

CMNS 498

Honours Project

Social Media and Chinese Students at SFU

A study of social media in cultural adaptation of Chinese students in Canada

August 2016

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Abstract

This article presents a case study on the experience of cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese students at Simon Fraser University, and social media is suggested as a means to improve their experiences living around the Metro Vancouver area. In particular, this article studies reasons of the uncomfortable adaptation process of Chinese students, including mental, cultural, ideological, environmental, and educational aspects. At the same time, social media is proved to be a supportive tool in information searching and social networking, and its extension into cultural and educational aspects will also be investigated. To do this, 27 responses to an Internet-based survey and 4 interviews have been analyzed. The findings show that the majority of the respondents had unpleasant experiences for various reasons, in the meanwhile, they believe social media is a good starting point for Simon Fraser University to improve the cultural adaptation experience of new Chinese students.

Keywords

cross-cultural adaptation, social media, international students, Simon Fraser University

Introduction

After the Chinese economic reform in 1978, while China economically expanded, Chinese citizens have gained sufficient capital and opportunities to explore the world. Nowadays, studying abroad is no longer a fantasy for Chinese students. According to Canadian Bureau for International Education (n.d.), there were 336,497 international students in Canada in 2014, which steadily grew from 184,155 in 2008. In 2014, Chinese students made up 32.96% of the total international student population. Similarly, according to SFU (Simon Fraser University)'s *Fall 2015 International Student Report*, amongst 4,457 undergraduate international students registered at SFU, 56.7% of them are from China. From 714 Chinese undergraduate students in 2006 to 2,527 students in 2015, more and more Chinese students are studying at SFU (Institutional Research and Planning, October, 2015). At the same time, this report only shows international students, but more Chinese students are Canadian citizens, even though they are not good at English. Considering the size of this population, Chinese international students in Canada, specifically at SFU, deserve more attention.

Even though Chinese students have been studying in Canada for generations, the current school policies are still developing, while their experiences are still unpleasant. Due to the long history, China has a very different cultural background from Canada. Based on existing culture and under the influences of the former Soviet Union, China has developed its modern society with its own education system. While Canada is a multicultural society, China has been comparatively closed and conservative. Therefore, the perspective of Chinese students is different from Canadian citizens. Along with other influences, Chinese students often have rough cross-cultural aberration as they start their new life in Canada.

In the meanwhile, social media has been a developing but prevalent technology for both Chinese and Canadian society. In accordance with Kantar's report on Chinese media using habit (2016), among the young generation (1990s), WeChat was the third trust-worthy media, listed after TV and the Internet. Due to the amount of time they spent on social networking sites and the amount of information they are exposed to, digital media have the potential to shape the way young generations think.

As an international student myself, I wonder about the potential of social media in improving the living experience and cultural adaptation of Chinese students in Canada.

Therefore, this study aims to answer the following question:

- *To what extent can social media improve Chinese students' experience of cultural adaptation in Metro Vancouver?*

From an international student's perspective, this thesis aims to study the potential of social media in improving the university life of students in a foreign cultural environment. Due to the large population of Chinese students at SFU, and due to the comparatively easy access to the population, SFU students will be the population of this study. In order to answer this question, there are several questions in terms of social media's impacts on student's academic career and cross-cultural orientation:

- 1) *How do international students usually react to the local environment when they first enter the country?*
- 2) *What are some reasons for the anxiety or uncertainty (if they have any) during their cultural adaptation process?*
- 3) *How do international students from China think of their role and identity in the Canadian society?*
- 4) *How has social media improved or decreased students' experience in Canada?*
- 5) *What can university do in order to enhance the students' cross cultural experience?*

Theoretical Framework

Cross-Cultural Adaptation

In order to explore the mental, physical, cultural and educational conflicts Chinese international students have been facing with, this study will compare historical and cultural environments in China and Canada. As a foreign student growing up in China, my education experience, especially my high school, was typically Chinese and disciplined. This education system is a result of reforms in past decades and traditional Chinese culture.

During the past decades, China has been through many reforms, which have made it more open and dynamic and which are also reasons that international students can study in a Western education system. As Pinar illuminates, China has an education system that was influenced by the former Soviet Union (2014, p. 5). But as time goes, education in the United States proved its efficiency in national development. In the meanwhile, China came to the age of reform and open-up. This change in economy boosted the quality of life for many Chinese citizens, and international trips became a more affordable choice. At the same time, new curriculum reforms required teachers and specialists to be aware of the situations in North America, so organizations sent teachers to work abroad for short period (Pinar, p. 77). Likewise, the government was also aware of the strength of education in the US, so studying aboard was encouraged in order to learn from the “Western”. However, education in China still has many differences from the Canadian system, so Chinese students not only experience adaptation in cultural and social domains, they also have different experiences in being educated.

In China, most schools are managed in a military way, in which students are required to follow orders, gather for weekly meeting in the morning on Monday, and wear uniforms all the

time. Specifically, before the beginning of high school, instead of an opening ceremony or an orientation, students are required to attend to a short period military training. During the summer break before grade nine, students are trained in fields for parade in the form of class. Moreover, class is the unit for every activity at school. Instead of enrolling for courses each semester, courses are scheduled for each class by the administrative department. In high school, we had 16 classes. Teachers would come to our class during his or her lecture, so students stayed in their classrooms for the most of time.

As a result of the military management system, students are used to follow orders and be obey to the authority. If students challenge the teacher, they will be seen as violating the rules. This is not only an educational practice in China, but the courtesy of hierarchy lies in the Chinese tradition. Since the Spring and Autumn period, under the influences of Confucius, Chinese culture is characterized by its hierarchical society. At home, the father or the elder is the priority, while at work your employer is the priority. Therefore, everyone is taught to value and respect the tradition and that's how the Chinese people are united.

At the same time, valuing the tradition sometimes lead to a comparatively closed society. Since China has its own cultural and ethical minorities already, and considering the large population, foreigners and foreign culture are rarely seen or accepted. Due to the long history, Chinese people have already developed a very sophisticated and comprehensive cultural system with so many practices. Now China is gradually more open, but the influences of the Western society are not strong in China. Hence, for the young generations, they have limited opportunities to know the world outside of China.

On the other hand, Canada is totally different from the Chinese imagination of a Western country. Canada has a comparatively short history (149 years), while China and its culture are

about 4000 years old. In contrast with the well-developed and closed cultural background, Canada is based on the mixture of people from different countries and various backgrounds. Therefore, the conflict a Chinese international student experiences is because of this inherent difference between Chinese and Canadian understandings amongst the idea of culture. To put it another way, the multiculturalism of Canada indicates its inclusiveness in regards to ethics and cultural practices, but it is in contrast with the Chinese exclusiveness. Multiculturalism can trace back to the pluralism of French, British and Aboriginal groups in Canada. Instead of leading to “outright formal war or apartheid”, the wave of migration into Canada constructed a “pluralist equation” (Paquet, 2008, p. 39). This situation has only been more complex as time pass, and the Liberal government was forced to accept the minorities. What’s more, multiculturalism was a result of the call by “the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, in its final report (1969)” (p. 39). Since then, Canada has shown its tolerance and acceptance of different ethics and culture. In order to fit into the local environment, Chinese students need to understand Canadian culture as a developing culture and their role in constructing that culture.

In addition to the multiculturalism national policy of Canada, from a subjective perspective, Chinese students need to embrace their identity as cosmopolitans. As international students enter Canada, their cultural identity is shaped from a pure Chinese to a cosmopolitan. In accordance with William Pinar’s argument:

Cosmopolitanism confounds conformity, even contemporary and fashionable versions of it, such as identity politics, with its commodification of subjectivity by culture. Cosmopolitanism, individuation, and self-knowledge are, I am suggesting, reciprocally related (2009, p. ix).

More specifically, cosmopolitanism indicates a way of self-identification for sojourners, people who travels across countries. Since international students are living in a Canadian community, they are not members of communities in China. However, their cultural and ethnic identity are

still Chinese. At the same time, multiculturalism in Canada embraces cultural diversities and celebrates differences between various cultures. With the wording “reciprocally related”, Pinar describes the reciprocity between local culture and culture of the sojourners. Instead of seeing oneself as a Chinese or Canadian, students should learn to percept themselves from a universal view.

