

University Integration of Chinese Undergraduate Students in Canada and the United States: The Role of Secondary School Experience

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Introduction

Students from Mainland China are the largest national group in the United States and Canada, and their numbers have grown substantially (Institute of International Education (IIE) 2017). The influx of Chinese students has contributed to US and Canadian higher education institutions academically, financially, and culturally (Cooper 2017; Hanassab and Tidwell 2002). In addition, the numbers at the *secondary level* have grown even more dramatically. In the United States, 42 percent of international secondary students (about 34,431) come from China, and the number had increased 48 percent from 2013 to 2016 (IIE 2017). Similarly, in Canada, 55 percent of international secondary students (about 24,480) were from China (IIE 2017). However, little is known about the lived experiences of Chinese students with secondary education abroad when they enter colleges or universities.

Research literature on Chinese students in US or Canadian higher education institutions has shown that most students suffer from various challenges during their acculturation to the US or Canada. For example, most of them have to deal with lack of interactions with local students (Sovic 2009) due to cultural differences and the language barrier (Henze and Zhu 2012). Moreover, Chinese students suffered from academic challenges caused by unfamiliar teaching styles and learning environments (Zhang and Zhou 2010).

While there are numerous studies addressing Chinese international students' social and academic experiences in US and Canadian universities, few researchers have investigated the lived experiences of Chinese first-degree students with secondary education

abroad or in international high school in China where curriculum and instruction are structured similar to those of another country's secondary school. These students are exposed to western cultures and gain academic experiences in US or Canadian classrooms before they go to US or Canadian colleges or universities. Such unique experiences add complexities and nuances to the lived experiences of Chinese undergraduate students with secondary education abroad or international high schools in China.

For decades, research studies have identified common problems facing Chinese international students going abroad. Such challenges include: reduced intercultural communication with local students; English-language difficulty; classroom participation; and social isolation (Feng 1991; Henderson, Milhouse and Cao 1993; Henze and Zhu 2012; Sovic 2009; Su and Harrison 2016; Sun and Chen, 1997; Zhang and Zhou 2010). Researchers find Chinese students have little communication with local students and too close contacts with co-nationals. Chinese and local students shared few common experiences together (Heublein, Lam 2006, cited in Henze and Zhu, 2012; Sommer and Weitz 2004). The limited research on Chinese students in Canadian universities similarly found it was not easy for Chinese students to make close friendships with local and other international students (Zhang and Zhou 2010). More positively, co-national friends in the host country provide international students with "the reassurance of instrumental and emotional support that was unforthcoming on the part of the host community" (Brown 2009, p. 246). Such "material, informational, emotional, educational, and entertainment services" (Kim 1988, p. 64) that co-national friends offer one

another facilitates international students' adaptation in the initial phase.

Moreover, previous studies found that the adjustment challenges of international students are related to the length of stay in the host country. These studies showed that a student's length of residence in the US is related to the adjustment issues of college and university student sojourners (Abe, Talbot and Geelhoed 1998; Mittal and Wieling 2006; Sodowsky and Plake 1992; Trice 2004). The longer students had lived in the US, the more they were acculturated. As discussed above, Chinese undergraduate students with secondary education abroad or international high schools in China have had spent several years in US or Canada or at least exposed to Western cultures. In this case, they might not experience problems and challenges as other international students without secondary education abroad. They might have different needs and expectations. However, most universities made various policies based on previous studies, largely addressing intercultural communication problems or social isolation problems. These policies might not meet the needs of international students with secondary education abroad or in international high schools.

Given the rapid rise of undergraduate students in both US and Canada (Araujo 2011; IIE 2017), Araujo suggested future research "should narrow the focus to international undergraduates, in order to further understand their adjustment problems and illuminate areas of convergence" (p. 6). Furthermore, given the recent increasing trend of Chinese international secondary students in US and Canada (IIE 2017), it is important for US and Canadian higher education institutions to understand the special group of Chinese undergraduate students who spent their secondary education abroad or in international high schools in China. Some researchers have pointed out "while international secondary students do benefit from improving their English skills and gaining academic experience in US classrooms, some may still face some language or academic challenges when they enter higher education and may require academic support services at the higher education level." (IIE 2017, p. 10)

In summary, this study aims to address an important, yet under-researched topic in the field of comparative higher education—the lived experiences of Chinese undergraduate students with secondary education experiences abroad or in international high schools in China. Their special secondary education experiences add more complexities and nuances to the lived experiences of Chinese international students. With the rapid increase of international students with secondary education abroad, it is necessary for universities to inform policies addressing this group of students specifically. My study aims to provide rich data for universities to make such policies to meet the needs of this group of students.

