AMONGST THE CHINESE:
A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY INTO CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

by

Lingnan Cai

B.A., Jilin University, 2011

PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

March 2015

© Lingnan Cai, 2015
Abstract

With the development of the global economy and international communication, China is becoming a new destination in which to live and work for many Westerners. The aim of this project is to probe into the lived experience of our Western participants in China by each one’s unique point of view in responses to living amongst the Chinese. My purpose is to describe the comprehension each participant has of China and its culture, exploring the further possibility of cross-cultural identity transformation. Information was collected from the participants during in-depth interviews as a qualitative inquiry. By analysing and interpreting such interviews, this project attempts to demonstrate individual identity transformation through personal adaptations to living in a foreign culture. Such explorations indicate how some individuals approach a transcultural cosmopolitan identity, while others respond differently. The research could also provide possible insights into leadership in international education.

Key words: Westerner, China, foreigner, lived experience, cross-cultural, multiculturalism, self, cosmopolitanism, culture, identity, perception
Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................ ii
Table of Contents ......................................................................................................................... iii
Acknowledgement ......................................................................................................................... v
Chapter I Introduction ................................................................................................................. 1
  Problem Statement ...................................................................................................................... 1
  Background and Significances .................................................................................................... 4
Chapter II Literature Review ....................................................................................................... 10
  Cultural Adaptation .................................................................................................................. 11
  Culture Shock .......................................................................................................................... 11
  Cross-Cultural Learning .......................................................................................................... 12
  Cosmopolitanism ................................................................................................................... 14
  Awareness of the Differences .................................................................................................. 17
  Resistance .................................................................................................................................. 17
  Superficial Understanding and False Assumptions ................................................................. 19
  Sustained Cross-Cultural Growth ............................................................................................ 22
Chapter III Research Design ...................................................................................................... 28
  Participant Selection and Data Collection .............................................................................. 28
  Methodologies and Researcher Role ...................................................................................... 31
Chapter IV Stories and Findings ................................................................................................. 37
  Meet the Participants .............................................................................................................. 37
  Heard, Seen and Learned ........................................................................................................ 45
    Interaction and Observation. ................................................................................................ 45
    The Opinions ......................................................................................................................... 50
    The Unique Foreigner Experience ...................................................................................... 64
    The Comparative .................................................................................................................. 65
  The Contradictory .................................................................................................................... 69
  Personal Background and Reasons to Come ........................................................................... 66
  Life Quality and Money Mentality ......................................................................................... 67
  Opinions on Own People ......................................................................................................... 68
Expectation versus Reality .......................................................... 69
Eagerness to Assimilate and the Need for Individual Identity .......... 72
Stories Continue ........................................................................ 73

Chapter V Epilogue ...................................................................... 75
The Individual Differences .......................................................... 75
Personal Background and Ethnocentrism .................................... 75
Coping Skills and Cross-Cultural Skills ....................................... 77
Contradictory and Cosmopolitanism ........................................... 79
The Contradictory ....................................................................... 79
The Whiteness .......................................................................... 81
Cosmopolitans on the Way .......................................................... 82
A Vision for the Future ............................................................... 84
Cultural Preparation and Educational Leadership in International Education .................................................. 84
Implications for Further Research .............................................. 87
Observations and Limitations ...................................................... 87
Personal Learning Journey .......................................................... 89

Denouement .............................................................................. 92

References ................................................................................ 93

Appendix A Teaching about Whiteness ....................................... 100
Appendix B Information Letter ................................................... 102
Appendix C Participant Consent Form ......................................... 103
Acknowledgement

I want to thank my parents, who give me life, endless support, unconditional love, and who have always stood behind me. I also want to thank Dr. Gregory Nixon, who patiently guides me through my degree by offering academic advice and providing mental support. Your mentorship broadens my understanding to this field and this world.

To my diligent, kind members of my project’s Supervisory Committee – Dr. Peter MacMillan and Dr. Nancy Jokinen – I could never say thank you enough for your kind support throughout this journey. And to Alden, Bryan, Calan and Omar, who are the participants in this research project, without you saying “yes” to me, this project would have never been accomplished. Thank you for your time and patience to share your lived experience. My appreciation also goes to the Office of Research and Graduate Programs of UNBC, which granted me travel funds to back to China for interviews.

At the end I want to say thank you to my friends and Cody Cools-Lartigue, who have helped to create some of the best memories and have been here for me during my hard times, thank you.
Chapter I Introduction

This chapter introduces my research question: How does the lived experience of Westerners lead them to modes of understanding Chinese culture? The background of the research is provided to demonstrate that this research benefits cross-cultural communication, which is an imperative in moving toward global harmony. This research not only allows me to explore my own cultural consciousness in the China-West crossover experience, but also may help Westerners gain insight into both cultures, especially with the rising trend of Westerners going to China.

Problem Statement

“Rabbit” is the password to a videogame and the word “elephant” is said out loud with raising an arm to draw a long hook shape in the air to describe the long nose that elephants have. Later, writing 26 English letters from memory would definitely get me an award such as a popsicle in summer. This is the way my father taught me English before school when I was little. Since then I have been wondering how the early Westerners who came to China started understanding the language and of course vice versa for the Chinese going to the West. It is easy to point at an apple and say the word “apple”, but how about those words that are abstract such as “ideal”, let alone those which are rooted with many meanings in Chinese culture such as “face”?

Furthermore, there are words like “kowtow” that appear to be legitimate in English but were borrowed intact from Chinese since Western culture does not have a precise historical or cultural reference for them. In this case, how did Westerners come to interpret “kowtow”, a verb
meaning to kneel and bow one's head, as abject submission and grovelling when in the original Chinese it implied respect, reverence or worship?

It is obvious that, though Mandarin is the language that spoken by the largest number of native speakers in the world ("List of languages," n.d.) due to the large Chinese population, but English is still the most popular language worldwide for business (Lauerman, 2011) even among Asian countries. Hence most Chinese elementary school students start to learn English systematically no later than grade four in order to be prepared for the world they are facing. Admittedly, owing to globalization (often Westernization in disguise) in the appearance of social media and popular Western brands, we are being challenged in almost every aspect of life, mentally and physically, to learn not only the language, but also much of Western culture and the values behind it. As this is becoming a public phenomenon, the new generation of Chinese are often criticized for being too Westernized, and some conservative observers, who might not have travelled abroad, even claim that it goes against Chinese traditional values to embrace everything tagged Western. "The moon in foreign countries is particularly round and bright" (Yuen, 2008, p. 295) as a proverb describes the views of these people, comparable to the English "the grass is always greener" expression. However, even with this cross-cultural phenomenon existing, some Chinese abroad in Western countries are still having troubles with the cultural adaptation or cognition after a long term stay such as feelings of not belonging to either world, like being on a delta in the river between the Chinese and Western cultures (He, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c).

So what is it like for the Westerners in China? It is a fact that the information exchange between China and the West is not on a balanced scale. From what I observe, though internet use is much more popular among mainstream North Americans than Chinese, the former still have limited knowledge about China and its culture. When asked about their first association to China,
Western interviewees most often replied *Chinese food, Kung-Fu* or *just people* (YJhulu, 2011). An American lady came to me confusedly when I was an exchange student in the United States in 2011 and asked what kind of clothes Chinese wear nowadays; later my first landlord couple in Canada insisted on teaching me how to use the TV remote control because they assumed that I had never used one before.

These are some examples from Westerners that I have met who have never been to China and have very limited knowledge of it. But this might be only the tip of the iceberg floating above the water. It is not rare to see arguments between Westerners and Chinese on the understanding of each side on mainstream social media websites such as YouTube. A casual topic could lead to unexpected thousands of follow-up posts ranging from different life styles between the two to sensitive political views. Judging from a Chinese perspective, some of the arguments our Western counterparts make are only partly true or not true based on the biased information they received from different media or the cultural diversity in China of which they are ignorant.

I have been learning English since I can remember, and now I am in North American academia, immersed in the Canadian version of Western culture. But if I asked myself how well I understand it, I could say enough for survival in both Chinese and Western environments, but not well enough to be tactful or manipulative enough to advance myself socially. To elaborate, I understand that certain cultural differences appear in conflicting cultural values, but it is difficult to articulate and justify the process of coming to know, to understand, to realize and to apply these understandings to life. So in distinguishing the Chinese-Western cultural exchange process I could not help but wonder if those Westerners who have lived in China for a long enough time have experienced the differences and conflicts like I have living in this Western culture. My
questions include: (1) How do they comprehend their lived experiences in China? (2) How do they interpret the Chinese culture from a Western perspective? (3) Do some go a step beyond understanding Chinese culture and their own to develop a more *cosmopolitan* identity?

The purpose of this study is to explore and possibly understand the questions mentioned above. It is further to bridge the limitations of culturally-biased terminology to explore how “understanding” China might mean different things to a Chinese person and a Westerner who lives there. What does it mean to *understand* another culture – is it to be able to explain it or does it imply the more subtle ability to inhabit that culture? Studying the lived experience of outsiders in China may help to shed light on these research questions.

**Background and Significances**

There has been a long history of academic exchange between China and Western countries. Early in the year 1847, Rong Hong (also as known as Yung Wing or Jung Hung) followed his teacher coming to the United States and attended Yale University (Bieler, 2008). He is best known for persuading the Chinese emperor of the time to set up the Chinese Educational Mission in which 30 Chinese students came to the US on educational exchange in 1872. Pearl Buck, raised in China, won the Pulitzer Prize for her novel, *The Good Earth*, and the Nobel Prize for literature. She had insight into Chinese culture not only shown in her writing but also her philanthropic activities, which were meant to promote understanding between Asia and the West (Filmakers Library, 2002). Author Helen Foster Snow commented, “Pearl Buck established the first bridge over the Pacific Ocean between China and America, but also between China and the whole Western world” (Filmakers Library, 2002). Buck played a “pioneering role in demythologizing China and the Chinese people in the American mind” (Kang, 1997, p. 4).
As globalization pushes business trading around the world, it is also making cross-border communication and understanding a necessity throughout the world. Developed countries have always been the choice for Chinese students studying abroad (Tao, Berci & He, n.d.). In 2009, Canada welcomed about 200,000 international students; over 50,000 of them are Chinese students, representing the largest group of foreign students in Canada (“Studying in Canada”, n.d.). The situation is the same in the United States. Chinese students take up to 25.4% of all the international students attending in 2011/12 (Institute of International Education, n. d.) and the number is seen to be rising.

In 1990, National Task Force on Undergraduate Education Abroad (U.S.) published a report expecting that in the last decade of 20th century at least 10% of those who receive baccalaureate degrees will have had “a significant educational experience abroad during their undergraduate years” (as cited in Laubscher, 1994). The U.S. Association of International Educators (NAFSA) argues that international knowledge and skills are imperative for the future security and competitiveness of the country, but the Association realized that the U. S. was desperately in need of people “who are able to understand global crises not only from an American vantage point, but also from those of our allies and our adversaries” (2003, p. 2). From that standpoint, early in 2000, NAFSA and the Alliance for International Educational and Cultural Exchange (U.S.) issued a white paper proposing changes in educational policy including promoting fewer traditional study locations and the study of more major world languages, including Chinese.

As the result of the efforts put in by government agencies, businesses, and increased interest from individuals, China is becoming popular as a less traditional study abroad destination for Western students in the recent years. In 2008/2009, among the top five host
countries, only the numbers of U.S. students in higher education going to China saw an increase, 4%. There were decreases in the numbers of students going to the traditional European destinations (Institute of International Education, 2010). In 2010/2011, students from the United States going to China increased by 4.9% over 2009/2010 (Institute of International Education, 2012), and the number of U.S. students ranked the second among all foreign students in China (Wang, 2012). The ambition of the Obama’s administration is to double the number of U.S. students studying in China by 2014 (Fischer, 2011), so we can safely predict that the number of Western students going to China will be steadily going up in the future.

In recognition of the growing need for academic/cultural exchange between the East and the West, many Western educational organizations now provide different types of exchange programs for students studying in China in various disciplines such as business, nursing, etc. (Smith, 2006; Hutchings, Jackson & McEllister, 2002; Hu, Andreatta, Yu & Li, 2010). Though the 2012 Educational Policy Briefing of Canada pointed out that Canada is far behind the goal of sending 100,000 Canadian students to China within five years (Shane, 2012), major universities in British Columbia and other schools in Canada provide exchange programs to China. Governments also provide incentives for students going to China such as the Canada-China Scholars’ Exchange Program Awards arranged by the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE). Other than designed programs launched by universities and colleges, there are more and more self-driven individuals coming to China to study or work.

Among the academic exchanging programs to China, cultural immersion is taken not only as a bonus or an add-on to aid and improve academic learning but as a means for students to improve their intercultural competence (Smith, 2006; Hutchings et al., 2002; Hu et al., 2010).
Noticeably, findings from studies of studying abroad suggest that students who study abroad also expand their global perspective or worldmindedness (Salisbury, 2011).

John Dewey (1938) pointed out that educative experience should guide students’ learning, but could sometimes lead to the wrong kind experience. If the students are disconnected from the learning or other schooling experience, then they could be mis-educated by learning harmful or narrow attitudes and habits.

So for educators it is important to determine the quality of an experience. Dewey quotes Tennyson’s “Ulysses” as a metaphor for the quality of broadened and deepened learning experience: “... all experience is an arch wherethro’/ Gleams that untravelled world, whose margin fades / For ever and for ever when I move” (1938, p. 35). Moving or travelling for the sake of new learning is, for Dewey, among the most important of all experiences.

In the General Model for Assessing the Effects of Differential Environments on Student Learning and Cognitive Outcomes developed by Pascarella (1985), the quality of student efforts and students’ own background, such as personality and interactions with the institutional environment, are considered as factors that influence students’ learning outcomes. The experience that Westerners have in China, as well as their attitudes towards it influence their future perspective on all cultures and acquaints them with values other than their own. For this reason educators and program designers who propose recruiting and sending students to China and for those who decide to experience a totally different culture in China, an exploration to understand precedents’ experience is a good starting point. Reflections might be triggered on their own attitudes or impressions of China even before arrival.
In 1994, Laubscher published *Encounters with Difference*, focusing on American students’ perceptions on the cultural differences that they met when studying abroad. He pointed out that there was a paucity of previously published researches covering the cross-cultural issues in higher education and the researches mostly were quantitative in nature, emphasizing the impacts and outcomes but not the processes of cross-cultural engagement. Admittedly, this is still true nowadays. Compared with the researches about Chinese students studying abroad which are ample and cover almost every aspect from students’ language proficiency (Liu, 2009), the perspectives on foreign-delivered programs in China (Willis, 2012), the problems for the returning students (Li, 1998), and the embedded culture and intercultural adaptation in the programs for Chinese students (Bodycott, 2012), the researches of similar topics from Western perspectives on living in China are inadequate and do not correspond to the fast growing speed and numbers of Westerners going to study or live in China. In addition, the existing researches on cross-cultural experiences for Western students are more generally focused on cultures that are different from theirs but not specifically on Chinese culture with its unique Confucian heritage.

Moreover, some cities in China such as Shanghai and some areas in cities such as Shamian in Guangzhou are seen by the Chinese as *Westernized* or occupied mostly by Westerners. Overall Westerners are a marginalized group in China, but they wish to have their experiences and feelings be heard. As a result, a considerable number of posts, videos and blogs about their living experience in China are now available on the Internet. They are eager to express themselves, which appears in the efforts they make to get their voice online by overcoming the media censorship in China.
For all the reasons stated above, academic qualitative research such as this may help both Western and Chinese higher education institutions to gain insights into designing exchange programs in order to help students on cultural competence and to maximize the usage of resources; it may guide policy-makers to foresee possible problems and on setting goals; it could serve as a good chance for the Westerners who are going to experience, are experiencing, or have experienced China and its culture to have psychological preparations or reflections; and, most of all, this project enables those who have never been abroad to have a sense of what might be expected when coming across another culture or values that might be totally different from theirs, because, after all, this world is becoming smaller and no one wants to be excluded.

As a Chinese student in Canada, I personally understand what comes with the collision and excitement of East meeting West. Learning how the Westerners in China gain ways of knowing and understanding Chinese culture guides me to reflect on my own cross-cultural experience, especially we are the generation that is described and criticized for being Westernized by our people. Am I really Westernized? Do I accept being Westernized? Therefore, this project may provide me with a new perspective with which to look at the culture in which I grew up with and help me to dig to a deeper level of understanding of this Western culture which I am now experiencing. Hopefully, in the process of doing this research, I may approach the arch of experience beyond which "gleams that untravelled world" of intercultural, cosmopolitan self-identity.
Chapter II Literature Review

In this section, I reviewed the available literature that discusses or exemplifies my exploration of the lived experience of Westerners in China. Resources from both academic (e.g., scholarly journals) and mass media (e.g., YouTube videos) would be presented and examined. What I found in the literature was not only the expected confusion and conflict with the culture-world of China, but also maladjustments in two more specific domains: value incompatibility and the language barrier. The authors appear to have understood China and its culture based on the values of their home culture, and their experience in China. Among the authors, some retained the Western perspective only while others were more open or at least tried to be to the viewpoints from a different culture.

The literature below contains both qualitative and quantitative theory-based research and more up to date, straightforward expressions from YouTube contributors. However, what could be gained from the literature are personal thoughts on one or more aspects of the intercultural exchanging/learning experience and Chinese culture. And since China is a country much richer in diversity than it appears to the West, the views often cover only some parts of the whole or are narrow in research scope.