Furthermore, not only the Chinese students are learning in a Chinese way, Canadian teachers also lack experiences on teaching Chinese students. A friend who moved to Canada at elementary school shared her educational experience with me. In contrast with my experience in China, they had much more casual class schedules in elementary school and high school. Instead of sitting at their desks for the whole day, in elementary school, they sit on the carpet and play with other kids after short lectures. In high school, students choose courses they want to take and change classrooms between lectures. Most importantly, neither elementary nor high school students spend their whole day studying. Their classes usually ended around 2 to 3 pm, so comparing to Chinese high schools, high schools in Canada are more close to universities. More specifically, Canadian teachers give more freedom to students and expect students to react actively. Due to the cultural and social background, Chinese students are used to behave according to a criterion, but Canadian culture replaces criterion with endless possibilities.

Since language and the old custom are stopping Chinese students from participating into the local community, I wonder if social media is an easier platform to start their interactions. During my research for literatures, so far, no study has been done in regards to the Chinese international students in Canada, but there are several researches have been analyzing similar issues from different perspectives in various countries. Both Rui and Wang’s (2015) *Social network sites and international students' cross-cultural adaptation* and “*Oh, I’m here!*”: *Social*

Media's impact on the cross-cultural adaptation of students studying abroad by Sandel (2014) are great works studying how social media influence the cross-cultural adaptation of international students. Specifically, Li and Chen (2014) studied international students in the United States and social capital they have built with the use of Facebook and Renren.

Firstly, Sandel built up a well-developed framework on cultural conflicts for international students. He not only explained the theories of cultural adaptation but also analyzed implications of different uses of social media. At the same time, Rui and Wang's article is very up-to-date, and their analysis on the cross-cultural adaptation with Anxiety and Uncertainty Management provides a solid foundation for in-depth researches. Nonetheless, both articles lack specific focus on certain media or on a certain area. In contrast, Li and Chen studied Facebook and Renren for a comparison, and they provide examples on how social media usage influences real world practices. However, their study was in the United States, which is a different situation from Canada. Moreover, Renren was once a dominant social networking site in China, but its influence has dropped dramatically in recent years. Although Renren is a Chinese version of Facebook, it had only 12.4% of social media users in 2015, which is a small population comparing to the record of WeChat (75.9%) (Kantar, 2016). Hence, I think Renren is not a good representative for Chinese social media.

As a result, this study investigates social media using experience of Chinese students at Simon Fraser University. In accordance with *International Student Headcount by Faculty* (Institutional Research and Planning, n.d.), in 2011, as 3292 students were in the Business program, 908 students were foreign students, which took 14.1%. Meanwhile, 348 out of 2470 students in the faculty of Communication, Art & Technology were international students, which were 27.6% of the population. In contrast, in 2015, both faculties had growths in the percentage

of international students among the whole population. Communication, Art & Technology faculty had 17.7% of international students, while Business faculty had 29.2% of international students. Due to this growing number of Chinese international students at SFU, surveys following up with interviews will be handed out to my friends and be passed on through their social networks at SFU.

Incorporation with Social Media

In order to improve the cross cultural experience of Chinese students, social media is a new and changing entity that has a great potential in helping students culturally and mentally. As the Internet connects everyone with the virtual network, modern society has grown its online community, in which the economy has commercialized information and knowledge. Correspondingly, there are a growing number of aspects in an individual's life that can be altered through digital devices. As one of the dominant forces, social media have extended Web 1.0 broadcasting media with individualism, so that everyone can be a participator in the online community (Flew and Smith, 2011; Fuchs, 2014; Raine and Wellman, 2012). At the same time, the young generation has quickly adapted to the virtual community. Their knowledge of the digital technology – or so-called “digital literacy” – allows them to adapt the network into their daily lives (Thomas, O'Bannon & Bolton, 2013; Ng, 2012; Mondahl & Razmerita, 2014). For instance, nowadays, people call taxi, make hotel reservation, and book tickets all through mobile apps, and most of them record their everyday activities on Instagram or Facebook. Basing on their knowledge and understanding of digital media, digital natives adapt the virtual community into their everyday life, and this world-wide phenomenon is also prevalent in China.

Despite the differences, the frequent use of social media is a common habit shared by Canadians and Chinese. Recently, social media have taken advantage of the prevalence of the Internet, and they have expanded their influences in Chinese urban cities. According to Kantar's report (2016), up until 2015, more than half of urban citizens are registered social media users, which grew from less than 30% in 2013. In a short period of two years, the market of social media has changed dramatically. As mobile platform dominates the digital market, media that based on mobile applications are even more popular than desktop based media.

Particularly, WeChat has become the new dominating application gaining more and more tractions every year. In 2013, it was already used by 64.5% of the population. As the number kept growing, in 2015, WeChat was accepted by 75.9% of the population (Kantar, 2016). On the opposite, Weibo (the Chinese Twitter) loses its tractions as time goes. In 2013, Weibo was still one of the dominating applications, and it had 58.8% of the population. But the desktop based website gradually lost its users, and it was only used by 35% of the population in 2015. However, since WeChat is a one-to-one media while Weibo is a broadcasting media, they serve different purposes. WeChat is frequently used due to its privacy and accessibility, so it is used as an instant message application. Comparative, Weibo is inclusive and open, so it offers a large amount of free information on a sharing basis. Moreover, in general, the report compares the user population of Weibo and WeChat in China with Facebook and Twitter in other countries (Kantar, 2016). While the United States topped the list with 62% penetration among the market, China was the third on the list with 56% of penetration. As a result of the large population of social media users and the high credibility of social media among the young generations, social media definitely have impacts on the population's everyday lives.

Furthermore, when international students from China enter new surroundings, with their digital literacies, social media is potentially a new solution in helping them maintain and develop their identities. As Rui & Wang (2015) suggested, Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) analyzes the cultural and mental obstacles that international students have to conquer in a new country. As it analyzes the anxiety and uncertainty of international students from psychological and sociocultural perspectives, social media is adapted into the cross-cultural adaptation as a complementary tool. By extending social networking sites to the cross-cultural experience, international students' anxiety and uncertainty can be eased in physical, social, cultural and academic aspects.

Firstly, social media will offer students easier access to information related to their new surroundings. Williamson, Qayyum, Hider and Liu (2012) suggest that even though print media is still the main source of news, new media is much more flexible and controllable in terms of "purposeful information seeking". The first step of moving to a new country is to know more about the new culture and the local social environment. New media can be used to build up an up-to-date information network. Meanwhile, the online community is built based on a shared interest, so users receive only the information they need. For instance, many universities have their social media accounts offering official and necessary information in a casual tone, students can engage with the accounts asking for helps as well. Due to the large amount of shared information in an easily reachable community, social media can be used to get familiar with the social and cultural environment in the host nation, the nation students are studying in (Arnett, 2012; Sin & Kim, 2013).

Secondly, on social media from both host nations and hometown, international students can develop their social capitals in order to emotionally and socially adapt to the local world.

There are generally three types of social capitals, including bridging capitals, bonding capitals and remaining capitals (DeAndrea, Ellison, LaRose, Steinfield & Fiore, 2012; Li & Chen, 2014). Bonding capitals offer people an intimate network in which they look for emotional connection, while bridging capitals provide an information network built up by colleagues or strangers. As international students enter a new country, they demand mental support from old friends, but they also need help from local communities. In addition, remaining capitals connect international students with friends and families in their home country. Moreover, with one-to-one media (e.g. WeChat) and broadcasting media (e.g. Facebook), international students will build up their own social networks online and in reality (Wang, Tchernev & Solloway, 2012; Glass, Gómez & Urzua, 2014). Broadcasting media and one-to-one media are used for different functions. As broadcasting media expand individual's social capital with an open network, one-to-one media can build personal and close connections between individuals.

Thirdly, living in a strange cultural surrounding, students will be supported with social media in learning the cultural practices of the host nation. Primarily, language is not only a discipline to be studied, but it is also a cognitive learning process that requires constant practices. Most importantly, sometimes learning a language means understanding the culture behind the language (Mondahl & Razmerita, 2014; Rui & Wang, 2015; Faizi, Afia & Chiheb, 2014). Since social media is online and distanced, international students take less risks in communication, so they are encouraged to be more engaging in an unfamiliar environment. Self-expression as a major part of learning a new culture and practicing a new language is highly promoted on social media. Meanwhile, the physical and perceptual distance between them and their country, friends and families are enlarged by different time zones (Sandel, 2014). To many of them, in order to make friends with local people, adopting the local environment may mean giving up their old

cultural identity. While the cultural identity of the international students is challenged by cultural practices in the host nations, social media helps international students cope with the stress so students learn to find the balance between different cultures (Xu & MocarSKI, 2014; Doughty & Long, 2003). Even though students only stay in host nation for a short period, which is the reason they are called “sojourners”, international students still face a conflict in their cultural identity.