Methodology

This study aims to answer the following question: *How do Chinese university students, especially those with secondary experience in the host country, view their current social and academic experiences in US or Canada?* One study site was an US state-related research institution in the Northeast and the other one is a large Canadian university in Ontario. The phenomenological approach allowed me to gain in-depth understandings of the meaning for Chinese undergraduate students of their lived experiences of studying abroad (Creswell, 2007). In the following sections, I describe the study settings, data collection, and data analysis.

Lion University (main campus) and Tree University (main campus) were selected for comparison as both are large public research universities with large populations of Chinese undergraduate students. Lion's main campus is the Lion's largest campus, with a population of over 9,000 international students in recent years (IIE 2017). Among them, about half are undergraduates. Tree's main campus is its largest campus, housing a population of nearly 14, 500 international undergraduate students. More than 9,000 were from China. Also, in terms of tuition, the two sites have similar tuition fee.

I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 10 Chinese undergraduate students at Lion and 10 at Tree. The focus population was Chinese

undergraduate students, whose immigration statuses were as international students at the time of data collection, or those students whose immigration statuses were not currently international students but had been international (visa) students when they first arrived. Moreover, those Chinese undergraduate students gained their secondary education either in Canada or in United States, or in international high schools in China. The potential subjects of the study were mainly identified through Chinese Undergraduate Student Association (hereafter "CUSA") and church communities at both Lion and Tree. Written recruitment letters were sent out through officials in both universities to potential subjects via email or in person. Moreover, hard copies of written recruitment letter in both Chinese and English were sent out in communities and cites with potential Chinese population, such as Chinese supermarkets, libraries and dining halls. Once Chinese students showed interest in my study, they contacted me with the contact information on hard copies of invitations. The interview protocol was designed to understand students' current experiences. Based on previous studies, this protocol addressed common problems and challenges students might meet, such as reduced intercultural communication with local students; English-language difficulty; classroom participation; and social isolation (Feng 1991; Harrison 2016; Henderson et al. 1993; Heublein et al, 2004; Li et al 2012; Perkins 1977; Sovic 2009; Su, Henze, and Zhu 2012; Sun and Chen 1997; UKCOSA 2004; Ward 2001, cited in Henze and Zhu 2012; Zhang and Zhou 2010). This protocol allowed participants to reflect on these problems during their studying and living abroad. Interviews were conducted in Chinese and then translated into English.

Three rounds of interviews were conducted as my research questions and interview protocol developed. During the first round of interviews, I asked the

students to share their daily life and academic experiences. I also asked them to share their views of their lives abroad. After initial coding of the first round of interviews, I further specified and refined my research questions. In Canada I arranged interviews with 10 Chinese undergraduate students. I asked them to share their thoughts on interactions with local students and Chinese students. After rough coding of the second round of interviews, I focused on students' academic stress. In the third round of interviews, with additional subjects, I specifically asked students to reflect on their academic stress. This essay reports in detail about the experiences of students in each university (see Table 1).

After the interviews, I reviewed all transcripts and memos to develop a comprehensive understanding of the data. I applied open coding to data and sought the themes emerging from the interviews. Major codes and corresponding excerpts were created and sorted in this phase. Sequentially, with my research questions in mind, I specifically coded data that speak to the social and academic lives of Chinese undergraduate students in each university.

Coded data were then analyzed using an approach which focuses on the themes of the data (Boyatzis 1998). The themes, as described by Boyatzis, are "[patterns] found in the information that at minimum describes and organizes the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon..., [which] may be initially generated inductively from the raw information or generated deductively from theory and prior research" (Boyatzis 1998, p. 4). Thematic analysis allows me to comprehend prominent themes emerging from the data, to organize them systematically, and to make interpretations based on the theoretical framework.

STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Major	Year in College	Secondary Education	Post-secondary Education
Tiaotiao	F	19	Chemical Engineering	2	US	Lion
Shu	M	18	Computer Science	1	International high school	Lion
Didi	M	21	Mechanical Engineering	2	US	Lion
Ku	M	21	Architecture Engineering	3	US	Lion
Jing	F	20	Economics	4	International high school	Lion
Manman	F	21	Public Accounting	4	Canada	Tree
Wen	M	21	Biological Physics	4	Canada	Tree
Cheng	M	20	Economics & Finance	3	Canada	Tree
Mian	F	18	Economics & Statistics	1	Canada	Tree
Xiuxiu	F	21	Accounting	4	Canada	Tree

Finding One: Similar Social Lives and Satisfaction with Social Life in Two Universities

When asked about their social lives, most students in Tree and Lion said that the majority if not all of their friends, especially “close” friends, were Chinese. Participants’ interactions with local students were mainly limited to the classroom. Such classroom interactions were not considered as a “friendship.” Some students even said that “class-friend” (friends in the classroom) was not true friendship. Rather, these relationships were only for specific purposes and interests, such as working on the assignments, group projects and examinations. Relationships based on these purposes are different from relationships based on emotional and psychological needs. For example, Tiaotiao, a female sophomore at Lion described her interactions in and outside the classroom:

“If [I] really want to have fun or for social purpose, [I would have] more interactions with Chinese. Yet for purposes of study, then [I would have] interactions with both Americans and Chinese. ... My American friends, um, they mostly are from either academic or career field. Um, no one is the

type, like deeply-bonding.” [Note that this and all interviews have been translated by the author from Chinese]. [Studied secondary education in the US] Cheng described a similar situation in Tree:

“All of my current friends are Chinese. Sometimes in the class, I will do projects with Canadians or other foreigners. Yet we do not become very good friends.” [Studied secondary education in Canada]

From Tiaotiao and Chen’s responses, we can see that it was difficult for Chinese students to make friends with local students. Interviewees saw many social differences between themselves and their Canadian or US peers. Their differences included not only language, but also cultures, personal experiences, and personalities. Yet language was seen as the most important barrier and caused most of my subjects to interact mainly with co-nationals. It was not about the influence of English. In fact, since all the participants had their secondary education in English, they were confident about their language skills. Instead, participants in both universities explained that it was simply easier for them to express their deep feelings by using the mother tongue. For example, Xiuxiu, a female

junior student in Tree, described her feelings of using mother tongue for communication:

*“Sharing the same language, we [my friends and I] undoubtedly spend more time together. But, then, I actually had many foreigners as friends in Freshman and Sophomore years, and **I don’t think my English is not good or I could not speak English frequently.** Yet I felt that, my mind works differently when speaking Chinese and speaking English. When speaking English, my mind may be more rational. I think thoroughly before I speak, whereas speaking Chinese may be more emotional. **Annoying complaints are conveyed with Chinese all the time.** Just closer to them [Chinese people]. Thus, now my friends are all from China.”* [Studied secondary education in Canada]

“*Feel closer to co-nationals*” is a common theme found across interviews. In Xiuxiu’s view, her problem was not English fluency. In fact, she was very confident with her English and did not think she had problems of expressing herself clearly in English. Yet using English did not allow her to express her deep feeling since she was “*more rational*” when speaking English. Instead, using Chinese made her “*more emotional*” and easier to share annoying experiences with her Chinese friends. Such conversations made her feel closer to her Chinese peers.