In 1994 Michael R. Laubscher published his book Encounters with Difference, focusing on Western students' perceptions on the cultural differences that they met when studying abroad. He pointed out that there was a paucity of previously published papers covering the cross-cultural issues in higher education, and the researches mostly were quantitative in nature, emphasizing the impacts and outcomes but not the processes of cross-cultural engagement.
Nearly 20 years have passed and there is more literature available on the experience on higher education student studying abroad, but the trend of using quantitative data to show impacts and outcomes still prevails. The tendency of going to China to study/work has been rising from the past decade, but scholarly qualitative studies focusing on the study abroad process in China – especially on Westerners’ perspective – are still in scarcity. But with the help of the emerging media, there are more qualitative data on the Internet such as YouTube, blogs, and other social networking sites.

Cultural Adaptation

Culture Shock. Coming to a new environment and being exposed to another culture inevitably challenges one’s ability to acquire new cultural knowledge and adapt it to one’s own cultural norms. Hofstede (1980, p. 277) states “forced exposure to an alien cultural environment can put people under heavy stress” (cited by Hutchings et al., 2002, p. 58). Investigating the stressors of African and Western students in China, Hashim and Yang (2003) came to the conclusion that culture shock was a common phenomenon in the process of adaption. Culture shock is identified as “the transition from a familiar to an unfamiliar environment where old behavior patterns become ineffective means for coping” (Oberg, 1954, as cited in Hashim & Yang, 2003, p. 218). Oberg distinguishes four phases of culture: (a) honeymoon phase; (b) disenchantment phase; (c) beginning resolution phase; (d) effective functioning phase.

Heusinkveld (1991) had a similar comprehension of the culture shock phases from Young’s (1975) cross-cultural handbook that she explained as (a) honeymoon; (b) culture fatigue; (c) “begin to understand” and (d) “not agree with all ... but ... can accept” (p. 9). As cited by Hu et al. (2010, p. 500), Maltby and Abrams (2009) quoted repeated words from studying abroad students’ journals about the phases they went through during the experience,
including “beginning to see,” “thinking about the seen,” “wanting to change the seen,” and “transformed by the seen.” There is still room to argue about whether transformed refers to action or merely attitude. It can be concluded from the culture shock phase studies that this is a process starts from the discomfort of realizing one does not understand, to accepting that one does not understand, to learning so one can begin to understand. But this is precisely the kind of question I will explore in my study.

The effects of culture shock can be seen in diverse presentations. In Hashim and Yang’s (2003) research on both Anglophone African and Western students in China and their environmental, intrapersonal, interpersonal and academic sources of stress, most students found the latter two the most common stressors. Damen (1982) noted that culture shock is more common “for those learning a second language in a second culture” (as cited in Hashim & Yang, 2003, p. 218), which could result in frustration and even illness.

However, as culture shock seems to be unavoidable for those having cross-cultural experience, Young (1975) assessed it as helpful to anticipate the experience: “The mental and emotional adjustment required of those living abroad is real. ... It helps to know that such problems will arise and to know what it is you are experiencing” (as cited in Heusinkveld, 1991).

**Cross-Cultural Learning.** In the orientation for American students going abroad, Heusinkveld (1991) made two lists respectively of *cross-cultural skills* and *coping skills* that she believed were essential for students to function in a second culture. While the coping skills require students to have willingness, courage, ability, and patience for new and different things, such skills are probably suitable for coping with any new situation. The cross-cultural skills range from understanding one’s own cultural background – tolerance, curiosity, willingness to
imitate – to the ability to adapt, accept, and awareness of cultural universals. Similarly, Gudykunst and Kim focused on individual efforts in communication across cultures.

“[T]olerance of ambiguity; open-mindedness; empathy; interaction managements; ethnocentrism; flexibility; and stress management skills” were identified by Hammer (1989, as cited in Hutchings et al., 2002, p. 59) as some of the factors influencing the likelihood of success or failure.

Campinha-Bacote (1999) developed a definition of cultural competence that she defined as “cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, cultural skill, cultural encounter, and cultural desire” (as cited in Hu et al., 2010, p. 500). What can be concluded from the researches on cross-cultural adaptation is that it is a learning process, “a dynamic interplay between stress-adaptation and growth” (Kim, 1988).

Spradley (1972) saw the “transformed” in culture shock mentioned in the last section as one of the levels of learning in the enculturation process. According to Hansen’s understanding, the levels “range from learning about, through understanding, believing, and using the belief to organize or account for behavior, to the ultimate level of ‘internalizing the belief so thoroughly that it is a part of [one’s] tacit knowledge and violation would be unthinkable’” (1979, pp. 7-8). On the other hand, Bamlund (1975) considered that even when students gained insight into the cognitive differences, they still interpret them within their original culture.

Social institutions and customs will be interpreted inevitably from the premises and through the medium of their own culture. Whether they notice something or overlook it, respect it or ridicule it, express or conceal their reaction will be dictated by the logic of their own rather than the alien culture. (As cited by Laubscher, 1994, p. 3)

Though there were different comprehensions towards the cross-cultural learning process the literature indicated that this process has the development model, which starts with the
awareness and acknowledgement of differences, imitation of actions to comply with second culture (to solve problems), to finding out the cultural values behind them. Whether continuing to believe the values or going beyond to internalize them should be based on the understanding of them.

Researchers and cross-cultural program developers have been paying attention to the preparation and exchanging of cultural values. More and more of them realize how important it is for international communication nowadays. Jackson (1991) suggested that discussion on their own and the other cultural values, paired with literature reading on national values, helped students to notice the stereotypes they held before actually experiencing the other culture. A more profound result would be that the students start realizing that their unquestioned actions are driven by values stemming from their home culture. However, the attitudes of one’s own/the other culture might change after perceiving, interpreting, and living with the values of the other culture.

**Cosmopolitanism.** Some thought that exposure to another culture and country helps to decrease ethnocentrism, which means the belief in one’s own culture as being superior to another’s (Haloburdo & Thompson, 1998; Maltby & Abrams, 2009). Morgan, Jr. (1972, 1975) used quantitative data to categorize some American students into *cultural relativists* and *culture opposites* before their departure to Switzerland. Concluding from the research data after the students’ return, he found that better coping and adaption were found in the cultural relativists. As expected, the culture opposites demonstrated a heightened degree of nationalism and nostalgia for their homeland. In Kafka’s research on students from the United States (1968), the results went to the extremes. He pointed out that the appreciation or the reinforcement of the appreciation for the homeland culture was gained at the expense of the new culture, and vice
versa for those "who achieved total cross-cultural immersion," that is, "the rating of the host country improved at the expense of the United States" (as cited in Laubscher, 1994, p. 9).

This loss of value for one's own country is likely against the intention of some organizations that sponsor such cross-cultural exchanges in hopes of benefitting economically. Other than developing understanding towards the other culture and have some stereotypes eliminated (Chao, 2000), it was anticipated that long-term visitors would deepen their appreciation for their home culture (Heusinkveld, 1991) by re-examining their own values and "reshaping of the principles that guide behavior" (Kauffmann et al., 1992, p. 110), presumably principles in accord with their original value system.

Gwynne (1981) used the word worldmindedness to describe the positive attitudes of some students including that they learned "a greater sense of autonomy and self-esteem, and became more sympathetic toward different ethnic groups" (as cited in Laubscher, 1994, p. 8). Kauffmann (1983) called it altruism in terms of the growing sympathy showed by the returning students. Carlson and Widaman's (1988) study concluded that besides a great leap of international political concern and cross-cultural interest, students demonstrated growth in cultural cosmopolitanism as well. In more recent studies, Hutchings et al. (2000) suggested that the three-week immersion in China contributed to those Australian students' cosmopolitan identity building, including willingness to interact with the other, a movement towards being part of a culture rather than accidental tourists (Tyler, 1985, as cited in Hutchings et al., 2002, p. 58).

In the International Encyclopedia of Social and Behavioral Sciences (2001), the word cosmopolitanism is explained:
AN INQUIRY INTO CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING 16

Cosmopolitanism ... epitomized the need social agents have to conceive of a political and cultural entity, larger than their own homeland, that would encompass all human beings on a global scale. ... Cosmopolitanism presupposes a positive attitude towards difference, a desire to construct broad allegiances and equal and peaceful global communities of citizens who should be able to communicate across cultural and social boundaries forming a universalist solidarity.

Due to its ambiguity and the different types of the subjects it covers, there are different meanings attached to the concept of cosmopolitan identity according to the various ways of interpreting it. Hannerz (1996) suggested that people of cosmopolitan identity have “involvement with a plurality of contrasting cultures on their own terms” (p. 103). He also described one world culture (p. 111), which may be emerging that is more than the sum of its separate parts. In this way, cosmopolitanism suggests the worldmindedness mentioned above, but it must be kept in mind that a possible world culture, in this sense, is not meant to replace original cultural identities but to allow for such differences within a larger world of cosmopolitan cross-cultural respect, understanding, and the desire to learn more (cf. Papastephanou, 2012).

Riberio (2001) concluded that there are two common criticisms against cosmopolitanism: it is an elitist social representation, and it is an impossible project. But he argued that not just the global migratory movements bringing “transnational and diasporic cultures” (p. 23) with the help of mass media, but also the global interconnection on world economics and sociology and universalist ideologies are creating a popular cosmopolitanism. Riberio believed that cosmopolitanism represents a new and powerful ideology in the future world.

Nowadays, achieving cosmopolitan identity during short-term programs in China for Westerners has floated to the surface as a possible purpose. By emphasizing the growth in cultural competence, cosmopolitanism is seen as a major reason for cross-cultural learning instead of being seen as an add-on feature. Quite a number of studies have suggested that


participants developed new or deeper understanding of Chinese culture. But it should be noticed that biases exist since some of the programs are designed and designated by special interests, and the findings are narrowed for purposes such as the acquisition of cultural knowledge to do business successfully with Chinese, as in the study of Hutchings et al. (2002).

**Awareness of the Differences**

**Resistance.** Besides the obvious surprise from the new sights, tastes and smells of China, the most abrupt changes are the distinctive ways of speaking and behaving of the local Chinese people. One word could describe this change—*different:*

> It is really different over there ... just the lack of diversity over there you know. Everyone’s Chinese, and you feel such a minority when you’re over there ... [E]veryone speaks Chinese, the food’s different, the culture’s totally different (univms, 2009).

Academic researches tend to categorize the differences in general such as business between China and Australia (Hutchings et al., 2002), nursing and clinical exchanging (Hu et al., 2010), or perception of stressors for Western students in China (Hashim & Yang, 2003), etc. Hutchings et al. divided the differences or mistakes the students encountered and categorized them into either (1) competitive/task, (2) personal/social, (3) acquaintance/social or (4) impersonal/task (2010, p. 64). In Hu et al.’s study, other than noticing the differences of the health care system between China and the U.S., students also had some cultural exchange with local Chinese students; however, the study did not focus on describing the cultural exchange. Hashim and Yang’s study, as previously stated, employed quantitative surveys to count the common the common stressors, which are also the reasons that contribute to culture shock for Western students in China. Those researches suggested that the differences stemmed from ignorance of cultural norms, such as not knowing to let the senior speak first (Hu et al., 2010). Very few of the
participants tried to find out the cultural values behind the ignorance: most of the time they limit themselves to the word *different*. The studies likely use current findings to back up previous theories.

Similarly, even some Western YouTube contributors who visited China found it frustrating that Chinese usually mean something different/opposite from what they actually say or act (cdzadek, 2012; pogobat, 2009) which I agree because I sometimes cannot read or I misread my own people; they pointed out that it is a part of the culture but did not discuss why this might be so. In *Encounters with Difference* (Laubscher, 1994), this was also discussed in the relationship between a Westerner and a Japanese lady (in terms of hiding emotions, the Japanese culture is comparable to the Chinese, at least as far as Westerners are concerned). Noticing but not being able to understand the indirectness or even misdirection in the words and actions, he just felt confused and left.

Morrill’s short story *Never Wanting to Go Back* (1996) is saturated with feelings of confusion, loneliness and desperation generated from his experience in China as he intimately documented random thoughts or stories of his and other Western people. He described the experience as a “second childhood” because of the uncertainty of understanding what was going on. YouTube contributor with the pseudonym pogobat, who went to China for a short trip a decade after Morrill did, also described as “the general sense of uncertainty” (2009). From his perspective, things in China change without being spoken about and he put that down as a cultural characteristic.

One thing that bothered Morrill was the invasion of privacy, such as the limited living space so people take a walk to leave private time for couples or his maid comes to clean his desk
without a knock. Though his Chinese students told him that “privacy for most Chinese depends on a psychological rather than a spatial domain,” he was not able to understand and “never grew accustomed to making room in my spirit for what I lacked in territory.” Morrill and his Western peers seemed lost and desperate to fulfill their material and mental desires, such as meeting Westerners they would not have met at home, cultural products like the *Playboy* magazine and cheese or even getting into immoral affairs. At last he seemed let go of the *want* and learned to deal with the living style. In other words, it is not necessary to accept the cultural values to survive in China, but that means remaining an outsider with little cultural empathy. By letting go, Morrill perhaps means he let go of the cultural expectations he brought with him and ceased resistance to the Chinese cultural norms that surrounded him, and this resistance discounted his living quality.

The most noticeable differences were those of daily life. There are an ample number of YouTube videos online in which people describe their first impression of such differences. Most of them focus on such things as dining or travel in (Jan vanderAa, 2009a, 2009b). Some posters noted how they are unable to visit some websites that they visited at home since the Chinese government blocks them (thisisyourwakeup, 2011) or how the toilet designs are different even from the Japanese (wingwaabuddha, 2011a). Others provide travel tips such as storing cold drinks in summer (wingwaabuddha, 2011b), but not with any cultural ideas.

**Superficial Understanding and False Assumptions.** Many program planners of different institutions pay great attention to the pre-departure orientation for the students on both living conditions and cultural practices with seminars, readings and discussions to prepare students for China. For those who travel alone to China, many guidebooks and online videos cover everything from food and transportation to the very root of Chinese interpersonal relationships,
expressed in such words as *guan-xi*, which means not only connections between people but the mutual benefits of such social links. In her book *Written on Water* (1945/2005), Chinese writer Eileen Zhang said that human beings in modern times always see the pictures of the sea before the real sea, that is, the real experience tends to strengthen or collide with previously-held ideas, no matter how well those ideas had been learned. Some commentators realized through direct experience that the cultural values of China became part of their own lives if they let them.

For example, in Kauffmann’s (1992) study, Robert, an American student who went to Beijing University for a year, confirmed the difference between courses taken at school and firsthand cultural experience. He discovered that making social connections (*guan-xi*) is not just an idea but a way of life:

> They would describe the connections involved with a Chinese word, *guan-xi*. So you would think, OK, *guan-xi* is how it works. But you go to China and you see that *guan-xi* pervades the whole society, that it is a really major issue, and that it also affects your own life. … It means a lot more after you’ve gone there and you’ve seen it. You think, well, it’s not just what you read in the book – it has meaning to you personally. (p. 35)

Many Westerners came to China to preach or teach. As early as at the beginning of 20th century, with encouragement from the Chinese government seeking modern education, Western religious groups came to China with the mission of creating a new Christian nation. Absalom Sydenstricker with his wife came to China in 1880 as American Southern Presbyterian Missionaries (Pearl S. Buck Birthplace, 2013); their daughter, Pearl Buck, had a neighbour named Margret Thomson who was a Methodist missionary based in Nanjing from 1917 to 1939. “They and millions of Americans at home linked Christianity and civilization, Christianity and democracy” (Berg, 1991, p. 456). Missionaries attributed the failure of Christianization in China to their not mastering the language, social awkwardness and insensitivity, and the isolation from the local Chinese people because of the special attention (having the military to protect them)
accorded them. Furthermore, the early Western visitors, such as the reformers and missionaries, tried to “jettison [Chinese] tradition entirely” (Berg, 1991, p. 456). In other words, the superficial understanding of the depth of Chinese culture meant the efforts of the missionaries and teachers to Westernize China were doomed to be ineffective.

The superficiality of Chinese culture was what Getty (2011) assumed before she came to China and taught in a university. Her Western colleagues assumed that there were no differences and tried to avoid mentioning them because they assumed any such differences must be bad. She put False Assumptions in the title of her article to indicate, “Lip service to the concept of internationalization is not the same thing as understanding the challenges involved” (p. 347).

False assumptions appear on the Chinese and Chinese cultural values also appeared when some Westerners attempted to gain insight. Though Getty (2011) had some words of wisdom for understanding another culture – “the greatest challenge is to convince my students not to discount or discard out-of-hand worldviews that are not their own” (p. 347) – she still generalized the differences she met in a particular Chinese university setting to the whole university/academic setting in China. For example, she found that Chinese students have only a vague idea of plagiarism and her explanation was because of the group ownership, which is more encouraged in China than individualism. She admitted that this assumption was from her “limited experience” (p. 350), which suggests more, will be understood with more experience.

YouTube contributor wingwaabuddha had a concise conclusion of all the differences people might come across in China, saying that “nothing is as it seems, and sometimes bad things could be good and good things can be bad” (2011b). Superficial understandings and false assumptions do not seem to be harmful in cross-cultural learning, at least in the short term. But
failing to understand or even developing strong stereotypes that bring negative emotional problems that haunted Morrill and his peers affect the quality of life. Kauffmann et al. (1992) concluded that visitors would be more likely to develop favourable attitudes towards the host country if they “spend a significant amount of time there (six months or more)” (p. 55).

Cosmopolitanism does not necessarily require a positive attitude towards another culture but, instead, a clear comprehension of the differences as in eccentric cosmopolitanism (Papastephanou, 2012). The major issue is non-superficial understanding, as previously stressed, and this could be tracked from some of the YouTube videos as they discovered the deeper values behind some common phenomena.

