Past Expectations, Current Experiences, and Imagined Futures: Narrative Accounts of Chinese International Students in Canada

by

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Abstract

The internationalization of higher education has led to the influx of Chinese international students in Canada. The literature on these students usually addresses the factors that drive them to Canada, their learning experiences, and the impact of the stereotypical constructions of "Chinese learners" on their language learning. But the literature does not connect the current learning experiences of these students to their past back in China and the futures in their imagination. This narrative study investigates the English learning and IELTS test-taking experiences of ten Chinese international students before and after they came to Canada to find out how their past and present experiences and imagined futures are interconnected in shaping their identities.

In analyzing the storied, shared, and envisioned experiences of ten participants, I found that they came to Canada to escape *Gaokao* and learn English for a better future. While in Canada, they experienced tensions between learning in an English language Pathway Program and in university disciplinary classrooms, between learning in homestay and church settings, and navigating their identities of being Chinese, being Chinese international students, and being transnational. IELTS related stories showed that they observed discrepancies between the test-tackling strategies and their university learning, misconstrued IELTS preparation as English learning, and challenged the power of IELTS in shaping their English learning experiences and themselves as English learners.

Drawing on Bourdieusian perspectives, sociocultural theorizing, Darvin and Norton's (2015) investment model, and Chinese *Ti-Yong* logic guiding language learning, my analysis suggests that the current learning experiences of these students should be considered holistically with their past and future taken into account. The data reflects how the gate-keeping IELTS test has affected their perceptions about learning English, emotions, and identities as test-takers. The study brings implications to the systematic contradictions in the education system in China dominated by *Gaokao* as a compulsory exam for university admission, and the need for universities in Canada to view international students holistically as individuals with histories, and as complex subjects with flexible and multiple identities. Institution- and discipline-specific measures of supporting international students and faculty members working with them are suggested.

Keywords: international education; Chinese international students; English learning; IELTS test; narrative inquiry; student experiences

Dedication

To my late parents: For bringing me to this world and planting the seeds of love, care, courage, responsibility, and vision in my heart and soul.

献给我的父亲母亲：感谢你们赐予我生命，给予我爱与被爱及关心他人的能力，赋予我承担责任的勇气；感谢你们把远方根植我心，促我不断奋进。

To my husband: For your unconditional love and support, and the immense patience and optimism throughout years of adventure in this home away from home.

To my son: For your independence, love for learning, pride of being a Chinese-Canadian, and all your great expectations for the future.

.

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List of Acronyms

AUCC	Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada
CBIE	Canadian Bureau for International Education
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
DFATD	Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade, and Development Canada
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
IELTS	The International English Language Testing System
MOE	Ministry of Education of China
NCEE	National College Entrance Examination (*Gaokao*)
PRC	People's Republic of China
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language

Chapter 1. Background: Globalization, Internationalization, and Chinese International Students

1.1. The Researcher's Story

> *Just as a fish is unaware of water until it is pulled from the ocean, the river or the stream, so most people are unaware of their culture or identity until they are confronted with other cultures and identities.* (Nunan & Choi, 2011, p. 5)

I often take Vancouver's SkyTrain, the ground metro transit service, to the downtown campus of Mountain University (MU)[1]*. The last three stops before the final terminal and the Vancouver Campus are located underground. The darkest part of the route is actually under the most prosperous and fast-paced district in the city. I always feel amazed at the striking contrast between the darkness of the underground space and the brightness of the streets when the elevator brings me up to ground level.*

It is rush hour, and the crowded compartments become gradually empty as commuters get off in the downtown area; the train moves deep down into the tunnel. From my seat facing the dark tunnel walls, I see the reflection of an Asian-looking woman flickering on the window as the train runs eagerly to the light ahead--and I ask myself: is this me...?

I have been asking myself this same question repeatedly in my pursuit of a doctorate degree: do I really know myself? My 12-year-old son would definitely laugh at this silly question. I came to Canada from Mainland China in 2007, with my husband and my son, as a skilled worker immigrant. As an associate professor of English Language and Literature in a Chinese university, I had planned to work on a doctorate degree at a Canadian university to fulfill a long-cherished dream. On the one hand, part of the discourse in higher education in China is that a university professor should have a doctorate degree. On the other, I secretly thought that a BA and MA in English Language and Literature earned in a non-English-speaking country was less than satisfactory, if not disappointing. In addition, my visits to other English-speaking countries

[1] MU or Mountain University is a pseudonym.

as a scholar and interpreter in the past had helped me to build up confidence in my English proficiency. I was confident that I would be competent in using English in academic and non-academic settings in Canada. I submitted my application to a newly established doctoral program at MU on the west coast of Canada, and was granted admission in 2008.

My doctoral journey started officially in September, 2008. To my dismay, the glory of my past position as a highly qualified and well-regarded university professor of English in China faded away really fast. I found concepts and ideas such as power relations, inequality, and discrimination alien to my ears, or virtually unheard of in my Chinese worldview. I have come to the realization that at that time I was unable to perceive social problems the way they were defined in Canadian discourses because (for better or for worse) I belonged to the so-called "mainstream middle-class" in China. Ironically, I only became aware of my identities and the "privileges" I had enjoyed in China when they started to show up on the radar of my perception in a North American classroom: in fact, when I did not have access to them anymore.

With my landing in Vancouver as an immigrant, the relationship between English and me changed. English was no longer the language that I had been proud of, and proficient in learning and teaching in China. I still remember what my parents told me when I got the chance to enrol in the English Department of Hebei Teachers' College without writing Gaokao[2]: "The college doesn't rank so well, but it's fine if you're going to major in English". When I was offered a position as a lecturer in the same department after earning my BA, most people did not consider working in the university to be a good career option financially, but since I would eventually become a professor of English, the offer seemed acceptable to my family. It was an established fact that English professors could earn more than our colleagues teaching other subjects. English "glorified" a major in the college, and English proficiency elevated college teaching as a profession.

My family's attitude reflects a perspective broadly accepted in China. The glory of English in China does not stop at helping the learners to further their education, to secure high-

[2] *Gaokao* (高考, "Higher Education Exam", Pinyin *gāo kǎo*) is the common name of The National College Entrance Examination or NCEE. It is a compulsory academic examination held annually for students to enter colleges and universities in the People's Republic of China.

paying jobs, and to achieve higher professional ranks (Ng & Tang, 1997). It infiltrates every walk of life. English is part of the curriculum of all levels of education, an important instrument at the policy-making level, and critical resource for achieving individual goals (Tsui & Tollefson, 2007). English even becomes an ideology capable of assessing the life chances of ordinary people (Osnos, 2008), not to mention the power of English as a global language that opens the pathway to the global village for advanced knowledge and information in industry, economy, and business, etc.. Everyone in my Chinese world shared this perspective, as did I.

I did not even think of, not to mention question or challenge, the privileges that English has been receiving in China before I came to Canada. It was not until my identity changed from an English professor in China to a non-native[3] English-speaking international student[4] that I started to become aware of these privileges. The same language that paved my career path and boosted my social status in China rendered me a nobody in Canada. I could only define myself in relation to what I believed I was not (Weedon, 2004): I am international, and I am not a native English speaker. This new self-awareness has not come easily: it was quite a tormenting process in that I had to contemplate what the same language meant to me in different contexts, and why. I began to doubt the power of English in China, and the momentum for so many Chinese people to invest so much effort, time, and money in learning it. What led a German lady I met at a community gathering in Vancouver to the notion that English was one of the China's official languages? And why does English have this mythical power over the Chinese (Kramsch, 2009)?

If the experience of gradually acquiring self-awareness from the standpoint of different worldviews was painful, the process of figuring out how a doctoral degree in a Canadian university worked was truly challenging. I felt lost as to how a course was supposed to operate, and was not certain about the expectations of professors had for me as an international doctoral

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[3] Even though the dichotomy "native" vs. "non-native" speaker of English is problematic and criticized by many authors (e.g., Faez, 2011; Leung, Harris, & Rampton, 1997) in the literature, I use this terminology in this dissertation because multilingual speakers of English are commonly positioned as non-native speakers of the language in English dominant countries and live this positioning on a daily basis.

[4] International students are usually defined as students who came to Canada to study holding a student visa. However, I identify myself as an international student because of my educational background in China although I was an immigrant when I started the journey of doctoral studies, and a Canadian citizen later on, in Canada.

student. I remember very clearly the sense of failure and embarrassment on one occasion when I was abruptly interrupted in a class discussion by one of the professors while I was trying to think of a better word to share my opinion. Desperately reading assigned books and articles day and night did not help me much in keeping up with and making contributions to class discussions. On the rare occasion when I did speak up, I found my English failing me and I could not express myself clearly. I must have looked like the stereotypical Chinese learner to my classmates and professors: silent, shy, speaking broken English from time to time, and not very critical in thinking.

Similar looks on the faces of the international students in an academic English Pathway Program[5] *in MU augmented my inquiry regarding the power of English in China. These students were enrolled in MU conditionally; they had to pass the program and achieve 6.0 in another IELTS (The International English Language Testing System) test to get official admission to the University. I got to know these students, most of whom were from China, when I worked as a teaching assistant (TA) in that program. A TA position may seem to be a minor supporting job with unsatisfactory pay to some, but to me it meant much more. It meant recognition: recognition of my past teaching experience in China on one hand, and of my English proficiency on the other. It was this recognition of my past experiences as an English professor, combined with my current studies, that began to change my perception and point me toward my future (Duff & Bell, 2002).*

My newly-acquired awareness prompted further inquiry. A strong compassion for my students' experiences and my wish to be able to understand the puzzling looks on the faces of the international students in the Pathway Program inspired me to conduct my dissertation research on the issues facing these students. My non-native-English-speaker position suddenly seemed very important in a different way: it became the common ground between us, and I became one of "them" who came from afar for international education in Canada. Being a non-native speaker took on a more positive meaning than the more crushing identity of 'deficient' English speaker. I

[5] The Pathway Program was an academic English program designed for international students whose English proficiency did not meet the requirement of MU. Students were conditionally admitted to MU when they enrolled in this Program, which was cancelled in 2011.

began to realize how "powerful" I was in the eyes of these Chinese international students as I appeared to possess what they had travelled far to pursue: my legal status as an immigrant (permanent residency in Canada) pursuing a doctoral degree (a non-native English speaker doing a PhD in an English-speaking country), and my past identity as an English professor at a Chinese university set up the image of a role model in their minds. It felt like my past "glories" that English brought to me resumed when I was with these students. I felt obliged to do something for them.

As I searched for a way to support my students, I did not want to rely only on my intuition as a teacher and fellow international student. I looked for research that could guide me in understanding and supporting their university experience. It became apparent to me that little research has been conducted on the detailed lived experiences of international students, especially, students from China. Although such experiences constitute important strands in the cultural fabric of Canadian universities (Jones, 2011), insufficient effort has been made to understand how international students—important participants in internationalization in Canada—experience and perceive their university lives (Beck, 2013). This discovery convinced me to explore the perspectives of my students more deeply by pursuing a study of my own. I knew I wanted to know more about my students' full educational journey as it started in the past in China, continued in Canada, and is leading to pathways in the future.

1.2. The Research Problem

I will first situate my study in the backdrop of globalization and the proliferation of international education and the internationalization of higher education. Globalization, "the broad economic, technological, and scientific trends that directly affect higher education and are largely inevitable" (Altbach, 2004, p. 5), is facilitating high levels of mobility across borders and influencing higher education (e.g., Altbach & Knight, 2007; Beck, 2008, 2012, 2013; de Wit, 2011). In particular, the neoliberal influence of globalization is reflected in the commodification of knowledge and educational programs (Marginson, 2006). For example, schools are transformed to the cradles of the workforce, and the market is impacting policy decisions in higher education (Axelrod,

Shanahan, Trilokekar, & Wellen, 2013). The pursuit of international education and the internationalization of higher education has become a significant element of Canadian higher education (The Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2016). In Canada, internationalization of higher education, the process by which higher education is becoming more 'international', has become a central topic for discussion regarding higher education policy enactment and has drawn the attention of provincial and federal governments (Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, 2012).

Internationalization and international education are not one and the same. International education, mostly educational activities between institutions located in different nations, is described as both a consequence of and the response to globalization (Beck, 2012; Knight, 2008). Though internationalization means different things to different people, it is generally defined as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education" in Canada (Knight, 2004, p. 11). While internationalization is a process, it is usually understood as activities that promote anything 'international' including international student recruitment, study abroad programs, exchanges, and so on (Knight, 2000, 2004, 2008). Hudzik (2011) expands Knight's definition, and proposes the concept of comprehensive internationalization, which "is a commitment, confirmed through action, to infuse international and comparative perspectives through the teaching, research, and service missions of higher education" (p. 6). These definitions underpin my foundational understanding of internationalization, and guide me to the exploration of the experiences of Chinese international students in this study.

The international dimension of a higher education institution is most commonly related to the number of international students recruited and their contribution to economies that is presented in information about international education in Canada (CBIE, 2016). The 2016 CBIE report also recognizes the positive impacts of international education on "Canada's future prosperity, particularly in the areas of innovation, trade, human capital development and labour market" (p. 25). Therefore, increasing the number of international students is believed to rank highest among all the factors that contribute to the internationalization of the campus (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2014). It is not surprising that international students are mostly seen in terms of recruitment targets and economic gains. The fact that international students brought $8.4 billion to the Canadian economy, helped create 86,570 Canadian

jobs and generate about $ 455 million in tax revenues, for example, are statistics often quoted to promote international education (DFATD, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada, 2014). There is evidence showing the continuation of this focus in the goal that the Canadian government has set: by 2022, Canada aims to recruit 450,000 international students. The estimated expenditure of these students will reach $16.1 billion; it will bring approximately $10 billion to the national economy, and produce $910 million revenue in tax (DFATD, 2014). International education will promote the commercial interests of Canada in prioritized markets around the world, and expand the people-to-people connections to help Canadian workers, businesses, and educational institutions to excel in the largest, and one of the most dynamic and fastest-growing economies in the world. This strategy will lead Canada to become the "21st century leader in international education in order to attract top talent and prepare our citizens for the global marketplace" (Government of Canada, 2014, p. 6).

Under the impact of the above-mentioned policies and strategies, Canada has become the sixth most popular destination of international education (following the US, the UK, Australia, Germany, and France) owing to the increased number of international students world wide and the diversified host countries of international education (DFATD, 2014). The top source country of international students for Canada has been China. In 2015, 118,915 Chinese international students studied in Canada, comprising 33.55% of all international students studying in Canada (CBIE, 2016). Among these Chinese international students, 65.67% were pursuing post-secondary studies (CBIE, 2016).

The influx of Chinese international students to English-speaking countries is reflected in the literature. It became apparent that while there is in general a robust scholarly interest in the experiences of international students in English-speaking host countries, certain key aspects of that experience are overlooked. Social adjustments, language learning, and identity issues, among others, are topics that have been widely examined (e.g., Beck, 2008; Ilieva, 2010; Miller, 2000; Montgomery, 2010; Phan, 2008; Ryan, 2013). In particular, language learning has been identified as a major challenge for international students in academic settings (e.g., CBIE, 2009, 2013; Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013; Montgomery, 2010) despite the satisfactory scores in IELTS or

TOEFL[6] they have gained as part of the requirement for entering the university. Regarding Chinese international students in particular, the literature suggests that the challenges they face have remained largely unchanged in the past one hundread years or so (Hammer, 1992). Chinese international students have been stereotyped in essentializing terms that negatively impact the images of this group of learners (e.g., Biggs, 1996; Clark & Gieve, 2006; Ryan, 2013): they are silent, passive in learning, and lacking in critical thinking skills. These constructs seem to prevail in the popular discourse even though it is mostly agreed in the academy that such portraits of Chinese international students are biased, twisted, and simplistic, as I will show below.

The construction of Chinese students as problematic learners has been challenged by authors from various fields who argue that Chinese learners are complex subjects (e.g., Grimshaw, 2007, 2011; Huang & Cowden, 2009; Jin & Cortazzi, 1995). In the context of Canadian higher education, Chinese learners have been investigated at the undergraduate level (e.g. Arthur & Flynn, 2011; Chen, 2008; Huang & Cowden, 2009; Lee, 2008; Wang, 2012; Zhang & Zhou, 2011), and at the graduate level (Beck, Ilieva, Scholefield, & Waterstone, 2008; Guo & O'Sullivan, 2012; Hu, 2010; Ilieva, 2010; Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013; Li & Dipetta, 2013; Li, Dipetta, & Woloshyn, 2012; Song, X., 2012; Windle, Hamilton, Zeng & Yang, 2008; Wu, 2014). But a closer look at the existing literature suggests that most studies focus on a certain period of the learning journey of Chinese international students in Canada with insufficient reference to their past experiences in China and/or expectations for the future. As I have argued in earlier work, Chinese international students are not seen and portrayed holistically as whole individuals with past experiences. Since the phenomenon of people crossing borders is "forever flowing" (He, 2003), there is a call for studies that integrate the experiences of Chinese international students in different communities, understanding them in their wholeness as people (Arthur, 2008; Wang, 2011) whose learning started before they began their journey of international education and continues to permeate all aspects of their lives (Beck, 2008). In addition, Norton and Gao (2008) advocate that researchers

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[6] TOEFL: Test English as a Foreign Language, is a standardized English ability test for non-native English speakers who wish to enter English-speaking institutions for academic studies. TOEFL is one of the two major English-language tests in the world being designed and administered by the Educational Testing Service (ETS), the other being IELTS. Internet-based test (TOEFL iBT) replaced the computer-based tests and paper-based tests progressively from 2005 onwards.

interested in identity, investment, and language learning need to conduct innovative research on identity, investment, and language learning in the "international community" by "refram[ing] their research questions and reconsider[ing] [their] assumptions" in the context when Chinese learners are "tak[ing] greater ownership of the English language" (p. 119). At the same time, how their past and the ongoing present help shape their envisioning for the future also needs exploration. In particular, not many scholars have considered the experiences of these students upon entering a university by looking at their prior English-learning and test-taking experiences; even fewer would relate the experiences of entering a university to their learning in the university.

Though some studies address the experiences of Chinese international students before they came to Canada, they touch either upon the *push-pull* factors and the individual desires to come to Canada (e.g., Beck et al., 2008; Li, Dipetta, & Woloshyn, 2012; Li & Tierney, 2013), or on how their current learning is affected by their undesirable learning approach acquired in China that does not seem compatible with learning in the North American context (e.g., Guo & O'Sullivan, 2012; Hu, 2010). I was motivated to engage in a more holistic investigation of Chinese international students, to understand better their progression from a Chinese to a Canadian learning environment, how their past experiences shape and influence their perceptions of their learning and their future, and more specifically how their test-taking experiences colour their view of education.

1.3. The Research Questions

Given the above-mentioned gaps in research and my own interests as described earlier, I investigate the following research questions in this dissertation:

1. What are the English-learning experiences of Chinese international students in China and Western Canada?
2. What are the IELTS test preparation and test writing experiences of Chinese international students in China and Canada?
3. How do Chinese international students understand international education prior to and after coming to Canada? What do they experience in Canada? How do their expectations for the future change over time?

4. How do they construct, negotiate, and understand their identities as Chinese international students in Canada? Does their understanding of being a Chinese international student change over time, and if so, how?

To address these questions, I have selected narrative inquiry, a qualitative research methodology.

1.4. Methodology

Various research methodologies have been adopted in studies on Chinese international students enrolled at graduate level studies in Canada. For example, a grounded theory approach (Ilieva, 2010) and discourse analysis (Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013) were applied in examining the construction of the academic and professional identities of Chinese students in a Master's Program in Canada. An interview study (Li, Dipetta, & Woloshyn, 2012) and a descriptive survey study (Li & Tierney, 2013) focus on a Master's program at Brock University. Guo and O'Sullivan (2012) conducted a hermeneutic case study to probe the learning experiences of a graduate program mostly attended by Chinese international students in Canada. In addition, qualitative interviews (Hu, 2010) and critical discourse study (Windle et al., 2008) were used in examining the learning experiences of Chinese international students in different programs. For studies involving Chinese international students at the undergraduate level, cultural studies perspectives (Huang & Cowden, 2009), case study (Lee, 2008), mixed-method study (Zhang & Zhou, 2011), and narrative inquiry (Li, 2006, 2009) have been employed.

Despite the various foci of these studies, Chinese international students are usually framed as individuals in a certain period of time without taking into account their history and future. Thus, I needed a methodology that allowed me to consider the flow of the students trajectories over time, as well as provide an opportunity to feature their experiences through their stories. Using narrative inquiry, this study will help to understand the continuous narrative of the past learning experiences of a particular group of international students, their educational journey in Canada, and how they envision their future after they gain their degrees. I will provide more detail on my rationale and specific methods in Chapter 4.

Narratives can "be understood as a language ideological practice" (Razfar, 2012, p. 78); in telling stories, people consciously or unconsciously share their beliefs in "the

nature, function, and purpose of the language", and "index ideologies of learning (including language learning) and student identity" accordingly (p. 61). Cortazzi and Jin (2009) propose that researchers should develop "a double vision, that of the insider, with the participants' perceptions of educational meanings, and that of the outsider, with the academic community's conventions and the ability to interpret the research to audiences of readers in other cultural communities" (p. 30). This double vision is facilitated by considering culture, ideology, and identity through narrative inquiry, which has not been employed often in studies on Chinese international students in Canada. As I will elaborate in Chapter 2, Chinese students are often stereotyped as being silent and uncritical. My application of narrative inquiry is to feature the 'voices' that are usually perceived to be missing in the literature.

1.5. Contribution

By focusing on a more holistic approach to participants' lives, and by employing narrative inquiry, I will address several gaps in the literature. First, I will examine the participants' English-learning experiences relatively broadly: their past experiences in China, their current experiences in the Pathway Program before and after they were officially enrolled in MU, and their visions for their futures. As I will discuss in further chapters, the tension that has shaped the English learning experiences of Chinese international students in China continues to impact their current learning in MU with or without their knowledge. However, this tension is rarely identified or addressed in current studies. To address this gap, I will draw on the model of investment that integrates identity, ideology, and capital as developed by Darvin and Norton (2015). This model creates a space for me to probe how the students in this study "evaluate and negotiate the constraints and opportunities of their social location" (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 47), and how they negotiate in "ideological sites" when they try to manage resources of language learning in Canada (p. 10).

Second, my use of narrative inquiry will work harmoniously with this model of investment in probing the language ideologies as held by the participants from China. As discussed in the previous section, narrative inquiry will facilitate the double vision of researchers and allows them take into consideration the culture, ideology, and identity of both the insider and the outsider. As a narrative researcher from China sojourning in Canada, I have the privilege to develop and apply such a double vision in this study. To

better represent the interpretation of the educational meanings of the participants as the insiders, I venture to integrate the so-called *Ti-Yong* logic, or the tension between learning for the pragmatic purposes (*Yong*) rather than the Western culture and ideology (*Ti*) in learning English in China, as part of the theoretical framework. I consider the application of such a lens in investigating the learning experiences narratively as another contribution of this dissertation.

This study will also contribute to the literature on Chinese international students. Rather than the prevalent stereotypical descriptions in the host countries of international education (e.g., Grimshaw, 2011), this study shows that Chinese learners are individual agentive actors coming to Canada for international education with histories and future envisionings. Their identities are flexible, complex, multiple, changing over time, and shaped by different social spaces. More peripherally, this study will add to the growing body of literature on the experiences of international students in Canada, adding specificity to knowledge about Chinese international students and their needs.

1.6. Terms Used in this Thesis

Gaokao, *Keju*, *Baosong* student, IELTS, and *Ti-Yong* tension are terminologies specifically related to the English-learning and test-taking experiences of the participants in this study and as they will be used repeatedly throughout this thesis, I will provide brief definitions.

1.6.1. *Keju, Gaokao,* and *Baosong* Student

Commonly known as *Gaokao,* the National Higher Education Entrance Examination is an academic examination held annually in the Mainland of the People's Republic of China. This examination is a prerequisite for entrance into almost all higher education institutions at the undergraduate level in China and is usually taken by students in the last year of their high school. It is general knowledged that *Gaokao* is a very competitive test, and preparing for and writing the test is the major goal of the middle school[7] education in China. Meanwhile, the test brings tremendous pressure to

[7] In the People's Republic of China, middle school has two stages, junior stage (grades 7–9, or grades 6–9) and senior stage (grades10–12). The junior stage education includes the last 3 years of a 9-year-compulsory education for all young citizens; the senior stage education is optional but

test-takers and their families. A *Baosong* student is a student who is admitted to a college or university through referrals of her high school, rather than writing *Gaokao*, on the merit of exceptional achievements in certain areas (e.g., outstanding academic performance, strong leadership, and talents in sports, etc.).

Keju refers to the imperial civil servant examinations in China, a national examination designed to determine who would be permitted to enter the state's bureaucracy in ancient China. *Keju* was founded during the Sui Dynasty in 605, and was abolished by the end of the Qing Dynasty in 1905. In this examination, test-takers had to pass through three levels of tests in three years. The passing of the lower level of the test was the prerequisite of writing the exam in the next level. It is generally believed that the modern testing system in China was originated from *Keju*, which has also influenced the general education of other Asian countries like Vietnam, Korea, and Japan (Cheng, 2010).

1.6.2. IELTS

IELTS (the International English Language Testing System) is a major high-stakes English test under the joint management of the British Council, IELTS Australia, and Cambridge English Language Assessment. It has been widely used for measuring the English language proficiency of non-native English language speakers after it was established in 1989. Four key English language skills, namely listening, reading, writing, and speaking, are tested in both the General Training Module and the Academic Module. The General Training Module is applied in assessing the basic language survival skills of test-takers who go to English-speaking countries for secondary education, training programs, work, or for immigration purposes. The Academic Module assesses a test-taker's readiness to study or train in the medium of English at an undergraduate or postgraduate level by testing Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing, the formal language skills required for academic purposes. Admission to undergraduate and postgraduate programs and courses is based on the results of the Academic Module. Students who will study at post-secondary institutions in Canada commonly require 6.5 in the 9.0 band score. In this study, the IELTS test refers to the

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considered as a critical preparation for college education. Some middle schools have both stages while some have either of them.

Academic Module.

1.6.3. *Ti-Yong* Tension

Ti-Yong tension, used interchangeably with *Ti-Yong* logic, is a concept that originated from China, and I borrow this concept as part of the theoretical framework to explore the English-learning and test -taking experiences of the participants in this study. In general, English education policies in China have been favoring the instrumental functions of the language (Adamson, 2002, 2004; Adamson & Morris, 1997; Wang, 2007). This pragmatic philosophy of learning foreign languages has been continuously emphasized and reflected in the concept of "Chinese learning for essence (*Ti*) and Western learning for utility (*Yong*)" over time. This so-called *Ti-Yong* logic, or substance-function logic, reflects the national strategy that considers Western knowledge and technology, including languages, as tools, but maintains the essence of Chinese culture and civilization in the lives of Chinese individuals. In this sense, English language and English learning are powerful tools, or "weapons", in the Chinese metaphor. This philosophy, according to Xiong and Qian (2012), disguises the ideological struggles of Chinese people and attenuates the political status of English in China. This concept will be further elaborated in Chapter 3.

1.7. Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is organized in eight chapters. I start each chapter with the researcher's story to narrate how my personal experiences and reflections on these experiences are connected with the stories and themes in the chapter under discussion. In this opening chapter, my introductory story was followed by the research problem situating the study, in the broader arena of the internationalization of higher education in Canada. I then detailed the research questions in what follows, and expounded why narrative inquiry would be the appropriate methodology enabling me to answer these questions. Potential contributions of this study and some key terms are defined before a brief conclusion.

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature related to my research. The chapter starts with the context of international higher education and discusses the influence of neoliberalism. I then talk about the ascendancy of English as the dominant global

language. The next section gives a brief introduction of internationalization and globalization in China, and how the *Ti-Yong* logic has impacted the policy around English education, the English curriculum, textbooks, and the popular ideology of English in China. Then, studies on the mobility of Chinese students are introduced, followed by those on Chinese international students in Canada. After that, identities of international students in general, and of Chinese international students in particular, are presented, with a focus on the imagined identities and investment in language learning, national and transnational identities, and narrative studies on identity. The literature on standardized tests is reviewed at the end of this chapter. I introduce studies on the discourse of standardized tests, identities of test-takers, impacts of such tests on the academic performance of the test-takers as well as their emotions.

Chapter 3 expounds the theoretical frameworks that underpin this thesis. Bourdieu's (1990, 1996) sociological concepts of *capital, habitus, field, and sanctuary* are applied in analyzing the learning experiences of the participants, as well as the driving forces that accompany the mobility of Chinese international students in the global landscape of education. Sociocultural theories of second language learning and identities in general (e.g., Beynon, Illieva, Dichupa & Hirji, 2003; Norton, 2000, 2003, 2010; Toohey, 2000), and the model of investment that incorporates capital and ideologies as proposed by Darvin and Norton (2015) in particular, are employed to examine the identities of Chinese international students when they travel across national borders between China and Canada. I bring in the *Ti-Yong* logic as a lens to investigate the learning investment and motivations of the participants.

Chapter 4 explores the application of narrative inquiry as the methodology of the study, focusing on its development, basic principles, data collection and methods of analysis. An overview of narrative inquiry is followed by a discussion of three key terms in narrative inquiry—*narrative, story,* and *experience*. Then I elaborate the rationales of the application of narrative inquiry in this study. After that, I discuss the procedures and protocols that I follow when I am in the field. Methodological considerations and problems will be dwelt upon. I conclude the chapter with a brief summary.

Chapter 5 examines the English learning test (*Gaokao*) taking experiences of the participants in the education landscape in China. Themes that emerged include an escape from *Gaokao*, the importance of English, participants' past expectations for their

international education in Canada.

The experiences of this group of Chinese international students in Canada are recorded in Chapter 6. Stories in this chapter focus on the various tensions they have experienced. They talk about their experiences in the Pathway Program as opposed to those in the classrooms at MU, their learning in homestay and church settings, and how they feel about being Chinese, being Chinese international students, and being transnational.

Chapter 7 focuses on data that relate to the test-taking experiences of these participants in China and Canada. Most participants found that there were discrepancies between the test-taking strategies they acquired in preparing for the IELTS both in China and in Canada, and the academic learning they experienced in the classrooms at MU. Study participants also told stories that show that they regarded IELTS test preparation as English learning, and how they perceived themselves as learners and test-takers.

In Chapter 8, I conclude the thesis by summarizing the study and making sense of the analysis provided in previous chapters. I then discuss the contributions of this study to the literature on Chinese international students and to narrative inquiry. I also discuss the implications of this study for Chinese students, their parents, and the education system in China, for educational organizations accepting the IELTS test scores to filter international students, and for Canadian institutions on providing focused support to faculty members so that they could assist international students in their teaching. I then summarize the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research directions. An epilogue offers some final reflections and the current situations of some of the study participants.

Chapter 2.
Review of the Literature

2.1. The Researcher's Story

I started my literature review quite early. At the very beginning, I created a folder entitled Lit Review, and came up with subfolders for all the themes that I thought would be relevant to my dissertation. I was very ambitious when I began my literature review, and started reading everything that even remotely connected to my topic, enthusiastically. I created a main folder, with subfolders for all the topics that I thought would be relevant to my dissertation. I was very happy to see the number of articles in each subfolder growing. Meanwhile, I was dragged in many different directions to different themes that seemed important at the time and I felt like an explorer making important discoveries. I felt like painting a grand picture by weaving various themes artistically in one piece of writing. However, this sense of artistic discovery gradually faded when the subfolders grew too fat with too many sources, and the number of themes grew out of control. What was I discovering? Why was it a discovery? And how would it be enlightening? Then I knew that I had to stop reading and instead, start to sort out what I had. This process was extremely difficult. My thoughts had gone wild in the reading and collecting stage, and it was very difficult to even find the original track I was on. Even the process of selecting turned out to be painful. It was similar to a house cleaning: as I am about to throw away an old piece of utensil or a pair of shoes getting dusty in the corner of my wardrobe, I think they might come in handy some day and I should not dump them into the garbage bin….

I eventually narrowed it all down to what is in this chapter, and I felt as if I had completed a productive weight control program and became slim and fit.

This study examines the cross-border English learning and IELTS test- taking experiences of Chinese international students both in Canada and China. This review will begin with a brief surveying of the contexts and conditions that lead Chinese students to study abroad and take English language tests. I express this in terms of the *Ti* (essence) and *Yong* (instrumentality) logic, the belief that English should be only

acquired for instrumental purposes, which has been widely accepted in education and among the general public in China. Learning English for its pragmatic purposes has impacted the English education at the national policy level; accordingly, English curriculum and textbooks are designed and developed under its influence. With the general belief that learning English well will lead to desirable material and practical gains, Chinese students will commonly make decisions on what to learn and what not to learn based on their judgment on whether the learning will gain them the desired results. Next, I will turn my gaze to the persistent influence of neoliberalism on English teaching and learning in China. Then I will present other impetuses, such as *push-pull* factors (Bodycott, 2009) and escaping the competitive *Gaokao*, that send Chinese students to embark on their journey of international education. Selected studies on Chinese students as related to their learning experiences in Canada are reviewed. Literature on identities of Chinese international students will be presented, making the argument that the English-learning and test-writing experiences of Chinese international students in Canada are not addressed with their past and future taken into consideration. This will be complemented by supplementary and related studies on Chinese international students and their experiences of homestay and religion as examples of other factors shaping their identities and experience.

2.2. Context of International Higher Education

Globalization—the incessant spread of ideas, images, goods, people, and resources across borders—has made the world more interconnected and interdependent (Appadurai, 1996), and shaped the highly competitive global economic markets (Marginson, 2004, 2006). The global-scale flows and mobilities have penetrated into various aspects of life (Giddens, 1999). Economic globalization has greatly influenced higher education (e.g., Altbach, 2004; Altbach & Knight, 2007; Knight, 2011), and this is examined extensively in the literature (e.g., Dixon, 2006; Rizvi & Linguard, 2000; Unterhalter & Carpentier, 2010).

It is widely acknowledged that globalization has increased academic mobility in the form of international education, and the economic dimension has permeated the internationalization of higher education. International education is generally regarded as both a product of and a response to globalization (Knight, 2004). To Altbach and Knight (2007), internationalization is impacted by globalization in terms of global capital and the

knowledge industry. Knight (2007) ranks the commercialization of higher education programs as the number one risk and concern in her article on the global trend to the market model of internationalization. As Knight (2004) forcefully puts it, "internationalization is changing the world of higher education, and globalization is changing the world of internationalization" (p. 5). In fact, internationalization and globalization are inseparable to Brandenburg and de Wit (2011), who compare the two terms to "two connected universes" that are difficult to demarcate by "a distinctive line" (p. 16).

The implied strong connection between economics and education is manifested in the dominance of neoliberal policies that have depreciated the value of education where knowledge production is governed by economic rules (Luke, 2010). In the context of neo-liberalism, actors in educational settings (e.g., faculties, students, and policy-makers) identify education as a "site of struggle and compromise" (Apple, 2000, p. 58) in conditions marked by the deregulation of education institutions and the victory of the market (Giroux, 2002). The function of schools is promoted to be primarily for the preparation of the workforce; market forces play a more important role in the process of decision-making and skills acquisition among programs, faculties and students, and whole institutions (Stromquist, 2007). Neoliberalism is manifest in international student recruitment. In Canada, international students contribute greatly to the national and provincial economies (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015), and to the funding of schools, benefitting communities and their economy (Tarc, 2013). Dixon specifically addresses how universities are increasingly consumer- and market-oriented (2006). The high tuition fees that international students pay generate great revenue to the local economy.

In this context, International student mobility becomes situated in the complex connections among globalization, pedagogy, and society (Brooks & Waters, 2010; de Wit, 2008). One-way (South-North) student mobility results in reproducing unequal power relations in the creation of internationalized knowledge economy, turning the "two-way street" of internationalized relations into "a wish rather than reality" (Beck, 2012, p. 137) for some. Internationalization is reliant on and promotes the global rankings of universities (Stack, 2016); certain degrees from certain places are endowed with more value (Stromquist & Monkman, 2014). High ranking institutions are more attractive to international students who believe they will gain internationally recognized capital in

learning in these institutions. In this situation, the individual decision making of students is heavily influenced by the ranking of educational institutions in the host countries. The educational excellence of Western countries, claimed in neocolonial discourses across the world, illustrates the dominance of Western imperial ideology in international education (Beck, 2009). Such ideology promotes the supremacy of Western culture over Other cultures and endorses Western culture as more “educated” and “developed” (Beck, 2009, p. 316).

In the literature on the connections between globalization and internationalization, one of the ideas that is useful in my study is Beck’s (2008) notion of an eduscape. Following Appadurai (1996), Beck (2008) proposes an ‘eduscape’ to emphasize ‘the flow of educational theories, ideas, programs, activities and research in and across national boundaries’ (p. 67). This theorization of internationalization as an ‘eduscape’ expands internationalization

> ….from being simply an infusion of intercultural and international content into the learning, teaching, research and service areas of a university, to being an understanding of the multiplicity of connections that begin long before the students set foot on the campus and are operational outside of the so-called ’learning, teaching, research and service’ areas of the university. (p. 269)

Therefore, the university, rather than a point where “activity begins and ends”, “is situated in a larger flow of internationalizing forces and elements” (Beck, 2008, p. 269). These flows are further influenced by geopolitical power relations.

Globalization and internationalization are the key concepts that I employ to set the general context of the study. I also used transnationalism as a lens in analyzing some stories that I collected. As described in Chapter 1, globalization is considered as the driving force that fosters the internationalization of higher education. Internationalization although defined as a process that brings the cultural, international, and global dimensions into the various elements of post secondary institutions, in practice it is usually understood as the wide range of activities that is referred to as international education (Knight, 2002, 2004, 2008). Through these activities, the exchange of ideas and people is achieved in a positive way because differences and traditions between different nations are recognized and respected (e.g., Gacel-A´vila 2005; cited in Guo & Chase, 2011). On the contrary, globalization is blamed for its over emphasis on the economic growth; it is thus accused of bringing negative impacts on

global citizenship (Gacel-A´vila 2005; cited in Guo & Chase, 2011). Transnationalism is understood as a concept that preserves the existing connections that migrants have with their home countries when travelling across borders and sojourning in another country (Wong & Satzewich, 2006). These connections will also undergo transformation since transnationalism is understood as a social formation (Vertovec, 2009).

The internationalization of higher education in Canada driven by globalization attracts Chinese international students to cross the border between China and Canada. When sojourning in the transnational space, they reconstruct localities of home and the host country and develop fluid identities in a deterritorialized way (Tomlinson, 1999). How they negotiate and reconstruct their identities as transnationals in the context of globalization and the internationalization of higher education is the key purpose of my application of these terminologies and my investigation .

2.3. Ascendancy of English as the Global Language

English has been keeping its momentum as a global language from the sixteenth century when the U. K. started its worldwide colonization to the twentieth century when the U.S. rose to the status of a global power. One third of the world population was exposed to English at the end of the nineteenth century (Crystal, 2003), and English usage has been taking the lead in the multilingual internet context. It is not surprising, then, that English is the language that includes the largest number of learners as a second language and has a monopoly in the language learning market (Pennycook, 1994, 1998, 2001;Tollefson, 2002). The English language is dominant in most national, educational, societal, and technical systems, specifically in academia, business, and commerce. It is directly associated with globalization and often referred to also as a 'world language' (Brutt-Griffler, 2000).

The spread of English and its relationship with globalization has been investigated by many scholars. As part of globalization, English carries different cultural and political meanings in different contexts (Sonntag, 2003). There exists a very close relationship between cultural globalization and the development of English as a global language (Short, Boniche, Kim, & Li, 2001). Graddol (2006) addresses how English functions as the accelerator of globalization, and vice versa. The hegemony of English and its status as the preferred language in language education settings are discussed in

the literature as well (e.g., Bamgbose, 2003; Pillipson, 1992). For example, Guo and Beckett (2007) argue that the dominance of English empowers "the already powerful and leav[es] the disadvantaged further behind", which contributes to neoliberalism (p.117). They consider the spread of English not only as a global phenomenon, but also as "the most potent instrument of cultural control and cultural construct of colonialism" (p.117).

However, the attitudes and expectations of global English among scholars differ widely. Some celebrate the colonial legacy of the language and consider the spread of English to be inherently good (e.g., McCrum, MacNeil, & Cran, 2002). They believe that English has become an accepted language that the world population desires to learn. However, this view is problematized by Pennycook (2001), among others, because it does not allow space for the diversification of languages. People viewing English as a global language for its instrumentalism believe that English language competence works as the gateway to the scientific and technological development of a country. To individuals, the mastery of the language determines social and economic assets. Therefore, English carries with it "linguistic capital" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) that can convert into other forms of capital such as educational qualifications, for example. This belief is shared by Chinese people (Lin, 2015); one example of the acceptance of the instrumental value of English is manifested in the investment of Chinese families in sending their children to English-speaking countries for international education. But this linguistic capital is not equally enjoyed; for some it would become a means to exclusion from further education, employment, or high social position (Pennycook, 1994).

The field of TESOL generally accepts the idea of Laissez-Faire Liberalism that regards the spread of English as natural, neutral, and beneficial when it supplements with other languages (Pennycook, 2000). Crystal (1997) refers to English as "a single world language", which will, ideally, enable people across the world to communicate while keeping their own native languages to preserve their identities, cultures, and traditions. This lasissez-faire liberalism is criticized as unrealistic in that it is impossible for people to avoid taking ideological positions when English is spread globally (Pennycook, 2000). Regarding English as a global language is interpreted as linguicide and linguicism (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1995; cited in Lin, 2015). Linguicide is defined as "the extermination of languages, an analogous concept to (physical) genocide" (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1995, p. 83; cited in Lin, 2015, p. 44), and it is argued that the globalization of English endangers the language ecology of the world

whereas it is critical to cultivate and preserve languages (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas,1996; cited in Lin, 2015, p. 45). Philipson (1992), for example, uses the term "linguistic imperialism" to indicate that English has invaded local spaces, and therefore, the ecologically balanced relationship between people, language, culture, and their environment is disrupted. Although laissez-faire Liberals may consider the spread of English to be natural, neutral, and beneficial with certain conditions, I argue that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to decide the degree to which English and other languages can spread equitably.

The ascendancy of English plays a critical role in credentials earned in English-speaking countries. English is believed to have the power to help learners to further their education, to secure high-paying jobs, and to achieve higher professional ranks (e.g., Waters, 2008). English has infiltrated every walk of life, and become part of the curriculum of all school grades and educational levels in China. English is viewed as a "multinational tool essential for achieving national goals to policy makers" and "an indispensable resource for personal achievement" to individuals (Tsui & Tollefson 2007, p. 18). English is hailed as worthy of great merit and "a defining measure of life's potential", one of the "unifying beliefs", even "an ideology" that carries the power to change the life opportunities of people (Osnos, 2008, p. 44). China is under the impact of the popular ideology that English as a global language critically influences the access to and communication with other countries individually and nationally in the process of globalization (Dai, 1999; Hu, 2001; Pan, 2013). In fact, the number of people in China who learned and used English as a second and foreign language ranged between 200 to 500 million (Crystal, 2009).

It is widely assumed that a successful English learner will have higher chances to stand out in academic studies, future job market, and life changes in the future. Waters (2008) presents examples to show how employers in Hong Kong would prefer applicants with degrees awarded from English-speaking Anglophone nations as they believe these degrees represent Western bodies of knowledge. The hierarchical positioning of universities internationally (Marginson, 2008), and the prevailing understanding of the superiority of Western knowledge, language, and qualifications may encourage the existing hierarchy in the flow of students across national borders. This neo-colonialist legacy is still strong in China, where English represents desirable embodied cultural capital (Leung & Waters, 2013). The economic success of China has been attributed to

learning from the West in general, and the learning of English in particular (Bolton & Graddol, 2012).

2.4. Internationalization and Globalization in China

China has become the top source country of international students in almost all English-speaking host countries. Statistics from China's Ministry of Education (MOE) show that 339,700 Chinese students studied overseas in 2011 alone and this number has been increasing steadily at an annual rate of 5% (MOE, 2012). In 2013, the number of Chinese students has already reached 414,000 (MOE, 2013), which means the actual increasing rate is even higher. China's education has never lacked influence from the globalized world.

The earliest international education engagement can be traced back to the late Qing Dynasty (1616-1912) when Chinese students were sent abroad for advanced science, technology, and diplomacy (Yang, 1994). The later development of internationalization was reflected in the coexistence of local and international experiences as promoted by the Chinese government (Wang, 2013, 2014). Locally, traditional Confucian ideas and values were observed; meanwhile, foreign cultures enriched the early modern educational thinking in China (Wang, 2013). To be more specific, the early stage of internationalization of Chinese education (late 19th century) involved learning from Japan, the U.S., and European countries. The communist ideology of the former Soviet Union inspired the foundation of a socialist education system when People's Republic of China (PRC) was established in 1949 (Hayhoe, 1984) and since then PRC started the national journey to modernization of education. In 1950, the Communist Party held the First National Conference on Higher Education, and announced that the reform in education would highlight specialization, unification, and centralization (Pepper, 1996; cited in Wang, 2014) without mentioning any international element. Economic development regained its momentum in China after the disastrous Cultural Revolution, and an open-door policy was reinforced. China started its transformation from an economy with no market forces to one with an important role in the global economy (Tisdell, 2009). In the education sector, "strategies such as marketization, privatization, and decentralization were adopted" to enhance the competitiveness of universities (Wang, 2014, p. 9). In regards to individuals, sending Chinese students abroad was encouraged in the hope that they would gain advanced

knowledge and skills to contribute to the reform in science and technology in China (Hamrin, 1990; cited in Kim, 2015).

The enactment of the open door policy in 1978 also signaled the change of the discourse of internationalization in China (Wang, 2014). While continuing to send Chinese students abroad, China has been attracting students from other countries and regions to study in China by internationalizing with Chinese characteristics (Wang, 2014). Analyzing five guideline policies[8] that have impacted the internationalization of education in China in 1985, 1993, 1999, 2004, and 2010, Wang finds that the discourse of internationalization in China has undergone great changes in the past three decades. The 1985 Policy began to show the awareness of the Chinese government of the context of internationalization although only some individual universities responded to it. The 1993 Outline showed evidence of increased internationalization in terms of international economy, politics, technology etc., and drafted specific strategies of internationalization. International academic cooperation and exchange were identified and highlighted, and Chinese students were encouraged to study abroad. The 1999 Plan actively embraced the internationalization process, and emphasized the pursuit of world-class status for Chinese higher education. Setting up funding to invite academics globally to work in China and to encourage international academic exchange are two examples of the initiatives in this Outline. The 2004 Plan specifically featured the strategy of expanding the influence of Chinese globally. By presenting a comprehensive interpretation and assessment of the process of internationalization in different aspects, this policy aimed to enhance "China's overall competency and profile through education" (Wang, 2014, p.15).

Meanwhile, China's participation in the globalization process became more active from mid-1990s as the social changes and economic reform led to the increased number of international students going abroad for higher education. This was partly because of changes in the reviewing process of the application material of those self-funded by the

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[8] The five guideline policies that Wang analyzed include: 1. "CCP CC Decision on Educational System Reform (CCP CC 1985)", or the 1985 Policy; 2. "Outline for Reform and Development of Education in China (CCP CC and State Council 1993)", or the1993 Outline; 3. "Action Plan for Revitalization of Education in the Twenty-First Century (MOE and State Council 1999)", or the 1999 Plan; 4. "2003–2007 Action Plan for Revitalization of Education (MOE 2004)", or the 2004 Plan; and 5. "The National Outline for Mid- and Long-Term Education Planning and Development (State Council 2010)", or the 2010 Outline (2014, p.11).