Other participants who did not have language concerns also had such feeling. They thought most of their conversations with local students were superficial and limited to “*small talk*.” From their perspectives, it was hard to have deep conversations with local students. This was partly seen to reflect cultural differences, which they could not define, using the word: 文化不同 (*wen hua bu tong*). For example, Cheng vaguely pointed to different types of entertainment enjoyed by him as compared to his Canadian peers:

“When white people go out, they normally prefer to party at home rather than at pubs [like Chinese]. They prefer to buy a bunch of drinks, and just drink until wasted at home. I just feel like we have cultural differences. Like, although I hang out with [Canadians], I feel happier when hanging out with Chinese. The stuff white people are interested does

not really appeal or interest me. I actually didn’t think that I had any language barrier with white people. But it’s just a cultural thing. I feel like they talk about girls together, drink together, do stupid stuff together. Like, I feel bad not doing stuff together with them, but feel stupid doing it.” [Studied secondary education in Canada]

“*What interests local students does not interest me*” was a common theme in the interviews at both universities. Many participants complained that it was difficult to find common interesting topics, and this difficulty hindered making friends with local students. They attributed this to cultural differences. Cheng had his secondary education in Canada, and he was exposed to Canadian culture for a long time. He knew how to be social with his Canadian peers and understood their activities, but this did not mean he liked the culture. Instead, he still felt “*stupid*” doing activities with his Canadian friends. Then he turned to his Chinese friends in college since he felt “*happier*” with them.

Yet other participants viewed this difficulty in a different way. For example, Shu, a male freshman expressed his understanding of his difficulties in interacting with his US peers.

“I feel like: This is a State University, a public school, with many Americans, many from the state. Those people are like, most of those people have lived their entire lives here, having never gotten out to know about this world. I think, they do not know about the cultural communication in this world and the many different cultures. I feel like, with most of the people, the Americans I have met so far, we actually do not have that many similar topics or concepts, differences in experiences and therefore conception of the world....” [Studied secondary education in international high school in China]

For Shu, due to his secondary education in an international high school in China, he got more chances of accessing to western cultures. He thought he was exposed to different cultures for a long time. In this sense, Americans around him and he had different conceptions of the world, and they did not have many similar topics or concepts. This hindered him from making friends with Americans around him.

Besides these social differences, participants reported that their interactions with Canadians and Americans were influenced by the number of available Chinese. Participants stated that they were surrounded by more Chinese students in and outside the classroom. They also reported that large numbers of Chinese students reduced their already limited social interactions with local students in the classroom. For example, Manman in Tree majored in business, which is a major predominated by Chinese students. She complained that Tree and her major had too many Chinese students. Therefore, *“it is extremely hard for me to reach out to local students in my major”*. Unlike Manman’s situation, Ku, a junior male student in engineering in Lion, stated that it was easy for him to make friends with local students. This was because his cohort in this major only had 88 students, and only five of them were Chinese.

Beyond the classroom, residence halls provide another space for Chinese students to meet and interact with local and other international students. Many participants stated that they had more interactions with local students in their first year in college, since they were forced to live in the dormitory. However, after they moved out of the university residence they began to meet more Chinese students. For example, when Didi was forced to live on campus in a university residence in his first year, he had more interactions with local students and other international students. At that time, his best friend was his American roommate. In his second year he moved off campus. He explained that he would have planned to live with his American roommate, but his roommate had too little money. As a result, Didi and other two Chinese students became roommates. After that, his friends were almost all from China. Didi explained that this is because *“there are so many Chinese students in Lion”*. He referred to his high school experiences as an explanation. Didi had his secondary education in the US, and at that time all his friends, including best friends, were non-Chinese because there were only two other Chinese students in his school. Thus he had no choice but to make friends with Americans. Yet the situation in university was different. He was surrounded with both Chinese and local students, and with many more Chinese after he

moved from the student residence. Thus, Didi’s surroundings with population of Chinese students influenced his social life most.

