalization of Higher Education**

Since the 1990s, the increasing globalization of economies and societies, along with the end of the Cold War, has created a context for adopting a more strategic approach towards the Internationalization of Higher Education. As a result, promoting IHE today has been placed top in the agendas of higher education institutions in not only the developed world but also emerging and developing societies (De Wit, 2020). Higher education has long been characterized by its inherent international nature, with views and activities that transcend borders. Scholarly travel and transfer of knowledge, despite often taken for granted, have traditionally served as the core element of internationality of higher education (Teichler, 2017). There has been much debate regarding the definition of IHE, but a generally accepted version was proposed by Knight (2008), who defined it as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education” (p. 21). IHE has different meanings to different people, taking various forms across the global landscape (e.g., between developed nations and developing societies) and having created its localized meaning and practices. It is evident through a collection of quantitative data about the growing international degree-seeking student population, and of international talents and scholars, of students going for credits abroad, of agreements and memoranda of understanding, as well as of co-authored international publications in high impact academic journals (De Wit, 2020). In the context of Canada, a 2014 UNIVCAN survey showed that fully 95% of universities identify internationalization as part of their strategic planning and 82% view it as one of their top five priorities (Universities Canada, 2014).

There are two primary streams concerning the Internationalization of Higher Education: Internationalization Abroad and Internationalization at Home. To begin with, Internationalization abroad encompasses all forms of education that occur across borders, and one of the key focal

points being the notable increase in international student mobility (Knight, 2006). According to CBIE's survey of its membership in 2016, among CBIE member institutions' internationalization priorities, IS recruitment (20%) slightly edges out other areas such as increasing the number of students engaged in education abroad (18%) and internationalization at home (15%). IS mobility in Canada witnessed a striking increase in the past two decades - there are 530,540 ISs who have valid study permits (approximately four-fold compared with 122,660 in 2000), despite the recent decline of 17.05% in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Statista, 2021). The emerging world, Asian developing countries in particular, continues to be the major source for inbound students in Canada. In specific, India and China together accounted for over a half of all ISs (180,275 and 116,935, respectively) in Canada higher institutions in 2021, followed by Vietnam, France, and Republic of Korea (IRCC, 2022).

Four categories of rationales are generally believed to drive internationalization— political, economic, academic, and sociocultural (Chankseliani, 2018; Knight, 2004). It should be noted though that these rationales have never been fixed or singular and are mutually inclusive and moving over time and space (Bamberger et al., 2019). In the recent two decades, the economic rationales and neoliberal ideology seem to have become increasingly hegemonic. Belief in the market as an efficient path to “good governance” led to decreased government funding for education in Commonwealth countries, requiring universities to become “entrepreneurial” in revenue generation (Pan, 2021). As a result, ISs are largely framed in higher education policy and practice as the neoliberal discourse “cash” (i.e., as economic asset; Stein & Andrepotti, 2016). As nations and institutions step up their efforts to recruit ISs, tuition fees from ISs have emerged as a significant source of revenue. A report from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC, 2021) indicates that ISs (representing less than 20% of the total

student population), who pay substantially higher tuition than domestic students, contributed an estimated 40% of all tuition fees and accounted for almost \$4 billion in annual revenue for Canadian universities in 2018/2019. Additionally, international students need to cover expenses such as housing, food, transportation, utilities, and other necessities using funds brought from their home countries. It is estimated that, in 2019, ISs contributed \$21.6 billion to Canada's gross domestic product (GDP) and supported almost 170,000 jobs for Canada's middle class (IRCC, 2019). In other words, they are a unique group closely tied to the economy of both the higher education institutions and local communities, creating a wide range of employment opportunities. Furthermore, ISs are considered as a promising pool of skilled individuals for the job market of host countries. According to The Government of Canada's International Education Strategy 2019–2024 (Government of Canada 2019), ISs are described as “excellent candidates for permanent residency: they are relatively young, proficient in at least one official language, have Canadian educational qualifications, and can help address this country's current and pending labour market needs, particularly for highly skilled workers” (p.5). Meanwhile, most ISs do intend to stay and work in Canada. A survey conducted by Canadian Bureau of International Education (Esses et al., 2018) suggested that a large percentage of ISs expressed plans to apply for permanent residency (68%) and seek employment in Canada after completing their studies (65%), despite the challenges and barriers they may encounter along the way.

The multicultural/intercultural dimension brought about by internationalization apparently has huge potential to add value to the learning, teaching, and researching environment in university. Hence, there is a growing emphasis on “Internationalization at Home”, another stream of internationalization. This stream aims at cultivating the multicultural capabilities of all students and recognizes the importance of fostering an inclusive and diverse learning

environment. As international sojourners adjust and start thriving in the host cultural context, they develop intercultural skills that local learners need but do not possess (Haigh, 2014). Their unique lived experiences and set of intercultural skills are valued in not only classroom but also this increasingly globalized world. Therefore, systematically engaging ISs, along with the intercultural dimensions they bring in, to create the meaningful interaction between domestic and international peers, can contribute to the development of intercultural competence and perspectives for both, making university truly “international” (Montgomery & McDowell, 2009). In other words, IHE can also help domestic students compete successfully in an increasingly cosmopolitan world of work by expanding their intercultural and cross-cultural competency (Haigh, 2014). Of course, the concept of Internationalization at Home cannot be equated with mere IS presence, regardless of it being one key element. As Beelen & Jones (2015) proposed, Internationalization at Home is “the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments” (p. 69). Consequently, it should be acknowledged that there is the need for a reflexive, iterative and constructive dialogue within higher education communities to determine the scope, scale, content, and pedagogy that characterise an “international” university (Robson, 2011).

On the other hand, while IHE does bring economic development and the intercultural dimensions, it has also led to the emergence of certain problems. Concerns have grown that internationality might often be conflicting with quality, economic rationales of internationalisation might undermine academic approaches, and “international understanding” and “global citizenship” might have lost their position as core values of internationality of higher education (Teichler, 2017). In a research study exploring discrepancies between policies and IS

experiences in a Canadian university, Guo and Guo (2017) reported that although at the policy level the university emphasized Internationalization at Home, in practice it is still, from the perspective of ISs, rather limited in various aspects such as the learning material, opportunities for interaction, and levels of supports. Internationalization in HE is, or at least should be, a strategic approach to enhancing the quality of education, facilitating research, and providing services to the increasingly globalized society. Probably as De Wit (2019) summarized, the main misconception about current internationalization is that we consider internationalization too much as a goal in itself instead of as a means to an end.

Due to the long-lasting influence of COVID-19 since 2020, IS mobility in higher education is experiencing its decline for the first time in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Nonetheless, the trend of internationalization seems unlikely to stop in any near future. According to Choudaha (2017, 2021), the pandemic is shaping the fourth wave of international mobility in global higher education, with the visa and immigration policies in some international student destination (e.g., a new points-based immigration system in the UK) becoming more welcoming to global talents. In 2021, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) also announced it would be launching six streams to provide additional immigration pathways to international graduates and essential workers living in Canada during the pandemic, among which the stream for IS graduates expected to process 40,000 applications that year (Thevenot & El-Assal, 2021). In the process of IHE, nations and institutions will continue to compete against each other, resulting in favorable policies. However, the major issue nowadays should probably draw attention to a more comprehensive, more intentional, and less elitist (for all students and staff) process, less focused on mobility and economic benefits, but with the goal to enhance the quality of education and research and to promote the interaction among all students and staff (de Wit et al., 2015).

The above literature review summarizes a set of concepts concerning internationalization in higher education institutions and current situation in Canada. Potential problems of IHE are also specified to inform the research.

### **The Adjustment and Adaptation of International Students**

Research studies concerning IS adjustment and adaptation have gained burgeoning attention since the 2000s, when Higher Education Institutions across the globe started increasing participation rates in study abroad programs (Jackson, 2018). Since the COVID-19 pandemic broke out at the end of 2019, the research focus in this area has shifted toward the various impacts of the pandemic on international students. As a unique sub-group of cultural sojourners, ISs are defined as people who are undertaking a full program of study outside of the country where they have received their prior education (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2009). The adjustment and adaptation of ISs in the host countries are worth thorough investigation for at least four reasons: 1) ISs are a fast-growing group that is fostering a more diverse campus environment, currently numbering over 6 million people worldwide (UNESCO, 2021); 2) ISs are a unique sub-segment of cross-cultural sojourners that can be distinguished from other sojourner groups because their primary goal is academic achievement, which can be referred to as evidence of learning and be measured by successful completion of course requirements, grade point average (GPA), satisfactory academic standing, or retention (Andrade, 2006); 3) ISs are of increasing importance when higher institutions seek to expand its effort of internationalization at home to promote all student's development of global, international, and intercultural competencies (Soria & Troisi, 2014), instead of merely focusing on the number; 4) ISs as a unique student population become more vulnerable (yet often ignored) during and after COVID-19 pandemic, as their temporary immigrant status excluded them from most government relief

programs despite their need for financial and social support (Firang & Mensah, 2021), along with other additional challenges such as travel restrictions and campus closure during the pandemic.

Before delving into theoretical foundations and existing empirical studies, terminological clarification in this area should be foregrounded. A wide array of similar terms has been used to characterize the process or changes experienced by sojourners in a foreign country, such as acculturation (Berry, 2005; Ward & Rana, 1999), adjustment and adaptation (Young & Schartner, 2014), and cross-cultural transition (Ward & Kennedy, 2001). To avoid confusion and ambiguity due to the different uses of these terms, I followed the two main conceptual frames of reference summarized by Young & Schartner (2014) — “adjustment” and “adaptation”. The former refers to the dynamic, interactive processes involved in functioning in the new academic environment (Anderson, 1994), while “adaptation” represents the outcomes of these adjustive processes (Pitts, 2005). In this study, my aim was to explore the dynamic process of how ISs adjust and negotiate their transnational identity at their campus and in the host country, focusing on the process rather than measuring the outcomes of their sojourn. Therefore, throughout the thesis, I will consistently use the term “adjust” and “adjustment” to describe this process.

With the changing student demographics, media is directing its focus toward the proliferation of the IS group and the impact of their participation in higher education and local communities. In a project examining news media representation of international students’ participation in Canadian universities and colleges, Anderson (2020) revealed the Canadian news media’s tendency to construct issues related to ISs and internationalization into one or a combination of four broad macro themes: Canada as benevolent and ideal, international students and internationalization as commodified assets, international students and internationalization as threats and the strategic neutrality of data. Of these, it is found that the theme of IS as “foreigner

threat” accounted for almost one-quarter of the total corpus. With the outbreak of COVID-19, this phenomenon seemed to become more explicit and internalized by the Canadian society. Koo et al. (2021) identified three key themes that encapsulated ISs’ experiences and perceptions of racism: explicit discrimination and fear of threats, feelings of being unwelcome and unsafe, and navigating tensions of relief and isolation. Chen and Wen (2021) also indicated that there was, before the pandemic, implicit racism directed toward Chinese ISs in the academia, while explicit racist attack is more evident during and after the outbreak of the pandemic.

Apart from racism, ISs are also confronted with a significant transformation in the educational landscape. As discussed earlier, academic achievement is a major outcome for ISs during their sojourn. Among the various academic adjustment challenges, the shift from face-to-face classes to fully online courses due to temporary border closures and lockdown measures stands out as one of the most significant. This sudden transition poses considerable difficulties for all individuals involved, including instructors, faculty, staff, and both domestic and international students. However, it is important to acknowledge that international students may encounter additional obstacles during this transition. Existing literature on online studying has already suggested that although online learning is accepted and can meet the basic learning needs in general, students are dissatisfied with it (Kimura, 2020; Tang et al., 2020). In a multicultural online class, there are many cultural barriers that must be addressed such as language problems, lack of multicultural content, time zone differences, and communication tools, all of which can negatively impact students’ participation in online courses (Liu et al., 2010). Overcoming these potential cultural barriers requires time and effective training for both students and instructors. Furthermore, the absence of students' body language and non-verbal cues in online classes can

impede teachers from making immediate adjustments to their teaching approach. Consequently, teachers may struggle to meet the specific needs of students (Nambiar, 2020).

During the pandemic, the sudden transition to online learning put unprecedented pressure on the Internet's infrastructure (Favale et al., 2020). Although students in Canada can usually have reliable infrastructure and stable internet connection, ISs starting their program in their home countries do not necessarily have the equal access, especially those from less advantaged backgrounds in developing countries (Tadesse & Muluye, 2020). Besides, many studies have shown that engagement and participation vary significantly among students with different cultural backgrounds (Wang & BrckaLorenz, 2018; Zhao et al., 2005). In a recent comparative study, Cranfield et al. (2021) revealed that different cultural backgrounds also predict a noticeable difference in student engagement, participation, and learning skills when all services migrate to digital platforms. More importantly, learning online with reduced social interaction proved to be a real challenge for ISs during the pandemic, because of their limited cultural knowledge of the host country, as well as the valuable insights that typically arise from face-to-face teaching and social interactions (Koris et al., 2021). Overall, online learning alone might not be the ideal approach to higher education. As COVID-19 pandemic mandates are lifted, how we can effectively integrate the advantages of online learning with traditional in-person teaching methods and how the benefits of online learning can inform classroom practices are worth further investigation.

During their pursuit of a degree in a host country, ISs undergo significant life changes with their relocation to the new place. Sociocultural adjustment can be rather multifarious given that the mundane life of an IS entails a variety of facets such as finding suitable housing, establishing social contacts, managing meals, and dealing with the weather. The successful

integration of ISs relies, to a large extent, on social interaction and friendship formation with host-national students (Robinson et al., 2020). For a considerable period, there was a widely held belief that enhancing the diversity of the student body would lead to mutual understanding and friendships between international and local students (Leask 2015). However, recent literature suggests that this is something that does not just happen easily. First, forming bonds with fellow students from abroad is often easier compared to establishing relationships with local students, because of a shared status as student sojourners and shared interests in exploring new cultures and forging new friendships (Moore & Popadiuk, 2011). Language is also a major barrier that can impede international students' attempts to make friends and interact with locals (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Now, during the COVID-19 pandemic, when stringent government policies were implemented and most public sites closed, social interaction became more difficult for ISs. These challenges can impact the experiences of ISs in the host country and their perception of their own identities, and as a result shape, to a large extent, their future decisions. Through a transnational lens that compares two or more national contexts, Hari et al. (2021) explored the experiences of ISs living in Canada during pandemic with the closures of borders and shutdowns of public places. The study suggested that ISs are negotiating the dilemma of staying or leaving Canada based on the unique circumstances of their lived realities, including but not limited to housing insecurities resulting from campus closures, unemployment due to terminated internships and lay-offs, and balancing short-term financial and psycho-social costs with long-term career and immigration goals. ISs are often recognized as a valuable pool of skilled individuals and ideal candidates for permanent residence in Canada. If this is true, it makes perfect sense for the government and universities to provide proportionate support. To this end, more theoretically informed and evidence-based research that aims to understand the complexity

of ISs' lived experiences and establish a holistic system of IS adjustment to address the diverse needs during and after the pandemic is still needed (Tikhonova et al, 2021).

Research studies paid extensive attention to the psychological condition of international students. According to a review conducted by Alharbi and Smith (2018), a variety of psychological adjustment challenges that ISs may encounter during the process of studying abroad were documented, including stress levels, loneliness, depression, anxiety, and maintaining wellbeing. Evidence shows that racialized international students face more significant barriers to mental health and psychological well-being (Wei & Bunjun, 2021). Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a significant increase in reported instances of racial discrimination against individuals of Asian descent. A recent study focusing on neo-racist incidents identified that ISs of color have been perceiving explicit discrimination and fear of threats, feelings of being unwelcome and unsafe, and tensions of relief and isolation since the pandemic (Koo et al., 2021). Feelings of loneliness and homesickness are also frequently reported by ISs as a result of minimal presence of students on campus and lack of opportunities to socialisation with peers due to the pandemic (Tavares, 2021). One study focusing on Chinese ISs notes a series of emerging risk factors that have exposed them to unprecedented adversity, including academic barriers, mental issues, health threats, and racial prejudices (Ge, 2021). Two years after the declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic, provinces and territories in Canada have transitioned to living with the virus, with most public health measures, such as mask mandates, being lifted, thereby placing the responsibility on individuals to make their own decisions (Miller, 2022). As the pandemic is still ongoing, further examination is needed to understand how past and current lived experiences may shape the perception and identities of ISs.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### Ontology and Epistemology Frameworks

The ontological and epistemological assumptions made by researchers are crucial aspects of any research because they are usually the first ideas in developing a study and can determine what direction research is heading and how research is conducted (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Different frameworks are introduced in qualitative studies based on their philosophical assumptions. For this research, I argue that the paradigm of interpretivism is applied.

Interpretivism, despite variations in its understanding among scholars, is primarily a theoretically developed approach that stands in contrast to the positivist paradigm. It adopts a relativist ontology and subjective epistemology. Ontology, in simple terms, seeks the nature of reality. Relativists suggest that no reality can exist independently of the human mind and socially constructed meanings, and thus there is no single shared reality to be captured (Ritchie & Lewis 2003). In other words, there are multiple realities because of individuals' perceptions and interpretations.

Epistemology, on the other hand, concerns the nature of knowledge and how we may come to know it. Subjective epistemology rejects the idea that subject and object, observer and observed, or mind and world can be separated, holding the belief that what constitutes knowledge depends on how people perceive and understand reality. Therefore, each individual observes the world from a specific place of purpose and interest (Moon & Blackman, 2014). From an interpretivism perspective, researchers strive to “understand, explain, and demystify social reality through the eyes of different participants” (Cohen et al, 2007, p. 19). Incorporating these diversifying views to help look into phenomena, interpretivist researchers can not only

describe objects, human or events, but also seek to gain a deep understanding of them in a social context with thick descriptions obtained (Pham, 2018).

Nonetheless, interpretivism has faced criticism primarily for two reasons— limited generalizability and subjectivity. When reality is relative and differs from person to person, it becomes impossible to arrive exactly at the same interpretation to other situations or for other people. Hence, knowledge generated within the interpretive paradigm has limited transferability as it is often fragmented and cannot be unified into a coherent body (Scotland, 2012). In addition, although participants will be given a voice to describe and interpret in their own account, they have limited control over the research data in the end. It is researchers who produce the final theorized accounts that represent the sociological understandings of participants (Danby & Farrell, 2004). For this reason, the outcomes of research are inevitably influenced by researchers' academic focuses, previous experiences, and belief systems, as well as their positionalities as insiders (or outsiders). Researchers need to indicate their “interpretive awareness” to acknowledge the subjectivity they bring to the research process and how they take steps to address the implications of the subjectivity (Weber, 2004).

Therefore, following the interpretivist view, I acknowledge that the lived experiences of Chinese ISs are inherently relative and diverse, shaped by their unique backgrounds and unique life journeys. In this research, I aim to explore and comprehend these experiences by considering diverse perspectives from participants. My goal is to interpret the nuances and meanings they attach to their narratives, taking into account their personal, cultural, and social contexts. However, it is essential to acknowledge that, despite my best efforts in self-reflection and awareness, my own beliefs and biases may still cast an influence on my interpretation and findings.

## **Theoretical Lens**

### ***Conceptualizing Transnationalism***

Cross-border activities have always existed throughout our history. Transnationalism in any sense is not a new phenomenon, but rather a different perspective to guide the research investigation and help understand the reality that is often neglected (Portes et al., 1999). Due to the wide range of political, economical, and sociocultural dimensions related to cross-border activities, as well as the inner processual and in-becoming character of transnationalism, it is difficult to draw a precise theoretical definition (Tedeschi et al., 2022). Starting with the broader meaning, Vertovec (1999) defined transnationalism as “multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the border of nation-states” (p. 447). This definition comprises the two mainstreams of current transnational studies— “from below” and “from above”. The majority of scholars who hold the concept of “transnationalism from below” focus on the micro-level migrant practices relating to their country of origin in economic, cultural and political terms, while those in favor of “transnationalism from above” investigate from a macro point of view, conceptualizing home country policies that channel the transnational activities of migrants (Hourani, 2012; Smith & Guarnizo, 1998). To scrutinize the lived experiences of international students, in this study I followed the former mainstream of transnationalism from a viewpoint of individuals and civil society, looking at how migrants construct and maintain transnational relations with both the home country and host country (Marotta, 2011).

Transnationalism as a theoretical lens primarily centres around immigrants and dispersed ethnic groups (Vertovec, 2001). However, this lens can also be applied to other mobile populations, such as international students. Despite their legal status as temporary residents, ISs often share common characteristics, and many aspire to become permanent residents in the future

(Hazen & Alberts, 2006). To date, there are only a handful of studies that take this lens to investigate ISs' practices across borders (e.g., Hari et al., 2021; Li & Stodolska, 2006; Rizvi, 2010). Transnationalism can be associated with IHE –the rapid rise in the global mobility of ISs has directly resulted in the growth of transnational practices in the last few decades.

Understanding and interpreting these transnational practices have implications for necessary changes needed in higher education institutions during internationalization. Therefore, more connections can and should be made between transnationalism and adjustment issues of international students in ISM literature.

### ***Transnational Identity***

Transnationalism not only emphasizes the physical movement across national borders, but also is deeply intertwined with identity - how people see or imagine themselves, how they are related to the social worlds, and how they are seen and positioned by others in their transnational life (Duff, 2015; Norton, 2000). Following a post-structuralist perspective, identity is governed by a range of “subject positions”, approved by their community or culture, and is available to them via particular discourses within a given social context (Baxter, 2016).

Therefore, the characterizations of identity are dynamic, subjective, and context-dependent rather than fixed or unitary. In a similar vein, transnationalism complicates the assumptions and discourses concerning the notion of identity in migrant studies (Sánchez & Kasun, 2012).

Conventional migration studies usually focused on the post-arrival lives of migrants (Nowicka, 2020), with most adjustment and identity issues primarily considered in the context of the host country. Transnationalism, on the other hand, underscores the fact that people nowadays live in social worlds that are stretched between, or dually located in, two or more nation-states (Vertovec, 2001). As individuals migrate across borders, they inevitably undergo linguistic,

social, and cultural upheaval that can have a substantial impact on how they perceive and assume their identities. Each locality can represent a range of identity-conditioning factors, including “histories and stereotypes of local belonging and exclusion, geographies of cultural difference and class/ethnic segregation, racialized socio-economic hierarchies, degree and type of collective mobilisation, access to and nature of resources, and perceptions and regulations surrounding rights and duties” (Vertovec, 2001, p. 578). Therefore, transnational identity acknowledges the multi-geographical nature of migrants who originate from a specific locality but lead their lives in another (Esteban-Guitart & Vila, 2015), and the translational lens conceives identity as unstable, mixed, and flowing. In the existing literature, Remennick (2002), for example, suggested that many transmigrants developed cultural hybridism, mixing the lifestyles and languages of both the host and home countries. Gu et al. (2010) found that the particular living and studying environment of international students can facilitate changes -- they may develop two sets of different values or sometimes feel in the middle. Anderson (2019) noted “a flowing space”, where ISSs try to make sense of their identities and belongings through formative experiences and positionalities during their study abroad. In summary, transnationalism scrutinizes localities in more than one nation-state (Nowicka, 2020), and replaces dichotomies (home countries versus host countries, or here versus there) with the notions of fluidity and flow to illuminate a more nuanced and richer account of migrants’ life and practices (Toukan et al., 2020).

### ***Transnationalism and Telecommunication***

Apart from the concept of identity, the notion of telecommunication (or Information communication technologies, ICTs; Cuban, 2014) has been associated with transnationalism. The purpose of telecommunication is to facilitate the exchange of information among users,

regardless of the distances in between. In the past, only a small number of migrants were able to maintain regular communication transnationally with their families and relatives, and friends, mainly due to the high cost of frequent travel and phone calls. However, the advent of affordable and user-friendly ICTs including hardware (e.g., phone technologies, computers, and digital camera) and software platforms (online media such as Facebook, WhatsApp and WeChat) has allowed for the virtual connection in lieu of geographical proximity (Bacigalupe & Lambe, 2011). Although digital divides such as access to the internet, level of online activities, and social networking site usage still exist based on various demographic factors (Haight et al., 2014), those gaps are gradually being bridged as electronic devices, internet, and social media become ubiquitous across the globe. During the COVID-19 pandemic, such online media played a pivotal role in maintaining social connections – not only did the use increased but also those platforms were repurposed to meet the increasing needs of virtual communication (Yang et al., 2020).

The continuing pandemic inevitably results in increasing challenges for international students abroad, which has heightened their reliance on seeking support through their transnational connections from home country (Hari et al., 2021). It is important, though, to note that retaining transnational ties with people in the home country cannot replace their local social networks (Ryan, 2015). On the contrary, intense virtual communication may even enhance the sense of separation of individuals in the host country. For example, Verdery et al. (2018) suggested that sustaining friendships in the country of origin can potentially lead to the withdrawal from their social networks in the country of residence. Moreover, as ethnic media and social media are increasingly present in our transnational life, disinformation campaigns continue to thrive online (Acker & Donovan, 2018). The information gaps provide space for

imagination and preconceptions about life on the other sides of borders (Tedeschi et al., 2022), leading to the often-used notion of “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1983). In other words, the information obtained through transnational ties and local networks can shape the decision-making of ISs regarding whether to stay or return after graduation, as they may engage in imaginative processes to envision their future paths. In summary, assumptions such as affordable and accessible telecommunication (online media in particular), flowing and in-becoming identities, and transnational connections with their home country and host country are embedded in transnationalism. Applying the transnational lens, therefore, can provide valuable insights and perspectives into the intricate and dynamic dimensions of international students' transnational lives amidst the COVID-19 pandemic in this study.

## **Research Method**

### ***Recruitment and Sampling***

I employed a convenience sampling method to recruit Chinese ISs for this study, selecting participants based on their accessibility, availability, and willingness to participate. As a CIS myself, I leveraged my connections within the local Chinese community in Winnipeg and utilized WeChat<sup>1</sup> as the platform for recruitment. From October 2022 to November 2022, I posted a message a few times on WeChat Groups and WeChat Moments, providing a brief introduction to my research and my contact information to make my research known to the community.

Due to the nature of life history case studies, it was more challenging than I expected to recruit participants. Despite some responses from interested CISs, most hesitated to participate

---

<sup>1</sup> WeChat, with over 1 billion monthly active users, is the most popular social media application used by Chinese people; there are many communities on WeChat including the U of M Chinese International Students group (2022), which currently has more than 400 members.

because they were less willing to share their personal stories and feelings or were afraid of not having much to say. In order to address their concerns and build trust, I was quite active in the WeChat group, sharing information (not limited to my research, but information in general) and answering their specific questions regarding my research (e.g., my purpose and interview questions, explaining what I mean by transnationalism or identity). It was also made clear that a drink (coffee or bubble tea at participants' choice) would be offered before the interview, and a compensation at a flat rate of \$10 for travel expenses like parking and bus fare was mentioned. The recruitment lasted from October 2022 to November 2022.

### *Participants*

After two-month effort, I managed to recruit a total of 6 participants. My criteria for the recruitment are Chinese ISs who are or recently have been full-time undergraduate students at the University of Manitoba, aged over 18 years old, and have been in Winnipeg for more than 6 months. Participants needed to be willing to take be interviewed in either Mandarin or English and be audio recorded. Chinese ISs who were learning remotely in their home country or those who just came to Canada (e.g., less than 6 months) were excluded because their exposure to Canadian society may be relatively limited.

All participants signed consent forms and were asked to select pseudonyms for the interviews to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of the research. Some participants picked pseudonyms by themselves, whereas the others asked me to do so. No real names were disclosed in the data or in this research paper. All participants are at a relatively young age - between 19 and 26 - and are pursuing diverse academic majors. At the time of interviews, Kevin was the only one who hadn't yet contracted the COVID-19 virus. It is noteworthy that although I expressed a preference for conducting in-person interviews and highlighted the associated

benefits, only two participants chose to be interviewed in person, while the remaining four preferred online interviews via Zoom. This preference for online interviews may be attributed to the impact of the pandemic on our preferences for meeting arrangements. The overview of the participant information can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Overview of Participants*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Length of study at the U of M</b>	<b>The time spent in Canada<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Major</b>	<b>How they were interviewed</b>
Forrester	3 years	3 years	25	Economics	In-person
Maverick	4 years	4.5 years	24	Computer Science	Zoom
Seven	4 years (including a temporary leave)	3 years	22	Economics	Zoom
Kevin	4 years	2 years in total	25	Computer Science	Zoom
Hazel	5 years	5.5 years	26	Athletic therapy to Kinesiology	Zoom
Patricia	1.5 years	1.5 years	19	Nursing	In-person

*Data Collection*

In-depth life history interviews in Mandarin were the main source of data. Overall, these interviews were semi-structured and one-on-one, and conducted in private locations (one at participant's working office, one at U of M library study room, the others via Zoom). During life history interviews, I always stuck to the guiding principles of to follow rather than lead, to listen rather than query, and to hold back rather than probe (Kouritzin, 2000). In subsequent interviews,

---

<sup>2</sup> Some participants took online courses at their home country during the pandemic, therefore their time spent in Canada may be different from their length of study. At the same time, some participants had graduated before the interviews and either found the job or continued to study in Canada, so their stay in Canada is longer than the length of their study.