Ministry of Education (Zhang, 2010). According to Liu (2016), who cited the 1992 Chinese Student Protection Act in the U.S. as an example, the increase of student numbers was also boosted by the changes in the laws and regulations that assisted the incoming international students in the 1990s in Western countries. Another factor that helped promote the trend of going abroad for international education among Chinese students was the increased unemployment rate after the expansion of college enrolment in the late 1990s (Zheng, 2010). It was assumed that those Chinese international students going abroad would return to China after they got their degree overseas, and thus contribute to the construction of socialist China (Zheng, 2010).

The transnational movement in China after mid-1990s was marked by neoliberalism exemplified in the home country, the host country, and the transnational individuals and their families (Liu, 2016). The Chinese state policies began to adopt the market-driven neoliberal approach to control its population and sovereignty (Ong, 2012). This approach enables the Chinese government to adjust its relationship with Chinese people, and change its policies to encourage Chinese students to gain international education. Chinese students started gaining more mobility across borders. This approach provided China the chance of receiving human resources equipped with Western knowledge, professional skills, and intercultural competences (Ong, 2012). The neoliberal logic that understands human capital or abilities as related to the knowledge economy during this period drove Chinese families to send their children to English-speaking countries for better education, and with the hope of obtaining citizenship in them (Ong, 2006). Seeking higher education overseas became the strategy of families to accumulate social capital so that the social status and prosperity of the family could be promoted.

The changed discourse of internationalization in China not only encourages the momentum of Chinese students going abroad, but attracts students from other countries and regions to study in China. Hosting international students has become an important way for China to gain international recognition in the globalized world. In 2010, an aggressive plan called “Study in China Program” was issued to make China the most popular destination for international students in Asia by increasing their number from 265,090 in 2010 to 500,000 by 2020 (Pan, 2013). In the year 2015, the number of international students has reached 377,054, among which 60% are Asian, 18% European, and 11% African (MOE, 2015). China’s increasing share in hosting

international students, as illustrated above, owes much to its national strategy for internationalization and the state-directed effort (Pan, 2013). China has become the third receiving country of international students following the U.S. and U. K. (Project Atlas, 2016).

2.5. English Teaching and Learning in China

In what follows, I will present a retrospective of the development of English education in China during the process of its modernization and globalization. Basic trends and corresponding policies at various sociocultural periods will be briefly noted, and how these policies have impacted the national curriculum and textbooks of English education will be examined. Though instrumentalism has been the primary guiding force of English teaching and learning in China, the essence of the language, or the cultural and ideological thoughts that a language is supposed to reflect, inevitably penetrates into the process of teaching and learning, which consequently impacts the language beliefs and even the ideologies of English learners in China.

2.5.1. Evolution of National Policies on English Teaching and Learning

Foreign languages learning, English in most of the cases, has been promoted in China at different historical times in reaction to military, political, and economic domination by foreign powers. The utility of English, or *Yong* (用) in Chinese, was the predominant purpose of English teaching and learning as China aimed to maintain or resume its long-held sense of superiority over the rest of the world. The preservation of Chinese traditions in learning and teaching a foreign language reflects the governing principle of "learning the superior techniques of the barbarians to the control of the same barbarians" (Gil & Adamson, 2011, p. 27). English teaching and learning first started in the Late Qing Dynasty when China was invaded by the U.K.: the Qing Dynasty officially reformed school curriculum to include Western knowledge and foreign languages after its defeat in the Sino-Japanese War (1895). The status of English in Chinese society was thus established, boosted, and incorporated into the culture of major cities. Learning foreign languages was valued as a tool to achieve political goals and personal transformation during the Republican Period (1911-1949), a movement that called for the creation of a new Chinese culture based on global and Western standards in spite of

claims that the practice of English invaded traditional Chinese culture. The instrumental function of English was highlighted during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) for military, political, and diplomatic purposes when ally countries had to cooperate to defeat Japan.

The status of English language learning continued to fluctuate after the foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. Initially, English-learning declined because of the national alignment of China with the former Soviet Union politically. About ten years later, the breakdown of the friendly relationship between China and the former Soviet Union at the end of the1950s reinstated the political position of English. Then the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) again devalued the position that English had just gained (Adamson & Morris, 1997) until 1976 when the Open Door Policy was issued to rejuvenate the economy of the country. At this time, English began to recapture attention in primary and secondary education for the purpose of the university entrance examination (*Gaokao*). English education was acknowledged officially as the main foreign language in secondary education across China in 1982 (Liu et al., 2001, quoted in Hu, 2001). Learning English for pragmatic reasons was critical for the development of the national economy during this period of time.

In the following two decades, the Chinese government called for a wider appropriation of linguistic resources necessary for more international interactions between China and Western countries, and English became the "barometer of modernization" (Ross, 1992, p. 240). The support for English education from the Chinese government during this period was reflected in two policies delivered in 2001. Initially, the first-ever nationwide policy enactment of English education in primary schools decreed that English language education become compulsory from Grade 3 in all elementary schools from the fall of 2002 (MOE, 2001a). A second policy issued in the same year aimed to quantify the proportion of tertiary courses (5%-10%) delivered in English or another foreign language in the fields of high-tech, finance, and law within three years after the enforcement of the policy (MOE, 2001b). These policies were effective in raising awareness among the public and educational institutions of the importance of English education at all levels and across various disciplines.

2.5.2. English Curriculum and Textbooks

As the most globally taught language in the present world, English has been privileged in the national curricula in China (Zhang & Zeegers, 2010). The Chinese Ministry of Education has been taking the lead in designing and implementing curriculum standards in English education for schools at various levels. With the reform in educational policies at different times in China, English has been endowed with different roles in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) curriculum.

The historical changes in China's political structure and consequent shifts in policy on foreign language learning have resulted in corresponding changes in EFL curriculum. Traditionally, English language teaching at the secondary education level has been oriented toward assessment by examination, in particular the National Higher Education Entrance Examination, or *Gaokao*, which focuses on testing students' knowledge of textbooks rather than their abilities in applying the knowledge they gain (Lam, 2002; Zhang & Zeegers, 2010). This traditional test results in imbalanced development in the English proficiencies of Chinese students: they are generally more advanced in reading and writing, and less so in listening and speaking (Liao & Wei, 2014).

To solve this problem, the 1993 EFL curriculum was issued to emphasize the pragmatic aim of equipping people with a certain degree of English proficiency in different walks of life. For example, bank clerks should be able to use basic English in banking, and shop assistants should learn some conversational English to help with customers who speak English. Though this curriculum recognized English as a language of international standing (Wang & Lam, 2009), its focus was still on teaching and learning output as measured by tests rather than the learning process. Then in 2001, MOE created the National English Curriculum Standard which established new standards to replace the traditional syllabus for all school subjects. The MOE 2001 Standards described particular competencies that students were supposed to attain in specific domains of curriculum content (Richards, 2001), e.g., comprehensive language competence, cultural understanding, and effective learning strategies, etc.. In addition, language education highlighted the cultivation of citizenship, which helped foster the idea among students that learning English comprises an indispensable part of the responsibilities of all Chinese citizens. Ideologically, the 2001 Standards promoted

curriculum material that integrated traditional Chinese culture and helped students to develop the ability to discern the essence of foreign culture (Xiong, 2012). However, the Standards were vague regarding how teachers might help students to develop their ability to understand, interpret, and assess Western culture. As Zhou (2013) mentions, it is probable that many students may accept Western concepts without understanding them.

In 2011, the 2001 Standards document was revised to highlight the unification of instrumental and humanistic views about the purposes for teaching and learning English. The revised curriculum promoted the cultivation of English learners as comprehensively proficient language users and global citizens with broad horizons, rich life experiences, and cross-cultural awareness. However, these transitions in the status of English education have not always been smooth. For example, since the guiding principles of the current examination system remain unchanged from the traditional Chinese imperial examination system, there exists an imbalance between the ideal of the curriculum design, how it is implemented in classrooms, and the current testing system (Gu, 2012). As a result, English is still a compulsory test subject which leads consequently to teaching and learning English for test-taking only (Pan & Block, 2011). A further complication involves the issue of English language textbooks often expressing cultural values that conflict with traditional Chinese values. You (2005) compares two editions of an English writing textbook for English majors at university level published in 1984 and 1994 in China, and found the 1984 edition was full of socialist sentiments, moral and ethical values, and explicit ideological teaching. The 1994 textbook identified a sharp decrease in communist or socialist elements, and the writing topics covered were associated closely with contemporary social issues. Zhou (2013) looks at the relationships between ideologies and English language textbooks and finds that the tendency to incorporate 'Westernized' ideologies into English language textbooks has been increasing, which brings about both advantages and challenges to the English learners in secondary schools. Despite the fact that 'Westernized' concepts in textbooks are attracting more young learners of English, there lies the possibility that students would accept those concepts without an adequate understanding of them.

The critical role of English in the advancement of technology, information, communication, and globalization as depicted above reflects a curriculum orientation designed to serve the economic modernization and globalization of China. I would argue

that the hegemonic status of English education grew out of its pragmatic contributions to political and economic advancement, including the creation of a huge system of standardized test design, delivery, and training. These standardized tests thus help form a big linguistic market (Bourdieu, 1991) that promotes the norms of native-English speakers in China, and creates great benefits to various interest groups (Li, 2006). Further, since the design and writing of a school textbook usually aims to transmit knowledge in a content area with certain pedagogical purposes, the inclusion or exclusion of specific content in textbooks reflects negotiations of power relations among groups with different interests (Zhou, 2013). This "selective tradition" in textbook compiling determines which meanings and practices will be presented and which will be ignored (William, 1976, p. 205; cited in Zhou, 2013, p. 1). In the case of English textbooks in China, the content selection has always been consistent with the ideological currents (though often conflicting and opposing) that are dominant in society at the time of printing.

In China, public schools are the major channel for Chinese students to learn English. Therefore, their understanding of English as a foreign language is mostly shaped by the English ideology as transmitted in the curriculum and textbooks.

2.5.3. Popular Ideology of English in China

In the past 150 years, the attitude of Chinese people towards English has been shifting as the political, historical, social, and cultural contexts in China change. Recently, English has been embraced enthusiastically as opposed to the active resistance it received in prior times (Gao, 2009; Orton, 2009). The popular beliefs about English regard English as a global language that critically influences the access to and communication with other countries individually and nationally in the process of globalization (Dai, 1999; Hu, 2001). Under the impact of this popular ideology, about 400 million English learners in China comprised the largest English-learning population in the world at the beginning of this decade (Chinarealtime, 2013). This figure, according to Seargeant (2012), almost equals to the population of native English speakers in the world (cited in Pan, 2015). Despite the persistent precautions (explicitly or implicitly) against Western culture and ideology filtering in national policies, curriculum, and textbooks through the English language, English has been promoted as an important instrument for the country's economic modernization (Adamson 2002; 2004; Bolton

2002; 2003; Chang 2006; Gao 2009; Orton 2009). The pragmatism of English as a means to achieve individual success is located at the core of the popular ideology of English learning in China. It is the linguistic capital and the symbolic power of English (Bourdieu, 1991), and the potential enhancement of one's social and economic status and mobility that attract most of the learners of English in China (Hu, 2002; Zhao & Campbell, 1995).

As I mentioned already, as a global language, English comprises a critical element of international development of China. Its instrumental value is related to employment and career development, and thus enhances the linguistic value of English. The status of English in a sense exceeds that of Chinese in business and education. The deeply rooted examination culture and the exam-based syllabus changed English to a highly valued commodity (Gray, 2010), and English is thus functioning as a gatekeeper to the modernization of a country, and the attainment of social and economic prestige for individuals (Pennycook, 2000). Consequently, individually and collectively held belief systems lead to different interpretations of the role of English, and are serving two distinct though interrelated functions in contemporary China. On the one hand, English is a commodity, defined by exam results, which can be exchanged on the job market (Block, 2010). On the other, English is considered as indispensable for China and Chinese people to take part in global affairs and the importance of communicative proficiently in English comes to the fore.

However, in order to maintain the cultural integrity of China, there is a traditional argument that students should study English for utility purposes to serve China (Adamson, 2004; Gao, 2009). The ideological beliefs as transmitted through English curriculum and textbooks are seen as efforts of the nation to build among learners the sense of nationalism and patriotism for English learners to fight against the essence of the Western culture that comes with the language (Zhao, 1998; Miller, 2010). Learning English for personal good as well as for the benefit of the nation becomes a perfect slogan for interested parties to promote English learning in China. Learning English for individual good is scrupulously transformed into the collective good of the nation, and the long-held *Ti-Yong* tension, or the tension between learning a language for the essence or practical purposes, seems diluted. However, this solution of the tension seems to apply primarily to the context of China where despite the unprecedented number of English learners, English is not a lingua franca commonly used in daily activities or in

institutional settings. When the learning contexts change to native English-speaking countries, how English learners would negotiate the deep-rooted ideologies of English learning is worthy of future investigation.

To summarize, the popular ideologies of English and English learning largely underscore the instrumental value of the language, and how language learners may attain success through their strong wills and great efforts. To alleviate the long-held *Ti* versus *Yong* tension and prevent the erosion of the identities of Chinese learners by focusing on the essence of English, English learning outside of school settings is witnessing the trend to transform the individual benefit of learning into the benefits of the state. This approach enables English learning to be politically correct in the process of China engaging with other nations in the globalized village. As a result, English language teaching and learning is considered relatively unproblematic (Pan & Block, 2011); and English has been the lingua franca in teaching international students in China.

2.6. Chinese Students' Mobility

Understanding English as an international language reflects the neoliberal notion that regards human capital or abilities as inseparable from the knowledge economy (Heller 2003; Urciuoli 2008; Williams, 2010). As an important aspect of human capital, English competence becomes a principal factor in deciding the career opportunities and upward socioeconomic mobility (Kubota, 2011; Park, 2010, 2011) of individuals. English competence is critical for the economic returns for both individuals and the national economic development (e.g., Kubota, 2013). English teaching and learning has been, accordingly, commodified, and the foreign language education in countries where English is not the native language is assessed by standardized tests such as IELTS and TOEFL. To learn English in a country where English is the native language is undoubtedly one of the major factors leading to Chinese international students to their journey of international education in Canada. Other factors that are at play will be addressed in what follows.

2.6.1. The *Push-Pull* Factors

Chinese students going abroad for higher education are impacted by *push-pull* factors (Mazzarol, 2002). Those factors that motivate students to undertake international

education within China are referred to as *push* factors, which usually include "economic, social, and political forces" in China (Bodycott, 2009, p. 354). *Pull* factors, on the other hand, are factors from outside China that attract Chinese students to study abroad. Many studies investigate the *push-pull* factors that influence the decision-making of Chinese students before they go abroad (e.g., Bodycott, 2009; Fang & Wang, 2014; Griner & Sobol, 2014; Mazzarol, 2002; Wu, 2014).

Literature shows that the factors initiating the decision-making process of Chinese students and their families have been changing over time. Prior to the 1990s, the major motivations were academic excellency overseas and its relationship with "political, geostrategic, and cultural issues and considerations" (Wu, 2014, p. 427). People going abroad were mainly students and academicians financially funded by the Chinese government. It was believed Marxism and Leninism would help construct a more developed socialist China from 1950's to 1970's (Yao, 2004). The shift from a planned economy to a socialist-oriented market economy in the 1980's and 1990's expanded the destination countries. The fast developing economy of China from the late 1990s led to more complicated reasons for Chinese students to go abroad. The Chinese government changed its role from direct sponsorship of students going abroad to regulation and facilitation (Li & Bray, 2007) of their educational endeavours. The changed policy has affected the flow of Chinese students going overseas (Mok, 2003). More options of destinations opened up for Chinese students, and 73% of them went to United States, Japan, Australia, Britain, and South Korea in 2009 (UNESCO, 2010). The fields they major in extend from those related to sciences to a more diverse range including social sciences, management, business economics, and engineering (Li, 2010).

Chinese students and their families usually regard going abroad as more advantageous in helping students to get a better education, understanding foreign countries better, building up comprehensive skill sets to secure a better job after graduation, and increasing their potential for successful immigration (Gareth, 2005; Gu, Schweisfurth, & Day, 2010; Lowe, 2007). In addition, many Chinese families have a great impact on the choices of overseas destinations (Beck, 2008; Bodycott, 2009; Bodycott & Lai, 2012; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). They perceive going abroad as a preferred alternative to the highly competitive examination system in China (Yang, 2007). For example, as I have mentioned previously, some Chinese students come to

Canada as an escape from *Gaokao*. Bodycott (2009), drawing on the work of Bass (2005), Fam (2000), Hiu (2001), Hung et al. (2005), Mei Li (2007), Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), and Zhao and Guo (2002), summarizes the pull factors. In his view, the ten dominant factors are:

> (1) Knowledge and awareness of the institution, its reputation, and general knowledge of the destination country. (2) Positive attitude toward supporting international education in the destination country. (3) Recommendations and the influence of relatives, parents and friends. (4) Tuition fees, living expenses, travel cost, and social cost. (5) Environment considerations including climate, lifestyle, crime, safety and racial discrimination. (6) Geographical proximity to Mainland China. (7) Social or educational links to family or friends living in the destination country, or family or friends studying there. (8) Immigration prospects after graduation. (9) Perceived higher standards of education and employment prospects. (10) Availability of scholarships for study. (p. 354)

In the current decade, some authors notice that the commonly accepted *push-pull* factors have been changing over time, but these changes are not sufficiently demonstrated in the literature. To address these changes in contexts (Findlay, 2011), Wu (2014) employs an integrative three-dimension human capital theory addressing scholastic, social, and cultural capital in her study that offers a detailed analysis of the respective weight of each factor involved. Focusing on the emerging transnational education that supplements domestic and overseas higher education, Fang and Wang (2014) apply consumer behavior theory in examining students' choice of transnational higher education. Different from the positive/negative binary view of *push-pull* factors, the consumer behavior theory integrates program characteristics and information channels of transnational higher education in the existing factors that impact students' decision making on adopting specific transnational programs. I will use the *push-pull* factors to analyze the reasons that have sent the participants abroad in Canada for international education.

2.6.2. Running away from the Local Educational System

As already mentioned, the history of testing in China can be traced back to the year 605 when the Sui Dynasty started *Keju*, or Chinese Imperial Examination, to select the best candidates to serve the government as administrative officials. It is generally agreed that *Keju* is a fair test for people from different backgrounds and social classes to compete for positions in the government (Yu & Suen, 2005). Though *Keju* was abolished

in the late Qing Dynasty in 1905, its impact has reached other Asian countries and has continued to affect China after the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The *Keju* tradition of selecting for excellence has been adopted in *Gaokao.* The prevailing understanding is that, like taking *Keju*, *Gaokao* offers life-changing opportunities by providing access to colleges and universities to Chinese students despite their social status and background. But according to Zhu (2016), critics of *Gaokao* claim that this test is guilty of training students in ways that are robbing students of creativity and imagination; Chinese students have to experience this test-oriented education system suffering tremendous academic and psychological pressures. Because a university education markedly increases the future life chances of students, this system creates heated competition in society and in the job market in particular (Davey, De Lian, & Higgins, 2007). A student cannot enroll in any university unless he/she passes *Gaokao*. Failure in *Gaokao* is disastrous to the student and even brings shame to the whole family, as the authors above note. In such a context, going abroad for higher education becomes a highly desirable alternative for many Chinese families. Consequently, competence in English is hailed by Chinese students and their families. They believe that going abroad will enable students to gain the competitive edge for satisfactory employment in the competitive global job market (Ragoonaden & Akehurst, 2013). Going abroad could also offer chances for students to gain knowledge and experience of Western culture, similarly viewed as important for success in contemporary global markets (Curtis & Lu, 2004).

When success in education is related to job prospects, it is connected with social reproduction and parental anxieties (Bourdieu, 1984). In this scenario, schools outside the mainstream system, argued Bourdieu (1996), could offer a "sanctuary" to students. Going abroad for international education becomes an option to find a "protective enclave" (Waters, 2008) against the fierce competition in *Gaokao* in China. Avoiding the highly competitive education system in China, especially *Gaokao*, is a significant factor that urges Chinese students to go abroad. In looking at the functions of education in shaping professionals who have gone through transformations when returning to Hong Kong after studying overseas in Canada, Waters (2007) focuses on overseas-educated locals with common identities. To secure academic success and find alternatives to the local educational system, these students take "roundabout routes" and attend "sanctuary schools" in Canada. They develop "an exclusive and elite group identity" (p. 494) that

shapes them as transnational professionals back in Hong Kong. Exploring the transnational mobility of these students, Waters (2008) argues that international students from Hong Kong, together with their middle-class families, are actually looking for an alternative way to escape the highly competitive local educational system. Pursuing international education in Canada, therefore, becomes sanctuary-seeking or a roundabout way to achieve academic success for these students.

2.7. Chinese International Students in Canada

China has been the top source country of international students in Canada. In 2015, 118,915 Chinese international students studied in Canada, who comprised 33.55% of 353,570, the whole population of international students (CBIE, 2016). Among these Chinese international students, 65.67% were pursuing post-secondary studies. In the context of post-secondary research in Canadian international education, three major strands of literature are identified for the purpose of this dissertation. The first strand of literature investigates the factors that drive this group of students to come to Canada for international education. By interviewing nine Chinese international students coming to Brock University for a Master's degree in a program specially designed for international students, Li, Dipetta, and Woloshyn (2012) aim to find out the factors that drive these students to take up study abroad, their learning and living experiences while pursuing their degree, and how they cope with the challenges they came across in the process. The findings show that participants in the study chose Canada as their destination mostly because of the safer environment, better academic reputation, and less expensive tuition fee as compared with other major Anglophone countries. This study also examines the hopes and expectations that the nine participants have for their future. Thirty-eight international students in the same Master's program (among whom thirty-six are from Mainland China) are investigated by Li and Tierney (2013) in a descriptive survey study on the experiences and future plans of the students. The results show that fifteen participants planned to stay in Canada after graduation, while twelve were not sure. The possibility of immigration was the reason for two of them to come to Canada. The authors find a seeming disagreement between the general satisfaction level of their learning, and their disappointment at the scarce opportunities to communicate with Canadian students. Though students were sufficiently assisted with regard to English language and professors' feedback, peer support from local students

was very dissatisfactory. In particular, the eighteen Chinese students who applied for this program through an agency had no knowledge that they were able to apply for the regular program. The article contributes to the knowledge about international students in Canada by reflecting on the students' own perspectives. Based on data collected using mixed-method, Zhang and Zhou (2011) suggest that Chinese international students experience differences between their understanding and experiences of learning in Canada. By looking at the challenges Chinese international students encountered in integration to the local communities, the authors find that the participants have problems in English language proficiency, communication with other students, and understanding of the local culture. In addition, their previous education background becomes an obstacle in their current learning in academic courses in Canada.

The second strand of literature focuses especially on the academic learning experiences of Chinese international students. I will draw on four studies which examine how the concept of Chinese learners is prevalent and effective in their learning. First, Guo and O'Sullivan (2012) conducted a hermeneutic case study in an international graduate program with the majority of students from China in a Canadian university. The study examined the conceptualization of critical thinking by Chinese students, and explored the much-debated challenges of developing critical intellectuals pedagogically. Their findings show that 'criticality' was challenging as a concept, and the participants appeared to have difficulty in engaging critically with different perspectives in education. Students were found prone to confuse criticality with criticism. The participants recognized factors that inhibited their development of critical thinking: insufficient English proficiency in China and test-oriented English teaching and learning in China. In identifying the educational value of criticality, the authors highlight the importance of conversations and cross-cultural understandings in the context of globalization. The authors argue that the educational background and cultural identities of Chinese learners should be integrated into pedagogy in such a program, and conversations on educational traditions, cultures, and philosophies should be promoted. The Western value on criticality and the Eastern value on harmony should be harmonized to create an environment "simultaneously critical and yet respectful of the cultural roots" of students (p.166).

A second study was conducted by Hu (2010) who offers the perceptions of six faculty members in science and engineering on how 15 Chinese international students at

graduate level negotiate writing in English. Interviews with the faculty members who worked closely with these graduate students identified some cultural problems—not saying no, being shy, and lacking critical thinking in writing—as well as linguistic challenges including speaking and written vocabulary, grammar, style, organization, format and plagiarism. The faculty members also provided suggestions on how students could prepare and improve their English before coming to Canada and how host institutions could support these students. The article concludes that Chinese graduate students face great challenges in cultural and linguistic aspects of their education in science and engineering; corrective faculty feedback and reinforcing comments are desirable in assisting them to overcome problems in these fields.

In a third study, Windle et al. (2008) look at how a group of Chinese graduate students understood their personal knowledge of the academy, their social identities, and how they applied these instrumentally as they entered the new academic culture of a Canadian university. Considering the academic experience of participants as an integral part of their holistic experiences in a new culture, the authors propose that it is critical to include "the international students' own perceptions of their ultimate goals and academic culture, and their own understanding of aspiration, resistance, negotiation and collaboration within the intersecting cultures" (p. 73). Narrative data were analyzed through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The findings show that the informants told different stories regarding their two educational settings. Strong parental influence, the examination system, and independent work were common themes related to their Chinese experience, while language problems, personal responsibility for difficulties, and dominant social influences featured in their stories in Canada.

Finally, Huang and Cowden's (2009) exploration of the academic learning of Chinese international students in a Canadian university challenges the assumption that Chinese learners are quiet, passive, surface learners. The study concludes that Chinese students are faced with challenges in linguistic and cultural aspects due to their unfamiliarity with the academic culture, and they lack academic background knowledge and study skills suitable in North America. By looking at how Chinese students are distortedly stereotyped in North America, these four studies argue that these problematic descriptors may be the result of insufficient understanding of Chinese culture and Chinese students themselves.

Studies on the identities of Chinese international students form the third strand of literature of this dissertation. Ilieva (2010) probes the development of the professional identities of the Chinese international students as non-native English-speaking pre-service teachers in a Master's program in a Canadian university. Her findings show that this group of Chinese international students responds to the complex discourses of the program differently; while some discourses are taken up unproblematically, others are resisted and negotiated agentively by the students in developing their professional identities. Ilieva and Waterstone (2013) continue to inspect the construction of the academic and professional identities of the Chinese students in the same program, and examine the cases when students accept and negotiate the ongoing academic discourses. The authors interrogate the practices of the teacher educators and challenge the norms of Western education in this program.

Lee (2008) critically explores the negotiation of local and global identities among Chinese students in the classroom in her one-year case study that investigated language and culture in an ESL classroom. The study found that the essentialized pedagogy and how instructors teach were inconsistent, which led to the essentialization of classroom culture that silenced the voices of Chinese international students. Lee argued that students' access to language learning as well as to powerful identities was limited. She proposed the need to reimagine international students in emancipatory ways.

Based on Norton's (1995, 2000) concept of language and identity, Fang (2014) examines the identity construction of six Chinese international students as EAL (English as an Addition Language) learners in the University of Saskatchewan. Using CDA in analyzing the interview data and written responses of the participants, the author focuses on the ideological and linguistic choices of these students while learning and using English in Canada. Fang discovers that that Chinese international students are impacted by their English learning experiences in both China and Canada when they construct their identities as EAL learners. This study shows that Chinese international students try to establish positive EAL learner identities despite the challenges and struggles they encounter in their learning.

2.8. Identities of International Students

In English-speaking countries, literature on international students seems bountiful. However, “international students” is as complex a term as the concept of internationalization (Grimshaw, 2011). The phrase “international students” usually refers to those who come to study in Canada with a student visa. The term is used to refer to students whose first language is not English. In the context of Canadian higher education, however, international students can include native English speakers. To make things more complicated, those who are officially categorized as ‘local’ (e.g. permanent residents) may sometimes identify *themselves* as international, as in my case. I have been regarded as ‘local’ in the headcounts of the student population at MU because of my status as a permanent resident before 2012 and a Canadian citizen since then. But I always consider myself international, since I earned both my BA and MA in China, not to mention the fact that my first language is Mandarin Chinese. The identity of ‘international student’ is therefore sometimes assigned by others and sometimes adopted by the individual. This complexity of identity construction is the topic of much research. Many authors (e.g., Bass, 2010; Rizvi, 2005; Waters, 2009) regard the participation of international students in internationalization as a process of identity (re)construction; how they identify and position themselves is related to the communities they interact with in the host country (Kenway & Bullen, 2003; Koehne, 2005). There is evidence that international students are “otherised” and assigned negative identities (e.g., Holliday, 2005; Holliday, Hyde, & Kullman, 2004; Ryan, 2013). Their experiences in Western universities are usually depicted in terms of various problems regarding social adjustments, learning strategies, and identity issues (e.g., Beck, 2008; Miller, 2000; Montgomery, 2010; Phan, 2008).

Language learning in particular represents a major challenge for international students in academic settings (CBIE, 2009, 2013; Feast, 2002; Montgomery, 2010; Sawir, 2005; Singh, 2005) even though they have earned the official gate-keeping scores in standardized English tests such as TOESL or IELTS to enter Canadian colleges or universities. Recent research on English language learners shows a shift in the foci from examining learning as a primarily individual cognitive process to employing sociocultural theorizing in studying second language learning (Norton, 2000; Norton & Toohey, 2001; Toohey, 2000). Though some studies have presented evidence that the

English proficiency of international students would improve with certain strategies, more studies exploring language learning and identity have demonstrated that the complex learning process is affected by factors that are too subtle for international students to name (Norton, 2000; Norton Pierce, 1995). Thus, unequal relationships of power, identity, and agency should be investigated to complement learning strategies and to understand the motivations of language learners (Norton & Toohey, 2001).

A number of studies demonstrate how Chinese international students in particular have been stereotyped in essentializing terms that negatively impact the images of this group of learners. For example, they are depicted as silent learners, passive, shy, teacher-dependent, and unable to think critically (Biggs, 1996; Clark & Gieve, 2006; Ryan, 2013). These learners are at once homogenized as "the Chinese learner" and labeled as the "reduced Other", seen as problematic and always lacking in certain appraised characteristics valued in Western countries (Holliday, 2005, p. 82). In addition, Chinese international students are usually unfavourably contrasted with domestic students, who are depicted as active, critical, and autonomous. Though it is mostly agreed in the academy that such portraits of Chinese international students are biased, twisted, and simplistic, these constructs seem to prevail in the popular discourse. My study participants and I, not surprisingly, encountered these essentialized attitudes in our educational settings, and our learning was no doubt affected. As my study will show, international students themselves may internalize the disadvantageous stereotyping imposed on them, and even undertake auto-stereotyping strategically in different situations for various purposes (Grimshaw, 2011).

2.8.1. Imagined Identities and Investment in SLA

Evidence shows that imagined participation in various communities could affect the learning of language learners (e.g., Kinginger, 2010; Ros, Sole & Fenoulhet, 2010; Ryan, 2006; Yashima, 2013). The concept of "investment" (Norton Peirce,1995; Norton, 2001, 2013) has been widely referred to in applied linguistics studies worldwide since it was introduced by Norton, and is acknowledged as a "significant explanatory construct" (Cummins, 2006, p. 59, cited in Darvin & Norton, p. 38). In the past two decades, many authors across continents have applied Norton's concepts of identity and investment to investigate the language learner, language learning, and language-learning context (e.g., Bearse & de Jong, 2008; Clark, 2010; Cummins, 2006; Cummins & Early, 2010;

Haneda, 2005; Higgins, 2011; Mckay & Wang, 1996; Norton, 2013; Potowski, 2004; Skilton-Sylvester, 2002).

In consideration of the participants of this dissertation, my selected review of this literature will focus on English language learners from China and their identities across learning contexts. I will draw from a study by McKay and Wong (1996) who examine the English language development of four Mandarin-speaking secondary students in a California school using the construct of investment. The findings show that learners are complex social beings with agency whose subjectivities are sites of contestation; their needs, desires, and negotiations determine the investment in learning English. In 2008, four articles from a special issue of the *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication* drew upon the construct of investment and imagined communities to explore how Chinese students invested in their social, cognitive, and linguistic practices in English-learning. First, Norton and Gao's (2008) comprehensive analysis of all the studies provides a prelude to the special issue. The authors argue that to better understand Chinese learners of English, identity and investment issues of these learners must be considered. They specify that this is important in understanding Chinese English learners in and out of the context of China. Next, Gu (2008) explores how three female learners in a Chinese university negotiated their identity and transformed their investment in learning. The study shows the multiple identity constructions of these participants as English language learners, and how they positioned themselves in a Chinese educated urban community and an English-speaking Christian community respectively. The author highlights the issues of motivation, identity, and culture that English language-learning in China involves. In a third study, Trent's (2008) research brings in institutional forces in investigating an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classroom in a Hong Kong university. Adopting multidimensional investment as the framework, the author proposes that learners' oral investment can be constrained as well as facilitated by the institutional forces. Finally, Gao, Cheng, and Kelly (2008) examine the English learning investment of a group of students from Mainland China in a weekly English club in Hong Kong. They find that these learners were strongly motivated by complex motives that transformed the learning event into various activities beyond learning English; the participants negotiated their identities as learners while imaging the community they intended to join.

Two other authors who also underpin their studies with imagined identities and imagined communities are Y. J. Chang and Y. C. Chang. Y. J. Chang (2011)

investigates the English learning experiences of two international students (one from Malaysia whose parents are Chinese immigrants, and the other from Shanghai, China) in a graduate school in the U.S.. Applying the concepts of investment and imagined communities, the study shows that the participants exerted agency in investing in the selective areas in their academic studies which have the potential to increase their market value in their envisioned future communities. The study also finds that the individualized academic paths that they took were largely informed by their "trajectories before, during, and after their doctoral studies" (p. 213). Y. C. Chang (2016) examines how two English as a Second Language (ESL) students from Taiwan negotiated their multiple identities in learning English in a college in the U.S.. The findings show that their investment in English learning was informed by their socio-cultural background and future aspirations. Meanwhile, their sense of affiliation was developed in both the immediate communities they were currently residing in and the imagined communities they desired to join in the future. These studies will help me to analyze the stories of the participants when they talked about their future plans after they graduated from MU in Chapter 6.

2.8.2. National and Transnational Identities

Questions regarding the issue of national identity and its distinction from transnational identity arose in my own research. The literature reveals that theoretical debates make claims for national identity as either essential and unitary or shifting and multiple. For example, national identity is regarded by essentialists as "integral, originary, and unified" (Hall, 1996, p. 1) and as "unchanging 'oneness' or cultural belongingness underlying all the other superficial differences" (p. 4). Discourses of national identity are concerned with ideas of a shared culture, history, and place, with a common language as an assumed signifier (Weedon, 2004). Some argue that national identity is imagined and there is no one-and-only national identity (De Cillia, Reisigl & Wodak,1999; cited in Phan, 2007). De Cillia et al. argue that identities are constructed on the basis of a shared history which is related to remembrance and memory. Identity is about both 'being' and 'becoming' where 'being' plays a critical role in holding 'a sense of belonging'. They further illustrate that national identities, the construction of which is connected to the role of culture, are inseparable from an "internalized structuring impetus which more or less strongly influences social practices" (p. 156). Echoing this

discussion, Phan (2007) illustrates the voices of Vietnamese theorists in terms of identity through their own—or 'the Oriental'—positioning. These authors, while arguing that identity is both stable and changeable, propose that an identity shift occurs by bringing change together under a shared sense of Vietnameseness. In her study on a group of Vietnamese English teachers in Australia, Phan argues that "there is a sense of belonging, a sense of national/cultural identity that differentiates one people from others" (p. 65). I found Phan's concept applicable to the students in my study when they talked about their feeling Chinese.

Migration systems created by the transnational social space include the "ties and …flows of persons, goods, ideas, and symbols" (Faist, 2000, p. 2). These "multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across borders of nation-states" are highlighted in transnationalism (Vertevec, 1999, p. 447). In understanding transnationalism as a social formation that transcends borders and transforms "social, cultural, economic, and political relationships" (Vertevec, 2009, p. 5), the author proposes that transnational networks are marked by a sense of identification. In contrast to the concept of the singular and stable 'national identity', transnational identities are viewed as fluid, flexible, dynamic, and "attach[ed] to specificity and particularity of places and times" (Phan, 2008, p. 42). This understanding of transnational identities reiterates the "interconnectedness across borders" and implies that the construction and reconstruction of identities involves "simultaneous embeddedness in more than one society" (Yeoh et al., 2003, cited in Phan, 2008, p. 42). Transnational identities of international students in particular are considered reciprocal, being co-constructed with "reflections of home and host countries" (Hayashi, 2014, p. 34) throughout the students' learning experiences. While travelling between educational landscapes, Chinese international students as migrants still maintain multiple connections with their home countries (Wong & Satzewich, 2006). In her study, Vanessa Fong (2004) coins the term "filial nationalism" to describe how transnational students strongly demonstrated their identification with their country, and believed that they would continue to be people from China despite some flaws of their country they could name (e.g., human rights issues). Hail (2015) observes similar patriotism in Chinese students in the United States; they disagreed with their fellow American students who criticized the policies of China. Chinese international students seem to feel more patriotic when learning and sojourning in a foreign country, which is confirmed in this study.

The participants in my study showed different identities while travelling between different spaces of learning. They were both Chinese and transnational simultaneously.

2.8.3. Narrative Studies on Identities

The role narrative studies play in the account of identity negotiation receives increasing attention in the current milieu of globalization and internationalization, which seems to entail "a tension between fragmented, decentered, and shifting identities" and the "desire for meaning and coherence" among people living in diasporas (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2003, p. 18). In connecting experiences from the past, the present, and the future, identity narratives present an opportunity to relieve the tension between competing identities and offer linkages for diasporians to find meaning (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2003). Identities, to narrative inquirers, are not only discursively "*enacted through*", or "*resulting from*" narrative accounts (Coffey & Street, 2008, p. 456, italics in original), but also reflect how we represent our position by ourselves and how we are perceived in recounting our past (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2003; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). From the larger body of literature on English language learners at the post-secondary level, the following review presents literature which I have found useful in considering the learning experiences of Chinese international students in English-speaking countries, and in particular, the application of narrative inquiry in such research.

In recording the lived learning experiences of Chinese international students in English-speaking countries, the narrative studies described here consistently show that English language proficiency (in social and academic contexts) is very challenging and triggered problems in academic studies, communication, socialization, and identity issues. First, Hsieh (2011) examines the transition experiences of some Chinese students and staff at one British university. This study found that students and staff faced similar challenges in navigating English language and customs and in establishing social relationships. In another important study, Hsieh (2006) invites stories from a Chinese female undergraduate, Li-Ping, studying at an American university. As the only international student, Li-Ping was mostly silent in her class and was viewed as a deficient learner, an inferior identity which she internalized. Her silence deepened the negative perception of her American classmates of her. The study argues that international students with insufficient English proficiency for academic courses would be

considered as lesser beings when native English is the norm at a university. In a longitudinal narrative study, Gao (2008) explores the language-learning motivations of a group of Mainland Chinese international students before and after they studied at a Hong Kong university. Their stories show that participants' learning motivations were mediated by both learning contexts and self-determination, and that participants highlighted self-assertion, identity fulfillment, as well as instrumental values of English learning. A fourth narrative study by Skyrme (2007) investigates the different learning experiences of two Chinese international students entering a New Zealand university. Their concurrent learning experiences at a private language school were recorded and analyzed to show how these experiences influenced their university life. The study points out that smaller first-year classes and timely communication with teaching staff would help international students to build up efficient learning strategies. All the studies described above, as well as other related studies of younger international students (Li, 2004; Li, 2006; Li & Larsen, 2012) show that Chinese international students in general encountered difficulties in their educational, social and cultural adaptation, and language proficiency was a major challenge which accompanied them throughout their learning experience. Using narrative inquiry, Ye and Edwards (2017) turn their gaze to four doctoral candidates who seek their education in the U.K.. Stories on the learning experiences show that these students have autonomy and self-determination in deciding to travel overseas for self-realization. Their stories challenge the stereotyping assumptions of Chinese learners as problematic; the participants demonstrated the capabilities of self-actualization, surviving and thriving in a new field, autonomy, and skillful social interaction. These participants are presented as complex subjects with the power of individual agency who compose “a particular narrative” in achieving the coherence of self-identity (p. 9).

However, no study has been conducted to investigate the test preparation experiences of Chinese international students before they enter a Canadian university nor how these experiences would affect their university learning pathways or the ways they perceive themselves as international students.

2.9. Review on Tests

2.9.1. Discourse of Standardized Tests

The globalization and internationalization of higher education has been accompanied by the increase in the number of international students preparing for and writing high-stakes English proficiency tests. As already mentioned, in the past two decades, Canada has been witnessing an unprecedented increase of internationalization at the post-secondary level, which results in a boost of numbers of international students from non-English-speaking countries. In order to be eligible for a degree course in a Canadian college or university, international students have to achieve certain scores in specific standard English proficiency tests.

Rather than being used for pedagogical (teaching/learning) purposes of assessment, international language tests are used to classify, select, and judge test-takers (Shohamy, 2001, 2007, 2013) in ways not necessarily related to learning. In this situation, the practice of tests involves power, control, and is therefore not neutral; the inequality that the social practice of tests creates can lead to social and political issues (Brown & McNamara, 2004; Shohamy, 2001). Testing and assessment are consequently value-laden (Johnson, 2003; McNamara & Roever, 2006); and “such values are necessarily political and social and can be understood most fruitfully in terms of the discourses within which language tests have their meaning” (Shohamy, 2001, p. 199).

In the context of multicultural and multilingual Canada, standardized English proficiency tests are used to filter immigration and education admission. To Shohamy (2001), “when a language is tested in a higher institution as criteria of acceptance, the symbolic power of the test and the language are enhanced significantly presenting the society with an extremely powerful tool” (p. 123). By exercising tests, people in power could make an unwritten agreement or a contract with test-takers, whose value is being determined by tests. By presenting a satisfactory score in a test, test-takers hope to be accepted and recognized by those in power because they have demonstrated how “good” they are. In addition, test-takers are forced to learn to “play the testing game” that is not “under their control” (Shohamy, 2007, p. 523). Test-takers also know “the detrimental consequences” of unsatisfactory test performance, which would transform them into “winners and losers, successes and failures, rejections and acceptance”

(Shohamy, 2007, p. 523). Ironically, Murray (2010) finds that many non-native English students encounter difficulty linguistically in their degree programs due to their insufficient English levels despite the fact that they have satisfied the English language entry criteria of the institutions and been admitted officially.

The application of the high-stakes, standardized English tests in Canada clearly conveys the message clearly that English is more legitimate than other languages, and people who own English have more capital than those who do not (Byrnes, 2005; Evans & Homberger, 2005; Shohamy, 2004, 2007, 2013). The dominant position of English is thus promoted and perpetuated, and inclusion and exclusion of social groups is created. The groups of people who do not possess the language of the mainstream society have to rely on their English test scores to show the gatekeepers their English proficiency; they, therefore, become the other (Shohamy, 2004). However, the absolute power of tests and the dominance of the testing system goes “unquestioned, unchallenged, unmonitored and uncontrolled” (Shohamy, 2007, p. 524). Those who do not succeed in writing tests rely on tests for their proficiency and are even marginalized (Bourdieu, 1991). The application of test creates a myth and becomes propaganda among the general public, who believe that tests are a fair, meaningful, and infallible tool (Evans & Homberger, 2005). Bourdieu (1991) also claims that the power of tests is derived from the trust that those who are affected by tests place in them.

Power has been dominating the discourse of tests, privileging certain languages and policies, and delegitimating and marginalizing others (Shohamy, 2013). The promotion of the existing language ideologies conflicts with the multilingual cultures and identities across regional, national, global, and transnational contexts (Shohamy, 2013). This type of testing discourse has been with us for a long time and has met little resistance or societal monitoring. To Bourdieu, tests are part of habitus and tools that are used to measure the value and worth of individuals; tests form the “rights of passage” and possess the power of maintaining the order of the existing society. The power of tests penetrates to various testing organizations (Foucault, 1996; McNamara & Roever, 2006; Shohamy, 2001, 2013). Shohamy accuses modern language testing of assigning “a deficient and subtractive identity” to test-takers (2013, p. 235). She believes that tests with one and only standard are not connected with the real usages of a language. She identifies the lack of “democracy, inclusion, and participation” (2013, p. 235) in language tests, and advocates researchers to focus on test approaches that

“reflect identities and proficiencies rather than impose them” (2013, p. 235). Test-takers all over the world tend to accept and comply with the testing discourse as true. Popular application of tests leads to the misbelief among the public that these tests are effective tools to assess people’s real language potential (Niu, 2007).

It is a general practice for post-secondary institutions in Anglophone countries to use IELTS in the admission of international students from non-English-speaking backgrounds. The presumption behind this practice is the idea that certain scores in the test would enable international students to succeed in their post-secondary academic studies. IELTS has been widely recognized as a large-scale and high-stakes English test. IELTS was designed to test “the language proficiency of people who want to study or work in environments where English is used as a language of communication” (IELTS, 2013, p. 1). The number of IELTS test-takers has been increasing worldwide; in 2011 alone, 150 million people wrote the test, among whom more than 300,000 were from Mainland China. It was estimated that the number of IELTS test-takers is increasing by 5% per year. As already mentioned, an average of IELTS score of 6.5 to 7.0 in all the four sections, namely Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing, is usually required for courses for degree purposes. Identities of IELTS Test-takers

Identities of IELTS test-takers have been researched by some authors (e.g., Brown, 2003; Brown & McNamara, 2004; Lazaraton & Davis, 2008). Brown and McNamara (2004) focus on how the gender identity of test-takers (international students) is related to their test scores. Brown (2003) examines how the identities of two IELTS interviewers impact their interactions with test-takers and scoring. Lazaraton and Davis (2008) suggest that identities of test-takers are fixed rather than “plural and context sensitive” as Brown and McNamara (2004, p. 534) specify. Test-takers would internalize their language proficiency based on how they perceive themselves performing on a language test. As powerful instruments that promote certain language ideologies while ignoring others, tests would impact the language proficiencies of test-takers, as well as their identities as language learners (Shohamy, 2013). However, these studies mainly investigate the identities of test-takers on the testing sites. The authors find that differences exist in the behavior of test-takers; the gender and interview style both have impact on the scores of the test-takers. Yet, how tests impact the identities of test-takers before and after test writing is rarely addressed in the literature. Besides, scant research has applied the construct of investment in examining the efforts of international students

in standardized high-stake English tests. My study addresses these gaps in the literature.

2.9.2. IELTS Preparation Courses

Since one of the purposes of this dissertation is to explore the IELTS preparation and writing experiences of Chinese international students, and the data collected always relate to my study participants' learning experiences in the Pathway Program at MU, I will review the literature on IELTS preparation in this section. Some authors compare the effectiveness of IELTS preparation courses with EAP courses in helping test-takers to write the test. Brown (1998) finds that an IELTS preparation course is more effective than an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course. Read and Hays (2003) investigate IELTS courses as offered by two language schools, and substantial differences are identified between the two courses, including different teaching focus, teaching content, and teaching approach. However, how these two courses are related is not touched upon. Green (2007) expands the comparison to include a class that combined IELTS preparation and EAP teaching. The test-driven IELTS preparation course shows no advantages of helping students to gain higher IELTS scores. Gan's (2009) findings show that IELTS preparation courses may inspire students to keep learning English after class, and improve their English proficiency in the long run. Rahimi and Nazhand (2010) propose that students have high expectations for the IELTS preparation courses, and believe that these courses could enable them to achieve high scores.

