The Academic Adaptation of Mainland Chinese Doctoral Students In Education at McGill University

by

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the academic adaptation of five Mainland Chinese doctoral students in the Faculty of Education at McGill University, Québec, Canada. Using individual interviewing as the primary research method, the study revealed 12 major challenge areas, i.e., *English as a second language, financial difficulties, outsider feelings, worries about career paths, course work, research network, TA/RA experiences, differences between doctoral and master's studies, isolation, pace of the PhD, motherhood and doctoral study,* and *adjusting research directions.* Through comparing the findings with the literature and the data from secondary sources, this study concluded that the academic adaptation of Mainland Chinese doctoral students in Canada is a process in which cross-cultural adaptation intertwines with disciplinary socialization. The study contributes to literature by 1) documenting an under-researched group—PhD students in education from Mainland China in Canada; and 2) looking at academic adaptation through two lenses: cross-cultural adaptation and disciplinary socialization.

RÉSUMÉ

Ce mémoire de maîtrise vise à savoir ce qu'il en est de l'adaptation académique de cinq étudiants originaires de la Chine continentale, qui sont présentement doctorantes à la faculté d'éducation de l'université McGill à Montréal, au Canada. Utilisant principalement l'entretien de recherche qualitatif comme moyen de collecte de données, cette recherche révèle 12 zones de défis majeurs, à savoir : anglais langue seconde; difficultés financières; sentiment d'être un « étranger »; soucis concernant les possibilités de carrière; travaux académiques universitaires; réseau de recherche; expériences TA/RA; différences entre études de niveau maîtrise et de niveau doctorat; isolement individuel; rythme des études de niveau doctorat; maternité et études doctorales; ajustements nécessaires en cours de recherche. En comparant les résultats de cette recherche avec ce que dit la littérature ainsi qu'avec d'autres données de sources secondaires, cette étude arrive à la conclusion que l'adaptation académique des étudiantes originaires de Chine continentale venus étudier au Canada est un procédé dans lequel l'adaptation interculturelle s'entremêle avec la socialisation disciplinaire. Cette étude vient contribuer à la littérature existante à la fois en y documentant un groupe qui y fut jusqu'à maintenant sous-représenté, soit les doctorantes du Canada originaires de Chine continentale, et en examinant de plus près l'adaptation académique à travers deux façons de voir, soit l'adaptation interculturelle et la socialisation disciplinaire.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Sleepless in Montreal

It was not a special night that day when I woke up from dreams at 2:00 am and could not go back to sleep. This had happened many times since I came to Montreal. It was a night in early December, and I woke up from dreams of my family and the apartment I rented in Beijing. I sat up half awake on my bed, looking outside through the blinds. The moonlight was beautifully pouring down; the road lamps were giving out cozy orange light; and the snow had almost hidden everything under it. I was not feeling well in my heart those days, and the doctor told me that my heart problem was probably due to the "changes" I had felt in a place far from home. The changes...Is my heart more sensitive than my mind?

(Chen, S. Excerpt from a course paper, April 2006)

Figure 1.1 Farewell: (left to right) Me, my father, and my younger brother

I came to Montreal on August 21, 2005. But it is like yesterday that I was packing for my study in Canada, and that my father, my younger brother and my best friend went to Beijing International Airport to see me off. The photo (Figure 1.1) was taken before we got on the airport shuttle. The facial expressions of my father, my brother and I more or less show our different feelings at that moment. My father never agreed on my idea to study abroad yet he never tried to persuade me to change my mind. Though he respected my decision, his smile revealed his mixed feelings. My younger brother, on the right, might feel sad to say goodbye to his sister, also his best friend, so he smiled somewhat unnaturally. The T-shirt he was wearing was a gift that I mailed to him three years ago from South China. Among the three, I was the only one free of sad feelings. As a matter of fact, I felt very excited about my new life in Canada.

Now, nearly two years have gone by, yet my journey to Canada, which was over 10,000 kilometres' long and across half of the earth surface, seems to be just beginning...