I utilized the transcripts from previous interviews to ask follow-up questions that sought further information or clarification on specific points or examples (Kallio et al., 2016). Overall, the first interview contained some structured and open-ended questions, while subsequent interviews relied more on previous interviews to further or complement the discussion.

As an alternative approach to one-shot interviewing, this kind of serial interviewing is suitable for research that aims to explore evolving and complex issues or when time is needed to develop a relationship between researcher and participants, allowing early questions generated from data analysis to be explored in depth later (Murray et al., 2009; Read, 2018). An additional benefit of serial interviewing involves the opportunities for verifying and cross-checking information, which helps produce information of adequate quality, quantity, and validity (Read, 2018). Serial interviewing is also helpful in building rapport and trust during interviews so that key questions can be answered in depth, and experiences and personal stories can be shared in a comfortable conversational environment. Life stories are created through the dialogues between participants and the researcher (Kouritzin, 2000). Although neither I nor the participants would know what would happen during the personal disclosure, where togetherness and a pursuit of common goal can be produced (Measor & Sikes, 1992) or emotions can be evoked, I was always aware that the relationship between the participant and I must be characterized by trust and responsibility. Lastly, although an in-person interview is preferred because of the immediacy and potential for relationship building, I respected the participants' choices whether they would like to be interviewed virtually or in-person.

All interviews (two rounds) were conducted between October 2022 and January 2023. I feel it necessary to highlight this specific period, as it coincided with a significant shift in China's COVID-19 policies, transitioning from a strict "zero COVID" approach to a full-scale opening.

The first round of interviews was all conducted between Oct 2022 and Nov 2022, when strict border controls and city lockdowns were in effect. The second round of interviews was conducted in December 2022 and January 2023, a time when the Chinese government lifted the lockdown measures and the COVID situation suddenly became out of control.

The interviews all started with the sharing of my research focus, and then an initial set of fixed questions concerning demographic and factual information as shown in Table 1. After the information was collected, I encouraged participants to share their stories by asking open-ended questions with words like what, who, where, when, or how (Chenail, 2009), and focused on events or experiences that begin with phrases such as “tell me about a time when...”. Interviews were transcribed within two weeks and sent to participants for member-checking. Meanwhile, an initial analysis was conducted to serve as a memory catalyst for reflections and to generate follow-up questions. Each interview in these two rounds of interviews lasted between 1 hour 31 minutes and 2 hours 54 minutes, with an average length of around 2 hours.

### **Data Analysis**

In this study, I employed a combination of within-case analysis and cross-case analysis to process the collected data and derive meaning from the cases based on my understanding (Creswell, 2013). My analytical strategy involved initially identifying specific issues within each individual case and subsequently exploring themes that emerged across multiple cases (Yin, 2009). I used Thematic Analysis (TA) to identify themes, a bottom-up approach that consists of identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set. This approach is flexible and accessible by novice researchers (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and particularly useful for examining perspectives of research participants, highlighting similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights (King, 2004).

Nonetheless, Holloway and Todres (2003) cautioned that there is an essential tension between flexibility on the one hand, and consistency and coherence on the other, in which the former may lead to a lack of coherence when developing themes. To establish the trustworthiness in my research, I followed a step-by-step approach to conducting TA as illustrated by Nowell et al. (2017). It is a six-phased iterative and reflective process that develops over time and involves a constant moving back and forward between phases, including familiarizing with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

It also feels necessary to address several limitations of the research. First, upon reflection, I recognize that the recruitment strategy may have introduced a potential sampling bias, as it was limited to one specific Chinese platform, WeChat. This might only attract individuals who are active on this platform, as my posts and messages were usually quickly replaced by others. Additionally, participants were required to reach out to the researcher through a friend invitation or had to already be a friend to me on WeChat, which could have posed a barrier for some individuals who were reluctant to friend the researcher or voice their stories. Second, participants were not always familiar with the concept of identity during the interviews, which necessitated clarification and examples. However, this may have influenced their responses to align with the researcher's examples, thereby potentially limiting a more nuanced exploration of their identity. For example, I provided examples like Chinese as a national identity – this may have led their answers towards my example (not realizing that Chinese may be referred as to racial, ethnic, and/or political identity). Lastly, in terms of representativeness, this small-scale qualitative research does not aim at making generalisations but rather seeks to develop an initial theoretical

understanding of transnational in-between identity based on the diverse experiences of the participants.

### *Positionality*

Positionality is the practice of delineating a researcher's own position in relation to the study, with the implication that this position may influence aspects of the study such as data collection and data interpretation (Qin, 2016). Recognizing one's positionality and acknowledging its potential impact on research is crucial, as it is virtually impossible for any researcher to be completely impartial or free from personal values and identities when interpreting reality. Therefore, it becomes imperative to reflect on and consider how my individual views, values, and identities shape our positionality and influence the research process.

Positionality can be identified by locating researchers with respect to three concerns: (1) the subject, (2) the research participants, and (3) the research context and process (Holmes & Gary, 2020). In this paper, I consider myself as an insider with regard to the lived experiences of CISs in Canada. As a CIS myself, I have first-hand experience throughout the pandemic. I believe that while studying in a foreign country certainly offers numerous benefits, it also presents various challenges. These challenges may differ significantly among individuals, depending on their personal circumstances and experiences. Personally, my journey to Canada has not been easy by all means, particularly due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic at that time which left me feeling anxious and uncertain about the future. As a CIS living in Canada, I have encountered moments of feeling disconnected from Canadian society and have struggled with the process of integration and finding a sense of belonging. These experiences along with my own understanding can equip me with the ability to conduct research “in a more sensitive and responsive manner” (Bishop, 2008, p. 148). Nonetheless, as an individual, my understanding is

moulded and impacted by my own experiences and identities I hold, so it would never represent Chinese ISs, either individually or collectively. I hereby admit that my positionality may lead to bias and /or preference of certain practices in the research process (e.g., impacting the focus of my interview by overemphasizing certain aspects that are salient to me). To address this, I make a conscious effort to engage in reflective thinking when interpreting, recognizing perspectives of others and being mindful that each person's experience is unique and constructed within the social world.

To locate myself in relation to research participants, I aimed to use more collaborative interviewing and to foster a closer relationship with them, which worked quite well to enable them to open up about their feelings and experiences. In my research, the qualitative data primarily come from participant sharing, which can at times delve into personal experiences and expose their vulnerabilities. The quantity and quality of data depend in part on the relationship that develops between the researcher and various participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009). Therefore, it is imperative to elicit the participants' stories, experiences, and knowledge pool of the research topic as much as possible. To achieve this, two interview strategies, rapport-building and self-disclosure, were employed (Dickson-Swift et al., 2006). Before recording the actual interview, I initiated a chitchat with participants to get to know them and develop the rapport. During the interview, I elaborated on the interview questions with some level of self-disclosure when needed. This is often cited as good practice to enhance rapport, show respect for participants, and validate their participants' stories (Dickson-Swift et al., 2006).

With regard to the research context and process, I acknowledge that I am an insider of this topic yet an outsider of the research context. As a student sojourner in the Canadian context, I sometimes found it hard to understand some culture-specific stories and develop in-depth

understanding. Secondly, my position as a novice researcher in the education field requires preparation and the ability to pose insightful questions based on the answers in a timely manner. To mitigate the impact in this respect, my second-round interviews served as a remedy for me followed up with further questions and double-checking with participants for verification.

In this section, I explored my positionality in the research study by situating myself about the areas of subject, research participants, and research context and process. In short, I believe my insider status as a Chinese IS provided resonance with participants and rich insights into IS lived experiences, which allowed for richer data and in-depth analysis. However, my status as a cultural outsider of the Canadian context and as a novice researcher called for additional work and preparation. Hopefully, my reflexivity in the research process through my positioning contributed to my collective knowledge and research outcome.

### *Ethical Considerations*

The consent forms were obtained from participants ahead of the actual interviews and then confirmed with participants again during the interview. This is in keeping with the idea of ongoing consent. For confidentiality and anonymity, after the data was collected, each participant was assigned a pseudonym, and the list connecting their names to pseudonyms was kept separately in my University OneDrive account. All research data including the recorded interviews, the list, and transcription are protected by passwords. Only my supervisor and I have access to the raw data. All data will be destroyed after the research is finished and defended.

One significant ethical consideration I addressed in this research was the potential discomfort that participants might experience when sharing their challenges and difficulties of living and learning in Canada. Questions regarding the impact of COVID-19 and related challenges could evoke negative emotions or evoke disappointing experiences for the

participants. To mitigate any potential harm, I highlighted their right to withhold information that made them uncomfortable to share.

However, Chinese international students' political concern became a bigger ethical concern that was frequently brought up by my participants during the interviews. Most participants hesitated or revealed concern when commenting on the Chinese government, as their online activities and comments may be monitored through digital surveillance technologies by the government (Xu, 2021). In light of this concern, I implemented additional measures to safeguard the identities and personal information of the participants. These precautions were especially important in situations where revealing their involvement or sharing their comments could potentially expose them to harm or retaliation. For example, I only used WeChat for contact and scheduling interviews. To ensure confidentiality and protect participants' privacy, I strictly followed ethical protocols by using Zoom to audio record the interviews and sent the transcripts only through a university email account.

## Chapter 4: Life Histories of Chinese International Students

In this chapter, I present the life histories of all my Chinese international student participants in this study. Through my voice, I aim to capture their past experiences in their home country, China, including family dynamics, daily routines, and academic pursuits, their transnational experiences in the host country, Canada, before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as their encounters with the challenges of crossing borders during this global health crisis. By delving into their unique life experiences, my goal is to provide a comprehensive understanding of their perspectives and insights regarding their opportunities and obstacles as Chinese international students in Canada amidst and following a global pandemic.

### Forrester

Forrester was the first one who responded to my request for participants and agreed to be interviewed immediately after I shared my focus of the research. Having the idea of enriching people's boring life during the long, boring, and freezing winter in Winnipeg, he started his own business of *Jubensha*<sup>3</sup> in 2021 in the hope that the Chinese community could have more entertainment options. This ambition makes him different from other participants because, unlike other CISs, he has already shifted his primary focus from study to work—passing every course and getting the degree are all he wants. Fortunately, I had the honour to meet him at his own office, a spacious game room with acoustic foam that soundproofs the room, comfortable table and chairs, and beautiful decoration all over the place. By that time, he was preparing an event for the coming Halloween.

---

<sup>3</sup> *Jubensha*, also known as scripted homicides or murder-mystery games, is a latest craze in China. In this game, each player is assigned a character from a script, including one who plays the murderer. The main purpose is to identify who is the murderer through clues provided by the scripts and conversation among players.

Forrester came to Canada for study over three years ago. He was impulsive, in his word “a hot-headed youth”, and he likes “doing stuffs that normal good Chinese people would stay far away from” (Forrester, October 25<sup>th</sup>, 2022). His parents were afraid of him being a troublemaker and thus “arranged” his study in Winnipeg, where his uncle resides and can keep an eye on him. Now, he has built up a music band, the first Chinese hip-hop band in Winnipeg. He has a decent job as a salesman in the retail furniture industry and his own business is getting on track. He believes there is no fixed definition of success, but by his definition he may be more successful than most of his friends and cousins who are teachers and public servants in China. However, he talked extensively about how he did not fit the traditional Chinese values and how he failed the expectation of his parents:

I want to be a rapper, then I will be a rapper; I want to be a hip hopper, then I will be a hip hopper. But my family is a decent family who have their own stubborn viewpoints. Even now when I returned to China, they said, “why did we bring up someone like you?” I am wearing long sleeves. If I am interviewed in summer, you will see lots of my tattoos. This is something I like but my family hate. We [my family] are in early childhood education industry, so it is too much to get tattoos<sup>4</sup>. But I like these stuffs, I have my arms and legs full of tattoos. These decisions are made by me with careful thought. ... Of course, similar big conflicts often break out in the family. Recently, some of my comments on the Chinese government really make them upset. I can say things that they can't, which make them annoyed, and they are already very annoyed by the current

---

<sup>4</sup> Although tattoo culture is getting popular in China recently, it is still far from being well-accepted by the mainstream society. The government also bans tattoo service for minors, and some work units like government agencies and public institutions do not recruit people with tattoos.

situation<sup>5</sup>. ... My mom said, “you tell me this and that, but it only makes me more anxious. You are not a young boy. You are so impulsive, so angry, it will do you no good at all.” ... Sometimes I feel I’m the evillest person [in this family]—I have tattoos and I rap. But they can’t do nothing about it. It is just me. (Forrester, October 25<sup>th</sup>, 2022)

Forrester, born and raised in Urumqi, Xinjiang Province, made a significant decision following the tragic Fire incident that occurred in November 2022 – He resolved to organize a memorial gathering in front of his *Jubensha* company. For this decision, concerns were raised along with cheers. While many of his schoolmates and friends hailed him as a hero for his courage and determination to make a positive impact, his business partners expressed worries about potential political ramifications. Simultaneously, his parents also persistently called him, explicitly expressing their desire for him not to proceed with the event. Forrester was hesitant and explained his concern to me,

If it were three years ago, I would have taken a speaker and marched on the streets, shouting for changes. But considering this issue from my current perspective, with some rationality, my intention is merely to mourn these 10 people who died tragically in this fire. They are representatives, a miniature, of innocent people affected by this pandemic... However, I am also aware that today's activity may be maliciously used by people or the media with ulterior motives as political propaganda, and as a result there is a chance that my family in China may be affected. But honestly, I am not trying to turn this activity into a protest or revolution, or anything political. I don’t think I can change anything. (Forrester, November 28, 2022)

---

<sup>5</sup> By the time of interview, Forrester told me that due to the covid pandemic, his family had been impacted by the city lockdown for over 2 months.

As Forrester said, one way or another, people have been significantly affected by the pandemic, including himself. On his journey back to China in 2021, he was firstly quarantined in the hotel for 7 days upon his arrival in Chengdu, followed by 7-days self-isolation as per China's protocols. To his surprise, his city still refused his return because of his history of overseas residence. As a result, he was forced to be "homeless" for another few weeks, wandering across mainland China in Chengdu, Shanghai, and Hangzhou. When he stepped into the hometown airport after all the troubles, Dabai (or Big White, China COVID Hazmat volunteers) were there waiting for him. He was taken away by an ambulance to undergo COVID testing. After receiving his negative COVID result, he finally reunited with his family. It took a day for him to travel from Canada to China, but a total of 42 days to return to his family in Urumqi.

It is no wonder that Forrester sees Zero-COVID policy in China as a "ridiculous" public health measure, yet travel barrier was not the only issue – his family business was under great pressure, too. The year of 2022 proved to be an incredibly difficult year for Chinese people. With the most contagious virus variant Omicron taking the place of Delta, city lockdowns became almost a common occurrence throughout the country. For the service industry, like education, it was nothing short of a disaster.

My family have been confined at home for 72 days. Earlier, the government said no "subject-based" curricula teaching is allowed. Fine. Now, the lockdown has been implemented for such a long time. The business was opened and closed. We have fixed costs, and the business has already taken a huge hit. .... My parents used to want me to take over the business, now they never talk about it. (Forrester, October 25th, 2022)

Forrester experienced lockdown in Winnipeg in 2020 too and saw a spike in the number of patients in hospital. While Forrester was not in favor of certain public health measures in

Canada, especially during the early stages of the pandemic, he commented “at least I can see it is moving toward a positive direction, despite its loopholes and slow reaction that caused pressure in hospital” (Forrester, November 28, 2022). Forrester's personal encounter with quarantine and lockdown played a pivotal role in shaping his current business venture. The experience he went through during the period of isolation inspired him to identify a need and develop a solution to address it – “I want to make it up for the impact brought by the pandemic. During that period, even sitting together with friends, we had nothing new to talk about because everyone stayed at home” (Forrester, October 25th, 2022). Therefore, he came up with this idea to help build connections among Chinese people in Winnipeg and bring “a trace of warmth in the harsh winter” (Forrester, October 25th, 2022). After his business obtained a reputation, he is now planning to expand his business to the whole Canadian market. He talked about it passionately:

Many people in Winnipeg said Chinese only like to hang out with Chinese while white people like to hang out with white people. However, I find out that many Chinese actually want to integrate into the Canadian society, especially those newcomers like Chinese first-year university students. The problem is they don't have an opportunity or a starting point to make friends with *Laowai*<sup>6</sup>, either because they are too shy or because of their English competency. What we would like to do is to establish a platform. ...

Boardgame like the Werewolf<sup>7</sup> is easy to play. You don't need to read loads of materials or rules. You just need to listen and talk. In this process, you practice your English, and you make friends with different people. (Forrester, October 25th, 2022)

---

<sup>6</sup> *Laowai* (or foreigner in literal translation) categorises people under this label for their noticeable non-Chinese physical appearance in mainland China (Liu & Self, 2020). Here, it refers to all non-Chinese people in Canada.

<sup>7</sup> The Werewolves of Miller's Hollow, a card game originated from the West and is getting popular in China in recent years. Chinese people developed a variety of ways to play this game.

Like many other businesses, Forrester's business was not smooth sailing. In the summer of 2022, his company fell victim to a burglary, with the door broken and all the cash stolen. What made this incident particularly noteworthy was the fact that Forrester's store was the only one on the street displaying four Chinese characters on its sign, and it was the sole target of the break-in. Despite reporting the crime to the police, little effort was made to investigate the matter. Forrester was left with no choice but to pay \$1600 out of his own pocket to repair the damaged door. He reflected on this incident:

There is a lot of limitations when it comes to defining crime. The police did not define this as a hate crime and did not really investigate on this since the loss and damage were not huge. But I have reasons to see this as a hate crime against us [Chinese]. If you think carefully, why we are the target when there are some many stores here. We are the only store with a shop sign in Chinese. If you don't know what it means, why you would burgle this shop? (Forrester, November 28, 2022)

Following this topic, Forrester shared his experiences regarding stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination against Chinese people. Having fun in a nightclub, a white girl shouted at him "this place is not fucking for yellow guys" (Forrester, October 25th, 2022). Noticing his Chinese-spelling nickname on video games, people would start swearing at him with comments like "bat soup" and many other nasty words, even before the game starts. This phenomenon, as in Forrester's word "climaxed at the time when the pandemic broke out", and "when the western media heavily publicized that the COVID virus is linked to the consumption of bat soup" (October 25th, 2022). While the West revised their tune and acknowledged that there was no evidence to back up these misleading claims, the damage was already done. Forrester comments:

I find it very disturbing. Before you fully investigate the source of this matter, how can you just jump to the conclusion that the cause of all this is due to Chinese people and bat soup? I don't think so [the link between Chinese people and bat soup]. I find it scaring and ridiculous. Later, Western media changed their tune and said, oh, it's not because of this reason. But at that critical moment [the pandemic outbreak], when this was already implanted to people's mind, everyone had this impression. (Forrester, October 25th, 2022)

Apart from his personal lived experience, Forrester shared something he witnessed at a Chinese butcher store, where stereotypes were exercised to mess with Chinese people:

There was a guy walking into the Chinese butcher store. He knew it because of the sign hanging at the entrance. 'You guys eat chicken?' the person asked. The Chinese person at the front desk, who were obviously struggling with English, replied, 'Yes, yes, yes'. 'Do you sell rabbits?' The tone shifted. When he mentioned rabbits, I already felt a bit uncomfortable because who would just ask a meat seller if they sold rabbits? Then, I saw what was coming next. He pressed the question right after, 'Do you sell dogs?'. (Forrester, November 28, 2022)

Speaking of the Chinese community in Canada, Forrester expressed his desire to enhance its image. He acknowledged, "Chinese people only hang out with Chinese people, and in the end blame them—it is very ridiculous. On the one hand, you complain Chinese people trick or deceive each other. On the other hand, you cannot break away from it" (Forrester, November 28, 2022). Forrester recounted his experience of working in a Chinese restaurant kitchen where he was required to pay for his meals, despite being an employee. In the end, his boss even refused to pay him for the two weeks that he worked. Forrester remembered too well what the Chinese boss said— "are you really shameless enough to ask for a salary?" (Forrester, November 28, 2022)

Nonetheless, Forrester reflected, “every community has this kind of trash, but no race is better or worse than another” (Forrester, November 28, 2022). To combat the negative stereotype surrounding the local Chinese community, Forrester took two actions. Firstly, he introduced *Jubensha* to Winnipeg and opened the market to everyone. This provides Chinese people with an opportunity to make friends with *Laowai* and also allows Forrester to demonstrate good stuff to a wider audience (in his word, “let them see us”; Forrester, October 25th, 2022). Second, he fairly treats his employees to set an example for the whole community. As he (November 28, 2022) noted, “I can start it with myself. I know it is a long way, but someone must do it.”

After living in Canada for several years and witnessing the significant impact of the pandemic on China, Forrester altered his initial plan of returning to his homeland. He explained that he has a family here – his girlfriend and a dog. He has limited contact with friends in China and he shares only a few hobbies and topics of interest with them, whereas he is surrounded by a bunch of friends in Winnipeg who share similar aspirations and ambitions. He is attempting to persuade his parents, who are both teachers and possess basic English skills, to join him in Canada. The allure of a life here where he can navigate more comfortably and have access to more opportunities makes returning to China no longer a viable option for him. He ended the conversation with some bitterness, though:

Chinese people attach great importance to the idea of falling leaves returning to their roots<sup>8</sup>, but I will never think about it. My original plan was to go home immediately after I finish my degree. My family business was there, and my parents wanted me to take over. Otherwise, all the hard work would be handed over to someone else when my parents

---

<sup>8</sup> A traditional Chinese idiom, meaning that a sojourner in a foreign land should eventually return to their homeland. It emphasizes the connection between people and their roots or place of origin.

retire. Now it is totally unnecessary. I have taken the responsibility, and I have a good income here. This is what I want. (Forrester, November 28, 2022)

## **Maverick**

Despite Maverick's reserved nature, we were able to establish a connection and build common ground, which led to the sharing of many special moments. Maverick arrived in Winnipeg accompanied by friends, and he was fortunate to have a relative in the city with whom he lived. His relative charged him a reasonable fee for providing food, so he didn't need to go out for groceries every week. After almost five years in Canada, Maverick sees Winnipeg as his home. When asked about where he comes from, he is more willing to say he is from Winnipeg, or a Winnipegger rather than from China. After graduating from the U of M this year, he went ahead and pursued his master's degree in a city in Ontario, where he can get permanent residence almost immediately after the graduation. He plans to further his study and get his Ph.D. in Canada as well. However, upon his arrival in Canada, he was a *Xiaofenhong*<sup>9</sup>, thinking about learning the advanced technologies and knowledge from the West and bringing these back to serve the motherland China:

Before the pandemic, I always popularized *Laowai* with the idea of how awesome China is, such as Chinese railway, bullet trains, and Chinese highway. I felt quite proud because the country is developing rapidly while Canada does not have anything. ... Now, I do not talk about it. I think you can feel it whether a country is good or not. It does not rely on your boast. (Maverick, Oct 29<sup>th</sup>, 2022)

Maverick's first year in Winnipeg probably epitomized the experience of many CIS newcomers during their early stage of settling in Canada—a sense of disappointment and

---

<sup>9</sup> *Xiaofenhong*, or Little Pink, is a term used to describe young jingoistic Chinese, who attack people that criticize China and brag about how great China and Chinese government are.

helplessness. “There was a huge difference in terms of the city and living conditions”, Maverick explained, “I had this perception that foreign countries, based on the American TV shows or movies, were supposed to be very clean and beautiful. But when I arrived, everything looked shabby and broken down, and the roads were always under construction” (Maverick, Oct 29th, 2022). Apart from this disappointment, the academic part was also challenging for Maverick. He told me that was the darkest year for him:

Basically, I failed whatever courses I took. I didn’t know how to study. My learning method was problematic. I can’t adapt. I didn’t know about office hour, even if it was written on the syllabus. I didn’t even know what it was for. I was afraid of talking to my teachers, maybe it’s because of the inherent awe for teachers [in China] ... For some time, I really had some mental issues because it was a year [failing every course]. I was afraid that I wouldn’t be able to graduate and started self-doubt— ‘do I really belong here? Why would I choose this path’. (Maverick, Oct 29<sup>th</sup>, 2022)

If it were not for his parents’ insistence, Maverick might have given up on his current major. He was miserable at the time and was considering transferring from 120 credits Computer Science to 90 credits Arts or General Science. He kept asking senior Chinese classmates for advice on which major was easier to pass. Maverick’s parents played a significant role in encouraging him to persevere, even resorting to the threat of withdrawing financial support to motivate him. They firmly believed in his abilities and talent, pointing to his impressive performance in the *Gaokao*<sup>10</sup> as evidence of his capability. While they acknowledged the challenges of pursuing computer science, they had faith that Maverick could overcome them with determination and hard work. Looking back on his journey, he is grateful for their support

---

<sup>10</sup> *Gaokao* refers to College Entrance Exam in China, which every year around 10 million high school students will compete in order to be admitted to university. The admission solely relies on their grade obtained from this exam.

and insistence. He recognizes that their belief in his potential propelled him to unlock his capabilities and achieve his goals.

Speaking of social life, Maverick expressed a strong desire to integrate into Canadian society. He shared a disappointing experience of trying to forge a friendship with one of his *Laowai* classmates, whom he met in class. They spent time together, hung out and discussed their assignments. By that time, Maverick already managed to navigate his study with ease, so for most of the time it was Maverick who helped his classmate. Maverick naturally thought they were already friends, until this “friend” gave him a cold shoulder after the course was finished:

I have been putting in effort all along, but I haven't received a corresponding return. I think we could have built something like comradeship, but he doesn't value it and probably thinks that we are just classmates who attend classes together like everyone else.

(Maverick, Oct 29th, 2022)

Despite encountering setbacks and embarrassment of conversing with someone who may not be interested in him and take him seriously, Maverick's desire to fit in remained relatively strong. He continued to actively participate in activities and clubs on the university campus including the photography club and developer club. He discovered photography as a new hobby, using it as a means to alleviate study anxiety and find a sense of relaxation. He also expressed joy in collaborating with peers to design games from scratch. Nonetheless, he refrained from intentionally seeking friendships with *laowai*, as he was still afraid of experiencing embarrassment and disappointment - “They are more like psychological counselors, but not friends. They respect your privacy. I may want to share my personal stories [like friends would do], but they don't necessarily see me as a friend. They have clear boundaries” (Maverick, Oct 29<sup>th</sup>, 2022). So far, while he made many *Laowai* friends yet none of the friendships were at a

deep level. He talked about it with a mixture of regret and hope, “maybe 10 years, 20 years later I will really integrate in [Canadian society], but now with all those cultural differences, I don’t think so” (Maverick, December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022).

Maverick stated that the impact of the pandemic on him has diminished to a minimal level. He recalled, though, to navigate through the challenging period, he even designed an application based on the data from Manitoba Government that indicated the severity of the pandemic. If the number of positive cases reached a certain threshold he set, he would not go out on that particular day. Maverick got COVID a few weeks after leaving Winnipeg for Ontario. He showed a set of symptoms for nearly half month, including sore throat (reached the point where he could not speak), fever, the loss of smell and shortness of breath when walking for a few minutes. While Maverick criticized the Zero-COVID policy in China, he sounded unsure here:

I didn’t get COVID in China, or in Winnipeg when we didn’t fully open up. However, as soon as I came to Ontario, I contracted the virus. It’s difficult to determine which government is right or wrong in handling this pandemic. China was under strict control, whereas in Ontario, the situation was completely relaxed, and nobody wore masks. COVID really had an impact on my daily life – I believe I have post-COVID-19 syndrome. (Maverick, Oct 29th, 2022).

There was also a bright side of the pandemic—Maverick depicted online learning as a “GPA booster” (Maverick, Oct 29th, 2022). He preferred to learn online because it not only saved his commuting time, especially during winter mornings when he had classes at 8 am, but also reduced his anxiety during exams sitting in a large silent classroom. Online learning also allowed him to review important information that he might have missed during physical classes,

since they were recorded. Therefore, Maverick attributed his improved GPA to, at least in part, online teaching and learning during the pandemic.

During the second interview, which took place nearly two months later, Maverick mentioned that he still experienced some weakness and fatigue. He expressed his relief that China finally opened up and chose to live with the virus. Prior to this, he never considered returning to reunite with his family. He disclosed the previous strict quarantine and lockdown measures really solidified his decision to stay in Canada indefinitely, but now he acknowledged “maybe this shift will change people’s mind” (Maverick, December 3rd, 2022) and he, for one, was talking with his friend about going back together for a visit next year (2023).

## **Seven**

Seven was the first female participant who contacted me through We-Chat and expressed her willingness to participate. Seven had probably initiated a transnational bond with her family well before she came abroad. Both of her parents are businesspeople, especially her father who left her at 3 years old to go to Spain and returned home in 2008, when China held the Olympic Games. “They [my mother and other relatives] thought the first time I saw my dad was in 2008, but actually no,” she said, “I started to remember things at a very early age. I have a vivid memory that my dad stepped off the bus, handed me a white ball with a cute blue footprint on it, and then he got back on the bus” (Seven, December 14, 2022). Her father later went to the US for the business, and Seven stayed with her mother in China. Until she turned 18, her father spent less than 3 years in total with her. The prolonged absence of her father resulted in a problematic father-daughter relationship, and they had a physical fight that almost involved police when her father suddenly started to exert authority as a father at her age of 16. She disclosed her feeling, “Why did you discipline me? I barely knew you, and you barely knew me. You weren’t even by

my side all this time” (Seven, December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2022). This rebelliousness later became a major reason for her to choose Canada as a study destination—staying really close to her father in the U.S. yet giving him no chance of visiting her, a revenge.