More generally, Moore (1994) regards test preparation behavior as an engagement in various activities which are designed to maximize test-takers' test performance. Lumley & Stoneman (2000) define test preparation as part of the more universal issue of washback. On the other hand, Stoneman (2005) believes that test preparation refers to any activity which is helpful for test-takers to learn/prepare/train for a test, regardless of whether such kind of activity happens inside or outside of the traditional classroom. In the area of IELTS test preparation, research often focuses on teachers' perspectives and teaching material (e.g., Hamp-Lyons, 1998; Saville & Hawkey, 2004), with learners' views being placed in a less important position. Studies on how learners experience test preparation remain limited. Existing research shows that teachers and learners have different expectations in test preparation (Peacock, 1998);

therefore, learners' views on test and test preparation should draw more attention in test preparation research and are discussed in this dissertation.

Testing experiences of international students from China have been investigated in the literature, though the impacts of IELTS on Chinese learners in the home setting is very rare (Fox & Curtis, 2010). The efforts of Chinese students to prepare for IELTS examination at home and abroad are investigated by Yu (2014), who focuses on the primary purposes and perception of their test-taking and applies cognitive theory in looking at participants who scored 7.0 or higher in IELTS. However, considering the increasing amount of Chinese international students preparing and writing IELTS test, the scarcity of the literature on their IELTS preparation and writing experiences, and how their English learning and identities are impacted by these experiences is shocking. This study intends to bridge this gap.

2.9.3. Impact on Academic Performance in Degree Programs

The literature on how IELTS scores may impact the academic performance of international students in degree programs falls into two different strands. On one hand, some researchers find that IELTS is a good general predictor of academic success, and therefore able to assess whether test-takers are ready to start academic studies (e.g., Bayliss & Ingram, 2006; Kerstjens & Nery, 2000; Maamoun, 2009). In analyzing the IELTS scores and language behavior of 61 international students from non-English-speaking countries, Bayliss and Ingram (2006) find that IELTS was accurate in predicting the language performance of international students, though participants themselves varied in their understandings of their own language performance. Based on qualitative and quantitative data with international students and professors, Maamoun (2009) concludes that English proficiency as indicated by TOEFL and IELTS scores was significantly positive in relation to their academic success. Data gained from a mixed-method study shows that there exists "a small-to-medium predictive effect" of IELTS scores and academic performance of the participants in it (Kerstjens & Nery, 2000, p. 105). Quantitative data in the study confirms that the Reading section was a significant predictor. As well, interview participants acknowledged the usefulness of the language skills acquired in writing IELTS in the first-semester. Similarly, Ushioda and Harsch's study (2011) shows that writing and the overall IELTS scores would best predict the academic performance of internationals students. Looking at the IELTS scores and the

GPA of 101 international students in an Australian university, Feast's (2002) multi-level regression analysis of the two factors proves "a significant and positive, but weak, relationship" between IELTS scores and the academic performance (p. 83). This finding is resonated in Ghenghesh's (2015) study, which shows the significant and important relationships between IELTS scores and academic performance, and the degree of correlation is "moderate". Woodrow (2006) also found the moderate predictive function of the IELTS tests among a group of international graduate students; her study indicates that the academic performance of the participants was related to their previous learning experiences. Yen and Kuzma (2009) identify a positive correlation between IELTS scores and academic success in a quantitative research study with a group of Chinese international students. But the relationship tends to decrease after the third semester. Such positive correlation between IELTS scores and academic success is investigated by Lloyd-Jones, Neame, and Medaney's (2012) study, which discovers that the master-level international students who were identified as "at risk" in academic studies by the university admission did in fact face difficulties in their academic learning. Yang and Badger (2014) demonstrate the positive impacts of an IELTS preparation course in their study on Chinese international students majoring in Economics. The study shows that the course is effective in helping students gain vocabulary and confidence. Elma (2011) points out the relatively weak correlation between the two factors and does not acknowledge the critical function of language proficiency upon entry. She identifies the importance of nonlinguistic factors (e.g., age, motivation, and learning background) for international students to succeed in academic studies.

Contrary results were produced in some studies on the relationship between IELTS and academic performance. Ingram and Bayliss' (2007) study on 28 international students in Australia identifies "no apparent correlation" between the two factors. Humphreys, Haugh, Fenton–Smith, Lobo, Michael, and Walkinshaw (2012) verify Ingram and Bayliss' result, although variance between the four skills was spotted in their research on the correlation between IELTS scores and GPA of international students. Humphreys et al. (2012) examine the IELTS scores and GPA of 51 undergraduate students. The findings showed variance between skills, and no correlation was identified for speaking and writing scores. In a similar vein, a slight relationship was shown in Phakiti (2008), who discovers that only 7% of the academic success among 125 Chinese international students could be attributed to their performance in the IELTS

tests. Based on qualitative data gained from interviews and focus groups, Edwards, Ran, and Li (2007) propose that students were not guaranteed to succeed in their academic studies even if they had achieved the threshold scores of IELTS. My study findings on participants' IELTS test scores do not show direct interrelationship with their academic performance in the Pathway Program and their learning in the disciplinary courses. Rather, I found that the participants' perceptions of the impact of IELTS test results on their academic learning in different settings are confusing and inconsistent, which I will discuss in detail in Chapter 7.

2.9.4. Impact of Tests on Students' Emotion

Understanding test-takers' perception on tests is significant in constructing a valid test (He & Shi, 2008). Studies show that preparing for, writing, and even talking about tests would negatively affect emotions of test-takers (Gan, Humpreys, & Hamp-Lyons, 2004; Huhta, Kalaja, & Pitnkanen-Huhta, 2006; Li, Zhong, & Suen, 2012; Murray, Riazi, & Cross, 2012; Triplett & Barksdale, 2005; Triplett, Barksdale, & Leftwich, 2003) and learning (Cheng, Andrews, & Yu, 2011; He & Shi, 2008; Huhta, Kalaja, & Pitnkanen-Huhta, 2006; Li, Zhong, & Suen, 2012; Puspawati, 2012; Xie & Andrews, 2013). These two impacts affect the way test-takers in the study perceived tests and the way they deal with tests. Triplett, Barksdale, and Leftwich's (2003) findings show that students felt worried before the test, while taking the test, and after the test. Their study also shows that students fear potential failure in tests. Triplett and Barksdale's (2005) study discovers that test-takers in their study express negative emotions about tests, and some even were angry about tests due to the chance they had of failing. The same negative feeling can be found in Huhta, Kalaja, and Pitnakanen-Huhta (2006), whose participants experience and express stress in test preparation. Puspawati (2012) focuses on how teachers understand TOEFL tests, and data show that negative feeling and emotion are obvious in students when talking about tests. Test-takers demonstrate stress, anxiety, and nervousness in writing tests. Test-takers with high test scores in Murray, Riszi, and Corss' study (2012) respond positively to tests, which resonates with Gan, Humpreys, and Hamp-Lyons (2004) who find that students with satisfactory English proficiency scores develop a positive attitude to tests. In both studies, students with unsatisfactory scores respond negatively to tests.

2.10. Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I first introduced the context of internationalization and globalization and the neoliberalism of higher education. After talking about the ascendancy of English as the global language, I briefed internationalization and globalization in China. In discussing English teaching and learning in China, I highlighted how the notion of learning English for its pragmatic purposes, or the *Ti-Yong* Logic, has been guiding government policies regarding English teaching and learning in China as well as the design of English-teaching curriculum and textbooks. This notion also has shaped the popular ideology of English in China. After that, the literature on the mobility of Chinese international students was examined. I also reviewed some selected literature on the identities of this group of international students. My review of literature informed me of the lack of studies on Chinese international students that regard them as learners coming to Canada with histories in the past and expectations for the future. In particular, there is scarce literature on examining the identities of these international students using narrative inquiry. In the last section of this chapter, I reviewed the literature on English tests, the IELTS test in particular. I looked at works on identities of test-takers, and the impact on the test-takers' understanding of academic performance and on their emotions. Informed by the literature, I will discuss theories that frame my investigation in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. The Researcher's Story

A few years ago, I met a Chinese doctoral student at a conference on international education in Vancouver. She had had just arrived in Canada and was eager to know what she could expect in her doctoral studies. She was specifically interested in hearing what seemed to be the most challenging aspect to me. I told her it was the various theories that I came across in the courses. Really, terms and concepts such as constructivism and structuralism seemed foreign to me already; when "post" was added to them, they seemed completely alien. As I began my dissertation, I felt unsure about what concepts and theories I should turn to; however, during the process of data analysis, when I found I was resonating with the stories of the participants, several key theories and concepts began to make sense. In many situations, I identified with the stories and understandings of the participants as they grappled with realities that we both shared. How they interpreted their English-learning and test-taking experiences helped me to illuminate the theoretical perspectives of this dissertation.

As discussed in my review of literature, Chinese students choose to go overseas for higher education for various reasons, and I have identified the gap in existing scholarship which rarely relates the current English-learning and test-taking experiences of international students in host countries to what they have experienced back in their home countries. I contend that without understanding international students as holistic beings with history and individual subjectivities, it will be difficult, if not impossible, for educators, policy-makers, and host institutions to understand how to provide them with efficient and equitable support. This chapter will discuss the theories and concepts in which I will ground my analysis of the learning experiences of Chinese international students. I will start with Bourdieu's (1986) sociological framework, focusing on the constructs of *capital, habitus, field,* and *sanctuary,* and how these concepts are useful in interpreting the experiences of the participants in this study. Then the notions "situated learning" (Lave &Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), and identity (Hall, 1991; Norton, 2001), investment, and agency will be introduced. These concepts will lead to Darvin and Norton's (2015) model of investment that encompasses ideology, capital, and identity. In

addition, transnationalism, transnational space, and transnational identities (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009; Phan, 2008) are important in investigating the (dis)embeddedness of identities in fixed time and space. I then introduce the *Ti-Yong* tension which reflects the strategic learning of Western knowledge and technology, including languages, by Chinese people. This logic of learning English for practical purposes (or *Yong*) is drawn upon to probe the English learning practices of Chinese international students in this study.

3.2. Concepts from Bourdieu

To analyze mobility in the context of globalization and internationalization, it is important to discuss how structure and power are at play. Pierre Bourdieu's sociological framework has been widely applied to understanding structure and power. In this study, Bourdieu's concepts of *capital, habitus, field*, and *sanctuary* are significant ideas in explaining the factors that impacted Chinese students to choose Canada as the international destination for their higher education, what experiences they invest in/divest in, and how they made plans for the future. These constructs are also vocabulary critical in understanding the other frameworks I employ, namely Community of Practice, investment, and identities.

Bourdieu's (1986) notion of *economy of practice* articulates how the social and cultural practices of language learning and use are linked to power and capital. In his theorizing, individuals and groups are all involved in exchanges that take place within an economy of human social practices. Bourdieu introduces the terms *capital, field,* and *habitus* to indicate how social relationships are reciprocally shaped in the complex and practical social environment. In demonstrating the interplay of the three "thinking tools" (Bourdieu & Wacquant,1989, p. 50), Bourdieu uses the following equation:

[(habitus)(capital)] + field = practice

In other words, practice derives from the relationships between the habitus, or dispositions, of a given individual—which have been largely shaped by the kinds of capital to which the person has access—and his or her position in the social field (Mason, 2008). Accordingly, people's language practices can be interpreted as expressions of their linguistic habitus: language characteristics and dispositions "that

mediate pronunciation, accent, lexical, syntactic and semantic choice" (Carrington & Luke, 1997, p. 101) as individuals are positioned within the field of their social interactions.

The social field, to Bourdieu, comprises the social activities (e.g., religion, politics, and education) that social actors perform and the social contexts in which these actors dwell. Within a field, power is framed as capital or resources that bring recognition and benefit in that field. The role of capital, so to speak, is to enable the agent to take up a power position in a given field. However, individuals are not free in navigating through different social and cultural fields; their access to desirable positions is made possible by capital or assets that they possess in various forms that can be "transformed and exchanged within complex networks or circuits within or across different fields" (Moore, 2008, p. 102). Social positions in a given sociocultural field are decided by the specific pattern and quantity of capital valued in that field. For example, in relation to agency, an international student may lack the appropriate capital that will enable the student to move out of a subordinate position or the student may actually be excluded from the field. The complexity of this process is evident as individuals who possess the same amount of capital may achieve different levels of status within the same field.

The notion of habitus refers to a system of dispositions that influences how individual actors can exercise their free will when participating in a practice within a given field. In this sense, practices are conscious since they can be prompted by the individual actor's agency; at the same time, practices can be unconscious as they are constrained by habitus, which

> is not the fate that some people read into it. Being the product of history, it is an open system of dispositions that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures. It is durable, but not eternal. [However] there is a probability, inscribed in the social destiny associated with definite social conditions, that experiences will confirm habitus, because most people are statistically bound to encounter circumstances that tend to agree with those that originally fashioned their habitus. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 133)

Habitus is both structured by "one's past and the present circumstance" and structuring because "one's habitus helps to shape one's present and future practice" (Mason, 2008, p. 51). Dispositions composing the habitus are "*durable*" and "*transposable*", and enable the agents to practice in different fields (Mason, 2008, p. 51, emphasis in original).

The exchange of 'capitals' is what drives all social interaction within a field; recognized and legitimate capital benefits people who possess it. Bourdieu distinguishes between *economic capital* which can be converted into money "immediately and directly" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243) and *symbolic capital* which takes two forms: *social capital*, which refers to resources connected to networks, relationships or memberships unique to a given community, and *cultural capital*, which includes knowledge, linguistic practices, credentials and skills. The value of cultural capital is decided by the recognition and status of institutions who grant qualifications, certificates or credentials. In particular, academic qualifications may convert into economic capital through the labor market. On entering a field, a newcomer brings with him or her certain amount of social, economic, and cultural capital. Whether the capital is convertible or not, and what the exchange rate might be, depends on the recognition granted by the social field to that particular capital.

Bourdieu's sociological concepts of 'economy of practice' allow me to interpret the language learning practices of Chinese international students coming to Canada for overseas qualifications. In the context of globalization, while travelling across borders between China and Canada, Chinese international students will pass through many fields constituted by educational institutions, homestay families, and community structures, as well as corporations and businesses, etc.. The social space created by these fields reconstructs continuously as a result of its own evolution and the individual agency (Carrington & Luke, 1997) of each of these students. Since these students vary in their English proficiencies, each will develop, as a result, a personal language habitus, which will transform into a unique level of embodied cultural capital. The newly developed habitus, in turn, will influence their future trajectory across these varied fields.

I found Bourdieu's concepts of 'field' and 'sanctuary' particularly useful in analyzing the learning experiences and social goals of the study participants. Marginson (2008), for instance, categorizes educational institutions making use of the concept of field. American Ivy League universities, Oxford, and Cambridge belong to "the elite sub-field of restricted production" while institutions that place more emphasis on revenues and market share belong to a "sub-field of large scale mass production" (p. 9). Universities lying in-between occupy a third sub-field of institutions. Brooks and Waters (2014) extend Marginson's categorization to national fields, suggesting that a field is also under the impact of certain national assumptions. In some countries, the "international"

enjoys a higher status than the “local”. As introduced in Chapter 1, there prevails in China an assumption that going abroad for education implies a better education and a brighter future; consequently, the participants in my study gained cultural capital merely by being accepted into Mountain University in Canada. Deeply rooted in examination success, a centuries-old culture of academic competition in China has been reinforced while setting up “distinct, rigid, and definite discontinuities among competitors” (Bourdieu 1996, p. 142). Examinations are the primary methods by which education is transformed into an exchangeable form of capital (Waters, 2008). Students have to pass a university entrance examination for access to a university education to increase their life chances (Davey et al., 2007). However, since there is no guarantee for students to obtain admission to reputable universities in China, many parents choose a “‘roundabout route” by sending their children to “sanctuary schools” (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 214) in lieu of having them pass *Gaokao*. Paradoxically, the pursuit of “sanctuary” triggers the increase of competitiveness in taking standardized English proficiency tests and securing a seat in a preferred university in Canada.

Bourdieu (1986) argues that life chances are determined by access to economic, cultural, and social capital. Coming to Canada for international education starts with the investment of economic capital, which may enable international students to gain cultural capital in the form of academic qualifications. It is usually assumed that possession of academic qualifications would, therefore, lead to profitable employment (translating into economic capital). There exists in China a perceived relationship between academic success and upward mobility; the if/then propositions are understood as causal links—if a child receives a good education, he or she will qualify for a good job with high income (Pieke,1991; Waters, 2008). Overseas qualifications, those gained from Western countries in particular, represent differential symbolic power in conferring social status in the Chinese employment market (Waters, 2008). In particular, “the kinds of symbolic capital that have *international recognition and value*, not only in the country of origin, but also in the country of destination” (Ong, 1999, p. 90; emphasis in original) are of more value to Chinese international students. An international education will earn Chinese international students desirable institutionalized qualifications and credentials that carry field-specific market value. Since one common goal of all the informants in the study under discussion is to earn a Canadian credential, I will use the concept of cultural

capital as a tool to analyze how their interpretations of the value of the credential they pursue change as the locations of practices vary.

3.3. Concepts of Identity: Real and Imagined, Fixed or Shifting, Single or Multiple

A major pillar in the theoretical framework of this dissertation is the concept of identity. A long-standing and rich body of Western scholarship explores questions of human identity from within which two opposing models have emerged. The essentialist stance regards identity as whole and homogeneous with a stable core and sense of belonging; this view maintains there is some intrinsic and essential content to all identities such as a common origin or a common structure of experience (Hall, 1996). The basic standpoint of this model proposes one completely constructed, separate, and distinct identity (Grossberg, 1996). The essentialist view of identity is usually referenced in talking about national identity, a concept that draws critique in the context of globalization and global mobility. In talking about the consequence that globalization brings about to national identities, Hall (1992) proposes that globalization may erode national identities because of cultural homogenization, strengthen the national and other local identities to resist globalization, or reduce and replace national identities through hybridity (cited in Marshall, 2009). But hybrid identities, presumably embedded in a "third space" (Bhabha, 1994), are critiqued for a lack of unity and fixity by Kumaravadivelu (2008), who believes that hybridity is "a state of ambivalence, a state of in-between-ness that is supposed to result when individuals, voluntarily or involuntarily, displace themselves from one national/cultural context and get transplanted into another national/cultural context" (2008, p. 5; cited in Marshall, 2009, p. 92). This view is confirmed by Marshall (2009), who argues that national identities may be expressed in a spectrum, and could demonstrate "varying degrees of lack of fixity, ambivalence, in-between-ness, liberation, and breaking down of hierarchies" (p.103). The individual understandings of national identity may be impacted by any of these factors at various degrees depending on the context.

Currently in the academy, an opposing poststructuralist concept has established a dominant position, maintaining that identities are dynamic, hybrid, fragmented and multiple (Hall, 1990, 1991,1996; Hall & du Gay, 1996; Gee, 2004; Grossberg,1996; Weedon, 1987, 1997, 2004). For example, in Pavlenko and Blackledge's (2004) edited

book on identity negotiation in multilingual contexts, eleven authors demonstrate their support for poststructuralist perceptions in their investigations into identity negotiation and transformation. In one case, Miller (2004) focuses on the discursive construction of identity in a group of ESL students struggling to make themselves 'sound right' in speaking English. She found that the cooperation between the listener and speaker is critical for learners to achieve desirable learning outcomes. In seeking a safe place in their learning process, the participants in Canagarajah's (2004) research exercised their agency by taking up different subjectivities to create, imagine, construct, and adopt alternate identities. This study shows that these language learners were conscious of the roles they were supposed to play in order to survive their specific academic environment. The well-established poststructuralist concept of identity implies that identities are never unified and are

> about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. (Hall,1996, p. 3)

I concur on the multiplicity, fluidity, and fragmentation of identities as denoted by poststructuralist theory. However, the poststructuralist theory of identities, in my view, may not provide sufficient theoretical underpinning for the investigation of identity issues among the participants of my dissertation research. As a Western construct, the non-essentialist notion of identity does not consider the voices from scholars of Asian descent. While acknowledging that identities are multiple, free-floating, and split, some Asian scholars hold that there exist some shared and unified identities among people with Asian origins (e.g., Ang, 2001; Wang, 2002; Phan, 2008). Ang (2001) found in her study that those who did not speak Chinese still demonstrated some sense of Chineseness, which she attributed to Asian cultures and traditions that underscore solidarity and stability. She concludes that the relationship between being and becoming is reciprocal: becoming postulates being and being is promoted by becoming (Ang, 2001). Wang's (2002) research, in a similar vein, shows that some Chinese immigrant teachers shared a common collective cultural identity. While coming to terms with their new identities as immigrants, they maintained their original cultural identities formed when in mainland China. Phan's (2008) investigation of the identity issues of a group of Western-trained Vietnamese English teachers reveals that these teachers constructed and negotiated their identities in a way that combined being and becoming. Being, as

Phan (2008) proposes, acts to maintain a sense of belonging. She further suggested that “identity is constructed, multiple, hybrid and dynamic, but it gives one a sense of belonging” (p. 65) to a shared nation and culture. She proposed that within an individual’s multiple identities there is a “core” or “root” on which new values will be constructed or added. Her participants, Vietnamese English teachers being trained in Australia, internalized their national identity as a core identity while being immersed in Australian culture. Following these Asian authors, I argue that while negotiating new identities, Asian people may hold some shared national and cultural ‘core’ identities to nurture a sense of belonging. Hayashi (2014) confirms Phan’s idea of core or root identities in her study on international students studying in a Canadian university. She found some of the participants in the academic English class she studied talked about their Chinese, Korean, and Canadian identities as reflecting their sense of identification. However, how much to hold on to these core identities and how much to let go may vary according to different anticipations people may have for their future and how power relations in different settings encourage or inhibit language learners to participate in various communities. This varied degree of holding on to the core identities aligns with Marshall’s finding in his study of the languages and identities of Latinos in Barcelona. He found that the participants demonstrated new national identities, among which are “entrenched essentialist Latin American identities”. I am applying the concept of core or root identities and “entrenched essentialist” national identities to analyze related stories in this narrative study.

Another recent theoretical contribution to concepts of identity has proven relevant to my research. As globalization has triggered constant flows of transnationals across borders and boundaries of various types (Vertovec, 2004, 2009), a new transnational space has been created, bringing challenges to the identities of people navigating it. A transnational perspective, or transnationalism, is adopted by Wong and Satzewich (2006) to conceptualize migrants as people maintaining connections with their home countries in multiple ways. Vertovec understands transnationalism as a social formation that transcends borders and transforms “social, cultural, economic, and political relationships” (p. 5). New types of capital formation, to Vertovec, are detached largely from national origins. Transnationalism has led to the reconstruction of localities and regrouping of people, and created the transnational space, or “symbolic/imaginary geography through which individuals make sense of our increasingly transnational world”

that is “complex, multi-dimensional and multiply inhabited” (Jackson, Crang, & Dwyer, 2004, p. 3). Transnational space breaks the dichotomies of home/host countries, origin/settlement, and sending/receiving, and offers opportunities to transnationals to negotiate and transform identities, detached from specific national spaces. Tomlinson (1999) agrees that globalization promotes the idea that identities should be understood in a deterritorialized way. Rizvi and Lingard (2009) believe that transnationals develop fluid identities that may belong to several locations (physically or imaginarily). Appadurai (1996) specifically addresses the cases of Canada and the United States, predicting that these countries will encourage “diasporic diversity” and “loyalty to a nonterritorial transition first” (p. 173). However, it is arguable whether transnational identities always privilege detachment from territorial or national locations over attachment to physical locations. For example, Jackson, Crang, and Dwyer (2004) emphasize the importance of attachment to a certain location. Glick, Schiller and Fouron (1999) maintain that globalization leads to the formation of transnational social fields that may not necessarily surrender national identities. Therefore, nationalism and national imaginaries may accompany transnational mobility (Gargano, 2009). Migrants may foster a sense of belonging to multiple locations physically or imaginarily; consequently, “habitus of dual orientation” is developed while they live here and there simultaneously (Gargano, 2009, p. 68).

3.4. Situated learning: Community Participation and Identity Construction

The sociocultural theory of learning, the theory that situates learners in a particular social and cultural context, is applied in this study. “Situated learning”, as articulated through the concept of Community of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), highlights the learner’s engagement in, and contribution to, the practices of given communities. Lave and Wenger (1991) hold that learning is both a process of cognition and socialization as well as a situated activity when learning is realized “through centripetal participation in the learning curriculum of the ambient community” (p. 100). Mediated relations between participants and the community are depicted in two variables—“legitimacy” and “peripherality”. Learning would be impossible if learners are not entitled to *legitimate* access to, and direct engagement with, the community of practice. At the same time, participation is *peripheral* in that the learner participates in

real activities “only to a limited degree and with limited responsibility for the ultimate products as a whole” (Hanks, 1991, p. 14). This sociocultural concept of learning provides a foundation for further theorizing specific to second language learning.

Recent studies in language learning (Norton, 2010; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000; Weedon, 2004) shift the focus of learning away from the cognitive ability of the individual learner to the social, cultural, and personal conditions within which that learning takes place, emphasizing the relationships between learners themselves and the communities in which they engage. Within this sociocultural framework of second language acquisition (SLA), the traditional acquisition metaphor that views language learners as containers of knowledge is replaced by the new participation metaphor that looks at learners as agents participating in various degrees in a given community in their process of language learning (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). As a situated process of participation in particular communities, learning is not a simple accumulation of skills and knowledge; rather, it entails a process of becoming or avoiding becoming a certain person in that context (Wenger, 1998). In order to acquire a desirable identity in a particular context, language learners have to negotiate who they are in their own perception and how they are perceived by others in the same community of practice (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). Language learners, while participating in practices in different communities, are woven in “dense relations of mutual engagement organized around what they are there to do” (Wenger, 1998, p. 74). Identity thus becomes “a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process” (Hall, 1990, p. 224).). A sociocultural view of language learning, therefore, enables researchers to take into consideration “how learners find ways to come to voice, what struggles are involved for them as they appropriate new ways of speaking, and what social practices structure their appropriation of voice” (Toohey, 2000, p. 71). How to build their way “to each community amid such complex relationships” and gain membership becomes critical in the process of learning, which “involves the construction of identities” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 53).

Building on Lave and Wenger’s (1991) proposal that most learning takes place as a result of an individual’s involvement in immediately accessible communities of practice, Wenger (1998) highlights the relationship between imagination and identity, maintaining that imagination bridges the efforts an actor makes to engage with practice or to align with broader enterprises. Imagination, therefore, expands the selves of actors by transcending time and space to create new images of the world and of themselves. In

this sense, learning occurs through the direct engagement of learners in tangible communities but can also extend to a wider world including "imagined communities" (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007). The term "imagined communities" was first coined by Benedict Anderson (1991) who regards nations as imagined communities "because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their shared communion" (p. 6). Communities, in this sense, become socially constructed ideas, as they "are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (Anderson, 1991, p. 6). Nation and culture, as a result, unify people into fellow compatriots sharing one cultural/ideological identity transcending time and space.

Native places have been regarded as the basis of the identity of people living in diaspora (e.g., Phan, 2008). Grossberg (1996), in summarizing the contemporary literature on diaspora, quotes Clifford (1994) that diaspora is understood as 'a whole range of phenomena that encourage multi-locale attachments, dwelling and travelling'. He then cites Gilroy (1992) that 'such identifications or affiliations, rather than identities, are ways of belonging'. Similarly, Eric Michaels (1994, cited in Grossberg,1996) argues that "people's access to knowledge is determined in part by the places—of conception, birth, death and residence—from and by which they speak, for one is always speaking for and from a specific geography of such places" (p. 101). Grossberg is arguing that native place determines, to a certain extent, people's construction of their identities and these affiliations to different locations are in a way an expression of a sense of belonging.

Among the three modes of belonging theorized by Wenger (1998), engagement, imagination, and alignment, I think the second category, imagination, is an important identification of people in mobility. Imagination is "the production of images of the self and images of the world that transcend engagement" (Wenger, 1998, p. 177). It is "a process of relating ourselves to the world beyond the community of practice in which we are engaged and seeing our experience as located in the broader context and as reflective of the broader connections" (Wenger, 1998, p. 177) that we are part of. People living in the diasporas regard their home as a place of an "imaginative geography and history", which "has acquired an imaginative or figurative value we can name and feel"

(Said, 1985; cited in Hall,1994, p. 399). The sense of belonging is part of a community in our imagination.

Following this line of thinking, the sense of belonging to a place, not necessarily one's native place in some cases, is beneficial to people living in mobility in that belongingness can help locate ourselves when feeling lost in places other than home. This location of one's belongingness thus works as the basis of our identity construction and reconstruction. It really does not matter much whether we can go back to the place or not; as long as we can feel we belong, even an imagined community may contribute to dealing with identity issues.

Norton (2001) applies Anderson's concept of imagined communities to educational settings to understand the social existence and investment of learners to approach and belong to a new community. She argues, "[a] learner's imagined community invite[s] an imagined identity, and a learner's investment in the target language must be understood within this context" (2001, p. 166). Language learners not only invest in participating in such tangible communities as schools, churches, and homestays, but also they have to observe the rules and meet the unwritten criteria of each imagined community as "an imaginative construction of the future" and a "reconstruction" of the past (Norton, 2001, p. 164) to become legitimate members. She follows Anderson (1983, 1991) and Wenger (1998) in understanding how individuals create their sense of social existence when encountering different people, cultures and values, and how identities are constructed in various communities of imagination. Therefore, to examine the identities of learners in their imagined world is as important as in their real world (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Norton, 2001). I have found the notion of learning as a social process of identity construction through participation in communities both real and imagined to be very relevant in interpreting the experiences of the participants in my study.

3.5. Norton's Concepts of Agency and Investment in Language Learning

In her research on the identities and experiences of language learners in Canada, Bonny Norton (Norton Peirce,1995; Norton, 2001, 2013) found that traditional SLA motivation theories were inadequate in addressing the learning process of her

participants. Her research caused her to question such theories—which attribute a learner's failure in learning a target language to that individual's insufficient commitment to learning—and inspired her to integrate Bourdieu's (1977, 1984, 1991) theories, in particular, the concept of "cultural capital" and economic investment, to formulate her notions of agency and investment in second language learners.

Norton's concept of investment is built on a poststructuralist view of identity which she defines as "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (Norton, 2013, p. 45). In learning the target language in the community, language learners are involved in power relations with the changing social world, a process which is critically examined through the lens of investment. Second language learners, so to speak, are people with human agency or investment who actively participate in learning the target language (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; McKay & Wong, 1996; Norton & Toohey, 2001; Norton Pierce, 1995; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000; Toohey, 2000). Put differently, in learning a language, learners are able to develop new ways to mediate their relationships to other people in the same community, and to themselves as well (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001). "[A]n investment in a target language is also an investment in a learner's own social identity" (Norton, 1995, p. 18). Different from the psychological concept of motivation that understands the personality of language learners as unitary, fixed, and ahistorical, the construct of investment views the identity of the language learner as complex, changing over time and space, and produced in social interaction. In Norton's interpretation, the concept of investment intends to break the long-held dichotomies that label learners as "good/bad, motivated/unmotivated, anxious/confident, introvert/extrovert" (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 37). It also acknowledges that "the conditions of power in different learning contexts can position the learners in multiple and often unequal ways", thereby affecting the learning outcomes. Grounded in Bourdieu's theories of capital, language, and symbolic power, Norton proposes that language learners assume that they will gain a wider range of symbolic and material resources when they invest in learning a target language. The resources would increase the value of their cultural capital and social power. In Kramsch's (2013) understanding, Norton's concept of investment gives prominence to "the role of agency and identity in engaging with the task at hand, in accumulating

economic and symbolic capital, in having stakes in the endeavor and in persevering in that endeavor" (p. 195; cited in Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 37).

3.6. Darvin and Norton's Model of Investment: Ideology, Capital, and Identity

Because globalization has triggered the flow of goods, people, ideas, and resources (Appadurai, 1990), this new more mobile and intangible world requires learners not only to move physically between locations, but also online and offline in digital spaces with greater fluidity. The changing linguistic landscape leads language learners to face the reality of globalization which is "complex and fraught with contradictions" (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 42). In response, Darvin and Norton propose that the language acquisition process should be investigated critically to uncover invisible patterns of systematic control. They have developed a theoretical lens "that explicitly calls out ideology and examines the sociopolitical contexts of schools and communities and the shifting values of linguistic capital" (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 43). Based on the existing language ideology studies that acknowledge ideology as a construct in understanding how power functions in language learning (e.g., Irvine & Gal, 2009; Kroskrity, 2004; McGroarty, 2008; Woodlard & Schieffelin, 1994), Darvin and Norton (2015) bring forth a model of investment that perceives ideology "as a normative set of ideas" (p. 43). This model encompasses symbolic power, legitimated authority, modes of inclusion and exclusion, learner positioning, and the right to enter a community of language learners. It recognizes ideology "as a site of struggle, of competing dominant, residual, and marginal ideas" so that identity can be understood as having both "a certain disposition to act and think a certain way", and "the agency to restructure contexts" (p. 44). They then propose to use "ideologies" to complement their understanding of "identity as multiple and fluid, and of capital shifting values in different contexts" (p. 44). Identity becomes "a struggle of habitus and desire, of competing ideologies and imagined identities" (p. 44). Ideology in the plural form is consistent with the mobile and flexible social order, and expands the concept of investment to inspire more agency and capacity for resistance. With investment lying in the intersection of identity, capital, and ideology, this model aims "to create a space in which learners are not by default marginalized or resistant, but where they have an agentive capacity to

evaluate and negotiate the constraints and opportunities of their social location” (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 47).

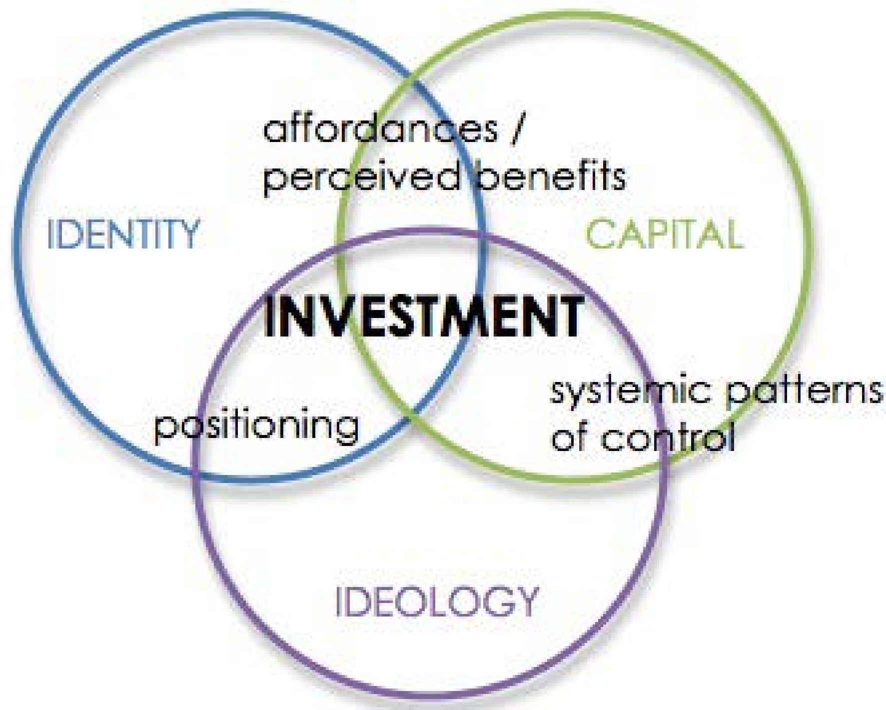

Figure 3.1 Darvin & Norton's (2015) model of investment (*Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 35, p. 42)

With the integration of ideology, this new model contributes to understanding the value of the skills, knowledge, and resources that learners bring with them, and how this value changes across multiple spaces. How learners position themselves and how they are positioned by others in various contexts are decided by different ideologies and levels of capital that they possess as played out in specific fields. Learners form their understanding of the social place that they should occupy, and decide what to do and what not to do within a given community based on habitus—the social dispositions or rules that “generate and organize practices and representations” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53; cited in Darvin & Norton, 1995, p. 45). As Bourdieu (2000) puts it:

> [G]uided by one’s sympathies and antipathies, affections and aversions, tastes and distastes, one makes for oneself an environment in which one feels ‘at home’ and in which one can achieve that fulfillment of one’s desire to be which one identifies with happiness. (p. 150, cited in Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 46)

Darvin and Norton's expanded model of investment offers me a useful lens as I try to integrate ideologies into my study on the learning experiences of Chinese international students in Canada. Locating investment at the intersections of identity, capital, and ideology, this model enables me to investigate how power in soft and invisible forms is at play when the participants of this study travel across borders in Canada and China and move between/within different communities. This model also allows me to bring in the existing language and language learning ideologies that the participants developed in their home country, China, when I look at the narratives of their experiences in Canada.

This model of investment could be critiqued for its enhanced emphasis on the agency of individuals over the structure and social system they reside in. For example, Block (2013), after examining studies on language and identity, has expressed his concern that "there is a tendency to grant much more weight to agency than to structure in the making sense of how individuals make their way through social worlds" (p. 131). The plural form of ideology in this model brings the concept of investment to a higher scale and it inspires more agency and capacity for resistance than before. Moreover, this model of investment is framed as an umbrella of ideologies that subsume many phenomena and concepts within it, which could hinder a more complex analysis. (Marshall, 2017, oral communication), While considering these critiques, I have decided to employ this model in my framework as it affords the potential of perceiving how different ideologies (visible or invisible) "collude and compete" (Darvin & Norton, 2015, April) in shaping the identities and positioning of learners in mobility in different ways. In this study, the integration of the power of language learning ideologies of Chinese international students enables me to weave their past, present, and the future in a more holistic way.

3.7. The *Ti-Yong* Logic

The *Ti-Yong* logic is the pragmatic philosophy of English learning that has been governing English education policies, curriculum and textbooks, and the popular ideology of English in China. This logic considers English language and learning as weapons that learners may acquire in order to defend China against the invasion of Western culture. In learning English, students rely on Chinese learning for traditional cultural and philosophical principles, and make use of Western learning for pragmatic

purposes. This approach to Western learning reflects China's self-strengthening strategy (Hsu, 1990): to take Western knowledge and technology (including languages) as tools while maintaining the traditional Chinese cultural spirit. The logic of *Ti-Yong* asserts that it is possible for a Chinese student of English to become proficient in the language without adopting the individualist and capitalist values it expresses. As I discussed in Chapter 2, this logic also implies "a profound fear of cultural or national identity loss" (p. 113) embedded in the history of China. In my attempt to use this logic as a lens to understand the identities of Chinese international students in Canada, I found that the national identity of these students as Chinese has been maintained.

3.8. Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed the theories and concepts that will underpin my study. Starting from Bourdieu's notions of capital, habitus, field, and sanctuary, I moved to concepts on identities. I then introduced the theory of situated learning, Norton's concepts of agency and investment in language learning, which pillars Darvin and Norton's model of investment. This model offers me a lens to examine the identity negotiation of language learners when investment lies in the intersection of identity, capital, and ideology. Finally, I introduced the *Ti-Yong* Logic, a lens that I used to analyze the English learning experiences of the participants in different communities in Canada. The following chapter will focus on the methodological approach that I adopted in this study.

Chapter 4. Methodology

4.1. The Researcher's Story

Research methodology was not among my favorite topics when I first began my doctoral studies. I was baffled by the various methodologies such as ethnography, case studies, grounded theory, and phenomenology, and I was overwhelmed by the task of selecting a method of investigation for my research in an advanced methodology course. The professor was very experienced and knew the concern of the students. She made a list of books and asked the students to choose one to read. The book that drew my attention was "Borderliners"; it inspired a change of heart. The book was written by Peter Høeg (1994), who used story-telling to construct the personal and social stories of Peter, Katarina, and August, three characters whose childhoods were ruined in an experimental school in Copenhagen in the 1960s. I was immediately engaged by their stories, by the way that their emotions, thoughts, and understandings of their experiences embodied different cultural values and personal subjectivities (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2003; Polkinghorne, 1995). Though the characters are immersed in and overwhelmed by the authoritative atmosphere in the 1960s, they were actively interpreting who they were, what they had experienced, and the reality that they saw, or their "version of self, reality, and experience" (Chase, 2005, p. 657) in sharing their stories. Though it is not until the end of the novel that the audience is able to grasp a holistic picture of the three characters, the seemingly inconsistent and disruptive stories offer a narrative plot to induce empathy and emotion in the reader. The particular voice of each narrator is given weight, and credibility is created as a result. Peter, the author and one of the narrators, chooses to write this narrative account with short pieces of non-chronological stories. I was enlightened and inspired by the power and potential of this approach to story-telling, and I wondered if I could apply this kind of storytelling to my research. Then my supervisor handed me the book Narrative Inquiry by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). As I read through this book, I knew that narrative inquiry would be the method for my research, and I proceeded to read more widely on the subject.

As the reader may have noticed by now, my own narrative was an important launching point for my inquiry, which responds to Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) claim that composing narratives is a good place for narrative researchers to start. Writing my own narratives prompted me to observe the students I was teaching; I continued this autobiographical writing throughout the whole process of my research and dissertation. In my conversations with the participants during the research, my stories and those of the participants were like "a river forever flowing" (He, 2003); they combined our social and professional lives "in ever-expanding social milieus" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2) that we encountered across the borders of home back in China and our newly found home in Canada.

My readings on narrative inquiry and how I make use of it in my thesis will be reported in this chapter. I will start with an overview of narrative inquiry as the methodology I employ and introduce its characteristics in what follows. I then give a rationale for adopting narrative inquiry as my chosen method and outline the procedures and protocols of this study. After discussing my concerns and considerations as a novice narrative inquirer, I wrap up this chapter with a brief summary.

4.2. Overview of Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is the study of experience as a story, and a strategy for thinking about as well as approaching that experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). A premise underlying narrative inquiry is that our lived experiences can be interpreted and given meaning through stories (Andrews, Suire, & Tambokou, 2008, cited in Trahar, 2009). The storied lives of people are described, collected, told, and written through narratives of experience by narrative researchers and participants (Connelly & Clandinin,1990). As a form of experiential inquiry, narrative inquiry offers a peculiar lens for understanding "the past events of one's life and for planning future actions" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 7). In line with this perspective, He (2003) argues that narrative thinking and narrative unity will enable us to "make meaning out of our lived experiences, modify the quality of our on-going experiences, and capture the moving force of every experience in the future" (p. 122).

The history of narrative inquiry offers me a platform to see how diverse academic disciplines and professions open up for this methodology and shows me how it evolves

to fit the study of educational experiences in SLA. The Chicago School, a group of scholars who attached importance to personal life record in the study of sociology during the 1920s and 1930s (Chase, 2005), is considered to have provided an antecedent to narrative research. Chase (2005) points out that almost at the same time, the method, a format of narratives, became a robust approach to the exploration of cultural facts, views of cultures, and cultural changes among anthropologists in the 1960s. In women's studies, the life story method was promoted during the liberation movements, and feminists used this method to investigate the social, cultural, and historical conditions that mediated their stories (Chase, 2005). In the following three to four decades, narratives and stories that people tell about their lives received increasing attention in psychology, law, medicine, education, linguistics, sociolinguistics, and language education (e.g., Barkhuizen, 2010; Darvin & Norton, 2015; Polkinghorne, 1998). For example, Barkhuizen (2010) and Darvin and Norton (2015) contend that a richer life story is constructed when language learners invest in their learning and imagine their future identities on the journey of their learning.

Despite the fact that non-narrative methods are still prevalent in many disciplines in current academic studies (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007), narrative inquiry has become a rigorous research methodology (Kim, 2015). As "a field in the making" (Chase, 2005, p. 651), narrative inquiry combines various analytic lenses and disciplinary approaches, mixing traditional methods with innovative ones (Chase, 2005; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Narrative inquiry also differs from traditional qualitative research in choosing and defining stories, and in methods of collecting stories. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) attribute the intellectual roots of narrative inquiry to humanities and narratology. They later claim that as a methodology, narrative inquiry "entails a view of the phenomenon", meaning that the adoption of the narrative methodology itself has already inferred the narrative perspective that the researcher takes in examining the circumstances of a specific study (2006, p. 477; Clandinin, Huber, Menon, Murphy, & Swanson, 2015). This perspective is now accepted as a valid approach to research. Whereas narratives were formerly dismissed as 'unscientific'—too subjective to be considered appropriate as research data—they are now accepted as objects worthy of rigorous analysis.

Combining their concepts of narrative inquiry with their understanding of Dewey's theory of experience, Clandinin and Connelly (1990, 1994, 2000) define the general characteristics of narrative inquiry. Based on Dewey's idea of interaction, they

first developed two dimensions and four directions in all narrative inquiries: inward and outward, backward and forward (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). They categorized under 'inward' such internal conditions as feelings and hopes, and labeled environment as 'outward'. 'Backward' and 'forward' are used to describe temporality, or the past, present, and future. The terms evolved, and in 2000 the authors developed "*a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space*" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50, emphasis in original) which included the personal and the social (interaction), the past, present, and future (continuity), and the concept of place or situation. These elements are later referred to as "checkpoints", or "places" that will guide novice researchers to enter the field of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). The meaning of place was expanded to contain "an emotional sense of belonging, discursive spaces, imaginative and virtual landscapes, as well as political divisions and cultural distributions" (Fenwick, 2005, n.p.; cited in Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013, p. 581). These authors turn to May's (2001) understanding of being at home and belonging, which was perceived as "an in-between state of being within and without our selves. […] 'Being at home' in this sense is a state of forgetting ourselves in living our relationality" (p. 228; cited in Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013, p. 581). In sharing the lived experiences that "speak of and about our experiences, and of and about relationship with others", narrative inquirers can "move forward and backward, inward and outward, and keep our knowing always located in place(s)" (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013, p. 582).

Following these dimensions, narrative inquirers can situate any event or any person under study at the interplay of their past, present, and future. In doing so, they can take into account their personal and social conditions. The peculiar place where inquiry and events happen is considered to highlight the importance of location in narrative studies. A narrative view of experience understands place, sociality, and temporality within the life stories and experiences of the participants; stories as lived and told are situated in the context of "larger cultural, social, familial, and institutional narratives" (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013, p. 577). As general characteristics of narrative inquiries, the three dimensions serve as a basis for inquirers to develop specific features in their different studies. It is the analytical task of an inquirer to balance and define these dimensions: "…the inquirer needs to examine, describe, and specify commonplace features to be built into the study" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 482).

For instance, Xu, Connelly, He, and Phillion (2007) identified "experience, time, intensity, collaboration, and following leads" (p. 417) as the five key elements in their narrative study of immigrant students' experience of schooling. In this study, I have adopted Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) 'three-dimensional narrative inquiry space' which has allowed me to integrate the personal and social interactions of the participants in their past in China, at present in Canada, and their imagined interactions in the uncertain future.