Figure 1.2 An Air Canada Flight

1.1 Me, The researcher

I was born and grew up in a small city in North China called Yang-quan (literally meaning *sun spring*), and had my undergraduate degree in Beijing, the capital of the People's Republic of China. Before I came to Canada in 2005 as an international student, I had no experience of studying in any foreign country. Probably for this reason, I soon found myself in a difficult situation of fitting myself into a new academic environment. Not only did I face a language problem, but also I had to deal with challenges from other aspects of graduate study. I still remember how hectic and messy the first months were when I could not decide which and how many courses to take for the semester, and how hard I tried to understand the professors' lectures and to make a comment in class discussions.

As time went on, I gradually realized that I was not alone in struggling with academic challenges. Most of my Chinese classmates and student friends were facing similar problems. When the time came for me to choose a topic for my thesis, I decided to write about the challenges that I and many other Chinese graduate students encountered in Canada. The main reason was simply that I wanted to help. During the preliminary research design period, however, I learned that doctoral students actually faced different challenges from master's students, as they stayed longer in a program and they were expected to meet much higher academic standards. Obviously I could not ignore these differences. Soon I was involved in a larger research project led by my supervisor on doctoral student learning experiences at two Canadian universities: McGill and Simon Fraser. Accordingly, I finally decided to concentrate my thesis study on Mainland Chinese doctoral students.

1.2   Context of the Study

Canada is the destination of 5% of the world international students at the post-secondary level and is ranked the 6th among the countries receiving international students in 2004 (OECD, 2006). According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), the annual flow[1] of Mainland Chinese students in 2005 is 6,996[2], which makes Mainland China the second largest source of international students in Canada. By December 1, 2005, 36,137 foreign students from Mainland China were studying in Canada, and this number accounts for 23.5% of the total foreign student population. The People's Republic of China was the No. 1 foreign student source for Canadian education in 2005. Table 1.1 and Figure 1.1 show the ascending trend of the number of Mainland Chinese students from 1996 to 2005.

Table 1.1 Numbers of Foreign Students from Mainland China 1996-2005

Year	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Number of Students	2,078	2,166	3,020	5,363	8,991	16,776	24,974	31,344	34,369	36,137
Share in Total International Students (%)	2.9	2.9	3.9	6.2	8.9	13.9	19.1	22.5	23.5	23.5
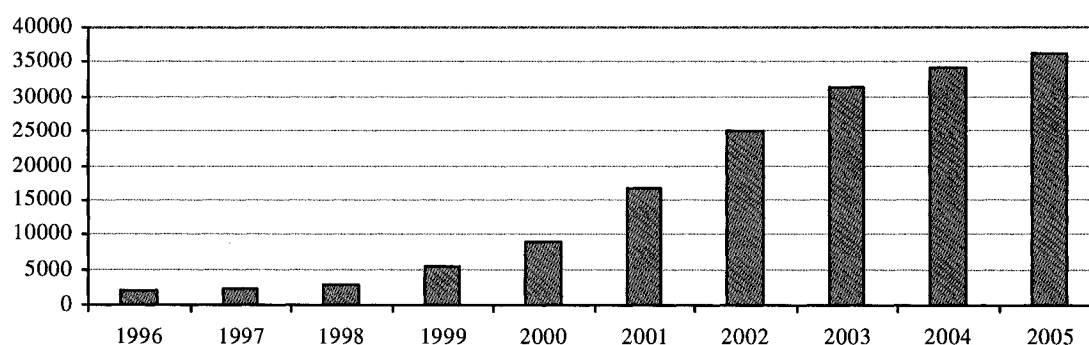
Figure 1.3 Numbers of Foreign Students from Mainland China 1996-2005

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[1] Student "flow" refers to the number of new international students coming to a country in a given year.
[2] Students from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan were counted separately.

Statistics have shown that many Chinese students come to Canada for their graduate degrees, and a few for their doctorates. The actual number of Mainland Chinese doctoral students is larger because the statistics above exclude those who are permanent residents of Canada. Unfortunately, however, Mainland Chinese doctoral students' learning experiences in Canada are very under-researched. No research has been conducted at the doctoral level, though there exist a few studies on Chinese students at graduate level, i.e., sampling both master's and doctoral students (e.g., Chen, 1989; Liang, 2004; Mongillo, 1995; Tu, 1992).