She has been studying in Canada for more than 4 years. There were two things that stood out in the description of her early years—her language competency and the harsh weather. Seven is a typical northern Chinese, extroverted and straightforward. However, her teacher gave her a comment that she’s very “solitary and doesn’t talk much” (Seven, November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022), which shocked her mother. Seven explained, “I was worried about my accent, and I was worried about making grammar mistakes. Grammar mistakes at home were serious mistakes” (Seven, November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022). She gave me another example of how language teaching in Canada is so different from China: “In high school, the systematic education told you ‘How are you’ and ‘Fine, thank you’. But here, you can say ‘I am ok’. Grammar suddenly becomes the least important thing. There were so many things that can reverse your mind” (Seven, November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022).

Seven’s study agency arranged her life in a Philippine homestay at downtown, and she needed to walk a few blocks to catch the bus. In winter, the cold weather was simply unbearable for her. Once, on a snowy day, she had a breakdown on her way to the bus station:

My feet were numb from the cold, and one shoe fallen off. I didn't know where it was.

There were just pits when I looked back, so I could only find it by following my

footprints. I wanted to cry but I dared not. Because my tears would freeze. I felt so

terrible and sad. I didn't even know why I came here for this. I just wanted to go home.

(Seven, November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022)

Although Seven was born in the north of China, where snow and the cold weather were not uncommon, it cannot be compared with the harsh climate in Winnipeg at all. As a young

woman who had just left the protection of family, she did not anticipate such hardships that lay ahead. Nonetheless, she was so proud that she hid this episode from the family – she didn't want to admit that she couldn't adjust. There was, luckily, a bright side. As Seven stated, “there are many Chinese people here that you can make friends with, and you do not feel alone or have no one to talk to. ... There are (Chinese) restaurants and grocery stores, so I don't feel very homesick” (Seven, November 8th, 2022).

In 2020, after the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in Canada, Seven went back to China with her cousin who was in Montreal. In order to fulfill the requirements of entry, Seven had to travel to three cities in 5 days to finish a COVID-19 PCR test at a designated institution within 48 hours. In addition, upon her return to China, she didn't realize that the pandemic would have such a continuous impact. Although she could take online courses at home, she had her days and nights mixed due to the time difference between China and Canada. This, combined with some of her conflicts with family, caused tremendous mental distress that finally resulted in her decision of taking a temporary leave of absence from the school:

I grow up with my grandparents, and they have been living in our home. ... There was then a situation—sometimes I had classes until 4-5 am, or even 10 am if we had exam. The elderly has a kind of idea, that is, they hope you eat enough before going to bed. For me, I was really exhausted and just wanted to sleep, so I didn't want to be bothered. My grandparents, however, would keep knocking the door, asking me to eat something. Once, twice, and then I lost my temper. ... They got up early and spoke loudly when I desperately need sleep.... I was mentally unstable; anxious, too. That's how I started to drink. It's just that I couldn't sleep, then I really want to drink, I pour myself a little [alcohol] so I could sleep well. ... Later I saw a doctor and started to take medicine.... It

was serious. ... Lack of sleep, sometimes I couldn't even see the sunlight. I didn't know what to do, depressed and confused. That's when I said to myself, 'ok, let's take a break, do not take classes and maybe just go out and do some travelling....' (Seven, December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2022)

While Seven got back on her feet very soon and came back to Canada the next year, her cousin never did. Neither did many of her friends in Canada. "Zoom university" is how Seven used to describe those friends who finished their degree without even being physically present in Winnipeg. Apart from the impact of COVID on her study and travel between two countries, Seven talked about her previous work in a local media company for Chinese. She reported to me with a deep sigh:

I have never come across it [racial discrimination]. I have never been treated like that. But you know, I worked in media industry, so I need to read all kinds of, yorkbbs<sup>11</sup> or other news websites, and then write something on We-chat official accounts. I can see the description such as Wuhan Virus, or Wu Fei Virus, similar expressions starting with the character of Wu. It was upset and unpleasant, but not much I can do. I just changed all those expressions when I was writing. (Seven, December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2022)

While the pandemic was becoming endemic and seemed to be headed for an end (or a new normal) in Canada, it was an opposite story for her mother in China. Seven's mother has heart disease and takes medicine on a regular basis, so it would be extremely hard to get medicine during city lockdown. In 2022, it tragically happened. Her mother was confined to the house even though she submitted the application to fetch her medicine and was permitted to do so. In the end, her mother had a heart attack at home. If it were not for her relative who took her

---

<sup>11</sup> Arguably the biggest Chinese portals in Canada, one of the main platforms for Chinese international students and Canadian Chinese immigrants to exchange information, find leisure and entertainment.

to the hospital in time, the situation could have been much worse. This incident also changed Seven's initial support for the lockdown measures, and her opinions toward China, too.

Seven's parents came up with plans for Seven to study abroad as early as middle school, and therefore hired native English teachers to help her with English. When Seven arrived in Winnipeg, she never thought about staying. When her parents asked her opinion about upon leaving China, Seven answered promptly, "I will not immigrate. I will go back, back to my own country" (Seven, December 14th, 2022). Now, she is a full-time student and has a part-time job as saleswoman at a car dealership, and is satisfied with her status quo. She told her parents that she would prefer not going back, and instead encouraging them to visit her more. During the previous trip home, she found it hard to adapt to the life in China including the life pace, and her mindset has somehow changed, all of which led to her decision of staying. Now, as she said, "when junior fellow students say they will definitely come back, I reply 'tell me this a few years later'" (Seven, December 14th, 2022).

### **Kevin**

Kevin describes himself as a family person. Out of the fear and uncertainty caused by the pandemic, along with his original plan to see family every summer vacation, Kevin went back to China in 2020. Upon his arrival in China, he received the email that all classes and activities would move to remote operations for the next term. This, to his surprise, lasted for over two years. He did not come back to Winnipeg until the university announced the majority of classes would be held in-person in Summer Term 2022. Soon, he graduated in October. By the time of the second interview, he had returned to Chengdu, his hometown. Not as fortunate as he was in 2020, China was facing raging COVID-19 outbreak this time. Kevin reported to me that his

family are all tested COVID positive, and he expects his positive result will just be a matter of time.

Kevin decided to leave Canada immediately after graduation. When explaining how he came to that decision instead of staying and working for at least a while, Kevin explained it with regret (he also made it clear that he would do the same thing again, though):

First, after I returned, I stayed for two years in China, so I have less information of Canada, either finding a job or something else. So, I am not like my friends (staying there) who are more adaptive and know more friends there, and their social circle. They become more familiar with Canada. ... Then is my family. I am more a family person. I don't like my family here and me alone there. That is another reason why I come back to China immediately. (Kevin, November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022)

Dating back to Kevin's *Gaokao*, he managed to get admitted to an average first-tier public university<sup>12</sup> in China. His *Gaokao* grade was not high enough to qualify him for picking his ideal majors, and he was assigned to study business administration instead, a major that his family didn't consider to be useful. Following a family discussion, Kevin opted for a 2+2 program<sup>13</sup> at a local university, even though he disclosed his initial hesitance to study abroad. Kevin arrived in Winnipeg in 2019 with high expectations of learning about foreign cultures, making new friends, and experiencing a quality Western education.

When attending classes at the English Language Centre (ELC), he signed up for a language partner program. Kevin was not a typical shy Chinese student. Having had prior experience hosting a Korean American with his family in China, he was able to communicate

---

<sup>12</sup> In China, universities are generally categorized into different levels based on their academic ranking and entrance requirements—1) 985/211 public universities; 2) first-tier public universities; 3) second-tier public universities; 4) third tier (for-profit) universities; 5) vocational colleges.

<sup>13</sup> 2 years of full-time study at a university in China, followed by 2 years at a Canadian university.

smoothly with *Laowai*. Nevertheless, they still lost touch after the term ended. Kevin added, “We had very few shared interests in daily life. ... Relying on a weekly conversation is simply not enough to build a deep and lasting friendship” (December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022).

During his first year in Winnipeg, Kevin encountered various challenges, with academic pressure being the primary source of stress. His two years of university education in China did not adequately prepare him with sufficient knowledge for challenging courses at the U of M. As a result, Kevin had to cram for those courses he missed in the first two years and at the same time completing assignments for his current courses. Of ten classmates who entered the university together with him, only Kevin and one more student passed the course. One transferred to another major, and the others all failed. Nevertheless, once he adapted to the learning environment and caught up with the study, he began to expand his social circle. Although he wasn't particularly interested in parties or campus activities, Kevin found common ground with others through his passion for working out in the gym and playing soccer. He started to hang out with *Laowai* friends who shared his passion or occasionally watch a movie with them.

In Kevin's second year, as he was considering the idea of finding a job to enrich his life and gain valuable experience, the unexpected onset of the pandemic disrupted his plans. The widespread uncertainty brought about by the pandemic compelled Kevin to make a difficult decision: whether to return to China or remain in Canada:

Before the pandemic, my family wanted me to work in Canada for a few years, or even stay there, whatever I want. ... But because of the pandemic, you have to make a decision. You can choose to stay here [in Canada], or not to, right? But once you make the decision to go home, you are more likely to spend more time at home and become less familiar with what happened abroad. ... The pandemic gave me a reason to go back. Why would I

come to Canada if I can take courses online and stay with my family? Studying at home is just the same as at abroad when you only take class online. The pure English language environment does not exist. It is all online. Besides, I can save more money and spend more time with my family, right? (November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022)

The pandemic substantially interrupted Kevin's plan and all his years spent in China made it difficult for him to develop a sense of belonging to Canadian society. He expressed clearly that he just went there to study and was not part of Canadian society because he is Chinese all the time. Even after heading back for in-person classes, he immediately came to the realization that he would soon graduate, thereby having no mood to engage in any activities or friend-making.

When discussing his future plans, Kevin expressed optimism that life in China would return to normal after the first wave of the pandemic. He noted that since a master's degree seems to be so common in current Chinese society, he has planned to pursue a postgraduate program in the UK. His decision to the UK is based on two reasons – it is quick, and the university has a higher world ranking which can be a benefit when he looks for employment in the future.

### **Hazel**

I met Hazel while volunteering for a non-profit organization. She responded to my invitation through WeChat and gladly set a meeting time with me. She has just graduated this year and become a pre-school teacher at a local school. During the interviews, Hazel stressed her

“*foxi*”<sup>14</sup> attitude and her “indoorsy” lifestyle. Her most comfortable state is to be left alone, doing something she herself is fond of:

I have never thought about integrating into local society, nor making friends with anyone.

I am always alone. I don't even have many Chinese friends, either. ... Integrating requires a lot of time and energy because I am troubling them not the opposite. It is exhausting for me, and how long can I pretend anyway? ... I usually read novels, study cookery books. Do you know data and scene editors? I like edit games through these editors. Now I also am learning painting skills. ...After going abroad, you have time.

Although I have 3-4 courses a term, I still have some free time to arrange my life. I have more money at my disposal, too, so I can do whatever I like. (Hazel, December 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022)

Starting from her story of studying abroad, Hazel said it was her parents who, all of sudden, took her to a local international school for an entrance examination. She was confused but fortunately she passed the exam. Later, she was enrolled in that school at grade 12 and followed the suggestion to study abroad. She was hopeful for the chance to take a different educational path and escape the intense academic pressures she experienced in her previous high school, where all parents and teachers were constantly pushing and classmates would turn on a lamp to study after ‘lights out’ at midnight – “It brings you so much pressure if you open your eyes in the early morning and just see that your classmates are already studying on their bed” (Hazel, December 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022). Meanwhile, Hazel was overcome with a sense of fear and apprehension about her future. As a young adult, living and studying alone in a completely unfamiliar country was undeniably daunting. The uncertainty and challenges that awaited her in this new chapter of her life evoked a mixture of emotions.

---

<sup>14</sup> *Foxi*, a Buddha-like mindset by its literal meaning, is a buzzword used in China to describe people who reject the rat race and who are in favour of a peaceful and apathetic lifestyle.

Before Hazel could take regular courses, she dedicated a year and a half to studying in the ELC, struggling with her language. Reflecting on her language learning experiences, Hazel shared her thoughts:

I feel like I was more motivated when preparing for IELTS exam in China. It seems like my English was at its best when I first arrived in Canada, because everything I was learning was new. ... I don't think there is a qualitative leap. I just became more "shameless". I let them repeat or change a word, so the communication turns out to be just fine. (Hazel, November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2023)

The language barrier and the cultural nuances associated with it continued to pose significant challenges for Hazel, particularly considering her major in Athletic Therapy (and later Kinesiology). Hazel has been taking medicine to tackle the depression caused by the study pressure. It happened when she entered the faculty with a GPA of 3.8 but soon dropped to the lowest at 1.0. The memory of diligently preparing for her Anatomy exam remains vivid in Hazel's mind.

When I memorized terms of human anatomy, I would stay up until midnight. I cried while talking to my family on video calls and then went back to studying after I ran out of tears. But in the end, I still failed it. ... Everything for me is new. For local students, they at least have the cultural background to help them understand the vocabulary. ... Once in an exam, I came across a word called "snow angel". I didn't know what it was, so I left it blank. There are just so many obstacles. (Hazel, November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2023)

Hazel retook the Anatomy course three times before finally passing. Determined to improve her academic performance and GPA, she also retook as many other courses as she could. Finally, she successfully graduated with a commendable GPA of 3.45. Apart from difficult

courses and her language issue, Hazel pointed out the separation in class – there were only 24 students admitted to Athletic Therapy per year, and it was the first time in history this major had CISs:

Starting from our second year, we would participate in hands-on training with different sports teams. These training sessions were led by senior students, creating a tightly knit system than other majors. However, even with this system, there was still isolation between us and local students. During my first year in the program, I only met one Black student. He was in a similar situation as me - Our practice requires cooperation during class, such as one person acting as a patient and another acting as a paramedic. We would have to find a partner, but to put it bluntly, we (she and the black student) were always left behind. No one would come to us. (Hazel, December 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022)

Athletic Therapy requires much hands-on training. After in-person classes were cancelled during the pandemic, Hazel changed her major to Kinesiology so that her graduation wouldn't be significantly delayed. Taking about the COVID pandemic, Hazel is a Zero-COVID policy supporter who expects stronger and mandatory policy from the Canadian government. She regarded public health measures in Canada as “*Bai lan*”<sup>15</sup>. Because of her experience of contracting COVID this year and developing long COVID symptoms such as reduced immune function, she overall agreed with the direction of Zero-COVID policy, taking an understanding attitude towards most measures in China, especially at the beginning of the pandemic outbreak. While she acknowledged that China and Canada were two different cases and both governments did what's best for its people, she emphasized:

---

<sup>15</sup> *Bailan*, or let it rot by its literal meaning, is also a popular Chinese slang to describe the action of giving up very easily because something is too difficult to achieve.

To start with, I would say Zero-COVID is necessary, or even of many benefits for people. I got COVID before, and at least to me, I can feel a significant decline in my physical fitness. Besides, current literature has suggested that COVID virus remains in our body even after so-called recovery, let alone its side effect or the long COVID symptoms. There is too little research on that. ... it is just after such a long time with COVID, I think the policies can be more flexible and humane. (Hazel, November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2023)

Our second interview took place in late December, just a few weeks after China began to lift restrictions and open up. During this interview, Hazel expressed her disappointment, frustration, and clear dissatisfaction with the government's actions and decisions. She made an interesting comparison:

I think China is the one who really *Bailan*. It is like, it doesn't care about it [the virus] almost overnight. It is just like how the family and the school treat their children— they strictly prohibit any romantic relationship or even forbidding you having contact with the opposite sex, yet they wish you to get married and give birth upon your graduation. ... I just don't understand. It is truly irresponsible. (Hazel, December 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022)

Despite her discontent, Hazel never hesitates to identify as a Chinese. She appreciates traditional Chinese culture and often wears *Mamianqun*<sup>16</sup> as daily outfit. On the other hand, Hazel also recognized that her years in Canada and her chosen major had a significant impact on her values and attitudes. Prior to coming to Canada, she never really considered the challenges faced by vulnerable groups, such as elderly scavengers or low-income communities in remote mountainous areas. She used to attribute their circumstances to their own faults, whether it was laziness or other reasons, and believed that they should bear the consequences of their actions.

---

<sup>16</sup> Mamianqun is a traditional skirt wore by the Han Chinese women. Its origin can be dated back to Song Dynasty.

However, her experience in Canada exposed her to a different perspective. She realized that in Canada, the voices of the vulnerable and minority populations are heard, and their struggles are acknowledged. This exposure broadened her understanding and fostered empathy towards those vulnerable people facing difficulties in society.

She went on to explain her shock at the comprehensive facilities available in Canada for individuals with disabilities. She was amazed by the accessible corridors, elevator handrails specifically designed for people with disabilities, braille signage on the walls, and various inclusive facilities at the university gym. She confessed, “I feel a little ashamed when thinking about the past self” (Hazel, December 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022).

In the two months between our interviews, I observed a noticeable shift in Hazel's attitude. In the first interview, Hazel viewed permanent residence as a backup plan because she was primarily worried about the fierce competition in China's job market (yet she is a *foxi* person). She considered options such as applying for a medical-related major at Red River College or pursuing a master's degree in her current field after obtaining permanent residence, but she never ruled out the option to return home. During the second interview, however, Hazel exhibited a stronger determination to stay in Canada. She said, “let me be clear. I don't want to go back. The social conditions do not look friendly to me” (Hazel, December 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022).

### **Patricia**

Patricia was the last participant I recruited. She confided in me about her initial hesitation and struggle in deciding whether to reach out because she feared not having much to contribute. After our first interview, she admitted that she never contemplated the questions I asked. Subsequently, she sent me a few messages to further elaborate on her thoughts. During the second interview, as COVID was raging across the country, she revealed to me her reluctance to

return but still booked her flight home the next Saturday and chose three online courses for the next semester; She felt her younger sister needed her around while both of her parents as doctors in hospital were busy with treating the increasing number of patients. Patricia has just finished the first-year study and is prepared to transition to the faculty that she has been dreaming of. If she failed to seize this break, she would probably be stuck in Winnipeg and live a busy life for the next 2 -3 years—she assumed a tight schedule of study after entering the faculty, having courses in all three terms as required by the university to accelerate the graduation.

Although Patricia currently finds her life fulfilling and expects it to continue that way, her initial departure from China was accompanied by feelings of indifference, confusion, and uncertainty. In fact, of the three countries she has been to - the UK, the US, and Canada – Patricia’s favorite study destination was actually the UK. Unfortunately, there wasn't much discussion within the family regarding this decision as her aunt already resided in Canada:

I don't think I have any expectation because this decision was not made by me. I didn't know what it [studying abroad] was like, so I asked my mom to choose .... I thought living here or there would just be the same. It was just life. Does it sound a little bitter? You know, even in China, my life was just to live, and for me it is only changing a place to continue my life. ... If now I were to move to a new place, I would make some preparation, but back then I was only a teenager girl. I was ignorant and didn't know what would happen because I never lived alone. ... I only had one drop of tear upon departure, for not knowing what my future life would be like. (Patricia, November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022)

Before Patricia shared her stories in Canada, she narrated her bumpy experience of learning English. In a small city of the northern China, English is not a subject that gets much

attention like in many major cities, nor does they have qualified English teachers. She said, “Learning is just like playing. Very easy. What was being taught is basically memorizing English words” (Patricia, January 6, 2023). In order to receive better education, Patricia was sent to Jiangsu, a coastal province with one of the best educational resources, where she soon realized that she must catch up with her English – she got the lowest score in an English test, worse than the prior last-place student. After years of effort, she managed to reach the average level of her class. Additionally, her IELTS teacher helped her with the language by teaching pronunciation and promoting self-directed learning, rather than simply studying for exams. For the first time, she felt like she was learning the language. Patricia admitted that she still failed to achieve an ideal IELTS score and thus had to take language lessons for an entire term, but she did benefit from the experience.

Continuing with her story here in Winnipeg, Patricia shared two positive changes that she did not expect. First is that she stutters less now, though it has not fully disappeared:

Actually, I have a bit of stuttering. You should be able to tell. But since I came here, the situation has improved a lot. Here, when people hear me stuttering, they just think I can't speak English, and they say, 'take your time, take your time', so I just need to speak slowly. But at home, they would say things like 'you stutter!', and then I would feel like 'oh no, I'm stuttering again', and I would become more nervous, which only made things worse.’ (Patricia, November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022)

Second, she now can pursue one of her favourite majors – nursing. She talked about this major with great enthusiasm and excitement, “I really like it. I enjoy learning it, though it can be exhausting. At home, I was not able to study this major because of my grade” (Patricia, November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022). She continued to talk about her disastrous past in high school—at grade

12, the immense pressure of study and constant failures caused her to lose interest and confidence. She described that period of time as “meaningless”—every time when she looked for her name on the score ranking list<sup>17</sup>, she always had to search it from the bottom. As time went on, Patricia's confidence began to erode, and she found herself lacking the willingness to exert effort. She grew increasingly exhausted to the point where she started questioning the meaning of her life. However, she is now grateful for the opportunity to have discovered her passion. Nursing has become a significant part of her identity, holding great importance in her life: “I introduce myself to others by saying I study nursing. I am proud of it because it is something I really like. I feel like I am at least a little better off than those who haven't found their goals and are confused” (Patricia, November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022).

There is no denying that difficulties can persist regardless of one's interest – language, for example, continues to be a barrier for Patricia. She shared a story about a professor mentioning the term "contact lens," a word she was unfamiliar with, and how a Taiwanese classmate kindly explained it to her. Numerous language difficulties caused her frustration, embarrassment, and a blow to her self-esteem. Consequently, she had to dedicate a significant amount of time to previewing new vocabulary and course materials to ensure she could keep up with her classes. Then, time is another matter, especially when she had exams and classes all mixed up in a few days. Patricia reported to me her experience of memorizing anatomy terms for weeks in the dark basement she rented, something she never wants to go through again. Thanks to her previous study in China, she said “nothing can be compared with my time at grade 12, so it is at least manageable” (Patricia, January 6, 2023).

---

<sup>17</sup> In China, students sometimes will be ranked from the top to the bottom according to their scores.

Regarding socializing, Patricia shared her experience of feeling somewhat invisible in Canadian society and finding it challenging to actively engage in class or group discussions. She also finds it tiring to establish friendships with *Laowai*. Patricia provided an example of a good relationship she thought she had with an Indian classmate, but she invited her to hang out, only to learn that the classmate had already left school and relocated to Toronto. “I wish she could have told me before I found out,” Patricia (November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022) added, “although she said let’s keep in touch, I know we would just quickly lose contact.” Following the example, Patricia discussed the mechanical social interaction in Canada and how she adapted:

They always start with 'how are you,' but they don't really want to know how you are doing. It is just how they greet. In the past, I used to wonder how I really was, and I told them 'I m not too good today' and explained a lot. Now I know they do not expect a formal answer. It’s like telling a lie. Instead of ‘how are you’, why don’t you just say 'hi!' and whatever you want to say? It is a little hypocritic. (Patricia, November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022)

Reflecting on the pandemic, Patricia, the youngest participant in this research, expressed her sentiment with a sigh, stating, "the past three years have almost erased my memories" (November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022). While Patricia's personal life was not significantly affected by the pandemic, it had a profound impact on her family. Her parents, as doctors, had to receive daily COVID test and adhere to countless regulations imposed by the hospital. Meanwhile, her sister had to engage in patriotic activities at school, such as singing songs related to pandemic prevention. Experiencing the stringent Zero-COVID policy in China for nearly two years and witnessing the return to normalcy in Canada, Patricia underwent a substantial change in attitude. She supported the prevention policies of China in the beginning when the virus was fatal, but after Omicron she believed many quarantine and prevention measures were based on political

reasons – “*Zhong Nanshan*<sup>18</sup> does not share his opinion in public. Neither do many doctors in hospitals. ... Or maybe they did, but what they said was censored” (Patricia, November 16th, 2022).

Previously, Patricia took pride in her Chinese heritage, but now she experiences hesitation when revealing her nationality due to the negative perceptions and stereotypes attached to being Chinese. She feels “ashamed” toward current situations in China, and believes that, unfortunately, being identified as Chinese has become a burden and carries negative connotations for her – she is concerned about the discrimination stemming from the perception that bat soup caused the COVID-19 pandemic, and she actually believes to some degree about this correlation. She made a comparison, “Even though most people may not explicitly say it, they may think so in their mind. Just like in China, we were afraid of people from Wuhan for some time, because they might carry virus. It is similar” (Patricia, January 6, 2023). She also noticed many Chinese restaurants and groceries stores here are not as clean as others, and some Chinese people require payment by cash to avoid tax, she fears that *Laowai* will have negative opinions of this and impose them to her – “this is too embarrassing for me, I don’t want people see me in this way” (Patricia, November 16th, 2022).

Furthermore, Patricia conveyed a significant shift in her perception of China since arriving in Canada. With life experiences both in her home country and abroad during the pandemic, she now has access to a broader range of news sources and can compare different perspectives. This exposure has allowed her to see a different side of China, which has had a profound impact on her mindset and how she views her home country:

---

<sup>18</sup> *Zhong Nanshan* was a leading advisor for the Chinese government in managing the crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic.

China will not collapse, but it is not what I imaged anymore. ... Sometimes I know it is useless to know all these (news). The education from my family also keeps telling me to mind my own business. We can't change it, so we just move on with our life. (Patricia, January 6, 2023)

On the other hand, she admitted that at times she finds herself enjoying the critiques directed towards China on Western social media. As a result, all these incidents and events that happened in China through news media and lived experiences of her family and friends in China have gradually changed her mind about her future plan – she is now reluctant to go back to China, and she wishes to bring her parents over to Canada, which in her word is “I don't want us to be *jiucai*<sup>19</sup> anymore” (November 16th, 2022).

## Conclusion

In this chapter, each participant's life history as an international student in Canada is presented, revealing a range of scenarios that may have influenced their experiences of academic sojourn. One particular case, Kevin, stands out among the five others, as he returned home after the pandemic broke out in Canada and stayed there for over two years. However, even among the remaining cases, distinct differences emerge. Patricia arrived in Canada amidst the pandemic in 2021, while Hazel never had the opportunity to return home after the pandemic. Forrester, Maverick, and Seven went back to China at different stages of the pandemic, stayed for a varying length of time, and thus had their unique experiences. These experiences, consequently, exert its potential impact of the formation of their transnational identity and decision-making process. In

---

<sup>19</sup> *Jiucai* (garlic chives) is a type of vegetable commonly used in Chinese cuisine. In the political context, it becomes a slang term to describe ordinary citizens who are easily manipulated or influenced by those in power.

the next chapter, I will present a summary of the main findings derived from a thematic analysis of the collected data.

## **Chapter 5: Thematic Analysis – Unpacking Lived Experiences and Transnational Identity**

Through a transnational lens, I seek to comprehend CISs' lived experiences and how these lived experiences have affected them in terms of their transnational identity. In the previous chapter, I examined the lived experiences of six CISs in Canada case by case. In this chapter, I present the main findings that emerged from the analysis of my participants' experiences and perspectives across cases. However, it is important to acknowledge that the participants had diverse experiences living across borders and at different stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, not all ideas expressed were unanimous, particularly in the case of Kevin, who primarily resided in China during the majority of the pandemic.

### **The Lived Experiences**

After conducting a cross-case analysis, a total of six themes have been identified to address the research questions regarding the lived experiences of Chinese international students. These themes encapsulate key aspects of their experiences and provide insights into their unique journeys.

#### ***From Dependent to Independent***

For CISs, living alone in a foreign country is a process to gain independence. All participants went abroad at a relatively young age - in their late teens or early twenties - a period of life when they were experiencing a transition from adolescence to adulthood. Their previous life consisted of huge study pressure at high school, limited life experience, and a majority of time with the family. In all cases, the option to study abroad was suggested by their parents, with only Maverick mentioning that he considered this option before his parents brought it up. In Kevin, Seven and Patricia's cases, they were even reluctant to leave their home country in the

first place and were eventually persuaded either through family discussion and/or by their teachers at school.

Upon departure, most participants had little knowledge about the country that they were going to. For example, Seven chose Canada simply because it has red maple leaves, her favorite singer Justin Bieber, as well as to get “revenge” on her father. Similarly, the selection of their university was not primarily driven by their specific academic interests but rather influenced by recommendations from study abroad agencies, their parents and relatives, or previous teachers who were familiar with universities in Winnipeg. Maverick's choice to pursue computer science was primarily driven by his parents' belief that this major would lead to a promising career in the future. Hazel's choice to study at the U of M was due to the recommendation from the principal in her high school who graduated from the U of M. Lack of experience in life and prior excessive reliance on other people no doubt resulted in hardships in their initial adjustment, as Maverick put it,

In China, wherever you are, your parents always have your back. That's what we call *guanxi*<sup>20</sup> in China, right? Your parents solve any problem for you with their connections. However, you need to handle things on your own here. For example, upon my arrival, ... I didn't even know how to select courses and ended up randomly picking some. But soon I realized that I hadn't taken the prerequisite course, and I couldn't understand what the professors were talking about. Almost after a year or so, I figured out how things work here. I learned about the education system, the ways of life, and how the society works.