Contrary to what many policy makers would predict, most participants expressed their satisfaction with their current social situation. Some participants explained that they had experienced friendships with local students in high schools, so they did not necessarily spend time and energy making friends with local students. Moreover, more interactions with co-nationals and fewer interactions with locals did not mean participants failed to blend into the local culture and were isolated socially from local students. Instead, my participants actively chose to have interactions with their own group. For example, Tiaotiao, a female student in Lion stated:

“I never tended to break the bubble [to make friends with local students]. I think I already passed that phase when in high school. In high school, sometimes I felt like I could not keep up with the way Americans talked, or could not understand the way they thought. Nevertheless, after a while taking the time to get along with them, it was not hard to understand after all. Thus, I personally think right now I simply am not reaching out, to be real friends with the American, but if I want to, I think I can do it. ... I am in my comfort zone, simple as that.”
[Studied secondary education in the US]

Other interviewees in both Tree and Lion also shared common experiences in high schools abroad. They thought their intensive interactions with local students in high school helped them better understand and get used to local culture. Interestingly, such experiences reduced their desire to make friends with Canadians or Americans students in university, and even pushed them back to their co-nationals for social needs.

Finding Two: Different Views of Academic Life in Two Universities

Although my participants shared similar perspectives on social lives in both Tree and Lion, they sharply diverge in their perceptions about their academic experiences. Moreover, participants’

experiences of secondary education did not help them adapt to their academic lives in colleges. My participants asserted that they did not have any difficulties in communicating with professors in and out of the classrooms, but they still had various complaints and worries of their academic lives. During interviews, I heard more complaints and worries from participants in Tree while participants in Lion expressed few worries about their academic lives. For Lion participants, although some of them complained about heavy workload, none of them mentioned their worries about not passing exams or gaining high GPA. For example, when asked about academic lives, Ku merely complained that his life was occupied with projects, assignments, and exams, which was quite different his lives in high school in the US. Yet he did not mention pressures from passing exams or worries of not being able to graduate. Instead, Ku was confident in finding an internship and even a job in the future. Didi, who finished his college in two years with an impressive GPA of 3.95 (out of a possible 4.0), even described his academic life as *“easy and satisfying”*. Echoing Didi, other participants also expressed their satisfaction with their academic lives, including good communications with professors and gaining a good GPA.

More Tree participants expressed frustration with the pressure of exams. According to them, passing exams was difficult and obtaining a high GPA was even harder. Hours of study did not guarantee a high GPA. Some of them asserted that it was common for students to re-take classes for another year. They worried constantly about their test scores, and their abilities to graduate. For example, Mian, a freshman stated:

“I feel like, I tried really hard, but still did not get the best grades. To give an example, what professor teaches, lectures, is at a level, homework is at another level, and exam is one more level. The problems in example tests used a different solving process that was never taught in class. When you put those in the exam, within one hour, such a short time, it’s impossible you can figure out how to do those. ...Anyway, if you don’t study at all, it’s just really hard at Tree, in order to graduate. I am studying really hard without getting a 3.8 or 3.9. If

I don’t get it, it may get pretty dangerous.” [Studied secondary education in Canada]

Echoing Mian most participants complained that they did not have time for being social and resting. Instead, they spent most of their time in the library studying after classes. Some participants even said that Tree students could only choose two things to do among sleeping, socializing and studying. When Tree participants were asked about their reflections of such stress from studying, they often attributed this to large class sizes and to, what they believed, an unreasonable teacher-student ratio. They also made negative comments about the faculties, and about professors’ intentions to lower the average grades. For example, some participants complained about 1,400 students in one class. *“It is true that you could not hear one word in the classroom if you sit backwards”*. Such large class sizes were seen as preventing professors from caring about most students. It was impossible to interact with professors inside or outside the classroom. Some participants complained that it was impossible for them even to ask questions after the class. *“The line of students who want to ask questions is too long,”* one student told me.

Another view was that professors intentionally lower GPA. Some participants complained that *“there’s no rule for [lower] grading, but it seems like every class keeps around the same average”*. They thought such action was *“like a tradition”*. One participant even used her summer abroad program (SAP) to explain how Tree purposefully created their difficulties to gain a high GPA. She explained that *“whatever grades students from Tree get in [the summer program], when converted back to Tree’s scores, would be curved 9 ~10 points lower. This rule was listed when we signed up, before we went.”* She thought such rule increased her academic pressure.