Last but not least, more and more universities are using social media as a supportive tool in education. With the social networks and language skills maintained by engaging with social media, the characteristics of social media construct a community that motivates students to engage with others, which is a more advanced way of learning (Dabner, 2012; Lepi, 2013; Wankel, 2009; Xu & MocarSKI, 2014). In a traditional classroom, students are receivers of knowledge, and they are pushed by teachers and exams to learn in a less efficient way. On the Internet, students are more self-motivated, and they have more choices in terms of how they would like to learn. At the same time, the adaptation of distance education cultivates a collaborative learning environment, while the participatory culture makes learning much easier (LiyanaGunawardena, 2014; Powers, Alhussain, Averbeck & Warner, 2012). In a virtual community, along with an enormous database and easy access, students can learn from collaboration with their colleagues. Therefore, international students have more time understanding the materials on their own, while teachers and colleagues are easily accessed for help and collaborative activities.

Research Methodology

In the beginning, the initial research proposal intended to study the potential of social media in helping Chinese international students adapting to the local surroundings at SFU. As the research began, more specifically, while the survey and interviews were being conducted, I started to realize the definition of “Chinese international students” was vague. Since Canada is an immigrant country, people from other countries have been living here for generations, but some of them may not be fluent at English as others. As a matter of fact, many of my friends at SFU have immigrated to Canada during the past few years, even though they still suffer from conflicts between cultures, languages and values. In the case of this study, nationality as an economic or political aspect should not interfere with the cultural and sociological experience. After consulting with Professor David Murphy, I decided to redefine the subject of this research as “Chinese student”, including all Chinese students who speak English as their second language. This means the research will have a population more qualified to share their experiences and opinions on the cross cultural adaptation at SFU.

In the same manner, instead of focusing on social media, the research is separated into two parts. While the online survey investigates the user habits on social media and their attitudes towards SFU’s communication style (including social media appearances), the interviews focus on students’ personal experiences and perspectives on cultural, social and educational differences between China and Canada. Even though social media is an important element in this research, since the purpose of this study is to improve students’ cross-cultural experience, experience has been re-emphasized in order to generate more concrete evidence.

What’s more, after the presentation of the proposal, Dr. Katherine Reilly suggested that this study can potentially connect with SFU’s plan in improving University communication with

international students. Even though I tried to consult with officials from SFU Student Service, unfortunately, due to the time constraint, we only shortly discussed the issue. Due to the length and time limit of this research, instead of waiting for their responses, I decided to combine a few points we've discussed to the research questions and continue the research.

In order to gather accurate and in-depth information to illuminate current attitudes of Chinese student towards existing Communication system and policies in related to International students at SFU, I took full advantage of my social network and reached out to as many people as possible. Firstly, I made a trial survey and invited two of my friends to fill in. Although they have provided precious opinions, the trial survey was not accurate. Then, I made a few changes accordingly and asked my friends to fill in the revised survey. Simultaneously, they were also asked to pass an invitation message to their friends via WeChat and Facebook message. Therefore, it can be hard to count how many people have been contacted, but eventually, 27 respondents have replied to the survey, while 4 of them were invited for interviews. Overall, the recruiting methods were mainly invitation message via social media, and this method has been proved to be effective in a short period.

After filling up the online survey, participants were asked to leave their contact information if they were interested in the topic and further interviews. Among 27 respondents from the survey, 12 of them demonstrated their interests and left their contact information. Initially, I planned to interview 3 to 5 participants on their experiences at SFU and around Metro Vancouver. However, after the first two interviews, I realized that I underestimated the length of interviews and the amount of information I can gather from them. At the same time, since myself is an international student from China, I intended to relate my personal experiences into the research to offer a more vivid example. All in all, I have only conducted 4 interviews: 2 of

interviews are with Chinese international students, and the others are with Chinese students holding Canadian passports.

By the end of the online survey, when respondents were asked to leave their contact and choose how they would like to be contacted, the most requested method was face-to-face interview. Though not all of them were interviewed, all four interviews were conducted in person. Even though face-to-face interview takes generally longer time for travelling and transcription of recording, communication with the participants was maximized. Since this study requires personal and detailed examples, during the interview, I shared my personal stories to warm up the conversation and ease down the participants. However, transcription for face-to-face interviews took longer than I expected. Because I was the only interviewer, I decided to audio record the interviews so I have time to react to the interviewees accordingly. While each interview took 35 to 45 minutes, transcription was very time consuming. Additionally, one of the respondents felt uncomfortable answering questions in English, so we talked in Chinese and I translated the whole conversation.

Including the potential of audio recording during interviews, a consent form was presented to the participants before interviews and the online survey. At first, I intended to collect consent forms in person. After the trial survey, I realized that it would be hard to collect their consent if the invitation is passed on my social network. As a result, instead of tracking each participant down, I added the consent form to the survey so respondents can see and sign it before the survey begins. However, participants in the trial survey either signed the consent in person or replied through email. On the other hand, for interviews, another consent was prepared. Since interviews was expected to be long (30 to 60 minutes), and because of the extra attention for voice recording, participant signed the consent in person before the interviews.

Analysis of Findings

Instead of answering the research question directly, the sub questions answer to the research question by five steps.

Sub-Research Question #1:

How do international students usually react to the local environment when they first enter the country?

For the first section of the research, I intend to study the potential cultural shock for the respondents when they encounter with Canadian culture and the society for the first time. Most respondents had an expectation of Canada like their perception of a Western society from TV shows or previous travel experience in Western countries. Therefore, the multicultural society in Canada was totally unexpected for most participants. At the same time, similar to many oversea students, one of the participants just finished high school when she came to Canada. When she started her academic career at SFU, the differences between high school and University were also reasons for her uncomfortableness (participant VK).

■ Survey Question #2, #3 & #4

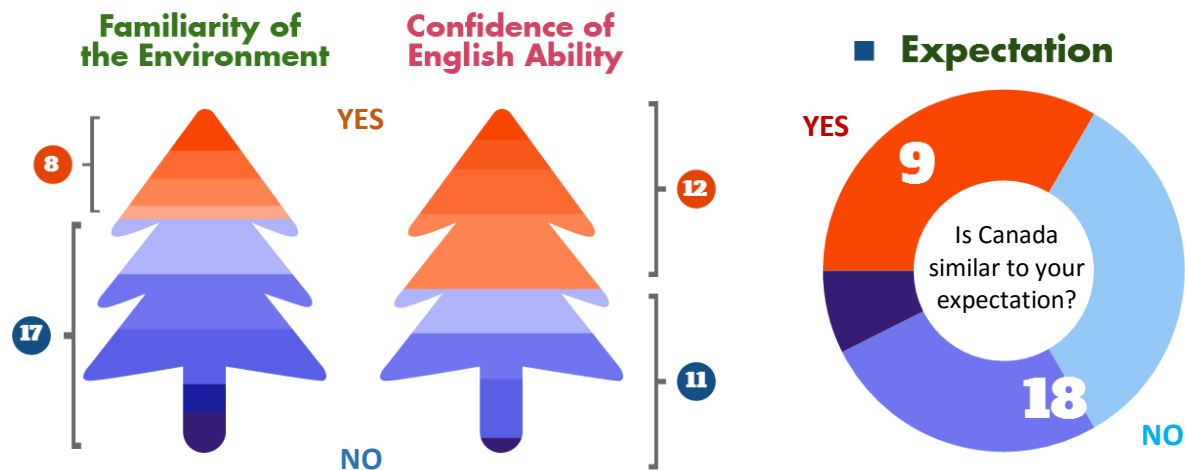


Figure 1. Participants' First Experience in Canada

- Even though more participants (12 vs. 11) are comfortable with English, the majority of them was new to Canada and wasn't familiar with local environment.
- What's more, only a small portion of the participants had an imagination closing to the true Canada, so the cultural and social surroundings in Canada are rather unexpected for the majority of them, because of the cultural diversity, the huge Chinese population, or other reasons.