1.3 Purpose of the Study

This study aims to 1) document the learning experiences of Mainland Chinese students in doctoral programs in education, 2) explore what adjustments they need to make in order to fulfill academic tasks required by their programs, and 3) picture the possible pattern of this process. It will also make recommendations to Canadian educational institutions, departments, and faculty members about how they may better help students from other cultures, especially Asian cultures, to adapt to the doctoral study in Canada.

1.4 Research Questions

This study was about "learning experiences" and "academic adaptation". Building upon various scholars' works on "adaptation" (e.g., Berry, 1997; Chang, 1996; Kim, 1988, 2001; Leung, 2001; Liang, 2004; Selby & Woods, 1966; Tallman, 1991; J. Wang 2003; Z. Wang, 2004; Zheng & Berry 1991), *academic adaptation* in this thesis refers to the changes and adjustments that a student makes in order to fulfill academic requirements and expectations of an educational setting.

My research question was "What are the academic adaptation and learning experiences of Mainland Chinese doctoral students in education at McGill University?" In order to answer this question, the following questions were addressed:

1) What adaptation difficulties/challenges do Mainland Chinese doctoral students in education encounter during their doctoral study, and how do they cope with them?

2) What do these experiences mean?

3) What is the pattern of the academic adaptation of Mainland Chinese doctoral students in education?

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

My search for literature relevant to this study went in two directions: the theoretical models that were related to international students' adaptation to a foreign environment, and the studies that were done in this area during the past two decades. I will start this section by defining the terms, followed by a review of theoretical models and studies, and then I will summarize the findings of the previous research.

2.1 *Adjustment* and *Adaptation*

There has been an inconsistent use of terms in cross-cultural studies (Kim, 1988). Among these terms are *adjustment* and *adaptation*.

Miller, Yahne and Rhods (1990) defined *adjustment* as both a "state" and a "process", and they wrote, "Adjustment refers to a state of harmony between the person and the environment. It is also a process of change whereby individuals adapt to variations in the physical and social climate by altering aspects of their behavior and/or the surroundings" (p. 4). Yet Guclu (1993) seems to disagree that *adjustment* is a state. She believes that "adjustment refers to the process through which individuals become integrated into a new environment. This means coping with one's environment sufficiently well to be happy, comfortable and fairly free of problems" (p. 6). In spite of the disagreement on "state" and "process", they all agree that *adjustment* involves changes of the cross-cultural individuals in a positive direction.

Adaptation, according to Klein (1977), means "a process of attitudinal or behavioral change in response to new stimuli" (p. 3). Klein believes that conflicts and

stress are typical characteristics of *adaptation* and these conflicts and stress vary across cultural groups. While Klein (1977) only considered the "process" aspect of *adaptation*, Feng (1991) holds that *adaptation* is also a "state". He defined *adaptation* as "the satisfaction of those needs related to survival, or the process whereby an individual accommodates to an environment" (pp. 4-5). The first half of his definition (satisfaction) indicates that *adaptation* could be a stable state. Zheng and Berry (1991) and Kim (1988) defined *adaptation* as both the *outcome* of the changes that individuals make facing a different environment and the *process* of dealing with these changes. Apparently, they consider *adaptation* as both a "process" of making changes and a "state" after making these changes, a definition similar to that of *adjustment*.

Though the literature has demonstrated that the terms *adaptation* and *adjustment* have been used interchangeably in cross-cultural studies, there are scholars who try to distinguish them. For example, both Czewoja-Shaikh (1987) and Feng (1991) recognize that *adjustment* is only one aspect of *adaptation*. Berry (1997) expressed the same point of view:

> *Adaptation* refers to the relatively stable changes that take place in an individual or group in response to environmental demands. Moreover, *adaptation* may or may not improve "fit" between individuals and their environments. It is thus not a term that necessarily implies that individuals or groups change to become more like their environments (i.e., *adjustment*), but may involve resistance and attempts to change their environments or moving away from them altogether.
> (p. 20, emphasis added.)