4.3. Entering the Narrative Landscape

I now turn to three terms and some additional general characteristics of narrative inquiry that are pivotal to deepening my understanding of this methodology: the notions of 'narrative', 'story', and 'experience'. Narrative, in the context of narrative inquiry, "refers to a discourse form in which events and happenings are configured into a temporal unity using a plot" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 5). As a type of narrative, a story is an account of our temporal, relational, and spatial existence. It helps the narrative inquirer to identify data despite the connotation of fabrication in the term "story" itself (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009; Polkinghorne, 1995). Polkinghorne (1988, 1995) uses the terms 'narrative' and 'story' interchangeably. Connelly and Clandinin (1990; 2006) regard narrative as both phenomenon and method, and call the phenomenon "story" and the inquiry "narrative" to differentiate the structured quality of experiences and inquiry. Considering the phenomenon as the story and the inquiry as the narrative, according to Pinnegar and Daynes (2007), is the fullest embracement of narrative inquiry as a methodology. Following Connelly and Clandinin (1990; 2006) and Pinnegar and Daynes (2007), I regard narrative as both method and phenomenon. However, I use "story" and "narrative" interchangeably in recording the experiences of the participants; it is the literal meaning that is at play in this situation.

The third key term, 'experience', earns its critical position in narrative inquiry through the influence of Dewey (1938, 1998) in understanding the educational life of individuals (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) demonstrate Dewey's contribution to the interpretation of experience as two-fold. Firstly, people should be understood as individuals with experiences at both personal and social levels. Clandinin and Connelly regard the learning processes of each individual as interactions between the learner, the teacher, the community, and so on. In the context of narrative

inquiry, this understanding of experience offers a lens to look at learners as individually and socially constructed. Secondly, Dewey gives much emphasis to the continuity of experience—"experiences grow out of experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences" (2000, p. 2). Defining experience as a continuum brings a historical perspective to narrative inquiry. Learners at once stand in a "forever flowing river" of educational experience, to borrow an expression from He (2003). This articulation is a vivid interpretation of the notion of the continuity of experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), which maintains that "[w]e learn to move back and forth between the personal and the social, simultaneously thinking about the past, present, and future, and to do so in ever-expanding social milieus" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). People interact with each other continuously by compiling, recompiling, and sharing lived experiences; they understand and interpret related experiences by telling stories, an approach for them to make sense of their existence (Clandinin, Huber, & Murphy, 2011).

Qualitative research is sometimes criticized as offering knowledge that is limited to very specific contexts and lacking in generalizability. However, researchers do value "the power of the particular for understanding the experience and using findings from research to inform themselves in specific places at specific times" (Pinnegar & Dayne, 2007, p.24). Particularity gains more importance than generalizability in narrative inquiry (e.g., Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Chase, 2005; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). What narrative inquiry upholds is the awareness that understanding particular experiences of a small number of narratives is not necessarily generalizable to a larger population (Chase, 2005).

> [M]any contemporary narrative researchers approach any narrative as an *instance* of the possible relationships between a narrator's active construction of self, on the one hand, and the social, cultural, and historical circumstances that enable and constrain that narrative, on the other. (Chase, 2005, p. 667, emphasis in original)

I align myself with Chase and with other researchers who find that producing generalizing statements is not the only worthy goal of research. I believe there is epistemological value to be found in examining particular "instances" of lives lived in specific historical and cultural conditions.

4.4. The Rationale: Why Narrative Inquiry?

This dissertation investigates the English learning and IELTS-taking experiences of a group of Chinese international students conditionally admitted to MU as related to their learning experiences in their home country China. I examined how their identities as second language learners and transnationals were shaped and transformed in the process of pursuing international education in Canada. The study focused on how their past expectations, current efforts, and future imaginations of English learning were linked during their learning trajectories. To achieve these goals, I adopted narrative inquiry as my methodological framework, and first-person narratives as a legitimate source of data to record their learning accounts (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). Learning stories were elicited and regarded as both construction and representation of their self-concepts (Bruner, 1994). In narrative studies of language learning, language is viewed as a social act and language learners as participatory agents (Norton, 2000; Norton Pierce, 1995). Language learners combine their personal accounts with their bilingual and bicultural identities when telling their stories (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001). The narrated stories of my study participants served as a thread in understanding current events as rising out of their past experiences and pointing to future outcomes (Duff & Bell, 2002).

Another rationale for me to adopt narrative inquiry is in particular consideration of this methodology and language test, an important theme I plan to explore. Back in 2004, Cumming proposes that research in language assessment should “broaden the scope of inquiry and contexts”, “deepen the theoretical premises and philosophies”, and “consolidate through systematic, critical reviews the information base of prior research on language assessment” (p.5). He highlighted that a broader range of methods should be used in inquiry, and

> [s]erious consideration of the uses of language assessment requires adopting research methods that investigate people’s attitudes, beliefs, cultural values, and ways of interacting…..I am at a loss to explain why I cannot think of a single application of narrative inquiry” (Cumming, 2004, p. 9).

He suggested that narrative inquiry should be rightfully applied to explore how people with different cultural values and beliefs would communicate with each other with reference to language assessment. Therefore, my application of narrative inquiry in this study is a response to this call in the field of language assessment research.

What I have been experiencing after coming to Canada, first as a landed immigrant from China and now as a Canadian citizen, has assisted me in locating narrative inquiry as a methodology appropriate for my study as well. As I discussed in Chapter 1, my identity as a university professor in China was significantly challenged in my doctoral studies at MU in Canada. The question of who I am, who I was, and who I am going to be keeps recurring during my studies. I know I am a different self now; I have developed identities that I am perhaps even unable to name at present and could not have imagined in the past. I intended to keep who I was, only to find out that I cannot identify my own self at all. On defining self, Kerby (1991) writes:

> Self is generated and is given unity in and through its own narratives, in its own recounting and hence understanding of itself…the self, and this is a crucial point, is essentially a being of reflexivity, coming to itself in its own narrational acts (p. 41).

Therefore, I take my research as an opportunity to tell my own stories and position myself as a character in co-constructing stories with my participants. “It is as a character in our (and other people’s) narratives that we achieve an identity” (Kerby, 1991, p. 40). From this perspective, there is no need for me to “deliberately imagine” myself as part of the inquiry. But I acknowledge that my life experiences as a researcher can both support and hinder specific perceptions (Rosaldo, 1989; cited in Andrews, 2007). For example, I share the same home country of China and the same native language of Mandarin Chinese with the participants, which enables me to establish rapport with them easily. Meanwhile, my experiences as an English professor in a university in China, and as the Teaching Assistant of the participants, may still generate an unequal power relation between us even though I have been trying purposefully to reduce it.

4.5. In the field: Procedures and Protocols

4.5.1. Setting

This study was conducted in the Pathway Program for international students at Mountain University, a high-ranking medium-sized comprehensive university in Canada. MU is a university with eight Faculties (Applied Sciences, Arts and Social Sciences, School of Business, School of Communication, Art and Technology, Education, Environment, Health Sciences, and Science). In the 2015/2016 academic year, MU had

an enrolment of 29,591 undergraduate students, 5,357 graduate students, and 964 faculty members. Among the student population, students with visa comprised 18.5% of undergraduates, and 28.5% of graduate students. The Pathway Program was open to both local and international students, though international students from Mainland China accounted for the overwhelming majority of its student population. Students took 25 hours of classes (including six hours of tutorials) each week in subjects such as Academic Culture and Learning, Academic Skills, and Academic Writing. International students could enter the program and be conditionally admitted to MU with a 5.0 score in IELTS. Students then had to pass the Pathway courses and achieve 6.0 in a designated IELTS test[9] by the end of the semester to exit the program and achieve official entry to MU. The Pathway Program was selected as the research site mainly because I worked as a Teaching Assistant in the Pathway Program while I was pursuing my doctoral studies. Most of the students in the program were high school graduates from China and were new to Canada. During the Grammar and Research Workshops that I hosted, I found they were struggling with English learning, IELTS test preparation, among other issues. Their struggles aroused my compassion for them, and inspired me to carry out this study on their learning experiences across borders between China and Canada.

4.5.2. Participant Recruitment and Interview Protocol

As I introduced earlier in this thesis, I got to know most of the participants when I was working as a Teaching Assistant in the Pathway Program of MU. Before the start of participant recruitment, I first made contact with and gained permission from the Coordinator of the Pathway Program to send out an invitation letter to the students using the mail-list of students. Meanwhile, information about my research study was also distributed in the Pathway Program through word of mouth by the instructors who knew me well and were aware of my future study. Except for Chen and Zoe, the remaining eight participants were in my Grammar and Research Workshops. Chen responded to my invitation email when she heard about the research from another instructor in the Pathway Program. She repeated the Pathway Program before she was successfully admitted by MU. I met Zoe before she attended the Pathway Program; she planned to

[9] To exist the Pathway Program successfully, all students were required to write another IELTS test by the end of the semester and achieve an overall band score of 6.0. Students usually wrote the test on the same day in the IELTS Test Center located in MU.

seek an MA in Economics when she came to Canada. Zoe took the Pathway Program twice too. More detailed description of these participants will emerge from their narratives. Below is a list of participants showing their field and year of study at the beginning of the research.

Table 4.1. Participant Information

Name	Field of Study	Year of Degree	Gender
Chen	Economics	3-4	F
Haotian	Health Science	1	M
Kaddy	Business	1-4	F
Leon	Economics	1-4	M
Liushu	Health Science	1	F
North	General Studies	1	M
Sam	Computing Science	1	M
Sean	Criminology & Gerontology	1-4	M
Winnie	General Studies	1	F
Zoe	Economics (2nd Degree)	3-4	F

I did not have a definite number of participants in mind initially, but I believed 8-12 was a good range for a narrative study. It turned out that 10 students participated and finished the first round of narrative interviews, but one of them withdrew from the study and was absent in the second round of interviews because of his personal relocation plan. At the outset, I did not consider the geographical origins of the students, but it happened that all these participants were from Mainland China. Similarly, gender was not a factor when I planned recruitment. It was a coincidence that half of the participants were males and half females.

4.5.3. Narrative Data Collection Methods

Narrative data are referred to as 'field texts' by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) who regard recorded data as created rather than discovered. Possible forms of data include, but are not confined to, field notes, journal records, interview transcripts, story-telling, autobiographical writing, conversations, and so on (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). In narrative data collection, no particular method holds privilege over another. All methods share the goal of generating empirical data in the collaborative process of

narrative gathering (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). However, interviews are extensively used as a source of storied narratives in narrative inquiry (Atkinson, 2007; Polkinghorne, 1995; Riessman, 2008) and are particularly suitable when investigating, as I was, the perceptions, attitudes, and experiences of participants (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009; Platt, 2002). The narrative interview, a "discursive accomplishment" in which the researcher and the participants cooperate to create meaning (Riessman, 2004, p. 709), is believed to have the potential of suggesting how people interpret their lives in meaningful ways (Josselson, 1996). Josselson and Lieblich propose that the narrative interview "requires that the interviewer keep her research aims and personal interests in mind, while leaving enough space for the conversation to develop into a meaningful narrative" (2003, pp. 269–270). To Trahar (2011),

> The extent to which the interviewer will share aspects of her own life and experience is contingent upon the extent to which she sees herself and her own stories as contributing to the development, the 'thickening' of others' stories. (p. 50)

I kept this in mind during my own study, and I found that occasionally sharing my own experiences and stories helped me in my aim to examine the participants' "identities, experiences, beliefs, attitudes, and orientations toward a range of phenomena" (Talmy, 2010, p. 25; cited in Kang, 2016, p. 92). I made sure the participants knew I was open to meet if any of them wanted to talk to me about their learning and living in Canada. It turned out that as well as the interviews we exchanged emails, text messages, and phone calls, although not all the information we exchanged became data for this study.

I designed two rounds of in-person narrative interviews with each participant to generate 'text' for this study, suggesting that each interview would take about one to two hours; the interviews were conducted in the office assigned to me as a research assistant or in a study room in the library. In the first interview, I briefly introduced the design and intention of the study and answered any questions that the participants had and then moved the conversation naturally to the research questions. The first interview was conducted in a free-flowing, exploratory, and open-ended format, so that the participants could have the opportunity to tell their learning experiences in their own preferred ways. This unstructured part of the narrative interview resembles an oral history interview which invites informants to narrate their own stories in the way they like (Anderson & Jack, 1991; cited in Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Based on the stories

emerging in the first unstructured narrative interview, I designed the second semi-structured interview to elicit more stories from the participants. By combining unstructured and semi-structured interviews that kept the information and interpretation a two-way street, I could not only balance the needs of the researcher and that of the participants, but also decrease the potential inequality between us. I made audios of each interview which I later transcribed.

As well as the transcriptions, I kept written notes of my thoughts and impressions during and after each interview. Field notes are the most important record that narrative researchers gain from an ongoing study, and become "the text out of which we can tell stories of our storied experience" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 104). Narrative researchers use field notes both as "an active recording" of an event and "an active reconstruction of the events" with the interpretation of a narrative researcher (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 5). My field notes not only recorded my "practical knowing" actively in my interaction with the participants, but also helped me reconstruct the events through my interpretation as a researcher (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 5). Moreover, field notes helped me keep track of my "feelings, thoughts, reactions, and questions" that arose during and after each interview talk with my participants, or when some incidences took place in our lives (Li, 2004, p. 29).

The second method in my data collection was to ask for a written autobiography on their educational experiences in China and Canada from each participant. Autobiographic narratives were suitable for my research owing to three advantages as defined by Pavlenko (2007). First, autobiography provides "the insider's view of the processes of language learning, attrition, and use" (p. 165). Second, learning processes and phenomena during different periods are revealed in autobiographical narratives. Third, autobiographies provide information for research when other sources are scarce. Autobiographical writing allowed my informants to center upon their becoming bilingual (Coffey & Street, 2008) and offered them, as insiders, a chance to freely connect their past expectations of English learning, their present efforts in English learning, and their imaginations for the future. Pavlenko (2008) warns us that narrative researchers should be aware of the "ease" in gaining data and that stories told by informants are "interpretations, and not representations, of reality" (Pavlenko, 2008, p. 324). She suggests that autobiographical narrative be applied with other source collection methods (Pavlenko, 2008). Although just a few of the participants wrote short paragraphs

autobiographically in Chinese, all of them embedded their autobiography related to education in both countries within the narrative interviews I conducted with them.

During the data collection process, I composed my own autobiographical narrative. I began to see the interconnection between this approach and narrative inquiry, and believe that the researcher's stories could best be documented in autobiography: "[b]ecause narrative inquiry is an ongoing reflexive and reflective methodology, narrative inquirers need to continually inquire into their experiences before, during, and after each inquiry" (Clandinin & Caine, 2012, p. 171). The autobiographical accounts of narrative inquirers help them "to break with the taken-for-granted by positioning [themselves] within the metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space with dimensions of temporality, sociality, and place" (Saleh, Menon, & Clandinin, 2014, p. 273). In reporting the participants' narratives, I kept reflecting on my own position, values, beliefs, and cultural background, and applied my own "voices, stance, assumptions, and analytic lens" to make clear whose story was whose (Connolly, 2007, p. 453).

I also collected data through conversations taking place in informal coffee or lunch meetings and phone calls. I tried to use a recorder for most of these informal meetings although the sound quality could not be guaranteed depending on the environment of the meetings. The participants and I developed close relationships during the research process, some of which are still continuing. I sometimes would receive a text message or a phone call that might or might not connect with the research project. When relevant, I made field notes about these texts and calls to include in my data.

4.5.4. Data Analysis Methods

To analyze stories collected, I used narrative data analysis method and MAXQDA. Diversity not only characterizes narrative inquiry data collection, but reflects the reality of narrative inquiry data analysis. For example, Polkinghorne (1995) creates and differentiates between narrative analysis and analysis of narrative. The former focuses on the collection and organization of data to create a plot to unify the data. The latter pertains to the analysis of data for a common thread so that general themes and concepts will be derived. Other analysis methods include structural narrative analysis (Labov, 1982), autobiographical analysis (Pavlenko, 2003), fictionalized representation

(Clough, 2002), three-dimensional spaces (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), performance analysis (Riessman, 2002; Coffey & Street, 2008), and sociohistorical, sociocultural, and rhetorical analysis (Pavlenko, 2002). What I will apply in my source interpretation is a combination of the last two.

According to Langellier (2001; as cited in Reissman, 2002), people enact their preferred identities when telling their lived stories. Performance analysis focuses on the performance of identit(ies) in story-telling. When this notion is used in narrative data analysis, the researcher will emphasize the performative element and the identities that are embedded and performed in social interaction (Reissman, 2002). New analytical possibilities are opened up for the researcher to go beyond static essentializing concepts of identity (Reissman, 2002). This performative analysis of narrative data enables narrators to flexibly position themselves, to apply their agencies and perform their identities. Rather than infiltrating the texts in narrative analysis, Riessman (2002) prefers to include both the analysis and transcripts in detail to separate the identities of storyteller and analyst.

On the basis of the assumption that narratives are collaborative, Pavlenko (2001, 2002) puts forth a sociohistorical, sociocultural, and rhetorical analysis approach, which "allows for a complex, theoretically informed investigation of social contexts of language learning and of individual learners' trajectories" (Pavlenko, 2002, p. 214). This approach in the first place acknowledges that personal narrative is a Western notion, recognizing the potential misunderstanding that may arise as a consequence of different conventions of story composition. Likewise, this approach touches on variations in interpretation over time and takes into account power relations in narrative performance and co-construction. I will discuss this concern over cultural conventions in greater detail in a later part of this chapter. I owe my choice of this method of analysis to the poststructuralist and sociocultural theoretical frameworks that underpin my whole study as aforementioned. In combining performance analysis with sociocultural, sociohistorical, and rhetorical analyses, I hoped to obtain a comprehensive vision of "how [my informants'] identities are shaped by symbolic values embedded within social contexts across time" (Coffey & Street, 2008, p. 453) through their storied experiences of language learning.

In my data analysis, I focused not only on the narratives that the participants shared deliberately but also on the underlying perceptions contained in these explicit stories. According to Gubrium and Holstein (2009), those perceptions which were "omitted", "ignored", or "could otherwise have been said" should also draw the attention of narrative researchers (p. 52). In "narratively" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 131) coding the collected data, I noted down the moments when the story-tellers paused or kept silent, and when similarities or inconsistency appeared. It was at those moments that I could differentiate common elements from exceptional ones (Grbich, 2013; Polkinghorne, 1995).

Data collection and data analysis in narrative study is carried out on an ongoing basis as in most qualitative research (Merriam, 1996). In my own study, I transcribed and analyzed the audio-recorded data immediately after each field text was complete, and I listened to all the audio recording multiple times for the sake of transcript accuracy. I invited my study participants to join me in listening to the recordings and in reading the transcripts and translations in order to check for possible omission or misunderstanding. However, only a couple went through this process with me for the first round of interviews. It was time-consuming on one hand, and on the other, they told me that they did not want to revisit what they had shared with me because some of the stories were painful to remember again. I also gained from my informants their perceptions of which stories should be included and to which degree, and why. I recorded and analyzed my data in Chinese and then composed my field texts in English. Using Chinese to record and analyze data allowed me to understand the deeper meaning of the stories, which I believe helped me to reflect the experiences of the participants better. In recording, transcribing, translating, and analyzing the stories, I shifted between the two languages freely as necessary, which reflects He's (2003) idea that "in fluid inquiry a fluid language is needed to represent the fluid storied experience" (p. 138). In collecting and analyzing data simultaneously, I was able to notice themes emerging from the interactive process and to take them into consideration in the later stage of the data collection process. For example, I was aware that the co-constructed stories of one informant might suggest a different lens to me as a researcher for looking at subsequent data. In data transcription and analysis, I have tried not to add or omit information but to faithfully represent my data (Pavlenko, 2002; 2003).

I also used MAXQDA 10 to analyze the stories collected and transcribed. MAXQDA is a computer assisted qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods data, text, and multimedia analysis tool. It supports a multilingual user interface, which allowed me to upload the transcript in Simplified Chinese. My application of MAXQDA in text analysis was somewhat spontaneous. I was working on another research project led by my senior supervisor, who suggested that I try my hand at using the software for my own data analysis. I could both familiarize myself with the MAXQDA system for the project and explore it for my own data. I first uploaded the interview transcripts to the MAXQDA system, and created an initial coding system that included the categories that I would like to investigate, based on my research questions and as prompted by the literature. I then added more categories as appeared in other transcripts into the coding system. The MAXQDA system helped me to identify and record those recurring categories in the rest of the documents. I then exported all the categories in the coding system for further analysis. After that, I compared the stories in each category with those I generated in my narrative data analysis. MAXQDA supplemented my narrative data analysis because it provided an opportunity to go through all the stories thematically again, and helped me to retrieve those that I neglected in my narrative data analysis. Also, the Simplified Chinese interface allowed me to concentrate on the data in the same language that I collected them and to avoid code-switching between Mandarin Chinese and English.

4.5.5. Data Interpretation

To narrative inquirers, the issue of voice exists for both researchers and participants and becomes one of the dilemmas in analyzing and writing research texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative researchers make great effort to convey their own individual voices in an inquiry “designed to tell of the participants’ storied experiences and to represent their voices, all the while attempting to create a research text that will speak to, and reflect upon, the audience’s voices” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 147). Generally speaking, narrative researchers intend to listen “first to the voices within each narrative” (Chase, 2005, p. 663), a practice which distinguishes this analytical process from the traditional theme-oriented data analysis methods in qualitative studies. In other words, narrative inquirers intend to find in the voices of narrators their “subject positions, interpretive practices, ambiguities, and complexities—within each narrator’s story” (Chase, 2005, p. 663).

The voices in stories are often related to the concerns over the ownership of stories. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argue that narrative researchers move away from the ownership of stories to relational responsibilities to others. Chase's (2005) typology of three narrative strategies offers three lenses to look at the relational responsibilities in dealing with the voice issue in interpreting and representing narrative data. The first strategy, authoritative voice, "connects and separates the researcher's and narrator's voices in a particular way" (Chase, 2005, p. 664). Narrative inquirers achieve their authoritative voice either by separating the scripts and interpretations or through their interpretations. Though these researchers are vulnerable to the criticism of privileging "the analyst's listening ear" (Denzin, 1997, p. 249; cited in Chase, 2005, p. 664), they do leave space for readers to interpret the data. The second strategy emphasizes the supportive voice of the researcher. Researchers employing this strategy often decide the ways of transcribing the story, the parts to include or not include, and the organization and edition of the final texts. These inquirers may be characterized as creating "a self-reflective and respectful distance between researchers' and narrators' voices" (Chase, 2005, p. 665). The last strategy highlights the interaction or the intersubjectivity between researchers' and informants' voices. Using this approach, researchers assume that they must understand themselves deeply before understanding the narrators. Narrative inquirers are not necessarily confined to one or two of the three voices; in fact, Chase's recommendation is to "move back and forth among them" (Chase, 2005, p. 664).

In my own research, I applied these three approaches at different points in the analysis process. For example, I 'authoritatively' made unilateral decisions about which stories to select, how to translate them, and to what degree of detail to share them. I applied the second 'supportive' approach when I invited the participants to go through some of the stories with me, checking to see if they would feel comfortable with my interpretation. Finally, by writing my own autobiography and drawing clues from it for my data analysis, I placed myself in a dialogical relationship with the participants. I find this flexibility in analytical approach enriched my data interpretation process.

There is also the matter of discourse, the distinction between narrative and discourse, and the role of each in this investigation. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) suggest that we all "lead storied lives on storied landscape" (p. 107) as agents of historical and cultural discourse that shapes ambiguous and unique identity constructions, some of which we might be unaware. Discourses, according to Foucault,

"systematically form the objects about which they speak" (Foucault, 1972, p. 49, cited in Luke, 1995, p. 8). Discourses shape “grids and hierarchies for the institutional categorization and treatment of people” (Luke, 1995, p. 8). “Truths” about the world are thus established and help establish the knowledge-power relations. Such truths are taken for granted and become the fundamental rule that a government observes in controlling its people. Members of communities also apply such truths to define themselves and others. However, such governing is not “simple top-down ideological manipulation” (Luke, 1995, p. 8). Community members could participate in discourse construction by both resisting and internalizing such rules. In this thesis, I look at the discourses about international education and the learning of English, and employ narrative to both examine these discourses, as well as understand the storied lives of the participants.

4.5.6. Trustworthiness

Current developments in qualitative research show the trend to pursue trustworthy knowledge (Altheide & Johnson, 2013) in lieu of focusing on research validity. Smith (1990) identifies criteria for trustworthiness as one of the pressing problems in social and educational research. She believes that such studies could be disconnected, non-cumulative, and often small in scale. Though many authors acknowledge the danger of applying a single set of criteria to all qualitative research (e.g., Elliott, Fisher, & Rennie, 1999; Hammersley, 2008), they admit the importance of settling on some general criteria that can be accepted by the broader qualitative research community. Among the plethora of works on such criteria (e.g., Elliott et al., 1999; Gibbs, 2007; Lincoln & Guba,1985; Polkinghorne, 2007), Lincoln and Guba (1985)’s trustworthiness criteria, which include credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity), dependability (reliability), and confirmability (objectivity), are highly regarded and influential. As an outlying member of the community of qualitative research methodologies, narrative inquiry has been accused of insufficient validity, although Clandinin and Connelly (2000) claim “apparency, verisimilitude, and transferability”[10] in

[10] Apparency, verisimilitude, and transferability are criteria that Clandinin and Connelly proposed for narrative inquiry, which, in their belief, relies on criteria beyond validity, reliability, and generalization. They turned to Maanen (1988) for apparency and verisimilitude, which are used to highlight “recognizability in the research field”, and to Lincoln and Guba (1985) for transferability emphasizing transferability (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.184). Clandinin and Connelly believe

conducting any narrative inquiry. Based on Lincoln and Guba (1985), Loh (2013) scrutinizes the trustworthiness of narrative inquiry and concludes that verisimilitude and utility should be emphasized and revisited to make narrative studies trustworthy. By achieving verisimilitude in narrative study, Loh (2013) means that the study has to make the audience empathize with participants so that readers could put themselves in a similar situation and find the stories understandable and plausible. He then highlights the importance of using member checking and peer and audience validation to achieve such trustworthiness. Therefore, narrative researchers should underline the "authenticity" (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009, p. 202) of the narrative data collected, but not worry too much about whether the stories reflect reality. This view resonates with Bochner's idea that people's narratives are "knowledge *from* the past and not necessarily knowledge *about* the past" (Bochner, 2007, p. 203, emphasis in original). Participants in narrative studies exercise their power and agency to explain and interpret in telling their stories.

To achieve this goal, a narrative inquirer should consider the extent to which the narratives make sense in everyday life and how fragmented parts of one story may create coherence holistically (Chase, 2005; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). In this study, the stories that I have chosen to report are the ones that either could resonate with my own experiences and knowledge, or those that I believe could trigger sympathy among the audience.

Producing knowledge for the community at large is also seen as important for any qualitative research (Hammersley, 2004). The creation of "trustworthy knowledge" in narrative studies is fundamental so that these studies are more acceptable and convincing for policy makers and practitioners and will bring about the potential changes that narrative researchers hope to realize. Since one purpose of this dissertation is to bring the attention of policy makers and practitioners in higher education to the learning and test-taking experiences of international students, drawing pragmatic implications in analyzing the data collected is important. I will contribute one section in Chapter 8 to achieve this goal.

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that "[i]t is important not to squeeze the language of narrative criteria into a language created for other forms of research" (2000, p.184).

4.5.7. Ethical Approval, Consent Forms, and The Anonymity of Informants

Ethical approval, consent forms, and the anonymity of informants are three key issues among the multiple ethical concerns of narrative inquiry. Most research institutions require qualitative researchers to apply for and obtain approval of a proposed study in order to confirm that human participants will be sensitively and ethically treated; the application often requires a detailed description of the anticipated areas of inquiry and processes of data collection and analysis. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) point out that narrative researchers are caught in two dilemmas when approaching participants regarding ethical approval from an institute. The first dilemma is "a catch-22 position" (p. 170) of inquirers: if they come in contact with participants before obtaining ethical approval, they are acting against the institutional requirement; if they do so after having obtained ethical approval, they will lose the chance to negotiate some aspects of the research. In spite of this drawback, as a graduate student and novice researcher, I believed it was necessary for me to contact the participants after I received ethics approval. The second dilemma involves the likelihood that "beginning participant negotiations with a set of already-approved forms and requests for signatures is a forbidding starting point" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 170) and may negatively affect the establishment of a comfortable researcher-participant relationship. To avoid this problem, I reassured the participants that the study would start after they exited the Pathway Program, which meant that the potential power relations between the researcher as the Teaching Assistant and the participants/students would not exist. A third ethical issue involves the anonymity of participants. Anonymity is supposed to be guaranteed in research relating to human subjects; however, on some occasions a participant may prefer to be correctly named. In this study, all the participants are anonymous to protect their privacy. One of them preferred to use his Chinese name, believing that no one knew him by that name. Another participant insisted on using the same English name as in class. His reason was that it was not a legal name and his real identity was still kept confidential. A couple of the participants said they did not mind using their real names (though participants had various interpretations as to whether the English name or the legal Chinese name was the real name). When some participants are inclined to be named while others are not, Tarah (2009) suggests researchers adopt a communal sense of responsibility by making a judgment call. So we decided that the

participants chose a pseudonym that did not represent their real identities based on their own understanding. Another approach to protect the privacy of the participants was that the name of the university was not mentioned throughout the dissertation. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) warn researchers to be sensitive to each situation and to always be conscious of possible "shifting and changing" in the narrative landscape and relations (p. 175).

Though ethical issues in narrative studies are as, if not more, complicated than they seem to be, I took up the "most ethical position of all" by ending the study "with some questions about the absolute ethicality of what [narrative researchers] have carried out" (Josselson, 2007, p. 559). At the end of this dissertation, I will discuss some ethical questions that I encountered in my narrative inquiry. In fact, I started reflecting upon these issues "at the outset as ends-in-view are imagined, as inquirer-participant relationships unfold, and as participants are represented in researcher text" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 483). However, fully anticipating and resolving complex ethical issues at the beginning of an inquiry is an impossibility (Bond & Mifsud, 2006; cited in Tarah, 2009). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) warn that ethical issues exist throughout the whole research process, or in "every aspect of the work", to borrow Josselson's (2007, p. 537) description of ethics of research relations. She attributes these complexities to the double-role of the researcher: he/she on one hand establishes a close relationship with the informants while at the same time playing the role of a responsible scholar. To cope with such complex or even "messy" conditions (Connolly, 2007; cited in Tarah, 2009), Josselson (2007) recommends that "*an ethical attitude*" be assumed, which she defines as "a stance that involves thinking through these matters and deciding how best to honor and protect those who participate in one's studies while still maintaining standards for responsible scholarship" (p. 538). This ethical attitude is what I have striven for in my inquiry.

4.6. A Novice Researcher: Methodological Considerations and Problems

In this section, I discuss four considerations for narrative inquiry that I have confronted as a novice narrative researcher. I first explain my view of theory and experience, and then differentiate between telling stories and living stories. I move on to

the relationship between researchers and participants, and finally I outline my expectations for the inquiry.

Following Clandinin and Connelly (2000), I consider experience, instead of theory and its formal set of terms, as the starting point of narrative inquiry. The three general characteristics of narrative, namely temporality, sociality, and place, form a striking contrast to the concept of formalism. On defining this term, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) write:

> Formalists say that the facts of the case, the experience one claims to have, or the data collected by empiricist researchers have little bearing on their claims. Persons, they argue, can never see themselves as they are because they are always something else; specifically, they are whatever social structure, ideology, theory, or framework is at work in the inquiry. (2000, p. 39)

Clandinin and Connelly further argue that formalists recognize agency in form but not in experience. For formalists, people just play out “the hegemonies of politics, culture, gender and frameworks” (Clandinin & Connell, 2000 p. 40). From a slightly different perspective, He (2003) and Phillion (1999, 2002) agree that theory alone is not sufficient in understanding experience, though they admit that theories help to increase understanding of multicultural issues. They hold that theory alone may even “obscure and bend experience” (Philion, 1999, p. 136). In understanding experience, these authors argue that people do not fall into pre-made theoretical categorizations; what researchers should emphasize is how an experience brings meaning to the individuals who tell it (Philion, 1999). In my understanding, what Philion (1999) and He (2003) signify here is to bring the storytellers to the forefront in deciding which stories to tell and in what form. The agency of the storyteller, as a consequence, is promoted in a real sense. Following Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000), and Coffey and Street (2008), I looked at these participants as people with agency; their personal and social contexts were important factors in shaping their learning stories. Such a stance is opposed to the assumptions of a formalist understanding of theory in narrative inquiries.

In coping with the potential pitfalls of formalist theory, He (2003) adapts and applies “fluid narrative inquiry” in her work with three Chinese women teachers who led cross-cultural lives between China and Canada. She finds that the existing formal terms in the literature of narrative studies fail to define the evolving and shifting experiences of her participants (herself included). Referring to Westbury and Wilkof (1978), He (2003)

argues that knowledge is characterized by its ambiguity; knowledge produced in one inquiry is changed in subsequent inquiries. I see her choice of fluid narrative inquiry as a response against formalism in action. Trahar (2009) argues that the methodological strategies of narrative inquirers are located in between theory and stories; methodological positioning will only appear during the research process, particularly at the data collection stage. My stand in dealing with the tension between theory and experience is definite: I started from experience rather than theory, and moved beyond some fixed labels and notions that are used to describe Chinese learners in the related literature by the application of fluid narrative inquiry. In addition, such fluidity in inquiry invoked my passion and supported my claims as a researcher in understanding the educational experiences of the participants To conclude, I endeavoured to keep my narrative inquiry fluid in its treatment of research phenomena, purposes, objectives, methodologies, and theoretical stands.

4.6.1. Telling Stories or Living Stories: What Phenomenon to Study?

There is general agreement among narrative inquirers across disciplines and professions that narrative inquiry aims to examine people's experience (e.g., Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007;). What they may not agree on is the phenomenon under study: is narrative inquiry a study about telling stories or living stories (Clandinin, 2007; Kerby, 1991). Kerby (1991) quotes Mink (1969) as an inquirer who holds the view that stories are told rather than lived; MacIntyr (1984) and Hardy (1986) are cited as narrative researchers standing on the other end: they think narratives are what people have lived out (Kerby, 1991). Clandinin (2007) sees these debates among narrative inquirers as important since they imply the complexities of experience. She suggests that narrative inquirers follow Stone-Mediatore (2000) in understanding that experience "consists of tensions between experience and language, tensions that are endured subjectively as contradictions within experience—contradictions between ideologically constituted perceptions of the world and reactions to these images endured on multiple psychological and bodily levels" (p. 122; cited in Clandinin, 2007, p.xiv). In other words, this insight into narrative inquiry places emphasis on the complexities of experience while leaving space for inquirers to take narrative inquiries "as both the living of storied experience and the stories one tells of their lived experience" (Clandinin, 2007, p. xiv). In

my study, I looked at how these students lived their experiences and how they narrated what they lived by. Their stories, as lived and as told, expressed multiple and diverse identities: they were not only Chinese international students preparing for English proficiency tests; they positioned themselves differently in their fluid narration of the past and present experiences while envisioning their future. Looking into the shifting space between "telling stories" and "living stories", I also repositioned myself so that I could follow the fluidity of their stories.

How their telling and living of stories was negotiated and conducted, which stories were told and in what way, what stories were perhaps omitted and why—these questions helped me to perceive the internal contradictions in their storied experiences, so as to reflect their identity negotiation during their learning trajectories.

4.6.2. The Researcher-Participant Relationship: How do I Position Myself?

The researcher-participant relationship in narrative inquiry moves away from an objective position to a focus on the interpretation and understanding of meaning (Chase, 2005; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Pinnegar &Dayne, 2007). Narrative inquirers need to negotiate the researcher-researched relationship constantly when in the field. This move, in Reissman's (2002) words, "privileges positionality and subjectivity" rather than objectivity (p. 696). Narrative researchers understand that the relationship involves both the researcher and the researched as humans existing in time and a particular context. However, the focus of narrative inquiries is on the lived stories of the participants, which implies that close relationships may develop especially in a long-term study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). What a narrative researcher should be interested in is the particular experiences as the participant understands them (Chase, 2005). As social agents with histories and worldviews, both parties grow and learn in the process of research. Novice inquirers should bear in mind that the narrators of stories position themselves in different ways. In Harré and van Lanenhove's (1999) words, "fluid positioning, not fixed roles, are used by people to cope with the situations they find themselves in" (as cited in Reissman, 2002, p. 701). To Clandinin and Connelly (2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006), the relationship between the narrative inquirer and the narrator is tenuous, temporal, and subject to constant negotiation; it is relational. This relational researcher-researched relationship

allows participants to express the meanings of their lives in their own preferred way, circumventing the power of the researchers (Riessman, 2002).

Because the participants in this study and I shared the same cultural and language background and were living and studying in a culture other than our own, and because my own learning experiences had been somewhat traumatic, I might have unjustifiably assumed that the study participants' experiences were equally traumatic (Andrews, 2007). However, I aimed to avoid this pitfall by being equipped with an appropriate theoretical and methodological grounding. For example, I designed the combination of unstructured and semi-structured interviews hoping to strike a "balance between the need for allowing [the participant] sufficient narrative space to articulate [his or her] experience and the need for information that is of interest to the [researcher]" (Tsang, Irving, Alaggia, Chau, & Benjamin, 2003, p. 365; cited in Hsieh, 2006, p. 380). This approach was also intended to decrease the potential inequality between the researcher and the participants, and in my view it did so: in the end, the interview situation was very much an interactive site where "information and interpretation flowed both ways" (Gudmundsdottir, 1996, p. 294) and neither party dominated the interview (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Applying the insights of relational researcher-researched relationship and fluid positioning of the informants, I have tried to break through my own assumptions and be ready to embrace new knowledge from the stories I was privileged to hear.

4.6.3. Other Considerations

By doing this narrative research, I am looking at relational practices of culture, common value and beliefs, and shared experiences of Chinese international students in order to help insiders (cultural members) and outsiders (cultural strangers) better understand the culture of the host country. My professional duties as the Teaching Assistant in the Pathway Program involved helping students with their online research assignments in other courses taught by instructors from non-Chinese backgrounds. These instructors were, in a sense, cultural strangers who did not have as much knowledge of Chinese international students and Chinese culture as I do. At the same time, as a researcher who is positioned "higher" in the tiers of international students, I felt an obligation to help the participants, my fellow Chinese international students, to understand the local Canadian culture better so that they could achieve better learning

results. When Cortazzi and Jin (2009) talk about the integration of culture, ideology, and identity in narrative studies in international and comparative research, they propose that researchers should develop the idea of "a double vision: that of the insider, with the participants' perceptions of educational meanings, and that of the outsider, with the academic community's conventions and the ability to interpret the research to audiences of readers in other cultural communities" (p. 30). My identities as an international student, an immigrant then and a Chinese-Canadian now, as an English professor in China and a Teaching Assistant in this Pathway Program, enabled me to develop such a double vision—a position that affected two more methodological considerations I would like to discuss.

The first is the choice of a language tool. Language choice is the primary issue in collecting linguistic autobiographies (Pavlenko, 2003); the same is true with my inquiry data collection. Because Mandarin Chinese is the common first language of the participants and myself, I used it as the language tool in data collection and data analysis. Because Mandarin Chinese was the common first language of the participants and myself, and because the English proficiency of the participants was quite varied, I decided to use Chinese as the language tool in data collection and data analysis. To Pavlenko (2003), "in studies of subjects and life reality where the speakers' L2 proficiency is low and the L1 is shared with the researcher, the choice of L1 as the language of data collection is justified" (2003, p.172). Translation did not take place until the narrative analysis was completed (Pavlenko, 2003). Given the English proficiency of the participants, it made more sense for me to share my initial analysis of the stories with those who told them using Mandarin Chinese, our shared first language.

The second consideration is related to the origin of narrative inquiry as a Western construction. To Bruner (1990, 1994), different cultural genres exist in various cultures; narrative forms and models are culturally shaped and, in turn, shape the storyteller's remembering. Autobiography, a cultural practice that has a close connection with the Western notion of an autonomous self, stands in contrast to the concept of personal narratives in Asian cultures (Wang & Brockmeier, 2002). Asian cultures generally underline "another genre of personal narratives where the ego often withdraws to the background to spotlight on significant others, the narrators' personal relationships to them, and the social context" (Wang & Brockmeier, 2002, p. 48). My shared cultural, social, and historical background with my participants enabled me to better comprehend

the stories they told me in the study. However, the comfort granted by my insider status with my participants is transformed into a challenge when I read this quote: “[i]f we are unable to release ourselves from the frameworks of meaning with which we are already acquainted, then we stand little possibility of learning something new” (Andrews, 2007, p. 508). I was so immersed in collecting, transcribing, and analyzing the stories in Mandarin Chinese that I would forget that I was supposed to translate and deliver the learning stories of Chinese learners applying a Western inquiry genre, Western theoretical frameworks, and a Western language in the final write up. I found myself preoccupied by my insider position with the participants, ignoring my responsibilities as a researcher who should be aware of the conventions of the academic community in Canada and capable of interpreting the stories to audiences outside of Chinese cultural communities (Cortazzi & Jin, 2009). I would sometimes lose the “double vision” of an insider and an outsider simultaneously. It was the regular meetings with my senior supervisor and committee members, and the luncheons with my fellow researcher friends and classmates from my cohort, that brought me back to awareness of my outsider position. I would then consider how I could convey the stories that were critical to me and those that were equally intriguing and important to the participants. I found the translation between educational systems, audiences, and cultures to be trickier and more complicated than translation between two languages. Flexibility in interpreting stories between cultures and languages was important for me as a narrative researcher, as I had to “remain true to the original” sometimes, and yet “adapt to the target language context or audience” or “compromise between these positions” at other times (Cortazzi & Jin, 2009, p. 30).

4.7. Chapter Summary

To conclude, I have attempted to map out and justify the methodology of narrative inquiry for my study. The recent expansion of narrative works on identity in the field of language learning (e.g., Pavlenko, 2000; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2001) and the legitimacy of narrative inquiry in language learning experiences honor the voices of the learners (Coffey & Street, 2008). Through recourse to narrative strategies, language learners in my study recounted their past learning experience with an eye to their current learning efforts as well as their learning expectations for the future. In telling language

learning experiences through narratives, they formed a thread to connect “otherwise disparate or unheeded happenings” in the development of their self (Kerby, 1991, p. 41).

The application of narrative inquiry in my study enabled me to incorporate my theoretical framework with my methodological strategy. Narrative studies of language learning regard language as a social act and language learners as participatory social agents (Norton, 2000; 2010), echoing sociocultural and poststructuralist theory in considering learners as people with agency in negotiating their language learning experiences and identity (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Toohey, 2000). I will now turn to the stories that I collected to share how this group of Chinese international students experience learning and test-taking in different educational landscapes across the borders of China and Canada.

Chapter 5. Educational landscapes in China: Past Expectations of the Learner

> *In the gathering and telling of stories, we are gathering 'knowledge* ***from*** *the past and not necessarily knowledge* ***about*** *the past'.* (Bochner, 2007, p. 203, emphasis in original)

5.1. The Researcher's Story

I was born into and brought up in a big family in a small village in North China. After finishing my elementary school at the age of twelve, I was admitted to the top middle school (grades 6-12, including the junior stage and the senior stage) in the province and spent six years there. It was a very famous boarding school well-known for the academic achievements of its students in Gaokao. However, students were only allowed to go back home once a month for one and a half days. For a twelve-year-old, spending only one and a half days with the family in a month seemed to me unbearably cruel and even inhumane. But it was such a high-ranking school that going to this school itself was an honor. "One of your feet is in the university if you go to No.1 Middle School of Changli", people would say, and as higher education has been extremely important for many Chinese families for so many years, turning down this opportunity was also unthinkable. Seeing me cry broken-heartedly again before l went back to school, my father, a very serious man working as the director in a local bank, sighed heavily and said that he would definitely not be sending me away if it were not the best choice for my future and education. It was really something extraordinary for my family that five out of the six children went to college or university by attending this same middle school (my oldest sister did not get the chance because of the Cultural Revolution).

Prestige aside, it was not easy for a twelve-year-old to foresee the prospect of going to university when she was so homesick. Neither could the bright prospect of being a university student (together with the promising career that the university education would entail) quench her thirst for home. I still remember the sleepless nights when I wept till early morning.

This experience led me to develop a strong sympathy for youngsters who have to leave home for education, especially those who go overseas. Fortunately I survived my six-year-boarding-school life and was admitted by the provincial teachers' university without writing the notorious Gaokao because I became a Baosong student as a result of my academic performance and demonstrated leadership in organizing and participating in various activities. Going to university without taking Gaokao is a great glory; the vast majority of students in China have to get satisfactory scores in Gaokao to get admission from colleges or universities.

Years later when I went back to visit my home village, one of my old neighbors asked me, jokingly, "Do you still cry when you leave home?" I could only reply, with a laugh, "Of course not". But the memory of sitting on the back rack of my father's bicycle crying all the way to school, is visceral, and still returns to me repeatedly. It is somewhat ironic that a little girl so closely attached to her family should ultimately leave, not just her home village, but her home country on yet another educational quest.

Before that quest materialized, a brief summary of my post-secondary educational experience is worth mentioning. As mentioned above, I was admitted to the English Department of a provincial teachers' university as a Baosong student, a great honor for high school graduates which I did not realize until years later. Then I started working as a lecturer after graduation. English as a major itself somehow mitigated the fact that the university was not high-ranking at all, and teaching English as a job was more acceptable and rewarding when teaching was not a great option as a profession in terms of compensation in China in the mid-1990s. As a university lecturer teaching English, I was able to work as a part-time translator and an interpreter, and earned good money. I was invited to interpret and translate for large-scale events, and for government officials who travelled abroad for business and official visits; I also translated two books (one from English to Chinese, one from Chinese to English). I benefitted from these experiences financially, and was always envied as someone who worked professionally with English. Most importantly, these experiences built up and strengthened my confidence in my English proficiency, not to mention that it led to meeting the man who would become my husband.

After we married, our future seemed to be on solid ground, but something appeared to be missing. Our decision to immigrate to Canada was inspired by the education and working background in English that my husband and I shared. We believed that we would not encounter much difficulty because we both knew and worked well in English (my husband was an Associate Professor in English in a Chinese university too). Part of our plan after landing in Vancouver was that I would go back to school for a doctoral degree. I had been feeling some regret that my degrees in English were earned in China, and the desire to get a degree in an English-speaking institution had been growing in me for a long time. How can my degrees in English be as legitimate as those earned in English-speaking countries? My husband fully believed that his wife, a brilliant English Professor in China, should earn a doctorate and work in academia in Canada. My application to MU was accepted and my long-held dream of entering a Canadian university came true and I began the journey of pursing a doctoral degree in Canada.

In addition to the desire for a doctoral degree in Canada, there was a critical moment that I usually share when I am asked for the reasons of coming to Canada. We lived in a high-rise apartment in China, facing a big playground of the university where I got my degrees, and where I had been working as a faculty member. For years, one of my previous professors, who had retired by the time I graduated from the university, would run around the playground in the early evening for his daily exercise. One day, when I stood on my balcony in the high-rise building, I saw again, the professor running. I suddenly realized that this might be my life after I retired from the university when I was sixty. I was scared at the thought that my life could remain the same in the next thirty years. It was that moment when I decided that I had to make a change. I wanted to pursue a different life, and get my degree in an English-speaking country: the very reasons that have sent the participants of my dissertation research to Canada.

When I started, my doctoral studies were not smooth. For the first two or three semesters, I was overwhelmed by the vast discrepancies between the learning that I had experienced in China, what I had imagined learning would be in Canada, and the actual classroom at MU, experiences that I will refer to later. I began to feel more at ease with my studies in my second year, and got my first position as a teaching assistant at an English Language development

program, the Pathway Program at MU. During this time, I got to know many Chinese international students who were enrolled in the Program.