■ *From interviews:*

Participant	Quotes
EM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ...when I come to school, I have to face the new environment, the new classmates, that's the first moment when I felt isolated... I just afraid that I can't understand the western culture, the cultural reference and I can't express myself clearly. ■ I remember in one class, which is most impress to me, which was 223, I even complain with him (the professor), because he used a lot of western examples. I don't really get it, I don't know why they are laughing in the class, I don't know why he thinks that example is interesting or fit into the concept we learn, I totally don't get it. And when I complain with him, he told me like: because we are... in the western country, in a western class, and everybody is (western people). We can't just... because you come from China, you don't understand, I can't just change for you. I was so impressed by the prof, and by everything
RX	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ...I was in Communication's "Frosh", I had no idea what they were playing. I didn't know what "amazing race" was, and I had no idea what to do when I was there. So I followed the others and did exactly what they did, but I still didn't figure out what they were doing. So I think this is a big cultural difference. I think this is the reason I refuse to participate into more events, and I feel there is a line between me and local people, I think I'm afraid or terrified about the idea of fitting into them, because I think I'm gonna embarrass myself.
VK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ For the general, when I just came to SFU, I thought, wow it's too many students sitting in a very very large classroom to listen to the professor... So I'm not very used to too many people sit in the very large classroom. And also... the professor usually teach and then after the class then go, that's different from high school.
AP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ People will also have a stereotype, thinking like Asian people are always shy, and they don't talk much. But I think that... it's true that we don't talk much, but I think the problem is because we are not very good at language we are gonna use now. So we are very afraid of... like speak loud when people ask us about some very complicated questions. We are really afraid that we can't not answer them really precisely.

Table 1. Interview Quotes to Assess Statuses of Chinese Students

Nevertheless, even though more participants showed confidence in English speaking, language and cultural background were still major barriers for them. During the interview, one of the participant (EM) expressed her pressure during the first year at SFU. While English and culture were her concerns interfering with her participation into the local surroundings, one of her professors showed a tough attitude. Because she wasn't familiar with Canadian culture, she

couldn't understand examples the professor used during lectures. When she tried to communicate with the professor, the professor said that he couldn't change for her just because she came from China and had problem understanding his lectures.

In the same manner, most new students from China, including myself, had similar experiences when they first came to Canada. My first night in Canada was the Thanksgiving Day, while my homestay invited me to their family dinner. Even though it was a sweet event, I felt awkward because I was too tired to understand and react to the others in English. Likely, participants RX also failed in fitting in to the local community, even though she had experiences in local high school. During her first experience in Communication department's "FROSH", she couldn't understand the games they played. After that experience, she never tried other activities, because she didn't want to embarrass herself.

Hence, since most participants were unfamiliar with local environment, local culture, local language, even the University, participants all experienced cultural shock at different levels. This also relates to the second section of the research, in which I will analyze the reasons for the anxiety of new students.

Sub-Research Question #2:

What are some reasons for the anxiety or uncertainty (if they have any) during their cultural adaptation process?

Relating with previous researches in cultural adaptation of international students, the research questions mainly studied three aspects of cultural aberration: culture and values, social networks and education. This is not only a problem of international students, but local teachers and advisors also need to understand the differences between Canadian society and Chinese

society in order to help new students who are not familiar with the local environment in Canada (participant EM).

One of the reasons for the low participation of Chinese students in local activities or classroom discussion is because of the way students were taught as kids. According to participant EM, teachers and parents always teach students to do the right thing and avoid making mistakes. What's more, participant AP also suggests that, in comparison with the individualism in Canada, students were taught to follow the rules and be conformity. Because of that, she continues, Chinese international students are generally less confident than Chinese students grew up here. If I had bad performance at school, my parents would request me to look up to all my friends who had good academic performance; if I stayed at home during the weekend, they would ask me why I can't play sports like the other boys. Consequently, students are afraid of being punished in language or with more works (participant VK), and they are terrified of making mistakes and embarrassing themselves in front of the others (participant RX).

- **Culture and values**

Participant	Quotes
EM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ I think that's also because of the culture and education system, because the teacher and parents they told us "never make mistakes" right? So we are afraid of making mistakes, so when we do the writing discussion, I think we can avoid making mistakes and avoid the embarrassment come with making mistakes. ■ I didn't know there was an orientation... I think because Chinese don't know about the society, they don't know about the culture, so they don't expect... events and that kind of information ■ ...SFU did have mental help... and Chinese people they did go to the service, but they don't have good experience, according to our research and our interview, so I guess it's the same. They use their own way, the Canadian way or Western way, to deal with international mental problems. So it's the same, they deal with Chinese students in their own ways, which doesn't fit in with Chinese culture and the way Chinese people think. So I think that's a huge problem.
AP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Also I think the cultural aspect I value the most about Canada is that they emphasize individualism. But in China, the reason I don't like them is that they always want to be the same as others (conformity). ■ They have a very strong ethical constraint, once someone say something is bad, they just don't do it. But in Canada, everyone is an individual, every thought of you and whoever you are very normal, because you are an individual, who is supposed to be different from others. ■ When you look at a CBC (Canadian born Chinese) and an oversee student from China, the biggest difference is that CBC are much more confident than us. The way they speak and act shows they are more confident than us. I think confidence is because they accept who they are, but most Chinese international student actually don't know that.

Table 2-1. Interview Quotes for Cultural Aberration

Another key thing to remember is that new students also lack the awareness of how things progress in a Canadian University, while local professors and advisors try to help them in a Canadian custom. Most respondents from interview were not in their orientation, they didn't even know what orientation was before they actually came here. On the other hand, even though student common, academic advisor or even mental health counselling were all available at SFU, students did not know where to find them until they really need them. What's more, as participant EM suggests, the mental health service deal with Chinese students' problems with Canadian ways, so there is a misunderstanding between students and counselors.

- **Social Networking**

Participant	Quotes
EM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ At the beginning, I feel like there's no difference, because we can talk and hang out, and I feel so excited to have them with me, because we can talk about the differences between Chinese culture and western culture, and we can share so many different stuff. I feel so fresh to get to know new culture and they are the window for me to get to know western culture right? But... after we are done with that part of conversation, there's no more conversation. We can't continue. ■ ...I think that's also related to culture... When you feel ...cultural perspectives toward something... you cannot share that parts. ■ Slangs, there are some slangs, like Chinese slangs and English slangs... (story behind a word) they can't get it... we don't have the same humour sense
RX	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ I remembered I was talking to a "foreigner", who can't stop talking about cartoons in their childhood, but I had no idea what they were talking about, so I can only listen to the others having fun but can't say anything. Culture and language... I think it is really hard to be in the local community.
VK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ I have several, like one or two friends, from other countries. ...it's not that close (with local people). It's friend(ship) but not that close...
AP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ...I know a lot of Chinese people here, I don't have to choose not to know them or avoid them, because they come from the same country as I do, so it's easily to get close. But I try to know more people. ■ ... if they find that they like the person who you are, we'll have more topics to talk.

Table 2-2. Interview Quotes for Social Relationship Barriers

Besides the misunderstanding with local services, Chinese students also have problem communicating with local people, because of the differences in culture and language. Most of the participants think making friends with local people is enjoyable at first, but things get tough when they try to discuss something they are interested in. For example, participant RX and I

share similar experiences talking to local people about cartoons. Even if we watched the same cartoons as kids, we can't discuss it because the terms and names are different. One of the participants (EM) also presents that slangs and cultural perspectives are also barriers between local people and Chinese students. However, participant AP thinks different. She believes people will want to make friend with you, even if you share different culture and history, as long as they like your personality.

As for the differences between Canadian and Chinese education, the discussion mainly focuses on different teaching methods of Chinese and Canadian teachers. Most participants agree that Canadian teachers encourage students to express their own opinions, while Chinese teachers are more textbook based. At the same time, students are in responsible for their own learning in University, but in China, teachers always monitor the students with punishments and rules. For instance, in University, students can even be the teacher during presentation, and they can share their understanding with the others (participant EM).