To put it simply, *adjustment* means "adapting well" and thus has a narrower sense than *adaptation*, which refers to both "adapting well" and "adapting poorly".

I have used "adaptation" in the title of this thesis because my study aims to investigate both the positive and negative aspects of Mainland Chinese doctoral students'

learning experiences; and I am more interested in the negative aspects (i.e., the challenges and difficulties that the students face). However, following the trends of the past studies, I am using *adjustment* and *adaptation* interchangeably in this thesis.

2.2 Theoretical Models on Cross-cultural Adaptation

Theoretical models concerning cross-cultural adaptation have been proposed and revised as early as 1950s. Generally speaking, these models fall into two categories: earlier models mainly focus on the stage divisions of the adaptation process; recent models have shifted to studies of variables that affect the adaptation process.

2.2.1 Stages of the adaptation process

Based on interviews with 200 Norwegians who studied or worked in American universities for a period of time, Lysgaard suggested his U-curve theory in 1955, which identified three stages of cross-cultural adaptation. During the first stage, the sojourners are enthusiastic about the new environment. Following this stage is a stage of crisis, in which sojourners feel lonely and frustrated about the new surroundings. Once having gone through the second stage, they begin to feel good again, and become more integrated into the foreign environment. Lysgaard argues that the adaptation process of cross-cultural sojourners follows a U-shaped curve with "ease" and "adjustment" at the two tops and "crisis" as the bottom point.

Oberg (1960) proposed a similar model based on "culture shock" studies. He distinguished four stages in cross-cultural adjustment, namely, *honeymoon*, *crisis*, *recovery* and *adjustment*. In the honeymoon period, which lasts from a few days or weeks to six months, the sojourner is excited about being in the foreign place; the crisis comes

when he/she encounters difficulties in the new culture and thus develops hostile or aggressive attitude toward the host country; when the sojourner gradually learns to function in the new culture, he/she enters the recovery stage; when the sojourner feels no difficulty in the new culture, the adjustment stage comes.

Adler's (1975) model of transitional experience focuses on the cultural adjustment of Westerners, in particular, Americans. This model is composed of five stages: *contact*, where the sojourner is separated from his or her home culture but excited about the new environment; *disintegration*, where the cultural differences become more intruding and salient; *reintegration*, where the sojourner rejects the new culture; *autonomy*, where the sojourner gains some skills to deal with the new culture; and *independence*, when the sojourner starts to enjoy the new environment. As Adler indicates, the transitional experience is a process of the growth and development of personality and identity.

Selby and Woods (1966) are among the first scholars who called our attention to the importance of academic aspects of cross-cultural adaptation. What makes their study even more important is that, unlike the previous studies, their research participants were all non-European students who came from Asia, Africa, Latin America, etc. According to the longitudinal interviews with these students in their first undergraduate year, Selby and Woods found that foreign students' socio-cultural adaptation was closely related to their academic adaptation, and "foreign students' adjustment could be better understood by considering the impact of the institutions (universities), rather than the impact of the culture at large" (p. 138). They concluded that non-European students lacked the initial stage of excitement indicated in Lysgaard's (1955) U-curve theory; rather, the students experienced a steep decline of morale at the beginning of their stay followed by a gradual

recovery over the year. Based on these findings, Selby and Woods visualized the adaptation process as a "V-shaped" curve[3].

These stage models have revealed that, 1) though cross-cultural individuals may share some patterns in their adaptation to a foreign culture, these patterns may vary depending on cultural groups (e.g., European or non-European) and the goals of the individuals (e.g., working or studying); and 2) for international students, academic aspects of adaptation seem to direct other aspects of their cross-cultural adaptation.

2.2.2   Variables affecting the adaptation

There are two theoretical models that deal with variables affecting cross-cultural adaptation: Kim's (1988, 2001) "communication model" (Figure 2.1), and Berry's (1997) "acculturation framework" (Figure 2.2).