As I have described earlier, my research interests developed from my observations of and interactions with these students. Not surprisingly, my interviews with the students who became the participants in my study started with our stories about learning English and preparing for *Gaokao* in China. This chapter focuses on the learning experiences, including English language learning, of the participants in China, before they set foot in Canada. Their stories will be presented in four themes: the *push-pull* factors in their decision making of coming to Canada; escape from *Gaokao*; the importance of English; and their imagined; and imagination of international education. Each section will start with a brief introduction of the participants followed by their stories. I will discuss these stories after that, wrap up this chapter with a summary.

5.2. Stories

5.2.1. Escape from *Gaokao*

Gaokao was an animated topic in all my meetings with the participants, who unanimously declared avoiding this highly competitive national exam as one of the major reasons for coming to Canada for higher education. I have specifically selected stories from Chen, Sam, North, and Sean because they are compelling, representative, and thought-provoking.

Chen described her experience of writing *Gaokao* as “agonizing”. Chen was born in Shenzhen of Guangdong Province in China, and she is the eldest of three children. Her parents, hard-working and successful business people, attached great importance to the education of the three children though they themselves were not well educated. They sent Chen and her brother to private schools from elementary to high school, and abroad for international education for higher education. This would be the path for her younger sister in the future, too. Chen came to Canada, but her brother went to the UK. Her parents made this arrangement deliberately, believing that the two siblings could share their international experiences with each other so that they could be better prepared for their future. Chen knew from early on that her parents would be willing to send her and her brother overseas if they could not earn high scores in *Gaokao* and get

into a high-ranking university in China. Chen was repeating the Pathway Program when I got to know her. She passed the program in the end, and was a second-year student in Economics when the interviews were conducted.

In Chen's memory, preparing for and writing *Gaokao* is

> so agonizing, and many students' dreams broke because of the unsatisfactory scores in the test. Students' life and fate is decided by a single test. It's like a life-changing gambling….Years of efforts and hard work would mean nothing if we fail this one and only test…. In a mock English test before *Gaokao*, I got 80 out of 150 and I broke down. I felt that my failure in *Gaokao* was predestined. In fact, no one gave me any pressure in my family; all the pressure was from the test, and from the intense atmosphere of the classroom. We had a countdown board in the classroom, and our teachers would remind us of the time we had before *Gaokao.* You could smell the pressure in the air. I attended *Gaokao* as planned anyways because it is once-in-a-lifetime experience. But I didn't do well enough to enter a good university. Then going abroad was inevitable. Before that, going to another country for education always seemed remote to me. My family has never travelled to other countries because of my aging grandma. We are a very traditional family, and we value staying together with our family as much as we could. I don't think I fit the test-oriented education system in China when my life chances are determined by one exam.

Sam described his experiences of writing *Gaokao* as "a great escape". Sam was from Hubei Province of China and is the only child in the family. I met him for the first interview right after he passed the Pathway Program. The other meeting took place after he finished his first semester at MU when he had a hard time choosing his major. He was very interested in psychology, but not sure if he would take it for his degree. He eventually chose Computing Science because of the better job potential. Sam's account of his high school life was full of pressure. The school he attended was famous for its strict discipline and high rank in terms of students' performance in *Gaokao*. His whole family had very high expectations for him.

> I think I was doing fine in a high-ranking school, and my parents and I thought I could at least pass *Gaokao* and go to a university in China. In the second year of my high school, we had a test to decide who would be qualified for going to university without writing *Gaokao*, or become a *Baoshong* student who could skip *Gaokao* and go to university directly. It was very enticing to skip *Gaokao* and many students took the test. I tried hard in the test but failed. Then I spent half a year preparing for a national chemistry competition; students who did well in that competition could be exempted from *Gaokao*. But the test results were annulled because some test-takers cheated. So another door to skip *Gaokao* closed for me; it was like a fatal blow because that meant that I had to write *Gaokao*. I felt collapsed when I realized that I had no way to avoid it. After that, my life at

> school became a nightmare. Everything in and out of classroom was about the test until I couldn't bear it anymore. I was very depressed. Then I wanted to ask for a leave from the boarding school, but I was not allowed to leave as time was running out for *Gaokao*; I was supposed to work hard on the preparation. Then I decided to run away from the school without any permission or bringing any of my personal belongings. I never went back to that school again. When I was home, I started seeing counselors and psychiatrists and taking pills for my depression. Then my parents sent me to Canada. My great escapes worked.

North's top reason to come to Canada was to free himself "from a vicious cycle" in the education system in China. North was from a small city in Hebei Province of China. In North's memory, the three members of his family were always in three different places: his father was doing business in Beijing, his mother was working in his hometown, and he was away for education. In the Pathway Program, he was regarded as the leader of his class because he was ready to help all his classmates. In North's opinion, *Gaokao* was a waste of time and a failure in the educational system in China.

> *Gaokao* creates a vicious cycle in the Chinese educational system. Schools would only teach what may be tested in all kinds of exams including *Gaokao*. Students were asked to memorize what they learned in all the subjects. But I didn't know how to make use of the knowledge, and this doesn't seem important at all as long as students could do well in tests. No one can escape the cycle (of learning for testing) as long as you're in China. This kind of education is short-sighted. After being trapped in the test-oriented education system for so many years, I didn't want to waste my university life anymore. I decided to go abroad. It was my last straw.

Unlike other participants, Sean had been comparatively relaxed before and after coming to Canada. He said he simply came to Canada to "run away from *Gaokao*". Growing up and attending school in Shanghai, China, Sean attributed his relaxing attitude to his parents. Sean is the only child in the family; his parents understood him well and did not push him in learning although they were concerned about his performance in tests like all other Chinese parents. But similar to Chen's situation, Sean's parents started the plan of sending him overseas very early.

> My parents sent me to learn English when I was very small. Though they didn't tell me directly, I got the feeling that they would send me abroad. As you know, *Gaokao* becomes something like a myth that could change the fate of students, but this seems funny to me. I didn't do well in my high school years and I knew I wouldn't get a good score in *Gaokao.* Though my parents tried to comfort me by saying it didn't matter if I failed the test, I knew they were worried about it a lot. But I think writing *Gaokao* is the experience that any Chinese student has to have in the whole life. It's once-in-a-life-time thing that you can't afford to miss….But it doesn't mean that I like it. I hate it. I want to run away from it. I can't

> do well in test-oriented education. Going abroad is good for me. Some of my classmates in high school also planned to go abroad after *Gaokao*. But nobody has ever talked about how difficult the studies overseas could be at that time. We just thought going to another country for higher education would be something like an honor, and the glory it brings about would obscure the bad memories of high school and unsatisfactory scores in *Gaokao*. You know *Gaokao* can be a topic forever.

With going abroad as a backup, Chen, North, Sam, and Sean knew that they would have an alternative if they failed in writing *Gaokao.* But their experiences of preparing and writing *Gaokao* were still painful.

5.2.2. The Importance of English

When talking about the impetus behind their decisions to go abroad for education, Liushu, Kaddy, and Leon highlighted the importance of English proficiency and foreign qualifications in terms of seeking a "good" job in the future.

Liushu thought learning English was extremely important. As the only child in a family in Qingdao, China, Liushu just needed to focus on school work and academic achievement: going to school, working hard, and getting satisfactory scores in different tests at various levels before she came to Canada. Her parents would take care of everything else for her. She passed *Gaokao,* was admitted to a provincial university, and had finished her first year of university study when she decided to come to Canada. She described herself as willful; one day she came up with the idea of going abroad and asked her parents to start the whole application process for her immediately. To facilitate the application process, her parents even changed her family name from LV to LU because it would take Liushu longer to get her correct family name on her visa. For Liushu, going abroad was equated to acquiring more English, and she talked about the importance of learning English repeatedly. She said:

> English is so important! English is super important now. It's super important. You have to learn English well if you want to be in line with the world. I mean it's important for both the nation and individuals. Do you want to go to a good university? Learn English well! Do you want to get a good job after graduating from your university? Learn English well! You also have to keep learning English even after you graduate from university. You may need English for your work and for your promotion in the future.

To Leon, English served as a stepping-stone for him to move forward at different stages. Leon's performance in *Gaokao* was not satisfactory; so he left his hometown Changsha, Hunan Province of China, for Beijing to attend an international program jointly offered by a Chinese and an Australian university. The advertised four-year-long cooperation between the two universities broke up, and it left students enrolled in the program stranded. Some students chose to go back to their hometowns, and this was the suggestion from Leon's mother, too. But Leon decided not to do so; instead, he started working for an English training organization and supported himself. He was influenced by his colleagues in the work place and persuaded his mother that coming to Canada for university would be a good choice. When talking about English learning in China, he said:

> Students in China learn English for passing different kinds of examinations: the entrance exams of junior and senior high schools, and *Gaokao*, among others. This is not the end; after they enter universities, they learn English for passing College English Test[11] Band 4 or Band 6. If they want to pursue graduate studies, English test is compulsory in the entrance exam. After graduating from universities, they have to keep learning English for job promotions and other professional development. Higher level of English enhances the comprehensive qualities of an individual. No one can afford not to learn English. English is like a stepping-stone that will lead you to the next stage of your education or work.

The idea of English as a stepping-stone was not lost on Kaddy; but she also noted the realities. She stated how the difficulties faced by Chinese international students studying English was beyond the understanding of local Canadians. Originally from Henan Province of China, Kaddy moved to Xinjiang Province in Northwest China with her parents, where they started their own business. Though her score in *Gaokao* was high in Xinjiang Province, it was not good enough for her to get admitted to a university in major cities in China[12]. She was admitted by a university in Tianjin, but was not happy with the ranking of the university. Her parents decided to send her to Canada

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[11] The College English Test, or CET, the national EFL test for non-English-Major students, is designed to examine the English proficiency of undergraduate and graduate students in China. CET has two levels of test: CET6 and CET6. The Test for English Majors (TEM) is for university students majoring in English, and includes TEM4 and TEM8.

[12]There exist vast differences in the *Gaokao* score that a student needs to enrol in the high-ranking universities that are open for application to students from all provinces in China. For example, a student with Beijing *Hukou,* or registered permanent residence in Beijing, can get admission from Bejing University with a much lower score than students from other provinces.

after she finished the second year of her university. She has been working arduously at school, and was very thoughtful in understanding English and its status in China.

> The status of English is very high, and learning English is a critical part of any student at any level of education. But learning English for *Gaokao* only is childish. I think most people who really understand English learn the language for their jobs after graduating from colleges or universities. They would just regard it as a skill for jobs and promotion. Those who would envy others because of the English proficiency don't understand English at all. But those who don't will think English is capital and it's something to show off. When I went back to China for a visit I told my friends that all my courses were taught in English, they said, "Wow! This is awesome! You could take classes in English!" But English is just the medium that the courses are delivered in.

She then took her mother as an example to show how English was regarded by people who did not understand the language well.

> My mom wasn't very well-educated; she barely finished her junior high school. People like her really worship English. I think this is because English has in a sense been mystified and elevated to a very high position in China. I can't think of any other non-English-speaking country that would be so crazy about English. Sometimes I would think to myself that I hope, one day, native English speakers will have to learn Mandarin Chinese every day. Or they can never understand what we've been going through (in learning English). Probably they would be a little more patient when talking with us then.

Liushu, Leon, and Kaddy's excerpts showed the great importance that they attached to English—not only as a motive for pursuing different levels of education and workplace promotion in China, but also for undertaking their quest for an international education. The importance of English was also a topic that North, Sam, Zoe, and Winnie mentioned though in less detail.

5.2.3. Expectations for the Future

The participants I interviewed commonly described going abroad for international education as a comparatively easy way to gain better education and more advanced knowledge and to learn "real stuff".

Chen regarded coming to Canada for international education as "the best investment in the best education". Chen agreed with her parents on this point:

> My parents work diligently to earn the money to send me and my brother to get the best education though they themselves didn't even finish high school. They

> think the best investment is to give us the chance to get the best education in a foreign country, which is much better than leaving us money. They asked us to choose the destination, and didn't push us. They didn't insist on what majors to take and what universities that we had to go to. But since they are businessmen, they hope that we could take up business. They believe that the educational systems in Canada are much better than China which I definitely agree. I think they're absolutely right and very far-sighted. Canada's education IS better.

Zoe thought studying in foreign universities would be easy for Chinese students. Zoe is the only participant who came to Canada for graduate-level education. Zoe had a very good job in China. She was from Jinan City, Shangdong Province, and is the youngest girl in the family. She gained her Bachelor's Degree in a renowned university and got a well-paid job. Two years later, she believed that she could not see any future in her job, and decided to further her education overseas. Then she came to Canada. To Zoe, seeking higher education in a foreign country was not only easy, but also feasible for Chinese students.

> Everyone is talking about the top universities in foreign countries, and saying Chinese students would be able to graduate from these top universities with ease because Chinese students are smart and hard-working. When they set a goal (in learning), they would spend all the time they have to work to achieve it. I may not be that smart, but I'm hard-working and goal-oriented. If other Chinese students could succeed in learning overseas, I could too. Strange that I have never doubted this before I came to Canada. Everyone is telling the same story (about going abroad for education): my extended family members, my colleagues, my old classmates, and of course all the agents who helped prepare my application for the study permit.

Sam, together with his family, believed that coming to Canada for international education would bring glory for the whole family. Sam's depiction of his imagining of international education is full of wordings such as "better", "advanced", and "glory".

> Going abroad is a very popular option for Chinese students and their parents in China nowadays. Chinese people are getting richer; more and more families could afford the cost of the expensive international education. Many Chinese people think going abroad means a better education, and consequently, a better job and better future for the students. Parents also think that the earlier their children can go abroad, the easier for them to integrate with the local culture…. Going abroad is really great in the sense that it means a lot to students and their families. First of all, the child can acquire advanced knowledge and cultivate capabilities. Then it means glory that glitters over the whole family. Most importantly, it implies a bright future that local education can't bring about at all…. In fact, I didn't think very seriously about what the university life would be like before I came. But you know what, all high school students believe that going abroad for international education would be easy and fun. Students in foreign

> universities spend much time playing and having fun. They are not good at math, physics, and chemistry. All Chinese students are so smart. And look at the media. There are so many role models who are very successful in their education overseas, like Lu Yiting[13] and other high-achieving Chinese students in world-renowned universities like Yale and MIT.

Sean thought international education would give him a chance to "stand on the shoulders of a giant".

> By going abroad for higher education, we could learn advanced knowledge in science, technology, and military from Western countries. We could develop faster if standing on the shoulders of giants…. In my case, test-oriented education system in China doesn't fit me at all, and it was impossible for me to get enrolled in a good university in China. But my parents hold very high expectations on me, and I can only fulfill their expectations by coming to Canada. It feels like I am standing on the shoulders of a giant too. Also, the degree that I will obtain in Canada weighs more than the one that I could get in similar universities in China.

North's afore-mentioned desire to escape the "vicious cycle" of education in China was more supported by his hope of learning "real stuff" in a foreign country than his concern over the competitive *Gaokao*.

> When I was in high school, I was doing well with my studies. I could easily handle all the courses. But it seemed that what I did was to find the strategies to deal with examinations but not to learn real stuff. I realized that my life would be wasted in memorizing test-taking skills. I decided to go abroad to learn real stuff in a better educational system.

In addition to running away from *Gaokao*, improving their English, and seeking an international education for more knowledge, Kaddy, Zoe, and Liushu expressed their desires for different lives and a better future by coming to Canada. For example, Zoe came to Canada because

> I couldn't see any future in my job, and I knew that I would do the same thing in the same office until I retire in my mid-fifties. It was a very well-paid job, and would be perfect for people who prefer a calm and stable life. But I'm different; I just wanted to see different places and to try different ways of living.

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[13] Yiting Liu, a Chinese girl who gained a full scholarship at Harvard University when she graduated from high school in 1999, became a role model for Chinese students and their parents. Her successful story of skipping Gaokao and going abroad for international education inspired millions of people in China. Her parents are deemed as successful parents, and they wrote a book on how they raised and educated Yiting Liu. The book was the best-seller in China consecutively for sixteen months after its publication.

The desire for changes and differences was echoed by Kaddy who "longed and yearned for a life in foreign countries". In fact, Kaddy ranked her curiosity for all the differences between China and Canada at the top of her expectations for an international education. She used words like "longing and yearning" to express her strong desires of going abroad for international education. Though she admitted that part of her expectations is to gild her life with an international experience, her main dream was to improve her English and achieve native-English-speaker proficiency so that a different life would be open to her. I still remember her facial expressions when she said:

> I'm interested in everything abroad that is different from China in learning and living. I'm interested in all the differences, and this is the meaning of my coming to Canada…I'm longing and yearning for the life in foreign countries, and I'm very curious about everything that is different than what I experienced in China. When I was in China, I was very ignorant and only wanted to seek for material things, which was decided by the general context in China. I just felt going abroad would gild myself and then I would live a much better life. I thought my English would improve greatly and I could speak native-like English. Then my world would change greatly for the better.

Kaddy later added that she would have the option to live and work either in a foreign country or go back to China. She also talked about her concerns about a future job, saying that she was not sure if she could earn a good salary. Though she said money would not be the first thing that she would look at in her future job seeking, she thought that the compensation should somehow be in proportion with the heavy investment her parents made and the hard work she had done. In fact, trying to "perfect" herself has been Kaddy's main goal throughout her studies in the Pathway Program and her undergraduate studies. Her story will be featured in more detail in Chapter 7.

Liushu's envisioning of international education was both practical and idealized. Liushu echoes Zoe in her dissatisfaction with the life and working prospects in China:

> I knew what would happen to me after I graduated from my Chinese university. My parents would find me a good job and then I would get married and have a family. It isn't challenging. I was very curious about and interested in both life and study in foreign countries and I was looking forward to some uncertainties in the future. A better future.

When asked what she meant by a better future, she was not certain, she said; she guessed that a better future should have something to do with her future job opportunities, compensations, and the flexibility in choosing in which country to stay,

whether China or Canada. She believed that all these differences could only be brought about by a Canadian credential. For Liushu, coming to Canada included dreams of romance:

> Before I came to Canada, I was small and had a lot of illusions about foreign countries. I thought I would take up Business in a foreign university, and my classmates would be from all over the world. The boys would be handsome and in suits. Then I would fall in love with one of them. I even imagined when he kissed me, I would tiptoe with my feet lifting from my high heels.

When Liushu was faced with the uncertainties of her study in Canada, she would tell a different story.

In this section, I have reported stories on the expectations of all the participants for their international education before they came to Canada. In what follows, I will analyze these stories from the lenses of the *push-pull* factors of going abroad, sanctuary seeking, English as a global language, and international education in their imagination.

5.3. Discussion

Most of the participants of this study started their narratives on who they were and what had brought them to Canada in the first interview. In this section, I will first look at these stories through the lens of *push-pull* factors that motivate Chinese international students to go abroad. I will turn to Bourdieu's (1986) sanctuary seeking, the power of English as the global language, and international education as imagined to explore their stories further.

5.3.1. The *Push-Pull* Factors

Overall, participants' stories on why they came to Canada confirm some of the ten *push-pull* factors identified by Bodycott (2009) which I discussed in Chapter 2. In relation to the reputation of country and institution, the participants ascribed greater importance to Canada, than to the particular institution they selected. There was an underlying implication that Canada's education standards were imagined as higher. The participants did not mention any knowledge of MU before having chosen it as their destination, and the lack of information in this regard implies that they attached less importance to the specific university than to the host country. Chen, Sam, and Sean

seemed aware of the advantages of Canada's education in general, which confirms the ninth factor "[perceived] higher standards of education", though none of them specified what the advantages were. Zoe and North mentioned Canada as their chosen destination *after* they outlined the benefits of "going abroad" or "foreign countries" for international education. In my understanding, this shows their perception that education in other countries, especially in developed countries, is better than in China. A survey by the Education International Cooperation Group (EIC) found that 70% of Chinese students went to the U.K., the U.S., Australia, and Canada for international education (2012; cited in Liu & Liu, 2016). The desire to study in economically developed English-speaking countries shows the impact of the neo-colonial belief that Western countries are better than others.

Another factor that was mentioned by participants was the influence of family and friends. This factor is strongly represented in stories by Sam, Zoe, Chen, and Sean. Their parents' influence predominated in their stories. This aligns with Beck's (2008) research that shows the significance of family influence in creating the desire for an international credential as advancing family and individual fortunes. The strong influence of these parents' on the decision to come to Canada for higher education also confirms Bodycott and Lai's (2012) observation that the parental influence on Chinese students in deciding to go to Hong Kong for higher education was significant and rooted in "Confucian family traditions, roles, and the related values of filial piety" (p. 17). Parents' influence on Chinese students going abroad is also discussed in Griner and Sobol, (2014), who found that parents play an important role in the decision to overseas, and some students considered filial piety in making the decision.

5.3.2. Escape from *Gaokao*: Sanctuary Seeking

As I presented above, Chen, Sean, Sam, and North's memories of *Gaokao* remained painful after they came to Canada. They understood *Gaokao* as "a life-changing gambling" and "once-in-a-lifetime experience". Therefore, writing the test is not only for the chance of going to a satisfactory college or university, but also symbolizes the completion of high school education. Sam's high school years were a history of "great escapes"; he made great effort to win chances to be exempted from taking *Gaokao*. Ironically, it was only possible for him to get away from *Gaokao* by succeeding

in two other exams. When he failed in both, he ran away from the school completely and ended up coming to Canada.

Gaokao has been a prevalent topic throughout this study. The participants named it as the foremost factor that led them to make the decision to go abroad for international education, and they described how this test has negatively impacted their learning experiences in China. As introduced earlier, *Gaokao* carried the legacy of *Keju* and adopted its general tradition of selection for excellence. The life-changing opportunity that *Gaokao* may offer to Chinese students means that these students and their families could not afford failure (Cockain, 2011; Davey et al., 2007; Waters, 2008).

The stories of Chen, Sean, Sam, and North on going abroad to run away for *Gaokao* confirms Waters's (2007, 2008) observation that international education became an option to find a "protective enclave" against the fiercely competitive system in Hong Kong. In looking at the functions of education in shaping transnational professionals in Hong Kong, Waters (2007) focuses on overseas-educated locals with common identities. As mentioned in Chapter 2, to secure academic success and find alternatives for the local educational system, these students take "roundabout routes" and attend "sanctuary schools" in Canada. They develop "an exclusive and elite group identity" (p. 494) that shapes them as transnational professionals back in Hong Kong. For international students from Hong Kong, together with their middle-class families, pursuing international education in Canada becomes sanctuary seeking or a roundabout way to achieve academic success. Coming to Canada for international education for the participants of this study also becomes a journey of sanctuary seeking, I would argue.

The stories shared by the participants in my study draw attention to a situation rarely discussed in the literature. When looking at the push factors on Chinese students going abroad, literature usually focuses on motives such as getting a better education, understanding foreign countries better, improving job potential with more comprehensive skill sets, or increasing the possibility of immigration (Gareth, 2005; Gu et al., 2010; Lowe, 2007). In other words, going abroad for increased social, cultural, and economic capital is thoroughly explored in literature. However, very little attention has been paid to seeking enclave, escape, or sanctuary as an important motivation for Chinese students to go abroad for international education. According to Bourdieu (1984), education is connected with social reproduction and parental anxieties when its success is related to

job prospects (Bourdieu, 1984). In this context, schools outside the mainstream system, argues Bourdieu (1996), could offer a “sanctuary” to students.

Paradoxically, the pursuit of “sanctuary” from *Gaokao* requires Chinese international students to secure a seat in a preferred university overseas, and the admission requires a satisfactory score on standardized English proficiency tests such as IELTS. This necessity triggers the increase of competitiveness in preparing for and writing such language tests, and the “sanctuary” these students and their families invested heavily to pursue turns out to be another battle of test. This will be examined in further detail in Chapter 7.

5.3.3. The Power of English: English as a Global Language

The importance of English as *the* global language (Pennycook, 1994, 1998, 2001; Tollefson, 2002) is prominent in the narrative accounts of Liushu, Leon, and Kaddy, whose strong beliefs confirm Ng & Tang (1997) that English is critical in seeking higher education, good job opportunities, and workplace promotion in China. For example, Liushu and Kaddy’s stories confirm Ng & Tang (1997) who believe that English is important in seeking good education, jobs with good pay, and higher professional ranks. Liushu’s comments on English showed her blind embrace of the idea that English is important without much evidence. When hearing Liushu’s exclamation that “English is so important! English is super important now. It’s super important”, I was reminded of Osnos (2008) who talked about how English is highly regarded as something worthy of great merit. In the same work, Osnos also proposed that English has become “a defining measure of life’s potential”, one of the “unifying beliefs”, even “an ideology” (cited in Gil & Adamson, 2011, pp. 23-24). This idea was reflected in Kaddy’s account of how less-educated people like her mom would embrace such mystification and popular ideology of English. Liushu’s understanding of the importance of English at national and individual levels confirms Tsui and Tollefson’s (2007) view that English is “a multinational tool essential for achieving national goals” on one hand, while on the other, it is “an indispensable resource for personal achievement” to individuals (p. 18). The seeming unproblematic acceptance of English among the participants also shows the existing impact of colonialism in China; it contributes to neo-colonialism because people with no or little English competency are disadvantaged in education and the job market (Guo & Beckett, 2007).

My secret dissatisfaction with my degrees in English earned in China, together with my long-held dream of coming abroad for education, as I mentioned in my narratives, reflects the impact of English as an ideology on me. It was also this "unifying belief" in English that had brought my parents to the conclusion that the admission of a college that did not rank very well was acceptable because my major would be in English. My family members' misconception of the superiority of English when I chose my university major and took the job of teaching English reflects the internalization of the neo-colonial legacy of English as contended by Guo and Beckett (2007). Further, my acceptance of the job offer after I graduated was due to the belief that teaching English would be more financially rewarding than teaching other subjects, and with more potentials in the future job prospects. My questioning on the legitimacy of degrees of English earned in a non-English-speaking country evidenced the neo-colonial legacy of English on me.

The study participants' stories show how individual students understand the "linguistic capital" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) of English, and its power in determining the social and economic assets that these students could possess, including being converted into other forms of capital such as educational qualifications. Kaddy, for example, critiqued people's perspectives on English learning and differentiated those "who really understand the language" and those who do not. By interpreting English "as a skill", she in fact highlighted the instrumentality of English. In emphasizing the importance of English in job seeking and promotion, she categorized English as a form of capital. This neo-colonialist legacy is still strong in China, and was discussed in Leung and Waters (2013) who believe that English represents desirable embodied cultural capital. Kaddy's claim that native English speakers will not understand the English learning experiences of Chinese international students until they take up Chinese represents her questioning of the superiority of English. Meanwhile, I also see this statement as an attempt to bring native English speakers into the ongoing conversation on the status of English. To me, what she implied is that native English speakers lack knowledge of international students, a social condition which is addressed by Beck (2008), Montgomery (2010); Sovic, (2009), and Yuan (2011).

Meanwhile, as reviewed in Chapter 2, the pragmatic function of English in China has been evident throughout the history of English teaching, learning, policy making, and in the formation of popular ideology of English. Though various policies have been

issued to alleviate the heavy focus on the function of English as an instrument, the enactments of these policies are not satisfactory, and helping students earn a high score in *Gaokao* has always been the priority of English education. Liushu, Leon, and Kaddy's understanding of the importance of English also reflects the popular ideology of English in China, which regards English as a language that will offer a passage to advanced knowledge and information in industry, economy, and business (Pan, 2015). Learning English for pragmatic purposes and the embrace of the popular ideology of English among the participants can be explained using Bourdieu's concept of habitus, a system of dispositions that impacts the experiences of individual actors. As stated in chapter 3, Bourdieu believes habitus is both structured by "one's past and the present circumstance" and structuring because "one's habitus helps to shape one's present and future practice" (Mason, 2008, p. 51). Liushu, Leon, and Kaddy's stories showed that they all have accepted the notion of learning English for its instrumentalism. Their dispositions composing the habitus of learning English proved to be "*durable*" in presenting the popular ideology of English (Mason, 2008, p. 51, emphasis in original).

Ti-Yong logic is also evident in the stories of Liushu, Leon, and Kaddy on the purpose of learning English. They implied that they had to learn English well for reaching higher levels of education (e.g., college and graduate studies), for finding a good job, and for professional development and promotion. Learning English overseas for such pragmatic goals confirms Griner and Sobol (2014), who find out that learning English as a tool for future job searching was popular in their study on the motivations of Chinese international students going abroad. These stories also align with Gu et al.'s (2010) finding that Chinese international students learn English to improve their academic performance and promote future career prospects.

5.3.4. Expectations for the Future: Imagining International Education

In the descriptive study by Li and Tierney (2013) reviewed in Chapter 2, a group of Chinese international students in Canada were surveyed on their learning experiences and future plans. The authors found several discrepancies between the students' expectations of their university program and their actual experience, particularly regarding their lack of contact with Canadian students. I felt this study was important in that it included the students' own perspectives, and it prompted me to ask the participants in my study to compare their expectations before coming to Canada with

the reality they found here and to invite them to share their visions of the future. The stories of Chen, Zoe, Sam, Sean, and North's expectations for their international education in Canada reveal that they were envisioning a brighter future for themselves owing to their belief that their studies in Canada could offer advanced education and knowledge. Their stories showed that their understanding of the benefits of an international education, in this case Canadian education, was greatly informed by popular Chinese ideologies of English and education.

Several of the participants' stories reflect a widely-held acceptance in China of the superiority of Western knowledge and technology. The neoliberal logic of this belief is related to the ascendency of English as a global language. Dai (1999), Hu (2001), and Pan (2013) have written about the critical importance of English for individuals and nations to access and communicate with other countries individually and nationally in the process of globalization. The core of this widely-held belief is that the linguistic capital of English will guarantee individual attainment in employment and career development, a hope which is vividly reflected in the expectations expressed by the participants before coming to Canada. Chen, Zoe, Sam, and Sean used similar wordings i.e. "advanced knowledge", "better jobs", a "better future", and the "best education" in talking about their early expectations for their studies in Canada. While agreeing with other participants in pursuing "advanced knowledge", North regarded what he had learned in China as a waste of time, compared to what he would learn in Canada, which would be the "real stuff". He implied that education in China was inferior and problematic. Sean used a vivid metaphor to characterize Western countries as "giants" and coming to Canada to study as "standing on the shoulders of the giants". These stories confirm similar views expressed in studies conducted by Gareth (2005), Gu, Schweisfurth, and Day (2010), Lowe (2007), and Wu (2014).

Seeking higher education abroad has become a strategy of families aiming to accumulate social capital (Ong, 2006), as in Chen's case. Coming to Canada for international education was "the best investment in the best education" to Chen and her family as they imagined that Chen would be a successful graduate from a Canadian university. The investment in Chen's international education extended beyond a Canadian credential; she could become the successor of the family business in their imagined future. Zoe, Kaddy, and Liushu expressed a desire for change and a longing for a different life by coming to Canada. They all envisioned many potential differences

between China and Canada, be it "different ways of living" to Zoe who regarded herself as different from people who would be happy with "a calm and stable life", or Liushu who craved anything different in Canada. In later communications with these participants, I found that 'a different life' in fact meant all the benefits that an international education could offer, from better job opportunities, higher salaries, to the flexibility of travelling and working transnationally. These students' desire for 'a different life' through better education and improved English proficiency was decided by their habitus that formed in China, where international education is seen as more advanced and English as more important. Also, since English has been transformed into a commodity in the examination culture (Gray, 2010), these participants also expressed their desire to exchange this commodity for social and economic prestige for themselves and their family (Pennycook, 2000; Phillison, 2010).

While crossing borders for international education, international students are guided by belief in the superiority of Western knowledge, language, and qualification (Waters, 2008) in choosing destinations based on the hierarchical ranking of universities internationally (Marginson, 2008). The encouragement and even promotion of the existing hierarchy is, I would argue, demonstrated in the transnational flow of students.

The desires for different life styles, similar to those expressed in Zoe and Liushu's stories, were explored in a narrative study on international students pursuing MA TESOL in Australia (Chowdhury & Phan, 2014). This study found that some of the participants chose to go to Australia because of the lives and studies they had envisioned they could experience in their future Australian university. In my own study, the participants described to me vivid imaginings of their future learning and living. Imagination, as demonstrated by Wenger (1998), impelled and supported the efforts of these participants made to seek and cope with different education and different life styles while abroad. In their imaginations, they actually transcended time and space and created new images of the world and themselves. In imagining the future that they believed an international education would bring about, they perceived themselves as graduates from Canadian universities of better quality who could speak good English, secure a good job, and be able to enjoy the kind of life they want. By asking them to share their dreams for the future, I feel that I was able to establish a baseline of expectations against which I could compare their actual learning experiences.

In fact, I shared the same desire for a life that was different from what I had in the past with the participants. As I narrated at the beginning of this chapter, my husband and I felt that something was not available in our stable life and job in China, and I did not want a life unchanged in the thirty years to come. I relied on coming to Canada for international education for the much-desired change. It was this aspiration for a different life that had brought me, my family (at least partially), and the participants this far to Canada. However, the specifics about the fulfilment, or the failure of fulfilment, of such expectations of international students are not well addressed in the literature, which is another gap this study tries narrow.

5.4. Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have shared the stories of the participants before they came to Canada. I found that their narratives were mostly focused on their efforts to run away from *Gaokao*, on the importance of English, and on expectations for the future. I then discussed their stories using the lenses of *push-pull* factors, sanctuary seeking, the legacy of English as a global language, and the envisioning of international education. Coming to Canada with those stories, the participants would soon find that learning and living in Canada, which will be addressed in Chapter 6, may not be consistent with their imaginings.

Chapter 6. Educational landscapes in Canada: Current Learning Experiences

> *Being a migrant, a transmigrant or, for that matter, a transnational are not just observable end-states where people meet the definitions attached to them. These are processes in which people are on their way to imaginary arrival points that are constantly rewritten under changing circumstances. (Baas, 2010, pp. 182-183)*

6.1. The Researcher's Story

I did not start reflecting on my own concept of 'home' until I was well into my dissertation research. Analyzing my interview data made me reflect on my own experiences of living 'away from home'. When I moved into the boarding school at the age twelve, home was the house in a little village where my parents resided, and where my siblings and I were born and brought up. At that time, my distance from home could be easily measured: it was an hour by bicycle, twenty minutes by car or motorcycle when my father or brother could pick me up. Homesickness accompanied me throughout my six years of learning in the Junior and Senior years, though I began to keep the sadness to myself as I grew older. Then the distance from home increased to six hundred kilometres, or ten hours of travel by train, after I became a university student in the capital city of the same province. I had become a migrant in my own country. It was strange that the lengthened distance did not increase my homesickness; on the contrary, I felt exhilarated about my university life. So it was not the distance from home that made me home-sick in middle school; it was the huge pressure of academic studies. Home, during those years, provided a temporary shelter from the intense study of exam preparation. I wrote the Entrance Exam for Senior High School in the same Middle School at fifteen. The Exam was very competitive, as my Middle School was a key school in the province. I passed the exam and was able to stay in the same school for senior high studies focusing solely on the preparation of Gaokao. Later I went to university a Baosong student, which seemed an escape from a real test like Gaokao, and escape was shameful. For many years, I felt I was inferior to others in academic performance because I "escaped" from Gaokao like a coward.

As mentioned earlier, I finished my university study successfully and started working as a faculty member in the same university right after my graduation. Later, I earned my Master of Arts in the same institution and became an associate professor of English before I came to Canada as an immigrant in 2007. Looking back, I found my journey of pursuing education (from middle school to my BA and MA, and to my current doctoral studies) has brought me further and further away from my home, the house in the small village. I have never called the city where I went to university—and where I got married—my home, though I spent about eighteen years in that city and I still own a pleasant high-rise apartment there. My home has always been the house in the small village and all the memories about it, though none of my family members live there any more. We later moved to a seaside city after my father retired; two of my elder sisters and one elder brother, together with their families, live and work there. This city became my home after I went to university. After I came to Canada, every visit back to China, to me, is going back home.

In my time here in Canada as an immigrant pursuing a doctoral degree, it seems that my home has been somewhere else. I see myself as the tourist who "immerse(s) themselves in a strange and bizarre element" (Bauman, 1996, p. 29). However, in my world, "the strange" has always been frightening and is far from "tame and domesticated" (Bauman, 1996, p. 29). I have been seeking to construct and negotiate who I am on my journey, while looking for a place I can belong to, and for an understanding of who I am. But I do have a "safety package" that I secretly carry subconsciously; a part of the package is "having a home", which "is the place to take off the armor and to unpack—the place where nothing needs to be proved and defended as everything is just there, obvious and familiar" (Bauman, 1996, p. 30). This 'package' is stored carefully in my memory, and helps me to anchor my sense of belonging, gives me recognition, love, and care through my memories from China. They help fuel me up. However, sometimes I can be so immersed in the everyday struggles of my life and learning that I almost forget the existence of this safety package.

A clearer perception of who I was and who I am is of great importance to figure out who I am going to be. I believe that the journey I have embarked on will continue (with occasional visits

to my past), and the journey itself is more important than any destination (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) I could name now.

I have been keeping close contact with my family members and friends in China since coming to Canada. I usually share good news about how well my husband, my son, and I are doing in our living, learning, and working. On the rare occasions when I complain to them about how hard the life for immigrants in Canada is, or how challenging my studies are, they always say, "You can always come back home when you get your degree and your Canadian citizenship!" To me, the call of home is always comforting, as it makes me feel that I can run away from the challenges of my current life and learning and find my shelter there. Home has been transformed into my permanent sanctuary, and the sense of home has become an indispensable element in my safety package (Bauman, 1996). But the comfort from the call of home seems to come with conditions: I should finish my doctoral studies and go back with a Canadian degree and citizenship as planned and expected. Going home, at least at this stage, is partially in my imagination; but it does somehow help relieve some of the pressures in my current life and studies as it always provides a shelter or escape (though imaginary).

As depicted in the previous chapter, participants in this study took refuge in international education: they wanted to escape from *Gaokao* and seek sanctuary in Canada. This chapter shifts to focus on the learning experiences of these students in Canada by describing three themes that emerged in the data. The first is a discrepancy between their learning in the Pathway Program and learning at MU. The second describes their struggles between opportunities that were offered and what they needed when living in local homestays. Lastly, several participants expressed their confusion over being Chinese as well as being Chinese international students in Canada. The Chapter will end with a discussion of these learning experiences of the participants through the lens of *Ti-Yong* tension, situated learning, notions of national and transnational identity, and imagined identities and imagined communities.

6.2. Learning in the Pathway Program vs. MU: Discrepancies between Learning in Different Realities

As introduced previously, participants in this study were offered "conditional admission" to MU; at the time this study was conducted, they had succeeded in the Pathway Program and were at different stages in their programs of study at MU. Some naturally compared their learning in the MU classrooms with that in the Pathway Program and felt great differences between the learning in the two settings. Kaddy used the metaphor of Shangri-La to refer to her experiences in the Pathway Program, an opinion that was echoed by several other participants. In this section, I will present stories of learning in these two settings.

6.2.1. Experiencing the Pathway Program: Learning in Shangri-La

The students/participants reported that they enjoyed a very accommodating and inclusive learning environment in the Pathway Program. Most of the participants focused on how the instructors made learning accessible. Chen, Sam, Liushu, Zoe, Leo, North and Winnie agreed that the Pathway Program was helpful in terms of the course design and class delivery. They talked a lot about how learning had taken place in the Program, and how the skills and strategies they learned from the Program had proven helpful for their university learning. They attributed their successful learning to the Pathway instructors. For Chen,

> The Pathway Program was pretty open and could guide me in learning…. The most valuable part was that all the instructors knew each student well. They delivered classes and also arranged individual tutoring for students after class. The class size was small and every student could feel the attention from the instructors. The comments that one instructor gave on a writing assignment were longer than my writing. I was surprised to see how well she knew me and my writing! Her comments were very helpful…. I felt that I had to work harder because my teacher knew me and cared about me.

Sam thought the Pathway Program was a good fit for him and prepared him for the current university learning.

> The Pathway Program is a very different program. The teachers were nice and easy to follow. There was a lot to do in class, and every student was given the chance to speak in English. We had to answer questions and took part in discussions…. The teachers put us under reasonable pressure; not too much to make us feel depressed, but enough to inspire us and develop our learning

> potential. In this sense, instructors turned the pressure into motivation. Only good teachers could do this…. My university study would have been super difficult for me if I hadn't taken up this program…. The instructors helped me in building up my confidence in learning.

Sam gave me an example of how he was supported when choosing courses for his first semester at MU.

> I had a splitting headache when I started choosing courses for the first semester. The courses seemed like weird combination of numbers and words and didn't make any sense to me. But my teachers were very nice to me. One instructor said four [courses] was good to start with…. And another instructor gave me suggestions on what courses to choose. I think teachers play the biggest part in the classrooms of international students. I knew no other native English speakers except for my teachers (at that time). Students could do better if teachers are good.

To Liushu, the Pathway Program was good even though the workload was heavy.

> My classmates and I felt good about the program…. I think the teachers were nice and I could speak in class…. Sometimes they pushed me to speak and answer questions. They pushed me to go to their office hours. And my learning improved.

Zoe agreed with Sam and Liushu on the push of the instructors. Her account of an instructor started with how she learned grammar.

> I didn't know English grammar until I came to the Pathway Program. I mean I memorized a lot of grammatical rules in China, but in the Pathway Program I began to understand grammar. It was an instructor who showed me that grammar was live; he wrote sentences on the blackboard, and told me how grammar functioned in each one of them. I remember it was after class when I went to him for questions on grammar. He used his body language while explaining, and it worked magically well on me…. He also encouraged me to open my mouth and speak in class…. He made me think of topics to start with and I began to speak.

To Leo, as in Chen's case, it was important for teachers to know each student.

> I think I learned a lot. We need a long period of time to improve a language; I learned a lot of strategies that are important for university learning, like how to write an outline, a summary, and how to do an academic presentation, etc.. The instructors cared about all the students because they knew everyone, and knew exactly who needed to improve on what.

North was perplexed at the beginning of his study in the Pathway Program. But a talk with one of his instructors impressed him greatly and changed his mind about going back to China.

> How well students learn is up to teachers most of the time in China and in Canada I think. When I just started this Program, I felt I was so tired after my struggling in another language school. I told one of the teachers that I wanted to quit. For a while, I couldn't see any hope even when I was admitted to the Pathway Program as planned. But she said that since I was there already, I should keep going and give it a try. She made me rethink if I was doing the right thing if I quit. She was right. Why did I come to Canada for international education? Not to quit for sure. As I said, I wouldn't be able to know if I was good enough (to go to University) if I didn't give it a try. Then I stayed in the Pathway Program and survived. I made one of the best decisions in my life with the encouragement of that instructor.

North continued to recall his progress as related to the instructors in the Pathway Program.

> I think the progress that students make was decided by teachers to a great extent. Teachers here taught me how to think rather than remembering rules and words as I did in China. If the teachers care about you, you would feel it and act differently…. One instructor once talked with me and said that he'd like to see me achieve a strong finish in the program, especially in my oral presentation. He believed that I was able to achieve this. And I did! … I was moved when he gave me a bear hug after I made the speech at the farewell dinner representing all the students in the program. I was recognized by my teacher. The recognition is very important to me…. The program and the instructors brought hope to my life.

Winnie's memory of one instructor is about a meeting they had in the office.

> One instructor was especially helpful. I failed my first homework in his class because I didn't have any logic in my writing, and the sentences didn't make any sense at all. He asked me to go to his office hours and went through my writing sentence by sentence. He explained in great detail how he understood the connections between sentences, and why he thought the logic was lost. Then I began to see his points and I did a great job in rewriting the same piece of homework.

The Pathway Program is a place where teachers knew each student individually, recognized their learning needs, supported them, cared about their progress and their struggles, and provided skilled instruction that helped them improve in their language learning. Such memories of the Pathway Program seemed more dear and cherished by the participants when their learning experiences in the classrooms at MU turned out to be strikingly different.

6.2.2. Experiencing MU: Waking up to a Different Reality

With the success in completing the courses in the Pathway Program and getting a satisfactory score in the designated IELTS Test, all the participants earned their official admission "ticket" to MU. They now entered disciplinary courses rather than just English language classes, and their peers expanded to include students from more diverse backgrounds. This changed situation brought new challenges to Sam, Zoe, Liushu, Kaddy and Chen, among others.

Sam had a hard time adjusting to university teaching in the first semester:

> My university learning is very intense. English is still my biggest headache. Professors speak fast and I have difficulty following them in class. They wouldn't slow down no matter how many students there were in the classroom. Sometimes I even felt that no matter how hard I tried to follow, I couldn't fully understand. Class sizes are a lot bigger (than in the Pathway Program) too, and it seems impossible for professors to know all the students in person, not to mention to provide individual support to each of us.

Liushu felt that university professors in her classes were not very supportive to international students, and were not equipped with the knowledge on how to help international students.

> I found in classes teachers don't care much about whether your answer is right or wrong; participating is more important. They will always encourage us to take part in the classroom discussion, and say "perfect" to all. But sometimes I would feel it is not helpful or sincere. For example, for the correct answer to a very, very simple question, they would still say perfect or great job. We're not kindergarten kids and I wonder if this really helps. I'm confused. But I know this is how Canadian teachers try to encourage students.

Later, Liushu said

> Teachers in Canada don't seem to know how to help students like me when we are in trouble. When I feel pressured or when I need more help on how to learn, Canadian teachers don't know how to help me out. In China, teachers are good at talking things out with students. Local teachers don't know how to teach you how to learn. Or maybe they just don't care. Who knows.

Kaddy attributed her unpleasant learning experiences in MU classrooms to her insufficient English proficiency.

> I thought I could finally relax after I finished my study at the Pathway Program: I passed the English program, and got a satisfactory score in IELTS. I thought my

> English was good enough for my courses at MU. But I couldn't be more wrong. I found English was still my biggest problem…Sometimes I felt so depressed. I felt that I had wasted my time and money in taking the Pathway Program and working for the IELTS. And I felt I was useless. It felt like climbing a mountain so hard for this long, but whenever I look up, native English speakers are always standing much higher than me. I've been climbing without knowing where the top is. Or native English is the top that I can dream of but never be able to achieve.

The following excerpt recounts her experience of taking a Business Communication course in her third semester.

> In my third semester, I took a course called Business Communication and I need to write a lot for the homework. The professor commented that I should drop the class, saying that I should take a basic writing class before taking this one. When I went to his office hour for help, he insisted that I drop the class. He said my writing was not OK, and I should drop and go to another university for a basic business class before I could come back to take this one again. What he meant was that I would fail the class anyways. This was a big blow to me…. He said that my writing was awkward, either in thinking or understanding. Honestly I still don't understand why the expressions were awkward….Then I emailed him and asked if I could ask a friend to take a look at my writing so that I could fix my awkward expressions before I submitted it to him. He said no; I could only go to teachers, English Learning Commons, and the TA for help. But when I did go to him for help, he said I need to drop!

Kaddy did not drop the course as the professor suggested. She later told me that she wanted to finish the course even when doing so might mean failure. She said she had paid for the course on one hand; on the other, she could learn a lot and use it as preparation for the retake. She failed as she (and the professor) had expected and registered for the same course again in the following semester. This time she finished successfully with a C plus, which she felt very satisfied with.

Another episode that Kaddy recalled was about her class interaction with a local student in an Economics class.