- **Education**

Participant	Quotes
EM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Well it's different, but not that much different. I think I'm more qualified to speak for that, because I was in Chinese university for two years and I came to here because I feel disappointed by Chinese teaching system and the way they teach. ■ So I came to here and I expect a brand new way, you know, more fresh, more... lively (from) the environment. I came here I did feel it's a new environment, the prof, they are more encourage students to share their ideas. But the thing is... when... you are not familiar with the language, English, you are using the second language to do your study here... you still feel... there's a barrier for you to share your ideas. ■ ...the Chinese teachers only teach and teach, and you just need to listen and do the homework, you know. I remember the only moment we share our own idea is when we share our homework. But now here, you can... even share your different opinion to the teacher. And... we share examples to help students. And you can even be the teacher, when you do the presentation
RX	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ I feel in the local culture, teachers... are very understanding, they know I have some difficulties, and they are willing to help with my problems... I think they allow the students to develop on their own, and they don't constrain students' values and what they think. They are generally very open-minded, as a part of the culture. ■ ...students are also expected to express their own opinions in class and participate into discussions. In China, it seems like they are only reading materials on their own, exam is everything, and that's how you are evaluated. In Canada, we have a lot of space to explore on ourselves.

VK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Canadian teachers are more nicer. And Chinese teachers are like: if you don't know this question, and then you will got punishment, right? ...it's more like the student's responsibility to learn or not. ■ Basically, in University in China, some specific subjects you are forced to take, like political issue something, right? But in Canada, you select the class, it's like you learn what you want to learn. ■ In tutorial... I think some tutorials really help, especially the tutorial from your math class or statistic class. Because in the lecture, professor teaches you the idea, the general ideas, and then in the tutorial, the TAs they always do the exercise and examples with you. That's why tutorials are helpful.
AP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ...if you don't come to find him (the advisor), find her, to talk to her, he won't talk to you first. Someone maybe doesn't know that. ■ Chinese teacher is always restrict, and serious ...the education background in China is really... hard for student to be creative... ■ Actually Chinese teachers always like to teach you in person. You didn't get a good grade last time, they just find you and assign you a lot exercises, and they talk to you again and again. But I think Canadian teachers ...they just teach you the thing they need to teach, and then you need to study yourself. And if you have question, you can ask them. You can't rely on them everything

Table 2-3. Interview Quotes for Educational Barriers

In general, there are cultural and ideological differences between Chinese students and local people (students and teachers), in order to support Chinese students, more information and knowledge in relate with the local life should be offered to new students. However, the school also need to study other cultures if they want to improve the experience of international students.

Sub-Research Question #3:

How do international students from China think of their role and identity in the Canadian society?

After examining the reason for the uncertainty and anxiety of Chinese students, I decided to move forward to their cultural and ideological identity after their experiences living in the Canadian society. On the one hand, I noticed my friends, and even myself, sometimes behave as a traveler or visitor in this country. I still don't have a family doctor after living here for four years, and I never pay attention to any political or other important events. According to the interviews, apparently I'm not the only one. However, even if we still think and live with our Chinese habits, we are living in a Western country, while the way we think is somewhat different from mainstream Chinese citizens now. Additionally, it is also interesting to highlight that some

of the participants (RX and VK) still don't think they are part of the Canadian society, even though they are Canadian citizens.

■ *Survey Question #6*

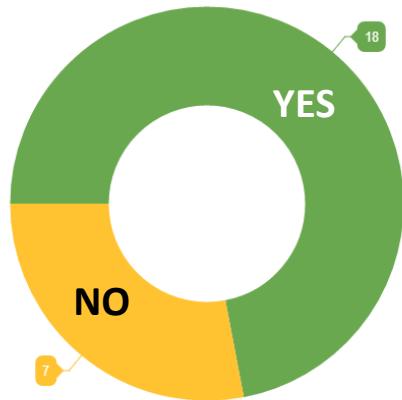


Figure 2. Participants' Self-Identification

- During the survey, the majority of participants actually think of themselves as members of the Canadian society, even though all interviewees think the opposite. However, there are still many participants who don't think they are part of the Canadian society.

As one of the participant also mentioned in her interview, because Canada is so diversified, local people are very used to the existence of other cultures or ethics (participant AP). However, growing up in China, Chinese people may turn to reject other cultures, because of our long history and complex culture. So when Chinese students live in Canada, they see themselves as visitors, while others may consider international students as part of the local society. Nevertheless, participant EM suggests that international students come to Canada because they already accepted the values of Canadian society. She illuminates that she wants to study in Canada because she admires the inclusive Western values, while Chinese values are still conservative.

However, even if they tried to open up to the new society, sometimes they were stopped by some variations. For example, respondent EM also felt isolated once because she overheard a conversation between local people, who were discussing their Chinese colleague. Similarly, after trying for several times to fitting into the local community, one of the respondents started to reject fitting into the others (participant RX). At the same time, even if she holds Canadian

passport, her knowledge about Canada is far less than enough, which is another reason for the feeling of not being a part of the local society.

■ *From interviews:*

Participant	Quotes
EM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ...after four years, I still don't know the political system here, I don't why, I don't know what can we do. There's a voting during I stay here, vote for the Translink. There's nothing. It won't happen in China, I feel new about that, but I cannot get involved to that. ■ ...even in the school, I don't feel I totally get involved to the school and the new community... ...when I was in a bus, and in my way back to home ...I heard somebody talking about their Chinese partners. ...I feel so isolated that time. Because I'm Chinese, sometimes I work with local group, local people's group. So I feel so afraid whether they will complain about me in the same way.
RX	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ No, I don't actually feel that way (fitting into the local community). Just because you took the immigration exam and hold the Canadian passport, it doesn't make you a Canadian, I don't feel any differences with before.
VK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ I don't know how to identify myself... It's kinda like a banana, so it's yellow outside but white inside. That's why if you stay in Canada or in other Western countries for a while, then you are thinking how to identify yourself. Because you are not in China, you are not getting familiar with Western country, then you are in the middle.
AP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ When I was in China, I felt the way I think is pretty open and diversified comparing to others. Pretty open-minded. So when I came here, I didn't feel very uncomfortable, because I actually love the way of thinking of Canadian. I just feel my personality is revealed here. ■ ...you don't really have to try so hard to be like that, because we lived in our country for more than 10 years, usually 18 years, before we moved to this new cultural environment, so I think we are definitely thinking with both Chinese and Western values, not necessarily close to either directions. So I think it's impossible to think ourselves as only a Western person one day

Table 3. Interview Quotes to Assess Self-Identification of Participants

Moreover, when the participants were asked to consider their cultural identity, all interviewees show different levels of struggle between their Canadian and Chinese identity. By using the phrase “banana”, participant VK describes international students who think in a Western way but still have so many Chinese roots. Because students are thinking in a “white” perspective, they are isolated from the Chinese community. As participant AP suggests, “it’s impossible to think ourselves as only a Western person one day”, but maybe it’s not necessary either. Interviewee VK, who also holds Canadian passport, doesn’t even want to fit into the local community, because she knows it’s not what she wants. In her opinion, people don’t have to try so hard to be like others in Canada, she prefers to have the life she wants with the ones she loves.

In a word, most Chinese students in Canada are experiencing different levels of struggle between Chinese and Canadian values. Most of them tried or are still trying to fit in, but there are some who know what they want and choose not to fit in. In relate to their understanding of the Canadian society, the next section will discuss Chinese students’ experiences with social media.

Sub-Research Question #4:

How has social media improved or decreased students’ experience in Canada?

Living in a foreign society, social media is a familiar platform Chinese students are using to adapt their new lives. As all participants admit the importance of social media in their life, they also have been using social media for friendship and information. Although the security issue is concerned by one of the participants, all participants have expanded their networks through social media.