(Maverick, December 3rd, 2022)

---

<sup>20</sup> *Guanxi* is a term used in Chinese culture to describe a mutually beneficial social connection with someone, and usually involves exchanging favors.

Patricia shared a similar experience, but she viewed it in a more positive light. She noted that she was content with her current academic performance because she achieved it through her own hard work, saying "I went to middle and high school in China through my parents' connections, so basically I didn't really have to study. But when I came here [abroad], I realized that I couldn't succeed without my own effort" (Patricia, January 6, 2023).

Additionally, the pandemic becomes another push factor that results in some participants' financial independence. While all participants reported being financially supported by their families and not having to worry about money during their academic sojourn, Forrester and Seven revealed that their family businesses have been impacted by the pandemic. This was one of the reasons why they began looking for jobs in Canada.

Thousands of miles away from parents, CISs learned to navigate their study and life on their own. After years in Canada, all the participants become more independent. Forrester, who will soon graduate, has not only secured a job but also started his own business. He now takes full responsibility for his financial situation and future alongside his girlfriend in Winnipeg. Maverick and Kevin have chosen to pursue master's degrees, and this time it is their independent decisions about their academic paths and study destinations. Seven, satisfied with her busy life as a salesperson and student, highlights her personal growth from "the one who asks questions" to "the one who answers questions" (Seven, November 8th, 2022). Hazel is working toward obtaining her permanent residence as a pre-school teacher, with plans for further studies. Patricia eagerly anticipates joining the faculty of her dreams to pursue her desired major, feeling proud and excited for what lies ahead.

### ***Transnational Relationship –Support, Conflict and Reconciliation***

Current literature has pointed out the important role of transnational family in the international student's education choices, adjustment process, and decisions regarding returning or staying (Fong, 2011; Zhai et al., 2019). The challenges and uncertainties brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic have further tested these transnational relationships, particularly within Chinese families. The one-child policy implemented in China between 1980 and 2016 has significantly reduced family sizes and placed the sole child at the center of the family (Pletcher, 2022). In this study, of six participants, only Patricia has a younger sister, while the others are the only child in the family.

Apart from the financial support mentioned in the first theme, parents' transnational involvement in the lives of my participants is common. Research has found that family emotional support provides a buffering effect when students experience difficulties in the host country (Wilcox et al., 2005). In Kevin and Maverick's cases, they both encountered tremendous challenges in their first-year studies due to the sudden increase in the difficulty of their courses and their lack of familiarity with the Western educational system. For Maverick, he even started to doubt himself and consider the possibility of changing his major. It was his parents who, after consulting with others' previous experiences, advised him to persist with his major for an additional year before considering a switch. This forced him to push himself beyond his limits and ultimately led to his current academic success. Maverick reflected,

If it weren't for my parents, I might have just changed my major and missed out all the sense of achievement that computer science brings to me, and I might have just returned home after graduation without anything I can brag about. (Maverick, Oct 29th, 2022)

Conflict among family members is an inevitable aspect of family life, but what captivates attention is how a family manages to address conflicts and reconcile while living thousands of

miles apart and leading distinctly different lives. It is to my surprise that all female participants reported improved relationship with their fathers. For Hazel and Patricia, one major source of conflict came from the father's conservative stance against the decision of studying abroad, such as the father's comment like "China is such a big place, why bother going abroad to study?" (Patricia, January 6, 2023). For Seven, conflicts stemmed from her father's absence in her childhood yet the sudden intervention into her life with a condescending attitude. Despite various reasons for conflicts, they reconciled with their fathers in similar ways – a series of video calls through which they proved their growth and independence in Canada. Patricia explained,

In the past, I didn't understand him. I didn't really want to talk to him, but after I came here, after he saw my progress and knew that my life is actually pretty good, plus he does miss me, he gives me calls, or sometimes I call him, too. Gradually, we start to talk and understand each other. (Patricia, January 6, 2023)

In a similar vein, Seven revealed that once she secured a job and started developing her own thoughts, her father's attempts to exert control over her has significantly diminished. As she grew older, she also gradually gained insight into her father's perspective. During the interview, Seven displayed a subtle but notable sense of pride when discussing her father, possibly without even realizing it – she takes great pride in his extensive travels to numerous countries and his ability to provide for the family.

The gradually divergent attitudes and values within families are a source of conflict as a result of their disparate experiences in different localities. This can be as small as different attitudes toward wearing masks during the pandemic (in Maverick's case), or as big as parents' strong opposition against the intention to hold a memorial meeting that may result in political consequences (in Forrester's case). Patricia explained that due to the deteriorating relations

between China and the West and the political environment in China, she was cautious about expressing opinions toward sensitive issues with her family like the pandemic or politics, because she does not wish to be perceived as someone who is *Chongyang Meiwai*<sup>21</sup>. Generally, participants adopt an evasive attitude when confronting this type of conflict, even if they have an unwavering mindset towards the issues involved.

Family is not the sole type of transnational relationship that CISs maintain – some CISs make regular contacts with friends in their home country. Nonetheless, it should be noted that as time goes on, these relationships often become characterized by less frequent communication. Notably, only Hazel and Patricia reported continuous communication through WeChat message and video calls, emphasizing the significance of maintaining connections with their one or two closest friends. As Patricia commented, soulmates are never growing apart due to distance.

On the other hand, the accounts of most CISs shed light on the factors contributing to the fading of transnational friendships – a decline in shared experiences leading to a scarcity of common topics, and the emergence of divergent opinions and goals. Seven explained,

Despite the happy conversations, I heard rumors that they thought I was showing off just because I went abroad.... Soon, I realized that my pace was not in sync with theirs. Many of my classmates are preparing for postgraduate entrance exams or internships at big companies as they are about to graduate, while I am heading down a completely different path here. It feels like we are drifting further and further apart from each other. (Seven, December 14th, 2022)

From an overall perspective, families assume a crucial role in the initial stages of CISs' transnational lives. However, as CISs gained independence and formed their own ideas and

---

<sup>21</sup>*Chongyang Meiwai* is a Chinese idiom that can be translated to “obsessing with foreign cultures and belittling their own”.

values, their involvement tended to gradually transition from being major participants to observers and supporters. In contrast, friends in the home country appear to hold comparatively less significance in this context.

### ***Challenges and Resilience***

The existing literature has extensively explored the variety of challenges that international students may encounter prior to and during the pandemic (Firang & Mensah, 2021; Schartner & Young, 2016). In this section, I present 3 challenges that resonate with most CIS participants (at least mentioned by 4 participants)—language barrier, harsh weather and poor transportation, and social contact with *Laowai*. The COVID-19 pandemic's impact is not delineated as a distinct factor here since it typically intertwines with other issues, often acting as an amplifier rather than a direct cause.

To begin with, language remains a significant obstacle for CISs to overcome in terms of academic success and social adjustment (Ma, 2020). All CISs reported their early exposure to English, with all receiving formal English education as early as grade 3 in primary school. Despite some participants having access to additional resources such as Forrester, whose family was involved in Child-English education, or Seven, who had the privilege of accessing native-speaking English teachers, all participants reported difficulties in study and daily life after their arrival in Canada, to a varying degree. A few recent studies have shown that exam-oriented education in China has a negative impact on students' daily use of English, and students under this kind of education system may struggle with their everyday oral communication (Meng et al., 2021; Yin, 2022; Zhao, 2023). These findings are in line with reports of the participants in this study. For example, Seven described her teacher's comment on her silence in class, and explained that the reasons for her silence are not due to shyness but her confusion about the

casual use of language in Canada and the fear of making grammar mistakes, a mindset that she carried with her from China. Both Kevin and Patricia mentioned their hard time understanding Indian accents, and Maverick mentioned he was so desperate in the first year that he would rather self study the textbook than attend class because he couldn't understand what the professor said. Finally, all participants, except for Seven, did not meet the minimal language requirements and therefore studied at English Language Centre for some time (ranging from 3 to 18 months).

Regarding weather, CISs are no strangers to the extreme cold in Winnipeg. Hazel and Maverick were actually glad during the pandemic when online classes relieved them from enduring the endless wait in harsh winter weather just to catch the bus and arrive on time for morning classes. Kevin's most vivid memory in Canada revolved around being stranded on a bus in the middle of the road due to heavy snowfall in 2020. The bone-chilling cold pierced through him, leaving a lasting impression. Similarly, Seven still remembers her numb toes and the tears she had to hold back on that snowing day, when she lost one of her shoes. These shared experiences (Hazel, Maverick, Kevin and Seven) reinforce the importance of having cars in Winnipeg. Forrester mentioned "the public transportation system in Winnipeg is often criticized". However, Forrester was fortunate to receive support from his uncle during the early years. This support proved to be advantageous as it provided Forrester with increased mobility in the city. With his uncle's assistance, Forrester soon obtained his driving license and was able to purchase his own car, which further enhanced his independence and ability to navigate the new environment. Patricia is the only one not bothered by the winter, as she is so passionate about her current studies that she considers waking up early and waiting for public transportation in the cold to be "a tiny sacrifice" (Patricia, January 6, 2023). She registered for the early class herself, fully aware of the schedule, and therefore, didn't find it to be a big issue.

Making social contacts with *Laowai* is also repeatedly reported as a challenge salient among CIS participants. Most CISs have the intention of making friends with *Laowai* and integrating into the broader Canadian society (rather than simply Chinese community in Canada), but they all encountered obstacles. Of four acculturation strategies illustrated in Berry's model (2005), pursuing the integration (adopting the culture of host country and maintaining own culture of origin) is generally believed to be the preferred strategy to achieve better adaptations. Nonetheless, the model overlooks many external factors such as the push-back of the dominant culture and language barriers. Hazel expressed that while her classmates were very friendly and helpful in answering her questions online, she was always left behind when it comes to hands-on training that involved cooperation in class. Maverick also shared an awkward situation in a workshop— "I really wanted to chat with those *Laowai*, but it turned out that they weren't interested in me. They found an excuse to leave and talk to someone else, leaving me standing there alone" (Maverick, Oct 29th, 2022).

In addition, the pandemic made it more difficult for CISs to adopt integration strategies, especially when online learning significantly reduced the chances of face-to-face interaction. Maverick initially faced challenges with language barriers and academic pressure, which hindered his ability to establish social connections. Just as he began to adapt and find his footing, the COVID-19 pandemic emerged and disrupted all his plans. A similar opinion was expressed by Forrester, who recognized many CISs (especially first-year students) have the intention to make friends with *Laowai* yet often have limited opportunities. It was this realization that prompted him to start his business and to strive towards expanding its reach to the whole Canadian society. Kevin had the desire and succeeded in making friends with other international

students, but due to his two-year absence in Canada, he realized that he was still accompanied by more Chinese friends in Winnipeg.

Another frequently reported reason shared by Forrester, Kevin, Hazel, and Patricia is the limited number of topics and interests that they have in common with *Laowai*. Both Kevin and Patricia applied for language programs, with the intention to meet local friends. The outcome was that they engaged in pleasant and polite conversations with their language partners on a weekly basis. However, they discovered that they had little overlap in terms of their lives or interests. As a result, once the program came to an end, they naturally lost contact with their language partners. Patricia made a comparison between her own experience and that of her friend who participated in the mentor program. Her friend was paired with a senior CIS who had a deep understanding of her friend's needs and interests, introducing her to places that they both find interesting in Winnipeg and taking her to different Chinese grocery stores and restaurants. In Forrester's case, he mentioned that all his current friends share similar interests, such as *Jubensha* and Chinese hip-hop. These shared interests have played a crucial role in bringing them together and maintaining their connections. This is also why he finds it more challenging to establish similar connections with *Laowai*.

Resilience reflects how individuals use their abilities to marshal resources available to adapt to challenges, threats, and shifting circumstances (Woolfolk, 2008). Through how CISs tackled the variety of challenges, we can see patterns of CISs' resilience. To begin with, CISs developed hobbies and interests to tackle the stress caused by either study or life. Forrester introduced *Jubensha* from China to enrich the social life in Winnipeg. Facing academic stress, Maverick developed the habit of taking a half-hour walk daily and a passion for photography. To

tackle the sudden increase in free time, Seven started making handicrafts and Hazel picked up hobbies that she previously lacked time for back in China.

Secondly, most CISs take initiative to seek out various resources. One of the primary resources they utilize is the support obtained from their social contacts, as friends play a crucial role in providing both informational and emotional support (Ye, 2006). Studies have suggested that CISs socialize less frequently with their host nation peers or other international students than their compatriots (Glass et al., 2014; Yu & Moskal, 2018). Similarly, the interviewed CISs commonly relied on their senior Chinese friends or classmates for information. However, some demonstrated initiative by reaching out of their comfortable zone for support. For example, Maverick participated in several clubs aligned with his interests and his intention to make friends on campus. University resources are also a significant source of support for CISs (Cho et al., 2015). Apart from intercultural program (in Kevin and Patricia's case), Hazel shared her experiences of using university resources including psychological counselling, Visa information from an International Student Advisor, and Career Services.

Lastly, CISs typically exhibit a positive and persistent attitude, even in the face of occasional failures or setbacks – Maverick and Hazel's persistence and diligence allowed them to overcome temporary academic failures, achieving satisfying grades upon graduation. Instead of complaining about the cold weather, which was beyond her control, Patricia chose to brush it aside and only viewed it as a small sacrifice that made her stronger. For Maverick, the memories of enduring the cold in Winnipeg have transformed into something he proudly shares with his current friends since relocating to Ontario, becoming a story he can boast about.

### ***Discrimination, Racism and Bias***

The outbreak of the pandemic was accompanied by increasing racism and discrimination, especially against Asians (Ge, 2021). However, among the participants in this research, Forrester stood out as the only CIS who reported experiencing multiple instances of bias and stereotypes imposed on Chinese, including a potential hate crime incident. In contrast, most participants indicated that they have never encountered racial or any other forms of discrimination during their academic sojourn (either prior to or during the pandemic), despite their recognition of the rising number of hate crimes against Eastern Asian in Canada reported on the news. When asked about this phenomenon, Maverick, Kevin and Hazel gave similar explanations - their limited exposure to the broader Canadian society, as they spent the majority of their time on campus, provided them with a relatively safe environment that protected them from any forms of discrimination. However, it did not take long for me to come to the realization that their understanding of "discrimination" might be narrow, as it only focused on "explicit physical or verbal acts of discrimination". For example, Maverick indicated that he has never come across any racial discrimination against him. However, in another discussion regarding his changing opinions toward China, he mentioned multiple experiences of being asked by local Canadians about Chinese immigrants:

Many Canadians are aware of this issue and have asked me, 'why there are so many Chinese people coming to my country?'. When they ask me this question, I don't know how to answer. Some may just be curious, yet some ask the question in a confrontational and provocative manner, like we are taking up their public resources and taking away their job opportunities. (Maverick, December 3rd, 2022)

This type of question usually sends a message that CISs and Chinese immigrants are not welcome in Canada. When asked in a hostile manner by multiple individuals, it contributes to a

broader pattern of discrimination and exclusion that Chinese people may face in Canada. While this is actually not even as covert as it looks from my perspective, Maverick did not count it as an example of racial discrimination. Such less explicit or unintentional forms of discrimination are often overlooked in the daily lives of CISs. However, an in-depth examination of Patricia's experience of feeling "invisible" in the classroom and Canadian society (Patricia, November 16th, 2022), as well as Hazel's experience of being "left behind" in classroom hands-on training, highlights the prevalence of this issue (Hazel, December 24th, 2022).

### ***From Disappointment to Satisfaction***

Contradictory to Lysgaard's U-curve model (1955) that suggested a sequential adjustment process experienced by sojourners, most CISs reported immediate disappointment upon their arrival. This disappointment arises from the significant disparity between their expectations for the host country and the reality. Gomes and Alzougool (2013) observed that international students develop transnational identity through global entertainment media, and this can take place even before they embark on their educational sojourn through media outside their home country, language, and culture. It should be added that this kind of exposure does not always provide a holistic picture of a country (in this case, the host country). On the contrary, such preconceptions may lead to unmet expectations and ultimately result in disappointment, whether immediate or afterwards.

The immediate disappointment usually comes from the dilapidation of the City of Winnipeg, in particular its streets—instead of “a bustling, prosperous metropolis that gathers different cuisines across the world”, Hazel (December 24th, 2022) saw a small city with few shopping malls to entertain and inauthentic food from across the world. For Kevin, his first impression of Winnipeg was “a poor village” (Kevin, November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022). Maverick reported

that he felt a big shock upon arrival: “Back then, because of American TV drama and movies, I truly believed that foreign countries had clean and beautiful cities! But when I arrived, everything seemed rundown and broken. The roads were always under construction” (Maverick, Oct 29th, 2022). Apart from the initial unsatisfactory impression, CISs highlighted various other factors such as the inconvenient transportation system, the challenging winter weather, and unfulfilled personal expectations. As an example, Seven expressed disappointment about not being able to witness the sight of red maple leaves covering the ground during autumn. Forrester didn't experience vibrant campus life filled with endless party day and night, and Patricia when her Indian friend left without saying goodbye.

Despite the disappointment, none of CISs regret their decision of studying abroad. The existing literature suggested relatively high satisfaction of international students toward their academic experiences and overall experiences (Garrett, 2014; Harman, 2003; Huisman et al., 2022). Likewise, Kevin, Maverick and Patricia stressed the benefits that the Western education offers. Maverick, for example, discussed his increasing satisfaction with the education system in Canada as he successfully adapted to it. He expressed his gratitude toward his supervisor, who serves as a role model for him to follow and offers valuable advice and recommendations for his future study and career. Forrester and Patricia were content with Canada's emphasis on the freedom of speech and human rights, while Hazel was deeply impressed by the remarkable presence of accessible facilities and the commitment to gender equality in Canada, all of which influenced their decision to remain in the country.

### ***Political Identity Shifts: Changing Attitudes and Performed Apathy***

There has been a considerable amount of research on the mobility and adjustment of CISs, but until recently few looked into CISs' political identity (Gao, 2022; Wilson, 2016; Zhao, 2019).

Given the ongoing international tensions between China and the West over issues such as trade, the COVID-19 pandemic, and human rights, there is a notable gap waiting to be filled in the field. In the most recent research, Gao (2022) applies postmodernism and transnationalism theories to identify three distinct political identity patterns: Chinese nationalists, advocates of liberal democracy, and transnational neoliberals. However, it may be helpful to add two cautions to the political identity patterns of CISs.

First, political identity, just like other types of identity, is viewed through a transnational lens as dynamic, hybrid, and evolving (Tedeschi et al., 2022). This notion was reflected in the interviews with Forrester and Maverick, where they disclosed their political journey of transitioning from *Xiaofenhong* to more politically rational individuals, and from giving unconditional support for the government and the nation to adopting discerning and selective stance. Specifically, Maverick showed discretion by refraining from bragging about China's achievement with *Laowai* and in Forrester's case, he even took a risk by planning a memorial meeting that might carry political implications against Chinese government. Likewise, Seven reported that in the past, she used to vehemently defend China's position on issues such as Taiwan, often reacting with righteous indignation. Now, she has undergone a transformative shift in perspective, embracing the validity of diverse viewpoints and choosing not to engage in arguments with those who hold differing political opinions. Additionally, due to the repeated cancellations of flights back to China by the government, she no longer watches those patriotic red films like *War Wolves II*<sup>22</sup>, as they served as a reminder of unfulfilled promises made by her own government. Their changed attitudes may add evidence to the argument that while we still

---

<sup>22</sup> A Chinese action movie featured patriotic plot and achieved a massive commercial success in China. It tells a story of how a Chinese soldier rescued a group of Chinese citizens in an unnamed African country from the local rebels and vicious arms dealers.

should be cautious about assuming that studying abroad substantially reshapes CISs' political attitudes (Wilson, 2016), it is also important to acknowledge the profound impact of their lived experience across borders on CISs and their constantly evolving political identity.

Second, before the three distinct patterns of political identity, there is a noticeable presence of a performed political apathy among CISs. This is evident from their hesitance and disengagement when the topic became political during the interviews. Even though they held political views towards events happening around transnationally, the majority of CISs expressed disinterest in politics or admitted to rarely following the news. For example, Kevin explained that he did not pay much attention to political affairs, and he only used YouTube to study and very occasionally watches news from CNN or BBC. Hazel, Patricia and Seven, similarly, prefer spending time on Chinese social media like WeChat and Weibo, where they already know information is censored. Hazel added "I know there are many critiques against China, but they can't change anything and so they just keep cursing and swearing. Despite all the criticism, China's pandemic policies haven't changed, so I'll just read it and forget about it" (Hazel, December 24th, 2022).

One major reason to explain this performed identity is fear (Li, 2015). During the interviews, some CISs asked me for permission to criticize the government and some even made a joke about the potential consequence. For example, Maverick said if the interview was conducted on Tencent meeting<sup>23</sup>, he would not share his attitude. Hazel stopped the conversation in a joke tone – "this is not what we should discuss, otherwise I am afraid I am not allowed to get off the plane" (Hazel, November 11th, 2023). Secondly, the influence of CISs' family and their previous life history may be another reason (Yan, 2014). Only Forrester and Patricia expressed

---

<sup>23</sup> A video conferencing service powered by Tencent, a Chinese multinational technology company.

their dissatisfaction toward current government without hesitation. Nonetheless, when Forrester planned the memorial meeting, instead of advocating for political changes, he simply wanted an emotional outlet for Chinese people to tackle the stress and sadness brought up by the pandemic. Even so, he faced strong discouragement from his family – his father’s multiple calls made him realize the consequence of his action could be serious. Likewise, Patricia admitted that she rarely discloses her political views to others as her family taught her to mind her own business and live her life.

### **The Transnational Identity**

Transnational identity encompasses a diverse array of interrelated aspects that profoundly influence individuals' self-perception and interactions in this transnational world (Wang, 2022b). Through my thematic analysis, I here found three important aspects of the transnational identity of Chinese international students: intercultural competence, multiple and flowing Identities, and belonging and localities. Understanding these aspects is crucial for recognizing and appreciating the rich tapestry of identities that exist in CISS’ transnational trajectories.

#### ***Intercultural Competence***

There is little consensus in terms of the definition and conceptualization of intercultural competence, and similar terms like intercultural awareness, intercultural intelligence, and intercultural communicative competence are used in confusing ways (Baker, 2011; Byram, 2012; Deardroff, 2011). In light of Byram’s intercultural competence model (1997), here I take in factors involved in intercultural competence including language, skills, attitudes, and dispositions to act.

One aspect that I can immediately observe is the change in the day-to-day behaviors and habits of CISS after their time spent in Canada, and these changes are usually combined with a

further understanding of local cultural norms and values, or in other word, “habitus” (Bourdieu, 1977). For example, many CISs were not accustomed to cold water and cold milk served in restaurants, which would never happen in China due to “the tradition of hot water being believed to make one feel better” (Forrester, October 25th, 2022). However, many soon realized that “unlike their hometown, indoor spaces in Canada are sufficiently heated— that's why iced water is served” (Hazel, November 11th, 2023).

Nuances in making friends are often reported as challenging for CISs in the literature (Palmer, 2016; Tsai et. al, 2017). Seven and Patricia, in particular, expressed confusion about common daily questions – specifically, the greeting "how are you." Seven was surprised to learn that the response can be much more casual, instead of the traditional response of "I am fine, thank you, and you?" For Patricia, she felt that asking a question without expecting a genuine response was hypocritical, but now she comes to realize that “when I say it, I feel we are more connected. Maybe it is meaningless or not meant for a deep relationship, yet it at least makes me happy” (Patricia, November 16th, 2022).

Second, it is common to see that CISs' lived experiences often coincide with transformations in their values, habits, and attitudes. Through immersion in diverse cultural environments, CISs have developed a heightened appreciation and respect for the values, perspectives, and experiences of others, prompting them to re-evaluate their own beliefs. Hazel revealed her guilt about previously blaming the vulnerable for their laziness. Her perception has totally changed after learning about the accessible facilities available in Canada and witnessing how people effectively utilize them. Likewise, Seven stopped engaging in arguments concerning political issues as she now genuinely recognizes the validity of other people's perspectives. Forrester talked about culture shock related to the gender and sexuality issues and his take-away:

After coming here, I realized that gender issue here is significant. At the time, I didn't really understand it. In China, we rarely receive this type of sex education or learn about the LGBTQ community. However, here, there are LGBTQ parades every year. After I get to know them, I realized that my previous belief that being gay just means being effeminate or flamboyant is a stereotype. Through interacting with these people, I gradually learned what this community is really like, and now I can reach an understanding and reconcile with them. (Forrester, October 25th, 2022)

While acknowledging the positive impacts of these changes, it is important to note that such transitions can be significant enough to potentially induce reverse culture shock when CISs navigate across different countries. In some cases, CISs may even find themselves not capable of adapting to their home country environment after years spent abroad. Kevin shared his discomfort when he came back home,

The year and a half in Canada have, more or less, changed me, and I pay more attention to people's privacy, frequently say thank you, as well as develop a few habits in Canada. It took me some time to readjust (when I returned home). But after some time at home, those influences faded away and I was more used to life at home. (Kevin, November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022)

According to Young (2014), there can be challenges for students when readjusting to their home culture after studying abroad. A study conducted by Presbitero (2017) on international student returnees found a significant negative relationship between reverse culture shock and adaptation. The findings of my research further support this argument by suggesting that the transition can greatly impact the attitudes, values, and habits of international students, leading to difficulties upon their re-entry, particularly when there is a significant cultural distance

between countries such as China and Canada (Pitts, 2016). This can also lead to a change in the plans of international students. For instance, Seven provided a specific example that she no longer feels accustomed to the pressure and fast-paced lifestyle in China. This partly influenced her decision to remain in Canada instead:

When it comes to driving, you know, honking is not common in Canada. ... But when I went back home, taxi drivers would honk their horns all the time as if they were free, and it was really loud. It was the kind of noise that would wake you up at home. I suddenly felt that I couldn't adapt to it anymore. My mom said I was just being too sensitive; it was ridiculous that I couldn't adapt to my own living conditions just after a few years abroad. But I know it's not because I became sensitive, but because the environment in Canada allows you to relax. When you suddenly return to an environment that was very tense, you may find it difficult to adapt. (Seven, November 8th, 2022).

A third observation is the enhanced communicative competence demonstrated by CISs. Despite initially reporting low English proficiency to varying degrees, after residing abroad for approximately a year, they no longer perceive it as a significant barrier to their academic studies or to engaging in intercultural conversations. Patricia and Kevin mentioned that they are able to understand Indian accents now, and Maverick has no trouble comprehending the professor during lecture. However, it is worth noting that the improvement in communicative competence does not necessarily indicate a remarkable improvement in their English language competency, which primarily encompasses the acquisition of words, grammar, and phonological forms (Lantolf, 2000). Rather, it refers to “the ability to interact effectively with people from cultures that we recognise as being different from our own” (Byram & Brumfit, p. 433). For example, Hazel joked that her English was the best when she first arrived,

Back then, the words I learned were all fresh, and I probably had a bigger vocabulary. Nowadays, I may not know exactly what other people say, but I can understand what they mean. Or sometimes they use a word that I know the meaning of, but I don't know how to spell it. I've started to *Bailan* .... I wouldn't say my English has a qualitative leap or I've become exceptionally good like a native speaker, but rather that I've become braver. I ask them to repeat or use a different word, and I have more confidence to speak. So, communication is overall smoother than before. (Hazel, December 24th, 2022)

Finally, the improved intercultural competence enables CISs to accumulate “linguistic and cultural capital” (Bourdieu, 1991), allowing them to shift from their sole reliance on the local Chinese community to the access of additional resources and support from the broader Canadian society. Maverick shared his experiences of transitioning from heavily relying on Chinese social media apps like *Wennibo Zhan*<sup>24</sup> to using Kijiji and Facebook. He emphasized how this shift in communication platforms allowed him to engage with the local community and expand his network. Additionally, Maverick highlighted the significance of his relationships with professors, noting that they provided valuable academic and career advice, as well as wrote recommendation letters to support his professional endeavors. Hazel mentioned how her warm-hearted classmates provided advice on finding employment in Canada and encouraged her to send her CV, and how her local colleagues taught her how to thaw the ice on the windshield of her car.

On the other hand, this may also help explain why Kevin returned China immediately after graduation – the minimal intercultural engagement during the pandemic resulted in little accumulation of “capital”. With limited access to resources and support in Canada, a period of

---

<sup>24</sup> Literally Winnipeg Station. One of the biggest Chinese internet Forums in Winnipeg, providing services such as local News, working and renting information, online marketplace, and travel guide.

adjustment time required to re-integrate into the local society, and his desire to be with his family, Kevin naturally came to the decision of returning immediately.

To summarize, the adjusted behaviors, values, attitudes, and enhanced communicative competence of CISs contribute collectively to their improved intercultural competence, which facilitates their accumulation of "capital." These developments play a crucial role in CISs' reconstruction of identities and localities (see next two sections).

### ***Multiple and Flowing Identities***

From a transnational perspective, identity is understood as multiple, dynamic, and context dependent (Tedeschi et al., 2022). Among six participants, all CISs mentioned national identity (not everyone strongly identified as Chinese though); four participants (Forrester, Seven, Kevin and Hazel) regarded international student as an important identity. Forrester and Seven believe their careers in Canada as salespeople matter. In addition, Patricia emphasized that she prefers to identify herself as a student majoring in nursing. No other identities, such as religious beliefs or membership in the LGBTQ+ community, were mentioned.