> The boy from Philosophy was very young and impatient. He's a native English speaker, and I found that he didn't care to listen to my broken English in the paired class discussion. He grew irritated as I tried to express myself. He didn't even try to be polite and cover his impatience. I was so sad after class that I kept asking myself why I would always be less competent no matter how hard I tried to improve my English. How I wish the professor could have noticed what was going on and helped me out. But I understand that there were too many students in class for the professor to attend to individually.

Chen's understanding of what makes a good teacher shows the difference in her view between Canadian and Chinese instructors.

When I was taking university courses in China, the teachers would share with us their notes. At MU, I have to take notes myself. Some nice teachers may share with us their slides, but I have to rely on my own notes most of the time. One professor could speak and write in Chinese, but he only taught in English. He had studied Chinese History very systematically in China. More than half of the class were Chinese international students you know. He didn't give us anything (notes or slides) in class.

Zoe was the only participant who provided an example of how a professor fostered communication between local and international students in class. She owed her friendship with a Russian student to that professor, saying that

Most of my friends are Chinese and I got to know them in the Pathway Program. But I have a Russian friend. So how did I get to know him? In the first class of a university course, the professor told us to say hello to students sitting close to us, talk to each other, make self-introduction, and ask if we could study together. The Russian boy sat close to me, and we greeted each other. We then got to know each other and would say hi on campus. And we would sit close to each other in class. We worked together for group assignments. I think this is very helpful and the professor is really good.

In fact, differences in learning between the Pathway Program and MU disciplinary classrooms only account for part of the tension that the participants experienced. In what follows, I will record the tension brought about by the different experiences in their learning in homestay and church settings.

6.3. Learning in Homestay and Church: Tension between Conforming vs. Resisting

Although living with local homestays was not an option for all of the participants, homestay and other settings of informal learning for some participants arose as a theme that drew my attention. This section will first record some stories on learning English, and culture, and making friends in homestays. Sam and Liushu's accounts of their experiences of going to church with the homestay families will be reported as examples. Winnie thought that living with English-speaking homestays would bring more opportunities for practicing English and making friends; but she also acknowledged the limitations of her expectations.

Many Chinese students choose to live in homestays with local people. My (spoken) English improved fast because my homestay parents would bring me to their friends' and they all speak very good English. I then was able to know more local people. I know very few of them at MU where I don't have the language

> environment that I thought I would have here (before I came to Canada). I don't have any white friends (at school). Probably it's because I don't try to approach them. But in fact, communication with my homestay was far from enough in terms of my English learning.

North agreed with Winnie on how living with local homestay offered chances for him to make friends and learn English.

> In a few months, I became a good friend with my homestay family. I think the most important thing in English learning is not to learn for the sake of learning. You have to integrate yourself with the local culture. Or how can you make use of the language you try hard to learn? I tried to practice my English with my homestay parents. They often got lost as to what I was talking about. But it didn't discourage me. I just kept trying with my limited English. We've been keeping in contact even after I moved out.

In recalling his experiences of living in the homestay for three months, Haotian depicted himself as "nervous", "shy", and "scared" because of his poor English and his newness to Canada.

> My homestay family are a white couple with three kids. We always had supper together. I was very silent and tried to listen and understand what they were talking about. But I couldn't understand a single word (when I first came). Later on things became better, but I still tried to finish my food as soon as I could and would go back to my room right after. I guess I was nervous and shy because of my poor English. I was also scared because I was so new to this country. Now I think I should have stayed with them longer and tried to talk with them more. Although I had more chances to communicate with native English speakers in the homestay, I just felt it was big suffering at the time being. I learn the most when I don't have any other options but speaking in English. This is the authentic way of immersing myself with the local culture. I can't learn that much (of English) when I am with my fellow Chinese students. I also learned about Canadian culture. My homestay parents would remind me of my table manners; they told me that if I wanted to stay in Canada, I had to learn Canadian table manners. They said that we Chinese people made noises while eating, but kept silent while learning (in class). I agreed and tried to eat without making noises. I also tried to think of topics that they would be interested in. When in Rome, do as the Romans do, right?

When living with his homestay family, Sam began to hear about Bible stories and observe some Christian rituals.

> My homestay parents are Christian. They would say prayers before eating. I'm happy to do that with them. It's the local culture. They sometime told Bible stories and shared with me how they understood the stories. It's interesting. And it is important as I want to learn the Canadian culture.

His homestay family also brought him to church. However, he decided to move out of the homestay because of his “unpleasant experiences” of going to church with the homestay family. The cost of this was that he lost the chance to interact with the homestay family.

> Later they invited me to go to church with them. I felt curious about everything about Canada at the time, and I really wanted to have more chances to speak in English and know more about the church. I had to use English to communicate all the time, and I enjoyed the English-speaking environment a lot. But later on, I kind of didn’t feel very comfortable with some of the ideas they talked about. Those religious talks were too difficult for me to follow, and the religious ideas seemed very remote to me too. It was not that I didn’t like the religion or I didn’t believe in it; I guess I wasn’t ready yet. After all, my foremost goal of coming to Canada is to learn the language and go to MU. To learn about a religion was not part of my plan. Later I moved out of that homestay mainly because of this.

Liushu’s homestay was a Taiwanese family, which she described as “perfect”. The homestay parents did not use English as the first language at home; but their children spoke English with each other. Liushu got along very well with the children, and spent a lot of time doing homework, playing games, and having fun with them. The family treated her like a family member; they brought her anywhere the family would go. Liushu met several teens who communicated only in English at the weekly Christian gatherings of the family.

> My homestay family are pious Christians. They go to church and attend fellowships each week. The fellowships were hosted by different Taiwanese families. The host family would prepare a lot of food for all. My homestay parents would sit around a table with other adults reading the Bible, singing praises to God, or sharing their understandings and experiences of the religion in Chinese. The Bible stories are interesting. I know religion is part of the Canadian culture and I think knowing something about the Bible is helpful for me to learn English and local culture. At first, my homestay parents tried to invite me to join the adult group; I guess they wanted me to learn more about the Bible and converted me to a Christian. But they spoke Chinese in the fellowship though I think most of them could speak very good English. I ignored their invitation and would usually join the teens after eating. It was more fun chatting and playing with the teens. The most important thing is that I could speak English with them all the time.

When asked whether she went to church with the homestay family, she said:

> I went to church with them every Sunday. But it was still the fun part that attracted me. You know churches would organize a lot of activities. I joined them in hiking, BBQ, and festival parties. Again I’m not that interested in the talks on religion. I went to church mostly for speaking English and making friends. But I know Christians are very nice people.

Talking about making friends, she said,

> When other international students that I know complained that they couldn't make friends with local students and feel lonely sometimes, I didn't. In fact, I didn't see why I had to make friends with local students on campus. My homestay has everything I need: Chinese food and English-speaking environment. It's just perfect.

The stories on learning at the homestay setting of Liushu, Sam, North, and Haotian show they placed high value on English and cultural learning, but were uncomfortable when language learning was dependent on their learning Christianity, or being pressured to do so. The tension between what was available for them and what they valued is clear.

6.4. Being Chinese, Being Transnational: Struggling to Understand Who They Are

6.4.1. Being Chinese: National Identities and Patriotism

In this study, North and Kaddy told stories on how they strongly claimed their national identities as Chinese, and how they became more patriotic in Canada. They further talked about their sense of belonging, and their feelings of homelessness while residing in the transnational space of Canada.

North felt the strong urge to identify himself as Chinese in different situations: first in a classroom, and then on the street when he encountered a group of unfriendly local youths.

> My sense of being a Chinese in fact brought me a lot of pressure (in class). For example, I can't stand when a Canadian instructor said that Taiwan was an independent country. I know it's an international issue, but I just couldn't accept it when the Canadian instructor said so in class. For a while, I thought I would just try to tolerate such talks. But later, when the same instructor talked about the same issue and used the word Taiwanese, I said Montrealese[14]. He was very unhappy and asked me what my point was. I told him that it was how I felt when he said Taiwanese. Then he seemed to understand what I meant.

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[14] Montrealese here means Quebecois.

Another episode that he shared with me was about his confrontation with some drunken local teenagers who challenged him by calling him names.

> One night, I went to a pub downtown. On my way home, I met a group of local teenagers who were drunk. They stopped me and asked if I was Japanese. When I told them that I was Chinese, they laughed and said that I was Chine. I was mad and scared at the same time. But I thought I should do something; I shouldn't behave like a coward. They knew I was a Chinese, so I couldn't lose face for Chinese people. I asked them to get out of my way as I was going back home. They were riding bicycles and tried to raise the front wheels to crush me. I asked them to wait and give me five seconds. I went to an old man nearby and asked him to call an ambulance. I told him that I didn't think they were strong enough to defeat me. Then I went back to the middle of the street and told them that I was ready. Somehow they didn't attack me and left without saying more. I did practice *Kongfu* a bit in China, but I'm not that good. I have to admit that I was scared at the moment; but I don't want to be bullied especially when I'm in a foreign country. In that situation, I'm not only myself; I'm a Chinese. I have the responsibility to defend myself as a Chinese. I won't allow myself to become a victim of bullying and discrimination in a foreign country.

Being a Chinese, and being identified as a Chinese, brought courage to North to face the challenge. Later, he told me that

> the deepest feeling that I developed in the past two years in Canada is my identity as a Chinese. I'm not only an international student who is seeking a degree in Canada, I'm Chinese. Other people may not always remember what I did, but they would easily remember me as a yellow guy with brown eyes and dark hairs.

The sense of being Chinese and patriotism also emerged in Kaddy's story:

> Now I began to understand why people would say that we wouldn't know how patriotic we are until we're abroad. Or can I say that I'm patriotic? It's huge commitment. Every time I hear any unfavorable comment on China from a foreigner, I become unbearably angry. I'm a Chinese; anything about China is about me. I know that my country is not at all perfect. But I love it, and I can't bear to hear unjustified critiques of China by foreigners.

Stories of the participants show that they felt more aligned to China while in Canada. The notion of patriotism and their identity as Chinese was provoked by racist attitudes they encountered; their difference and their being seen as different prompts an allegiance to their national identity.

6.4.2. Being a Chinese International Student

North, Kaddy, Leon, and Winnie talked about their confusion on, and understanding of, being Chinese international students in Canada. For example, North thought Chinese international students were equal with other students as he believed that all people were equal.

> Some Chinese international students feel that we're nothing and inferior to local people. That is not true. They can just speak better English than we do. That's it. It's about the attitude (of international students). If we feel that we're inferior, then we will be. But why should we? Is it just because of our insufficient English? It doesn't make sense.

Meanwhile, North emphasized the importance of cultural integration with local people, as

> some international students are still in China though they are in Canada physically. If an international student just eats Chinese food, shops in T&T[15], and spends all the time with their Chinese friends, they are still in China even though they own a house and a car in Vancouver. They are still in China because they have never been to a bar or tried to experience the life of local people.

Kaddy had mixed feelings when being referred to as a Chinese international student.

> I feel proud and meanwhile inferior when called a Chinese international student. Sometimes I feel it's a label that carries with it all the negative meanings. The first thing would be the poor English a Chinese international student could speak. Then people will say that a Chinese international student could come to Canada only because their parents are rich. They won't be able to find a job in Canada even after they have gained a Canadian degree. I will only feel very proud of myself when I do very well in my courses at MU.

Both Leon and Winnie said they knew the meaning of being a Chinese international student in Canada though they did not explain explicitly. Leon said,

> I know clearly that I'm a Chinese student and what this means to some people. But I don't care how others look at me. I'm too busy to worry about this. I'm just myself. I'm interested in anything that is different from China, and this is the very reason why I'm in Canada. I like the sentence that a mathematics instructor quoted in a slide: 'Life is beautiful and fair; when you give something, you'll get something'. I'm working hard and my English has been improving greatly; I feel good about it. I'm becoming a better self day by day, and this is enough for me.

[15] T & T Supermarket is a Canadian supermarket chain that sells Asian food.

In later communications, Leon told me that he was very actively engaged in different clubs and part-time jobs, and his social network developed to include a lot of local people.

Winnie realized the importance of self-identification as an international student from China; meanwhile, she was confused about it too.

> One thing that is really confusing is that I feel safe when there are many Chinese international students around. We can't avoid using our native language when communicating with each other. As a Chinese international student, I know how I feel about myself and how I identify myself is very important. But my problem is that I don't know how I should position myself in and out of classrooms…. Am I a Chinese? Yes I am; but I'm a Chinese international student in Canada. I feel uncomfortable when hearing people say this is a Chinese international student. I don't know. I think I could feel the unfriendly hint there.

Stories in this section show the complexity of how the participants were identified and how they identified themselves in Canada, and the discrepancy between being identified and their self-identification was prompted in different ways.

6.4.3. Being Transnational: Finding Home

Several participants expressed their feeling of uncertainty when talking about their sense of home or lack of it in terms of their sense of belonging. To Liushu, her feeling of not belonging on campus was because of the lack of certain factors that she valued in learning.

> Did you notice that there weren't many activities (for international students) at MU? We don't have a classroom for all the classmates taking the same course as in China, and I'm taking different courses with different students. We don't have a class advisor as in China. I went to different classes with different students, many of whom just left after class without talking with each other. I feel like I don't have a home on campus. It's so different from my past.

When she talked about her off-campus experiences, she said:

> I don't feel that I'm a foreigner in Vancouver. There're so many Chinese people in here. I only feel that I'm a stranger when there are few Chinese people. The houses and streets in this city look foreign to me; but if I'm in contact with Chinese people, I feel like I'm still home.

Chen also related her sense of belonging to the number of Chinese people around.

> (How I identify myself) depends on where I am. I don't feel like a foreigner here when there are a lot of Chinese. But I didn't feel I belonged (to Canada) when I travelled to Banff or Victoria where there are less Chinese people. It's very strange that I feel more belonged to Canada when I visited the States.

Chen's sense of belonging was connected to her English proficiency in class.

> Sometimes I feel sad when discouraged in a classroom discussion because of my English, thinking this is not my place anyways. I don't need to care too much because I will go back to China sooner or later. That's where I came from and where I belong. We are not local, and it's ok if we can't integrate into the Canadian society. My English can never be as good (as native English speakers). I sometimes can't follow professors in classrooms no matter how hard I've prepared for that class. Then I'm haunted by the feeling of not belonging (to Canada).

In Sean's accounts,

> International students don't have any sense of belonging in Canada even though our home is here, and we've bought a car and a house here. We just don't have the sense of belonging….I grew up in Shanghai, China, and most of my families and friends are there. I know Vancouver well, and I have friends here too. But I just feel I'm a tourist in the city. I'm a stranger in this country. This is not my place. I still feel I belong to China no matter how far away I am from it physically and how long I've been away from there. I'm just a passer-by here.

Later, he continued to explain the differences between "a sense of belonging" and "a sense of security":

> A sense of belonging isn't the same as a sense of security. I would seek for a sense of belonging, but not the latter. I feel safe when I'm with my parents in China, but this is not what I'm talking about. I can live well by myself in Canada and I feel safe. I don't think I'm lacking anything except for a sense of belonging. I feel close to my fellow international students from China, but we are all tourists in the city; we are all passers-by.

Haotian shared this feeling of not belonging when talking about his involvement in classes and activities. He said that he felt lonely and isolated because Canada was not his place; his unsatisfactory English proficiency strengthened his sense of helplessness and not belonging.

The sense of belonging was related to the students' physical locations, social networks, and English proficiency. The lack of a sense of home and belonging created the feeling of uncertainty among the participants.

6.5. Envisioning the Future: Tension between Going Back Home and Staying in Canada after Graduation from MU

In Chapter 5, I recorded the stories about the participants' expectations for international education that were formed before they came to Canada. Their lived experiences in Canada brought them new visions about their future after they finished their international education. Narratives on their detailed future plans were frequently brought up in the second round of the interviews. Among them, North and Liushu were the only two who were certain about their future: while North would go back to China right after he gained his degree at MU, Liushu was definite that her future was in Canada. Most of the participants were not certain about their future; the uncertainty ran through the narratives of Sam, Zoe, Winne, Kaddy, and Haotian.

Sam's priority in the future was to stay in Canada, and he was working towards this goal in and out of classrooms. However, he was aware that he may have to go back to China. He said,

> My plan is to find a job in Canada after I get my degree. I know it's super hard for an international student to find a job in Canada. I have to stand out in my study and compete with local graduates. That's why I'm working super hard not only in my courses for a high GPA, but in participating in clubs and other activities with local students for the social network. But my English is always my drawback in Canada. I also want to get Canadian permanent residency, which really depends on what kind of a job I can find. But I have to be flexible just in case I fail to find a job here. I'll go back to China of course. Then there will be the problem of reintegration into the Chinese system. You know how hard I have tried to learn to speak English as well as think in English. If I go back to China and become a returnee from overseas, I have to switch and think in Chinese. My English can become my strength. So learning English well will benefit my future no matter where I am. My Canadian credential will help too. But some Chinese companies may not need to hire a returnee from Canada. If a local graduate can do the job, why do they have to hire me? But I can't think too much about this at this stage. Right now I'm trying my best to get ready for the future. And I don't worry about that because I'm back home and it won't be very hard.

Kaddy also prioritized securing a job in Canada and considered going back to China as a backup plan.

> I may go back to China, and may stay here too. If I go back and become a returnee, I won't feel inflated because of my Canadian credential like some other people. I often watch a job seeking show on TV broadcasted in China. Some job seekers with overseas credentials usually asked for very high compensations, and think that was how their investment can be paid off. I won't. I'll show the

employers that I really have learned good stuff from Canada. And I'll show them that my English is native-like, not like some of the job seekers in the TV show who could only speak very poor English. I'm sure my English will be good enough in China although it is never the case in Canada. But going back is my second option, or my backup plan. I first and foremost want to find a job in Canada. To achieve this goal, I will major in Accounting though I don't like it at all. Then the chances are high that I can find a job in accounting and become a permanent resident. Only then will I have the power and right to choose and decide whether I will stay in Canada as a citizen or not.

In a later chat with Kaddy on immigration to Canada, she told me that she had to be selected by the Canadian university in the past, then by the local workforce and Immigration Canada in the future if she wanted to stay here after graduation.

Zoe also used the word "backup" to refer to the potential to go back to China.

> My plan is to get my degree, find a job in Canada, and maybe apply for immigration to Canada. I'll do whatever I can to improve my English, to get good marks in my courses, and to find ways to integrate into the local society. Going back to China is always a backup. I don't think it's hard for someone who has a Canadian degree and can speak English really well to find a job. Although there are numerous people who can get high scores in various English tests in China, I don't think there're that many who can make use of the language to their life and work on a daily basis. I believe that I'm able to find a good job because of my English. I'm sure my English will sound very "English" to Chinese people.

Winnie had similar plans to Sam, Kaddy, and Zoe in getting prepared for both possibilities.

> Before I came, I thought I would be able to become a very fluent English speaker, and could communicate with local people smoothly. Now I know that was a mission impossible. But this doesn't mean that I will stop trying; in fact, I'm working even harder on my English and for any chance of knowing more local people. I have to get prepared especially when my future is uncertain. If I'm lucky enough to find a job in Canada, I'll work hard and prove that I'm a good employee even I'm a Chinese. Or I'll go back. Returnees in China are not as welcomed as before although foreign credentials are worth more than Chinese ones. Coming to Canada is an exchange of my parents' money for a promising future for a better future for me. I hope I have a great future no matter where I will be.

Narratives on the uncertainty about the future of the participants point to two potentials: staying in Canada or going back to China. Although the participants talked in detail about their efforts for the former potential, they did not mention what they would do for the latter one.

6.6. Discussion

I have presented several discrepancies and tensions that the participants of this study encountered in their learning in Canada: the discrepancies between their learning in the Pathway Program and MU content-based classrooms; the tension between what they wanted to learn and what was offered to them in the homestay and church settings; the tension between how they saw themselves and how they were perceived by others—as Chinese nationals, as Chinese international students, and as transnationals; and the tension between staying in Canada and going back to China after graduation. But these are not the only tensions that they experienced. The narratives that I collected include stories of challenges that are well-documented in the literature; so these themes are intentionally omitted in this dissertation. For example, insufficient interactions between local and international students as a concern for international students (e.g., Beck, 2008; Montgomery 2010; Sovic, 2009) were brought up by some participants. Some authors find this is due to the lack of interest in international students and their home cultures among local students (e.g., Brown, 2009; Leask, 2010; Volet & Ang, 1998), while others hold that race and nationality segregate these two groups of students (e.g., Andreade, 2006; Marginson, 2005). Some participants also talked about various struggles in their academic life—a set of challenges which has been addressed by Holmes (2006), Chang and Strauss (2010), Marshall (2010), and Morita (2004), for example, who talk about how international students struggle to participate in classroom interactions at the university level. The participants discussed how their academic writing was not sufficient in their own fields; this theme is examined by Evans and Green (2007) and Woodward-Kron (2008), who write about how international students made adaptations to academic writing using specialist vocabularies in different disciplines. A couple of them also were blamed as lacking in critical thinking, a topic investigated by Melles (2008) and Guo and O'Sullivan (2012), among others. My data confirmed the literature on these themes, and I will not be discussing them in depth because my investigation leads me to the discussion that follows.

I will analyze the tensions that emerged in the stories using the lenses of *Ti-Yong* logic, national, international, and transnational identities, Community of Practice theorizing, and imagined identities and imagined communities.

6.6.1. The *Ti-Yong* Logic

In their comprehensive model of investment at the intersection of identity, ideology, and capital, Darvin and Norton (2015) propose that ideology should be understood as a site of struggle where identity is perceived as enacting dispositions and agency. By using ideology in its plural form, this model offers me the lens to look at how Chinese international students applied the logic of *Ti* versus *Yong*, or learning English for pragmatic purposes, as formed in the Confucian habitus in China, in their learning in the context of Canada.

6.6.1.1. A Good instructor in *Ti* (traditional Chinese culture)

In describing their learning in the Pathway Program, seven out of ten participants ascribed their successful or unsuccessful learning to their instructors and how they were encouraged, inspired, or supported (or not) by them. Their comments on the roles of an instructor are based on the traditional criteria of a good instructor in the Chinese culture, or *Ti* in the *Ti-Yong* logic. They specified some features of instructors that they valued highly. For example, Chen, Zoe, Leo, North, and Winnie thought that the knowledge of and attention paid to each student by the instructors greatly boosted their learning. Sam, Liushu, and Zoe appraised the reasonable push from instructors as motivation in learning. In comparison, when they talked about their experiences in classrooms at MU, they would point out how university professors lacked the desirable attributes of the instructors in the Pathway Program. For example, they mentioned that professors did not support or accommodate international students even when the professors were able to do so. This changed scenario brought new challenges to Sam, Zoe, Liushu, Kaddy and Chen. Though some English academic skills (note taking, outline writing, bibliography writing, etc.) they acquired in the Pathway Program were proven useful, English remained the biggest concern for them in taking courses and getting satisfactory marks in different academic disciplines. Several told stories of how university professors could facilitate a more supportive or hospitable learning environment. For instance, though Liushu acknowledged that “Canadian” professors may try to encourage students by using “great” and “perfect”, she thought it was “insincere” and unhelpful for her learning real knowledge. Liushu felt teachers in Canada either had no knowledge of or care for international students, and that the lack of knowledge was due to their lack of care. Chen

noted that a professor did not do anything to support Chinese international students (half of the class) even though he knew Chinese language well.

The attributes that the participants valued in instructors of the Pathway Program, and that their professors in the disciplines seemed to lack, reflect the students' understanding of teaching in China where it is a highly regarded profession and teachers much respected professionals. The general understanding of the roles and responsibilities of teachers has been greatly impacted by Han Yu, the famous Chinese philosopher who promoted Confucian's concepts of education in the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD). Chinese students rely on teachers not only for knowledge, but also for care, concern, and help; the teacher-student relationship is reciprocal (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997). In this reciprocal relationship, students and teachers take up mutual responsibilities of learning: students respect and obey the teacher, and the teacher teaches and cares for students like a parent (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997). To Cortazzi and Jin (1997), the creation of a culture of learning that "depends on the norms, values, and expectations of the teachers and learners relative to classroom activity" is important (p. 84). It seems to me this can explain why participants in this study pointed out the importance of the individualized attention they received from instructors in the Pathway Program. Knowing each student, in the Confucian concepts of learning, is fundamental to "teach in accordance with the aptitude of learners" (因材施教). The perceived mutual responsibility for learning was partially developed from traditional notions of filial piety in China (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997), and the traditional Chinese teacher-student relationship is said to involve a moral dimension: the roles of teachers go beyond teaching knowledge to include teaching about life.

In their descriptions of disciplinary professors at MU, some of the participants were disillusioned because the professors failed to attend to this reciprocal relationship that they were used to while in the Pathway Program and in China. For example, Chen and Sam emphasized the importance of instructors by considering them as fulfilling the "most valuable role" and being the ones who "play[ed] the biggest part" in the classrooms of international students. Their "push" and the "reasonable pressure" helped Chen and Sam build up their confidence in learning; the inspiration from an instructor led North to make a critical decision on whether to quit his study and go back to China or not. One instructor's support on choosing credit courses for the first semester at MU was also acknowledged by North. These can be interpreted as teachers assisting students to

resolve their doubts on how to learn and on the future direction of their learning. The Pathway Program and the instructors offered access and support for these students to acquire academic skills and knowledge central to learning in this context. These testimonies on the effectiveness of the Pathway Program at MU contribute to the scant research on students in similar programs.

When the participants in this study talked about their unsatisfactory experiences with professors in the MU classrooms, they applied the ideological understanding of good instructors developed in the learning habitus of China. These stories showed that the participants were “governed” by the ideology of learning of their home country when learning in Canada. Kingston and Forland (2008) write about how international students from East Asian countries deal with the clash between their traditional philosophies in academic studies and the norms lying behind the academic and social environment in the U.K., and observe that the inconsistency between their expectations and their experiences was probably because of the tension between collectivist and individualist cultures in classrooms—an observation which this study seems to confirm. The participants in my study lack what Zhu (2016) describes as appreciation of the unique academic learning features of the host country which would help these students to make progress in their learning. Since most of the participants in my study were comparatively new to Canada when the narratives were collected, they may not have had the chance to know sufficiently the particular Canadian academic culture, not to mention appreciating it. What they experienced in their university classrooms showed that the accommodating and inclusive environment in the Pathway Program was not existing in the university classrooms; they had to wake up from the language learning Shangri-la to face the reality in the university classrooms.

These stories on the perception of university professors are different from what I have experienced in my doctoral study. Although there were moments that I could recall when I felt stressed at the beginning of my study, most of the professors that I know are supportive, understanding, and willing to help when I reached out for help. I suggested that the participants seek help more actively in and out of class on campus so that their need and problems are known to the professors. In my view, international students have the responsibilities to show their “aptitude” to the professors when possible, so that both parties could contribute to the establishment of the reciprocal relationship in class.

6.6.1.2. Learning English for Pragmatic Purposes

Homestays are reported to enhance intercultural understanding and facilitate interactions between international students and the local community as international students have more opportunities to communicate with the host community and thus learn local cultures (e.g., Chang, 2011; Lee & Wesche, 2000; Ward, 2001; Zhang & Brunton, 2007). The various ways that homestay can help international students with their language has also been examined by Davidson (1995). The benefit of social integration was addressed by Bruederle (2010), who believes that homestays are a miniature of the larger host community. However, Wong, Homma, Johnson, and Saewy's study (2010) discovers that only ten percent of East Asian students chose to live with local homestays, and among them were only a small percentage of Chinese international students. Among those who did live in homestays, some identified conflicts with the host families as one of the challenges Chinese international students face in Australia (Ramia, Marginson, & Sawir, 2013). Some Chinese international students felt stressed in interacting with their homestays due to English proficiency and cultural differences (Zhang & Brunton, 2007). For international students in Canada, homestay helps improve English and social adjustment, which will build up confidence and satisfaction (Lee & Wesche, 2000). My study demonstrated that there were both costs and benefits to the homestay experience. Two participants in particular made very pragmatic use of the homestay situation specifically to improve their English proficiency.

Both Sam and Liushu agreed that their homestay experiences were beneficial for their English learning and friend-making, though Sam ended up moving out while Liushu was perfectly happy the whole time. Sam regarded his learning at the homestay as the "authentic way" of learning English; he even thought that his communication with the other international students from China was less important than his interaction with the local homestay family. To maintain the chance of learning authentically, Sam accepted the stereotyping of Chinese people (e.g., Holliday, 2005; Holliday, Hyde, & Kullman, 2004) and implicitly consented with the Othering constructs that his homestay family imposed on him; he was in fact conforming with the cultural stereotyping that the homestay family imposed on Chinese people as a whole. This conformity with the stereotyped Chinese, in fact, aggregates his auto-stereotyping as a Chinese (e.g., noisy eating habits constituted very bad table manners that had to be corrected). Sam valued the chances of communicating in English both in the homestay and church and even

spoke positively about the reminder of table manners by the homestay parents. However, he finally decided to leave the homestay because he did not feel comfortable when going to church with his homestay parents. In other words, he moved out of his homestay at the expense of improving his English and communicating with local people. Sam's experiences confirm the three benefits that Ward (2006) discussed in his work on international students and homestay: language learning, informal teaching, and social integration.

Liushu's pleasant experiences with her homestay parents who were originally from Taiwan are similar to those in Han's (2007) study, which shows that shared ethnicity and first language makes the process of interaction easier. Joanna and Harry, the participants in Han's study, immigrated to Canada when they were young. They were popular among new Chinese immigrants because they knew Chinese culture and were caring and supportive. Similarly, Liushu's homestay parents were Chinese, and they spoke Chinese in religious meetings with their friends. But their kids could speak perfect English and they communicated with Liushu in English. What Liushu appreciated was the social networks that the homestay helped her to build up, with many opportunities to interact in English. Liushu understood that her homestay parents intended to convert her to Christianity by bringing her to the weekly fellowship. However, she deliberately ignored their intention for two reasons. First of all, she was not interested in the religion itself. Echoing Sam, Liushu found the Bible stories interesting, and acknowledged the importance of religion in some local communities. But she did not have any intention of becoming Christian; her explanation was that it was not part of her plan of coming to Canada. She had never thought about converting to any religion. Secondly, her homestay parents communicated in Chinese in the fellowships. She chose to hang around with the children in such gatherings because she could speak English when communicating with them. Liushu's narrative on how she made friends with these children in a sense resonates with Hsu, Krägeloh, Shepherd, and Billington (2009) who found that international students may join in religious communities to build social network, though her way of building up alliance with religious groups is more indirect.

Though Liushu did not attend the religious gatherings and go to church for the sake of Christianity, she was impressed that Christians were nice and willing to help. She enjoyed the company of English-speaking children, and was very satisfied with the combination of Chinese food and English language in her homestay. The pleasant

relationship with the homestay family and her friendship with their English-speaking children, especially, exempted her from the frustrations of making friends with local students. After all, Liushu's main pragmatic goals of living with the homestay and going to church with them were to improve her English and make English-speaking friends.

Sam's case of running away from the homestay family is different than Liushu's strategic use of the access to the religious group. Sam's withdrawal from the church activities with his homestay family at first, and moving out from his homestay completely later on, are similar to Han's (2007) finding that more formal church activities lead to less participation of Chinese immigrants with insufficient English proficiency. Though Grace and Timothy, the two participants in Han's study, are different from Sam in age, legal status, life experiences, and expectations of going to church, their cases are similar in the degree of participation in the targeted community they intended to approach. Grace and Timothy aimed to improve their English, build up a social network, and eventually convert to Christianity. For Sam, an 18-year-old (when he first arrived Canada) high school graduate working hard for admission to MU, the primary goal in living with a Canadian family and going to church with them was instrumental: to improve his English and learn the local culture. He admitted living with the homestay was the only time when he felt close to local people and Canadian culture. He felt regretful for the loss; but between sacrificing his ideology and losing the chance to speak English, he chose the latter.

Liushu and Sam's intention to learn English by going to church and participating activities related to religion could be related to Ek (2009) and Han (2007). The female Guatemalan in Ek (2009) participated activities in Pentecostal churches to practice her language skills and building up social network. Han's (2007) dissertation on the language practices and identity negotiations of an immigrant couple in a church setting showed they were offered the chance to English learning, social interactions, and economic life. In deciding whether to participate in religion-related activities with their homestays, Liushu and Sam exerted their agency to stick to their pragmatic goal of learning English. By participating in all religion-related activities with her homestay, Liushu's case in fact was similar to Gu's (2008) study on how three female Christian undergraduate students negotiated and constructed identities related to Christianity. Pauline was converted to Christianity for the linguistic capital that joining the church community would bring about. She identified herself as "practical and goal-oriented"

rather than a real Christian (p. 60). Though Liushu did not consider converting to Christianity, her attitude to religious practices was similar to Pauline's. Even though Liushu did not completely turn her back on the church, she strategically ignored the implicit invitation of her homestay parents to join their Bible studies by sticking to the children's group because of her interest in socializing with the English-speaking children. Meanwhile, Sam's moving out of his homestay and avoiding participation in church activities was also the result of his effort to align with his primary goals of learning English and building up social networks.

Considering the long-held emphasis on the *Yong*, or the utility of English in China, it is not surprising to see that some participants in this study valued the practical function of English (e.g., improving oral English and communicating with local people) over learning more about religious concepts and ideas: they engaged in religious activities as long as the main purpose of doing so would boost their English learning. When such a purpose was not achieved (as in Sam's case), they withdrew completely. It seems to me that there is a mismatch between opportunities offered to Chinese international students as new-comers to Canada and what they desire to gain from the local community at different stages.

6.6.2. Identities

6.6.2.1. Being Chinese: National identities and Patriotism

In interviewing North and Kaddy, I was impressed by their clear and strong claim of their national identities as Chinese, and the love for China after they came to Canada. Such accounts of the self-identification of international students resonate with Montgomery (2010) who suggests that international students may reinforce their feelings for their nations when abroad, and therefore strengthen their alliance with the community of international students (2010). Similar claims were proposed by Coelho, who pointed out that study-abroad experiences may strengthen students' identification with their home countries (1958, cited in Hail, 2015). Love for China, or "filial nationalism" (Fong, 2004) confirms Ward, Bochner, and Furnham's (2001) observation that love for one's home country could be intensified for migrants. North and Kaddy stories also support Hail's (2015) observation of an increased sense of national identity among Chinese international students.

Interpreted as “integral, originary and unified" (Hall, 1996, p. 1) by essentialists, national identity is usually understood as the “unchanging ‘oneness’ or cultural belongingness underlying all the other superficial differences” (p. 4). As discussed in Chapter 2, Phan (2007) suggests that her study participants, migrants from an Asian country, performed oriental identity positioning that incorporated “being” and “becoming”. They were holding on to their ‘being’, ‘a sense of belonging’, or their national and cultural identity while ‘becoming’ more by taking on new identities in the transnational space. I would argue that Chinese international students like North and Kaddy kept their national identity as Chinese while developing other identities as Chinese international students and transnationals, among others. Other participants of this study did not talk about their national identities which confirms Marshall’s (2009) point that there exist varied degrees of holding on to core or root identities and “entrenched essentialist” national identities among migrants.

6.6.2.2. Being Chinese International Students: Questioning the Stereotype

In taking up international education, international students start a process of identity (re)construction (Bass, 2010; Doherty & Singh, 2005; Rizvi, 2005; Waters, 2009) and self-identification in relation to host country communities. In fact, international students, a terminology that often implies negative identities (Grimshaw, 2011), are “Otherised”. As discussed in Chapter 2, Chinese international students are essentialised as silent, passive, shy, teacher-dependent, and lacking in critical thinking (Biggs, 1996; Clark & Gieve, 2006; Ryan, 2013). Though these biased, twisted, and simplistic portrayal of Chinese international students have been challenged by authors from different fields (e.g., Grimshaw 2007; Huang & Cowden, 2009; Jin & Cortazzi, 1995; Watkins & Biggs, 2001), they are still prevalent in Western countries.

North, Kaddy, Leon, and Winnie expressed their awareness of the negative depiction of Chinese international students, explicitly or implicitly. North and Leon believed that they should not be positioned as secondary to native English speakers because of their insufficient English proficiency, which was at least one of the reasons why Kaddy felt inferior at MU. I could see that they were referring to the so-called stereotyped international students from China. They responded to this perspective in different ways.

North, Kaddy, Leon, and Winnie talked about their understanding of being

Chinese international students in Canada. In North's words, international students do not live in "a vacuum", which emphasizes that the challenges they faced extended beyond academic studies. Their stories show that they understood how Chinese international students were "stereotyped" and somehow accepted it as fact. Their lack of comment on being stereotyped demonstrated their passive acceptance of the description and the tendency to internalize the "Otherness" that was assigned to them. To North, Chinese international students were equal with other students as he believed that all people were equal. He critiqued the sense of inferiority that some of his fellow students developed because of their unsatisfactory English proficiency in Canada, and pointed out that being able to speak better English did not make local people superior. By critiquing the living style of some of his fellow students, North implied that too much attachment to the Chinese way of living could only confine these students to their Chineseness and would not help them to integrate and experience Canadian lifestyles. Kaddy's feeling of pride as a Chinese international student would come only from achieving "academic excellence". For her, "Chinese international students" became a negative label that implied that they were inadequate English speakers and job seekers with gloomy prospects in Canada. Leon ignored the label as he believed that he could achieve his goals by working hard. In later communications, Leon told me that he was very actively engaged in different clubs and works, and his social network developed to include a lot of local people. Winnie said she felt safe as there were many Chinese international students on campus; meanwhile, she considered their communication using Chinese as a hindrance to her English learning. She tried to differentiate between being Chinese and being a Chinese international student, and expressed some confusion on how to position herself.

Interestingly, the stereotyped images of Chinese international students are very different from how the participants of this study talked about themselves. For example, Zoe and Kaddy both mentioned that Chinese international students were smart and hard-working, and this perception of Chinese students was typical in their home country. Like Zoe, Sam also believed that learning abroad would not be difficult for Chinese students as they worked hard and were good at math; on the contrary, Canadian students were supposedly not good at subjects in sciences, and did not spend much time learning. These views about Canadian students are as stereotypical as the Western views about Chinese international students. One explanation would be the different

“stereotyping” of Chinese students operating in China: they are represented as hard-working, tenacious, smart, and good at math and sciences while students in foreign countries are usually described as learners who are not good at certain subjects, and who spend too much time having fun. The implied meaning is that Chinese students will be able to succeed in their studies in a foreign university because local students can do so even though “they are not good at math, physics, and chemistry” and they lack discipline. I argued in a different work that Chinese international students held stereotypical views on local Canadian students. However, it seems that the Chinese image of Chinese international students has been overshadowed in Canada by the predominant portrayal of them as dependent, shy, reticent, unable to think critically, and always staying in their “comfort zone” with students with the same background (e.g., Grimshaw, 2007; Huang & Cowden, 2009). I was struck by the degree to which the ideal role models of Chinese international students greatly boosted the spirits of the study participants who seemed to believe, as Sam did, that they could be as good as the positive stereotype circulating in China. The striking contrast between images of Chinese international students within and outside China, I would suggest, is worthy of further investigation in the future. Also, it seems that mutual stereotyping between Chinese international students and local students in Canada is an educational barrier—on both sides. In my view, this mutual stereotyping shows both parties lack knowledge of each other.

6.6.2.3. Being international: Transnational identities

Accepting transnational identities as shifting, dynamic, and not anchored to specific locations or times implies that identities can be concurrently constructed (and reconstructed) across national borders (Phan, 2008). The transnational identities of international students may therefore be seen as reciprocal and co-constructed through daily experiences that reflect both the home and the host nation (Hayashi, 2014). Likewise, according to Smith (2007), international students show “a desire to hold on to their identities” even when they have made adaptations to the new environment in the host country. They therefore develop hybridized identities and subjectivities, “within which students begin to see themselves belonging not to either one country or another, but to one and another” (2007, p. 67). However, some participants in my study expressed feelings of belonging to neither their home country nor the host country. I argue this feeling of belonging to neither country is a form of hybridized identity: an

expression of feeling in-between and belonging to both. The sense of belonging to both their home and host countries confirms Gargano's (2009) concept of "habitus of dual orientation" that transnationals develop when residing here and there simultaneously (Gargano, 2009, p. 68).

The theme of home and belonging and absence of home and belonging emerged repeatedly in the stories of this study. Some narratives showed that Chinese international students were profoundly impacted by living and learning in multiple transnational social spaces, or "transnational social field" in Gargano's words (2009). Liushu, Chen, Sean, and Haotian felt uncertain about their home or where to belong when living in different transnational social spaces. They tried to seek a sense of belonging first to a physical or geographical location (a classroom, a city, or a country), confirming Jackson, Crang, and Dwyer's (2004) finding that location or spatiality was an important factor for transnationals to find the sense of belonging. The participants also turned to a community or a network (students attending the same class, or people from the same ethnicity) for the sense of belonging. By identifying the differences between her present in Canada and her past in China, Liushu positioned herself in the transnational space created by international education in her daily practice. English proficiency became an important factor in deciding her sense of belonging in Chen's case. She actually implied that native-like English proficiency was the key factor for her to gain the sense of belonging to the university classrooms. These stories support Rizvi and Lingard's (2009) idea that transnationals may belong to several locations (physically or imaginarily) simultaneously.

In their stories, terms such as "home", "house", and "families", "here" and "there", "China", and "Canada" are plentiful. In describing his shifted/shifting senses of identities and belonging, Sean used "tourist", "stranger", and "passer-by" that consolidate his feelings of uncertainty. Sean's comparison of international students to tourists reminded me of Bauman's (1996) tourist metaphor to speak of individuals in pursuit of a place they belonged to during the process of identity construction. To Bauman, "in the tourist's world, the strange is tame, domesticated, and no longer frightens; shocks come in a package deal with safety" (1996, p, 29). But this is not the case in this study. The participants encountered various challenges, discrepancies, and tensions in different transnational spaces that they were not familiar with, and coping strategies were not available for them.

As the tourist makes the journey his/her life mode, home becomes a place 'out there' without knowing where 'there' is (Bauman, 1996). Not knowing where home is creates uncomfortable feelings of uncertainty and longing, often referred to as 'homesickness'. Johnathan Matthew Schwartz (1989, cited in Bauman, 1996) differentiated homesickness and nostalgic yearning. To Schwartz, homesickness referred to the recognition of one's belonging to the physical surrounding, "to be *of* the place, not merely *in*" (p. 30), while nostalgic yearning referred to a dream of belonging to a home in one's memory or imagination. Emphasizing nostalgic yearning as an ever-future feeling, Schwartz believed that home carried with it an oxymoron: it is both shelter and prison. The tourist enjoyed 'the placidity of home', but it also sent him on an incessant journey without the need of a home, even in his imagination (Bauman, 1996, p. 31). I have no intention to deny what Bauman meant to convey here—identity is never unified but rather fragmented, relational, and contextualized. However, what seems more important to this study is the sense of *belonging* to the home. In this sense, Bauman perceives travelling as a mode of living with no need for a home, even in imagination; but I argue that people in a state of mobility do have a need for a home, no matter how elusive and imaginary the home is. The feeling of uncertainty will also be shown in their envisioned future, which will be discussed in a later section in this chapter.

6.6.3. Situated Learning

As discussed in Chapter 3, learning, according to Lave and Wenger (1991; Wenger, 1998), is not only a cognitive process of acquiring knowledge and skills, but also involves changing patterns of participation in diverse communities with shared practices. These two socio-cultural learning theorists interpret learning as individually constructed, socially supported, and culturally situated and mediated. The social and cultural milieu, as well as learning contexts, therefore, bear supreme importance in various communities of practice where knowledge is co-constructed by old-timers and new-comers. In this section, I will use Community of Practice as a lens to discuss the learning narratives of the participants in the Pathway Programs and the university classrooms, as well as in the homestay and church settings.

6.6.3.1. The Pathway Program and the University

Stories on learning in the Pathway Program and MU classrooms can be interpreted using the lens of Community of Practice (Wenger, 1998) to capture the changeable, volatile, and sometimes contradicting status of Chinese English learners in tangible communities they tried to approach and enter. As newcomers to the communities of the Pathway Program and MU classrooms, interviewees of this study participated in the learning practices of these two communities to various degrees. It appears that international students go through an unpredictably long process of "entering" the community of a university in host countries, and the official "entrance" they gain from the University is merely part of the process of their "entering" various communities of learning.

In Chen, Sam, Liushu, Zoe, Leo, North and Winnie's narratives, the Pathway Program encouraged their classroom participation through the course design and class delivery. The Pathway Program was designed as an EAP course to help students to improve their overall language proficiency as well as to introduce them to the linguistic conventions and academic skills required for their university study. These stories actually confirm the self-reported effectiveness of EAP courses (Terraschke & Wahid, 2011; Storch & Tapper, 2009) in helping students to increase the formality of their writing (Storch & Tapper, 2009) and other academic skills (Dooey, 2010). However, there is very little research on how the inclusive learning culture in EAP in fact creates a "Shangri-la" for international students, the welcoming but unrealistic learning environment that the Pathway Program created for international students as recounted by Kaddy. The course contents in the Pathway Program were specifically tailored to the needs of international students and the instructors were well-trained and certified with experiences and knowledge regarding how to teach students from non-English-speaking countries. Students enjoyed the learning that was effectively facilitated by instructors. Students were encouraged and given individual attention from English-speaking instructors, who exerted great efforts to create different ways to engage Chinese international students in the community of English classes. In this case, with peripheries of the community being fully open to Chinese international students, learning became "…the vehicle for the evolution of practices and the inclusion of newcomers" (Wenger, 1998, p.13).

Stories that Sam, Zeo, Liushu, Kaddy and Chen shared about their learning in MU academic classes showed a vast difference in their participation in this community. Unlike in the Pathway Program where they were welcomed and offered lots of opportunities to participate in learning activities with abundant support from the instructors, the university classes were open to all students from diverse backgrounds. Professors, the 'old-timers' of this community, did not seem to support international students as much as the instructors in the Pathway Program did as evidenced in the stories narrated by Sam, Chen, and Liushu. The professor in Kaddy's Writing course did not give Kaddy any chance, not to mention support, for her to complete the course. The professor even had an unrealistic and unjustified assumption about her: he thought her English should be at the native-English level. As the significant 'veteran' in the classroom community, this professor not only denied Kaddy's potential to succeed in the Writing Course, but completely shut down her access to legitimate membership in the Writing Course. What seems ironic to me here is that although Kaddy had gained official "entry" to this course, she was literally refused any chance of becoming a legitimate student. Though Zoe offered her story of how a professor invited students to mingle in class by suggesting they greet those sitting close to them, this is a very superficial form of learning, and does not reflect any of the deeper learning practices of the course. The professor in Zoe's account who facilitated interactions between students is the only such case in the stories of this study, suggesting that the engagement of faculty members in an internationalized classroom is largely based on personal perceptions and individual efforts (Friesen, 2012). Kaddy's unpleasant experiences with a local student in class discussion showed that faculties might consider going beyond pairing local and international students in class discussion and guiding the discussion in certain ways. By taking the lead in the classroom to identify and cope with the potential problems that international students may encounter, faculty members could go beyond the social integration of international students, and initiate and support their academic integration (Ryan, 2011). A welcoming and inclusive community of practice in university classrooms that fosters academic integration is possible if international students are not only encouraged but also guided to participate in classroom activities.

There is much literature on the critical roles that faculty members play in the changing academic profession with the influx of international students. AUCC (2008) asserts that "strong interest on the part of faculty members is the single most important

organizational factor to support internationalization". However, studies conducted by several authors (e.g, Beck, 2008; Friesen, 2012; Sanderson, 2008) show that faculty members are insufficiently engaged in teaching international students.