Sustained Cross-Cultural Growth

Researchers implied that international learning experiences can be profound but difficult to translate and sustain (Kirkham, Hofwegen & Pankratz, 2009), so there is not much that could be explored in the literature alone to track someone’s sustained cross-cultural growth between China and the West. YouTube provides an easier and more convenient platform for people to express themselves, plus it is not limited by academic constraints. A number of videos about lived experience in China revealed different levels of understanding Chinese cultural values hidden behind the behaviours. However, there is no standardized measure to judge how deep or profound someone’s understandings of Chinese culture might be, so for the purpose of qualitative review I am using my own understanding to interpret the videos and literature.

Wingwaabuddha is not the only one Westerner YouTube contributor in China who noticed that not every single Chinese is politically a communist (Jeff Martinez, 2012) as some Westerners assume. In the video titled “Myths about China: All Chinese are Communists”
(2011c), wingwaabuddha noted that some Chinese joined the ruling party for utilitarian or practical reasons, not necessarily because they believed in its doctrines.

Judging from the date of the first video on his playlist, “China, How It Is,” the YouTube contributor serpentza began to perceive foundational Chinese values only after being in China for “six or seven years” (serpentza, 2012a). The topics of the videos cover various social phenomena from the controversial topic of dog meat as food for Chinese to a topic that he, as a white Westerner, gets asked most often: “Are Chinese girls easy?” (serpentza, 2011). He may have gained some insights into Chinese culture that the Chinese themselves do not see. For example, he started seeing the reason why some Chinese girls prefer lighter skin over darker skin Westerners is not racism, but may derive from the tradition that lighter skin equals higher socioeconomic status. This identification of status with lighter skin is found in ancient Chinese literature, so its actual origins may be lost in the mists of time. But in ancient Chinese literature, tanned skin was the result of working outdoors for the lighter skin upper class that did not need to do such work. He noted that many people regarded as good looking or educated were lighter skinned. Recently, he added another video (2012b) about a letter from a Chinese girl who claimed that some of his statements were not true in all cases. In response serpentza admitted to generalizing, “Of course I am generalizing, I have to generalize.” This relates to the generalization of Westerners and even of China in the last section. As cross-cultural learning is a dynamic process, what can be generalized and how to avoid overgeneralization while understanding and interpreting the cultural values appear to be significant issues. A certain amount of generalizing is necessary, and this will be explained in the next chapter.

Being open-minded is one of the suggestions to face and deal with the differences in Chinese culture from various YouTube contributors (uiowainternational, 2011). On the other
hand, being open-minded also means for the Westerners themselves to be different in Chinese culture. Julien Gaudfroy, a comedian from France studying the traditional Chinese comedy art called Xiangsheng, had struggled with the way he was identified by most Chinese people. Mastering the Chinese language, he had tried to weaken the Chinese perception of him as a foreigner: “I used to really not like people saying I am the foreigner ... why you have to remind me every second that I am a foreigner? To some point I realize that [they] never forget who you are” (SeeChinaOrg, 2010).

In terms of language, Shaffer, Harrison and Gilley (1999) suggested that learning the language and non-verbal communication skills are major assets in adapting to another culture; Kaufmann et al.’s study stressed that “foreign languages must be taken seriously” (1992, p. 149) for cross-cultural integration. While there is no negative report about language from people who stayed for a short term in China, those who became long-term residents in China do suggest the importance of knowing the language.

As psychohistorian Robert Jay Lifton (1993) has written, “Culture is inseparable from symbolization” (p. 13), implying culture and language are two aspects of the same thing. In “How it is—Culture shock,” one of the suggestions of YouTube contributor serpentza is to learn the language, which may seem obvious but is often overlooked. This is also true of Julien Gaudfroy who took the language advantage for his Xiangsheng performance in China. From the nuances of the Chinese language he realized that that cultural diversity exists in China – that something funny in Beijing might not work in Guangdong (SeeChinaOrg, 2010). Tang (2006) pointed out that in order to perform appropriately and effectively in a second culture, a foreign language learner must draw on the “inculcated default memories of that culture” rather than relying on his or her base culture or on “a dialectic between base and target cultures.” Hall
(1959, as cited in Tang, 2006, p. 87) confirms that a culture is in essence the mode of human relationship: “Communication is culture and culture is communication.” Since culture is the name we give to the essence of human communication, it is only through culture that we understand each other and expect to be understood. It is an intangible quality of human relationship, not a measurable quantity, and, as such, can best be researched qualitatively. Gaudfroy represents a good example: “[B]ecause I learned Chinese, I learned the culture, the environment. ... Once inside their culture I understand. It is a learning process” (SeeChinaOrg, 2010).

Robert (in Kauffmann et al.’s study) stated that two-year Chinese language class was enough to “get the basic things done.” However, understanding nuances and differences in usage, can be only acquired from life: “It comes with talking with people on the trains, reading newspapers, learning slogans, and things like that” (p. 38).

Few literature sources reveal how authors attempted to understand Chinese culture. Tomaszek (2006) tried to do it by analyzing her Chinese students’ interpretation of Western literature and familiarizing herself with Chinese history and traditional (philosophy) values when teaching Toni Morrison’s trilogy in a Chinese university. She expected that the students would talk about class struggle or liberation in the books, but instead they talked more about identity cognition as the result of the internal migrations within the country, the tradition of remembering the past and projecting the experience into the future, and familial life-long responsibility, and other things that were more within the themes of real Chinese society.

From a historical perspective, Zhang (2010) argued that neither insiders nor outsiders have privileged access to the knowledge or the truth of the real China, including its history and
culture. Neither the *China-centered* approach nor seeing China as the *other* of the West helped comprehend the changing China in the ever-changing world. He claimed that only the integration and mutual illumination of both insiders’ and outsiders’ views (not simply comparing or adding up) could help to reach a closer approximation of understanding.

There is very little comment on such integration from YouTube contributors but the videos showed a tendency in this direction. Contributor *thisisyourwakeup* told people who go to China, “Don’t judge a country which you’ve never been to” (2011), indicating the importance of being in the culture in order to understand it. To allow for integration of two cultures, it may be that one must dis-integrate the narrow grip of one’s native culture.

Below some of the YouTube videos (especially the controversial political/historical topics of China contributed by Westerners who have been in China) are the comments where the collision of views from *insiders* (the contributor or Chinese) and *outsiders* (Westerners who had never been in China) takes place. Stereotypes, over-generalizations or even racism are clearly seen in some of the comments. In some cases comments from native Chinese expanded the insight of the contributor or the topic was directed to other aspects of China/Chinese culture that occasionally caused massive debates online. An example is the topic “WHAT I HATE ABOUT CHINA” uploaded by contributor *pogobat* that attracted 18,176 comments in three years since 2009 (retrieved Jan. 31, 2013). It appears that coming to China enables Westerners to break the stereotypes they had from “like many people say” (Myumeful, *Living in China: Reaction to Foreigners*, p. 2). Some YouTube contributors emphasize difference, such as those who specifically talked about the cities in China in which they live to avoid being identified with a generalized or stereotypical Chinese viewpoint (austinguidry2, 2012).
Kauffmann et al. (1992) listed two other conditions for an increased possibility that the students in the study would develop favourable attitudes toward the host country. Other than the significant time spent there, the researchers suggested the qualities of “start out with realistic expectations about it” and “experience a high degree of immersion in the culture” (p. 55). These were qualities of those YouTube contributors who appeared to have more insights into Chinese culture than the students in short-term programs.

Austin Guidry, an American who now lives in China, has a blog for his Chinese adventure online. In the entry “Seeing the Elephant” (2011), he said:

I was reading "Shooter" by Jack Coughlin and he talks about seeing the elephant. He says that if you've never felt the sting of smoke in your eyes, never heard a bullet zing by you, never killed a man, never smelled the stench of death, then you can never really talk about war with veterans. ... This may seem like a clumsy parallel, but I believe that living abroad is the same way – you just have to be there to understand what kind of experience living in China is.
Chapter III Research Design

Participant Selection and Data Collection

This project used qualitative methodologies and a phenomenological perspective to collect and interpret data. I collected information regarding the experience my participants have in China, and this included their life experience in narratives and interviews, my interpretation of their narratives and interaction with them in interviews, and my exploration of my own authentic responses to them. In this research, I sought to 1) study the phenomenology of cultural differences experienced by the participants, 2) to explore the authentic challenges to personal identity that arise in cross-cultural situations, and 3) to recognize and be open to the possibility that some individuals might realize an emergent cosmopolitan identity. To meet these goals, I have carefully structured the parameters of my research.

I set up three inclusion criteria for choosing participants according to related research and my knowledge and experience in this field. To take part in this research, I required the participants to be Westerners who

- had been in China for long enough time (no less than continuous 12 months);
- started out with a willingness to learn about the culture in China;
- were able to reflect on the experience and were willing to talk about it.

The term “Westerners” here refers to the people from the Western world (northwestern Europe, Canada, and the U.S.) in general. Roughly and directly speaking, for Chinese, both Lao-wai in Mandarin and Gweilo in Cantonese refer to Western (white) foreigners, a judgment based on appearance. This is a biased label, for such “foreigners” come from many nations with many individual differences. Even though they may share similar democratic political systems,
religious traditions, capitalist economies, distinct social classes, as well as ethical values and cultural norms all rooted in western European history, in reality each nation is unique unto itself with even further sub-cultural divides within each one. Not only does the sobriquet, Westerner, include many different languages, these days it would also include many different dialects, belief systems, and even the skin colours of many races.

When defining “Western world” Wikipedia itself a great generalizer among encyclopedias, states that there is no agreed upon definition of what those countries have in common yet “the West” is often contrasted with “the Orient” (“Western world”, n. d.). This seems to be a generally accepted idea when we refer to the “West” and the “East” nowadays, even though we know that exceptions to such generalizations abound and its over-application results in stereotypes. Despite these limitations, the colloquial term, Westerner, functions sufficiently well to provide a research parameter for the purposes of this study, but it must be noted that I am using the term in the open sense, that is, inclusive of diverse races and languages, as long as the participants had come to China from somewhere in “the West.” In that case, eligible participants were not be restricted by their nationalities as long as they come from the West and met with the other criteria I set up above.

Interview was used as the main method to gather information in this project. To ensure the information gathered in each interview has depth and quality, the number of participants was restricted to four. Before the interviews, I reviewed those who have already voiced their thoughts about their experience in China, either to me personally or via Internet. For convenience of interviewing, potential participants were sought using snowball sampling method starting in the city I come from. Brief pilot interviews were done to ensure the participants have met these
standards for the research. The participants appear in my later chapters under the pseudonyms as Alden, Bryan, Calan and Omar.

The medium of the interviews was mostly face-to-face communication. Before interviews, participants were offered an information letter of what this research about and how I was going to conduct it. Upon signing the consent form, which was designed by me the researcher and approved by the UNBC Research Ethics Board (REB), participants agreed to have me record the interview using recorders. The amount of interview time for each participant varied mostly because of the availability of participants.

The interviews were done in the language with which the participant was most comfortable. In practice, conversations were made mostly in English. For a few times the participants used Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese) in the interviews to better explain some situations, translations and explanation of the context were provided by me with the participants’ approval. Though English is not one of my native languages, it was used for both interviewing and coding. The researcher role will be clarified in the next section.

Some of the participants already have their voices out on the Internet in such places as YouTube videos, entries on blogging websites, pictures and statuses on social websites. These online resources were treated as supplementary data to the interview conversations themselves; as such, it was referenced during some conversations.

The interview questions were open-ended, allowing the participants free expression, but I had also anticipated running through such topics as the different living style in China, the Chinese people they have met and with whom they have interacted, their view of the cultural events they experienced in China, reflections their own interpersonal and intrapersonal changes
and their comparison of Chinese culture with their home culture. There were opinions, imaginings, and reminisces, and intense emotions that I did not constrict with overly pre-planned questions. It was my responsibility to allow the participants room to say what they wish yet to finally keep the conversations within the parameters of what cultures mean and make us who we are. The interviews are conversations, so should end or at least pause naturally.

Interview and online resource data were in storage in electronic copies in the audio format. They were later transcribed into Microsoft Word documents and imported to NVivo9 (qualitative data analysis applications) to code and help me to bring forth latent themes.

Methodologies and Researcher Role

I have chosen to do qualitative over quantitative research because this project focuses on the process of Westerners in China gaining ways of knowing and understanding the culture. It is about “how” instead of “what” (not what they learned but how they learned), or about “who” instead of “how many” (with the focus on individual personhood over statistical number crunching). Though past researchers have developed theories of the stages that one experiencing another culture would go through from culture shock to apparent assimilation amongst the locals, there is no set standard to define which stage one is in during the cross-cultural experience. Since the process is dynamic, holistic and usually private (a continuous procedure of changing consciousness within an individual), it could not be measured by numbers, graphs or statistical variables in quantitative analysis.

A phenomenological approach allowed me to probe into the lived experience of the participants and attempt to sense the essence of each participant’s unique experience in China, at least from my own perspective. My attempt to understand is itself subject to phenomenological
AN INQUIRY INTO CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING 32

Bracketing - the epoché (setting oneself aside) of Husserl (Beyer, 2011) – so after the interviews, I will critically reflect on how I come to my own sense of understanding. Phenomenology is a philosophy developed by Edmund Husserl (cf. Beyer) that regards the perceiver as part of the perception, the knower as part of the known, and the researcher as part of the research; the subjective is not sundered from the objective as in the knowledge acquired through quantitative analysis (Smith, 2011). Phenomenology is also a major qualitative approach that “aims to get ‘to the things themselves’ through creating written descriptions of personal experience as the source of all claims to knowledge” (Conklin, 2007. p. 276), though Conklin is unclear whether the things themselves are ultimately objects or the process of human meaning-making in lived experience. The purpose of using a phenomenological approach is “to describe and understand the essence of lived experiences of individuals who have experienced a particular phenomenon” (Lichtman, 2013, p. 83). The key words here, as concerns qualitative research, are “to describe and understand,” perhaps as opposed “to explain or measure” as found in quantitative research.

In my project, the phenomenon of “living in China” is both a shared and particular experience for the participants. There is great of cultural diversity in China because of its different regions and ethnicities, but one could argue that deep down these differences only mask the Confucianism that pervades all Chinese culture. Perhaps this relates to the way the West reduces such differences to the unified concept of China. To the West (as far as it is integrated), China and its culture appear to be the West’s opposite, “the East” as Canadian comedian Russell Peters joked in his performance (GforceRock, 2007). Living in China is a particular phenomenon for the Western participants – their lived experience (cf. Smith, 2011).

Hermeneutics (Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2009) as a term related to phenomenology is often used interchangeably. Lichtman (2013) suggests two assumptions of hermeneutics are that
“humans use language to experience the world and that we obtain understanding and knowledge through our language” (p. 89). To make an analogy, Gundykunst (2001) sees learning a new language as a process of **encoding and decoding**. Stories told, written, or posted on the Internet were all encoded by those who experienced them; and we readers make sense of them by decoding them through the unique experience we each have. This helps explain why hermeneutics sees language as central to all lived experience. This is especially true for my research participants no matter if they know the Chinese language or not since it is incorporated in the culture and embedded in everyday life. The literature review gives strong examples of the centrality of language. A theme of using the language to understand the culture could be even possible in later interpretation.

Phenomenologist Husserl used the phrase *transcendental reduction* (related to the epoche or bracketing) to ask the researchers to deliberately set aside the presuppositions of the topic to make it uncluttered without their views from past experiences (cf. Beyers, 2011; Smith, 2011). So ideally this transcendental attitude could “approximate something of the pure form” (Conklin, 2007, p. 283). Many have questioned this idea of transcendence or pure form and have offered other interpretations. Jacques Derrida (1973) and other deconstructionists disagreed that Husserl’s *Bracketing of oneself from oneself* is a possibility. Norris (1982) summarized, “What Derrida fastens on to in Husserl’s various texts is the element of subjectivism which he sees still at work once the ‘transcendental reduction’ has been carried through” (p. 4). I would have to side with the deconstructionists and oppose Husserl’s and Conkin’s idea that a pure form of consciousness, “uncluttered” by culture or language, is conceivable. The best we can do is to be authentic and open to reinterpreting our interpretations as we go. Lichtman (2013) suggests making the researcher’s ideas explicit on the topic and this is what I am going to do.
It is impossible for me to be an outsider to either culture. Studying how the Western participants begin to know about China and its culture is the same process in reverse as what I am doing as a Chinese student in Canada. This is a cross-cultural experience both the participants and me. By defining the levels of knowledge and perspectives of the “cultural community” being researched and the “outsider community that they might socialize in”, Banks (1998) theorized four types of cross-cultural researchers: indigenous insider, indigenous outsider, external insider and external outsider. I would say I am both the insider and the outsider. What my participants have experienced as new and strange in China was somehow likely normal to me. It was not much of a difficulty for me to determine if they have authentically learned Chinese culture or if they are misinterpreting it. However, I must guard against making such judgments since I can never be certain I know all there is to know about China, especially the China that is experienced by someone not Chinese. It may be that a participant authentically experiences the real China but I do not know China from that perspective. As a result, I must suspend judgment and learn as much as possible from the viewpoint of my study participant, so I am able to roughly describe the quality of understanding my participants have of Chinese culture. The point is that I am not judging how much the participants know about China, but exploring the observation and reflection process they made of the culture and of themselves living in the culture.