It is not uncommon to see that many ISs identify themselves in terms of 'other' (Page, 2023; Pollock & van Reken, 1999; Yao, 2018). The identity of "international student", to begin with, is "other" to domestic/Canadian students. As Hazel explained,

I would say another identity is international student because there is a world of difference in tuition fee between international students and local students. ... Besides, I wanted to study medicine, but I didn't know that international undergraduates couldn't do that until I came here. (Hazel, November 11th, 2023)

Likewise, while Patricia emphasized her identity as student who studies nursing, she later noted that "... I don't know any local or white students. I have friends who are black or

from India, Vietnam, all are international students. ... I think international students are more likely to understand each other” (Patricia, November 16th, 2022).

In terms of national identity, there are remarkable discordances among CISs. At the time of interview, three CISs (Forrester, Kevin, and Hazel) strongly identified themselves as Chinese (as opposed to Canadian), prioritizing their national identity above other identities. However, others feel less connected to their national identity. For example, Patricia had a negative perception of her Chinese national identity and viewed it as deficit when interacting with *Laowai*:

Upon leaving, my mother encouraged me to bring some gifts with Chinese characteristics. At that time, I actually don't want others to identify me as a Chinese. Maybe it is not logical, and I haven't really thought about it. ...it is just sometimes I am afraid of being discriminated against if I introduce that I am from China. (Patricia, November 16th, 2022)

In addition, the life experiences of Seven and Maverick have been accompanied by a noticeable trend of diminishing recognition towards their national identity. Initially, both individuals expressed pride in being Chinese and were eager to defend China's position and highlight its achievement to *Laowai*. However, Seven now believes nationality does not hold as much significance as her student and work identity, and people should not only make friends based on nationality. International students can develop new identity within cultures of hybridity (Koehne, 2005; Smith, 2008). Maverick, for example, stated that he wishes to be Canadian because he now “behaves like a Canadian” and “is more accepting of Canadian thoughts and values”, so his identity has somewhat changed – “The identity of Chinese does not matter to me. ... While I still talk to my Chinese peers about which city I am from, I prefer to say I am from Winnipeg when chatting with *Laowai* here [in Ontario]” (Maverick, Oct 29th, 2022).

On the other hand, while half CISs strongly identify themselves as Chinese, they tend to separate their political identity from national identity, especially after the pandemic. Forrester elaborated his change of views toward Chinese government,

A few years ago, I was one of those *Xiaofenhong* who unconditionally supported the Chinese government. After all, there are 1.4 billion people [to manage]! However, due to its handling of the pandemic, my mindset has changed. The government's actions have made me realize that not everything they do is for the benefit of the 1.4 billion Chinese people, but rather for the benefit of certain privileged groups. But living in Canada, I feel okay. Are there corrupt officials? Of course! Are there social inequalities? Definitely! But at least here you can speak up. When faced with injustice, you can speak out and every voice is valued. This is not possible in China, where 1.4 billion voices are unlikely to be heard. (Forrester, October 25th, 2022)

Even between the two interviews, a change of attitude can be traced in terms of the recognition toward the government. While Hazel recognized most health prevention measures imposed by the Chinese government in the first interview, Hazel was upset with the sudden opening-up. She explained what China means to her,

China is just a designation, like the Tang Dynasty or the Ming Dynasty, a general term used for convenience. I do not acknowledge regime but the people. With the current opening-up, I see doctors who work day and night while receiving their IV drip, those who are truly saving lives. This is my self-identification. So, I don't really care about what the government is doing. It has little impact on me because I have left China. ...The government policy does not affect my national identity, because the country and its regime are two completely different concepts. (Hazel, December 24th, 2022)

Despite the wake of globalization and migration, political identity remains deeply interconnected with national identity in complex ways (Berg & Hjerm, 2010). It plays an essential role in both the formation and the functioning of nation-states, serving as both a defining characteristic of national groups and an important indicator of national identity (Prinsloo & van der Waldt, 2016; Zhan & Wang, 2014). This may be particularly true for China, a near-monoethnic nation-state governed by a single party. Therefore, when CISs separate political identity from national identity, some of them experienced a decline in their sense of original national identity. For those who still strongly identify as Chinese, what they refer to as national identity may in fact be “ethnic identity of Han Chinese”, or in Berg and Hjerm’s word (2010) “ethnic national identity”.

### ***Belonging and Localities***

Transnational individuals are often found and retained in more than one locality, developing varying degrees of belonging and attachment (Klingenberg et al., 2020; Vertovec, 2009). During the initial adjustment in Canada, CISs sought to reconstruct a new Chinese locality by both virtually and physically embedding themselves within local Chinese community. ISs can have transnational identity before embarking on their educational sojourn (Gomes & Alzougool, 2013). In this study, all CISs established connections with the Chinese community in Canada prior to their arrival through relatives, friends, or teachers who were or still are there. Local Chinese online platforms provide them with opportunities to find housing, buy second-hand items and look for classmates and friends, all of which offer them a sense of familiarity in the host country. All CISs reported either living with their relatives in Winnipeg or renting a room from a Chinese landlord. This attachment to the community can be profound for individuals with limited English proficiency, such as Maverick, Hazel, and Patricia. They rely

heavily on the experiences and opinions of senior CISs to navigate their daily lives and studies, including seeking assistance from them when searching for accommodation in specific areas and selecting suitable courses, rather than consulting their academic advisors. Virtually, while some CISs may gradually switch to other local online platforms in Canada, they primarily use WeChat, *Xiaohongshu*, and *Weibo* to access resources and find entertainment.

The formation of this new locality, as well as the sense of belonging and attachment among the Chinese community in Winnipeg, is marked by complex emotions, though. In the literature, it is not uncommon to find that international students are subject to exploitation and abuse from their own cultural community (Forbes-Mewett & Nyland, 2008). Most CISs in this study also presented narratives that depicted the community in a negative light, highlighting instances of mistreatment and exploitation that have occurred within the community. For example, Maverick shared his shock to find so many scandals, gossips, and accusations that circulated on *Wennibo Zhan*. Forrester failed to receive 2-week payment from his Chinese restaurant owner. In another instance, Seven was forced to move out of her new residence after the Chinese landlord raised her rent by \$200 per month, just the day after she moved in. The Chinese community in Winnipeg can be seen as an imagined community, as described by Anderson (1983), because despite Winnipeg not being a metropolis, CISs are unable to personally acquaint themselves with the majority of Chinese people. These experiences of being explored and abused, or even just hearing about them, can affect the perceptions toward the community and alter their sense of belonging and attachment. Norton and Pavlenko (2019) argue that the actual and desired memberships in “imagined communities” can shape individuals’ present and future decisions and behaviors. Transnational individuals like CISs are given the opportunity to construct new localities in the host country. Therefore, it is possible for CISs to

reimagine the community and reconsider their actual and desired memberships if they have experienced mistreatment from their own community or even just witnessing negative aspects of their community. Seven, after finishing the whole story about her obnoxious landlord, commented, “now I hate it the most when people say, ‘we’re all Chinese, we should ...’ . Because they are actually using the identity to morally manipulate you and take advantage of you” (Seven, December 14th, 2022). Similarly, after seeing the poor hygiene condition of Chinese restaurants and cases of tax evasion within in the local Chinese community, Patricia regarded being a Chinese in Winnipeg as a negative label.

On the other hand, many CISs also realized that every community has its bad apples. As Forrester noted,

I have encountered more good people than bad people here. We all know that Chinese people like criticizing Chinese bosses for taking advantage of their own people. However, there is no good or bad among communities, or races. There are also shameless *Laowai*, right? At least in my opinion, putting my identity as a Chinese first shows that I love this community. I don't really consider myself a Winnipegger, but I feel I am a part of the Chinese community in Winnipeg. This is why I am willing to bring so many things to this place, I believe that there is hope in this community. (Forrester, November 28, 2022)

Likewise, Hazel explained this from her Indian colleague’s perspective, who said to her, “Chinese people are really nice and united, helping each other, unlike our Indian community, where people often bully their own community members and are hypocritical with their words” (Hazel, December 24th, 2022).

After becoming accustomed to their new surroundings, most CISs have made effort to engage with the wider Canadian community, as it is often part of their intention to develop

meaningful relationships with people from diverse cultures. However, stepping out of their comfort zone and trying to integrate into a new social context can be challenging. For example, while Kevin and Patricia signed up for the programs in the hope of developing meaningful relationships with *Laowai*, friendship did not just happen naturally. Kevin did not share similar interests with his language partner although their conversation went well. Patricia, on the other hand, soon realized her paired partner was not actually interested in their conversation but just wanted to enrich his CV, and thus the weekly conversation was just “symbolic”. Maverick also described his experience of being ignored in a workshop, followed by his embarrassment and lowered intention to reach out. At some point, most CISs reported they had good *Laowai* friends that they would hang out with. However, as time went by, it was usually their Chinese friends who stayed with them. As Forrester noted,

I would say lack of opportunity [to engage in a meaningful relationship]. ... The friends I make are usually because we are somehow connected. For example, we are into this *Jubensha* business, so we become business partners and friends. Or we all share a passion for hip-hop. Or we might become friends with our roommates. I won't talk to some strangers on the street and make friends with them, right? (Forrester, October 25th, 2022)

With years spent in the host country, half of CISs (Maverick, Seven, Patricia) reported a strong sense of belonging toward Canada and constructed a new locality surrounding the wider Canadian society. When Maverick headed for his master's program in Ontario, he referred to Winnipeg as his home instead of China or Chengdu, boasting about the cold weather of Winnipeg. He couldn't really explain why. Instead, he stated, “I find it strange, but I think, wow, I once stayed in one of the coldest cities in Canada. I feel so proud” (Maverick, Oct 29th, 2022). Seven also shared the change of her discourse in describing the travel to Canada from “I will go

to Canada” to “I will go back to Canada” (Seven, November 8th, 2022). In other words, Canada has become a place that she now considers home. After all, "home" is the place that one feel belonged to and that will go back to.

Other CISs (Forrester and Hazel) expressed less attachment to Winnipeg or Canada. As Forrester noted, “I don't feel like this place is my home, I always feel like an outsider. I have little sense of belonging, so if someone online is insulting Winnipeg, I don't really care. If someone insulted Xinjiang, I definitely couldn't stand it” (Forrester, November 28, 2022). Hazel talked about her feeling about national anthem,

I work at school, so every day we sing the Canadian national anthem, .... but I just feel like we're singing a song, even though I do stand up to show respect. Deep in heart, I don't really have any special emotions. My thoughts and feelings were not quite the same when singing the Chines national anthem. (Hazel, November 11th, 2023)

Finally, I should not leave Kevin behind, who reported no sense of belonging at all toward the host country and regarded himself as a pure outsider of Canadian society. Kevin answered with a rhetorical question, “How come I become a part of Canadian society? Just because I was there studying does not mean I am related to the local society. ... I have no sense of belonging to it” (Kevin, December 18th, 2022).

In addition, the pandemic is repeatedly reported as a hindering factor that affects CISs' sense of belonging toward the home country. With the strict travel ban and quarantine measures tightened up in China in 2022, CISs reported no intention to return. For Hazel, that was already the third year away from the family. Maverick also expressed that those malicious reviews online is a “trigger point” for him to consider immigration:

I think people in China doesn't recognize me as a Chinese like I do. They think we (CISs) don't love the county, like we ran away and only came back when the pandemic was under control. I have already developed rebellious feelings and just don't want to go back. (Maverick, December 3rd, 2022)

This finding is consistent with Yu (2021) and Jin and Wang (2022)'s studies, both of which pointed out that stigmatizing CIS returnees have detrimental effect on their sense of belonging and resulted in their identity shifts.

Furthermore, the pandemic impacts CISs' families in a variety of ways. Seven and Forrester acknowledged the financial conditions of their families have worsened, and Patricia complained that her parents as doctors had to adhere to exhausting and seemingly pointless pandemic prevention protocols. These inconveniences and challenges were not directly caused by the pandemic itself but rather by the inflexible prevention measures imposed by the local government – “measures are being escalated step by step from the central to the local level” (Hazel, November 11th, 2023). While most CISs expected a gradual relaxation of Zero-COVID policy at the time of the first interview, their eyes widened in shock by the decision of the sudden opening up. Kevin joked that he was basically waiting to be tested positive at the second interview. Patricia indicated that her parents had to work around the clock due to the surge of patients: “the entire healthcare system is overwhelmed. My mother is a cardiologist, and her patients are all referred from the respiratory department to hers because it can't accommodate more patients” (Patricia, January 6, 2023).

The loss of vision or the disappointment of an expectation in a country can result in a diminished sense of belonging over time (Klingenberg et al., 2021). As Forrester expressed his concern for China,

The pandemic has huge impact on China. Is it possible that there will be another bigger crisis? I would say, definitely. It is already difficult for me to predict what kind of country China will become in the future, especially considering that the pandemic has already set the country back by, like, ten years. I can't say for sure, and I dare not. I don't want to consider this question anymore. (Forrester, October 25th, 2022)

Finally, it is still important to note that the re-opening of China at the end of 2022 represents a chance of reunion with the family, and the hope for the recovery of the nation. At the time of second interview, despite the surge of COVID cases, two participants expressed their intention to visit China, and one (Patricia) had booked the flights home. Their return to the home country, as a result, may continue to facilitate the reconditioning of their identity in between the multiple localities (Wang, 2022a).

In this chapter, I conducted a thematic analysis of life history interviews to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences and transnational identity of CISs. The analysis uncovered six overarching themes that encompass these experiences. Furthermore, I explored the transnational identity of CISs and classified them into three dimensions. These findings offer valuable insights into the distinct challenges, perspectives, and identity dynamics that CISs encountered while studying abroad, particularly during the pandemic. Moving forward, the next chapter will delve deeper into the themes identified, offering a comprehensive discussion of the experiences of CISs and their implications for their transnational identity development.

## **Chapter 6: Discussions**

In the last chapter, I summarized my findings with themes that emerged from the life history interviews with CISs. In this chapter, I will continue to address my two research questions and further the discussion with a specific focus on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Unraveling the Profound Impact of the Pandemic**

In response to the first research question, there are a total of 6 emergent themes of CISs' life history including independence, transnational relationships, challenges and resilience, perceived discrimination, satisfaction, and change of political attitudes. Despite the increasing attention on the lived experiences of ISs due to the significant and far-reaching impact of the pandemic, as evidenced by previous studies in the last three years (Chen et al., 2020; Firang & Mensah, 2021; Hari et al., 2021; Hu, 2022; Mbous et al., 2022; Yu, 2021), this research provides additional evidence to this field.

### ***Travel Restrictions***

The COVID-19 pandemic had an immediate and significant impact on IHE both abroad and at home, with the implementation of a series of travel restrictions and other pandemic-related challenges disrupting the mobility of ISs (Yang, 2022; Yıldırım, 2021). In Canada, the number of study permits issued to ISs dropped sharply from 400,640 in 2019 to 255,665 in 2020, as a result of concerns over health risks, uncertainty, and travel restrictions. However, this figure quickly bounded back to the pre-pandemic levels in 2021 and soon reached a record high of 550,505 in 2022 (IRCC, 2023). Contrary to this overall trend, the number of CISs who received study permits in Canada declined steadily throughout the three-year pandemic, falling from 84,150 in 2019 to 52,030 in 2021 (IRCC, 2023). On the other hand, it has also disrupted the effort for the

internationalization at home, for example the benefits for both domestic and international students' intercultural competence, (Beelen & Jones, 2015), creating barriers to access social life and culture.

Through CISs' lived experiences, to begin with, we may be able to have a glimpse of one specific reason for the decreasing number—all CIS participants were impacted by the pandemic in one way or another. Restrictions on physical mobility of students, especially with China's stringent entry and quarantine policies, significantly increased the difficulties of transnational movement of CISs across borders. Hazel and Patricia hadn't found the chance to return until China re-opened its border at the end of 2022. Forrester wandered across mainland China for over 40 days before finally being able to see his family. Seven was disappointed by the multiple cancellations of her flight home. While this is the experience of CISs abroad, prospective CISs can also perceive difficulty and uncertainty, either because of the pandemic itself or due to rigorous implementation of prevention measures, and thus they showed less interest in studying abroad. Consequently, students and their families may reconsider the weight of different factors in their decision-making and country choices of studying amid the pandemic (Mok et al, 2021).

### ***Campus Closure and Online Learning***

Another form of pandemic impact is campus closure, followed by a sudden transition to online learning for nearly three years, both of which significantly affected CISs in a variety of ways. Previous studies in the past three years focus on mental health (such as stress, frustration, depression) and academic difficulties during the pandemic (Hohlfeld et al., 2022; Keyserling et al, 2022; Parker et al. 2021; Spatafora et al., 2022; Telli et al., 2021). The evidence indicates that CISs faced increased academic and psychological challenges during the pandemic. In terms of mental health, a majority of CISs experienced stress at some point, but two participants, Seven

and Hazel, reported being diagnosed with depression and taking medication for it. Hazel associated her depression with academic pressure in general, while Seven primarily attributed it to online learning and managing time differences between China and Canada. For academic difficulties, Forrester mentioned cases where classmates resorted to cheating in order to quickly complete their coursework and graduate early during the initial stages of the pandemic. He emphasized the challenges faced by less self-disciplined students like himself, stating that online learning is problematic: “Online courses are easy. I just sit there every day, click the mouse, and one course done. I don't aim for high grades, especially if I just want my university degree. To me, this whole thing is too scary” (Forrester, October 25th, 2022). Besides, Hazel identified another difficulty of lacking opportunity to contact teachers for questions, which can reduce the efficiency of the teaching and learning. Apparently, online learning poses a threat to the engagement and motivation of students, and thus requires more autonomy and agency from students than the traditional learning situation (Parker et al., 2021).

While Zoomiversity (Hohlfeld et al., 2022; or, as one participant Seven called it “Zoom university”) has gained attention amid the pandemic, there are few studies that specifically address the social challenges of ISs. It is crucial to acknowledge that the closure of campuses and the shift to online learning during the pandemic disrupted the norm of commuting to campus for students. This change not only presented psychological and academic challenges but also contributed to feelings of isolation for CISs, as they might have been confined to their rented homes in the host country or even had to learn remotely from their home country. Kevin explained his social experiences after he went back to China: “When [online] class is dismissed, everyone just closed the chat box and left right away” (Kevin, November 1st, 2022). Without being physically present at campus and in Canada for two years, Kevin realized at the end of his

academic sojourn that, contrary to his intention, he still made more Chinese friends. The absence of campus life and the significant reduction in interaction between teachers and students, as well as among students themselves, can impede access to cultural experiences and resources for both international and domestic students. This creates a notable obstacle to fostering internationalization at home.

On the other hand, except for Forrester, CISs expressed their positive perception of the benefits of online learning. It appears that the participants widely accepted online learning due to its flexibility and its facilitation of their understanding of lectures. As Larkin (2010) argued, online education technologies provide a flexible learning environment that can address diversified need of students including but not limited to pace, space and time. Maverick, Seven, and Hazel all expressed a sense of relief that they no longer had to wake up early and endure harsh winter conditions to catch the bus, thanks to online classes. Maverick, in particular, expressed a strong preference for online learning over traditional in-person classes, stating, “you need to wake up early and go to school in March when it is snowing heavily outside. If you don’t go, you will miss one class session’s content that can be very important. With online classes, you wouldn’t have this kind of situation” (Maverick, Oct 29th, 2022). Patricia, similarly, thanks to the flexibility of online learning, was able to go home and stay with family for a semester after almost two years’ separation without lagging behind her academic schedule. Furthermore, since most CISs reported language as a difficulty to their adjustment in the host country, the online education also provided possibilities through recorded lectures. As Hazel demonstrated, “my depression was caused by my low GPA. [After online courses] I could stay home and get more sleep. No need to rush for 8 am class, ... and you can always watch recorded lectures later, right? I feel more at ease and my mental state has improved a lot” (Hazel, November 11th, 2023).

### *Online Media*

The third aspect regarding reported lived experiences of CISs during the pandemic is online media, which has consistently been closely tied to transnationalism, given its significant role in transnational practices (Tedeschi et al., 2022). Here I focus on two forms of online media that seem to be the most relevant to CISs living transnationally on digital places amid the pandemic – social media and news media. Regarding social media, CISs primarily spend their time on Chinese-language social media such as WeChat, *Weibo*, *Xiaohongshu*, and *Wennibo Zhan*. These Chinese-language social media platforms play a crucial role in enabling the sharing of local content and fostering the formation of local Chinese community, making them an integral part of the social and cultural landscape for CISs in Canada. Of six participants, Maverick was the only one who mentioned being active on Instagram, as well as Telegram for communication and collaboration within a classroom context. One possible reason for this preference towards Chinese apps is the "Great Firewall of China", which restricts access to many foreign websites and social media platforms such as Facebook or Instagram for (Chandel et al., 2019; Griffiths, 2021). Hence, foreign social media platforms are relatively new to CISs, and it may take them some time to become familiar with these platforms. Additionally, this presents a social challenge for CISs since they may have limited foreign friends to interact with initially, which makes their social media experience less engaging and interactive. Secondly, compared to foreign social media, Chinese-language social media provide tailored support, service, and content to CISs in Canada. Jauhiainen et al. (2022), through their study of Syrians' social media in Turkey, pointed out that transnational individuals frequently used social media for accessing basic needs and services, to enhance their challenging psycho-social well-being, to maintain transnational bonding and bridging connections to the home country, as well as implementing

their mobility plan. When CISs have convenient access to a platform they have been using for years, with services and information that already meet their needs, they might be hesitant to switch to something new. However, this preference for Chinese-language social media platforms can have drawbacks, particularly when it leads to limited exposure to the broader Canadian society. Given that the Chinese community in the host country is often sizable enough to fulfill their daily needs, some CISs may choose to remain within the comfort zone of the Chinese community. This can potentially restrict opportunities for language practice, cultural exchange, and integration into the wider society for CISs.

Indeed, online media functions as a transnational social field, providing transmigrants with a parallel space that surpasses the limitations of time zones and geographical distances (Ip & Yin, 2015). The availability of social media has significantly enhanced the role of transnational relationships in supporting the adjustment of CISs, particularly in comparison to traditional printed media. This is especially important for newcomer ISs who have limited knowledge of the host country and require emotional support and practical guidance. An example of this is seen in the cases of Kevin and Maverick, who faced challenges in their computer science studies. Their parents provided them with encouragement and support, recognizing that computer science can be difficult to begin with. On the other hand, while multi-localities can be built through social media and a hybrid culture can be cultivated, it sometimes can also give rise to conflicts. For instance, Maverick encountered differing opinions regarding the wearing of masks during the pandemic, resulting in disagreements between his parents and him. Similarly, Seven faced divergent decisions and perspectives regarding future plans with her classmates in China. Though, this phenomenon appears to be more common in transnational friendships than in relationships with family members, many CISs have observed increasingly

distant relationships with their friends back home. Probably like Maverick explained, due to CIS's living in another reality, their thoughts and goals inevitably diverge: "Now I prefer taking to people around me [CISs] or even locals, rather than those from China, because you think you are right, and I think I am right. There is little to agree upon" (Maverick, Oct 29th, 2022).

Similar to their use of social media, the majority of CISs tend to consume news from Chinese-language sources. This includes Chinese platforms like *Weibo*, Chinese-language content on platforms such as YouTube, as well as news within their local community and among their friends. However, most CISs express limited interest in current events and news in general. For instance, Maverick is the only participant who mentioned checking news on the simplified Chinese political section of Twitter, and Forrester occasionally checks news on Twitter (but only for the purpose of searching materials for his rap music). Kevin mentioned clicking into the news section on YouTube only when he came across it and was surprised by the aggressive attitude towards China. Other participants are primarily interested in *Weibo* for entertainment purposes. Despite reported apathy of CISs towards news, they have been inevitably affected through misinformation and hate speech online, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (Kim & Kesari, 2021). For example, Forrester was angry with the news coverage of the unproven connection between Chinese consuming bat soup and the COVID virus, which directly worsened the bias toward Chinese at the beginning of pandemic breakout. As he said, "Before you fully investigate the source of this matter, how can you just draw a conclusion that the cause of all this is due to Chinese people and bat soup" (Forrester, October 25th, 2022)? By contrast, Patricia actually took in this unsupported assumption and was worried about the possible discrimination if she identified as a Chinese. Likewise, Seven, as a media practitioner, felt really

uncomfortable when she found discriminative naming of COVID-19 such as *Wuhan Virus*, or *Wufei Virus* on Chinese-language media in Canada.

### ***Racial Microaggression***

Recent studies have shed light on a significant rise in hate crimes and discrimination targeting Asians during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ge, 2021; Tessler et al., 2020). In contrast to these previous findings, my study reveals that the majority of CISs did not perceive an increase in hate crimes or discrimination around them. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that discrimination can manifest in more subtle and unconscious ways, which can still have a negative impact on CISs. It is crucial to be aware of these subtler forms of discrimination and address them to ensure a supportive and inclusive environment for all individuals.

Based on the literature, my initial assumption was that CISs might easily fall victim to discrimination as a result of the media's political othering, blaming, and stigmatization during the pandemic (Gover et al., 2020; Lee & Waters, 2021). However, in contrast to this belief, the majority of participants in my study, except for Forrester, did not recall any incidents of discrimination or mistreatment in their daily lives. This could be attributed to the fact that they primarily spent their time on campus studying. According to their accounts, there seems to be a consensus among participants that the university campus is a safe and inclusive environment.

Despite this, is it safe to draw the conclusion that university campus and classrooms have indeed become inclusive and equitable places for students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds? My further analysis of the data indicates that there are still issues to be addressed. For example, while Hazel and Patricia both acknowledged the friendliness and helpfulness of their classmates, Hazel reported being left behind during group cooperation in class, and Patricia reported feeling invisible. These incidents might be committed unconsciously, but still, they

suggest that social disparities and isolation persist, even within the university environment, undermining the social and academic experiences of CISs. In reviewing the literature on these contemporary and subtle forms of racism, Sue et al. (2007) used the term “racial microaggressions” to describe brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color, and identified three forms including microassault, microinsult, and microinvalidation. In light of this notion, a study identified that Asian ISs in Canada typically reported feeling excluded and avoided by peers on campus (Houshmand et al., 2014). This research finding aligns with Maverick's personal experience of feeling embarrassed when he realized that his peers were not interested in him and found an excuse to leave and speak with someone else during a workshop. Similar instances of racial microaggressions are prevalent in everyday experiences among racialized students and can have consequences by fostering alienation, isolation, and exclusion, and thus continuously impacting their academic and socioemotional outcome (Benner & Kim, 2009; Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015). As a result of the terrible experience, Maverick reported that he became hesitant to initiate conversations in social settings, fearing that he might not have common topics to discuss with his peers, and that they would find excuses to leave.

As mentioned earlier, most CISs have intention to socialize with their peers of different cultural backgrounds and develop meaningful relationships. To achieve this purpose, many did take the initiative to break the ice in a variety of social occasions such as language exchange program, university clubs, and workshops, while others prefer to remain within their comfort zone among the Chinese community (or even alone, in Hazel's case). However, in either situation, CISs may encounter unpleasant and disappointing experiences and perceive racial

microaggression such as being isolated or avoided, either intentionally or unintentionally – the “push-back” from their peers (Bardhan & Zhang, 2017). Consequently, a few CISs developed feelings of being “invisible”, “isolated” or feeling “disappointed” at some point and may even abandon their original intentions to integrate and develop new relationships with peers of different cultural and racial background. Of course, various other factors can also affect ISs’ adjustment and integration including language proficiency or cultural differences, which act as significant barriers for CISs to fully participate in academic and social settings (Young et al., 2013; Zhang & Zhou, 2010). However, what I would like to emphasize here is that experiencing everyday racial microaggressions is also a lived experience of CISs, especially regarding their social adjustment outcome during the pandemic, as well as the fact that they may not necessarily realize microaggression can be a form of racism that affects their perception and adaptation.

To summarize, this section discusses the reported lived experience of CISs through the impact of travel restriction, campus shutdown and online learning, online media, and racial microaggressions amid (or beyond) the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Unveiling the Development of Transnational Identity**

As argued by Vertovec (2009), migrants develop and maintain a sense of belonging, loyalty, and attachment in multiple places. When CISs travel across the borders and lead a transnational life, they constantly navigate their way through an array of localities, developing multiple identities and belongings in response. Regarding the second research question, I have summarized three overarching themes: intercultural competence, multiple and flowing identities, and belonging and localities. In this section, I will expand on the impact of CISs' lived experiences in Canada on their transnational identity.

#### ***The Impact of the Pandemic***

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted CISs' transnational identity. National identity remains a central subject of transnationalism, as transnational ties can dissolve some national barriers while simultaneously strengthening or creating others (Clavin, 2005). It is, therefore, usually in a state of constant change and requires a continuous time- and effort-consuming negotiation for transmigrants (Vorobeva, & Jauhiainen, 2023). Despite this understanding, it remains surprising to hear that half of the CISs (Maverick, Seven, and Patricia) no longer place much importance to their Chinese national identification or express a desire to identify themselves as Chinese. This phenomenon is particularly obvious in the aftermath of the three-year pandemic crisis. One such example is Seven, who expressed her disappointment over her repeatedly cancelled flight home. This stands in stark contrast to the message propagated by Chinese red films in recent years, which often portray that "the motherland will bring you home no matter what."