However, participants who did not complain about grades pointed out such stress may be due to what they described as easy admission standards of Tree. According to them, the quality difference among Tree students was dramatic because Tree did not require students to pass any standard test. This is different from US universities, they felt, which required students to

have minimum SAT scores. Since it was imagined to be comparatively easy for international students to enroll in Tree, my interviewees thought that some students might be unqualified for college-level academics. Consequently, after admission, some Chinese students may find it difficult to catch up or gain a good score. Some participants even thought their academic stress was a deliberate way for Tree to eliminate some students from competition.

Discussion and Conclusion

Chinese students in both universities had similar social lives but different academic lives. Overall, they were satisfied with their experiences of studying abroad.

Benefits from previous secondary education experiences

Participants in my study completed their secondary education abroad, either in Canada or in US, or at least attended international high schools in China. In the past five years, more and more international secondary students in the US ultimately seek to enroll in US higher education institutions following their secondary studies (IIE 2017). Their experiences of secondary education abroad or in international high schools played an important role in students' social life in colleges. Such experiences helped these Chinese undergraduate students feel confident with their language abilities and satisfied about their social lives. This is different from post-graduate students who complained about few interactions with local students (Yuan 2011). They explained that this was because of insufficient language skill and cultural difference (Yuan 2011). Thus, they might "lose their motivation to engage in uncertainty reduction because it requires too much effort and it may bring them out of their comfort zone (p. 153)."

Although my participants reported fewer interactions with local students than with co-nationals, they did *not* ascribe this to language barriers. In fact, most interviewees were fluent in English. Most thought they had the abilities to make friends with local students. As Tiaotiao pointed out, after her intensive interactions with local students during her high school in the US, she learned how to communicate with

Americans. Therefore, she was confident in her ability to make friends with local students in college. She was unsure whether she really wanted relationships with Americans, and what she wanted from friendships.

Thus, my interviewees' adaptation to local culture did not mean they actually *liked* Canadian or US culture. As Cheng said, he spent his high school in Canada. Nevertheless, he felt "stupid" when doing things with his Canadian peers. Meanwhile, he felt "happier when hanging out with Chinese". Consequently, he actively chose to be social with his co-nationals. We might conclude that Chinese undergraduate students with secondary education abroad or in international high schools have fewer adjustment problems in their college social lives. After experiencing and understanding both Chinese and local cultures, Chinese undergraduates exposed to both cultures actively chose their friends. They did not need interactions with local students to gain knowledge of the local culture, adapt to local culture, or improve their English. They felt they had already experienced this process in their high schools.

Population of Chinese students in higher education institutions

With expansion of enrollment of international students in higher education institutions in US and Canada, the numbers of Chinese students, especially Chinese undergraduates, continues to grow. Although there are signs of increased anti-immigrant sentiment in the US (Cooper, 2017), the US still witnessed an increasing number of Chinese international students. Most recently there have been over 350,000 Chinese students studying in the US (IIE 2017). Canada, with more friendly immigration policies and lower tuition fees, now outpaces other countries in terms of international student enrollment (Cooper 2017). Beginning from in November 2016, Canadian visa requirements gave greater weight to the value of a Canadian post-secondary credential. Under the new Express Entry system, this will benefit international students hoping to remain in Canada (Cooper 2017). More importantly, due to the rhetoric and policies of US President Donald Trump, several Canadian schools experience a surge in applications (Cooper 2017).

The increased populations of Chinese students in both Canada and the US have increased the interactions of Chinese undergraduate students' with co-nationals. However, classrooms and student residences are places where Chinese students to meet and interact with non-Chinese. In classrooms, students often need to participate and collaborate with other students on group projects. Chinese students have greater chances to interact with local students and other international students. And yet Chinese students have fewer chances to meet local students in the classroom, given recent trends.