■ *Survey Question #6 #7 & #9*

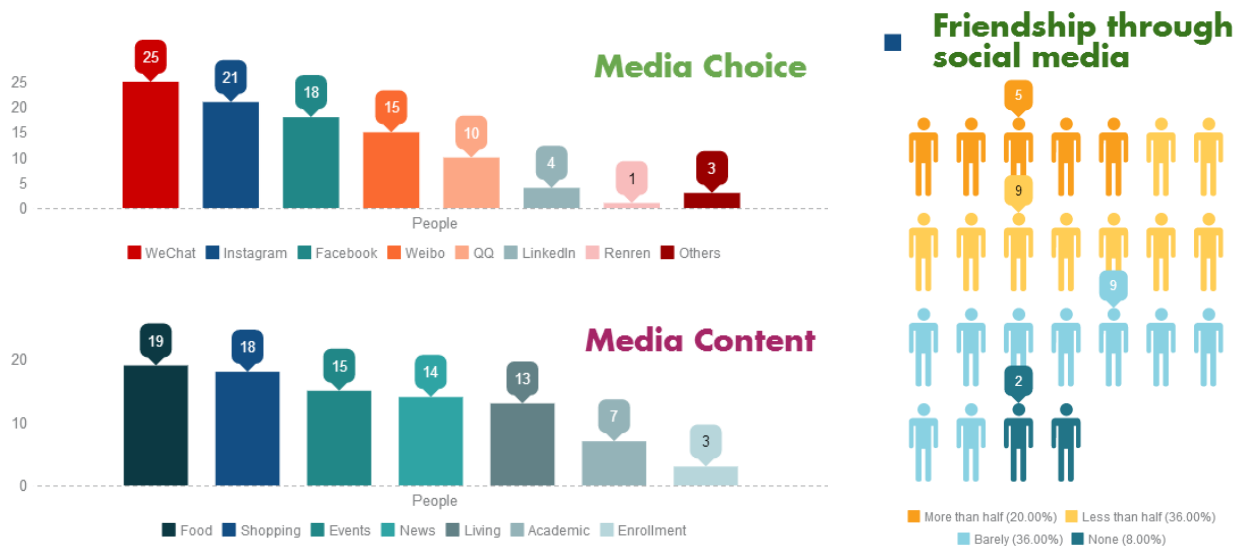


Figure 3. Participants’ Social Media Habits

- From the survey, we can see (from the chart “Media Choice”) most people are using Chinese media (bars in warm colors) including WeChat, Weibo, QQ, Renren, and even others didn’t mentioned in the questionnaire. Every participant uses WeChat.
- As for media contents, food is the most popular topic, followed by shopping and events, while academic related information is actually a unpopular online topic.
- On the other hand, most people actually have been using social media to make new friends. The warm color groups have made around half of their friends on social media, while the cold color groups have only made a few friends or even no friend on social media.

At the beginning, social media was mainly used for maintaining relationship with friends and family in China. One of the participants (EM) describes social media as something to connect her with her old relationships and getting mental and cultural supports. In the meanwhile, students gradually use social media to start new relationships, even with the local community. For example, Facebook is used by all interviewees for group work with local colleagues. This can explain why Facebook is the third most popular social media among the participants (Figure 3). Additionally, instead of going to Western media for new relationships, one of the participants actually introduced Chinese media WeChat to her foreign friends. Last but not least, one of the participants (AP) expressed her preference to social media communication, because she concerns that she couldn’t react to her local friends as natural as in Chinese. Hence, social media communication not only gives her time to consider her words but also becomes an opportunity to improve her English ability.

Nevertheless, another participant (VK) tried to getting familiar with the local environment through Facebook, as the first thing she did in Vancouver. As she argues, because

of the unknown identity on social media, she feels social media is an unsafe place to build new relationship. However, like the other participants, she also expresses her trust toward social media as a source of information. Even on Chinese platforms, participants can learn Canadian customs and learn about the life in Vancouver. Participant AP even describes social media as the only thing people can know about the local society before they actually arrive.

■ *From interviews:*

Participant	Quotes
EM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ... I guess social media does help a lot when I first came here ...it's really really helpful if you can get in touch with your own family and your own culture here. ...personally (social media) it's more for relationship, and the second is information. ...I live here alone without my parents and friends, they are all in China, so social media, WeChat is the only tool I can get in touch with them to maintain our relationships.
RX	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Nowadays, my friends are mostly Chinese or Asians, I don't really have many non-Chinese friends. So I often use WeChat and Line, and I do regularly browse on them, and I often browse Instagram and things like that. Now if I want to communicate with Caucasians, who usually go to class with me, mostly on Facebook. ■ ...I use social media mainly for information, for example, which restaurant I should go, what should I do for fun, where should I travel... or clothes, so it's mainly about building my own lifestyle.
VK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ...In the beginning, I used Facebook a lot..... much more about general information, like what happened and what's going on in SFU. But nothing very much in relationship. ■ ... (meeting people online)It's easier than actually you meet them in personally, somehow I think if you get friends on social media, it can be unsafe. Because you actually don't know them, so you never met them and you will not be sure if they are good or not.
AP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Someone may have the argument like, Facebook makes our daily life more lonely, or makes us lonely. But I think it depends on how do you use it, so... I think social media for me is a very good resource for information, as well as relationships. I have a lot of friends, I met them on Facebook firstly, and then we get into very good friends in real life.

Table 4. Interview Quotes for Social Media's Role in Participants' Life

In a nut shell, social media is supported by most participants as a tool for communication and information on local and international scales. However, although SFU has official social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and even on Weibo, these accounts as the main communication style of SFU have comparatively low preference among Chinese students.

Sub-Research Question #5:

What can SFU do in order to enhance the cross cultural experience of international students?

Even though there are similar amount of participants who are satisfied or dissatisfied about the general communication style of SFU, we can see most people are in the middle area (Figure 4). Not only SFU’s general communication is not satisfied by most participants, SFU’s general policy for international students is unsatisfied. At the same time, interviewees’ suggestions for improvement focus on events and Chinese media for new students.

■ *Survey Question #10 to #14*



Figure 4. SFU’s Communication Style

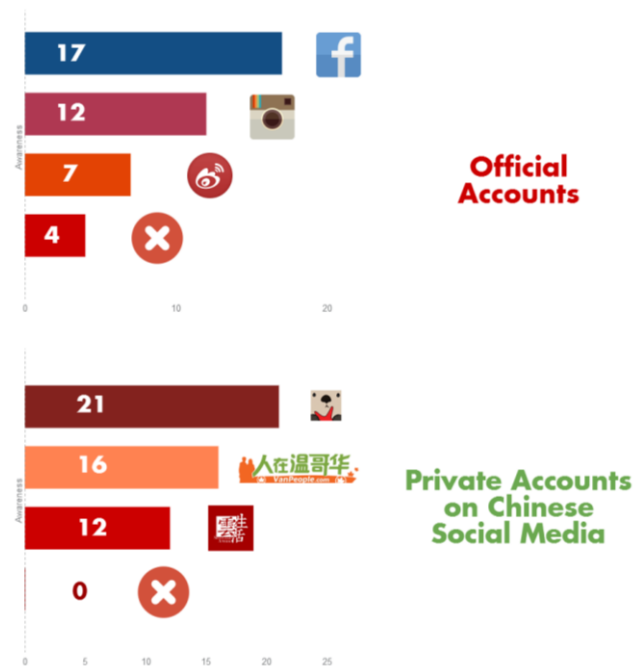


Figure 5. Social Media Awareness

- The charts in Figure 5 depict participants’ awareness of SFU official and private accounts. Even though the majority of participants knows about official SFU accounts on Facebook or Instagram, only a small portion of them knows about the official accounts on Weibo (Chinese Twitter), and there are some of them who didn’t know any of these accounts.
- On the opposite, when I listed a series of Chinese social media accounts in terms of life in Vancouver, everyone knows these accounts.

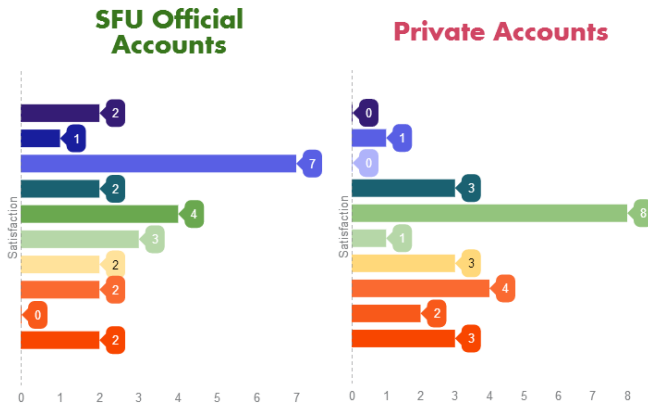


Figure 6. Social Media Content

highest vote is 3, while private accounts have a generally high satisfaction rate, and the highest vote is 5.