To be clear, the term "Chinese" or "Chinese identity" can connote multiple interpretations that imply a variety of identities. For example, "Chinese" may simply refer to people who hold Chinese citizenship and are geographically from China (regardless of their ethnic and cultural background), or more specifically to the dominant ethnic group, the Han Chinese, who share ancestral ties (Chandra, 2006). The latter denotes people who share a common culture, language, values, and traditions associated with ancient China and its Chinese people. This can include individuals who are not Chinese citizens but identify with Chinese culture, such as members of local Chinese diaspora communities in Canada. Furthermore, "Chinese" can refer to people who demonstrate recognition and support toward the government and political party, its policies, actions, and the interest of the nation, thereby implying a political identity. Therefore, interpreting what CISs mean by Chinese or Chinese identity and what

changes have taken place in recent years during the pandemic are crucial to understand the shift of CISs' transnational identity.

Based on the interviews, it was evident that the political identity of CISs has undergone a significant transformation. The implementation of travel restrictions and bans in China made it challenging to travel between China and other countries. This inconvenience has not only affected foreign travelers but also Chinese citizens both within China and abroad. In addition, the multiple on-and-off city lockdowns across the country in the past three years such as the Shanghai lockdown in 2022, as well as the reoccurrence of COVID-19 outbreaks in other megacities, resulted in numerous crises that have been covered by both domestic and foreign online media (Cheshmehzangi et al., 2022; Tian et al., 2022). Absorbing negative media coverage of zero-COVID policy and their own personal experiences, Forrester and Maverick mocked their previous political identity as *Xiaofenhong* and shared their transition to more rational individuals. Similarly, Seven's disappointment about her cancelled flights and her mother having heart attack during city lockdown, and Hazel's disappointment toward the sudden nationwide opening up suggested that most CISs had a varying degree of disapproval toward the government's doings during the pandemic.

On the other hand, despite the discontent, CISs preferred staying away from politics, or at least away from expressing critiques against Chinese government. Many of the CISs interviewed were hesitant to disclose their political attitudes towards the Chinese government and its handling of the pandemic. Even Forrester, who organized the memorial meeting, was not interested in making it a political event. These lived experiences of CISs may reflect the wider fear and sense of powerlessness felt by many Chinese people under the authoritarian political system during the pandemic (Gallagher & Miller, 2021).

Coming to ethnic identity, which from my point of view is closer to what CISs mean by Chinese, Forrester, Kevin, and Hazel expressed their appreciation for Chinese people, their set of values, history, Confucianism of being modest and humble, as well as preference for ancient Han Chinese clothing. As Forrester pointed out:

I don't think that criticizing the Chinese government necessarily means criticizing me personally. I am still very proud to be Chinese. I hold a Chinese passport. I am proud that my country has a history of 5000 years. We have Confucius—we know what it means to be humble. We also have very good technology. These are good enough for me. ... This is my identity, something that has given me life and pride. However, identity has nothing to do with superiority or inferiority. White people are not superior to us. You have Nobel Prize winners, and so do we. You have LeBron James, and we have Yao Ming, right? Every country has its own strengths - you are good at basketball, and China is good at table tennis. (Forrester, October 25th, 2022)

It should be noted that while the other CISs may not want to identify or be identified as Chinese, none of them identified as Canadian. Only Maverick expressed that he wishes to be Canadian because he now “behaves like a Canadian” and “is more accepting of Canadian thoughts and values” (Maverick, Oct 29th, 2022). However, he revealed there are still huge cultural differences that he needs to overcome: “Maybe 10 years, 20 years later I will really integrate in [Canadian society], but now with all those cultural differences, I don’t think so” (Maverick, December 3rd, 2022).

Seven and Patricia seemed to indicate the potential of a cosmopolitan identity (Oikonomidou & Williams, 2013). Cosmopolitanism presupposes individualization (Beck, 2002) and embraces the notion of “citizen of the world” who rejects belonging to a certain group, either

national, ethnic, or religious (Nussbaum, 1994, p.29). It features a sense of openness and respect for cultural differences, as a result of a wide range of ongoing empirical phenomena including transnational migration, cross-border mobility and globalization (Inglis, 2014). A cosmopolitan identity, then, is viewed as an expression of selfhood that transcends cultural identity and collective belonging (Skovgaard-Smith & Poulfelt, 2018). Hence, one would usually define oneself as non-nationals according to cosmopolitanism. Both Seven and Patricia appeared to have undergone a transformation, shifting from prioritizing their collective identity to embracing a more cosmopolitan worldview. In Patricia's case, while fear of racial discrimination is one major reason why she is hesitant to identify as Chinese, it is also evident that she is more content with her identity as a nursing student, which gives her a sense of accomplishment and enthusiasm. This preference for being recognized as an individual rather than showing allegiance to one's national or ethnic identity implies the potential for being a cosmopolitan individual. Similarly, Seven sought to be perceived differently on various occasions rather than being constrained by a specific collective identity. She explained:

At school, I am an international student, and at work I am a saleswoman in a car dealership. ... I don't think national identity matters much to me. Yeah, I don't really care about where my friends come from, or their religious identity. If they tell me about it, I will respect it, but if they don't, I won't ask, either. ... People often ask me, 'are you from Korea?' For some reason, everyone thinks I look Korean. Only if they ask me, I'll tell them that I'm Chinese. (Seven, November 8th, 2022)

### ***Online Media***

Online media plays a crucial role during transnational mobility, not only in sustaining relationships with family and friends but also in providing a sense of familiarity and

connectedness in a somewhat unfamiliar environment (Collins, 2010). However, as an essential tool bridging the distances between 'here' and 'there,' the use of online media can also give rise to a plethora of complex emotions (Wilding et al., 2020). For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, CISs experienced the distressing impact of double stigmatization through the social media of both their home country and host country (Jin & Wang, 2022). This similar double stigmatization can also be seen in this study. Based on the interviews with CISs, to begin with, my empirical evidence suggests that while most CISs did not experience overt racism in reality, they were troubled by the stigmatization they faced through social and news media in the host country, particularly during the initial outbreak of the pandemic. This stigmatization took place on digital platforms through disinformation, political othering and blaming, and shaming through naming (Dionne & Turkmen, 2020; Holt et al., 2022; Jamieson & Albarracin, 2020). As the pandemic progresses into its third year, its impact on CISs has become minimal, and they no longer pay much attention to it. However, compared with the stigmatization abroad, the stigmatization at home has imposed far more detrimental effects. For example, speaking of hateful speech against CIS returnees on Chinese social media, Forrester found those comments ridiculous, and Maverick felt angry; both expressed that they have no intention to go back after seeing these comments. As Maverick explained,

My understanding is that those negative opinions online [about CISs returnee bringing back the viruses] affect my mentality. I would associate it with myself because if you call it out the entire group of international students, then you are talking about me. Sometimes, I would respond by arguing back online. ... I was definitely angry. It also triggered my desire to immigrate, a trigger point I would say. Like, I feel people in my home country don't fully identify with me, and they think that I am not a true Chinese, or I don't love

my own country, because I left it and only returned after seeing that things [the pandemic situation] have improved. (Maverick, December 3rd, 2022)

For those who haven't been able to return home after the pandemic, like Hazel and Patricia, this feeling might not be as strong as Maverick's. Nonetheless, encountering these malicious attacks on social media from time to time still proved disheartening for them. As exemplified by Hazel, "That was specifically targeting student returnees... I have no experience of 'bringing back the viruses', so I couldn't feel the same. I just immediately swiped away and tried to forget about it" (Hazel, December 24th, 2022).

### ***Transnational Negotiations: Managing Changes and Resolving Conflicts***

The multiple changes in nearly all aspects after sojourning in the host country were apparent, accounting for an integral part of transnational identity development. Difficulties and challenges encountered by ISs during the adjustment process tend to be more pronounced when the home culture and host culture exhibit significant differences (Galchenko & van de Vijver, 2007; Taušová et al., 2019). This may especially be the case for CISs in their academic sojourn in Canada, as it is culturally distant from China (Hofstede, 2001; Muthukrishna et al., 2020; Yu et al., 2019). The adjustment process for CISs may involve changes as small as adapting to new customs like drinking iced water at restaurants or expressing gratitude more frequently. However, it can consist of more significant shifts in values, such as developing respect and empathy towards vulnerable and minority groups, and reevaluating notions of human rights and freedom of speech. These changes may require CISs to navigate unfamiliar and intricate cultural norms. Consequently, these changes contribute to a broader transnational identity shift and the development of a more nuanced and global perspective.

Significant changes can also lead to difficulties and stresses when CISs return home, since they may need to readjust, reacclurate, and reassimilate into their home culture after living in the host culture for a significant period of time. This process is termed by Gaw (2000) as reverse culture shock. There is little known research on this topic, especially when it comes to the experiences of ISs returnees during such unplanned and uncertain time as the COVID-19 pandemic (Raja et al., 2023). In my finding, four CISs who returned home during the pandemic all reported experiencing a certain level of difficulty adjusting to their daily lives in China. For example, Forrester expressed feelings of not fitting in with the fast-paced and consumeristic lifestyle in China. He mentioned that his friends continuously pressured him to engage in various entertaining activities after work. He disclosed,

To be honest, this was the kind of life I once yearned for, simply just eating and drinking every day. But now it seems that those days have passed, and I feel that living here [in Canada] makes people more down-to-earth and better able to see what they really want. I may not know who I am if I come back and may easily get lost. (Forrester, November 28, 2022)

Furthermore, significant changes in values and perspectives can sometimes lead to conflicts within family and friends, as exemplified by Seven's experience. Seven faced criticisms from her mother for being too "sensitive" when she expressed her discomfort with the frequent car horns on the street. Similarly, Maverick's adoption of Canadian values has made him more willing to engage with people with oversea experiences or even *Laowai*. This shift, as he explained, is due to contrasting values, particularly in regard to attitudes towards the government and the nation. Additionally, conflicting views on the pandemic and preventive measures were identified as significant sources of disagreement. Maverick shared that he intentionally avoided

discussing the pandemic with his family due to anticipated disagreements. Similarly, Forrester's parents became upset when he voiced his criticisms of the government's prevention measures during the pandemic. These instances highlight the potential for tension and conflict arising from differing perspectives on the topic within families.

CISs have to navigate and negotiate differences and changes with themselves, friends, and family in their transnational life. As a result, their complex transnational mobility trajectories and experiences lead to the development of their transnational in-between identity, characterized by its inner processual and in-becoming character (Tedeschi et al., 2022; Wang, 2022).

### ***Local Chinese Community***

The Chinese community is found to be an indispensable element in CISs' life abroad (Liu et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023). My findings are in line with the recent empirical studies, highlighting the crucial role of Chinese community, particularly prior to the arrival and during the initial adjustment phase of CISs. Most CISs chose to study at the U of M through the recommendation of their teachers and relatives who lived or still live in Winnipeg. Meanwhile, they all construct locality around the local Chinese community by the time of their arrival, opting to rent accommodation from Chinese landlords and seeking advice from senior CISs. Only one participant (Seven) was initially placed with a Filipino family by her study agency, still she sought out rental information from *Wennibo Zhan* upon her re-entry to Canada.

Establishing social connections with individuals who share similar cultural, ethnic, or national backgrounds and participating in ethnic communities are important strategies that can buffer ISs from problems that arise during their initial adjustment phase (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998). As the representation of Chinese culture, tradition and customs, the Chinese community can also render a sense of familiarity – just as Seven said, “There are (Chinese) restaurants and

grocery stores, so I don't feel very homesick" (Seven, November 8th, 2022). It overall serves as a bridge between CISs and the host country and provides a comprehensive and practical social support networks that can facilitate the initial adjustment of CISs.

However, the other side of the story is that after some participation in the Chinese community, some CISs feel that the Chinese community does not align with or reflect their personal values and beliefs. For example, Patricia is concerned about being stereotyped based on the perceived uncleanliness of local Chinese restaurants and the use of cash by Chinese people to evade taxes. Through the two rounds of interviews, it saddens me to learn that most CISs had negative experiences when interacting with local Chinese community, such as Forrester's employer refusing to pay for his work and Seven being asked to pay a higher rent on the second day of her stay. The dissonance between the group and individuals can result in the varying sense of disappointment and negative perceptions of the local Chinese community among CISs. While most CISs actively engage with the local Chinese community, they do not necessarily strongly recognize or identify with it. On the contrary, for many CISs, the local community often serves only as an important source of information and a sense of familiarity when they are geographically distant from their home country.

Lastly, many studies have emphasized that relying excessively on one's ethnic community abroad can result in isolation from the host society (De Araujo, 2011; Khawaja & Stallman, 2011; Yan & Berliner, 2011). The local Chinese community provides CISs with a comfort zone that may potentially prevent them from embracing the opportunities to have cross-cultural communication with people from other communities. This can be probably better reflected through their intention to seek job opportunities within the local Chinese community

and a relatively low self-esteem when looking for jobs in the wider Canadian society. When asked about finding employment outside the local Chinese community, Seven answered,

Maybe I am worried that my ability, what if I went to a foreign company, but I didn't do well, I might lose both jobs. ... Language barrier may be another reason, like, you may face professional terms that you don't know. They (foreign companies) will not indulge you. While the next job may offer a better salary, you have to face the higher probability of getting fired. One cannot leave the job for another but in the end return with feathers plucked. So, for now, I do not want to step out of my comfort zone. (Seven, December 14th, 2022)

In Seven's case, she has a part-time job that can provide for her life, the need for experience, and the flexibility while she is still a full-time student. Leaving her current comfort zone, however, means a high degree of uncertainty and risks. Similarly, Patricia reported similar feelings when she planned to apply for a job as a waitress but hesitated because of her concern about language ability and fear for failure.

### ***Transnational Futures***

The shift of transnational identity can significantly affect transnational futures of CISs, such as making the choice of either staying in the host country or returning to the home country. All six CISs have already thought through their settlement plans. Kevin has already returned home to reunite with family in China, and the other five CISs will stay in Canada for either further education or work to get Permanent Residence. Only Hazel considered getting permanent residence as a backup plan, whereas the rest wished to stay in Canada as permanent residents in the future. As summarized by Chen (2017), the decision-making process surrounding the transnational mobility of students is influenced by a strikingly broad range of factors, including

policies implemented by states and institutions, such as talent policies and immigration policies, as well as individual considerations, such as national identity, sense of belonging, and family responsibilities. These factors played a crucial role, as demonstrated by the sensitive and thought-provoking analysis of the personal and professional transformation experienced by CISs.

In this section, I discussed how the COVID-19 pandemic, changes in values and habits, and the local Chinese community can have extensive impact on the shift of CISs transnational identity. It is found that ISs in the host country can present different attitudes toward their identity, ranging from enthusiastically embracing the new self to resisting to change (Fincher, 2011). This balance between primary identity formed in their home country and identity constructed and negotiated through their lived experience in the host country, as a result, has determinant impact on CISs' transnational future.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The research journey started with my curiosity about Chinese international students' lived experiences and the development of their transnational identity, with a particular focus on the COVID-19 pandemic as the (critical) context. Unlike many other studies that place primary attention on the adjustment challenges of ISs amid the pandemic, my study tries to explore them through a transnational lens that focuses on their construction of localities and development of identity. There is, of course, no right or wrong answer regarding identity development during the adjustment in a new environment, nor the best strategy to navigate life abroad. However, the formation of transnational identity can exert a huge impact on CISs' future plans, especially for those having a potential migration plan in an immigrant country like Canada.

Six case studies cannot provide a comprehensive representation of the diverse range of scenarios that CISs may encounter, nor can they represent the whole CIS group. Moreover, while

transnationalism has proven to be a useful theoretical lens in this study, other theories may yield different interpretations of the research data and findings. Nevertheless, these case studies still offered a nuanced understanding of the complexity of CISs' lived experiences and identity formation, particularly with the use of in-depth qualitative data obtained from life history interviews with CISs. Lastly, I would like to end my paper with a few potential practical implications that may be helpful to understand and facilitate the adjustment process of CISs.

### ***Recommendations for Chinese International Students***

Some international students, especially young individuals with limited life experience, who originate from non-democratic countries and have been educated within distinct value systems, may develop unrealistically high expectations based on what they have heard or learned in their home country (Yasin & Bélanger, 2015). These expectations may not align with the realities and complexities of the host country they are studying in. As indicated in my study, most CISs expressed disappointment almost immediately upon their arrival in Canada. For potential or newly arrived CISs, therefore, it may be important to manage the expectation of their overseas experience. Research has indicated that many ISs can develop transnational identity through exposure to global entertainment media before embarking on their academic sojourn (Gomes & Alzougool, 2013). Nonetheless, these media typically portray an idealized image of popular study destinations like Canada or the U.S. while inadequately acknowledging potential struggles and hardships that newcomers may face. Meanwhile, due to the limited availability of globalized media and websites in China, CISs' understanding of the host country can be confined to their imagination or can even be contradictory. To enhance their preparedness for life abroad, it is essential for CISs to make a conscious effort in acquiring a comprehensive understanding from diverse sources. Proactively learning about the host country's indigenous history, local

climate, and cultural norms that might be unfamiliar to them may also prove beneficial. By doing so, CISs can adapt more effectively to their new environment with a more realistic and nuanced understanding that empowers them to navigate challenges and thrive in their host country..

The language barrier has been repeatedly reported as major challenges in this study. Considering exam-oriented language education (Meng et al., 2021; Yin, 2022) and the continuous authority of native English are still prevalent in China (He & Zhang, 2010; Wang, 2016), CISs under this language learning environment may find it hard to initiate and maintain a conversation with *Laowai* in Canada and thus are exposed to a series of problems in their academic and social life. Hence, CISs can benefit from their attempt to challenge and overcome the constraints of exam-oriented education and intentionally immersing themselves in a non-native English-speaking environment. To achieve this, they could start by shifting their focus away from solely preparing for IELTS exams and instead, finding interest in exploring diverse topics in English prior to their sojourner. Additionally, it can be beneficial for CISs to seek out opportunities to interact with non-native English speakers, instead of solely interacting with English native speakers or their Chinese peers.

### ***Recommendations for Higher Education Institutions***

Ensuring tailored and efficient support, as well as high-quality education, remains a crucial objective for all higher education institutions. The COVID-19 pandemic has put each and every aspect of the education system under investigation. To begin with, the pandemic brought about a major shift towards online teaching and learning. While literature has suggested that online teaching and learning are far from ideal to replace tradition classroom setting, the benefits of it are also evident, particular during the pandemic (Adnan & Kainat, 2020; Castro & Tumibay, 2021). My study collected evidence on how online courses have enabled CISs to continue their

study at different places during the pandemic. It also showed that online courses have provided a possibility for students to learn from home during extreme weather conditions like snowstorms, eliminating the need for travel and ensuring their safety. Furthermore, the access to recorded lectures has been beneficial for CIS newcomers who face language barriers and require more time to adapt to the new academic environment, as they can review the course multiple times at their own pace to fully understand it. Therefore, providing blending courses that combine traditional classroom instructions with online learning opportunities and incorporating a proportion of online courses in the program can add a sense of flexibility to students' overall schedules, as well as to the plan of their cross-border travelling.

Second, while it is worth celebrating that the university campus is considered as a safe place where students from different cultural backgrounds are free from discrimination, the experiences of my participants have highlighted that racial microaggressions can still be pervasive, albeit often going unnoticed. This finding serves as a reminder that there is still much effort to be made. The university, in particular, can play a crucial role in addressing this issue by providing education on explaining concepts such as racism, discrimination, and microaggressions, and by sharing and discussing coping strategies (Steketee et al., 2021). Introducing a course on microaggressions into the curriculum for all students, for example, could enhance students' self-awareness regarding microaggression, ultimately leading to a more inclusive and welcoming campus environment.

Expanding opportunities for social interaction benefits not only international students but also domestic students, facilitating the concept of Internationalization at Home within the host country. During health crises and periods of insecurity, social boundaries between identity groups can be intensified through pandemic othering and blame (Dionne & Turkmen, 2020).

This, in turn, has amplified the issue of limited social interaction, affecting the sense of belonging during the academic sojourn of ISs. Although it is ultimately the responsibility of individuals to bridge these gaps, the university can play a critical role in facilitating effective and meaningful interaction. My study has highlighted the lack of opportunities for social interaction as one of the key obstacles in this regard. Although the university has provided a wide range of programs such as language exchange and intercultural programs, it often pairs two students in one program, which may not always lead to satisfactory results due to limited shared interest. Hence, in addition to existing programs, universities can organize larger events that enable students to forge relationships in a more natural manner. For example, group activities can bring together students from different backgrounds, foster a sense of community, and break down social boundaries. In contrast to being paired by the university according to forms filled out by a number of students, friendships developed during such activities may be more lasting and meaningful.

### ***Recommendations for Future Research***

Since identity is typically shaped through a gradual and ongoing process rather than being formed and developed all of a sudden, it makes more sense if a longitudinal study can be conducted through this transnational lens to track its dynamic process. In particular with China giving up its Zero-COVID policy and opening up border, the re-entry to the home country is getting possible for CISs. This change of situation will bring about new experiences if active border-crossing is possible and thus may reshape CISs' transnational identity. Therefore, by examining this evolving process over time, a longitudinal study can provide valuable insights within the changing context, shedding light on the complex interplay between transnational experiences and identity development.

Another topic worthy of further investigation is transnational intergenerational family. International students have a unique experience because they experience, develop, and internalize the values, norms, and behaviors of two probably distinct cultural contexts (while their parents don't). This exposure may give rise to intergenerational conflict within the family. Therefore, exploring the intricate dynamics and complexity that characterize transnational ties, as well as how international students resolve these conflicts, may be particularly fascinating and helpful in understanding the intergenerational interaction. This can also bridge the gap where the existing literature on transnational family places the experiences and practices of parents at the center yet usually leaves another side of story - the next generation - behind (Carling et al., 2012).

Lastly, while my study primarily focuses on transnational identity, it is found that some CISs expressed a desire to be recognized as unique individuals rather than being specifically associated with a particular ethnic or national identity. This inclination opens up the potential for the development of a cosmopolitan identity as a global citizen (Anker, 2010). To gain a deeper understanding of this connection and explore the interplay between transnationalism and cosmopolitanism, future research could benefit significantly from further investigation supported by empirical evidence.

## References

- Adnan, M., & Anwar, K. (2020). Online learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic: Students perspectives. *Journal of Pedagogical Sociology and Psychology, 1*(2), 45–51.  
<https://doi.org/10.33902/JPSP.2020261309>
- Alharbi, E.M., & Smith, A.P. (2018). Review of the Literature on Stress and Wellbeing of International Students in English-Speaking Countries. *International Education Studies, 11*(6), 22–44. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v11n6p22>
- Al-Sharideh, K.A., & Goe, W. R. (1998). Ethnic Communities within the University: An Examination of Factors Influencing the Personal Adjustment of International Students. *Research in Higher Education, 39*(6), 699–725.  
<https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1018714125581>
- Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. Verso Editions / NLB.
- Anderson, L.E., (1994). A new look at an old construct: Cross-cultural adaptation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 18*(3), 293–328. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767\(94\)90035-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767(94)90035-3)
- Anderson, T. (2020). News Media Representations of International and Refugee Postsecondary Students. *The Journal of Higher Education (Columbus), 91*(1), 58–83.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2019.1587977>
- Andrade, M.S., (2006). International students in English-speaking universities: Adjustment factors. *Journal of Research in International Education, 5*(2), 131–154.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1475240906065589>

Van Den Anker, C. (2010). Transnationalism and cosmopolitanism: Towards global citizenship?.

*Journal of International Political Theory*, 6(1), 73-94.

<https://doi.org/10.3366/E1755088210000467>

Azad, N.F., Serletis, A., & Xu, L. (2021). Covid-19 and monetary–fiscal policy interactions in

Canada. *The Quarterly Review of Economics and Finance*, 81, 376–384.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.qref.2021.06.009>

Bacigalupe, G., & Lambe, C., (2011). Virtualizing Intimacy: Information Communication

Technologies and Transnational Families in Therapy. *Family Process*, 50(1), 12–26.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1545-5300.2010.01343>.

Bamberger, A., Morris, P., & Yemini, M. (2019). Neoliberalism, internationalisation and higher

education: connections, contradictions and alternatives. *Discourse (Abingdon, England)*,

40(2), 203–216. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2019.1569879>

Bardhan, N., & Zhang, B. (2017). A Post/Decolonial View of Race and Identity Through the

Narratives of U.S. International Students from the Global South. *Communication*

*Quarterly*, 65(3), 285–306. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463373.2016.1237981>

Baxter, J. (2016). Positioning language and identity: Poststructuralist perspectives. In *The*

*Routledge handbook of language and identity* (pp. 60-75). Routledge.

Beck, U. (2002). The Cosmopolitan Society and Its Enemies. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 19(1-2),

17–44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/026327640201900101>

Beelen J., & Jones E. (2015) Redefining Internationalization at Home. In A. Curaj, L. Matei, R.