Though living in North America for higher education and by interacting with Western information before that, one could still argue about the depth of my understanding of Western culture. From the perspective of my Western participants, I may be seen as an outsider. However, I have come to understand some Western values so, to some extent, I understand my participants’ uncertainty with regard to Chinese culture. I am still learning, changing, and trying not to reject but to understand this Western world. This is an ongoing process of changing
consciousness – for both my participants and me. Kusow (2003), referring to the boundaries between insiders and outsiders, pointed out, “[I]nsider status can also become an outsider within the same social groups and geographical locations” (in Liamputtong, 2010). From this perspective I see it does not matter much if I am an insider or outsider or half-and-half. My experience affects what I am going to interpret, and how I interpret will, in turn, affects my experience. It is up to me to understand my dual influences and whether they combine or conflict.

To find out the actual influence of my experience (a Chinese immersed in Western culture) on this project, subjective comparative cross-referencing was provided to show how my experience and knowledge of Western culture influence how I emotionally responded to the Western research participants. A reflective journal in a blog form and field notes were kept by me during the interviews and interpreting of data. Thick description was also provided. I must be aware of how I am affecting the qualitative data. The experience of the participants might in many ways be a mirror image of my own, so I cannot leave myself uninterpreted.

Max van Manen (1997), who has written much on qualitative inquiry in educational research, states that phenomenological inquiry relies on the “interpretive sensitivity, inventive thoughtfulness, scholarly tact, and writing talent of the human science researcher” (p. 34). Among all these qualities, Liamputtong (2010) sees cultural sensitivity as important in cross-cultural studies for achieving successful and unbiased research results since this is the key to developing trusting relationships with participants. I see myself capable of cultural sensitivity toward both cultures included in this project, and the openness illuminates the starting point of my research. I notice the differences and I wonder how one not only adapts to the living styles but also takes in the values instead of simply labeling them “different” or “unacceptable.”
Studying Westerners helps me to understand more of my personal knowledge in the Western world where I now live and to strengthen and transform the cognition of my identity between the West and the Chinese.

I also agree with Liamputtong's point that sensitivity alone is not good enough; knowledge of the culture is essential. I see myself in this project as not only the researcher but also a learner seeking to understand my own cultural background as well as the Western cultural context from/for my participants. I have respect for the cultural norms from both sides and the knowledge to "ask questions in a culturally relevant and explicit manner" (as cited in Liamputtong, 2010, p. 94), instead of merely asking culturally sensitive questions. I have often been in awkward situations when culturally offensive questions were asked, so I understand how to avoid offending people while maintaining my integrity. The knowledge also helped me to interpret the lived experience of the participants by providing a more direct way to get to the presumed essence – the phenomenology of human interactions – which should prevent me from hovering over trivial details or insignificant information.

My native languages are Mandarin and Cantonese, which are the first and the third most widely spoken languages in China, and I also speak English fluently. Kapborg and Bertero (2002) claim, "[D]ifferent languages create and express different realities, and language is a way of organizing the world – one we cannot understand another culture without understanding the language of the people in that culture" (as cited in Liamputtong, p. 136). This is the foundational understanding of hermeneutics – language and culture are deeply mingled. My trilingualism is perhaps the biggest advantage I have as the researcher in this project.
Chapter IV Stories and Findings

In this chapter, I discuss the findings derived from the analysis of the interviews with four participants about their experience of living in China as a foreigner after a brief introduction of each of the participants. My questions - (1) How do they comprehend their lived experiences in China? (2) How do they interpret the Chinese culture from a Western perspective? (3) Do some go a step beyond understanding Chinese culture and their own to develop a more cosmopolitan identity? - served as a lighthouse for the discussion of the topics. In addition to the direct focus on lived experience, feelings towards the experience of the participants were related and any explanations they held were invited. The main themes that emerged from the data were grouped into three categories: (a) Heard, Seen and Learned; (b) The Comparative and 3) The Contradictory.

Meet the Participants

Alden was the first one that I interviewed. It was nice to get his contact via a friend of a friend whom I had never met, and, surprisingly, Alden said, “Yes.” This was a positive sign and a good debut for my interviews since he lives where I am from in China, Guangzhou (once known as Canton) the city that I know the best.

Alden has a British accent, not so heavy but still noticeable after being in China for three years. He has good memory of timeline and he also sounds certain when he speaks. But he was not forthcoming about the details of his life, neither personal nor even in offering his views. I had to ask probing questions to dig for information, but he kept his guard up and was not richly informative about his life experience in China. This seems to be his natural predisposition; I admit I wondered if he had more insight or depth even in the privacy of his own thoughts.
Alden was dating with a Chinese girl back at home in London during undergraduate times and went to China for a short visit during then. After breaking up with her, he sought programs that offer English teaching jobs in China, so he took classes learning to speak Mandarin before going to China. It is not known whether Alden was seeking an emotional replacement for his lost girlfriend or whether he was just curious about China after the short visit, for he expressed both ideas.

Coming to Guangzhou in southern China where most people speak Cantonese, Alden taught in a high school the hiring program placed him into, but after a year he quit and found another teaching job in another high school in the same city. During this time he met another Chinese girl who was a nurse and they started dating. He did not say so, but this may indicate he was looking for another Chinese girlfriend.

In general, he seemed cautious or had afterthoughts when picking words to say. He once said, for example, “Those students are crazy.” But then, even though the conversation had moved on to another topic, he went back to explain specifically what he had meant by “crazy”. When he talked about his work (which takes up a big portion in the conversation), it often sounded to me like he was in an interview with me trying to get a job. He preferred to talk impersonally of the work he had been doing, which generally avoided topics with emotional components.

This feeling that he was being somewhat evasive continued for the whole time that we had conversational interviews. It is not that Alden tried to avoid talking about himself. In fact he did talk about himself, including his own feelings and emotions, but he did so in a manner that avoided self-reflection, as though he did not want to question his own emotions. It may be that he is simply a more reserved personality, which is indicated by the fact that he only posted rarely
Bryan immediately replied to my email request to be interviewed and was happy that I could go to Lanzhou in which he was living for live conversations. Lanzhou is in the upstream of Yellow River and is the capital of Gansu province in the north-central of China. I visited there approximately 10 years ago in a trip with my parents. The air is dry there and people are mostly from diverse backgrounds since it borders with areas that are populated by various minority ethnic groups.

I knew that when I sent out my email request to Bryan he would be likely to accept to be interviewed, judging from how I learned about him online. I knew that he loved to communicate and probably would love to talk more than I could hope for. It turned out that I was right.

Having discovered the dream of coming to China in his third year of university, Bryan started to learn about China from different resources – going to classes, watching documentaries and reading books in the university library where he worked at that time. Once he had decided to do his undergraduate thesis about China, he came to China for six months as an exchange student at a university. After that time, Bryan went back home for few months, graduated, and started applying for jobs in China. He returned to Lanzhou but found employment in a different university.

I waited outside of the classroom where he was teaching English listening. The class sounded boring as other English listening classes that I have attended in my undergraduate years, though that is usually the fault of the prescribed curriculum. After the class, he walked me out of
the school and insisted on showing me around and buying me food, because he was happy to see me and do the interview. “Friendly and hospitable,” I marked in my mind.

Our first discussion was carried on in a restaurant outside of the school. It was a restaurant that specialized in a traditional kind of a fast food from another area of China. That was my first time having it and he showed his greater familiarity with the food and the area when he ordered in Mandarin. It was a more than two-hour dinner/interview/conversation after which I wrote the word “Contradiction” in my notebook. Bryan was so talkative that he sometimes seemed to get ahead of his own thoughts, elaborating his answers and jumping to another topic before I could enter the conversation. In the midst of his loquacity, I noted not only contradictions in his stories, but also in his attitudes. He could be so certain about a point he was making, but when I questioned him, he would readily switch to the opposite site point of view. I assumed that he simply did not do much forethought before he spoke, but expressed his own feelings at that moment.

This intuition or insight was even stronger after the second interview. I never thought that Bryan wanted to deceive me to cover-up or embellish anything. He was quite blunt in his responses to the questions or when explaining himself. He stressed how honest he should be because he really loved to share: he would talk nonstop on a 30-minute bus trip downtown and, after that, he continued talking the whole time we walked on the busiest street! I was a good medium for him and I believe, a good listener. I could fully sense his sincerity and I believe that sincerity came from his love for China, as he himself stated. But the paradoxes in his thinking were so obvious that I could not ignore them. “Love can cloud good judgment,” I thought to myself. Perhaps this was his character: enthused and effusive, but also a bit whimsical.
During his time in China, he travelled extensively, mostly to the cities that are touristy - big and developed but he also went to some small towns and villages from where some of his Chinese friends originated. He met his Chinese girlfriend on Sina Weibo [a popular online social network in China] and it was a long-distance relationship, a two-hour train away.

Bryan talked about his hometown in Texas as well. He perceived his hometown as being religious, conservative, and maybe even narrow-minded. On one hand, Bryan was not sure if his hometown folks thought of themselves as superior or not. On the other hand, Bryan was surely confident about how he understood China, and he expressed some remarkable insights. For example, I thought “wow” when he commented on how people looked at us when we were walking on the street. I tried to avoid mentioning that we were being constantly checked out, but he did first, and with bold words. Bryan said aloud, “Some of those people must be wondering what you, a Chinese girl, did to get a white guy.” It was awkward, but I laughed. At the same time I was surprised since I knew that was the reason why people kept looking at us – the Chinese mindset that I am still figuring out, the mindset that whiter skin is more privileged. I knew that he was not insulting me, but, no matter how he got this impression, it exists, and he was bold to state it in front of me. Maybe he was just being arrogant, but “cocky” was the word in my mind at that moment.

Among all the participants, Bryan had the longest interview audios and our conversations covered a vast number of topics. He was fun and easy to talk to, though at times I had the sense that he wanted to show-off to me how well he understood China, which could be a bit wearing. He said he did not know the whole China, which could be interpreted as, “I do know a lot, but just not all,” or perhaps this was just another contradiction. During the few days I was staying in Lanzhou, he showed me the Yellow River (Huang He), the famous “street-food street”, and we
also met with one of his Chinese friends. Bryan’s Chinese understanding and speaking were exceptional for someone who had only been in China for three years by then – the slangs, idioms, and even Chinese Internet slangs. “If he is cocky, he does have good reason,” a note to self.

**Calan**’s background was more complicated than other participants – British family but born and raised in an African country. He considered himself as a Westerner regardless of his nationality, but more because of his family background. Calan had also spent some time in different European countries before going to China.

We sat outside of a café in a breezy October afternoon in Shenzhen, the same city that he had been living for eight years and where he first stepped foot onto Chinese land. The way Calan dressed revealed what his job was – a business-man. The way he talked was calm and organized. “Mature,” I wrote down on my notebook.

However, this maturity may be a lesson learned from some impulsive decisions that Calan made in his early experience in China. He decided to move to China only after a three-day business trip in the country. Not being able to speak any kind of the Chinese language and so unable to find a job back then, Calan ended up living on the street for few days after a month in China. But then things got better – an agency helped him to find a job as an English teacher in kindergartens (though he never liked it). After having some money saved up from hard work and good luck, he got his own place and had a job as an IT consultant, which was what he has been good at and likes to do.
Calan is a keen traveler, especially with his motorbike. His helmet was marked with different names of the provinces he had been to – more than I have even though I am from China.

Calan dated a few Chinese women during these years and later married a Chinese women he met in Hong Kong. In eight years he only went back to his hometown once. This may not have been a positive experience, for after that he determined to stay in China if the Chinese government granted him permanent resident status, which is difficult for foreigners to gain in China.

Calan gave me the impression of being talkative, yet always getting to the point and not lingering on words so nothing he says feels excessive, which should not be surprising since I was not the first one to interview him for a similar topic. I do not question his sincerity, but doing business in China has meant dealing with different kinds of people in situations in which some deception may be required. He seemed to know what was expected of him and did what was necessary but no more.

Omar was born and raised in Saudi Arabia until he was nine years old. His family immigrated to Canada and has been living in Toronto, where he later earned his business degree. Omar then went to a teachers college, but he did not intend to teach in Canada but to gain more opportunities to travel. After graduating from the teachers college, he went to Kuwait to teach for a year before moving on to China. During the time in Kuwait he travelled around the vastness of Asia – from the Middle East to Southeast Asia.

China was not his first choice but Omar wanted to teach in East Asia and China had a job offer for him at that time. China was the first place Omar stayed away from his home for over a
year, but he was also open to other places if there were better job opportunities. Before coming to Panyu, China (a relatively large district in Guangzhou) teaching IB (International Baccalaureate) Business and Management, he was in Dalian (a northeastern city in China) doing the same job for one month, where he found it boring with a big workload so he quit and moved away.

Omar was a person motivated by fortune and profits. Teaching was not his dream job but simply a way to save money to start his own business later. Meanwhile the focus of his words was still about work. I was not surprised to hear he had few reflections on his experience in China because he focused on his own ambitions much more, which were all to do with making money and getting ahead. Omar also admitted that it took a full year in China before he started considering learning the Chinese language and probably getting to know more about the culture, at least as far as it concerned his business dealings.

He reviewed his previous experience immigrating to Canada, which he described as "easy" and "no culture shock" since he said he had learned to adapt to Western cultures) while attending a private international school before coming to Canada. The only problem was the Muslim religion that he described as being "born with" but not calling it his. It was a gradual change for him from stating that he was an atheist when he was younger to again calling himself a Muslim out of respect for other Muslims, but still not practicing the rituals. Otherwise, Omar held his cards close to his chest and was not very revealing.

Among all the participants, Bryan and Calan provided the richest sources of information and reflections. It was relatively less (in both quantity and quality of candor) from Alden and Omar. As a researcher I am grateful for all the participants taking their time to talk to me and
from their words I began to see another China through their eyes, one that was different yet understandable to me.

**Heard, Seen and Learned**

This section explores how the participants see their lives in China. It is organized into three sub-themes that came up from the data: (a) interaction and observation; (b) opinions; and (c) the unique foreigner experience. They are interrelated and justified by each other in the realm of actual lived experience in China for my participants.

**Interaction and Observation.** The compression of personal space resulting from the population density in China is something that cannot be neglected. Acquaintances, friends, connections, or especially, the significant other they may have met in China mark an important step for the participants’ paths towards knowing China including the social life, the culture(s), and themselves. The people with whom they relate play the role of knowledge source, guide (sometimes in questionable directions) or supporter. These are the people with whom the participants tend to identify and assimilate.

The process of interaction and observation starts earlier before arrival, dynamically takes places during their entire time in China, and gradually changes and deepens their understanding of China and, concomitantly, themselves. Simply put, interactions and observations are basically the two things that my participants do that run through all the aspects of their lived experience in China.

The Chinese acquaintances my participants made in China or even before coming to China had a remarkable effect on the participants’ presumption of knowing China. They, to some extent, established for the participants the first sense of knowing China and Chinese. When I
asked Bryan why he knew that he would be treated “rude” by people from Guangzhou, he replied that before coming to China his Chinese teacher who had lived in Guangzhou told him so.

For Calan, the crowding, which composes a large part of the totally different lifestyle, was actually the reason for him coming to China. After a three-day business trip in China, he decided to move to China and tried to stay permanently. Though he admitted that the decision was quite impulsive, it reveals the power of anticipation that led to being amazed by China.

I came and stayed three days ... But actually I enjoyed myself more in those 3 days than I enjoyed myself probably a year in [hometown]. I really enjoyed it here. So in my spare time I was going into [place name] and walking around [place name] area and I met a lot of people, and I really enjoyed it.

After coming to China, the participants each distributed around the country and travelled to meet Chinese people outside their residential areas. Their interactions with Chinese people soon increased in number and type, ranging from those who live in small villages and who have never seen foreigners before to those living in urban cities who deal with foreigners every day. While experiencing same culture in general, each participant’s specific path was distinctly different.

In terms of interactions with Chinese people, participants gave many more positive comments than negative ones. The keyword that my participants most frequently use to describe Chinese people is friendly. Both Bryan and Calan noted that they were sometimes discouraged or irritated, but experience with friendly strangers brought back a positive outlook. Calan described to me that once a restaurant opened again at late night just for him and his friends because the staff recognized him when they passed by. Such friendliness and good business reminded him of
“why I’m still here and... know that things are good again.” Hospitable is another word that regularly appeared in the interviews.

Being a Westerner where the Chinese usually have little interaction with foreigners was often an advantage. Bryan was the only foreign exchange student in this Chinese university at that time. He was given special attention, which earned him the privilege of meeting more people than he otherwise would have, and that meant a richer inside knowledge of China,

It was fun. I got to meet the President of the University, the Vice President. I got free dinners all the time. I met so many people. Since I was the only foreign student at the university I was kinda popular. So I met hundreds of people. God I met so many people every day, just meeting more and more friends. You know my QQ (a Chinese online messenger) friends went up so high you wouldn’t believe. ... I don’t know, when you meet hundreds of people you hear lots of stories, plus travelling, reading books and documentaries. So from that you can learn quite a bit.

Regarding making friends from and within the other (Chinese) culture, the participants show different levels of confidence and trust. Since internal migration within the country (see Chapter Two) is common in China and the fact that my participants’ occupations (teachers and businessmen) allowed them to be flexible and work where they choose, the friends the participants made in China were generally from all around the country. From their friends my participants got to absorb all kinds of information from languages to regionally different customs, and some of the participants seemed to make good use of their sources. Fun is how they addressed this process of learning, which is not surprising since the learning was based on friendly relations. Alden, Bryan and Calan have described situations when they could understand some words in Chinese dialects while their Chinese friends could not; surprisingly, they became communication intermediaries among friends. As Bryan explained, “It’s quite funny because sometimes when I’m with a Chinese friend and I’ll be talking with someone, and they can’t understand what the other person was saying but I can.”
Friends develop connections (in Chinese guanxi), which is critical for living in the Chinese world. (I will expand this topic in the next section.) What needs to be emphasized here is the trust generated from friendship strengthens their confidence in what they have learned from Chinese friends about China. On the other hand, the confidence of trusting in friends helps them make good use of the connections, which implies a greater level of confidence in both interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships and thus a greater acceptance of a new culture.