Kim's (1988, 2001) model centers on the development of the *host communication competence*, i.e., "the overall capacity of the stranger to receive and process information appropriately and effectively (decoding) and to design plans to initiate messages or respond to others (encoding) in accordance with the host communication system" (Kim, 2001, p.73). It is composed of "language competence", "knowledge about the norms of the host culture", and "the ability to act in ways that are effective and appropriate in the host environment" (Kim, 2001, p. 73). Kim (1988) argues that through communication with the host environment, an individual stranger unlearns "some of the original attributes" and acquires "some of the host cultural attributes" (p. 80). As a result, he/she has attributes of both cultures at any given moment during the adaptation process. The

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[3] "V" is the letter that Selby and Woods (1966) used in their article. However, a "tick" seems to be more like the shape of the curve they described, which starts with a steep decline.

greater the development of host communication competence, the more adapted an individual becomes, and vice versa. The model identifies three sets of variables. Under "predisposition" are preparedness for change, ethnic proximity, and adaptive personality; under "environment" are host receptivity, host conformity pressure, and ethnic group strength; concerning "communication", there are personal and social communication variables.

Kim's work is more advanced than those concentrating only on "stages" because it looks into the nature of cross-cultural adaptation and places adaptation in a network of relationships. This is a crucial step since socio-cultural phenomena are far more complicated than several stages. However, this model does not show the "process" feature of cross-cultural adaptation very well. Communication is a process itself, but we need to know what happens during the communication. In addition, the negative outcomes of adaptation are not explicit in the model either.

ENVIRONMENT
Host Receptivity
Host Conformity Pressure
Ethnic Group Strength

PREDISPOSITION
Preparedness for Change
Ethnic Proximity
Adaptive Personality

Host IC
Host MC

Host Communication Competence

Ethnic IC
Ethnic MC

INTERCULTURAL TRANSFORMATION
Functional Fitness
Psychological Health
Intercultural Identity

PERSONAL COMMUNICATION

SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

IC-Interpersonal Communication, MC-Mass Communication

Figure 2.1 Kim's (1988) communication model of cross-cultural adaptation

Unlike Kim's (1988, 2001) model, which was meant to apply to all cross-cultural adaptation contexts, Berry's (1997) "acculturation framework" mainly deals with the psychological aspects of cross-cultural adaptation. Though Berry's work seems to be more limited in terms of generalizability, it has two strengths. First, it clearly displays and distinguishes the adaptation process and moderating variables that affect this process. The five boxes along the central line of the model indicate that the adaptation process is not only temporal but also highly variable with the influence of factors above and below. Echoing Kim's consideration of both the original and host cultures, Berry also takes these two sets of variables into consideration. Moreover, it includes other variables such as age, gender, education, migration motivation, etc. Second, Berry (1997) clearly pointed out that adaptation could be both positive and negative, depending on a number of factors.
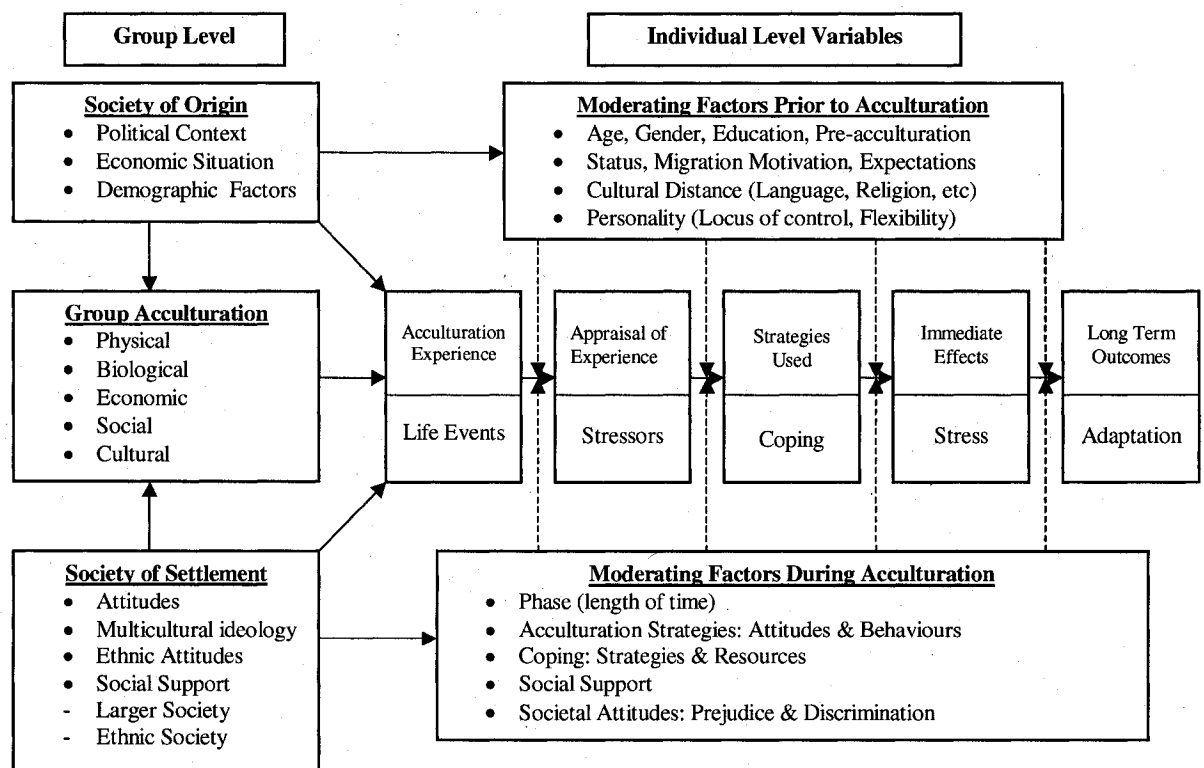
Figure 2.2 Berry's (1997) acculturation framework