Pricopie, J. Salmi, P. Scott (Eds.), *The European Higher Education Area*. 59-72, Springer,

Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-20877-0\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-20877-0_5)

- Benner, A. D., & Kim, S. Y. (2009). Experiences of discrimination among Chinese American adolescents and the consequences for socioemotional and academic development. *Developmental Psychology*, 45(6), 1682–1694. <https://doi-org.uml.idm.oclc.org/10.1037/a0016119>
- Berg, L. & Hjerm, M. (2010). National Identity and Political Trust. *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, 11(4), 390–407. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15705854.2010.524403>
- Berry, J.W. (2005). Acculturation: Living successfully in two cultures. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 29(6), 697–712. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2005.07.013>
- Béland, D., S., Rocco, P., & Waddan, A. (2021). Social policy responses to COVID-19 in Canada and the United States: Explaining policy variations between two liberal welfare state regimes. *Social Policy & Administration*, 55(2), 280–294. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spol.12656>
- Block, D. (2006). Identity in applied linguistics. In *The sociolinguistics of identity*, 34-49.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power*. Harvard University Press.
- Byram, M. (2012). Conceptualising intercultural (communicative) competence and intercultural citizenship. In J. Jackson (Ed.), *The Routledge handbook of language and intercultural communication* (pp. 85–98). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203805640.ch5>
- Byram, M. & Brumfit, C. J. (2000). *Routledge encyclopedia of language teaching and learning*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203219300>
- CAAC. (2020, December 16). CAAC Notice on the Adjustment of the Circuit Breaker Measures for International Passenger Flights. *Civil Aviation Administration of China*. Retrieved

March 13, 2022, from

[http://www.caac.gov.cn/en/XWZX/202012/t20201216\\_205613.html](http://www.caac.gov.cn/en/XWZX/202012/t20201216_205613.html)

- Cao, C., Zhu, C., & Meng, Q. (2017). Predicting Chinese international students' acculturation strategies from socio-demographic variables and social ties. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology, 20*(2), 85–96. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajsp.12171>
- Carling, J. Menjívar, C., & Schmalzbauer, L. (2012). Central Themes in the Study of Transnational Parenthood. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 38*(2), 191–217. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2012.646417>
- Castro, M. D. B., & Tumibay, G. M. (2021). A literature review: efficacy of online learning courses for higher education institution using meta-analysis. *Education and Information Technologies, 26*, 1367-1385. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-019-10027-z>
- Calvo, D.M., Cairns, D., França, T., & de Azevedo, L. F. (2021). “There was no freedom to leave”: Global South international students in Portugal during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Policy Futures in Education, 20*(4), 382-401. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14782103211025428>
- Chandel, S., Jingji, Z., Yunnan, Y., Jingyao, S., & Zhipeng, Z. (2019, October). The golden shield project of china: A decade later—an in-depth study of the great firewall. In 2019 *International Conference on Cyber-Enabled Distributed Computing and Knowledge Discovery (CyberC)* (pp. 111-119). IEEE.
- Chandra, C. (2006). What is ethnic identity and does it matter? *Annual Review of Political Science, 9*(1), 397–424. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.9.062404.170715>

- Chen, H. (2022a, November 27). *China's Urumqi to ease Covid lockdown amid public anger over deadly fire*. CNN. Retrieved February 12, 2023, from <https://www.cnnphilippines.com/world/2022/11/27/china-urumqi-covid-lockdown.html>
- Chen, Q., (2017). *Globalization and Transnational Academic Mobility the Experiences of Chinese Academic Returnees* (1st ed. 2017.). Springer Singapore.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-287-886-1>
- Chenail, R. J. (2009). Interviewing the Investigator: Strategies for Addressing Instrumentation and Researcher Bias Concerns in Qualitative Research. *The Qualitative Report*, 13(4), 14-21. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2009.2821>
- Chen, J. H., Li, Y., Wu, A. M., & Tong, K. K. (2020). The overlooked minority: Mental health of international students worldwide under the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. *Asian journal of psychiatry*, 54, 1-2. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajp.2020.102333>
- Cheshmehzangi, Zou, T., & Su, Z. (2022). Commentary: China's Zero-COVID Approach Depends on Shanghai's Outbreak Control. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 10, 912992–912992. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2022.912992>
- Cho, J. & Yu, H. (2015). Roles of University Support for International Students in the United States: Analysis of a Systematic Model of University Identification, University Support, and Psychological Well-Being. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 19(1), 11–27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315314533606>
- Chun, K.M., Organista, P. B., & Marín, G. (2003). *Acculturation: advances in theory, measurement, and applied research*. American Psychological Association.
- Clavin, P. (2005). Defining Transnationalism. *Contemporary European History*, 14(4), 421–439. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777305002705>

- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education*. Routledge.
- Collins, F.L. (2010). Negotiating un/familiar embodiments: investigating the corporeal dimensions of South Korean international student mobilities in Auckland, New Zealand. *Population Space and Place*, 16(1), 51–62. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.576>
- Conrad, N., Schülke, B., & Bayer, J. (2022, December 2). *Fire tragedy in Xinjiang: Is China's COVID policy to blame?* –Dw.com. Retrieved February 12, 2023, from <https://www.dw.com/en/fire-tragedy-in-xinjiang-is-chinas-covid-policy-to-blame/a-63959843>
- Costello, M., Cheng, L., Luo, F., Hu, H., Liao, S., Vishwamitra, N., Li, M., & Okpala, E. (2021). COVID-19: A Pandemic of Anti-Asian Cyberhate. *Journal of Hate Studies*, 17(1), 108–118. <https://doi.org/10.33972/jhs.198>
- Cranfield, D.J., Tick, A., Venter, I.M., Blignaut, R.J., & Renaud, K. (2021) Higher Education Students' Perceptions of Online Learning during COVID-19—A Comparative Study. *Educ. Sci.* 11(8), 403. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11080403>
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Cuban. S., (2014). Transnational families, ICTs and mobile learning. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 33(6), 737–754. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2014.963182>
- Danby, S. & Farrell, A. (2004). Accounting for young children's competence in educational research: New perspectives on research ethics. *Australian Educational Researcher*, 31(3), 35–50. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03249527>
- Davey, G. (2020). The China–US blame game: claims-making about the origin of a new virus. *Social Anthropology*, 28(2), 250–251. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1469-8676.12900>

- De Araujo, A. (2011). Adjustment Issues of International Students Enrolled in American Colleges and Universities: A Review of the Literature. *Higher Education Studies*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.5539/hes.v1n1p2>
- Deardorff, D.K. (2011). Assessing intercultural competence. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 2011(149), 65–79. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ir.381>
- Department of Finance Canada. (2022, March 10). COVID-19: Financial support for people, businesses and organizations - Canada.ca. *Government of Canada*. Retrieved March 12, 2022, from <https://www.canada.ca/en/departement-finance/economic-response-plan.html>
- De Fina, A. (2016). Linguistic practices and transnational identities. In *The Routledge handbook of language and identity* (pp. 189-204). Routledge.
- De Wit, H. (2020). Internationalization of Higher Education: The Need for a More Ethical and Qualitative Approach. *Journal of International Students*, 10(1), i–iv. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v10i1.1893>
- De Wit, H., Hunter, F., Howard L., & Egron-Polak, E. (Eds). (2015) *Internationalisation of Higher Education*. Brussels: European Parliament, Directorate-General for Internal Policies.
- Dionne, K. Y., & Turkmen, F. F. (2020). The politics of pandemic othering: Putting COVID-19 in global and historical context. *International Organization*, 74(S1), E213-E230. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818320000405>
- Duff, P. (2015). Transnationalism, Multilingualism, and Identity. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 35, 57–80. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S026719051400018X>

- Durnin, M. (2020). *Covid-19 update: China survey results*. British Council. [https://education-services.britishcouncil.org/insights-blog/covid-19-update-china-survey-results?\\_ga=2.183165667.436377671.1596516253-1764238916.1596516253](https://education-services.britishcouncil.org/insights-blog/covid-19-update-china-survey-results?_ga=2.183165667.436377671.1596516253-1764238916.1596516253).
- Esses, V., Sutter, A., Ortiz, A., Luo, N., Cui, J., & Deacon, L. (2018). Retaining international students in Canada post-graduation: Understanding the motivations and drivers of the decision to stay. *CBIE Research in Brief*, 8. Retrieved Feb 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022, <https://cbie.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Intl-students-post-graduation-RiB-8-EN-1.pdf>
- Esteban-Guitart, M. & Vila, I. (2015). The voices of newcomers. A qualitative analysis of the construction of transnational identity. *Intervención Psicosocial*, 24(1), 17–25. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psi.2015.01.002>
- Favale, T., Soro, F., Trevisan, M., Drago, I., & Mellia, M. (2020). Campus traffic and e-Learning during COVID-19 pandemic. *Computer networks*, 176, 107290. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.comnet.2020.107290>
- Fincher, R., (2011). Cosmopolitan or ethnically identified selves? Institutional expectations and the negotiated identities of international students. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 12(8), 905–927. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2011.624193>
- Firang, D, & Mensah, J. (2021). Exploring the Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on International Students and Universities in Canada. *Journal of International Students*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v12i1.2881>
- Fong, V. L. (2011). *Paradise redefined: transnational Chinese students and the quest for flexible citizenship in the developed world*. Stanford University Press.

- Forbes-Mewett, H., & Nyland, C. (2008). Cultural diversity, relocation, and the security of international students at an internationalised university. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 12(2), 181-203. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315307308136>
- Galchenko, I., & van de Vijver, F. J. R. (2007). The role of perceived cultural distance in the acculturation of exchange students in Russia. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 31(2), 181–197. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2006.03.004>
- Gallagher, & Miller, B. (2021). Who Not What: The Logic of China’s Information Control Strategy. *The China Quarterly (London)*, 248(1), 1011–1036. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741021000345>
- Gao, Z. (2022). Political identities of Chinese international students: Patterns and change in transnational space. *International Journal of Psychology*, 57(4), 475–482. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ijop.12776>
- Garrett, R. (2014). *Explaining international student satisfaction: Initial analysis of data from the International Student Barometer*. i-Graduate.
- Gaw, K.F., (2000). Reverse culture shock in students returning from overseas. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 24(1), 83–104. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0147-1767\(99\)00024-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0147-1767(99)00024-3)
- Ge, L. (2021). A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Inquiry at a Canadian University: Protective and Risk Factors for Chinese International Students in COVID Times with Gender Comparison. *Journal of International Students*, 11(3), 586–607. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v11i3.2218>

- Gerdes, H. & Mallinckrodt, B. (1994). Emotional, Social, and Academic Adjustment of College Students: A Longitudinal Study of Retention. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 72(3), 281–288. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.1994.tb00935.x>
- Glass, C.R., Gómez, E., & Urzua, A. (2014). Recreation, intercultural friendship, and international students' adaptation to college by region of origin. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 42, 104–117. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2014.05.007>
- Gomes, C., & Alzougool, B. (2013). Transnational citizens and identities: International students' self-perceived identities, their social networks and their consumption of entertainment media in Australia. In *Proceeding of the 24th ISANA International Education Association Conference Proceedings* (pp. 1-15).
- Gover, A.R., Harper, S. B., & Langton, L. (2020). Anti-Asian Hate Crime During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Exploring the Reproduction of Inequality. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 45(4), 647–667. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-020-09545-1>
- Griffiths, J. (2021). *The great firewall of China: How to build and control an alternative version of the internet*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Gu, Schweisfurth, M., & Day, C. (2010). Learning and growing in a “foreign” context: Intercultural experiences of international students. *Compare*, 40(1), 7–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057920903115983>
- Guo, S. (2021). Multiculturalism at a crossroads: toward pandemic anti-racism education in post-covid-19 Canada. *Canadian Issues* (Fall 2020/Winter 2021), 81-85. Retrieved from <https://uml.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/multiculturalism-at-crossroads-toward-pandemic/docview/2598124823/se-2?accountid=14569>

- Guo, Y. & Guo, S. (2017). Internationalization of Canadian higher education: discrepancies between policies and international student experiences. *Studies in Higher Education (Dorchester-on-Thames)*, 42(5), 851–868.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2017.1293874>
- Haigh, M. (2014). From internationalisation to education for global citizenship: A multi-layered history. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 68(1), 6–27. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12032>
- Hari, A., Nardon, L., & Zhang, H. (2021). A transnational lens into international student experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Global Networks (Oxford)*, 23(1), 14–30. <https://doi.org/10.1111/glob.12332>
- Harman, G. (2003). International PhD students in Australian universities: financial support, course experience and career plans. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 23(3), 339–351. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0738-0593\(02\)00054-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0738-0593(02)00054-8)
- Hazen, H.D. & Alberts, H. C. (2006). Visitors or immigrants? International students in the United States. *Population, Space and Place*, 12(6), 201–216.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.409>
- He, D., & Zhang, Q. (2010). Native speaker norms and China English: From the perspective of learners and teachers in China. *TESOL quarterly*, 44(4), 769-789.  
<https://doi.org/10.5054/tq.2010.235995>
- Hswen, Y., Xu, X., Hing, A., Hawkins, J. B., Brownstein, J. S., & Gee, G. C. (2021). Association of “# covid19” versus “# chinesevirus” with anti-Asian sentiments on Twitter: March 9–23, 2020. *American Journal of Public Health*, 111(5), 956-964.  
<https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2021.306154>

- Hofstede, G. H. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions and organizations across nations* (2nd ed.). SAGE.
- Holloway, & Todres, L. (2003). The Status of Method: Flexibility, Consistency and Coherence. *Qualitative Research: QR*, 3(3), 345–357. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794103033004>
- Holt, L.F., Kjærvik, S. L., & Bushman, B. J. (2022). Harming and Shaming through Naming: Examining Why Calling the Coronavirus the “COVID-19 Virus,” Not the “Chinese Virus,” Matters. *Media Psychology*, 25(5), 639–652. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2022.2034021>
- Hourani, G. (2012). Transnationalism from above: Homeland political parties of Lebanon and the Lebanese diaspora. *SSRN*. Retrieved March 13, 2022, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2211406>
- Houshmand, S., Spanierman, L. B., & Tafarodi, R. W. (2014). Excluded and avoided: Racial microaggressions targeting Asian international students in Canada. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 20(3), 377. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035404>
- Hu, Y., Xu, C. L., & Tu, M. (2022). Family-mediated migration infrastructure: Chinese international students and parents navigating (im)mobilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Chinese Sociological Review*, 54(1), 62–87. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21620555.2020.1838271>
- Huld, A. (2022, March 9). China Travel Restrictions 2021/22 - Latest Travel and Entry Requirements. *China Briefing News*. Retrieved March 13, 2022, [from https://www.china-briefing.com/news/china-travel-restrictions-2021-2022-an-explainer-updated/](https://www.china-briefing.com/news/china-travel-restrictions-2021-2022-an-explainer-updated/)

- Huisman, Vlegels, J., Daenekindt, S., Seeber, M., & Laufer, M. (2022). How satisfied are international students? The role of town, gown and motivations. *Compare*, 52(8), 1332–1350. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2020.1867826>
- Ibrahim, E. (2022, January 8). Anti-Asian racism still experienced within Canada, poll shows. *The Canadian Press*. Retrieved Feb 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022, from <https://globalnews.ca/news/8497381/anti-asian-racism-canada-poll/>
- Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC, 2022). Temporary Residents: Study Permit Holders – Monthly IRCC Updates - Canada - Study permit holders on December 31st by country of citizenship. Retrieved Feb 6<sup>th</sup>, 2022, [https://www.cic.gc.ca/opendata-donneesouvertes/data/IRCC\\_M\\_TRStudy\\_0009\\_E.xls](https://www.cic.gc.ca/opendata-donneesouvertes/data/IRCC_M_TRStudy_0009_E.xls)
- Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC, 2023). Temporary Residents: Study Permit Holders – Monthly IRCC Updates - Canada - Study permit holders on December 31st by country of citizenship. Retrieved April 4, 2023, [https://www.cic.gc.ca/opendata-donneesouvertes/data/EN\\_ODP-TR-Study-IS\\_CITZ\\_sign\\_date.xlsx](https://www.cic.gc.ca/opendata-donneesouvertes/data/EN_ODP-TR-Study-IS_CITZ_sign_date.xlsx)
- Inglis, D., (2014). Cosmopolitans and cosmopolitanism: Between and beyond sociology and political philosophy. *Journal of Sociology*, 50(2), 99–114. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783312438788>
- Ip, M., & Yin, H. (2015). Cyber China and evolving transnational identities: The case of New Zealand. In *Media and Communication in the Chinese Diaspora* (pp. 165-183). Routledge.
- Jamieson, K. H., & Albarracin, D. (2020). The relation between media consumption and misinformation at the outset of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic in the US. *The Harvard*

- Kennedy School *Misinformation Review*, 1(2), 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.37016/mr-2020-012>
- Jin, R. & Wang, X. (2022). “Somewhere I belong?” A study on transnational identity shifts caused by “double stigmatization” among Chinese international student returnees during COVID-19 through the lens of min sponge mechanism. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 01–13. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1018843>
- Khawaja, N. G., & Stallman, H. M. (2011). Understanding the coping strategies of international students: A qualitative approach. *Journal of Psychologists and Counsellors in Schools*, 21(2), 203-224. <https://doi.org/10.1375/ajgc.21.2.203>
- Kallio, H., Pietilä, A.-M., Johnson, M., & Kangasniemi, M. (2016). Systematic methodological review: developing a framework for a qualitative semi-structured interview guide. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 72(12), 2954–2965. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.13031>
- Kasun, G. S., & Sánchez, P. (2018). Transnationalism and Education. In G. S. Kasun & P. Sánchez (Eds.), *Oxford research encyclopaedia of education*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.458>
- Keyserlingk, L., Yamaguchi-Pedroza, K., Arum, R., & Eccles, J. S. (2022). Stress of university students before and after campus closure in response to COVID-19. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 50(1), 285–301. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.22561>
- Kim, J. Y., & Kesari, A. (2021). Misinformation and hate speech: The case of anti-Asian hate speech during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Online Trust and Safety*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.54501/jots.v1i1.13>
- Kimura, N. (2020). Online Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Social Interaction and Its Impacts on Student Satisfaction. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*. 1-16

Retrieved Feb 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022,

[https://www.academia.edu/44081555/Online\\_Learning\\_during\\_the\\_COVID\\_19\\_Pandemic\\_Social\\_Interaction\\_and\\_Its\\_Impacts\\_on\\_Student\\_Satisfaction?auto=citations&from=cover\\_page](https://www.academia.edu/44081555/Online_Learning_during_the_COVID_19_Pandemic_Social_Interaction_and_Its_Impacts_on_Student_Satisfaction?auto=citations&from=cover_page)

Klingenberg, A., Luetz, J. M., & Crawford, A. (2021). Transnationalism—Recognizing the Strengths of Dual Belonging for Both Migrant and Society. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 22(2), 453–470. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-019-00744-2>

Knight, J. (2006). *Internationalization of higher education: new directions, new challenges*. IAU.

Knight, J. (2012). Concepts, rationales, and interpretive frameworks in the internationalization of higher education. In D.K. Deardorff, H.D. de Wit, J. D. D. Heyl, T. Adams, (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of international higher education* (pp. 27-42). Sage.

Koehne. (2005). (Re)construction: ways international students talk about their identity. *The Australian Journal of Education*, 49(1), 104–119.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/000494410504900107>

Koo, K.K., Yao, C. W., & Gong, H. J. (2021). “It is not my fault”: Exploring experiences and perceptions of racism among international students of color during COVID-19. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 16(3), 284–296. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000343>

Koris, R., Mato-Díaz, F. J., & Hernández-Nanclares, N. (2021). From real to virtual mobility: Erasmus students’ transition to online learning amid the COVID-19 crisis. *European Educational Research Journal EERJ*, 20(4), 463–478.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/14749041211021247>

Kouritzin, S. (2000). Bringing Life to Research: Life History Research and ESL. *TESL Canada Journal*, 17(2), 1–35. <https://doi.org/10.18806/tesl.v17i2.887>

- Krsmanovic, M. (2020). I Was New and I Was Afraid: The Acculturation Strategies Adopted by International First-Year Undergraduate Students in the United States. *Journal of International Students*, 10(4), 954–975. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v10i4.1160>
- Lantolf, J. P. (2000). 7 Second language learning as participation and the (re) construction of selves1 Aneta Pavlenko Temple University. *Sociocultural theory and second language learning*, 78(4), 155.
- Larkin, H.P. (2010). “But they won’t come to lectures...’ : The impact of audio recorded lectures on student experience and attendance. *Australasian journal of educational technology*, 26(2), 238–249. <https://doi.org/10.14742/ajet.1093>
- Larue, B. (2021). COVID-19 and labor issues: An assessment. *Canadian Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 69(2), 269–279. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cjag.12288>
- Leal Filho, W., Wall, T., Rayman-Bacchus, L., Mifsud, M., Pritchard, D. J., Lovren, V. O., ... & Balogun, A. L. (2021). Impacts of COVID-19 and social isolation on academic staff and students at universities: A cross-sectional study. *BMC public health*, 21(1), 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-11040-z>
- Lee, S. & Waters, S. F. (2021). Asians and Asian Americans’ experiences of racial discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic: Impacts on health outcomes and the buffering role of social support. *Stigma and Health*, 6(1), 70–78. <https://doi.org/10.1037/sah0000275>
- Li, L. (2015). China’s Rising Nationalism and Its Forefront: Politically Apathetic Youth. *China Report*, 51(4), 311–326. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0009445515597805>

- Li, M.Z., & Stodolska, M. (2006). Transnationalism, Leisure, and Chinese Graduate Students in the United States. *Leisure Sciences*, 28(1), 39–55.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400500332686>
- Li, S. (2021, April 2). *Politicization of virus fuels rise in hate crimes* - Chinadaily.com.cn. China Daily. Retrieved July 21, 2022, from  
<https://epaper.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202104/02/WS60664d9ba31099a2343551ed.html>
- Liu, P. (Ed.). (2022, August 6). 8月7日零时起, 上海全市疫情风险区“清零”-中新网. [the translated title should be in brackets here] Www.chinanews.com.cn. 中国新闻网.  
<https://www.chinanews.com.cn/sh/2022/08-06/9821518.shtml>
- Liu, T., Sato, Y., & Breaden, J. (2023). Factors influencing international students' trajectories: a comparative study of Chinese students in Japan and Australia. *International Journal of Comparative Education and Development*, 25(1), 23–39. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCED-08-2022-0060>
- Liu, X., Liu, S., Lee, S., & Magjuka, R. J. (2010). Cultural Differences in Online Learning: International Student Perceptions. *Educational Technology & Society*, 13(3), 177–188.  
[https://www.j-ets.net/collection/published-issues/13\\_3](https://www.j-ets.net/collection/published-issues/13_3)
- Liu, Y. & Self, C. C. (2020). Laowai as a discourse of Othering: unnoticed stereotyping of American expatriates in Mainland China. *Identities*, 27(4), 462–480.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2019.1589158>
- Lluprà, A., Rodríguez-Giralt, Fité, A., Álamo, L., Torre, L., Redondo, A., Callau, M., & Guinovart, C. (2020). What Is a Zero-COVID Strategy and How Can It Help Us Minimize the Impact of the Pandemic? In *Wayback Machine* (pp. 1–9). IS Global. Barcelona Institute for Global Health.

[https://www.isglobal.org/documents/10179/7943094/26\\_ISGlobal+COVID19+y+COVIDCero+o+Maxima+Supresion+EN/0a4e83bb-6257-4f5d-8960-16c323b464b2](https://www.isglobal.org/documents/10179/7943094/26_ISGlobal+COVID19+y+COVIDCero+o+Maxima+Supresion+EN/0a4e83bb-6257-4f5d-8960-16c323b464b2)

Lubbers, M.J., Verdery, A. M., & Molina, J. L. (2020). Social Networks and Transnational Social Fields: A Review of Quantitative and Mixed-Methods Approaches. *The International Migration Review*, 54(1), 177–204.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0197918318812343>

Lveitt, E.E., Gohari, M. R., Syan, S. K., Belisario, K., Gillard, J., DeJesus, J., Levitt, A., & MacKillop, J. (2022). Public health guideline compliance and perceived government effectiveness during the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada: Findings from a longitudinal cohort study. *The Lancet Regional Health - Americas*, 9, 1-11.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lana.2022.100185>

Lysgaard, S. (1955). Adjustment in a foreign society: Norwegian Fulbright grantees visiting the United States. *International social science bulletin*.

Jauhiainen, J.S., Özçürümez, S., & Tursun, Ö. (2022). Internet and social media uses, digital divides, and digitally mediated transnationalism in forced migration: Syrians in Turkey. *Global Networks*, 22(2), 197–210. <https://doi.org/10.1111/glob.12339>

Ma, H. & Miller, C. (2021). Trapped in a Double Bind: Chinese Overseas Student Anxiety during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Health Communication*, 36(13), 1598–1605.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2020.1775439>

Ma, J. (2020). Supporting practices to break Chinese international students' language barriers: The first step to facilitate their social adjustment. *Journal of International Students*, 10(1), 84–105. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v10i1.773>

- Mackey, A. (2016). New directions for the Annual Review of Applied Linguistics. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 36, 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190515000136>
- Marotta, V. (2011). Hybrid Identities in a globalised world. In J. Germov & M. Poole (Eds). *Public Sociology: An Introduction to Australian Society* (2nd ed.) (pp. 188-203). Allen & Unwin.
- Mbous, Y. P. V., Mohamed, R., & Rudisill, T. M. (2022). International students challenge during the COVID-19 pandemic in a university in the United States: A focus group study. *Current Psychology*, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-022-02776-x>
- Measor, L., & Sikes, P. (1992). Visiting lives: Ethics and methodology in life history. In *Studying teachers' lives* (pp. 221-245). Routledge.
- Meng, H., Tang, M., & Wu, M. (2021). Current Situation on Exam-Oriented Education in China and the Outlook for Quality-Oriented Education. In *2021 3rd International Conference on Literature, Art and Human Development (ICLAHD 2021)* (pp. 325-331). Atlantis Press.
- Miller, A. (2022, February 5). Canada is shifting to 'living with the virus' — for better or worse. *CBC News*. Retrieved March 24, 2022, from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/canada-covid-19-pandemic-lifting-restrictions-1.6340078>
- Miller, A. (2022, March 9). Mask mandates are being lifted in Canada — and could further divide Canadians. *CBC NEWS*. Retrieved March 9, 2022, from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/mask-mandates-canada-covid-19-1.6377428>
- Mok, K. H., Xiong, W., Ke, G., & Cheung, J. O. W. (2021). Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on international higher education and student mobility: Student perspectives from mainland

- China and Hong Kong. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 105, 101718.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2020.101718>
- Montgomery, C. & McDowell, L. (2009). Social Networks and the International Student Experience: An International Community of Practice? *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 13(4), 455–466. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315308321994>
- Moon, K. & Blackman, D. (2014). A Guide to Understanding Social Science Research for Natural Scientists. *Conservation Biology*, 28(5), 1167–1177.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/cobi.12326>
- Moore, L. & Popadiuk, N. (2011). Positive Aspects of International Student Transitions: A Qualitative Inquiry. *Journal of College Student Development*, 52(3), 291–306.  
<https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2011.0040>
- Murray, S.A., Kendall, M., Carduff, E., Worth, A., Harris, F. M., Lloyd, A., Cavers, D., Grant, L., & Sheikh, A. (2009). Use of serial qualitative interviews to understand patients' evolving experiences and needs. *BMJ*, 339(7727), 929–960.  
<https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.b3702>
- Muthukrishna, M., Bell, A. V., Henrich, J., Curtin, C. M., Gedranovich, A., McInerney, J., & Thue, B. (2020). Beyond Western, Educated, Industrial, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) Psychology: Measuring and Mapping Scales of Cultural and Psychological Distance. *Psychological Science*, 31(6), 678–701. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797620916782>
- Nambiar, D. (2020). The impact of online learning during COVID-19: students' and teachers' perspective. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 8(2), 783-793.  
<https://doi.org/10.25215/0802.094>

- Niewenhuis, L. (2022, January 14). Omicron triggers mass flight cancellations into China and Hong Kong. *SupChina*. Retrieved March 13, 2022, from <https://supchina.com/2022/01/13/omicron-triggers-mass-flight-cancellations-into-china-and-hong-kong/>
- Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and Language Learning*. Longman.
- Norton, B., & Pavlenko, A. (2019). Imagined Communities, Identity, and English Language Learning in a Multilingual World. In G. Hall & G. Smith (Eds.), *The Second Handbook of English Language Teaching* (pp. 703-718). Springer International Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-02899-2\\_34](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-02899-2_34)
- Nowell, L.S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>
- Nowicka, M. (2020). (Dis)connecting migration: transnationalism and nationalism beyond connectivity. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 8(1), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-020-00175-4>
- Oikonomidou, E., & Williams, G. (2013). Enriched or latent cosmopolitanism? Identity negotiations of female international students from Japan in the US. *Discourse* (Abingdon, England), 34(3), 380–393. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2012.717191>
- Page, C. (2023). Linguistic Racism, Deficit Constructions, and the Othering of International Students. In *Global Perspectives on Microaggressions in Higher Education* (pp. 26-44). Routledge.
- Page J., McKay B., & Hinshaw, D. (2021). The Wuhan Lab Leak Question: A Disused Chinese Mine Takes Center Stage; It isn't the predominant hypothesis for Covid's origins, yet

- prominent scientists are calling for a deeper probe and clearer answers from Beijing. *The Wall Street Journal*. Eastern Edition. Retrieved Feb. 28th, 2022, from <https://americafirstpolicy.com/latest/an-answer-that-raises-questions-the-wuhan-lab-leak-theory-and-implications-for-biodefense-and-public-health/>
- Palmer, Y.M. (2016). Student to Scholar: Learning Experiences of International Students. *Journal of International Students*, 6(1), 216–240. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v6i1.489>
- Pan, S. (2021). Reconceptualising “internationalisation” in higher education: The case of Hong Kong. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 75(3), 487–499. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12286>
- Park, E.S., & Lee, H. (2022). “I want to keep my North Korean accent”: Agency and identity in a North Korean defector’s transnational experience of learning English. *TESOL Quarterly*, 56(1), 19–40. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.3016>
- Parker, S., Hansen, M. A., & Bernadowski, C. (2021). COVID-19 Campus Closures in the United States: American Student Perceptions of Forced Transition to Remote Learning. *Social Sciences*, 10(2), 62. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci10020062>
- Pérez Huber, L., & Solorzano, D. G. (2015). Racial microaggressions as a tool for critical race research. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 18(3), 297–320. <https://doi-org.uml.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/13613324.2014.994173>
- Pham, L. T. M. (2018). *Qualitative approach to research a review of advantages and disadvantages of three paradigms: Positivism, interpretivism and critical inquiry*. University of Adelaide. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.13995.54569>
- Pitts, M. J. (2005). *The role of communication in cross-national adjustment and identity transitions among student sojourners*. The Pennsylvania State University.

- Pitts, M. J. (2016). Sojourner reentry: A grounded elaboration of the integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation. *Communication Monographs*, 83(4), 419–445. <https://doi-org.uml.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/03637751.2015.1128557>
- Pletcher, K. (2022, August 25). One-child policy. *Encyclopedia Britannica*.  
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/one-child-policy>
- Pollock, D. C., & Van Reken, R. E. (1999). *The third culture kid experience. Growing up among worlds*. Nicolas Brealy.
- Portes, A., Guarnizo, L. E., & Landolt, P. (1999). The study of transnationalism: pitfalls and promise of an emergent research field. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 22(2), 217–237.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/014198799329468>
- Presbitero, A. (2016). Culture shock and reverse culture shock: The moderating role of cultural intelligence in international students' adaptation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 53, 28–38. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2016.05.004>
- Prinsloo, B. & van der Walddt, G. (2016). Expanding the disaster risk management framework: Measuring the constructed level of national identity as a factor of political risk. *Jamba*, 8(1), 232–232. <https://doi.org/10.4102/JAMBA.V8I1.232>
- Raja, R., Ma, J., Zhang, M., Li, X. Y., Almutairi, N. S., & Almutairi, A. H. (2023). Social identity loss and reverse culture shock: Experiences of international students in China during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Frontiers in Psychology*, Volume 14, 1-14.  
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.994411>
- Ramos, M. R., Cassidy, C., Reicher, S., Haslam, S. A. (2016). A longitudinal study of the effects of discrimination on the acculturation strategies of international students. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 47(3), 401-420. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022116628672>

Read, M. L. (2018). Serial Interviews: When and Why to Talk to Someone More Than Once.