Bryan states that “I only have Chinese friends,” and, “Me and my Chinese friends have a lot of common interests that I just don’t share with a lot of my friends back home.” He shows great determination to learn about China and a certain tendency to assimilate. He has lived in China for three years, residing in the same area; he believes that he and his Chinese friends have already passed the “small talk” period and are now into the “deep stuff”. He recalled the times he most enjoyed with his friends on campus just lying on the lawn and talking about life. “I am completely honest about my intentions. I just want to know what it is really like here.” Trust is the word he stressed, “There is a certain level of trust there. I just have to trust.”

While Chinese friends are imperative for acquiring knowledge, some of the participants had to rely mainly on themselves before making friends with Chinese, especially when they first arrived. At this early stage, the time used on observations of people and the surrounding environment greatly surpasses the time spent in actual interaction.

Coming to China without any contacts, Calan was basically dependent on himself from the first day in China. It was the first and only time he used the phrase “culture shock” to describe his adjustment period in China. Before ending up on the street, he was sleeping on the floor of a worn-down apartment in a bad area. All the income came from his roommate’s
girlfriend, who was a young prostitute. After she left, he had to live on the street for two days. During this difficult period, he had no choice but to make careful observations of other people in order to learn to survive.

While I was living in the area I got to see probably the worst of China as well as the best of China all into one. ... During the whole time I used to spend my days and my nights, mainly my nights just walking around the city. ... I didn't like the situation I was in. I used to walk from that village, walked as far as I want, walked for 5 hours some time. Explored the city at night, which was really nice. I got to know more or less how the city was laid out, and also got to know just how safe here as well.

Half of my participants earned their job offers from China by having previous experience living in China. Bryan assumed that his experience as an exchange student in China before coming to work was the main reason why he was hired. He used the word “babysit” to describe the way he dealt with other foreign fellows he met in China. A considerable amount of help in daily life such as getting groceries was needed for newcomers. In follow-up contacts with Bryan after eight months of the interview, he told me that he had obtained a better paying job in a bigger city in China.

Observation and imitation were applied to the acquisition of skills for living in China. I recalled having interviews with my participants in the cafés and restaurants that were usually their hangouts. Many times I have seen them feeling more at ease more than I did, so I almost forgot I was the cultural native. One particular time I had another “wow” moment when Bryan taught me how to order the different sizes of noodles in the local way of which I had never heard.

I went to another restaurant in the area later and ordered the same kind of noodles using the way he taught me and it worked well. Being surprised to see how unique customs could be within a nation, I discussed this experience with Bryan later. “It is just from experience you
know.” He commented that was the exact same way he learned in China, not just for ordering food.

Travelling, as previously stated, is one of the most common ways for participants to acquire knowledge of China. Indeed, travelling opened a new door to the participants for interaction and observation with people from different areas. Bryan and Calan, both have extensively travelled around the nation. People that they met on trains, in rural mountains during a motorbike trip, or simply just outside where they reside opened new perspectives on China. Travelling offers a wider range of experience for the participants to examine what was heard or read. They exhibited the adventurous spirit in different ways; Calan used it to summarize his experience in China. When Chinese friends told Bryan that Shanghai was too Westernized and therefore he had no reason to go there, he showed determination to experience it himself, “I should experience it and see if it is like people say.”

Travelling exposes the traveler to the regional diversity of China. Regionalism was used by Bryan to summarize his feeling of this diversity; it will be further discussed in the next section. Generally, participants showed confidence in their opinions of what they experienced in China. As Calan stated, “Things I say is something I learned from first hand. Either see it with my own eyes or experience it myself... always first-hand information.” Of course, even “first-hand” experience is filtered through a cultural lens.

**The Opinions.** With this first-hand experience, the opinions (or the fancies) the participants held before coming to China started to fade, change or reinforce.

**Regionalism and Westernization.** The participants noticed that China is a nation of diversity with different dialects and ethnic groups, as well as varying customs. As Omar stated,
the primary reason for him to go out and explore is to “get to meet different people and learn about new stuff.” Though not always correct, all of them tended differentiate Chinese people from diverse regions by their dialects, and few of them (Bryan and Calan) claimed to be able to tell the region from people’s faces. The food eaten is another clue for those who travel widely around China. Besides traditional clothing, the way that Chinese dress and people’s habits in daily life are not significant enough for participants to tell the differences. Though commenting diversity is great in general, some participants did not seem to accept the variations. Bryan described China as “a collection of regions” and “not one united kind of a country yet.”

When asked why China did not seem united, language is the reason stated by Bryan, and the dialects seemed to be the biggest barrier stopping him from “fitting in” life in China. As the participants’ first language was standard English (second for Omar), which seemed normal and universal for us Chinese, because there was only the British, standard type of English in the textbooks when we learn English in China, Bryan, Calan and Omar showed frustration with the various dialects in China. Though praising the diversity, Bryan spoke about the Chinese ethnic minorities and his concern that Mandarin should be the commonly spoken language. So when he found out the elders from different ethnic minorities only speak their dialects and thus could not communicate with him or with others, he was frustrated and shocked to realize how distinctive regional languages could be.

This language barrier could be a reason for not feeling content. They might be able to speak Mandarin and recognize few words from different dialects, but not being able to speak the local dialect itself sometimes isolated them from the local people. Speaking an intermediate level of Mandarin, Bryan felt stressed in the Cantonese speaking region. He assumed that because he did not speak Cantonese he was treated rudely by the locals. Calan admitted that though he could
pick up an acceptable amount of Mandarin on the street, it was not until he went to a university for a Chinese language course that he learned the Chinese characters systematically. He could then start having richer conversations, recognizing signs or dealing with legal documents, all of which were deeply helpful when he decided to stay in China. Omar, who left Dalian only after a month with his first job in China, found it stressful since he did not know any Chinese nor had any Chinese friends to ask for help at that time. However, Alden, who has been learning Mandarin the whole time and living in Guangzhou, did not find it a problem, which might result from having a local girlfriend who helped him along.

The southern and northern rivalry in China also deepened the idea of regionalism for the participants. It is normal to see Chinese argue or joke online about whether southern or northern China is superior. An extreme example is when the netizens from China created petitions on the White House’s “We the People” website.

Three separate petitions requested that Obama weigh in on the perennial debate in China about what flavor of tofu is best, sweet or salty. (Salty is traditionally preferred in the north, sweet in the south.) (Carlson, 2013, retrieved on Jan. 19, 2014)

When asked about if there was anything that he had first heard from a Chinese then experienced in China, Bryan told me a story that he Ironically labelled as interesting. He was having a lamb kabob as street food that was traditional and popular in that particular region. After the first bite he realized the meat was not lamb but something less savoury based on his previous experience. He assumed the fake meat must be from the south because “the SARS, the bad milk powder, all the bad stuff is usually from the south.” Living in Lanzhou for such a long time Bryan had developed what he called the “feels like home” emotion. When asked why he chose a city in China so little known that “no one talks about it” back in United States, he implied it was the real China, unlike Hong Kong, which he asserted, “It’s not even like China.”
There is no way to find out if the meat was from the south and there is not the space to discuss in detail what the real China is like for Bryan. But from these stories we can see an individual who spent a considerable time living in the same area of China, so he began developing an emotional attachment to biases of the region, to the point of taking sides in the southern/northern argument. Or perhaps might it be merely an expansion of his original imagination of how China should be, to the extent of denying the China that does not match his expectations?

Both Alden and Calan living in big cities of southern China explained that the preference for staying in south was for the urban lifestyle that their hometowns did not have. Judging from traveling experiences, the northern regions seemed less developed and less hectic. When asked if developed means Westernized for them here, participants offered ambiguous responses. This may not mean they were blind to their own biases, but it does seem a comparative possibility.

Resonating with what I explored in the literature review, all of my participants disagreed with that idea of China was a communist country since most of the Westerners (at least the Western media) labeled it as run by the Communist Party. This lack of communism in daily life is demonstrated by the Chinese preoccupation with making money, as Bryan noted,

China is one big shop. People are selling stuff on the streets. People in the malls they are selling stuff out from their homes, out from the back of the trucks. They are making money setting up their own business... This is the most capitalistic country in the world... It’s ridiculous that the government thought is socialist communist China... whatever it completely doesn’t make sense.

Similarly, Calan pointed out,

[T]he only thing communist about China is the way that the government runs, as if there’s no choice for the people to choose what the government really does. But other than that, I’d say China is a capitalistic society, you know as the same as living in the West.
It appears that my participants, though different, agreed on this. They felt the lifestyle and economy were more capitalist than communist, but they recognized that the ruling body had no opposition and still called itself the Communist Party. Possibly, it seemed ironic to them that the Communist Party was not communist at all, but in fact dictatorial.

Similar observations were made by Bryan on other aspects of Chinese lifestyle. He was teaching English in a Chinese university and I asked him later about the sign outside of his English lab classroom that reads: “He who gains English gains the world.” To some degree he admitted that was true, but he was also surprised to see how blunt and direct it was. In addition, in contrast to the idea that Chinese are conservative and cling to traditions, Bryan described his adult Chinese students as greatly influenced by Hollywood movies and Western songs, which led to a change in their sexuality mindset. He made that comment after telling me that he had seen a university couple having intercourse secretly on the roof of a campus building (ironically that is public). He assumed that they were doing that because, “They say oh that’s what Americans are doing so that’s okay.”

However, Bryan suggested that with modernization and development globalization is the word that “everyone likes to throw around these days.” Western media/culture happens to be the mainstream nowadays and things like Hollywood movies sell well because “people are curious”. “It is a natural process for culture and the country that is developing.” In his view, China sought modernization and in the process allowed in some consumerist Western influences, but that does not mean modernization equals Westernization.

According to Bryan, attitudes towards sex in China, as well as many other customary restrictions, are changing nowadays. Women today are much freer from the weight of traditional
oppression, but I still have witnessed people demeaning women online for their loss of virginity, and I have also heard parents telling their daughter to keep her virginity until marriage in order to be treated better by her husband and his family. More open Western sexual morals are introduced from media such as movies, and like Bryan said, the youth often try these new ideas. So there is some tension between the new ways and the old ones.

Bryan further explained my question from a historical perspective. Having studied Chinese history, he had read of Confucianism and noted with approval that it commends such qualities such as moderation in all things, loyalty to family and state and honouring one’s parents, which qualities still exist today in most Chinese people. At the same time, he did not think such qualities were necessarily limited to Confucianism or China since such virtues were also promoted in “general Asian cultures”. He was disappointed to see some of the younger generation did not celebrate or even know about a traditional Chinese festival when he, a Westerner, knew about it. He went on to compare the Industrial Revolution in the West with the Chinese economic reform started in the 1980s. Bryan expressed sympathetic insight into the above situation, reasoning that China has been transforming through only a few decades into this capitalist stage, so the Chinese people need time to figure out “what to do with this money” while simultaneously retaining their traditions. He said the Chinese seem “lost” in developing a vibrant capitalist economy while keeping traditions alive in the younger generations.

Connection and Face. While Bryan was very concerned with the connections (Chinese guan-xi) of meaningful interpersonal relationships in China, the others were not. Calan saw guan-xi as simply a powerful tool in any culture, no matter which society the culture is within. During their experience in China all four of the participants utilized relational respect (guan-xi) to achieve personal goals, especially in hunting for jobs.
Mutual benefit is considered as the base of *guan-xi*, and Bryan showed conflicted attitudes towards it. He strongly believed in making connections because, “You gotta get something done. Yeah you need people; you can’t live in a foreign country without help.” This seemed to me the main purpose of utilizing *guan-xi*, to achieve your goal. With that stance, he used his Chinese connections to find a participant for his undergraduate thesis, whose topic was sensitive enough for original volunteer numbers of zero. As far as I am concerned, he did not have to pay because the concept of *face* was involved – how others perceive you – was involved. By helping Bryan his friend gained face because Bryan was the only foreigner in that area doing such a study. However, when referring to what happened to his girlfriend who failed to get a job because she did not pay enough money to the connection, Bryan became negative. “I know what it is like finding a job in China. You have to have *guan-xi*, you have to have *bei-jing* [background], *hou-tai* [someone powerful that stands behind to support], you have to have money to find a job, you have to pay people to make introduction for you.” From his words and my experience with *guan-xi*, it is a double-edged sword: if used fairly it is mutually beneficial, but if one side does not reciprocate the trust or expects too much, it will cost the other.

Though other participants did not display such attitudes, they did not seem to have experience with *guan-xi* directly related to money. Calan told the story of working in a nice kindergarten where he met some rich parents who “have good connections and a lot of them are bosses who have their own factories.” He switched to a better job shortly thereafter, and he owed it to help from the parent-connection. The benefit he offered in return remains unknown here. However, what is reported on news and social media is that some Chinese parents would offer teachers benefits in order to have their children receive preferential treatment at school (retrieved
January 8, 2015). This accords with my own experience in China. Whether or not Calan was aware this agreement for mutual benefit, he “made a lot of connections through that way.”

*Face* is another concept to consider in interpersonal relationships in China, based on the literature review and my own experience. Bryan and Calan again present opposite interpretations of it. Bryan stated that he could not find any kind of equivalent to it in his home country:

> It’s so complicated and so deeply woven into this culture... It’s really difficult to even write about and it’s really difficult to talk about. It’s something that you know it’s there; it’s something in the essence of being a Chinese.

When further questioning why *face* is complicated for them, Bryan related it to the Chinese *indirectness* and found them both *weird*. On one hand Chinese seem to need to “save face”, but on the other hand they do not like compliments, being modest but also “self-deprecating” in Calan’s words. This *indirectness* is often seen in the work environment. Omar found it hard to understand what his Chinese boss really wanted when the boss was giving a vague rule of office hours and then got angry when Omar was not in the office at the time that he was “supposed to” be there. He also found it hard to figure out if the boss was giving compliments to him just to save his face and let him read between the lines, but not genuine compliments for what he has achieved.

Contrarily, Calan supposed *face* was the same in Western culture, “but in a different way.” He made an analogy in drinking culture – when young and first drinking with friends, people tend to go over the bounds to push themselves to drink more than they should just to “show that you are stronger than your friends.” Looking at life in the same way, he showed understanding to people trying to save face by doing or trying to do things beyond their means.
On the *indirectness*, Calan claimed. “Chinese are the most direct people I know,” very direct, he explained, “like simple.”

They’ll say to you, “Oh you look fatter than before”, you know they’ll say that. They’ll say, “So how much money do you make?” [or] “how much did that cost?” I’ve never ever thought about the Chinese people being indirect.

Being in the West for some time, I resonate to Calan’s words. Words like, “You look fatter than before” are usually nothing offensive but simply a comment. I have seen my Canadian colleague get upset at the exact line said by an old Chinese lady. The words sound rude and too direct for Westerners (maybe not for close friends) but it is acceptable between Chinese.

*Embellish* was also used by Calan to describe the *indirectness*. He found it “very easy to spot” if someone was trying to exaggerate to save face as he felt that everyone more or less does the same thing regardless of which country he/she was from.

*The Chinese Girlfriend/Spouse and Stereotypes.* Among all the people my participants met in China, their Chinese girlfriend/spouse had the greatest influence on how they each understood his intimate cross-cultural relationship: “I have someone I could constantly question and interrogate about China,” as Bryan said. Their Chinese lovers, girlfriends, or wives break some stereotypes the participants had but also affirm others.

Bryan admitted to me that “having a Chinese girlfriend” was one of his fancies before coming to China, “Like really that was one of the only things I’ve been thinking about.” He joked about his having “yellow fever” and suggested, “When it comes down to a lot of white guys … we always want it, somewhere we want an Asian girl, at least at some point in our lives.” It was amusing that he admitted to such a “fever”, but I also noted his honesty.
With that “fever” he commented that meeting his Chinese girlfriend online was actually *sui-yuan*, comparable to the English “natural” or “letting nature take its course.” It started from her commenting on one of his *Weibo* posts, after which they started chatting. Though this participant “fancied having this totally Chinese girl,” which suggests the tacit stereotype of the traditional, shy, submissive and conservative Chinese girl, he stated that his girlfriend “is different than other Chinese girls”. “She likes to watch Spanish football... she doesn’t like Chinese music. She likes Western music and Western movies ... Her outlook is more Westernized than most people [from China].”

Cultural differences were not seen as an issue for Bryan and his girlfriend. He assumed that it was because they had not been dating a long enough time to find serious disagreements also since their relationship was still long-distance. He joked about smacking or spanking their children as punishment, but his girlfriend surprised him by saying she would not do that, which was contrary to his idea that “Chinese people love beating their kids.”

Alden, now engaged, and Calan, married, both had previous relationships with other Chinese girls. They agreed that Chinese girls were not as compliant or shy as the Western stereotype indicated. (This was discussed in the literature review.) By “not easy” Calan elaborated his answer to explain it also means dealing with “all of these differences in culture, such as the jealousy, the mistrust, the clinginess and et cetera.”

Each in his own way suggested that there was a very big difference between the mindsets of Western girls and Chinese girls, as Calan summarized:

*You find, in the West anyway, foreign girls are lot more demanding in a lot of ways, but at the same time they are not as jealous and not as clingy. ... Western girls are usually a lot more trusting and lot more free, but at the same time they are a lot more demanding and they are a lot less feminine in the way that people would think. Chinese girls would like to*
look after you, would like to cook food for you, would like to treat you like a man really. But in the West the Western girls try to be more equal.