The participants considered the transformation from the Pathway Program to the learning at MU as a process of wakening up, implying that the Pathway Program created in them a sense of unreal community where they were accommodated in terms of the program design and the instructor support. In referring to the Pathway Program as "an imaginary paradise", the participants in this study were actually expressing their disappointment at the teaching and learning in the MU classrooms. This vivid metaphor regarding the different experiences of the participants in these two settings brought me to wonder why the teaching, learning, and support should be so different. I went back to the literature on Chinese international students in Canada, and found that Canadian authors had conducted research on the learning experiences of Chinese international students and how they could be better supported by faculty members. By exploring how Chinese international students conceptualized critical thinking, Guo and O'Sullivan (2012) find that 'criticality' is challenging as a concept and that the participants were confused about the difference between criticality and criticism. The authors emphasize the importance of conversations and cross-cultural understandings in a globalized classroom, and proposed that such programs for international students should integrate their education backgrounds and cultural identities into pedagogy. They also advocated that such programs should promote conversations on educational traditions, cultures, and philosophies so that Eastern values and Western pedagogy could be connected. The six faculty members in Hu's (2010) study endorsed similar conversations to address the academic and cultural problems these professors encountered. They suggested that students prepare and improve their English before coming to Canada and that professors should provide corrective feedback and reinforcing comments in assisting students' learning. Windle et al. (2008) regard the past academic experiences of Chinese international students as integral to their holistic experiences in a new culture, and proposed that faculty members engage in conversations about the students' perceptions of their own goals, their understanding of academic practices, and their strategies for resisting, negotiating or collaborating within both cultures. They could also support the academic learning of international students by challenging the wide-spread stereotyping of Chinese international students (Huang & Cowden, 2009). Following

these authors, I suggest that post-secondary institutions revisit the problematic descriptors of Chinese international students and cultivate a better understanding of the "cultural roots" of their students (Guo & O'Sullivan, 2012, p. 166).

6.6.3.2. Homestay and Church

Looking at the experiences of the participants from a CoP perspective, I can see positioning of legitimate and non-legitimate membership in communities of homestays and churches. As a small community of practice, the homestay family provided opportunities for Sam, who was new to Canada, to participate in the activities conditionally: he had to conform with certain rules, sometimes stereotyping, that the homestay family put on him. What I read in the words of the homestay family is that new-comers have to comply with the established norms of a given community to acquire the legitimized position as a member.

Liushu and Sam's stories are good examples to show the access to the communities of homestay and church was open for them to start peripheral learning. Both Liushu and Sam were agents in their learning (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000) who actively engaged in avoiding becoming Christian though they took different approaches (Wenger, 1998). They both wanted to become legitimate learners in the two settings; meanwhile, they were aware of the identities they were shaping for themselves. In addition, as language learners, they had to negotiate who they were in their own perception and how they were perceived by others in the same community of practice (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). For example, their homestay families just assumed that Liushu and Sam should go to church and join other religious activities with them. Sam's homestay family talked about their assumptions of Chinese people directly, and reminded him of table manners as they believed that Sam should learn the local culture in this way. Liushu, Sam, and their homestays were mutually engaged in "dense relations" based on the homestay families' understandings of "what they are there to do" (Wenger, 1998, p. 74). The strategic participation of Liushu in such activities and the withdrawal of Sam from the relations are different ways for them to "come to voice" (Toohey, 2000, p. 71).

6.6.4. Envisioning the Future: Imagined Identities and Imagined Communities

The future plans that Sam, Kaddy, and Zoe narrated show that they preferred staying in Canada after they gained their degrees at MU; going back to China was mostly their secondary option, or the "backup plan". Winnie did not show such preference, and stated that she would be ready for both possibilities. To achieve their goals for the future, the students specifically highlighted the importance of working hard academically, building up and expanding their social network with the local communities, and learning English well. These stories suggest that the participants are people with multiple identities residing in both the immediate communities (e.g., classrooms and clubs) that they are currently engaged in, but also communities in their imaginations (e.g., successful MU graduates, employees in the local workforce, candidates for Canadian permanent residency, and returnees from overseas in China). Their memberships in the imagined communities are fluid, multiple, layered, and relational, and not just one process that "leads to a unitary membership that moves from 'peripheral' to 'legitimate'" (Song, J., 2012, p. 522). Meanwhile, they exerted agency in deciding which imagined community or communities to join in, and how much to invest in (or divest from) their imagined membership(s) (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007; Darvin & Norton, 2015). In this complex process of negotiating their imagined memberships and belongings, they cultivated the power and capacity to resist their marginalized positions in different communities (Darvin & Norton, 2015).

To be more specific, Sam, Kaddy, Zoe, and Winnie first imagined themselves as members of the community of successful university graduates. They all decided to invest by working hard to complete their academic courses; in particular, Sam and Zoe aimed for "a high GPA" or "good marks". Then they envisioned that they belonged to the workforce in Canada and had gained the critical qualifications (in their understanding) as required, and such imagined belonging brought new emphases to their current learning practices: working hard for their degrees from MU, gaining social skills by building up local social networks, and improving their English. In my view, the interpretation of these qualifications as critical to their future job seeking implies that they tried to meet the unwritten criteria of the Canadian workplace in their imagination. On the other hand, considering academic excellence and a good mastery of English as important to the job market reflects the popular belief in the functions of examinations and the importance of

English in China, which I have discussed in Chapter 2. The last imagery that Sam, Kaddy, and Zoe presented was as eligible candidates for Canadian permanent residency. Among these participants, only Kaddy knew that she wanted to become an accountant and imagined herself as a member of the professional community of accountants. Kaddy showed pragmatism in selecting a major that she did not like only for its potential to make her eligible for permanent residency. Kaddy envisioned herself as a Canadian permanent resident who had the agentive capacity to decide whether to become a Canadian citizen or not.

When talking about going back to China as a less desirable future, they imagined that they belonged to the community of returnees in China. They believed that their envisioned identities as returnees with Canadian credentials and high English proficiency would give them easy access to the Chinese job market, which confirms Ho and Bauder's (2012) finding that returnees to China assumed an easy re-entry to their home-space because of the increased social capital they have gained through international education (cited in Ai & Wang, 2017). Such confidence in securing a job implies the belief of the participants that their international education experience in Canada would enhance their power and status in China. Their confidence was shaped by the neocolonial belief in the supremacy of international education, foreign credentials, and English as a global language (e.g., Pillipson, 1992; Crystal, 2003, 2009) that I have reviewed in Chapter 2. Although Sam and Winnie mentioned potential problems they may encounter in China (e.g., reintegration to the Chinese system and returnees being less welcomed than before), they did not show any intention to exert any effort to work through such problems. This non-investment or an area of investment the participants may ignore intentionally suggests that their investment is selective, and the selective investment is informed by their immediately tangible and imagined communities (Darvin & Norton, 2015). The selective investment/non-investment of the participants regarding future vocationally oriented goals resonates with Chang Y. C. (2016), who found that an international student from Taiwan learning English in the U.S. A. selectively invested in the areas that he believed would bring desirable economic and symbolic values for his future. The participants applied the same selective investment in improving their English. Sam, Kaddy, and Winnie specified that they need to enhance their speaking skills in English; Kaddy implied that her focus was oral English when she said that she would show her "native-like" English to her future employers. Such highlight of oral English

confirms literature that Chinese students usually selectively invest in oral English or their communicative competence (Chang, Y. C, 2016; Chang, Y. J., 2011; Gao, Cheng, & Kelly, 2008; Gu, 2008; McKay & Wang, 1996; Trent, 2008). In addition, the stories on their perceptions of English in Canada and China reiterate the status of English as a global language, and the popular ideology of English in China. Sam thought English was his “drawback” in finding a job in Canada, but would become his “strength” in China. Kaddy thought her English would be good enough in China, but not so in Canada. Zoe believed that her good English itself would secure her a good job in China. Winne thought she had to improve her English for both potentials. The changed linguistic capital shows that capital shifts in value in different contexts especially when ideology is pluralized to include the beliefs of transnationals (Darvin & Norton, 2015). In addition, their assumption that their Canadian education would help them to get a job easily in China shows the increased cultural capital of Canadian credentials.

The supremacy of a Canadian credential, together with its implied increased English proficiency, and the capital of becoming a Canadian citizen explains why my family and friends in China would suggest that I could go back after I gained my Canadian degree and citizenship when I felt challenged in my current living and learning in Canada. To go back to China as a returnee, I have to equip myself with these valued social and cultural capitals. This perception of a foreign credential, English proficiency, and the permanent residency and citizenship in Canada has actually been hiding in my understanding of international education; it guided me in my journey across borders of Canada and China, with or without my awareness.

This pluralisation of ideology also adds to the notion of investment and stimulates more agency and capacity for resistance (Darvin & Norton), which is exemplified in Kaddy’s imagining of herself as a permanent resident in Canada. Kaddy was determined and goal-oriented, and she chose to major in Accounting for the pragmatic goal of gaining permanent residency in Canada. More importantly, she regarded her imagined membership in the community of permanent residents as the site for her to resist her subordinate position as an international student at MU. She thus applied her “agentive capacity to evaluate and negotiate the constraints and opportunities” (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 47) of her social locations (MU currently, and a local workplace in imagination), and created a space for herself to fight against the assigned marginalized position as an international student and as a future permanent resident in Canada.

Participants' stories on their future plans demonstrate the impact of the imagined future communities on their current experiences in Canada and on their past experiences in China. They are guided to acquire knowledge and skills with value and capital as indexed in their imagined communities. Meanwhile, their imaginations are also partially confined by their beliefs and experiences in the past. Therefore, in aligning themselves with practices and views in their future communities, the participants situate their transnational learning practice "in a continuum of past and future communities as they negotiate their membership among the past ones, local ones, and the ones they wish to be part of in the future" (Song, J., 2012, p. 510).

6.7. Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I focused on the experiences of the participants in formal and informal learning settings in Canada. By looking at the various discrepancies and tensions that these students encountered in learning in different settings, I found that they applied the *Ti-Yong* Logic in viewing whether instructors were supportive and in deciding what to learn. Further, the findings show that they have been negotiating their identities as Chinese, as Chinese international students, and as transnationals residing in multiple social fields. They also negotiated their imagined identities regarding their future plans, and exerted the agentive capacities to invest in their desirable future aspirations.

In the next chapter, I will examine the thought-provoking, sometimes heart-aching stories of the participants' efforts as they prepared for and wrote the IELTS test both in China and in Canada.

Chapter 7. Stories about English tests

7.1. The Researcher's Story

Before I came to Canada as an immigrant, I had taken standardized English tests for different purposes. I wrote both the "old" (before 1998) and the "new" TOEFL tests because I once wanted to earn my Master's degree in the United States. I got quite satisfactory scores in both: 657 out of 677 in the traditional test, and 110 out of 120 in the computer-based test. These high English test scores, together with my pleasant English teaching experiences in a university in China, led me to believe that my English was good enough to tackle the general IELTS test for immigration purposes. Indeed, born and brought up in Mainland China, I was imbued with the idea that English tests are effective tools to assess people's language potentials (Niu, 2007). If I could earn very high scores in TOEFL, I could definitely do well in IELTS. In fact, I got 6.5 out of 9.0 in IELTS for general purposes, which was far lower than I had expected.

For quite some time, I had been attributing my unsatisfactory IELTS score to my unpreparedness. I thought I should have got a higher mark if I had spent more time preparing. After I started my doctoral studies, I gradually realized that I had established the connection between test scores and "real" learning since my elementary school education in China. My parents and teachers would equate the scores in academic studies with real learning potentials. Also, I believed that students could achieve a satisfactory score should they spend enough time and efforts in preparation. However, the IELTS test-taking stories from my participants contradicted my assumptions. Several of them could not attain an adequate score despite their prolonged preparation and repeated writing of the test both in China and Canada. For those who finally gained the score as requested by different institutions and/or academic programs, they could not live happily ever after as English would still be the most challenging part in their studies.

Stories on how the participants learned English in the educational landscape of China and Canada have been reported in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 respectively. My initial design of the dissertation was to include the participants' IELTS preparation and

writing experiences as a theme running through these two chapters. Though I was able to separate the stories on IELTS based on the time line, I felt that the flow of the stories on test-taking would be interrupted if I did so. Locations (China and Canada) were specified in the previous two chapters because I intended to highlight the importance of the dimension of places, one of the three in narrative studies. The continuity of English learning across time and space in these two chapters is achieved in the general design of the dissertation. This reminded me of Connelly and Clandinin (2006) when they talk about the analytical task of a narrative inquirer: she should be able to balance and define different dimensions of narratives. In this case, the data suggest that the continuity of the theme on IELTS itself weighed more than the importance of the locations where participants prepared and wrote the test. I therefore decided to document stories related to IELTS test in a separate chapter.

In this chapter, I will investigate my participants' experiences of IELTS preparation and writing in China and Canada. What draws my attention here are the students' experiences and stories that reflect their memories of language tests that went through their past in China and their present in Canada. As discussed in Chapter 2, current research on assessment does not sufficiently address the identity issues of international students as test-takers. Also, their experiences after they passed the test in the university can be "arduous, attenuated and even humiliating at times" (Skyrme, 2007, p. 360). However, since it is generally held that completely abandoning the instrumental function of testing as a gate-keeper is not feasible (Chik & Besser, 2011; Alderson & Banerjee, 2001; Shohamy, 2001), the application of standardized tests in filtering international students has to be revisited.

Bearing this in mind, I follow Schohamy (2001) in understanding tests as value-laden social practice that represents symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1991) and impacts the educational lives, social lives, and identities of test-takers as language learners (Shohamy et al., 1996; Xiao et al., 2011; Xiao & Carless, 2013). Knowing how students perceive tests will inform us of the importance, the use, and the meaning of the tests in students' lives (Shohamy, 2001). Preparing for, writing, and even talking about a test has affected the emotions of test-takers (e.g., Li, Zhong, & Suen, 2012; Murray, Riazi, & Cross, 2012) and their learning at school (e.g., Cheng, Andrews, & Yu, 2011; He & Shi, 2008; Xie & Andrews, 2013). These experiences affect the way test-takers perceive

tests and the way they deal with and understand tests, learning, and themselves as test-takers.

In what follows, I will present the IELTS-related stories of my participants based on three themes: discrepancies between the test strategies for writing the test and the academic learning in the university, taking learning for the test as real academic learning, and IELTS and identities. I then will analyze these themes through the lenses of capital, investment, habitus, identity, and power and resistance of test-taking. The emotions of the participants as related to test preparation and writing will also be discussed. I then conclude this chapter with a short summary..

7.2. Stories on IELTS

7.1.1. Test-coping Strategies and Academic Learning at MU

All the participants in this study talked about the strategies of writing IELTS they learned in IELTS preparation classes in relation to their university learning at MU. Among them, Sam, Liushu, Zoe, and North shared more details on the uselessness of the strategies they worked hard to acquire for the purpose of IELTS test-taking and their academic learning in university.

> After I decided to come to Canada, I went to an IELTS school to prepare for the test. I worked six or seven hours per day for 20 days. That was just the start of my two-year-long IELTS preparation. All language training schools (in China and Canada) are the same, you know. They just want to make money. They just taught me test-taking strategies, like how I could guess a correct answer without reading an article. But these strategies were useless in my academic courses at MU. This is ridiculous. (Sam)

Interestingly, Sam told me that he had known that the IELTS strategies were not helpful in university learning before he started taking courses in the IELTS school in China. But he had to learn the strategies as he needed a satisfactory IELTS score to enter a Canadian university.

> I just told myself to take one step at a time. The first step was to pass the test and get 5.0 to enter the Pathway Program at MU. As for whether these strategies would be useful or not at university, it would be something that I should consider and worry about after I was in. I couldn't plan that far. I even didn't have the excuse to complain (about the uselessness of the test-taking strategies) before I could enter the Program at MU.

Zoe, like Sam, heard from her friends that IELTS preparation courses would be unhelpful for her studies in a Canadian university. However, she said she would not mind learning those strategies as long as they could improve her IELTS score.

> They (IELTS teachers in China) taught us some strategies in reading and asked us to remember some writing templates. The strategies and templates should have helped me because my IELTS scores improved to 5.5 after taking the preparation course in China. But it's true that they are not helpful in my learning at MU at all! One professor once said that she could recognize the trace of writing for IELTS that international students from China usually use in writing, and would intentionally grade those writings lower. She said that using templates in writing was the evidence that these students did not have their own ideas and could not think critically; therefore, they were not ready for learning in a Canadian university at all. I wondered if my writing was graded lower because of this.

In Liushu's case, she attended two different IELTS schools to prepare for the test before coming to Canada.

> When I prepared for IELTS in China, the instructors told me to remember vocabularies using some strange ways that they invented. They said those were very good strategies to expand my vocabulary and boost my score. They also told me to remember a lot of topics for Speaking and templates for Writing…. My IELTS score increased by 1.0 after 20 days of learning in that school. But I don't think I made any progress in my real English there. Later, I went to another IELTS school in Qingdao, and the teaching was no good, either.

When asked why she went to another IELTS preparation school since the first had already somehow disappointed her, she said it was because everyone said she should. It was the only way for most of Chinese test-takers to prepare for the IELTS test.

> You only knew whether the preparation courses were helpful or not after taking the courses, right? When a friend in China asked me if she should take up IELTS preparation classes before writing the test, I said yes of course. If you want to pass the test, go take a class.

In his visit back to China after he gained the offer from the Pathway Program, North regarded taking IELTS preparation classes as a way to keep learning English when in China.

> Generally speaking, I felt what I learned from the test preparation schools were deceitful, not honest at all. Some teachers there would say that I didn't need to finish reading to understand an article, and I just need to know where and how to find answers. But I need to learn something really helpful for my learning at university. They might have their own reasons in teaching those strategies; test-takers can improve their IELTS scores. But to me, am I just going to look for

> answers without understanding a text for my degree? I think they just tried to teach us how to use cheap tricks to get a score but not how to learn in the future. My English can't improve at all. But I still keep taking IELTS preparation courses. Isn't it funny? This is the only way for me to keep learning English when I went back to China for a break. I can only say that it's because I'm an international student and I have no choice but to write the test for a ticket from a foreign university.

English has been challenging to Kaddy. She was emotional almost every time when she talked about learning English. When she did well in her courses, she would tell me happily that her English was improving. When she was not satisfied with her academic performance, she would relate it to her insufficient English proficiency. I could then see sadness and disappointment on her face. She wept a couple of times.

> I thought I could finally feel relieved after I finished my study at the Pathway Program. I passed the English program, and got a satisfactory score in IELTS. I thought my English was good enough for my study at MU. But I couldn't be more wrong. I found English was still my biggest problem…. How could I learn English well? How can I make greater progress? You know how much I love English. But English doesn't like me. I've been working so hard. I went to the learning center for international students, and I met with the learning coaches regularly. But I will have various problems in English at different stages of my learning. I would feel very sad from time to time when I think about my English, and would want to give up. But one or two days later, I would tell myself to turn over a page. The next day would be a new day, and I will keep going.

When the participants realized the discrepancies between what they learned from writing IELTS and its relevance to their academic studies in content areas at MU, Sam, North, Zoe, and Leon questioned the functions of the test, and the application of the test by the university as the gate-keeper for international students to be admitted.

Sam was a reserved boy; usually I could not see much expression on his face. But when he was talking about IELTS, he frowned and kept rubbing his hands.

> I just don't understand why they asked for the IELTS score…. After writing IELTS for four times, I did get the score. It was not only a score; it's the ticket for me to become an MU student. But now my study has nothing to do with IELTS, and what I learned in test preparation doesn't help me in my learning at MU. But I did nothing but preparing for the IELTS tests in the past two years. Then it turned out that what I learned was useless for my university learning. So what's the point (of asking for the IELTS score)? Both my time and money were wasted in working on the test!

North had doubts about the grading of his Writing section in one of his IELTS tests, and believed he should have earned a higher point on that test.

> In my last (10th) IELTS test, I thought I could get at least 6.5 overall, and 7.0 in Listening. Then I did get a 7.0 in Listening… But I only got 4.5 in Writing. I believed that I could get 5.5 at least…. I just felt that there must be some mistakes in the grading, and I could have appealed. But I didn't. Why? What I can say is, ok, this is IELTS. You will never know how an examiner would grade you. The examiner may feel unhappy that day, or they just don't like you. Or they don't like Chinese. I felt angry and despaired at first. But later I just accepted it. What can I do about this? As far as I am concerned, there isn't any test that could really assess the ability and proficiency of a test-taker.

Leon was caught in the dilemma of preparing for the IELTS test and working on the final project in the Pathway Program.

> I got another 6.0 in the designated IELTS test. The rest of the class all got 6.5. But I don't think that it was a failure. Not at all. When I got to know about my score last night, I began to ask myself how much I wanted the 6.5. I heard that international students could be exempt from the compulsory academic writing course with a 6.5 in IELTS. It is a very expensive course, and we won't get any credit from it. I wanted to save money. But I had been very calm throughout the whole process and my classmates couldn't understand my calmness. I just said it would be great if I had a 6.5, but I just don't want a 6.5 out of luck. It's great if I could save the money from taking that academic writing course, but on the other hand, I don't believe I'm ready for any credit Writing course even with a 6.5. I'm glad that I could interpret my 6.0 in this way, but you know I've always been paradoxical. I always thought I should have written the test for another time for a 6.5. My English is as good as, if not better than, my classmates'.
>
> I wouldn't put the blame on the project (that took up my time for preparing for the IELTS test). I've been enjoying my project in the Pathway Program. When my classmates were working hard for the test, I was devoting myself to the final project. As you know, I got the highest score in the project. Isn't it ironic that my IELTS is the lowest? Honestly, I'm still a little disappointed with the IELTS score. But I have to accept the fact anyways. Later, I talked about this with a friend in Australia who just got a 8.5 in IELTS. But he said so what. People with 6.0 or 6.5 are not necessarily inferior to those with 8.5. I agree with him. Besides, what I did for the project in the Pathway Program is very helpful with my presentations at MU.

When talking about the role of MU in requiring standardized test scores to admit international students, Zoe said:

> They (MU) require that international students have to gain a certain score in either TOEFL or IELTS. But do they know how hard international students like me worked for a stupid test? Do they know that IELTS doesn't have much to do with my study in the content area at university? I don't think they do, or this doesn't matter to them if they do know. They just care about how much we pay.

It is the discrepancies between what they learned from writing IELTS and their academic studies at MU that lead Sam, North, Zoe, and Leon to question the function of

the test as well as the application of IELTS scores as the gate-keeper of MU for international students. Getting the official admission from MU brought the sense of achievement to my participants. But they did not foresee that their struggles in English would persist with the officially accepted IELTS scores.

7.1.2. IELTS Test Preparation as English Learning

A common theme among the participants' stories showed that many of them considered their IELTS score as a literal assessment of increased (or not) English proficiency. The following are what Liushu, Sam, North, Leon, and Zoe shared with me on this theme.

"Olivia, I have some good news to share with you. My English improved again!" Liushu announced this news very happily when I met her for coffee at the beginning of her first year at MU. "I took IELTS recently and I gained 0.5 points more!" Seeing the big smile with pride on her face, I said nothing but congratulated her with a big hug. She was not the only participant who equated their IELTS scores with English proficiency. At that time, she had just entered MU after succeeding the Pathway Program. Her score had improved by half a point in the designated IELTS test to exit the Pathway Program.

When Sam knew that he still earned 6.0 in the designated IELTS test, which was the same as the score that placed him in the Pathway Program, he said:

> I had thought that my English must have improved, as I had been living in an English environment and taking classes taught by native English instructors (in the Pathway Program). But I was mistaken. I just got another 6.0, the same as when I entered the program. So My English didn't improve at all. Otherwise my IELTS score would be higher!

North also regarded his IELTS score as reflecting his English proficiency. As mentioned in the previous section, North took IELTS classes in China because he did not want to stop learning English when he was on vacation back home. By doing so, he thought he could improve his language proficiency and get a head start for his future learning at MU. In recalling his 10 times of IELTS writing, North was glad to see that he had improved by 4 points in Listening.

> I wrote IELTS for six times in China, and four times here. I was happy to see that I made progress little by little in my English. For this time, I thought I could get at

> least 6.5 overall, and 7.0 in Listening. Then I did get a 7.0 in Listening, and can you believe that I improved 4 points in Listening from the first time of writing IELTS! I felt proud of myself because of the progress I made in my English. You know I only got 3.0 in my first try. I think IELTS is just a test. It isn't very fair, and is impossible to reflect the real language proficiency of test-takers. The entrance IELTS score in the Pathway Program was 5.0, with a minimum of 5.0 in all four sections. When I was admitted, I felt a little relieved because I could see hope for the first time after I spent one and a half years in Canada. I could hardly see any sign of going to university before that. In fact, I know very well that IELTS is just a test, and it is impossible to reflect the real English level of a test-taker. But I still use the IELTS scores to judge my English because this is how I'm judged in Canada. It is how I was judged before I came to Canada. I always feel like hearing the voices saying, 'Are you good enough? Is your English good enough?' When I got 5.5 in IELTS and then the offer from the Pathway Program, I felt ok, now I'm good enough.

Among all the stories on IELTS scores and English learning, perhaps Leon's case is the most complicated: he earned the highest score in the Pathway Program, but the lowest in the designated IELTS test. Leon could not explain the discrepancy, and he tried to convince himself that spending time on the final presentation rather than preparing for the IELTS test was totally worth it as he enjoyed so much doing the final presentation for the Program. Meanwhile, he was also confused:

> After learning in the Pathway Program for three months, I should have made progress in my English, right? Or how could I do so well in my final project? If the answer is yes, how can I explain another 6.0 in the designated IELTS test? I got this score before I started my learning in the Pathway Program. If my English has really improved, I should have got a higher mark in IELTS, as well.

Zoe also made an implicit connection between the test score and academic studies at MU. "I know without an English test score, it would be difficult for international students to survive academic studies in the university. But does it mean that a 6.5 in IELTS would guarantee success? I don't think so." She borrowed a metaphor one of her instructors in the Pathway Program made between writing IELTS repeatedly and standing on a scale:

> An instructor in the Pathway Program told me that IELTS test was like a scale. You stand on the scale today and it shows 6.0; if you do it again the next day, it probably would become 6.5. So if you get a higher score in writing IELTS repeatedly, it doesn't mean that your English proficiency has improved. It is your IELTS writing strategies that have improved. She was right; but at that time, I just cared about the score itself and didn't mind whether it was my English proficiency or the writing strategies that improved…. I didn't improve my English in the real sense, and had never thought about how to learn a language (when I prepared for IELTS test).

In addition to equating IELTS test scores to real learning in the narratives, the participants also related the marks with who they were, which I will discuss in what follows.

7.1.3. IELTS and Identity: Kaddy and Zoe

This section will present Kaddy and Zoe's stories specifically on their lengthy IELTS test preparation process and repeated test writing experiences. These stories show how IELTS tests informed and shaped the self-identifications of international students like Kaddy and Zoe as test-takers.

7.1.3.1. Kaddy- Marked by Marks: "Am I not a Good Girl?"

Kaddy was the participant that I met most often during and after my data collection. I still remember that we met for the second interview in a coffee shop on campus.

> After I decided to come to Canada for international education, I wrote the IELTS test for the first time. That was the start of my IELTS preparing and writing life. Oh my. I could never forget my experiences during that period of time. Do you know how many times I wrote IELTS? Five times! I even flew to another city to write my first IELTS test ever. It happened because the city where I was attending university didn't have any spot at the date I wanted to write the test. I need the test score for coming to Canada or I would miss the deadline of application for the Pathway Program.
>
> I got 5.5 in my first try. I wrote IELTS for the second time in Tianjin and I got a 6.0. But I was aiming for 6.5. With a 6.5, I could get enrolled in the university directly without taking the Pathway Program. Then I took IELTS for the third time. It was in November, and I was running a high fever during that week.
>
> Before that, I believed that I was very strong-minded and could handle all kinds of difficult situations in my life. But I was wrong. I actually called my parents and told them I couldn't bear it anymore. The IELTS test was hard and I was under great pressure. My dad went to visit me. It was a shame. I shouldn't have made my parents worried as they are always busy with their business. I'm not a good daughter. I took my third test on a Saturday and it was 6 again….
>
> Then I came to the Pathway Program at MU…. Writing IELTS tests is expensive, and coming to Canada for international education is more expensive. So I'm under great pressure. I kept working hard on IELTS while taking courses in Pathway Program and then I wrote IELTS for the 4th time. Another 6.0 made me collapse literally. …. I was shocked at the score, and kept crying and couldn't stop. I felt hurt and miserable. I'm a good girl and I'm very nice. I would help

> homeless people on the street and buy food for them. When I didn't have enough money to buy food for both of us, I would only buy food for the homeless.
>
> So why did I have to go through this? It was not that I didn't work hard. If I had been very careless with my study and put little effort in preparing for the test, I would deserve the punishment from the heavens. But I've been so good and hard-working. Why am I punished by not being able to get the extra 0.5? I just want 0.5 more. I'm just asking for that much. I was very depressed and frail. I would start crying whenever I thought about IELTS. Then I went to talk with every instructor and asked them where my problems were. I needed their help to find out why I couldn't improve…. I had been working so hard! I cried when meeting them. Then I was awakened up by the words of one instructor. He said, it was your choice to come to Canada for international education, and if you were not ready to face all the problems, why are you here? Then I thought he was right. I began to reflect upon myself, and realized that I didn't work as hard as I had believed. I wasn't as good as I had believed.

Kaddy quivered as she told me her stories and I could feel her effort to hold back her tears. Though she felt better and thought she was not "that bad" after she got her 6.5, her good feeling did not last long because the challenges of English in her MU classrooms followed. In my recording, there were pauses when she tried to calm down. There was a longer pause after she finished the above words. In fact, I could not look her in the eyes at that moment as my eyes became moist too. This was just one of the many scenes when both of us were moved and could not keep talking without either a pause or change of the topic.

When I felt inspired by her questioning on her unfair experiences in taking IELTS, she stopped to reflect that it must be her own problem that she did not get a higher score. When an instructor told her that she had to face and solve all the problems by herself as it was her decision to come to Canada for an international education, she agreed immediately and believed the source of her problems was that she herself did not work hard enough. What she did after that was to work even harder by spending longer hours in the IELTS preparation.

7.1.3.2. "I'm a Loser!": Zoe

Among all the participants of this study, I have known Zoe the longest. I was working in an IELTS preparation school as a part-time instructor when I met her. It was a year before we met again in the Pathway Program.

> I don't remember how many times I wrote IELTS. At least 10 times I guess. The IELTS organization institution and IELTS training schools owe me a medal: I've

> spent so much time and money in preparing and writing this one test! And I'm still working hard for a 6.5. I know without an English test score, it would be difficult for international students to survive academic studies in the university. But it's so hard. It's not only about time and money. I think I've been under great pressure, and this is the most painful part. Without the score I can't see any hope. I can't get enrolled at MU to start my dream of graduate studies. I can't see any future…. Sometimes I think it's a mistake for me to come to Canada. I could have lived comfortably with my parents and earned a good salary in my job in China. But I can't go back, right? I don't want to give up and go back without getting my degree as planned. Or I'm a loser. I didn't come to Canada to become a loser. But I think I am a loser anyways because I can't get that score. I need the score to move on, and I need the score to show that I'm not inferior to other people. If other people can get a 6.5, why can't I? So I have to keep working on IELTS until I get it.

This excerpt is from my first meeting with Zoe; then I did not hear from her for about a year, when one day she sent me a text message telling me that she got admitted in a second degree program in Economics at MU. We met for coffee; and she told me that she eventually became a "loser" in writing IELTS.

> Looking back, I don't think I should have spent that much time and money (on writing IELTS)…. I didn't think of anything else except for taking IELTS preparation courses and registering for the test. I registered for all the IELTS tests that a test-taker is allowed to write in a certain period. It was not only about time and money. It was more about how I felt. There was only one thing in my mind: prove that you're not a loser by gaining a higher IELTS score. Then I was forced to give up my plan of getting an MA in Communications because I couldn't get the desirable score in IELTS. I decided to take a different way – I was forced to I should say. I went to a college for a year, and then I applied for a second degree without an IELTS score. It was a hard decision to make, but later I came to terms with myself. Moreover, my learning in the college was very satisfactory. In fact, I found I could make greater progress in English while taking courses in a content area. Only then did I realize that I was probably not a loser. It was only that writing IELTS repeatedly under great pressure didn't work out well for me. Now I just regard all the time and money spent on IELTS as part of the growing pain in seeking an education in a foreign country.

7.2. Discussion

In proposing an expanded model of investment, Darvin and Norton intend to make use of it as "a normative set of ideas" that are "constructed by symbolic power or world-making power" " (2015, p. 43). Such power creates different models of inclusion and exclusion in which learners are judged and positioned. By integrating ideology, this model can not only enable the examination of power, but also how power is structured

so that the entry to a certain space may be prohibited to certain people. I employ this model to explore the structure of power in the space of the IELTS test system.

7.2.1. Capital, Field, and Investment

In this section, I will use the concepts of capital, field, and investment as explanatory constructs to examine narratives on the discrepancies that the participants experienced between their preparation for the IELTS test and the academic learning in the classrooms. As discussed in Chapter 3, language learners, according to Norton, invest in learning a language to gain symbolic resources (e.g., language, education, and friendship) and material resources, or various forms of capital. All practices that language learners perform as social actors are within the field that they dwell in. Capital or resources in that field will frame power, and bring recognition and benefit to the actors. But as capital is fluid, dynamic, and subject to the ideology of a specific field (Darvin & Norton, 2015), the capital that language learners invest to gain in one field may not be as valuable in another. I understand all the IELTS test-related experiences of my study participants before entering MU as happening in one field, and the MU classrooms as another. When the participants moved into the field of the university after they achieved the satisfactory IELTS scores, those test-coping strategies, for example, the capital that enabled them to pass the gate-keeping test and gain the power to get into MU, turned out to be largely irrelevant, if not useless, in the new field of academic study in the university. Whichever academic field they entered, they had virtually no power. Those who control the fields, I argue, are not aware of, nor concerned about, this lack of power.

The learning paths of the participants in this study have been predetermined by the different levels of test scores that different academic programs or institutions require: 5.0 to enter the Pathway Program, 6.0 in the exit IELTS test plus success in the program to enter MU, and 6.5 to be exempt from the non-credit language course for international students whose IELTS score is lower that 6.5. In Zoe's case, she needed 7.0 in passing the Pathway Program to enter an MA program. The 5.0, 6.0, 6.5, and 7.0 are different gate-keeping thresholds that stood mercilessly along the learning path of this group of international students. More importantly, the test requirements framed their understanding of the IELTS scores. Some (Liushu, Leon, Zoe, and North) believed that their English proficiency would be improved with the increase of their IELTS scores,

though Sam, Liushu, Zoe, and North realized there were great discrepancies between what they learned in test preparation and what was expected in the academic learning at MU.

IELTS stories showed that these participants as language learners invested immensely in preparing for and writing IELTS test across borders both in China and in Canada. Their investment included lengthy preparation (ranging from one to four years), costly expense in taking preparation courses, and writing the test multiple times (ten times in North's case, and more in Zoe's) in different locations (Kaddy flew to another city in China, for example). The great impetus behind their investment was their belief that a certain score in IELTS would lead them to certain capital they desired, and allow them access to the communities they wanted to enter: the Pathway Program first and then MU. Some of the participants worked for a higher score either to enter an MA program (Zoe), or to be exempt from an expensive non-credit language course at MU (e.g., Leon and Kaddy). In working hard to achieve IELTS marks, they in fact considered these IELTS scores as symbolic resources what would enable them to enter MU as legitimate students with increased symbolic power. Norton (1995, 2001) has written about how language learners invested in their social identity when they invested in a target language. When participants in this study spent time and money in preparing for the IELTS test, what they worked hard to achieve went beyond the grade itself. They were hoping to get the "ticket" (in North's words) to a desired college or university, where they could gain and increase their symbolic resources and get the credential. Eventually, the credentials would transform into forms of cultural and social capital that would enable them to find good jobs, and/or to travel freely between borders, and live a different life they desired, as discussed in Chapter five.

Stories on the investment of the participants in test preparation are rich in test-coping strategies that they acquired in IELTS preparation schools or classes. Sam, Liushu, Zoe, and North found that the strategies they learned for writing IELTS were not useful in their academic learning at MU. In Sam and Zoe's cases, they had known that the strategies they gained would not help their studies in the university; they invested in those supposedly useless strategies to enter the Pathway Program first, and MU later. Sam thought that he did not have the power to complain when he was outside of the field of the university. To Zoe, her academic study was in a sense negative affected because when she used the writing template that she learned in writing IELTS, the

professor thought she lacked critical thinking and gave her a lower mark. Although they did get the coveted scores that they needed after their investment in the test, Liushu did not regard what she learned for the purpose of IELTS as real learning, and North did not believe his English had been improved.

Taking IELTS preparation courses also seems to me an investment that the participants made to win access to different imagined communities. When they started preparing and writing the test, they made the investment for their potential identity as international students in Canada. After they came to Canada, they invested to enter the Pathway Program first and MU after that. Moreover, they intentionally invested in strategies that might help in IELTS test writing; however—except for Kaddy's choice to take as business writing course—the study participants did not say much on how they invested in learning at MU. They came to the university with the expectation that their English proficiency as demonstrated by the IELTS test scores was sufficient to succeed in learning in the university, and the strategies they gained in preparing for the test whould be useful for their university learning. Such strategic investment in different learning settings comprised their efforts to get legitimate access to and participation in different communities. Their selective investment resonates with Norton's concept that investment underscores how agency and identity work when language learners are engaged with the task at hand, which, in this case, was preparing for the IELTS test (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Also, their strategic investment shows that the investment of language learners could be "complex, contradictory, and in a state of flux" (Norton, 2013, p.159). Such strategic investment also confirms Chang's (2012) suggestion that international students in U. K. used their agency "to fight their academic battle" (p. 228). Although the test-tackling strategies were important for the participants of this study to gain satisfactory IELTS scores, such strategies were not convertible in the field of MU classrooms; this is why most of the participants found the strategies they learned for IELTS were not helpful in their learning in the community of MU classrooms.

Some participants equated their improved IELTS score with their English learning. Liushu, who exclaimed that her English was improved because she gained half a point in another try, later judged that her English had not improved when she got another 6.0 in exiting the Pathway Program, the same score as when she entered the program. North and Zoe's understanding of their performance in IELTS and English learning is inconsistent. Though North knew that an IELTS score could not reflect the

English proficiency of a learner, he later made a self-contradictory statement by saying his English had been improving since his Listening part of the IELTS test improved by 4.0 points. In particular, he understood the increase of his IELTS score as progress in his English, of which he felt proud. Zoe did not think a satisfactory IELTS score would guarantee her academic success at MU at first, but she said that international students would not be able to survive academic studies in the university without a 6.5 in IELTS. I would suggest that such inconsistency in understanding learning for IELTS as real learning reflects the confusion those test-takers have regarding the IELTS test and the entire testing field. The test-taking industry seems to lead students to believe that test preparation will improve their English; test-taking becomes a proxy for learning and the test score becomes a proxy (an awful one) for English proficiency.

The equation of test scores with real learning as presented by some of the participants could be tracked in my own learning experiences too. As I mentioned earlier, I was admitted to the university as a *Baosong* student and felt inferior to those who entered university with good grades in *Gaokao.* The same equation led me to my pride in my TOEFL scores. Indeed, this equation largely helped build up my confidence that I would have no problem pursuing my doctoral degree in Canada. When the scores that earned me access to the doctoral program failed to assure me smooth learning, I began to ponder the roles of tests in China and overseas.

Inspecting the roles of Western tests in China, Niu (2007) points out that the general public in China were obsessed with exams and misled to believe that tests were effective in evaluating people's English proficiency and potential. I propose that such confusion between learning for tests and learning for academic purposes shows the impact of Chinese people's obsession with exams. However, since IELTS combines the power of English and of testing and is used to determine access to universities, test-takers will exert every effort to pass it even when they understand tests as unconnected to "their perceptions of 'true' and 'real' knowledge" (Shohamy, 2013, p. 228). The power of tests and how test-takers may resist it will be discussed in detail in the next section.

I found that literature on IELTS preparation courses was limited. All of my study participants admitted that the strategies they learned from different IELTS preparation courses helped them in earning higher IELTS test scores. This confirms Brown's (1998) point that an IELTS preparation course is effective in helping learners to reach higher

scores. But Green's (2007) finding was different when he compared a test-driven IELTS preparation course with an EAP teaching class: there was no evidence showing the advantages of the test-coping class in helping students gain higher IELTS scores. Gan (2009) found that students who have taken the IELTS preparation course could narrow the gap in their English language proficiency at university level. In the same study, he also found IELTS preparation classes may bring inspiration for students to keep learning English after class, which was partially supported in North's case when he mentioned that he took such classes while in China to keep learning English. It was not clear what motivated him to do so, though.

Leon's attitude to the fact that he scored the highest in the final project in the Pathway Program but the lowest in the IELTS in his class changed from being ironic to acceptance, and then to questioning. He thought he was not inferior to his classmates whose IELTS scores were higher than his. What is more important is that he valued his time and efforts in working on a project at the Pathway Program, as he believed that the investment was worthwhile for his current identity as a university student at MU. This narrative by Leon supported literature arguing that EAP courses were not effective in helping students write IELTS test and partially coincided with Brown's (1998) observations. After comparing the outcomes of IELTS results between an IELTS preparation course and EAP course, Brown concluded that EAP courses are not as effective in helping students in the IELTS test than the IELTS preparation course. Such differences may be explained by the vast differences in teaching focus, content, and approach (Read & Hays, 2003) of the two types of courses.

7.2.2. Identity, Power, and Resistance

All the participants in this study wrote IELTS tests multiple times; North and Zoe could hardly remember how many times they wrote the test. As discussed earlier, they felt they should put all the blame on themselves in failing to gain satisfactory scores as required by different levels of learning in Canada. In Kaddy and Zoe's cases, they perceived their academic identities and who they were as learners based on the scores they earned in writing IELTS tests, a demonstration of the power of the tests. When writing IELTS for the third time under pressure, Kaddy got sick and called her father. Her father then took time out of his busy schedule to visit her, which made her think that she was not a good daughter. This in fact shattered her perception of herself as a nice girl

and a filial daughter. Another 6.0 in IELTS in her fourth try caused Kaddy to mentally collapse; she felt that she was not “as good as” she believed, and that she did not work as hard as she thought. Her self-perception as a good and hard-working student was thus smashed. For Zoe, the unsatisfactory IELTS test scores led to the perception of herself as “a loser”, and one who was “inferior” to other people with higher IELTS scores. In a later reflection, she regretted the time and money she invested in preparing for and writing the test. Seeing no hope of getting a desirable score to enter her dream MA program as planned, Zoe took a different path: she went to a college and transferred back to MU for a secondary degree. Her self-perceptions as “a loser” were erased only after she was a successful learner in that college. Zoe’s case also shows how she “ran away” from the IELTS test and found sanctuary in taking courses in a college. Relating to the discussion in chapter 5 on how my participants undertook the journey of international education to escape the competitive *Gaokao,* Zoe’s experiences show that international students have to keep finding sanctuary, though it is unlikely that there is a sanctuary that could ease all the worries and concerns about language learning for international students.

Literature on identities of international students as IELTS test-takers is limited. Shohamy (2001, 2013) asserts that the field of modern language testing regarded test-takers as deficient with subtractive identities, and called for testing methods that could “reflect identities and proficiencies” of test-takers (2013, p. 235). Brown and McNamara (2004) looked at the understanding of test-takers of the IELTS test, focusing on the connection between gender identity and their scores. Although the narratives of this study did not show much connection between gender and my participants’ IELTS test scores, my findings confirm these authors’ claims that test-takers internalize their sense of self based on performance in the test. Lazaraton and Davis (2008) suggest that the identities of test-takers are fixed rather than “plural and context sensitive”, which I disagree with. From the narratives of this study, I could see that as test-takers the participants did change in how they looked at themselves during their long process of writing the test repeatedly.

As described in the previous section of this chapter, the participants realized the discrepancies between what they learned from writing IELTS and its relevance to their academic studies in content area at MU. The expensive, time-consuming, and painful process of IELTS preparation and writing that my participants went through brought

confusion to their learning and doubt on their investment in learning for the purposes of passing the test. Some of them (Sam, North, Zoe and Leon) questioned the power of the test as a gate-keeping mechanism used by the university: Sam thought it did not make sense for MU to be using such a score to admit students. When North claimed that no test could really evaluate the real English proficiency of a test-taker, he questioned the unbreakable power relations between examiners and test-takers; however, this was a contradiction of his earlier statement that improvement in IELTS score meant progress in English learning. He also brought up how an IELTS examiner could be subjective in grading test-takers, which resonated with Brown (2003) when he wrote about how IELTS test examiners could affect the performance of test-takers by eliciting information from them in a certain way. The potential that an examiner may be subjective in grading test-takers, as North understood it, was explored by Brown and McNamara (2004) as well who found that two IELTS test interviewers were different in grading the same test-taker, and showed how the subjectivities of the interviewers could affect the test performance of a test-taker. North also believed that the emotions and personal preference of an IELTS interviewer could also impact the test-taker. Furthermore, his feeling of helplessness was explicit when he said a test-taker would never know how he had been graded. North's questioning reminded me of Kunnan's (2008) work that advocated the examination of "socio-economic-political issues" in testing (p. 14) and the contextual exploration of the fairness of tests. The cultural backgrounds and ethnicities of test-takers were brought up by Camilli (2006) who proposes that all test-takers should be treated fairly, although Kunnan would disagree saying that it is hard to do so when the entire system is plagued with inequitable power dynamics, and with intentions that do not serve the students (2008). These stories also confirm Shohamy's (2001, 2013) and Yucel and Iwashita's (2017) assertions that the current application of standardized language tests in deciding the access of international students to tertiary institutions puts international students in disadvantaged positions with barely any space to negotiate. This also exacerbates the already unequal treatment of international students in host countries. Further, the application of language tests reinforces the internalization by some international students of a self-image as deficient learners. The existing discourse of international students as problematic learners is therefore strengthened and perpetuated.

When language tests are used as a filter to determine who has the chance to get into an educational institution, or "as a rite of passage" (Shohamy, 2001), what these tests measure are the social, cultural or linguistic capital of test-takers, but not their academic abilities. As demonstrated above, participants in this study have to earn different scores in IELTS in order to gain access to different learning communities. In pursuing the dream identities of an international student in the Pathway Program, and at MU, my participants perceive IELTS test scores as tickets without which their pursuit of academic qualifications is impossible. I would argue that test scores are transformed into cultural capital that my participants keep seeking. Their entrance into different levels of learning is solely decided by the capital, or the test score, that they possess. The increase of test score will help accumulate capital, which will lead to attainment of more cultural capital: the admission to university. As Shohamy proposes, the IELTS test functions more than an assessment tool as it decides the learning paths of international students while shaping how they perceive themselves as language learners and test-takers. My study proves how this group of Chinese international students as language learners and test-takers are shaped by the IELTS test-taking experiences. More importantly, their understandings of themselves as Chinese international students are impacted by the gate-keeping test-taking experiences. The test score that enables them to get in did not really help them, as they then still have real problems in their various classes at MU.