Both models have provided guidance for academic adaptation research. However, as they are largely based on research on migrants—rather than students, and socio-cultural adaptation—rather than academic adaptation, the information delivered in the models is too general. For example, Kim (2001) admitted that it is in the "immediate social milieus", such as "workplaces, neighbourhoods, and communities" (p.78), that the adaptation takes place. However, her model does not detail in what way the "immediate social milieus" make some individuals' adaptation different from others'. Berry's (1997) model has limitations in a similar way when applied to academic contexts. Also, the group acculturation variables do not fit the case of Mainland Chinese doctoral students because 1) even though they share socio-cultural backgrounds to some extent, there are factors, such as the institutional culture, departmental culture, and disciplinary culture, that make individual experience different; and 2) the number of Mainland Chinese doctoral students within one institution and one discipline is not large enough to be considered as a "group" in Berry's sense.

2.3   Studies on Academic Adaptation of International Students

This section is composed of the studies about international students in North America without attending to the country of origin, and the studies particularly about Mainland Chinese graduate students.

2.3.1   Adaptation of international students

Based on the literature on cross-cultural adaptation, Foust, Fieg, Koester, Sarbaugh and Wendinger (1981) summarized the factors that influenced the adjustment of cross-cultural student sojourners, and made suggestions about how people working with sojourners

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might facilitate this adjustment. They argue that both the sojourners and the educators should consider three time periods: the periods while students are preparing to enter a new culture, living in a new culture, and re-entering the primary culture. Foust et al believe that two factors determine the nature of cultural adjustment. One is the difference between the original culture and the host culture. The more different they are, the more difficult the adjustment will be. The other is the objective that the sojourner wants to achieve in the new culture. For example, the adjustment of students is different from the adjustment of workers as the objectives of these two groups are different.

In terms of previous studies about international doctoral students' academic adaptation, I have found the following studies relevant and informative[4]. I have divided them into two categories informed by Becher and Trowler's (2001) work on disciplinary differences: 1) studies on students from a single disciplinary area (Robinson, 2005; Dong, 2005; Tallman, 1991; Naidoo, 1990), and 2) studies about students from various disciplinary areas (Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006; Z. Wang, 2004; Chacon Arias, 1999; Guclu, 1993).