I do not want to impose the idea here that Western girls and Chinese girls are always different since this is just the viewpoint of two persons. But at least in these two cases – whether the participants met a girl that “is different” or went with the girl that will “treat you like a man” – Chinese girls were somehow stereotyped in the same way.

Calan mentioned that he had a bad experience with a “control freak” Chinese ex-girlfriend. He later tried to figure out why this clinginess went beyond tolerance in some cases, so he rationalized it, “It’s kind of a common trait I understand that it’s very common in China for men to treat.” He assumed because of that, Chinese girls get clingy to hold on to their men. He added, “It’s kind of part of the culture,” because he has seen lots “from [his] own eyes.”

Stereotype projections are mutual from both sides. According to few of my participants, Westerners typically hold stereotypes of Chinese such as all Chinese know kung-fu, which they found is not true; all Chinese love doing mathematics and making peace signs when taking pictures, but they were not sure about how true these were.

Bryan noted that he was not sure if the kung-fu stereotype came from Westerners having viewed movies and TV shows of China in ancient times. As a result when Westerners thought about China it was only Beijing and Shanghai and probably would never consider Hong Kong as a part of China. Other than that, China was “a bunch of rice fields.”

He considered that point of view might not be absolutely true for all but just more “making fun” of China. However he confessed that he did not know what to expect of China before coming because the media was “stingy” in showing other sides of China: “It’s all media’s fault.”
Calan had similar comments:

Like most Western people, we had an idea that it’s rural, backwards, dirty, very restrictive, communist. You know we get the idea through the media that China is full of policemen and army guards walking around keeping an eye on everyone. People think of China sort of like North Korea really.

On the other side, when asked what stereotypes Chinese hold of Westerners, Bryan and Calan listed a few: 1) Westerners are all rich; 2) Westerners are hairy; 3) Westerners “are obsessed with sex and violence”, and 4) “black people are dangerous.” Participants laughed at the first one and declared it not to be true. They admitted that they were more hirsute than most Chinese, so Chinese were not wrong about the second one, but they also stated that some of their foreign friends in China regularly got irritated on the street when people pointed at them and said in Chinese, “Look at that big beard,” or “He has a big nose.” When these things happened to my participants, they did not seem to mind, though they were again amazed by how direct Chinese could be, at least to each other.

Media is again the reason for causing the stereotypes and probably the profit behind the media as well, according to Bryan. On one hand they owed it to Western media that movies that contain sex and violence were usually commercial movies that sold well. Also, “American movie industry still portrays black people being more dangerous, more aggressive, but in real life it’s not necessarily that way.”

On the other hand, on “pure speculation”, as Bryan put it, he believed the Chinese government “wants to keep a wall between Chinese and foreigners.” There was “not enough information, not enough foreigners in China,” which leads to the popular topic of censorship that I will discuss in the next section. However, many stereotypes were already broken on both sides because of the individual efforts to see through them. Despite their individual differences, my
participants are still on their way to breaking down more assumptions and know it will not be easy: “Even if they can break some stereotypes of me, it’s impossible for me to break every stereotype” (Bryan).

**Freedom and Education.** Quite opposite to the stereotype that the Chinese are not free, assumed by most Westerners cited in the above section, my participants often seemed to disagree; some felt that China was a place with unusual personal freedom. As Calan said, “As far as everyday life is concerned, I think that in China you live a much freer life than you do in any other country.”

The freedom spoken of here has different meanings to participants. Bryan defined it as a “wonderful sense of independence,” and by independence he meant to “escape everything of my life” to “have a new start” in China. According to him, the freedom to “get away from everything” lasted the whole time that he was in China and it was the greatest feeling for him in China.

“That’s a very interesting paradox,” Bryan commented, when I presented the idea that most people thought that you do not come to China for freedom (especially since Texas is famed for conservative notions of individual American freedom and against government interference). His students showed the same doubt, and some suspected him being sarcastic, but after few interviews he still could not offer an explanation. It sounded like the freedom for Bryan is more related to simply being away from the confining routines of home.

For other participants, like Calan, freedom in China means a loose grip on laws in day-to-day life. He was “not interested” in concepts such as intellectual property, which probably means he tended to ignore such rights even though he had his own business in China: “I quite like the
freedom in China, you know. If you want to get something done, you can get it done without having to worry about funny laws or regulations getting in your way.”

Calan called it “a big grey area” – as long as “you are not doing anything bad” or “as long as you are not trying to harm anyone” then “it’s okay.” This thought or conclusion might come from his experience that China is not like what he has heard “full of policemen and army guards walking around.” Both Calan and Omar referred to their ignorance of a legal drinking age in China because they have never been checked or seen others being checked for birth IDs. They were surprised to find out from me that the legal drinking age in China is 18, because they have seen people apparently under that age purchasing alcohol with no questions asked.

In general, both Calan and Omar seemed to enjoy this kind of freedom in China, but Calan admitted that problems came with the freedom from law enforcement – just like taking shortcuts on the road but always ending up being stuck in the traffic. “It’s good and bad,” as Calan commented, but it seemed to me that Chinese freedom in this sense of lack of enforcement earned more praise than blame from them.

When freedom comes to media censorship, it is another story. All of them were concerned about how censorship was going to affect education in China, and they unanimously blame it on the Chinese government, though they did not feel the censorship intruded on their lives because they could always use VPN services.

On one hand they felt that the government had such a tight grip on information that the Chinese do not get the “truth” or the power to “use critical thinking to figure out what’s the difference between the stories,” as Bryan said. On the other hand, they admitted that the Internet could be a “really dangerous weapon” against the Chinese political regime because most of the
older generations in China “do not have critical thinking yet.” Calan was blunt, “I think that when the older generation dies out, that’s when it’s going to change…”

The Unique Foreigner Experience. This is seen from the participants who have been in China for a relatively longer time such as Bryan and Calan. (Alden had been there three years, but he supplied comparatively less information.) They generally agreed that their experience being a foreigner in China meant to be different from Chinese people, and by different, each suggested from his own perspective, that racism for foreigners and white priority coexist in their experience. With a different appearance, even if one thinks like a Chinese to some extent, one “can never be Chinese”.

Racism is a loaded term and could be a bit harsh here. Alden and Bryan mentioned that they were “frustrated” by some of the scams only perpetuated on foreigners in China, such as making them targets for over-priced goods or “ridiculous art,” as Calan put it, likely as the result of the Chinese stereotype of Westerners being rich and maybe naïve. Bryan described a famous trap for Westerners that he almost fell for: a few Chinese girls approached him in a coffee shop saying they wanted to practice English speaking. The girls then tried to get him to take them to a fancy karaoke place, and that was when Bryan realized that they were likely planning to leave him there alone with a big bill. Similar ploys were identified that were only targeted at Westerners.

Westerners are often called Lao-wai in Mandarin or Gweilo in Cantonese. This used to annoy Bryan, Calan, Omar, and a few of their friends are still irritated by it. However, my participants generally showed a tolerant attitude towards these titles after they understood that most Chinese do not feel the hostile attitude that the words literally indicate.
Bryan agreed that a Westerner in China has certain advantages over their Chinese peers, such as being remembered or treated better “because I’m the only foreigner in the area,” which starkly contrasts to the negative racism discussed above. He said, “I completely accept that I am a white guy here with advantages.” What is interesting here is that they do not mind being called “white” in China even though calling people by their colour is often frowned upon in the West. I personally have experienced this sensitivity to colour-coding, even though some older African-Americans still call themselves blacks and many teenagers of Asian Indian ancestry apparently refer to themselves as browns without feeling any stigma.

In resonance to the literature review, Bryan and Calan explained the idea that “a foreigner would never be a Chinese; it is impossible.” This reflects the participants’ different levels of acceptance. Bryan was living the contradiction of struggling to be accepted, yet at the same time wishing to himself as a unique outsider. I will discuss this more in the next chapter. Calan did not agree with the statement of “taking advantage” and, in contrast to Bryan’s frustration at not being accepted, he seemed to embrace the fact of being different. He stressed that he liked this foreigner-in-China experience, knowing that he would be set apart from the start, perhaps with advantages.

The Comparative

I have shown in the last section that my participants hold very different opinions as a result of what they have heard, seen and learned during their unique China experience through interactions and observations. Comparisons were made and seen between individuals and between China/Chinese and the participants’ home countries and their own people.
Some of the comparisons have been revealed in *Regionalism and Westernization*, where participants made comparisons of the Southern and Northern China and the changing Chinese lifestyles; in *Connection and Face*, different ideas of “saving face”; in *The Chinese Girlfriend/Spouse and Stereotypes*, comparisons of Chinese and Western girls, Chinese to Westerner and Westerner to Chinese stereotypes; and in *Freedom and Education*, the changing idea of freedom and its application. In addition, the differences among participants’ comments were also presented on various topics in the last section. There are a few other comparisons out in the perceptions of my interlocutors worth noting between China/Chinese and the participants’ home countries/people.

**Personal Background and Reasons to Come.** Calan and Omar grew up with mixed cultural backgrounds before they came to China. In their words, they were considered as the minorities in their native or early adopted home country, either because of religious belief or race (skin colour). Calan explained that his people were considered the colonizers of his homeland so the priorities of job opportunities were officially given to the original inhabitants but not to people of his race, even though he was born and raised there.

Alden and Bryan had connections before going to China. Alden had dated a Chinese girl during their undergraduate years and had come to China to visit. Bryan “caught the China bug” from the professor in his school who had been “so passionate” about China.

Though not all the participants came to China to teach English, they all ended up doing so to some extent during their experience in China. It seems to be the only job that requires only their native language skills, though not all the participants enjoyed it. Calan stated that he was never a professional in teaching, so teaching was merely a way to survive. He hated it. Omar
considered teaching in China a good way to fill his gap year between undergraduate and graduate study, but he ended up staying in China longer.

**Life Quality and Money Mentality.** China is attractive, according to half the participants, because: 1) Shops and restaurants closed late while in their hometown going outside at 10 or 11 o’clock at night is, as Calan said, “quite like a ghost town...It’s terrible.”

2) Cost of living is low though food safety/air quality is not guaranteed in China. Compared to participants’ home cities, China’s cost of living is mainly low because of food prices (high class restaurants not included). Drinkers like Alden, Calan and Omar mentioned the average alcohol price was cheaper in China, as well, so going to bars did not cost as much. Omar listed the low cost of living as one of the reasons he planned to stay in China longer, so he could save money and go back home to Canada to invest.

Compared to the high expenses back in his home country, Calan described the low cost of living as “the beauty of China”:

The beauty of China was actually really easy to start from nothing because the cost of living here is very low, so you can survive eating Baozi or Mantou [different kinds of steam buns] or something for a month, you know. It’s only five Mao [50 cents] for a Baozi or something so you can, you know, food is not expensive, transport is not expensive. So you can actually save the majority of your salary, if you are careful with money.

From what I observed, the participants became used to different kinds of Chinese food, including street food, because of the time they spent in China. Most ate it even though street food is sometimes frowned on for its lack of safety. Bryan had been a fan of street food despite the fact that he once complained that it was “dirty”.

Compared to food safety, the air quality was less discussed by the participants. Though my participants were not living in Beijing, the capital city that keeps drawing attention from
media over its air pollution, the air pollution did not seem to matter to their lives. The air back home was identified as “cleaner” because “there are more trees” by Bryan, but no fuss was made about it.

As indicated above, participants agree that in China it was easier to save money. Besides the lower cost of living, Calan suggested that, in China, “the mentality here is to save.” Whilst in the West, “In order to get back to your feet you have to have a credit card.” He added, “My friends and families are struggling with debts,” but in China “debt isn’t a big thing; people don’t really believe in debt.” For this reason, Calan saw China as a place of opportunity, and indeed he took the opportunity and is now running a successful business in China.

Opinions on Own People. In conjunction with the regionalism noted in the last section, participants also showed a playful preference for stereotyping their own people and regions. For example, when referring to Florida, Bryan mentioned that “old people live there,” and when it came to Texas, he summed it up with “guns” and “really religious.”

Two participants, Bryan and Calan, had a thorough reflection on their hometown and their own people in the interviews. Not much changed and ignorant take up a big portion of their comments.

Bryan showed great disappointment about going home and seeing everything was the same. He said, “Nobody gives a shit, nobody cares about my life over here.” He was trying to explain that private property was not illegal in China as this was what his cousin thought: “I had about one minute to explain myself then after that it’s helpless.” He admitted that his people shared the mentality of “America is No. 1!” with which he did not agree before coming to China, but now he put up with it less than before and thought it was arrogant.
Calan, who commented on the differences of mentality above, returned home and saw his friends and families in debt for their whole lives. He saw that daily life at home was just “struggling”. He also felt that his hometown did not have the sense of community that he perceived existing amongst the Chinese. While the West focuses more on individualism and personal space, he preferred that in China you “formed very personal relationships with people in your community.” Similarly, Bryan’s home friends recommended that he not go to China, saying, “Why China? You shouldn’t go there; it’s bad.” Referring to a seven-day visit back home eight years after he had come to China, Calan stated, “I enjoyed my stay there, but I could also see the reason why I wasn’t there anymore.”

The Contradictory

Various similar or opposing opinions of the participants regarding their experience in China were presented in the last two sections along with a number of comparisons that revealed similar themes. To be fair, not everything in China differs from the Western view of it, but contradictions emerged not only in the differing viewpoints between individuals (which should not be surprising since there are always differences between individuals), but also within the words of individual participants, especially with regard to expectation versus reality and the eagerness to assimilate versus the need for individual identity. Bryan stands out among the participants as he often expresses himself by supporting both sides of the above contradictory pairs.

Expectation versus Reality. Early on, I sensed contradictions in Bryan’s words. First, before going to China, he confessed his fantasy of finding a traditional Chinese girlfriend, but then he found a Chinese girl whom he discovered as “not so Chinese.” Was he really looking for a Chinese girl with a Western personality? Bryan affirmed that “coming to China is my dream,”
and, "I have deep love for this country," but he also stated, "I absolutely cannot imagine living here as an old man and die in China." He seemed to embody these contradictions without realizing it. It was not just in his words, but also in his actual life. He lived between his high expectations before coming to China and his anxiety that he might get stuck there (thus hoping to leave China before growing old). This may indicate more discontent with his life than he was willing to admit.

Digging into the reasons for his coming to China, it seems John Pomfret's book, *Chinese Lessons: Five Classmates and the Story of the New China* (2006), affected Bryan greatly and led him to unfavourably compare his own situation to the great unknowns of China. John Pomfret was one of the earliest students coming from the West right after President Nixon visited China in 1972, and he recorded observations of China and his Chinese experience. All of that looked "completely alien" to Bryan, who grew up in a strict religious family in a very conservative state. He went to private religious schools most of his life and had never been abroad. Growing up in such a seemingly stifling environment, Bryan was enthralled by the *China* revealed in John Pomfret's words. The need to escape from his social environment soon started to grow. He wanted, he said, to

... go somewhere where nobody knows me, where I could just do what I want and just be what I am, and no one has any prior knowledge of me, so they could just say yes or no to me based on the most honest picture of myself. Where I was like - I don't know – and just the idea of completely submerging and immersing himself in that completely different culture. Wow, that's so like, inspiring!

Arriving in China, he chose Lanzhou that had fewer Westerners than more famous ones, such as Hong Kong. "It's not even like *China,*" were his words earlier quoted, again revealing a contradiction between his expectations and what he found. It turned out that the *China* he lived in for three years was more than an escape. He stated, "[I] feel like I fit in here more than I do at
home,” and that he had found his “true self”, a phrase that he borrowed from a blog he read before coming to China. When I questioned what “true self” meant for him, he replied it was “abstract” to explain. Instead, he quoted a sentence from the blogger, “When I was in China, I felt like I was one step closer to the person who I always wanted to be.” I believe in Bryan’s sincerity, but I note his tendency to see himself from the outside, as it were, using other people’s words. I remain uncertain to what extent he really has discovered his true self.

However, even though Bryan’s coming-to-China dream – “so deep that it drives me” came true, and he felt he had discovered his “true self”, he remained vague when being asked about his future plans. Without hesitation, he seems to have felt that returning to his homeland and perhaps his original situation was as inevitable as fate:

I can't picture..., it's impossible. So I know ultimately my future life's in the America ... I don't want to do that but that's just where my future's heading. If I could have a perfect life I would be in China teaching English. I've got it. What else do I want?

Bryan seems to feel pulled both directions at once. He summarized few reasons why he felt he did not want stay in China for the rest of the life, even though back at home he assumed he would be considered as a “qi-pa”, the Chinese word for “weirdo”. Life quality was the first and foremost reason for his discontent – he considered the food often “dirty” and he felt driving was “suicidal”. A friend who was also a foreign teacher in China told Bryan that it was harder for him after living in China for 20 years, because he still had to get on the bus to go to hospital for his knee pain and he could not understand the prescription in Chinese. This led to Bryan’s conclusion that “China is really good for foreigners when they are young.” Bryan did not see it as the place to raise children or grow old. “It [America] has got the better environment than China.” He also revealed some discomfort with Chinese social customs: “I cannot deal with Chinese people being so indirect for 20 years. It drives me crazy.” This indicates that Bryan lived
his dream of discovering a world that was truly other than the one he had been brought up in, but, over time, it seems the otherness – as shown in his impatience with the indirectness of interpersonal relations with Chinese -- became an obstacle to continuing his life in China.