As depicted above, some of my participants (Sam, North, Zoe, and Leo) questioned the function of IELTS test as the gate-keeping mechanism of the university, as well as the lack of knowledge of the institution in adopting such an entrance requirement. However, while acknowledging the problems of tests (e.g., unhelpful for academic learning in the university, misleading in raising expectations that higher scores mean higher English proficiency), all of them expressed their helplessness and felt they had no choice but comply and write the test. Moreover, their realization of the problems of the test only came after they were admitted by MU, which suggests international students seem to be unaware of the problems of the test during the process of struggling to prepare for and write IELTS. Their unconditional compliance to the test was most telling in Sam, Zoe, and Liushu's cases as they decided to take IELTS preparation courses even though they had heard that these courses were irrelevant to their future learning in university. IELTS-related narratives vividly showed how the participants were

forced to learn to “play the testing game” (Shohamy, 2007, p. 523) that was not “under their control” at all. They also suffered from the “the detrimental consequences” of unsatisfactory test performance, which transformed them into “winners and losers, successes and failures, rejections and acceptance” (Shohamy, 2007, p. 523). It is evident that the participants as test-takers and international students have internalized the irresistible power of tests, and are rendered invisible and voiceless in the hegemonic relationship between tests and test-takers.

The study participants have invested immensely in the test; they also have encountered many challenges in preparing for and writing the test. In her work coauthored with Stein (1995), Norton reported on a project using a reading passage for different purposes: first as part of a pilot test on the English proficiency of students applying for pre-admission to a university, and then as a topic for discussion following the test. They found that students would interpret the passage as a simple story in the test, while reading it symbolically prior to the discussion. As the test was related to academic success and future opportunities, students would conform to the test because they were powerless as test-takers. There was no room for them to show their resistance. However, in the discussion section, students became “informed, powerful, community members” who could interact and form solidarity with other students. In writing a test, my participants in this study, together with other international students who have to achieve a certain score in a language test to become a legitimate student in the host universities, are “isolated and silent” in writing IELTS (Norton, 2013, p.108). By providing to the participants the space to talk about their IELTS test related experiences, I hope I have been able to retrieve the voices of test-takers that were muffled in writing the test. I argue that test-takers can be silent; individual test-takers fumbling in writing tests alone suffer from great pressure that may lead to their undervaluation of themselves as whole beings. By sharing their stories of writing language tests, test-takers could form solidarity with each other in understanding the test and themselves. More importantly, the voices of the test-takers on their unpleasant experiences will become “evidence [of] the power of tests and the detrimental decisions they lead to for test-takers” (Shohamy, 2014, p. 1). Meanwhile, these accounts also offer stakeholders in the field of testing an opportunity to become aware of the impacts of the tests on test-takers so that they may form different perspectives on test features.

7.2.3. IELTS and Emotions

As shown in the narratives, IELTS stories have been constantly shaping both the learning and identities of the participants who believe IELTS test scores determine their well-being as test-takers (Shohamy, 2001, 2014; Green, 2006). But the effects do not stop here; their emotions are also affected. Leon felt “a little disappointed” with the IELTS score especially when he realized he had scored the lowest in the class though he did the best in the final project in the Pathway Program. Kaddy used “shocked”, “hurt and miserable”, “under pressure”, and “depressed and frail” in recalling her IELTS preparation and writing process, though she said that she was “satisfied” with her test performance after she was admitted to MU. North felt anger and despair. These experiences reflect Shohamy’s (1998) observation that test-takers could experience fear, pressure, and doubt when they prepare for high-stakes standardized tests. Among other negative emotions, Triplett and Barksdale’s (2005) participants showed anger in talking about their tests. Huhta, Kalaja, and Pitnakanen-Huhta (2006) found their participants experienced stress in test preparation. Data from Puspawati (2012) show that negative emotions were visible when the participants were talking about tests; in writing the test, there was stress, anxiety, and nervousness. My study confirms a strong thread of evidence highlighting the emotional toll of high-stakes tests on international students.

There are authors who have observed positive emotions among particular groups of test-takers. For example, Murray, Riszi, and Corss (2012) find that the participants with higher test scores responded positively to tests, and Gan, Humpreys, and Hamp-Lyons’ (2004) participants with satisfactory English proficiency scores developed a positive attitude to tests. In both studies, students with unsatisfactory scores respond negatively to tests. This finding is supported by other authors investigating preparation experiences of IETLS test-takers (e.g., Huhta, Kalaja, & Pitkänen-Huhta, 2006; Xiao & Carless, 2013). In my own study, most of the participants in this study just showed relief after successfully completing a test rather than positively commenting on their higher scores.

Darvin and Norton (2015) suggest that emotions play a role in an individual’s subject positioning. Although the participants in my study mostly experienced negative emotions while preparing for and writing IELTS, their stories reflect feelings of both powerlessness and of resistance as they struggled to position themselves as test-takers.

7.3. Chapter Summary

I started this chapter with my autobiographical account of test-taking experiences, then moved on to record IELTS stories on three themes: discrepancies between the test strategies for writing the test and the academic learning in the university, taking learning for the test as real academic learning, and IELTS and identities in Kaddy and Zoe's accounts. In the discussion of the stories, I used the lenses of capital, field, investment, identity, and the power of tests. I also explored test-takers' emotions. I conclude that IELTS has much more of an impact than a test should carry, shaping how test-takers perceive themselves as test-takers and language learners.

Chapter 8. Navigating between Different Educational Landscapes, Switching Multiple identities: Revisiting and Reimagining

> *Strangely, the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder…. The foreigner comes in when the consciousness of my difference arises, and he disappears when we all acknowledge ourselves as foreigners, unamenable to bonds and community. (Kristeva, 1991, p. 1; cited in Montgomery, 2010, p. 39)*

8.1. The Researcher's Story

It was in the winter of 2016, the coldest winter with the most snow since my family and I came to Vancouver, that I started compiling the final chapter of my dissertation. It has been so long since I embarked on the journey of my doctoral studies that I will not bother to count the years. A day that I do recall clearly was when my son asked me if I would be able to finish by the time he would be starting university; I was walking the first-grader to school when the conversation took place. He is a diligent student, keen to learn, and has a lot of ideas; and the topics we have been discussing while walking or driving to school and various classes after school have been changing. For a while, he took MU as his dream university as his mom was studying and working there. Later, he checked with me cautiously to see if I would be fine if he aimed for a different university: first the University of British Columbia, then the University of Toronto, the University of California, and now the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He is now twelve, the age when I went to boarding school.

I had told my son bits and pieces of my life in the boarding school when he was younger, and told him more this year. My life and study about thirty years ago in a small town more than five thousand miles away is very much beyond his comprehension; but he was in tears when I told him how homesick I was. I missed my parents, the house we lived in, and the big front yard with various flowers and vegetables throughout the year. It seems I keep coming back to this memory.

My parents moved to Qinghuangdao, the city where three of my five siblings and their families live, after I went to university. I would still pay occasional visits to the small village; the house and the yard were still ours until my parents decided to sell it to a close relative. I then started calling the house my old home where my eighteen years of memories were harbored. My physical distance between the old house and where I am has become longer and longer: from half an hour of bicycle riding, to ten-hour of train travel, and to twelve-hour flight plus four hours of driving. Most importantly, my travel back involves border crossing between Canada and China. My feeling of homesickness gradually tapered off and shifted to nostalgic yearning, a dream of belonging to home in my memory or imagination (Schwartz, 1989, cited in Bauman, 1996). Schwartz interprets homesickness as the recognition of one's belonging to the physical surrounding, "to be of the place, not merely in"(Schwartz, 1989, cited in Bauman, 1996, p. 30). It is the sense of belonging to the home, no matter how elusive and changeable the home is, that matters to me. In this sense, Bauman perceives travelling as a mode and there is no need for a home even in one's imagination; but in my view, people in mobility have their need for a home, no matter how elusive and imaginary the home is.

Although I would still say that I am homesick （"想家"） in wording in Chinese, I know that this "homesickness" is, in fact, my "nostalgic yearning" ("思乡") as I am very aware that I can never go back to the house, or the old home, any more. In my home, which exists only in my memory and imagination now, I am still the little girl who would sit on the back rack of my father's bicycle, crying, on the way to the boarding school, because of my homesickness. It does not matter who I am right now; although I have become a Canadian citizen, I still feel I am a tourist in a country away from my home in China. I can be the nervous and silent doctoral student sitting in the corner of the classroom, the proud speaker in an international conference presenting to my fellow scholars and the professionals in international higher education, or the confident and eloquent director of education guiding a language centre. When I go back to visit my old house, I am still the youngest daughter of the family who would cry every time she left for the boarding school in the eyes of her neighbours.

I have been on the way for many years, but I have never forgotten what has sent me on my way: seeking international education and a different life, which turned out to be a journey probing my home and self, as well as the experiences of the participants in this study.

8.2. Summary of the Study

In this dissertation, I set out to investigate the English-learning experiences, the IELTS test preparation and writing experiences of Chinese international students in China and Western Canada, their understanding of international education before and after coming to Canada, and their construction, negotiation, and perception of their identities as Chinese international students. Now I summarize the findings to these questions below.

Most of the study participants came to Canada with the expectations of escaping the highly competitive *Gaokao*, learning English, and acquiring advanced knowledge. However, their international education in Canada did not end up in the imagined sanctuary, but led them to other problems and tensions that they did not foresee. Their learning turned out to be another "academic battle" (Chang, 2012, p. 228) that may be comparable to *Gaokao.* With the keen awareness of the importance of English in achieving these expectations, they have been investing immensely in learning the language both in China and Canada. In this sense, English itself plays a double role of the goal and the tool to achieve their goals; this double role of English in a sense perpetuates the concept of learning English for pragmatic purposes as illuminated by the long-held *Ti-Yong* logic of English learning rooted in the English ideology of these participants. But learning English itself is not sufficient to ensure that these learners accomplish their expectations; they had to prove their English proficiency by writing the IELTS test, and achieving the gate-keeping thresholds in their path of learning in Canada. Therefore, their English learning has been largely constrained and shaped by the IELTS test, taking the form of IELTS test preparation in both countries.

My findings show that the current learning practice (in and out of MU) of the participants in Canada was also greatly constituted by their expectations formed in China. This study found that their learning experiences in the Pathway Program and the disciplinary courses were different, and that participants applied the concept of good

instructors in China to compare the instructors in these two settings. Their learning in homestay and church settings exemplified that the participants were guided, consciously or unconsciously, by the *Ti-Yong* tension. They performed as agentive actors in deciding their investment/divestment in their learning in different social spaces. The findings also show that the participants went through a complicated process of identity negotiation and construction; they demonstrated identities as Chinese, as Chinese international students, and as transnationals. They also negotiated their identities as test-takers who both complied with and resisted the discourse of tests. These findings demonstrate how identity is fluid, layered, multiple, contested, and relational, and that these identities were constructed and constituted by the ideologies regulating the practice in different social spaces that they resided in, and the ideologies guiding them in the process of learning transnationally.

My study also found that the imagined future of the participants pointed to two directions: staying in Canada or going back to China. The former was the preferred plan while the latter a backup. The future was directed by the various communities that the participants envisioned, and they selectively invested in certain areas (English, academic achievement, and social networks) to gain access to these communities. These imagined communities are not linear; rather, they are layered, multiple, and relational. The access to certain community/communities requires membership(s) in other community/communities. On the other hand, my finding in reference to the belief that good English and Canadian credentials would give them easier access to the job market in China shows the colonial legacy that Western knowledge and language is superior to those acquired locally in China.

8.3. Discussion of the Findings

Experience has been a key word repeatedly used throughout this dissertation, both as a noun and as a verb. As a novice researcher, I entered the research field with questions about the experiences of ten Chinese international students in this study: their English learning and IELTS test-taking experiences in China and Canada. I was inspired by Clandinin and Cornelly's (2000) interpretation of the notion of "experiences": "a three-dimensional narrative space" (p. 50) that included personal and social interaction, the past, present, and future (continuity), and the concept of place or situation. In collecting and analyzing the narrative data of the participants, I found that each learner told stories

within this three-dimensional narrative space. Their narratives before they came to Canada included how they prepared for and understood *Gaokao*, and how and why they decided to come to Canada. In talking about their learning in Canada, they related that their experiences included interacting with instructors, homestay parents, and various communities and wove in their own reflections on losses and gains in learning. Thus, each participant in this study is socially and individually constructed.

The past, present, and future (continuity) dimensions were demonstrated in the stories of the English learning experiences and IELTS test-taking experiences in China in the past, in Canada at present, and their envisioning of the future. The continuity dimension is inseparable from the dimension of location, as stories of their past, present, and future took place in different locations. Stories they told about their past in China constitute their learning for the notorious *Gaokao*, the main source of the unbearable pressure in their high school and the major impetus for them to seek international education overseas. Another important cause was to learn English, the global language that carries so much power, so that they could earn foreign qualifications, the desirable capital that would open up better job prospects for the future. They also expected an international education in Canada that was better and more advanced than the education they could receive in China. Moreover, the pursuit of different, sometimes rosy, lives abroad was also part of the plans of the participants for coming to Canada. The experiences of the participants at present in Canada were recorded under three themes: stories of their learning in the Pathway Program as compared to learning in the MU classrooms, stories of their learning in the homestay and the church settings, and stories of being Chinese, being Chinese international students, and/or being transnational. Each theme represents a particular tension. The learning stories in the Pathway Program and the MU classrooms show the tension that they experience between a program specifically designed for international students and the university classrooms that are for all students. They described their learning in the former setting as learning in Shangri-La, and that in the university classroom as learning in reality. They specifically compared the instructors of these two settings, pointing out that those in the Pathway Program were caring and supportive, and therefore “good” instructors. On the contrary, the university professors in MU were not perceived to be as “good” because they did not seem to show as much care and support to them. In commenting whether an instructor was good or not, they were, in fact, referring to constructions of a

good instructor circulating in Chinese culture. When the settings changed to the homestay and the church, their stories demonstrate the tension between what they wanted to learn and how they would like to proceed with their learning, and what was offered to them in these different settings. Their decisions on how to learn and what to learn reflected the impact of the English learning ideology deeply rooted in the history of China: to learn English for *Yong*, or for pragmatic purposes. For example, Liushu went to the fellowship gatherings with her homestay family mostly because she could build up her social network and practice her oral English with the teens there. In a similar vein, Sam moved out of his homestay when he found going to church with his homestay families was not helping him in improving his English any more. Stories of their sense of being Chinese, being Chinese international students, and being transnational manifest their confusions of who they were in different settings. Some of them felt strongly they were Chinese, especially when they were challenged in different settings in Canada for various reasons, a feeling that was not evident when in China.

The sense of being Chinese international students was evident in the stories of the participants, too. Some of them expressed their confusion about being Chinese international students: they felt inferior and proud at the same time. Stories they told show that in some cases they were aware of the label of a stereotyped Chinese international student, and their lack of comment on this seems to indicate passive acceptance of the label. Only one participant, North, critically remarked that the feelings of inferiority among Chinese international students because of their English proficiency was unjustified. North believed that embracing the Canadian way of living and learning and detaching themselves from the community of Chinese international students would help them to get rid of the sense of inferiority and gain the sense of equality with local people. However, building up the sense of equality with local people by loosening their connection with the community of Chinese international students may not work well for some who felt safe mostly when being with their fellow Chinese students.

Place or location, one of the checkpoints in the three-dimensional narrative space, has been used as an important signifier in the structuring of this dissertation. Since the participants are Chinese students studying in Canada, reflecting on the shift between the countries in their learning stories is prevalent. In the context of Canada, the locations of stories have been changing between different learning settings. Location is also manifested in their feeling of home or homelessness. Contradictory feelings, as

displayed in how to feel safe as a Chinese international student, resonated in stories on seeking a sense of home. Overall, the participants in this study share a sense of not belonging in Canada. They used “home”, “house”, “here”, and “there” in the physical sense at times and in a nontangible sense at other times, to talk about their pursuit of a sense of belonging in the transnational landscapes of China and Canada. Feeling dissatisfied with their English proficiency explains at least partially their lack of a sense of belonging to Canada.

Despite the various purposes that have sent these students abroad for higher education, what they did not expect was the great challenge brought about by English itself, the very tool that they need to achieve their envisioned future of international education. English has become a huge barrier for them to enter a post-secondary institution for higher education in Canada. In their efforts to achieve a certain score in the IELTS test for entering MU, they found that their route to escape from *Gaokao* turned out to be another battlefield. Three themes emerged in IELTS-taking narratives, one of which was the discrepancy between test strategies and academic learning. The participants found that what they had learned in various IELTS test preparation classes were test coping strategies that proved to be useless in their academic learning in university classrooms. They, therefore, started reconsidering the great investment they had made in preparing for and writing the exam, and even questioning the meaning and importance of the test as a filter and gate-keeper on their way to enter MU. Their stories also showed that some of them mistakenly understood learning for writing the IELTS test as English learning, and they would measure their own progress in English learning using IELTS as a benchmark. Their IELTS test preparation and writing not only greatly impacted, informed, and shaped the English learning of the participants, but also who they were as learners. To further illustrate this point, I explored the stories of Kaddy and Zoe in further detail. The stories on IELTS show the impact of the test preparation and writing on the emotions and identities of these students as test-takers. When the “isolated and silent” (Norton, 2013, p. 108) test-takers were offered the space to talk about their IELTS test related experiences, their voices were clear and loud to listening ears. These voices function as evidence of the power of tests and the “detrimental decisions they lead to for the test-takers” (Shohamy, 2014, p. 1). To test-takers, sharing test-related experiences and stories helped them to form solidarity with each other in understanding the test and themselves, and the larger surrounding contexts of

international education. More importantly, I contend that these accounts can offer test designers, test delivery organizations, and those who rely on test results a lens to understand the impacts of the tests on people who take them, thus allowing for stakeholders in testing to develop expanded perspectives on test features and their impact.

As a narrative inquirer, I have enjoyed the space to interpret the narratives as "both the living of the storied experience and the stories one tells of their lived experiences" (Clandinin, 2007, p. xiv), reflecting the complexities of the experiences of the participants in this study. Because of the complexity and the ambiguity of the experienced stories, it is very difficult to decide which part of the sharing is "the living of the storied experience", and which are "the stories that they told about their lived experiences" (Clandinin, 2007, p. xiv). The two categories of the experiences are intertwined with frequent reflections and occasional references to a different location and time dimension. For example, I have included Kaddy's stories on how a professor in a business writing class suggested that she drop the class, how she insisted on finishing the course that she was doomed to fail, and then how she succeeded in the retake. It was only after her successful completion of the course that she shared her experiences with me. Before that, during our first interview, I could sense her stress and pain in the semester when she worked desperately for the course that she knew she would fail. She was only ready to tell me about those experiences after she passed it; her telling of the past and the present experiences was tangled and woven. I noticed her effort to avoid delving too much into details on the first take of the course. What she emphasized was her "victory" (in her own word), one that boosted her confidence in herself as a Chinese international student. As a narrative inquirer, I am aware that what the participants shared with me was their understanding and interpretation of the "knowledge *from* the past", which is not necessarily the truth of what happened in the past (Bochner, 2007, p. 203, emphasis in original). To me, the participants could develop their explanatory power after they engaged with the tools of telling their stories as part of this study, and were legitimated as people who could reflectively develop models that explain their experience. This is how I understood the narratives of the participants in this study. Similarly, when I recalled my own educational experiences across the transnational educational landscape, what arose in my mind may not be the factual details of what

exactly happened in the situations that I remember. Rather, it can be stories of my lived past, or my lived and storied past that help me explain the experience to myself.

I consider my integration of Chinese philosophical concepts in making sense of the experiences of Chinese international students as the most important contribution that I make in this dissertation. I have incorporated the concept of the *Ti-Yong* Tension, or the tension between learning English for pragmatic purposes, as well as the idea of a good instructor in China, as part of the theoretical lenses to analyze the experiences of the participants in this study. As I have presented in the literature review chapter, English teaching and learning in China has been greatly favoring the pragmatic philosophy of foreign languages, which emphasizes and reflects the concept of "Chinese learning for essence (*Ti*) and Western learning for utility (*Yong*)" over time. This logic of learning English for pragmatic purposes persists over time, and has influenced, configured, and permeated the English education policies, the design of English curriculum, English textbooks at all levels, and the formation of the popular ideology of English in China. Therefore, the *Ti-Yong* tension has shaped the English learning experiences of the participants of this study, and learning English for its pragmatic purposes continues to impact their current learning in Canada.

To weave the above ideological concepts on English learning in China into the theoretical framework of this study, I found the model of investment integrating identity, ideology, and capital, as developed by Darvin and Norton (2015) most appropriate. This model "creates a space in which learners are not by default marginalized or resistant, but where they have an agentive capacity to evaluate and negotiate the constraints and opportunities of their social location" (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 47). When the locations of learning changed from China to Canada, the negotiation of the participants in the "ideological sites" (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 10) in Canada reflected how they tried to manage the resources of language learning by investing in or divesting from certain language practices. Darvin and Norton discussed the prevailing English ideology and how English has been positioned as a language of power. This perspective on English is evident in the participants' stories when they shared why they came to Canada and what they would like to learn in Canada. For example, some of them would weigh over how participating in a community may or may not help them to learn, or what pragmatic purposes this participation would entail. Haotian could bear the stereotyping comments on Chinese people by his homestay parents when he figured out that he could learn

about Canadian culture in talks on religion at their dinner table. But he moved out of his homestay when he found he could not get practical help from going to church as he did not plan to convert to Christianity during his journey of international education in Canada.

Moreover, the use of narrative inquiry worked harmoniously with this model of investment in probing the language ideology as held by the participants. In narrative inquiry, human beings reflect "whatever social structure, ideology, theory, or framework … is at work in the inquiry" (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 39). Without considering the English learning philosophy of these international students, it might be difficult to understand why Liushu would keep attending church activities and hanging around with the children's group in the fellowship gatherings when she was not interested in the religion.

Another concept that I drew upon when exploring the narratives of this group of Chinese international students is the idea of a good instructor. When talking about their learning in the Pathway Program and the university classrooms, the participants explained how the instructors in the former were "good" while those in the latter were not. Their understanding of a good instructor would seem obscure if the concept of a good instructor that guides them is not known by the researcher. Teaching in China is a very respectful profession; people's understanding of the roles and responsibilities of teachers has been greatly impacted by Confucian concepts of education that value teachers as imparting knowledge, as well as showing care and concern, and providing help as needed to learners. In the reciprocal relationship (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997) between teachers and students, there are mutual responsibilities for learning: students respect and obey the teacher, and the teacher teaches and cares for students like a parent. The popular culture of learning that "depends on the norms, values, and expectations of the teachers and learners relative to classroom activity" (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997, p. 84) in China can explain why participants in this study attached great importance to the attention and individualized support from instructors in learning. Knowing each student, in Confucian concepts of learning, is fundamental to allowing one to "teach in accordance with the aptitude of learners" (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997, p. 84). The perceived mutual responsibility for learning originated from traditional notions of filial piety in China (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997) and involves a moral dimension: the roles of teachers go beyond teaching knowledge to include teaching about life. When the participants in this study

could feel the care and concern in the Pathway Program and received support from the instructors accordingly, they were inspired and motivated in learning. On the contrary, when they found that MU professors seemed less caring and concerned about who they were, they felt lonely and unsupported, and these were moments when they felt inferior and not belonging to the learning communities at MU.

In fact, these participants showed bias and limited knowledge of what Western university instructors value in the student-teacher relationship when they perceived professors in MU classrooms as less caring and supportive. This is partly because of the fact that most of them had just come Canada less than half a year before the first interview was conducted, and they were likely unaware of the approaches their professors may have used to try to support them. On the other hand, it seems that faculty members are not sufficiently supported by the university in teaching and interacting with international students. I will discuss this in further detail in the implications and recommendations section of this chapter.

8.3.1. Contribution to the Literature on Chinese International Students

Shaped by theoretical understandings of current and historical social conditions in China and Canada and by influential works on the identity construction of international students and English language learners, as well as by my own educational experiences, this dissertation is an attempt to bring additional light into the literature on the experience of Chinese international students in Canada. I hope to contribute to the literature that understands Chinese learners as complex subjects with flexible and multiple identities, as individual human beings with specific histories and experiences, and as agentive actors who are able to decide which identities to put on or not, and what to invest in or divest from, as well as in what situation, with respect to their learning. In travelling between and within different educational landscapes and during the “fluid and multilayered” learning process (Skyrme, 2014, p. 305), Chinese international students position themselves as Chinese, as Chinese international students, and as transnationals. These identities are not exclusive; rather, they are hibernating in the same subjects all the time. Depending on the specific context and situation, the participants put on different “faces” or identities as they deemed to be appropriate. It was possible for them to change over time, but their earlier identities were not overrun (Skyrme, 2014). It is this fluidity of their identities that complicates who they really are.

Also, the investment /divestment of the students in their learning practice is selective, strategic, and guided by the interplay of ideologies formed in the past in their home country and gained at present in the host country. Therefore, to consider Chinese international students as complex human-beings who came to the host country for an international education with their past (e.g., learning cultures, experiences, expectations, etc.) and their future (envisioning) is critical in order to understand this group of students who are currently engaged in learning in a different country. I hope this dissertation helps to mitigate the long-held, and wide-spread stereotyped view of Chinese learners prevalent (covertly or overtly) in literature and in the host countries of international education (e.g., Grimshaw, 2011).

8.3.2. Contribution to the Methodology: The Fluidity in Vision, Voicing, and Languaging of a Narrative Researcher

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, I was inspired by my own learning experiences in Canada and China when I designed this dissertation research. The discrepancy between how I experienced learning and perceived my English proficiency, and accordingly myself, in the educational landscapes in China and Canada, led me to the burning question in this research: how were the current English learning and IELTS test-taking experiences of Chinese international students impacted by their past experiences and expectations, and future envisioning of their international education? When seeing the puzzled faces of these students in the workshops of the Pathway Program, I felt the obligation and urge to do something to help them. At that time, I was unaware that the research would prove to be a journey of self-discovery for me. Throughout this journey, I have been both one of them, or an insider to the participants, and an outsider, who is usually positioned "higher" as their Teaching Assistant and a researcher. With shared learning experiences, and common values and beliefs, I have the privilege of helping the participants of this study, as well as other Chinese international students (insiders, or the cultural members), and outsiders (or cultural strangers) better understand the culture and ideology of learning (Maso, 2001) of Chinese international students. Meanwhile, I have been an insider in Canadian culture for the participants because I came to MU earlier than they did, and I had been working and learning in this Canadian university. My double identity as an insider and outsider requires of me a double vision as a researcher conveying my interpretation of the educational meanings of the participants to audiences in cultural communities in Canada. With this double vision, I was able to

weave together the understanding of languages and cultures that I had acquired in my past in China, and at present in Canada, in this research. In particular, my doctoral studies and my various working experiences at MU offered me the space to know and learn the conventions of the academic community in a Canadian university and beyond. I hope this dissertation serves as a channel for members from other communities to understand the experiences of the many Chinese international students in Canada. I was able to achieve this double vision of a researcher only by integrating cultures, ideologies, and identities in narrative inquiry as methodology.

The double vision of a narrative researcher could be related to the fluidity in voicing in research. Clandinin & Connelly (2000) argue that voice has become one of the dilemmas in analyzing and writing research texts. Narrative researchers try to convey their own individual voices in an inquiry "designed to tell of the participants' storied experiences and to represent their voices, all the while attempting to create a research text that will speak to, and reflect upon, the audience's voices" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 147). It is usually "the voices within each narrative" (Chase, 2005, p. 663) that the narrative researcher listens to before she applies an analytical lens. Narrative inquirers intend to identify the "subject positions, interpretive practices, ambiguities, and complexities—within each narrator's story" (Chase, 2005, p. 663). In identifying the voices of the research participants, the ownership of stories is shifted from the researcher to the relational responsibilities of the researched (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In this study, I have expressed my authoritative voice by "connect[ing] and separat[ing] the researcher's and narrator's voices in a particular way" (Chase, 2005, p. 664). Meanwhile, I have used my own and their supportive voices in deciding on the transcription, selection, organization, and the edition of the final text. In so doing, I tried to create "a self-reflective and respectful distance between researchers' and narrators' voices" (Chase, 2005, p. 665). My voices and those of the participants' kept interacting; I had to understand myself more deeply before understanding the narrators in this study. These voices were not fixed or stable; rather, I needed to "move back and forth among them" (Chase, 2005, p. 664) as a narrative researcher. In fact, as I already mentioned, this research turned out to be a journey of self-discovery, and I have been contemplating my identities from my past to the present and future. But I was very aware that I should only offer my stories after the topics or themes were brought up by the participants. I have double checked with them to make sure that my interpretation of their stories was

accurate to them, either during the interviews or in the process of my data analysis. In this way, I could make sure that their voices were truthfully presented with the right amount of the voice of the researcher.

The fluidity of choosing languages also turned out to be very important in narrative data collection and analysis. Though my research questions were designed in English, I offered Chinese translations to the participants so that it was the participants who decided which language to use in telling their stories. Both the participants and I found that it was difficult for us to express our deeper feelings and deeper thinking in English at times using our second language. In fact, several of them checked with me specifically whether they had to use English; they would not have participated in this study if fluid languaging was not available as an option. They said that they felt safe and comfortable in telling stories while shifting between Mandarin Chinese and English as necessary; they did not feel their English was judged by me as their TA and the researcher. This language shifting reflects He's (2003) idea that "a fluid language is needed to represent the fluid storied experience" (p. 138) in a fluid inquiry.

The fluid inquiry as understood by He (2003) and Trahar (2009) highlights experience over theory, and emphasizes the importance of methodological positioning in the research process. These authors contend that the fluidity of narrative inquiry should be reflected in its treatment of the research phenomena, purposes, objectives, methodologies, and theoretical stands. My research shows that the fluidity of visioning, voicing, and languaging is as important, which I view as my contribution to narrative inquiry in transnational education studies.

8.4. Implications and Recommendations

8.4.1. Implications for Chinese Students and Parents, and the Education System in China

By examining the experiences of ten participants through their travel within and between different educational landscapes in China and Canada, I hope this dissertation can highlight implications for the education system in China that utilizes *Gaokao* as the one and only compulsory entrance test for most colleges and universities. Although exploring experiences with this test was not included in the original design of this study,

stories of the participants on *Gaokao* and how it has become the most critical factor in their decision making in the pursuit of international education in Canada were prevalent, revealing, and touching. The pressures and stresses that *Gaokao* has brought to students in China are enormous; some of them, like the participants of this study, would just like to escape by going abroad. Sam's example, as mentioned in Chapter 5, was the most forceful. He worked desperately for different chances to avoid writing *Gaokao*: he attempted the *Baosong* student Candidacy test followed by a Chemistry competition, and success in either one would have enabled him to avoid *Gaokao*. When both attempts failed, he just ran away from school completely. He eventually sought help from consultants before he could continue his study in a different country. But even for those lucky ones who could come to Canada and other countries for international education, the "sanctuary" that they would invest so heavily to seek would turn out non-existing: they had to write the IELTS test, very often multiple times, to get enrolled in a college or university in Canada. Their struggle would not stop after their entrance at the university; they would still encounter various difficulties and obstacles with English in and out of classrooms in their pursuit of university credentials. Their pursuit of sanctuary from *Gaokao* turned out to be another battle. Therefore, I hope this study will shed light on the Chinese education system that fosters test-oriented teaching and learning in China. Though China has been conducting various reforms in the education sector, for example, the fact that the higher education system has greatly expanded admission in the past twenty odd years, *Gaokao* has remained a controversial topic.

Concerns about *Gaokao* persist as the long-held, traditionally test-oriented culture of teaching and learning has been extensively adopted in China (Liu, 2016). As I have discussed in Chapter 6, the advantages of going abroad as an alternative to taking *Gaokao* have been exaggerated, gilded, and romanticized. Interestingly, discussions on going abroad for international higher education as an ideal option to escape *Gaokao* usually stop after the students leave the country. This reflects the blind acceptance of international education in China. What Chinese international students experience in their international education in the host countries is not usually talked about. In the rare cases when such experiences are discussed, it is usually the bright side that is shared, according to the popular ideology: going abroad for international education is simple and easy; students can achieve their goals as long as they work hard. The scant, sometimes misleading, description of the learning experiences of Chinese international students is

limited in its value, especially considering that China has become the top sending country of international students around the world. I hope this dissertation could open a small window for Chinese in general, and Chinese students and their parents in particular, to have a glimpse at what Chinese international students really experience in the educational landscape in Canada. Running away from *Gaokao* by going abroad is only a passive solution to the systematic contradiction as presented in the education system in China, and is only accessible to those who can afford it. I hope this study has implications for education stakeholders and policy-makers in China and adds to the growing body of evidence on the need for overall reform.

8.4.2. Implications for the Application of IELTS in Accepting International Students

I have spent the whole Chapter 7 in recording the confusing and sometimes agonizing stories of the participants in this study in preparing for and writing the IELTS test both in China and in Canada. Their lived experiences have shown that the impact of preparing for and writing the standardized test, and the enormous investment in this process, are far beyond what a test should entail. In particular, the emotions and identities of the test-takers are severely affected by their test preparing and writing experiences. Some test-takers not only measured their English learning using their IELTS scores they have gained, but they also revealed how it had influenced their sense of self-worth. Using standardized high-stakes language tests for the classification and selection of international students does not serve the pedagogical purposes of assessment (Schohamy, 2001, 2007, 2013). Also, the knowledge assessed in language tests mostly reflects and highlights “the knowledge” of the dominant group, and other knowledge is ignored in test construction and development (Shohamy, 2004). Such reflection of dominant knowledge in tests brings extra challenge to Chinese test-takers. Western culture, part of the Ti of English language, has never been promoted in English teaching and learning that is guided by the *Ti-Yong* logic in China. As a result, Chinese international students often lack the knowledge measured in such tests.

As I have discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2, it is a general practice for post-secondary institutions in Anglophone countries to use IELTS in the admission of international students from non-English-speaking backgrounds. The application of such a test perpetuates the existing power relations in language learning, and is in conflict

with the diversified student population in terms of their cultures and identities. Also, there is little evidence that satisfactory IELTS test scores guarantee successful learning after international students enter a post-secondary institution in the host country. My research reinforces this result: the participants found that the learning strategies they acquired in IELTS preparation courses were not useful in their learning in MU; higher scores in the IELTS test did not guarantee that the test-takers would succeed in the university classrooms. With this in mind, I hope that post-secondary institutions in Canada and other host countries reconsider the practice of accepting international students based on their scores in high-stakes language tests. The standardized tests rank individual test-takers for gate-keeping, monitoring, and surveillance (Inbar-Lourie, 2008) without considering the learning context and culture of test-takers. The institutions that use IELTS and other high-stakes English tests are participating in the creation and perpetuation of the inequality of languages. In addition, such institutions also help promote the marketization of standard tests in the application of the high-stakes English tests in admitting international students.

I propose that institutions hosting international students examine the limitations of the high-stakes English tests they use in admissions. Meanwhile, I recommend that such institutions create their own methods and procedures for reviewing the qualifications of international students from different backgrounds. Such institution-specific methods and procedures, I suggest, should take into account the learning culture and experiences as well as the linguistic background of students. Only in this way can the institution free itself from the intentional or unintentional participation in the sustainment and aggregation of the existing inequality between different languages. In addition, high-stakes English test-takers, international students from non-English-speaking countries in particular, would be rid of the heavy onus of preparing for and writing the tests. Although the implementation of such institution-specific procedures can be complex and even unfeasible at the current stage, this is at least a direction that institutions may consider in order to mitigate the harm of standardized tests in the long run.

8.4.3. Implications for Institutions in Canada

Faculty members play critical roles in adjusting to the changing academic profession with the influx of international students. AUCC (2008) has identified the roles

of faculty members as a significant organizational factor in supporting internationalization. However, faculty members are insufficiently engaged in teaching international students as attested in studies conducted by several authors (e.g., Beck, 2008; Friesen, 2012; Sanderson, 2008). Faculty members are not well informed of the experiences of international students and may help perpetuate the existing discourse of international students as deficient and problematic (e.g., Andrade, 2010; Friesen, 2012; Murphy, 2016). I suggest that the university should provide focused support to faculty members in their daily interactions with international students by providing professional training, research-based workshops, and other forms of resources that would lead to positive changes in the learning community.

This study also showed the disjuncture between the academic learning at MU and participants' previous learning for IELTS test preparation, which supports the establishment of a research-based learning center that provides opportunities for students to develop disciplinary-specific learning at MU. In order to help international students to move away from IELTS-orientated English learning, post-secondary institutions should learn from the Pathway Program as a supportive community that understands the needs of international students. With sufficient support in academic literacy and language skills associated with specific disciplines, international students will feel less challenged in their university learning. When their confidence in learning and their sense of self boosted, international students will not feel so homeless and in need of sanctuary.

8.5. Limitations and Future Research Directions

In this dissertation research, I examined the English learning and test-taking experiences of ten Chinese international students conditionally admitted to the Pathway Program and MU. I intended to explore how they understood their current learning in Canada as related to their past and future, and how they perceived themselves as English learners and Chinese international students in the educational landscape in China and Canada. Despite the findings that I have presented, there are some limitations that I hope other researchers could address in the future.

The first limitation refers to the ethnicity of the study participants. This study only invited Chinese international students from Mainland China to participate. The research

findings, therefore, can speak better to the experiences of international students from China. However, I am curious about how international students from other ethnic groups experience English learning and test-taking before and after coming to Canada, and how their perceptions of self are impacted by their experiences of international education. I hope the English learning and test preparation and writing experiences of international students who come to Canada from other countries and regions can be explored further in the future. Such further investigation will not only offer a holistic picture of how international students experience learning and testing, but also make it possible to compare such experiences between international students from different countries. Another limitation regarding this study is that all the participants happened to come from Mainland China. For students coming from other regions of China that do not use *Gaokao* as the major test in deciding college and university admission, their experiences can be different from what the participants in this study experienced. It would be interesting to see future research on international students from these regions, too.

My second concern with regards to this study is associated with the number of years the participants had spent at MU when this research was conducted. Eight out of ten of the participants were in their first year at MU when both rounds of interviews were completed, and three continued contacting me for different purposes; so my narrative data collection extended to the later stage of their university learning. I have gained more insights from the reflections on their learning experiences from the later contacts. It seems to me that the longer they stayed in Canada, the more reflective they became. However, the experiences of those who did not approach me after the first year were unknown, and I am curious about what they experienced later. Therefore, I would like to see more longitudinal studies on the learning experiences of Chinese international students in Canada, and how the findings of this study will be similar to or different from such longitudinal studies.

A third possible direction for future research studies on international students could probe further relates to sites of interview data collection. In translating and analyzing the narratives that I collected, I found stories that the participants shared with me through our informal meetings (e.g., coffee or lunch meetings, or phone calls) were more “juicy” and nurturing than the ones from the recorded interviews, especially those taking place in my office. For example, Haotian was usually a bit nervous and quiet in the interviews. Though I tried to explain to every participant that the interviews would be

open, free, and flexible, and that I would follow the flow of our conversations and ask questions only when necessary, Haotian was very cautious in wording his experiences and reflections. But he was more talkative in meetings outside of my office, and willing to tell me more about himself and his family. Haotian's example made me reconsider the importance of the interview location in narrative studies in the future. Even though I made a great effort to diminish the power relations between me and the participants, the fact that I was a university professor of English in China and I am a doctoral student in Canada, as well as their TA before the narrative study was conducted, was not erasable. This was perhaps more evident for my participants when interviews took place in my office. As previously discussed, in China students respect and obey the teacher, and the teacher teaches and cares for students like a parent (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997). Teachers are regarded as people with more power, as a result. Moreover, the high status of English in China is more or less responsible for students like Haotian feeling self-conscious and uncomfortable in talking freely with me, especially in the office setting. I hope future researchers could take the research location further into account so that deeper stories might be shared when the power relation between the researcher and the researched is at least somewhat reduced in less formal settings.

Lastly, I would also like to see more narrative researchers turn their attention to the identities of test-takers in the future. Despite the negative impacts of IELTS on the emotions and identities of test-takers, completely abandoning the instrumental function of testing as a gate-keeper is not feasible (Chik & Besser, 2011; Alderson & Banerjee, 2001; Shohamy, 2001), for the near future at least. This means that international students have to keep preparing for and writing IELTS and other high-stakes language tests to get enrolled in post-secondary institutions in English-speaking host countries. Although there were studies on the identities of test-takers at the site of the IELTS test, I could hardly find any scholarship investigating the experiences and identities of test-takers before and after their writing the test, especially by using narrative inquiry as the methodology. I hope this gap could be addressed in the future, too.

8.6. Epilogue

In my sojourning in Canada as an immigrant and a Chinese-Canadian pursuing a doctoral degree, I feel like I am fumbling through a tunnel, dark and long; but the belief that there

will be light at the other end has always accompanied me. When I met the participants of this study who were struggling in their learning in the Pathway Program, I decided to share with them how I had been fumbling in my own learning. Although we embarked on the journey with different purposes, our shared English learning and test writing experiences, together with our common first language and culture, formed a strong bond between us as the researcher and researched. The various encounters on our journey of pursuing Canadian degrees speak to the close ties between our past and present, between who we were in China and who we are in Canada. As a tourist (Bauman, 1996), for quite some time, I was searching desperately for a place to belong to, and for the recognition of who I was, not knowing that I brought with me "a safety package", where my "real face is kept safe, immune, stain resistant, unsullied" (Bauman, 1996, p. 30). It was this "real face" of mine that I showed to the participants of this study, in the hope of creating a space for the participants to show theirs to me. . This research study, to some extent, was a reminder of the existence of the safety packages that the participants and I brought with us from our past in China to our current situations in Canada. It is who we were in the past and who we want to become in the future that make up who we are at present. I believe that the journey I, the participants of this study, and other international students have embarked on will continue, dark and long, but with light at the end.

I have been in regular contact with Chen, Kaddy, Leon, Sean, and Zoe. Chen is back to China. After graduating from MU, Chen spent two years working on her diploma in Early Childhood Education. Then she found a job in a Montessori daycare in Hong Kong, where her identity as an English and Cantonese bilingual is greatly appreciated. She just started her Master's in Education in a university in Hong Kong this Spring. She told me before she left Canada that her dream was to start her own bilingual Montessori daycare in her hometown Shenzhen, Guangdong. From the photos that she posted on the social media that we both share, I could see that she was enjoying her work with kids greatly. Kaddy worked very hard to get employed in a local bank working part-time, and then working in another bank full-time after she earned her degree in Business. She then quit her job in the bank and worked for a trading company because it could help her to apply for immigration. She told me a lot about her working experiences, and how her English would never be good enough for a local workplace. Two years

ago, she got married and became a mom of a lovely boy. I was invited to her wedding and met her parents, who were surprised to see the number of local guests attending the wedding. They told me that it was worth it sending Kaddy to Canada for international education. But I heard from Kaddy recently that her parents were not very happy with her staying at home taking care of her little boy; they thought she should find a job since she has a degree in Business. Leon just graduated last winter, and we have been planning to have dinner together ever since last Christmas. Before he gradudated, he had worked in the career center at MU, and was an outstanding coach in helping international students to prepare resumes and equip them with job seeking skills in Canada. In Zoe's case, after she gained her second degree in Economics, she went to a college for a Paralegal Diploma. She has married a local Vancouverite whom she has known for years and is living a happy life.

Recently, as I was completing my dissertation, Sean contacted me for information on writing IELTS for immigration purposes. After he graduated from MU three years ago, he went back to Shanghai for six months, working in a large-scale financial corporation where his parents have relations. He then came back to Canada and found a job in a bank because his parents wanted him to get Canadian citizenship. He told me that he was also preparing for IELTS for academic purposes as he was planning to pursue an MBA in a good university, in his parents' words, so that he may find a satisfactory position in the same financial corporation. Last nigh,t he sent a message to me, saying that he finally got an average of 6.5 in the IELTS test for general purposes. He is now preparing for GMAT (The Graduate Management Admission Test) for his future MBA studies, and he thanked me for introducing a GMAT tutor to him.

Sam is in Vancouver too; he is working in a computer company and happy with his work and life balance. I last saw him on MU's campus during his last year of university studies. He told me that while he had been very active in participating in all kinds of activities and building up a big social network with a lot of local students, in his third year, he suddenly felt tired of doing this and gradually quit the clubs. He then hired a local student as a tutor and they met twice a week; he said he kept practicing his English this way. Haotian is back to China as planned

to help with his family business. I have lost contact with him, as well as with Liushu, North, and Winnie.

My memories of meeting with my participants are still fresh years later, and I hope they all have seen the light at the end of the tunnel and are all doing what they imagined and living a happy life. I hope they agree that the journey itself is more important than the destinations we each work hard to achieve (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), and, like me, believe that there will be light at our destinations, no matter where the destination is.

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Appendix A.

Interview Protocols for Participants (English)

The first interview will start by the introduction of purposes of the study. I then check the preferred language (English or Mandarin Chinese) of each participant. After that, I discuss confidentiality and pseudonym with them, request them to sign the Consent Form, and ask for permission to record the conversation.

The following is a list of questions illustrative of the type of open-ended questions in the first round of narrative interviews.

- Why did you choose to study abroad? Why did you decide to come to Canada?
- What did you expect for your study in Canada before you came?
- Is your current life and learning in Canada the same as you expected? If not, how?
- Could you say something about your English learning in the past in China?
- How are your studies going? How is your English learning going now in Canada?
- May I ask about your IELTS score(s)? How did you prepare for the test in China? How are you preparing for it now?
- Do you think IELTS preparation courses are helpful? If yes, in what sense? If no, why?
- What are your plans for the future?

The questions in the second round of interviews will be decided based on the topics of interest arising from the first round.

Appendix B.

Interview Protocols for Participants (Chinese)

在第一轮访谈中， 首先我要介绍这项研究课题的目的，然后和每位参与的学生确认他们希望使用的语言（英语或中文）。之后，我们会讨论如何确保他们提供的资料安全不外泄，并请他们选定化名，签署“同意参加课题研究协议书”，及请求在谈话中进行录音。

下面是第一轮访谈中可能问到的问题：

- 为什么会选择出国留学？为什么会决定来加拿大？
- 出国之前，对在加拿大留学有什么期望？
- 现在的学习生活怎么样？和你以前想象的一样吗？为什么？
- 可以和我讲讲你在中国英语学习的经历吗？
- 现在各方面的学习怎么样？你的英语学习怎么样？
- 我可以问一下你的雅思成绩吗？你在中国怎样准备雅思考试？现在呢？
- 你觉得雅思培训课程有用吗？如果有用， 怎么体现出来？如果没有用， 为什么？
- 将来的计划是什么？

第二轮访谈中的问题会由第一轮中出现的相关话题为基础而衍生出来。

Appendix C.

Invitation Letter for Participation

Dear Pathway Program graduates,

Hope you're doing great in your study at MU.

I hope you still remember me, Olivia, your former TA at the Pathway Program. As a Ph. D Candidate, my research focus is on the learning experiences of Chinese international students in Canada. I'm collecting data for my research at this stage, and would like to invite you to participate.

Briefly put, this study aims to look at the English learning and IELTS preparation and writing experiences before and after you came to Canada. Hearing so many stories about your past and current studies, I decided to make some serious investigation to see how your English and IELTS related experience may influence how you see yourself, how you study in Canada, and how you understand international education.

Your participation will enable you, as an international student, to get your stories on your learning heard so that you could be understood and supported better in the future.

If you are interested and/or have further questions on my research study, please feel free to contact me at […].

Thank you very much for your consideration and hope to see you in the interview!

Best Regards,

Olivia