- As for the social media contents offered by official accounts and private accounts, we can see a comparison by these charts. Warm colors means more satisfied, while cold colors are low satisfied.
- SFU official accounts has a generally low satisfaction rate, the

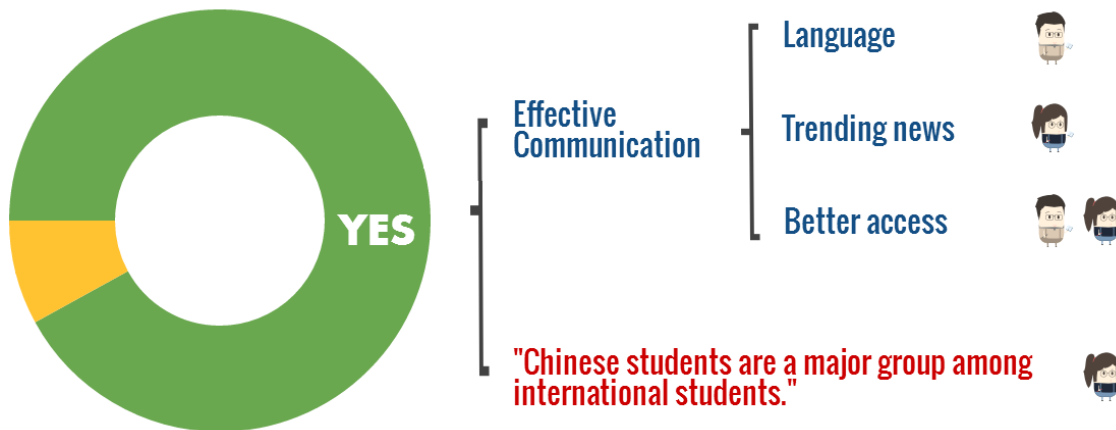


Figure 7. Survey Responses for Improvement on Social Media Appearance

By the end of the survey, respondents were asked to consider the role of SFU in communication and information sharing with Chinese students. Most of the respondents think SFU should offer the information they receive from Chinese accounts on social media. Amongst these respondents, some of them believe that Chinese students generally are not good at English when they first came to Canada, receiving these information on their familiar platforms will be

much easier; social media is updated quickly, so news are very fresh; also SFU official accounts on Chinese social media would be easily accessed by all students, even if they are in China for vacation (considering the fact that most Western social media are blocked in China).

As the survey mainly focuses on how satisfied or unsatisfied students are, the interviews offer diverse opinions on how SFU can help with Chinese students' cultural adaptation in the local community. First of all, "event" is commonly mentioned during interviews. Most participants agree that SFU should hold more events for international students to make friends and expand their social network. While participant EM and VK didn't even know the existence of orientation, participant RX suggests that Facebook event has been used by some clubs, but they were unknown until the day of the event, not to mention that some students don't even have Facebook accounts. Similarly, participant AP argues that SFU should be more engaging with international students for orientation and other events. This relates to another key word, "interactive media". One of the reason participants support social media is because of the interaction between human beings. Participants argue that students should actually feel a person is talking to them, instead of receiving automatic newsletters every week (participant RX & VK).

At the same time, most participants are unsure about Chinese media and Chinese media content, but they all agree that new students deserve more attention. During the interview, participant EM has a struggle between Chinese and English media contents. On the one hand, students should learn about Canada including its language. However, she also feel the needs to express herself in Chinese. Similarly, she and participant RX agree that students should learn about the local culture on their own, rather than waiting for and relying on SFU.

Nevertheless, participants do agree SFU should offer better services for international students. On the one hand, for people from other countries, they should feel belonging to the

community at SFU, because their old connections are useless in a foreign land. Participant RX suggests that a university should have communities for students to feel belonging to, because it's not just for friendship, it would also be great for academic study and future career exploration. On the other hand, when new students just arrive, they may have limited access or knowledge among Western social media, so Chinese social media is still necessary for new students (participant RX). In the meanwhile, participant VK also suggests that SFU should have more diversified social media appearance for students from different countries. Participant EM's suggestions align with VK's idea, and she argues that local people uses Canadian ways to understand problems on an international scale, which is a reason for the unpopularity of both SFU's mental health department and social media communication.

From interviews:

Participant	Quotes
EM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ...we PAY THAT MUCH! ...please offer us proper help and proper people to do their job. ■ ... mentally health is most important. ■ (For the official accounts on Chinese platforms, such as Weibo) When you open this kind of account, your niche, your target audience is Chinese student, right? That's actually SFU need to do more. I don't even know SFU has an official account in Weibo ...so the official account should be more comprehensive for Chinese students. ■ I think (a Chinese liaison) must be necessary! But they can also cooperate with the existing Chinese media accounts, like YunShengHuo (Cloud Life Daily), you can totally...
① Mental health; ② Chinese social media; ③ Self-motivation; ④ Events	
RX	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ I don't actually know (SFU offer) any (helps)... I think they should be doing something, but because I'm not in the international community, so I don't know. ...I'm domestic, just my friends are still mainly Chinese speakers, so I guess I am a special case. ■ I think even it does help students getting familiar with the local community and local culture, but they are still using the media they are familiar with... I think they need to motivate themselves to make a change. I don't know, it doesn't really relate with social media... I think it's about culture, about comfort zone, you need to try.
① Case of Chinese students with Canadian citizenship; ② Events; ③ Interactive communication; ④ New students; ⑤ Future career; ⑥ Self-motivation	
VK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ...we just get rid of the (news)letters... Do you think the letter is efficient? I think it's inefficient. A lot people don't read the letters. When you log into the SFU email, you only think about study and something like that... think those things more than activities or something. So I think maybe they can somehow don't send the letter through SFU Connect, send the letter in some other ways... ■ If you want to fix the problem, just change the international center to be more diverged... If you are not diverse, you are not international. So that international centre should be some of them are Chinese, some of them are from other countries, and make it more diverse.
① Social media message; ② Chinese social media; ③ Diversified officers for Communication;	

AP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ...you can find everything on SFU website, there are a portion targeting at international student's need, so it's quite convenient... (but) no one teaches me (how to use it) actually... I discovered the official website (on my own)... ■ ...it's always tough as a beginning for a new people, so... if they want to get close to this community really fast, they need a person or something to guide them.....(and) just push them to make new friends... ■ ...they don't need to guide us all the time, like four years, they just need to... like the first few months, I think we need a person, who can teach me about those... everything about Canada, because we really don't familiar with the Canadian community and school community. <p style="text-align: center;">① New students; ② Events; ③ New friendship;</p>
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Table 5. Interview Quotes to Determine University’s Role in Student Experience Improvement

By the end, I would like to re-emphasize the population of this research. As you can see from the chart above, participant RX expresses the feeling of isolation because she doesn’t belong to either local community, Chinese community or even the community of Chinese international students. Even if SFU has offered some helps (including the newsletter), because of her nationality, she doesn’t receive any of them.

Discussion of Findings

Cross-cultural Adaptation

Even though China has opened and reformed, Chinese citizens have limited knowledge about other cultures. According to the first and second sections of the results, Chinese students were used to the Chinese dominated society, when they came to Canada, multiculturalism was totally new to them. When they tried to get along with the cultural diversity, they faced with the challenges of language and Western culture. This is not only a barrier for their social networking, but it also influences their academic performances. When instructors tell stories and jokes in lectures, growing up in a different social background, Chinese students have trouble understanding the instructors correctly. At the same time, friendship with local people remains only on surface, which reminds me of “bridging social capital” introduced by DeAndrea, Ellison, LaRose, Steinfield and Fiore (2012, p. 16). On the other hand, growing up with Chinese teachers, students were used to studying under the guidance of teachers. As Chinese students’ education experiences were dominated by textbook based teaching system, teachers in China were also more distanced, and they used punishment and rules to manage students. Similarly, they had less control over the course materials, and the way they learn was mainly listening to teachers’ lecture. In a word, students lacked the flexibility and control over study, so they may lose their way in a Western education system.

Miscommunication

At the same time, schools in Western society also generally lack the experiences of getting along with Chinese students. In both education and student services, students are expected to act actively and go find helps on their own. Most professors only teach their lectures

and hold office hours, and those are the only chances for students to connect with them. At the same time, students are expected to think independently, rather than simply listening to and remember teachers' speech. What's more, in tutorial, or even some lecture, professors or TAs expect students to participate actively. This reveals a miscommunication between Canadian professors and Chinese students and their different understandings of education.

In the meanwhile, student services are also new to Chinese students. While mental health is an area lacking of awareness, students who actually went to SFU health centre did not find the help they need. Like most student services (such as SFU website), mental health is not promoted enough among the Chinese student community. As a matter of fact, academic advisors, SFU website, mental health and more student services are waiting for students, rather than actively presenting themselves to those who may need help. Furthermore, the way student services perceive and solve problems is strange to Chinese students. For example, when one of the participants went to Student Learning Common for help, she felt it was a short period for a huge problem, so she didn't feel her problem was solved. Similarly, during my first experience with SFU mental health service, I was introduced to a group activity afterward (not to mention I was the only one in that group). Talking to friends who had experiences with mental health service at SFU, apparently guiding students to a group activity is a common policy.