Eagerness to Assimilate and the Need for Individual Identity. Bryan has been putting forth notable efforts to assimilate with his Chinese friends and into the Chinese social environment. He was amazed by the friendships John Pomfret made with Chinese people:

[H]e was talking about one thing that really affected me ... [It] was just how his Chinese friends came to just accept him... He was really accepted by a lot of people... Just him being himself, [but] you know he could not completely be himself; he had to still censor himself a bit of course. But he was just so accepted by these people, and I was like wow I [would] really like to try that you know.

Bryan was the one who believed he had developed “really close friendships”. However, in other interviews, he seemed to contradict himself. On one hand, he felt he was fully accepted by his Chinese coworkers and friends. Two times he repeated, “They just treat me like a friend, not a foreign friend.” On the other hand, he stressed that the idea that Western people cannot understand China was a stereotype that Chinese people had and it was not correct. This may reveal that, though he denied the stereotype, the fact that the Chinese continued to express it to him showed otherwise. Besides feeling offended when noting that the Chinese were shocked to see him using chopsticks so well, he also got frustrated when his Chinese friends would say, “You don’t understand. This is China.” This indicates that he may not have been as accepted as he imagined he was.

Commenting on that, Bryan responded, “No, I understand. You don’t understand cause you are in the middle of this situation. I’m looking at it from a neutral perspective.” Arguably, by putting himself in the neutral perspective, he was admitting his status as an outsider while he attempted to be accepted as an insider by the people. When considering the idea of neutral,
things are again contradictory. Bryan previously suggested that his was the unique foreigner experience, and he was “a white guy here with advantages.” He further explained, contradicting his words to his Chinese friends, “I am not neutral and never have pretended to be.”

Holding the foreigner identity and trying to be accepted by Chinese people in Chinese society seemed to prove a tough tightrope to walk. He dealt a double hand, just as his Chinese friends had done when denying him full acceptance by saying, “This is China.” Bryan explained this away by rationalizing, “It’s just culture, it’s just life,” thus refraining from making comments or explanations because, “I am a foreigner. This is not my country.”

Stories Continue

In this chapter, I presented the themes drawn from interviews and my observations of the participants. Though each one proved to be a unique individual, all were still Westerners in China and admitted in different ways that it was a unique foreigner experience. The participants often showed similar understandings and interpretations of different phenomena or stereotypes of China, yet, as I have described, each one had a unique response to his circumstances.

Clear divergences were shown in comments and reflections on different aspects of the living in China experience. Each participant had a different reason for going to live in China and each one told a different story of his lived experience of being there. This can be seen as the natural result of individual personalities, as well as the perspectival changes each experienced through his various interactions with different Chinese people. Each participant had the Westemer-in-China experience, but each one told his own story in his own way.

The stories reveal quite a number of comparisons made between China and the West in general, China and their specific home countries, Chinese people and their own people and even
between regions of China to do with social norms, mindsets, etc. Most participants felt they had undergone a major learning experience, though sometimes it seemed that some were trying to convince themselves that this was the case. Stories often have contradictory elements, and, as indicated, Bryan’s story especially revealed the conflicted feelings in his own mind, which one might expect from any person living in two worlds at once.
Chapter V Epilogue

In this chapter, I further discuss the findings and results from the themes that were presented in the last chapter by investigating the individual difference of the participants to find out why each conceives China, Chinese people and Chinese culture in his own way.

Interpreting the sources of the contradictions or paradoxes in their perspective indicates a clearer idea of what cultural Cosmopolitanism is and how it reflects a viewpoint embracing paradox. Implications for educational leadership in the international spectrum will be summarized and further research topics will be introduced. Included with the interpretations of the participants’ stories will be a narrative of my own personal learning journey through this project and the opening of new doors to understand my own country and myself from an emerging transcultural perspective.

The Individual Differences

**Personal Background and Ethnocentrism.** Participants’ personal backgrounds and their reasons to go to China were presented in the last chapter. It is likely that those who grew up in an environment dominated by a single mainstream culture/religion would find it more difficult to adjust to a totally different culture, and to some degree this is reflected in the increasing stress levels of Bryan, who expresses strong emotion but sometimes for contradictory reasons.

For those who were grew up as the minorities in terms of race (skin colour) or religion in their home countries, such as Calan and Omar, generally exhibited a lower degree of stress and frustration to cultural adjustment, and they related this partially to their early life experience as being minorities at home. As Calan reflected, “My background living in a very cultural diverse
Comparing with other participants, especially with Bryan, Calan holds neutral feelings and seemed to be calmer when talking about both his home country and China. Using the same quantitative categories as Morgan, Jr. (1972, 1975), I would label my participants as either cultural relativists or culture opposites; however, my qualitative research showed that a heightened or lessened degree of nationalism did not appear to happen to all of them. Each responded in an individual way. The general, quantitative viewpoint of Kafka’s (1968, as cited in Laubscher, 1994) that appreciation or reinforcement of the homeland culture was gained at the expense of the new culture or vice versa thus is unreliable, which again indicates the uniqueness of a person’s lived experience as revealed by in-depth qualitative research.

Ethnocentrism is something that is difficult to detect since most would not directly admit to it; it is more implied by pauses, words left unsaid, general attitudes, or by body language. But a decrease in the tolerance for the ethnocentrism of others was revealed in Bryan’s negative response to the “America’s Number One!” statement after living to China. He either harbours negative feelings about the arrogance of his native land or he is approaching a more inclusive multicultural or even transcultural (cosmopolitan) viewpoint.

Insisting on stereotypes could be a subtle indication of ethnocentrism unless the stereotypes are being mocked; in which case using them could be disinhibition. Reviewing the stereotypes discussed, I think most of them were some exaggerated truth, which is based on misleading, out of date information, entertainment, or governmental controlled messages (as some participants attributed such clichés to Western media or the censorship enforced by the
Chinese government. Other stereotypes may be over-generalizations (as seen in Chapter 2) resulting from unfamiliarity with new cultural patterns (i.e., the unbearable Chinese' indirectness for Bryan and Omar). In that case, the idea of Chinese being indirect could be a result of comparing Chinese manners with their own people’s less considerate and more direct means of talking or dealing with things. This does not mean their sense of experiencing Chinese indirectness was false; but their intolerance of it does suggest an unwillingness to adapt.

**Coping Skills and Cross-Cultural Skills.** Reviewing participants’ lived experience in China and interpreting from my observation, their reactions reflect Heusinkveld’s (1991) categories noting cross-cultural skills and coping skills. Heusinkveld noted that participants exhibit different levels of curiosity, willingness to imitate, the ability to adapt, accept, or awareness of cultural universals. It might be worth pointing out that tolerance is one of the three words Calan used to summarize his experience in China.

It is not just “tolerance for ambiguity”, which was pointed out by Hammer (1989, as cited in Hutchings et al., 2002, p. 59), but also tolerance of the “little things that irritate you in life”. Calan indicated that understanding the background and history of other human beings helps to avoid intolerant ignorance for that which cannot be understood. There were still certain things he had trouble tolerating such as people commonly spitting on the ground, likely generally meeting disapproval in most of the world.

Otherwise, Calan claimed he was very tolerant. However, this tolerance can be interpreted as an attitude of apathy – not having enough interest or concern to take things seriously. It can be seen as a sign of apathy when things took place that were not directly related to the participants themselves: “can’t explain, it’s just culture” (Bryan), or simply “I don’t care” (Omar).
In addition to the qualities mentioned above, being optimistic was also seen from the participants. Though at different levels, they tend to find silver linings out of the negative or unhappy experiences they had in China. During interviews, most of the time when participants were talking about something frustrating but then they ended up laughing about it, and trying to find out why it happened. Perhaps such optimism is necessary for anyone bold enough to uproot and live in an entirely different culture.

*Determinateness* is also demonstrated by the participants. Those who were determined to assimilate into Chinese society, like Alden, Bryan and Calan, all wanted to stay and live in China, so they took Chinese language courses in order to more deeply participate and increase their quality of life in China. All of my participants pointed this out: learning the language is essential.

Of course, language is helpful in day-to-day life in a foreign country and is essential for cultural participation. According to the Whorfian hypothesis, “People whose language provides numerous terms for distinguishing subtypes within a category actually perceive the world differently from people with a more limited linguistic repertoire (Kowalski & Westen, 2009, p. 250). That might be able to explain Bryan’s frustration with his Chinese friends telling him, “It’s China, you don’t understand,” because he assumed that he knew (the language and the meanings underneath) so he could perceive China in the Chinese way.

Research by Ross and colleagues (2002) suggests that people who are multilingual do in fact generate different thoughts depending on the language they are speaking, especially with more complex concepts such as “freedom” and “capitalism” whose felt meaning depends on many hidden emotional associations and conceptual assumptions. It is unlikely that a person’s
understanding of such words is limited to their formal definitions; for example, my participants’ experiences in China allowed some of them to feel an unexpected sense of freedom not implied in Western political connotations of the term. Ross and colleagues’ conclusions are arguable, but it could be one of the reasons why my participants come from similar cultural backgrounds yet each perceived a different China, which they openly expressed or implied.

Contradictory and Cosmopolitanism

The Contradictory. “What a lot of books!” she screamed. “And have you really read them all, Monsieur Bonnard?” “Alas! I have,” I replied, “and that is just the reason that I do not know anything; for there is not a single one of those books which does not contradict some other book; so that by the time one has read them all one does not know what to think about anything. That is just my condition, Madame.” (Anatole France, The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard, 1917, cited by Dunn, 2009)

As discussed in the previous chapter about the contradictory, Bryan had the China and his life in China imagined before going. This is common for everyone before going to a new place, but Bryan’s expectations seemed too grand and it sounded unrealistic that he had developed such “deep love” for China before stepping onto Chinese soil.

John Pomfret’s book constructed the most complete vision of China in Bryan’s mind even before he left home – the China in which Pomfret was accepted “as him being himself”, and Bryan has never masked the wish for the same to happen to himself. It seemed to me that Bryan preferred the China he had imagined rather than the actual China he is living in. His imagined Chinese culture was not the same as his daily experience was revealing to him. But he appeared to avoid admitting to his actual reality, for the sake of his lived reality, which was coloured by his imagined love of China and his dream of acceptance. He could not allow his personal reality to be, contrary to the “imagined China he came there to seek.
I was impressed by Bryan's knowledge of Chinese history, which was very helpful for him to rationalize his insights into current Chinese issues. The historical perspective was questioned by Zhang (2010), who stated that neither insiders nor outsiders have privileged access to the knowledge or the truth of the real China – implying that history is always an interpretation.

As I have mentioned, several times he also expressed the desire to reconstruct his self in China to show the “most honest picture”, which implies that the self at home was not the “most honest” or authentic self he could be, and that could be the cause of his overwhelming need to escape.

Furthermore, this is evidence that Bryan was on the proverbial quest for identity, but he wished for an identity that was at home in two cultures – the self at home and the self in China. The fact that Bryan was not able to articulate what a true self really is along with his current state of mind of being lost suggests he is still searching and possibly unclear of what he is looking for. This might explain why he sways between being eager to assimilate and the need for an individual identity.

If the desire to escape surpasses the “China bug” as the actual reason for Bryan going to China, it is not surprising to see that he felt lost after achieving his going-to-China dream. In this case, the delta analogy applies to Bryan. But Bryan may yet find the bridge to an authentic new self: paradox may be the source of growth, as Heracleitus (ca 500 BCE) aphorized: “That which is in opposition is in concert, and from things that differ comes the most beautiful harmony” (Heracleitus, in Freeman, 1948/83, p. 25), which is a wonderful vision of a cosmopolitanism that is yet composed of diverse cultures.
The Whiteness. In terms of identity, it is interesting to see that participants categorized themselves as foreign rather than white or Westerner. A matter of fact, they do not mind being called white by others, and they called themselves “white” occasionally. But under the context of labelling their experiences, Bryan and Calan stated that theirs was the foreigner experience but not (necessarily) white people’s experience in China.

This could be a sign of trying to dis-identify from the white priority as a result of learned white guilt. Jackson (1988) first posed this idea as opposite to white priority, “… guilty white is almost as entrenched in its negativity as the racist white, people actively try to dis-identify from both” (p. 54). But Omar, whose skin colour is not white, experienced both priority and racism in China. In this case, the advantages of being white and the disadvantages of being called Lao-wai or Gweilo on the street seemed to balance out in the idea of being foreign, rather than white.

Contrary to the fact that guilty white might exist as Calan refused to admit the special treatment he received was an advantage, accepting the label “white” could be perceived as a sign of open-mindedness; for example, the fact that Bryan brought up white issues and even laughed about the generalization that white men always want an Asian girl. Open-mindedness was recognized by Hammer (1989, as cited in Hutchings et al., 2002, p. 59) as one of the factors that influenced someone’s likelihood of either success or failure in a cross-cultural environment.

But Calan is a special case because of where he came from. In his words, his home country nowadays give special employment privileges to the darker indigenous people who were colonized by Calan’s European ancestors, so whites like him are consequently having less chance in the job market. This suggests white guilt overkill to me in his home country, and Calan was disappointed finding himself in such situation back home even while respecting the cultural
diversity. Perhaps he may have used the situation as an excuse for leaving home to seek the advantages his race once had, especially since being white in China obviously brings him some bonus. Calan, however, would rather see this new privileging as simply “being different” and “easy to be recognized” rather than being white.

**Cosmopolitans on the Way.** It would be too broad for me to discuss all the aspects of the rather vague and idealistic term, cosmopolitanism (and I have already reviewed this concept in Chapter Two), plus I am not in a position to judge if any of the participants has achieved or is approaching a cosmopolitan identity. However, here I would like to discuss few aspects of cultural cosmopolitanism, in a hyponym sense, that was expressed by my participants.

My participants have developed to different degrees the necessary open-mindedness by gradually accepting cultural differences and trying to take an altered perspective or a more native lens to view the differences, such as Calan trying the historical angle to explain Chinese behavior, or Bryan seeing Chinese culture in generational change as the result of its participation in the global economy and so hoping for critical thinking for younger Chinese generations. Increasing political concern was shown in both of them. Calan was speaking to me regarding the Chinese hatred towards Japanese (mainly from the Second Sino-Japanese War) that he heard from some outspoken Chinese he met. Though Calan was uncomfortable with this, he tried not to take sides but to understand the sources of such emotions. It is not for me to judge my fellow Chinese citizens on this issue, but I do note that this particular participant who expresses his political concern so openly and has integrated well amongst the Chinese still avoids assimilating himself to group emotions he finds irrational or negative. It could fall under one of the expressions of Tyler’s understanding of cosmopolitan identity – a movement towards being part of a culture rather than accidental tourists (Tyler, 1985, as cited in Hutchings et al., 2002, p. 58).
I must point out that though Bryan seems to contradict himself, he and Calan have been promoting China and its culture utilizing different social media. While I need to protect their real identities by not revealing any possible trace that links to the participants’ lives in the real world, the comments provided by others who viewed Bryan’s and Calan’s contributions showed they were inspired by them. It appears to me that more than a dozen people have gone to China because of them, not to mention the number of people who learned more about China or changed their views of China. Each of them is presenting the China he experienced to everyone online. Each of his own biases and preferences, but these just add character and colour to the social media information exchange. Such postings often reveal how different China is from the mainstream media portrayal, which is the China travelers might have imagined before experiencing. As Calan said,

I came here I thought China’s a really different place. But you know that’s one of the main reasons why I made my own videos, is to show people that China is not the way they think. ... If not, the main reason for me making videos is to show people that, hey, you know China is a great place. It’s a very interesting place and it’s completely different to what you think.

The change they are making might be small and only received by those who care to know, but these are the desirable efforts made to “construct broad allegiances and equal and peaceful global communities” that Riberio (2001, p. 29) defined as part of the movement for Cosmopolitanism in the International Encyclopedia of Social and Behavioral Sciences.

Based on the discussions above and despite the lack of information from Alden and Omar, some aspects of cultural cosmopolitanism have been presented on my participants Bryan and Calan. Though individual differences, including Bryan’s inconsistencies and my own possible biases (which I have been trying to minimize) need to be taken into consideration when coding the interviews, the progress they are making toward the cosmopolitan ideal cannot be
overlooked. Cosmopolitanism may be a controversial concept, but attitudes revealed by such travelers as Bryan and Calan suggest that the cosmopolitan self may be a reality on the way.

A Vision for the Future

Cultural Preparation and Educational Leadership in International Education.

Reviewing the previous research that I gathered for the Literature Review, after presenting the themes and discussing the relevant phenomena, I found it difficult to generalize a specific plan of cultural preparation for a concrete exchange program. After all, my participants exhibit similar yet distinctive points of view, which is to be expected in a qualitative research project. This necessarily renders any general recommendations vague but not impossible.

This does not mean, however, that I am either for or against the methods I have employed and summarized. For educators and policy-makers, having limited or stereotypical information is not enough for students who need to learn from the experiences of others. It is possible to make few recommendations drawn from this project and my own experience as an international student in Canada. These may be helpful for cultural preparation and leadership in international education or exchange programs.

Open-mindedness is as important as cultural awareness. Too often we are uncomfortable with cultural differences but are reluctant to either adapt or admit to our own xenophobia – perhaps projecting blame on the other (culture or person) for not being like us. Current exchange programs established in UNBC last from six weeks to two years, but it is hard to expect personal preparation for such cultural adaptation; open-mindedness cannot be taught or accurately measured by any standardized test. Experience abroad might help strengthening the awareness of cultural differences, but it is not necessarily enough for the individual to engage or accept such
differences, which first requires a willingness to be open-minded. I incline to the idea that being open-minded is spontaneous activity of consciousness that permeates biases, but guidance could still be offered to increase the likelihood of seeing the other side of the coin, that is, by learning to reflect on one's habitual ego defence mechanisms. One cannot be trained to be open-minded, but one can be prepared for the possibility.