University residences prove another place for Chinese students to meet and interact with non-Chinese. Many of my participants asserted that they had more local friends when they lived in dormitories in their first year in colleges. Most of them moved to shared rental apartments/houses in their second year for a comparatively lower cost and more comfortable living conditions. The majority of those who shared off-campus accommodation chose Chinese students as their roommates. Some studies thought staying together only with co-nationals would limit their communication with local and other international students and their chances to learn about local culture as well as academics (Jiao 2006). Thus, many researchers have called for more interactions between local students and international students as such interactions can help boost international students' academic achievement, less alienation and homesickness, and so on (Perrucci & Hu 1995, cited in Sovic 2009). Yet we should notice that, as discussed above, Chinese undergraduate students who experienced secondary education abroad were not in urgent of these interactions. They were already used to local cultures. Instead, living with other Chinese students helped them build up good social network, which would be beneficial for them if they would like to go back to China for future development. This is consistent with some UK research, which sees the separation between local and international students as desirable and actually calls for "less emphasis on the integration of international students, who will remain in a host country for a relatively short time, and an encouragement to maintain links with home, and form

links with co-nationals in the host country" (McKinlay et al 1996, p. 392; also quoted in Sovic 2009, p. 749).

Academic stress and complaints

Tree participants were vocal about what they described as a heavy workload and pressure from exams. They asserted that they spent hours and hours in the library after class, but still could not get a high GPA. Some of them stated that they even worried about graduation if they did not study hard. However, participants in Lion did not mention such worries or stress. This did not mean Tree was stricter or harder than Lion. In fact, Tree and Lion had similar retention rate, 91.7 percent and 93.1 percent, respectively (Lion 2017; Tree 2016). Lion even has a lower graduation rate than Tree, with 66.5 percent to 77.2 percent (Lion Fact Book, 2017; Tree 2016). In this sense, it is puzzling why Tree participants complained more than Lion participants about academic stress.

Some Tree participants ascribed their academic stress to an inconsistency between what they were taught and what was examined. From their perspectives, lectures, homework, and exams were at different difficulty levels. Thus, they had difficulties applying what they learned in the class to exams. Nevertheless, were all material to come at the same difficulty, there is no point for their existences as separate individuals. Learning is a process involving more than receiving, a process requiring comprehensive and critical thinking. The purpose of homework is to challenge students to think, to ask deeper questions, and hence to learn. Aside from homework, distinct level for exams are also necessary to test acute and comprehensive thinking. If students received homework, which do not require more effort and thinking, their knowledge will only include the exact basic concepts in lectures. If exams were at the same level as homework and lectures, which require no additional thinking but only memorization, they then only serve the purposes to test students' writing speed.

Although Tree and Lion have similar acceptance rate, since Tree has a more open admissions process and does not require standardized test scores, it is very likely for Tree to enroll students with a wide range of learning abilities and language proficiency. It is possible that some Toronto students will experience

greater challenges. By contrast, like most US universities, Lion requires minimum SAT scores admission. This may be the reason that, although some participants asserted that workload was heavy, none of them mentioned it was hard for them to pass the exams or gain a high GPA.

Their different situations in the two universities also create different student attitudes toward academic life. The student-faculty ratio at the Tree's ratio was 35.2 (Tree 2016). But Lion's student-faculty ratio in was 16.2 (Lion Fact Book 2017). In addition, although Tree is committed to providing undergraduate students with the opportunity to participate in a variety of learning formats, including smaller class experiences, 57.5 percent of first-year courses for undergraduate students in Arts and Science had more than 200 students (Tree 2016).

In summary, we can see that Chinese students with secondary education abroad or in the international high schools did have their own advantages and needs. Due to students' experiences of secondary education abroad or in international high schools, these students did not have strong desires and needs for intercultural interactions with local students. They actively made their own selections of social relations. In terms of academic lives, their secondary education experiences did not help them survive in the college studies. They still struggled with their academic experiences.

Recommendation

There are several policy implications from this study. First, higher education institutions need to help Chinese undergraduate students, even those secondary education abroad. Also, policies aimed at helping international students integrate into local culture may not work for Chinese undergraduate students with secondary education abroad or in international high schools. It is possible that many Chinese students – despite exposure during secondary school - do not desire for integration into local culture. Their fewer interactions with local students and more with co-nationals result from rational and active selections of social relations. In this sense, this group of students do not need policies to help them integrate to local cultures. Nevertheless, many international students

do not have such experiences. Therefore, it is important for higher education institutions to learn from the secondary education experiences of this special group. Universities can use it to create similar environment for their international students and domestic students to meet each other and have relatively intensive interactions.

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