Identity

Notably, Chinese student's Chinese cultural background also causes their misunderstanding of their role in Canada, and they still think of themselves as visitors even though some already hold Canadian passport. Firstly, due to the limited knowledge of local environment and practices, Chinese students have limited participation into local events. Most participants lack the awareness of daily or political events, for example, voting for TransLink or

political election. Because of their narrow participation, they do not feel belonging to the local community, or SFU community. Meanwhile, Chinese students think of their identity in Canada in a Chinese perspective. Because of the small amount of foreign visitors in China, even though Chinese students are common to the Canadian society, they still think they are different or isolated from the local citizens. This can be another reason stopping them from participation into local events and making friends with local students.

However, both Chinese students and oversea students suffer from the identity crisis between different cultures or values. Most participants illuminate their identity is in between Canada and China, but as some suggest, they will never be the same as the local people, and they don't have to be. Additionally, Chinese students who hold Canadian citizenship not only suffer from the same crisis, they are even distinguished from oversea student community because of their nationality.

Social media

In the meantime, Chinese students have been using social media to get familiar with the local environment, reconnect with close friends and families, and study the local culture. In the beginning, participants either used social media to follow up with trends in China, or they used it to learn about the local environment. On the other hand, as Facebook becomes a popular choice for group activity with colleagues, participants also learn daily expressions, such as slangs or cultural stories, with their local colleagues. By following others' posts and shares, they can learn more about what local community does and how they live their life.

SFU's Support

Nevertheless, the communication style and student services of SFU have gained comparatively low satisfaction rate. Comparing to the well-known private accounts on Chinese media, official accounts of SFU have low awareness. Concurrently, participants find their posts not as helpful as the private accounts. While most private accounts offer information and news updates about Metro Vancouver area, official account on Chinese platform Weibo seems to focus on recruitment rather than guidance, and their help is mainly through links to other websites.

In accordance with Hernandez¹ and Kose (2012), Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), which is constantly used for intercultural education, describes the cross-cultural experiences as six stages: denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, and integration. The first three stages were marked as ethnocentric stages, in which people show their pride among their own culture and ideologically defend themselves in front of other cultures. Then, during the last three stages, which were also called ethnorelative stages, and people act the opposite and embrace cultural diversity. New students from China came from a single cultural society, so most of them will be in the first three stages, either denying the differences between Chinese and Canadian cultures, defending their own culture, or trying to minimize the conflicts. As a University, SFU can start from creating a culturally neutral environment, so students do not have to feel the pressure choosing one of two cultures. Then, with the proper guidance, they will start to understand and embrace their identity in a global scale.

Suggestions for Improvement

At the same time, participants have made suggestions for SFU's student service and communication practices. As the most supported key word, participants expect SFU to hold more

events, especially for international students. SFU should be a community students can feel belonging to, and this would be a valuable experience for their academic supports and future career explorations. In order to promote for the events, the way SFU send message and the content both need some reforms.

On the one hand, participants argue that SFU Connect is mainly used for study related communication, so newsletter for international student is usually unnoticed, not to mention its information is not helpful. Simultaneously, since SFU already has official accounts on Chinese platforms, one of the participants suggest it should be used by the right people who are familiar with these platforms and the community. Similarly, supported by most participants, they believe SFU should have more cultural diversities among the social media appearances and student services. New students, who just came to a foreign country, would need guidance and information in related with local surroundings on their familiar platforms.

Assessment

During the first few weeks, I tried to wait for responses from SFU officials in university communication and student service, but it wasn't a successful conversation. Because this research has a time limit of one semester, I couldn't wait any longer, so I decided to continue the research with only a few points from their responses. I believe people who actually work at SFU student service should have more specific questions in terms of how the university experience of international students can be improved through social media. Therefore, I would recommend an in-depth conversation with officials in university communication.

In the same manner, this research initially meant to study the general topic of Chinese international students in Canada, due to the constraints of time and space, I narrowed down the topic to specifically Chinese students at SFU. Canada has been one of the most popular countries for Chinese international students, I believe their experiences deserve more attention, and this was my initial motivation of this research. Therefore, if time and space constraints are conquered, I would choose Canada rather than Metro Vancouver. As one of the most culturally diversified area in Canada, it may not reflect the full picture of the problem. What's more, I would also invite participants from other universities across Canada, because I believe SFU has a comparatively good communication style, while other universities may not pay so much attention to international students yet. These will be discussed specifically in the conclusion.

On the other hand, in related with the recruitment of participants, I would say the most effective method in this research was my recruitment method of sending invitations through my social network. Due to my identity as an international student, I have easy access to a social network of international students from China. At the same time, this recruitment method has overreached the expected amounts of responses in a very short period. Comparing to traditional

ways of recruitment, such as email or face-to-face invitation, receiving an invitation from a friend adds more trust to the survey, which I believe is one reason for the effectiveness.

However, this recruitment method is also flawed because of the difficulty in management. In order to reach the ethic standard, I added consent form to the survey, so they can sign the consent form before answering the questionnaire.

In the meantime, the survey is mainly made of multiple choice questions, while interviews collected qualitative data. During the trial survey, I realized that participants had trouble sharing their personal experiences. It can be potentially caused by the lack of trust to an online survey, or maybe because they never thought about the topic seriously. Therefore, during the interview, I tried to relax participants with casual questions, and consequently, I shared my personal experiences to trigger their memories in relate with the research questions. This is also part of my auto-ethnographic research methodology. However, as my stories reminded them of their experiences, this practice might have the potential of leading questions. Even if I tried to keep the questions as fair as possible, the way I asked the questions still have the potential of creating bias to the results.

Conclusion

Due to the differences between the Chinese society and Canadian society, such as various cultural, historical or educational customs, when Chinese students enter the Canadian society for university, they experience different levels of cultural aberration. Since Canada has been one of the most popular options for overseas education among Chinese citizens, while SFU has a growing proportion of Chinese students as well, the cultural adaptation experience of Chinese students deserves more attention.

At the same time, social media is an interactive communication tool across multiple platforms. It shows a potential in enhancing communication between students and local environment and consequently easing the anxiety and uncertainty of cross-cultural aberration. What's more, social media has already proved its importance and convenience in the life of Chinese students at SFU, it has supported students in terms of social networking and information searching. However, SFU's communication style is comparatively weak in improving Chinese students' life and creating the sense of a community.

Solution

According to participants' advices, events and multi-lingual social media appearance for new students are some potential areas to be enhanced. Learning from the research and literature review, I recommend an official liaison who can offer helps through social media platforms and support new students' cultural adaptation.

First of all, for new students, offering important information in their language and on their familiar platform is definitely more effective than newsletters. Similarly, according to participant EM's suggestion, SFU can actually cooperate with existing platforms, such as

Cloud_Life_Daily (a SFU based Chinese account on WeChat), in terms of updates for social media content.

Then, the main focus of a liaison is to communicate with students interactively. Instead of waiting for them looking for help, the official liaison can reach out to students who potentially need help. Comparing to existing student services, the familiar language and interactive appearance may be more trustworthy. It took me four years to learn the local society and be aware of my own identity as part of the society, it would be much helpful if the university offer mental, cultural, and social guidance for international students.

Last but most importantly, Chinese students do not regularly participate into events, such as orientation, because they are not aware of these events. Therefore, SFU events can be promoted and cooperating with social media contents, for example, through Facebook events. Based on social media platforms, official online events and chat groups can be created for specific themes. For instance, it can gather people in the same major, so they have a chance to make new friends.

Future study

In general, this paper focuses on Chinese student at SFU, but this topic can be developed into several directions, because there still are many subtopics to cover in related with international student's experience in Canada. For example, in relation to international students at SFU, FIC as the official international college can be another focus of the research; also, differences between international students with and without Canadian citizenship is another potential extension of study. Nevertheless, as previously discussed, this paper meant to cooperate with SFU officials but failed due to time and space constraint. In order to analyze the problem

from various perspectives, it will be a more developed study to officially cooperate with SFU or other universities and include their opinions, knowledge and experiences.

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