Gregory Jay, professor of English at the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee, provided a list of discussion questions (Appendix A) on his *Teaching about Whiteness* website (retrieved March 12, 2015). On his list, there are open-ended questions to provoke students' thinking, such as "Is 'white' a 'panethnic' category along the lines of 'Asian American' or 'African American' or 'American Indian'? Or should we speak of 'European Americans,' even though not all of them are 'white'?") Though this list only gears towards students' learning of *whiteness*, it and such assistance provided in similar manners could be beneficial in exercising one's critical thinking and reflective learning capacities before departure. Such reflective learning may continue throughout the journey, increasing the probability of the spontaneous open-mindedness that allows one to take the perspective of the other.

Given that factual information about the exchange student's destination is the most common form of preparation before departure, personal narratives of feelings and thoughts on the experience are in scarcity because they may not be as uniformly positive as the image the programs aim to project; that is, personal narratives may be *politically incorrect*. For the sake of authenticity, an open discussion or information-sharing group would be helpful to build up useful connections between actual experiences and learned expectations (some of which might be unrealistic). Genuine experiences could be shared and discussed in pseudonyms; questions should be encouraged and disagreeable emotions need to be anticipated and respected. Idealistic
as they may sound, the leader or organizer of such groups would hopefully be someone without strong prejudices who has had research experiences of cross-cultural issues and/or life experience in cross-cultural environments. The major research intention of this project is to engage with and probe into different individuals’ experiences with the goal of learning from them but not judging them.

It has been attested by most of the participants that learning the language is essential if one is to experience another culture. Along with psychological preparations for seeing-through one’s biases, language assistance is imperative, especially in long-term residence programs. Having the awareness of cultural differences in mind, educators should be able to adjust their teaching plans or methods in order for students to encounter real life situations, perhaps via the Internet. In addition, mentorship programs or co-national peer support groups could be appropriate if schools decide that culturally tailored orientations are too costly and time-consuming. Such programs would help bridging the gap between home and foreign cultures from the time of arrival onward.

As educational leaders we have to bear in mind that under the rapid changes caused by world economics and global media it is inappropriate to apply same rules to different individuals of different cultures. Even though we in international education often call academic departments by the same name, we could begin by realizing that this does not mean such departments function in the same way. Recognizing the differences and respecting them need to be the base of every decision made. Being a lifelong learner and always prepared for changes and challenges is one important thing I learned from my participants, and I think it is applicable to international education leadership.
Implications for Further Research. There are few research topics I gathered that are worth mentioning in order to better understand individuals’ experiences in a cross-cultural setting.

Mirror to my research of Westerners in China, a number of qualitative inquiry into cross-cultural understanding of Chinese students in Canada have been available, but to my knowledge, an overview or summary of such researches is difficult to find. It should be of great benefit to Canadian institutions since China is the major origin country of international students coming to Canada and between 2012 and 2013, during which time the numbers grew by 18% (CBIE, retrieved on March.17, 2015).

The hypothesis of linguistic relativity that suggests people who are brought up speaking different languages also perceive the world differently was an eye-opening discovery to me. I am very sympathetic to this idea as it helps me understand many of incongruences between people who speak different languages and sometimes seem to perceive different realities. Further research with regard to this could consider applying qualitative methods to probe into and compare the different realities people might conceive after mastering a specific language.

Observations and Limitations

There are a few limitations worth mentioning in this project considering the participant selection and interviews.

As should already be clear, all my participants were adult males. These were my volunteers, even though it almost certain that the women would have had different stories to tell, likely told in a different (but not necessarily identical) manner. For example, there is some evidence that suggests that women often experience emotion more intensely than men and are
better able to read emotions from other people’s faces and nonverbal cues, as well as expressing emotion more intensely and openly than men (Brody, 1999; Brody & Hall, 2000), though such broad findings are highly controversial. In any case, having women participants would certainly have added another dimension to this study, but none were readily available.

The other limitation is the frequency and times of interviews. Comparatively, I had more interview opportunities with Bryan and there was rich information about Calan available online even before our face-to-face interviews. As a result I was able to gain much more information and stronger impressions from the conversations with the above two. Alden was not given to expressing himself freely in speech, and I only had the chance to interview him twice due to our conflicted schedules. However, he was interesting and I believe there would be more of his experiences to excavate if we had been able to arrange few more meetings.

The nature of qualitative research methods themselves left me limited in my ability to make generalizations or draw conclusions. One could always argue that total objectivity in a qualitative researcher is impossible. There are always some subjective undertones in a researcher’s interpretation of participants’ words, which of their words to choose, and in the researcher’s own verbal expressions. However, as I have already made it clear in Chapter Three, I made an effort to suspend judgment and bracket my own emotional responses to my participants’ knowledge of Chinese culture. No doubt some of my own unconscious feelings did colour my interpretations and expressions, but I do not try to convince readers to accept my interpretations – such as Bryan’s contradictions – but rather what I have been trying is to present are the themes I coded from the mouths of my participants. With such intentions I am for authenticity with my thoughts and remained open to reinterpreting my interpretations as I went.
To make my ideas more explicit and to provide readers a more direct sense of where I come from, a reflection of this research journey is summarized briefly below.

**Personal Learning Journey**

My motivation and passion for working on this project come in threefold: my everyday changing life experience in Canada as an international student, my work at school that deals with other international students, and the curiosity of seeing my personal growth and changing perspectives on the values that may be owned exclusively by either my home country China or Canada where I have been in for almost four years, as well as the growing awareness of identity transformation during this whole time.

This project did not take a long time to choose the topic and find related literatures. Participants were selected both by choice and randomly. The longest journey was transcribing and coding the conversations qualitatively. It was time-consuming and challenging in ways I never anticipated. My participants did not say things like “so that’s why I got to know it” or “that’s how I understand it”, which I suspect would have made it easier to spot the process of looming understanding and measuring the progress they have made. But no; instead they said in so many words, “That’s how it goes”: narrative not measurement.

It was only after a few months learning and working with NVivo9, reading and re-reading the transcripts and switching words for codes to aim for better fits – that I started seeing the things in common among the participants as well as the unique struggles and feelings underlying the words. Thousands of times I doubted that the lived experience of someone could be simply put into words for my readers (I do not want to use the word conclude or generalize). I have to be honest here: the overall experience was quite disorienting to me. I felt lost for quite some time
and it seemed I was drowning in the unexpected words of my participants – the Chinese experiences that sounded familiar yet strange, the opinions that appear to be understandable yet alien and distanced.

The epiphany that helped me pull all this together did not come until I received an email asking if I would be a volunteer to be interviewed for a Psychology student’s class assignment about cross-cultural experience. I met with the student during lunchtime in the early fall in Prince George. Questions came directly, prepared in advance: “What did you know about Canada before you came here?” or “What do you think of the food here?” They were also the questions I had asked my participants, not exactly in the same way and of course mine were about China. Sitting there I felt myself suddenly pulled out of the circle within which I had enclosed myself. I realized the transformative totality of cross-cultural experience could never be reduced to words. A lived experience, a sudden insight, or maybe an epiphany, could never be explained by answering one single question: *What do you think about the cultural differences between here and your home country?*

I was speechless when I was asked that. Cultural differences aside from the obvious like the chicken feet we Chinese eat that my Western friends could not stomach, or the more positive stereotypes that all Asians are good at mathematics, or us giving the impression of being emotionally reserved – what else could not be understood by communication with an open heart, an open mind, patience, and a growing sense of acceptance? The best way to understand is the chance to live that cross-cultural experience that you know is going to be different.

I have had similar struggles to those of my participants, and have kept to the attitude to say to myself, “That’s okay. Been there, done that.” Inner conflicts readily emerge in their words
Indeed in this project I strove to discover how my experiences in Canada have led to the changes I can sense in myself, what the true self is like after being influenced by different cultures and seeing so many other international students experiencing similar states in work and life. Observing how they deal with their lives here becomes a part of my life and that generates a refreshing reflection every single day. I have realized a true self is a dynamic self, always changing in response to one’s environment, the people one meets, and the choices one makes.

To use one phrase to describe and summarize my mixed, changing feelings towards my cross-cultural experience or even towards the prevailing emotion that I have in developing this project, some words from Confucius may work the best. In the Analects, he is quoted as saying, “Since we are here, we may as well make the best of it; now that we have come, let us stay and take the rough with the smooth.” From my understanding, it is not a passive statement about accepting whatever we have; neither is it a negative way to blindly follow the flow of life. A flexible and smooth transformation asks for the price of rational compromise, and more of an honest and continuous introspection. Knowing who we really are and what we really want is in fact more challenging than accepting what is given to us. Unless we succumb to mindless routine, this challenge to continually become who we are will likely continue throughout our lives.
Denouement

This study probes into four participants’ lived experiences in China by presenting their unique points of view in responses to certain phenomena, such as their comparisons between the China in which they lived and the China they had anticipated. Contradictions or conflicts were evident to some degree in all of them but were openly revealed by one participant. This project demonstrates that one’s background, choices and personality, along with other factors have created such distinctive standpoints and attitudes that it is difficult if not impossible to explain each individual in terms of the cultural cosmopolitanism perspective. Clarifying one’s changing stance or personal grounding in a cross-cultural setting based mainly in the relationships one develops not only assists the individual to cope and transform, but also indicates the necessity of the relationships found in education.
References


Freeman, K. (1948/83). *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers* (Freeman, K., Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.


Western world. (n. d.). Retrieved November 15, 2012 from Wikipedia:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_world


Appendix A

Teaching About Whiteness from Dr. Gregory Jay

Why teach about whiteness? (quotation)

1. In the past, teaching about “race” or “multiculturalism” has usually meant only focusing on people of color, as if “whiteness” had no place in the story. But it’s impossible to understand the history and socio-cultural effects of racializing classifications without studying the category of “whiteness.” (Just remember those signs on the water fountains.) Who invented it? Who has been included? How was it written into our laws? What positive and negative effects does it have on those it supposedly names? How can “white” people play productive roles in undoing the legacies of racism?

2. Studying whiteness means studying institutional and cultural racism, especially racializing practices that create “white privilege.” Since white privilege is systemic and not personal, this approach can combat the tendency to get stuck in the “white guilt” syndrome (which involves both confessions and denials).

3. Silence about whiteness lets everyone continue to harbor prejudices and misconceptions, beginning with the notion that “white” equals normal. Whiteness oppresses when it operates as the invisible regime of normality. Thus making whiteness visible is a principal goal of anti-racist pedagogy.

4. Whiteness has been a significant aesthetic and cultural value (or symbol or commodity), and thus requires a defamiliarizing or deconstructive interpretation, especially in analyzing art, literature, popular culture, and other media where whiteness is privileged.

Approaches to whiteness, questions to ask (quotation)

1. Always historicize: who invented “white” people? When was the term first used as a racial category? in Europe? in the United States? Who was included? Has the list of the included ethnicities changed since then? Why? (See essay, “Who Invented White People?”, online at https://pantherfile.uwm.edu/gjay/www/whitepeople.pdf).

2. When does “white” enter into usage as a legal term in laws, statutes, court decisions, etc. in the United States? What are some significant milestones in the legal history of whiteness? (See the three-part documentary Race: The Power of an Illusion.)

3. Is "white" a term for a racial group or a cultural group? Is there any such thing as "white" culture? Are all its practitioners of the same skin color?

4. Is "white" a "panethnic" category along the lines of "Asian American" or "African American" or "American Indian"? Or should we speak of "European Americans," even though not all of them are "white"?

5. Can "white" be used as a group name without invoking connotations of white supremacy? Or are whiteness and white supremacy fundamentally linked?

Exercises, Activities, Projects, Inquiries (quotation)

1. Consciousness raising: Begin with Peggy McIntosh’s essay on “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack.” Sample some or the entire documentary Mirrors of Privilege: Making Whiteness Visible (on YouTube). Read other deconstructions of whiteness in David
Reediger’s anthology *Black on White* to establish the long history of African American theorizing about whiteness. Sample contemporary white writers on whiteness and mixed-race writers on the complexities of identity.

2. **Keyword exercises**: have students collect the entries on "race," "white," "Caucasian," "Aryan," "black," and "Negro" (for example) from at least two dictionaries and two encyclopaedias. Compare the results, and ask students to now try writing their own definitions of some of these terms. Or have them use an interview technique, in which they record definitions of these terms gathered by interviewing other students, family members, teachers, librarians, etc.

3. **Historical research**: have students find uses of the word "white" and "black" (or "colored" or "Negro") in legal or political documents, such as acts of Congress, Supreme Court rulings, state and local statutes, etc. Discuss "whiteness" as a legal category (or legal fiction). Investigate the laws on interracial sex and "miscegenation" (see the anthology *Interracialism*, ed. Werner Sollers).

4. **Life analysis (based on the questions in McIntosh’s essay)**: have students make a list of ten things they normally do during the week. Then have them imagine that they woke up one day to find that their "race" had changed to [fill in the blank]. Going through their lists, students should analyze how each thing might be different for them were their "race" different. Would they be able to go to such places, talk to such people, enjoy such events, etc.? Would they feel comfortable doing so? What would be the chances that people of that race would be found doing these things in these places in these ways? What other things might they be doing instead? What real differences, in other words, does "race" make each day in our lives?

5. **Cultural Identity paper**: This assignment challenges students to examine their identity in terms of culture, race, and ethnicity. Typically, white students have tremendous problems with this assignment at first, since they have unconsciously coded "culture" as something that only "people of color" have. "I don’t have a culture, I’m just white, just an American" is a fairly standard first response. By exploring their own race and ethnicity, and by thinking critically about the notions of culture and identity, students gain both a vocabulary and a method for taking on the larger issues raised by multiculturalism and whiteness studies. (For an account of this assignment see Gregory Jay, *American Literature and the Culture Wars*, chapter three, “Taking Multiculturalism Personally,” also available online at: http://www.uwm.edu/~gjay/jaymulticulturalism.pdf.)

6. **Media analysis (read excerpts from Richard Dyer’s book *White*)**: look for images of whiteness in the media. What kinds and types of whiteness appear most often? Are there different classes of white people? If so, how are they represented differently by the media? How long can one watch television or read a newspaper or magazine without encountering anything but white people, or mostly white people? Have students bring in copies of major newspapers and magazines and analyze the distribution of images of whiteness, blackness, or of ethnicities such as Latino/a, Asian, Native American. Make a list of the top grossing films of the last five years and consider whether their characters and presumed audience show a bias toward whiteness. Consider screening such films as *King Kong, The Jazz Singer, Pinky* or *Imitation of Life* (1934; remade 1959).
Appendix B

Information Letter

Dear Participants,

This letter is an invitation to participate in a research study. As a full-time MEd. student in the Department of Education at the University of Northern British Columbia, I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Professor Gregory Nixon on “Among the Chinese: A Qualitative Inquiry into Cross-Cultural Understanding”. This study should be beneficial to individuals in cross-cultural settings, both Chinese and Western educational institutions and policy makers, and most importantly the participants and me the researcher.

As China is becoming one of the most popular destinations for Westerners in the recent years, the quality of their life experience in China is decisive to their cross-cultural learning experience, even the forming of the cosmopolitan identity in between the cultures. A qualitative research featuring Western participants in China and focusing on the process of how they comprehend and interpret the life and culture in China helps not only the participants but also me the researcher in the cross-cultural setting to develop a deeper understanding of what “understanding” a culture might mean different things to a Westerner and a Chinese. It might also help educational institutions and policy makers on both sides to maximize the usage of resource.

This interview is open-ended and it involves topics covering life style in China, Chinese people you have interacted with, your views of the cultural events you have been experienced and the natural comparison of Chinese and the you own culture. Please note that your participation is voluntary. All information of you and those you provide will be completely anonymous. Only the researchers involved in this study will ever have access to the data and it will be kept in a secure place at the university for a period of two years, after which time it will be permanently deleted. Also please note that there are no known risks associated with participating in this study. Once you participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time with no consequence and any information collected from you will be deleted. The times and length of interviews depend on the depth of the conversation and interviews would be arranged at a time convenient to your schedule. If you would like to know about the result of the research, please leave your contact information at the end of the consent form.

Should you have any concerns or complaints regarding this study, please contact the UNBC office of Research at 250-960-6735 or reb@unbc.ca or my supervisor Dr. Nixon at nixong@unbc.ca. If you need any emotional support that arises during the interviews, you may contact the UNBC counseling services at 250-960-6369 or wellness@unbc.ca. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Lingnan Cai  (cail@unbc.ca or 250-961-7838)
Appendix C

Participant Consent Form

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Lingnan Cai of Education Program at the University of Northern British Columbia, under the supervision of Professor Gregory Nixon. I have had opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I am aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in the project of publications come from the research, with the understanding that quotations will be anonymous.

I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics approval through the UNBC Research Ethics Board. I was informed that if I have any complaints or concerns resulting from my participation in this study, I may contact the UNBC office or Research at 250-960-6735 or reb@unbc.ca. I was also informed that if I need any support for the emotional responses that arise during the interview, I may contact the UNBC counseling services at 250-360-6369 or wellness@unbc.ca.

I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

Yes ___  No ___

I have read and fully understood the information letter that provide with consent form.

Yes ___  No ___

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any project or publication that comes of this study.

Yes ___  No ___

I understand that I can refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time.

Yes ___  No ___

Participant Name: ____________________ (Printed Name)

Participant Signature: ____________________

Date of Participant’s Signature: ____________

I would like to learn about the findings of this study. Please call me or e-mail me at:

____________________________________

Best times to call are:

____________________________________