*International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 17(1), 1– 10.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406918783452>

Remennick, L. (2002). Transnational community in the making: Russian-Jewish immigrants of the 1990s in Israel. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 28(3), 515–530.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13691830220146581>

Rizvi, F. (2010). International students and doctoral studies in transnational spaces. In *The Routledge Doctoral Supervisor's Companion* (pp. 176-188). Routledge.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nepr.2011.04.006>

Robson, S. (2011). Internationalization: a transformative agenda for higher education? *Teachers and Teaching, Theory and Practice*, 17(6), 619–630.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2011.625116>

Robinson, O., Somerville, K., & Walsworth, S. (2020). Understanding friendship formation between international and host-national students in a Canadian university. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 13(1), 49–70.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/17513057.2019.1609067>

Ruiz, N. G., Horowitz, J. M., & Tamir, C. (2020, December 17). Many Black and Asian Americans Say They Have Experienced Discrimination Amid the COVID-19 Outbreak. *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved Feb. 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022, from

<https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/07/01/many-black-and-asian-americans-say-they-have-experienced-discrimination-amid-the-covid-19-outbreak/>

- Ryan, L. (2015). Friendship-making: Exploring Network Formations through the Narratives of Irish Highly Qualified Migrants in Britain. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 41(10), 1664–1683. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2015.1015409>
- Sanchez, P. & Kasun, G. S. (2012). Connecting Transnationalism to the Classroom and to Theories of Immigrant Student Adaptation. *Berkeley Review of Education*, 3, 71-93. <https://doi.org/10.5070/B83110061>
- Schartner, A. & Johnstone Young, T. (2016). Towards an integrated conceptual model of international student adjustment and adaptation. *European Journal of Higher Education*, 6(4), 372–386. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21568235.2016.1201775>
- Skovgaard-Smith, & Poufelt, F. (2018). Imagining “non-nationality”: Cosmopolitanism as a source of identity and belonging. *Human Relations*, 71(2), 129–154. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726717714042>
- Smith, K. E. I., & Leavy, P. (Eds.). (2008). *Hybrid identities: Theoretical and empirical examinations* (Vol. 12). Brill.
- Smith, R.A., & Khawaja, N. G. (2011). A review of the acculturation experiences of international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35(6), 699–713. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2011.08.004>
- Smith, M. P. & Guarnizo, L. E. (1998). The locations of transnationalism. In M. P. Smith & L. E. Guarnizo (eds.), *Transnationalism from below* (pp. 3–34). Transaction.
- Soria, K.M. & Troisi, J. (2014). Internationalization at Home Alternatives to Study Abroad: Implications for Students’ Development of Global, International, and Intercultural Competencies. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 18(3), 261–280. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315313496572>

- Spatafora, F., Matos Fialho, P. M., Busse, H., Helmer, S. M., Zeeb, H., Stock, C., Wendt, C., & Pischke, C. R. (2022). Fear of Infection and Depressive Symptoms among German University Students during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Results of COVID-19 International Student Well-Being Study. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(3), 1659. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19031659>
- Starikov V. S., Ivanova A. A., Nee M. L. (2018) Transnationalism online: exploring migration processes with large data sets. *Monitoring of Public Opinion: Economic and Social Changes*. 5., p. 213—232. <https://doi.org/10.14515/monitoring.2018.5.17>.
- Statista (2021). *Number of study permit holders with a valid permit in Canada from 2000 to 2020*. Retrieved Dec 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/555117/number-of-international-students-at-years-end-canada-2000-2014/>
- Stein, S. & Andreotti, V. O. (2016). Cash, competition, or charity: international students and the global imaginary. *Higher Education*, 72(2), 225–239. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-015-9949-8>
- Steketee, A., Williams, M. T., Valencia, B. T., Printz, D., & Hooper, L. M. (2021). Racial and Language Microaggressions in the School Ecology. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 16(5), 1075–1098. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691621995740>
- Stober, E. (2022, May 6). Canada’s 6th wave of COVID has plateaued or is post-peak in some areas: Tam. *Global News*. Retrieved July 20, 2022, from <https://globalnews.ca/news/8814848/covid-19-canada-sixth-wave-plateau/>
- Sue, D.W., Capodilupo, C. M., Torino, G. C., Bucceri, J. M., Holder, A. M. B., Nadal, K. L., & Esquilin, M. (2007). Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Implications for Clinical

- Practice. *The American Psychologist*, 62(4), 271–286. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.62.4.271>
- Tadesse, S., & Muluye, W. (2020). The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on education system in developing countries: a review. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 8(10), 159-170. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2020.810011>
- Tang, T., Abuhmaid, A. M., Olaimat, M., Oudat, D. M., Aldhaeabi, M., & Bamanger, E. (2020). Efficiency of flipped classroom with online-based teaching under COVID-19. *Interactive Learning Environments*, 31(2), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2020.1817761>
- Taušová, J., Bender, M., Dimitrova, R., & van de Vijver, F. (2019). The role of perceived cultural distance, personal growth initiative, language proficiencies, and tridimensional acculturation orientations for psychological adjustment among international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 69, 11–23. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2018.11.004>
- Tedeschi, M., Vorobeve, E., & Jauhiainen, J. S. (2022). Transnationalism: current debates and new perspectives. *Geo Journal*, 87(2), 603–619. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-020-10271-8>
- Telli, O., Mountcastle, L., Jehl, B. L., Munoz-Osorio, A., Dahlquist, L. M., Jayasekera, A., Dougherty, A., Castillo, R., & Miner, K. (2021). Impact of COVID-19 Campus Closure on Undergraduates. *Teaching of Psychology*, 50(3), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00986283211043924>
- Teichler, U. (2017). Internationalisation Trends in Higher Education and the Changing Role of International Student Mobility. *Journal of International Mobility*, 5(1), 177–216. <https://doi.org/10.3917/jim.005>.

- Tessler, H., Choi, M., & Kao, G. (2020). The Anxiety of Being Asian American: Hate Crimes and Negative Biases During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 45(4), 636–646. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-020-09541-5> 0179
- Thevenot, S. & El-Assal, K. (2021, May 7th). Canada's new International Graduate stream reaches cap. *CIC NEWS*. <https://cicnews.com/2021/05/canadas-new-international-graduate-stream-reaches-cap-0517985.html#gs.plzbr4>
- Tian, R., Yin, R., & Gan, F. (2022). Exploring public attitudes toward live-streaming fitness in China: A sentiment and content analysis of China's social media Weibo. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 10, 01–12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2022.1027694>
- Tikhonova, E.V., Kosycheva, M., & Efremova, G. I. (2021). New Understanding of the Barriers to Foreign Students Adaptation in the Changing Educational Landscape: The Case of Psycholinguistic Narrative Analysis. *Journal of Language and Education*, 7(3), 166–186. <https://doi.org/10.17323/jle.2021.13341>
- Toukan, E., Gaztambide-Fernández, R., & Anwaruddin, S. (Eds.). (2020). *Curriculum of Global Migration and Transnationalism*. Routledge.
- Tsai, W., Wang, K. T. & Wei, M. (2017). Reciprocal Relations Between Social Self-Efficacy and Loneliness Among Chinese International Students. *Asian American Journal of Psychology*, 8 (2), 94-102. <https://doi.org/10.1037/aap0000065>.
- Tu, H. (2022, December 16). Easing of COVID curbs a boon to economic recovery. *China Daily HK*. <https://www.chinadailyhk.com/article/305583#Easing-of-COVID-curbs-a-boon-to-economic-recovery>

- Ulloa, A.C., Buchan, S. A., Daneman, N., & Brown, K. A. (2022). Estimates of SARS-CoV-2 Omicron Variant Severity in Ontario, *Canada. JAMA: the Journal of the American Medical Association*. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2022.2274>
- UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2010). *Global Education Digest 2009: Comparing Education Statistics across the World*. UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Retrieved Feb 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022, from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001832/183249e.pdf>.
- UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). (2023, March). UIS statistics: Other policy relevant indicators: Outbound internationally mobile students by host region. UNESCO. Retrieved May 9, 2023, from <http://data.uis.unesco.org/>.
- UNESCO. (2021). Other policy relevant indicators: Inbound internationally mobile students by continent of origin. Retrieved Feb 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022, <http://data.uis.unesco.org/index.aspx?queryid=3804>
- UNICEF. (2020, April 4<sup>th</sup>). Children at increased risk of harm online during global COVID-19 pandemic. Retrieved March 23, 2022, from <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/children-increased-risk-harm-online-during-global-covid-19-pandemic>
- Universities Canada. (2014). Canada's Universities in the World: AUCC Internationalization Survey. *Ottawa: UNIVCAN*. Retrieved Feb 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022, from <https://www.univcan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/internationalization-survey-2014.pdf>
- Uscinski, J. E., & Enders, A. M. (2020, April 30). What Can the Coronavirus Tell Us About Conspiracy Theories? *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2020/04/what-can-coronavirus-tell-us-about-conspiracy-theories/610894/>

- Vertovec, S. (2001). Transnationalism and identity. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 27(4), 573–582. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691830120090386>
- Vertovec, S. (2009). *Transnationalism*. Routledge. <https://doi-org.uml.idm.oclc.org/10.4324/9780203927083>
- Vorobeva, E. & Jauhiainen, J. S. (2023). Transnationalism and belonging: national identity negotiations and their outcomes. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 49(13), 3389–3408. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2023.2184293>
- Wang, B. (2022). Immobility infrastructures: taking online courses and staying put amongst Chinese international students during the COVID-19. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 48(11), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183x.2022.2029376>
- Wang, R. & BrckaLorenz, A. (2018). International Student Engagement: An Exploration of Student and Faculty Perceptions. *Journal of International Students*, 8(2), 1002–1033. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1250402>
- Wang, Y. (2016). Native English speakers' authority in English: Do Chinese speakers of English care about native English speakers' judgments? *English Today*, 32(1), 35–40. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266078415000516>
- Wang, S. (2022a). Self in mobility: Exploring the transnational in-between identity of Chinese student returnees from the UK. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 52(6), 861-878. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2020.1840335>
- Wang, S. (2022b). The transnational in-between identity of Chinese student returnees from the UK: Mobility, variations and pathways. *British Educational Research Journal*, 48(3), 536–555. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3781>

- Ward, C., & Rana-Deuba, A. (1999). Acculturation and Adaptation Revisited. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 30(4), 422–442. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022199030004003>
- Ward, C., Bochner, S., & Furnham, A. (2001). *The Psychology of Culture Shock (1st ed.)*. Routledge. <https://doi-org.uml.idm.oclc.org/10.4324/9780203992258>
- Ward, C., & Kennedy, A. (2001). Coping with Cross-Cultural Transition. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 32(5), 636–642. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022101032005007>
- Weber, R. (2004). Editor's comments: the rhetoric of positivism versus interpretivism: A personal view. *MIS quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Mar. 2004), pp. iii-xii. <https://doi-org.uml.idm.oclc.org/10.2307/25148621>
- Wei, M. & Bunjun, B. (2021). “We Don’t Need Another One in Our Group”: Racism and Interventions to Promote the Mental Health and Well-Being of Racialized International Students in Business Schools. *Journal of Management Education*, 45(1), 65–85. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1052562920959391>
- Wilcox, P., Winn, S., & Fyvie-Gauld, M. (2005). ‘It was nothing to do with the university, it was just the people’: The role of social support in the first-year experience of higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 30(6), 707–722. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070500340036>
- Wilding, R., Baldassar, L., Gamage, S., Worrell, S., & Mohamud, S. (2020). Digital media and the affective economies of transnational families. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 23(5), 639-655. <https://doi.org/10.1177/136787792092027>
- Wilson, L. (2016). Does International Mobility Change Chinese Students’ Political Attitudes? A Longitudinal Approach. *Chinese Journal of Political Science*, 21(3), 321–337. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-015-9387-6>

- Woolfolk, A. (2008). *Educational psychology* (10th ed., active learning ed.). Pearson/A and B.
- World Health Organization: WHO. (2021, March 30). WHO-convened global study of origins of SARS-CoV-2: China Part. *World Health Organization*. Retrieved March 10, 2022, from <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/who-convened-global-study-of-origins-of-sars-cov-2-china-part>
- World Health Organization: WHO. (2023, May 3). Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic: Numbers at a glance. *World Health Organization*. Retrieved May 8, 2023, from <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>
- World Health Organization: WHO. (2023, May 5). Statement on the fifteenth meeting of the IHR (2005) Emergency Committee on the COVID-19 pandemic. *World Health Organization*. Retrieved May 9, 2023, from [https://www.who.int/news/item/05-05-2023-statement-on-the-fifteenth-meeting-of-the-international-health-regulations-\(2005\)-emergency-committee-regarding-the-coronavirus-disease-\(covid-19\)-pandemic](https://www.who.int/news/item/05-05-2023-statement-on-the-fifteenth-meeting-of-the-international-health-regulations-(2005)-emergency-committee-regarding-the-coronavirus-disease-(covid-19)-pandemic)
- Wu, H. P., Garza, E., & Guzman, N. (2015). International student's challenge and adjustment to college. *Education Research International*, Volume 2015, 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2015/202753>
- Xu, K. (Ed.). (2022, June 1). 6月1日起上海全面恢复正常生产生活秩序. [title needs to be translated] Cn.chinadaily.com.cn; 经济日报. <https://cn.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202206/01/WS6296e91ea3101c3ee7ad852a.html>
- Xu, X. (2021). To Repress or to Co-opt? Authoritarian Control in the Age of Digital Surveillance. *American Journal of Political Science*, 65(2), 309–325. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12514>

- Young, T., & Schartner, A. (2014). The effects of cross-cultural communication education on international students' adjustment and adaptation. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 35(6), 547–562.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2014.884099>
- Yan, K., & Berliner, D. C. (2011). Chinese international students in the United States: Demographic trends, motivations, acculturation features and adjustment challenges. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 12(2), 173–184. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12564-010-9117-x>
- Yan, S. (2014). Engineering Stability: Authoritarian Political Control over University Students in Post-Deng China. *The China Quarterly*, 218(218), 493–513.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741014000332>
- Yang, P. (2022). Rethinking international student mobility through the lens of “crisis” at a juncture of pandemic and global uncertainties. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 42(sup1), 20–33. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2022.2031872>
- Yang, S., Fichman, P., Zhu, X., Sanfilippo, M., Li, S., & Fleischmann, K. R. (2020). The use of ICT during COVID-19. *Proceedings of the ASIST Annual Meeting*, 57(1), 1-5.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/pr2.297>
- Yao. (2018). “They Don’t Care About You”: First-Year Chinese International Students’ Experiences With Neo-racism and Othering on a U.S. Campus. *Journal of the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*, 30(1), 87–101.  
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cehsedadfacpub/84/>
- Yasin, Y.M., & Bélanger, C. H. (2015). Key Determinants of Satisfaction among International Business Students in Regional Context. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 10(9),19-32. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijbm.v10n9p19>

- Ye, J. (2006). An Examination of Acculturative Stress, Interpersonal Social Support, and Use of Online Ethnic Social Groups among Chinese International Students. *The Howard Journal of Communications*, 17(1), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10646170500487764>
- Yıldırım, S., Bostancı, S. H., Yıldırım, D. Ç., & Erdoğan, F. (2021). Rethinking mobility of international university students during COVID-19 pandemic. *Higher Education Evaluation and Development*, 15(2), 98-113. <https://www.emerald.com/insight/2514-5789.html>
- Yin, X. (2022). Design of Oral English Teaching Based on Embedded Microprocessor. *Wireless Communications and Mobile Computing*, 2022, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/8421019>
- Young, G.E. (2014). Re-entry: Supporting Students in the Final Stage of Study Abroad. *New Directions for Student Services*, 2014(146), 59–67. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.20091>
- Young, T. J., Sercombe, P. G., Sachdev, I., Naeb, R., & Schartner, A. (2013). Success factors for international postgraduate students' adjustment: exploring the roles of intercultural competence, language proficiency, social contact and social support. *European Journal of Higher Education*, 3(2), 151-171. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21568235.2012.743746>
- Yu., J. (2021). Caught in the middle? Chinese international students' self-formation amid politics and pandemic. *International Journal of Chinese Education*, 10(3), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/22125868211058911>
- Yu, Q., Foroudi, P., & Gupta, S. (2019). Far apart yet close by: social media and acculturation among international students in the UK. *Technological Forecasting & Social Change*, 145, 493–502. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2018.09.026>

- Yu, Y., & Moskal, M. (2019). Missing intercultural engagements in the university experiences of Chinese international students in the UK. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 49(4), 654-671.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2018.1448259>
- Yuan., N. (2020). Reflections on China–US relations after the COVID-19 pandemic. *China International Strategy Review*, 2(1), 14–23. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42533-020-00049-5>
- Zhan, X. & Wang, S. (2014). Political Identity: A Perspective from Cultural Identity. *Social Sciences in China*, 35(2), 155–173. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02529203.2014.900890>
- Zhan, Z.Q., Li, J., & Cheng, Z. J. (2022). Zero-Covid Strategy: What’s Next? *International Journal of Health Policy and Management*. <https://doi.org/10.34172/ijhpm.2022.6757>
- Zhang, Z., & Zhou, G. (2010). Understanding Chinese international students at a Canadian university: Perspectives, expectations, and experiences. *Comparative and International Education*, 39(3), 43–58. <https://doi.org/10.5206/cie-eci.v39i3.9162>
- Zhao, C.M. Kuh, G. D., & Carini, R. M. (2005). A Comparison of International Student and American Student Engagement in Effective Educational Practices. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 76(2), 209–231. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jhe.2005.0018>
- Zhao, H. (2023). The Influence of Test-oriented Teaching on Chinese Students’ Long-term use of English. *International Journal of Education and Humanities*, 6(2), 123-128.  
<https://doi.org/10.54097/ijeh.v6i2.3658>

## Appendix A: Interview Structure

These questions will be translated into Mandarin and will not necessarily be asked in this order. However, I kept them in mind and made sure these issues were discussed in the interviews.

The first round of interviews is more structured (questions and prompts):

1. An initial set of fixed questions concerning demographic and factual information will be asked.

- *Where are you from(city)?*
- *How old are you?*
- *what is you sex and race?*
- *What is your ethnicity?*
- *What is your program of study and which faculty you are studying in?*
- *Have you ever been employed, and do you currently have a job in Canada?*
- *Can you tell me about your economic status in general?*

2. The home country:

- *What was your life like in China? (Prompts: family, friends, social media, life, work)*
- *Tell me about when and why you decide to study in Canada (and at the U of M).*
- *How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact you when you were in China?*

2. The host country:

- *How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your life in Canada so far?*
- *What does your life look like now in Canada? (Prompts: academic, social life, mental health)*
- *Tell me about one of your unforgettable experiences in Canada.*
- *How do you identify yourself in Canada in different situation (e.g., at the university, at work)?*

3. The flowing space:

- *To what extent those expectations that you have toward Canada are fulfilled (or not)?*
- *What are your attitudes toward recent social events (e.g., city lockdowns) and Zero-COVID policy in China? What about events and public health measures in Canada?*
- *Can you tell me about the changes that happen in you after your arrival? (Prompts: values, beliefs, habits)*
- *Tell me about your connections with your friends and family (where are they, and how often are you in touch with them?)*
- *What are the sources of information and news that you obtain regularly? How do you identify yourself online in social media (we-chat, Weibo and other western social media)?*
- *What do your identities mean to you? Tell me an experience where you find your identity matters.*
- *What is your plan in terms of staying and returning (short-term & long-term)*

Do you have any questions or anything you want to share with me before we finish our conversation?

Thank you so much for your participation in this project!

The purpose of the serial interviews is to initially cover a wide range of general topics before delving into more specific areas during the second-round interviews. The questions asked in the first round were general in nature, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of various aspects. In the second round, the interviews are tailored based on the previous discussions, addressing specific issues such as financial difficulties, online learning, sociocultural adjustment (including friend-making, housing, and employment), and psychological challenges. This approach allows for a deeper exploration of the participants' experiences. A few examples are given as follows:

- *Can you tell me a bit more about your experience of finding this job?*
- *How do you feel about the comments on social media in China at that time?*
- *What are the barriers you encounter during social interactions with laowai?*
- *You talked about stereotypes toward Chinese in the last interview, so can you give me an example or one of your experiences?*
- *What changes your mind when you decide to stay in Canada after graduation (your long-term plan)?*

## Appendix B: Recruitment letter

### Recruitment

My name is *Linxiao Wang*, and I am a graduate student in the faculty of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at the University of Manitoba. I am conducting a research study called *A Case Study of Chinese International Students' Lived Experiences in Canada during the Pandemic: A Transnational Lens*. This research study is for my master's degree under the supervision of Sandra Kouritzin. The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of Chinese international students from a transnational lens, and understand how the pandemic affects these students, as well as how they develop their transnational identities during this special period.

I am contacting you to invite you to participate in an interview in which you will be asked to share your experiences and stories during Covid-19 pandemic. There will be 2 interviews with an estimated time of 60-90 minutes per interview, and a third follow up interview is possible.

Although I would assume participants prefer being interviewed in Mandarin, you can choose either English or Mandarin. Besides, you will be asked to review the transcripts in Mandarin.

Therefore, participation will require approximately 4 hours in total (or more if a third interview is needed) over 2 months including the time for interviews and reviews.

**The participant criteria** are 1) Chinese international students at the University of Manitoba; 2) Participants need to be a full-time undergraduate student, aged over 18 years old, and have been in Winnipeg for more than 6 months; 3) Students need to be willing to choose either Mandarin or English as the language to communicate in the interview; 4) Participants who have lived experiences both in China and Canada during the pandemic are preferred; 5) the time frame for the pandemic is from December, 2019, when the pandemic started to spread in China, till now; 6) Participants need to be willing to be audio-recorded.

As a way of appreciating your time in helping me with data collection and interpretation, participants will be offered a drink (coffee or bubble tea at participant's choice) before the interview. A flat rate of \$10 in cash will be offered to participants if there is parking or transportation fee caused because of the interview.

This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry campus. If you are interested in participating in this study or have any questions about me or my study, please feel free to contact me by email at [wangl8@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:wangl8@myumanitoba.ca) or my advisor Dr. Sandra Kouritzin at [sandra.kouritzin@umanitoba.ca](mailto:sandra.kouritzin@umanitoba.ca). If you know anyone who may be interested in participating in this study, please give them a copy of this information.

Thank you in advance for considering my request,

Linxiao Wang

### 研究受访者招募

我叫**王林霄 (Linxiao Wang)**，是曼尼托巴大学课程、教学与研究系的一名研究生。我正在进行一项名为“**大流行期间中国留学生在加拿大生活经历的案例研究：跨国视角**”的研究。这项研究是我硕士学位的毕业论文，该论文会在 Sandra Kouritzin 教授协助下完成。本研究旨在从跨国视角审视中国留学生的生活经历，了解疫情对这些留学生的影响，以及他们在这个特殊时期如何发展自己的跨国身份认同。

采访内容包括分享在 Covid-19 大流行期间的经历和故事。本研究将有 2 次采访，预计每次采访时间为 60-90 分钟，并且有可能会进行第三次后续的跟进采访。你可以选择英语或普通话接受采访。此外，希望你可以在采访转录之后能抽空帮忙进行校对。包括采访和评审所需的时间，2 个月内参与者总共需要大约 4 小时（如果需要第三次采访，则需要更多时间）。

**该研究的入选标准**是 1) 曼尼托巴大学中国留学生； 2) 参赛者需为全日制本科生，年满 18 周岁，且已在温尼伯居住 6 个月以上； 3) 学生需要愿意选择普通话或英语作为采访交流的语言； 4) 有疫情期间在中加两国生活经历者优先； 5) 大流行的时间范围是从 2019 年 12 月大流行开始在中国蔓延，一直到现在； 6) 参与者需要愿意被录音。

为了感谢您在帮助我收集和解释数据方面付出的时间，在采访前，参与者将获赠一杯饮品（咖啡或奶茶，由参与者选择）。如果因采访而需要停车费或交通费，我将向参与者提供 10 加币现金的统一费率。

该研究已获得曼尼托巴大学 Fort Garry 校区研究伦理委员会的批准。如果你有兴趣参与这项研究或对我或我的研究有任何疑问，请随时通过电子邮件 [wangl8@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:wangl8@myumanitoba.ca) 与我联系或我的指导老师 Sandra Kouritzin 教授 [sandra.kouritzin@umanitoba.ca](mailto:sandra.kouritzin@umanitoba.ca) 如果你认识任何可能有兴趣参与这项研究的人，请给他们一份此信息的副本。

提前感谢你能考虑我的邀请，

王林霄 Linxiao Wang

## Appendix C: Consent Form



Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning  
 Education Building  
 71 Curry Place  
 University of Manitoba  
 Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2 Canada  
 T: 204-474-9004  
 F: 204-474-7551  
[faculty.education@umanitoba.ca](mailto:faculty.education@umanitoba.ca)

### Consent Form

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

---

**Research Project Title:** A Case Study of Chinese International Students' Lived Experiences in Canada during the Pandemic: A Transnational Lens

**Principal Investigator and contact information:** Linxiao Wang  
 Master's student, Faculty of  
 Education, University of Manitoba  
[wangl8@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:wangl8@myumanitoba.ca)

**Research Supervisor and contact information:** Dr. Sandra Kouritzin  
 Distinguished Professor, Faculty of  
 Education, University of Manitoba  
[sandra.kouritzin@umanitoba.ca](mailto:sandra.kouritzin@umanitoba.ca)

**Purpose of the Research:** to understand the lived experiences of Chinese International students (CISs) during the Covid-19 pandemic, and how these lived experiences affect CISs in terms of their developing transnational identities.

**The participant criteria are** 1) Chinese international students at the University of Manitoba; 2) you need to be a full-time undergraduate student, aged over 18 years old, and have been in Winnipeg for more than 6 months; 3) you are willing to choose either Mandarin or English as the language to communicate in the interview; 4) your lived experiences both in China and Canada during the pandemic are preferred; 5) the time frame for the pandemic is from December, 2019, when the pandemic started to spread in China, till now; 6) you need to be willing to be audio-recorded.

**Procedures:** Chinese International students will be invited to be my research participants through We-chat (the most popular Chinese social media) Groups. Two interviews in Mandarin for around 60-90 minutes will be conducted after the recruitment. Although I assume Mandarin will be the preferred language to interview, you have the option to choose either English or Mandarin. Besides, In-person interviews are preferred, yet you can also opt for a Zoom meeting if it makes you feel more comfortable. You will be audio recorded and the audio will be transcribed by me into Mandarin and then translated into English with the assistance of Google Translate. I will email the transcriptions to participants for member check (to check the accuracy of the transcription), and then next interview will be scheduled at participants' convenience (usually taking place next month). Compared with the first interview, the second one will be more in-depth and focus on your specific stories and your own sense-making. Overall, 4 hours over 2 months including the time for interviews and member checks will be required for the participation.

**Compensation:** The compensation for your participation will be a cup of coffee (or bubble tea) at your choice. I will also cover the transportation fee or the parking (a flat rate of \$10) if applicable.

**Recording devices:** Digital Voice recorder. The data will be downloaded from the recorder and stored on UM Cloud service OneDrive. After the transfer, the original files will be deleted immediately. All audios will be destroyed once participants finish the review of the mandarin transcript. If this is a Zoom interview, I will use zoom local recording function to capture the audio. In this way, both audio and video may be recorded, but the video file will be destroyed immediately after.

**Benefits to participants:** PI may be able to provide some useful resources and information such as how to travel around or how to find apartment around the university according to participants' response in interviews and PI's own life experiences. Besides, the result of this study may be of help to their cultural adjustment both here and / or elsewhere in the future.

**Potential risk to participants:** During the interview, when asking questions about experiences relating to COVID-19 pandemic, there is a chance that the conversation will lead to negative emotions and discuss mental health as the topic may concern family loss, uncertainty or stress directly and indirectly caused by Covid-19. If participants feel uncomfortable and need help after the interview, they may find helpful resources here:

- 1) International center of the U of M at <https://umanitoba.ca/international>
- 2) On-campus counseling provided by the Student Counseling Centre at <https://umanitoba.ca/student-supports/counselling-resources-students>
- 3) WRHA Mobile Crisis Service (24/7) – Call 204-940-1781. Mobile Crisis Staff are available to assist you 24 hours, 7 days per week.

**Confidentiality and Anonymity:** Your identity will always be kept confidential. Your information will be assigned a pseudonym before the transcription, instead of any personally identifying information. You can pick a pseudonym at your choice, or you can ask me to do so. The list connecting your name to this pseudonym and other data will all be kept in the UM-provided File Storage Software OneDrive and uploaded only through my personal computer. Only my supervisor and I will have access to the data. When the study is completed (the expected date is Dec 2022), all data will be destroyed. In addition, the findings will be reported with only coded information rather than any direct identifiable information.

**Right to Withdraw from the Study:** Participants have the right to withdraw from the research at any point of the study without consequence. The data from a participant who chooses to withdraw will be destroyed immediately. You can refuse to answer any of the questions I ask you. You can withdraw by telling me during the interview or emailing me after the interview. If you have finished the first interview but do not want to participate in second interview, your data will be destroyed and not used in my study. You may not withdraw after the study is complete, so the deadline for your withdrawal is Dec. 2022.

**Debriefing:** You are invited to review your interview transcripts when they become available. I will email the transcriptions (in Mandarin) to you for member-check, and then next interview will be scheduled at your convenience. If I do not hear back from you in a week, I may assume the transcript is accurate and nothing needs to be changed. Transcripts will likely be available in October and November 2022, within a week after the interview. Besides, you can obtain a summary of the research result after it is completed (Dec 2022) by indicating at the end of this consent form.

**Dissemination of the Research Results:** The research results will be disseminated to participants via email, and to my supervisor and committee members. My master's thesis will be publicly available in the thesis collection of the University of Manitoba's repository Myspace (<https://mspace.lib.umanitoba.ca>). I also intend to publish or present on your findings in academic conferences or journals.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry campus. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Officer at **204-474-7122** or [HumanEthics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:HumanEthics@umanitoba.ca). A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

I acknowledge that the interviews will be audio-recorded

Choice of pseudonym:

I will pick a pseudonym myself

I want PI to assign a pseudonym for me

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If you would like to obtain a summary of the results of this study (the expected date is Dec. 2022), I will send it to you if you can list your email or mailing address below:

\_\_\_\_\_

(Email or mailing address)