Studies on single disciplinary areas

In his Ph.D. dissertation, Robinson (2005) used socialization theory and cognitive-ecological theory to interpret the learning experiences of first-year doctoral students in natural sciences in an American university. He found that 1) international students were less informed about their programs than American students; 2) international students thought they had less control over their research directions, and thus expected their

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[4] There are relevant studies done in the U. K. and Australia. As a matter of fact, more studies have been done in these regions than in North America. However, as my study investigates Chinese students in Canada, I have only included studies done in the U.S. and Canada in this thesis.

advisors to "dictate" their dissertations; and 3) international students worked harder and longer in laboratories compared to American students.

Focusing on the effect of "disciplinary culture" on dissertation/thesis writing, Dong's (2005) dissertation research revealed how non-native graduate students in natural sciences in two American universities did their dissertations/theses differently from native students. He concluded that, in comparison with non-native students, native students sought more outside help in writing from peers, staff, specialists in the fields, manuscript reviewers, informal review groups and thesaurus. In contrast, non-native students only consulted their supervisors.

Tallman's (1991) research is among the earliest studies that focused on doctoral students' academic adaptation. She surveyed 114 international Ph.D. students in library and information science programs from 15 American universities, and found that most international graduate students had an "outsider" feeling of seeing themselves as "substantially outside the educational objectives of US programs" (p. 283). In addition, language was found to be the greatest adjustment problem for non-English speakers, and the faculty's lack of knowledge about other cultures was a barrier for the students' academic performance.

Naidoo's (1990) dissertation research identified five major concerns of the international graduate students in education at the University of Iowa. Namely, they were English language, financial aid, academic record, placement service, and social-personal issues. These problems areas were found to vary by age, gender, marital status, length of stay and the level of study. For example, on language, students who were under 30 years old, female, and at master's level, reported more problems than those who were over 30 years old, male, and at doctoral level.

Studies on several disciplines

Poyrazli and Kavanaugh (2006) conducted a survey study to investigate how marital status and ethnicity influenced international graduate students' academic achievements and their adjustment in five universities in the United States. They found that 1) married international students experienced lower levels of social adjustment strain than single students; 2) Asian students experienced more overall adjustment strain, more specific strains related to education and English, and lower levels of English proficiency than European students; 3) English proficiency significantly influenced academic adjustment; and 4) master's level students reported more strain related to English and education than doctoral students.

Z. Wang (2004) interviewed 21 international graduate students from both social science and science areas to explore their motivation for studying overseas and their learning experiences in the United States. Besides identifying the challenges that these students faced, such as language barrier, unfamiliarity with American culture, and feelings of isolation, she concluded that the adaptation process promoted students' psychological and emotional growth.

Chacon Arias (1999) identified 3 major challenges for international students at the University of Alberta (95% of the participants were masters and doctoral students) based on his survey results: financial support, stress of academic work, and loneliness. He documented the changes that international students wanted the university to make, such as reducing differential fees, internationalizing curriculum content, offering more English language classes, and developing recreational activities.

Guclu (1993) studied 293 international graduate students' adjustment problems and coping strategies in the University of Pittsburgh, and found language difficulty and

financial aid the most outstanding problems among the 11 problem areas that he identified. The research results also included some differences in academic adjustment depending on gender, level of study, country of origin, and academic discipline. For example, master's students had more problems than doctoral students in language areas; and European students had fewer problems than students from other regions.

Lin and Yi (1997) conducted a study on Asian international students' adjustment to American universities, and they identified many common problems Asian international students encounter, such as pressure from academic demands, language barriers, financial concerns, depression, loneliness, and bicultural conflicts. They also provided suggestions to American universities for them to better help international students' adaptation. Lin and Yi take adjustment as an ever on-going process, and for this reason they argue that assistance from the schools should start before the students arrive and continue until their graduation.

Summary

International students share many adaptation difficulties such as language barriers, financial aids and loneliness. However, the severity of these problems varies across cultural groups. For example, Tallman (1991) found that in terms of English speaking ability, students from the Asian-Pacific area were much less confident than their counterparts from other areas; Guclu (1993) found that African and Middle-East students had more problems in religious services than students from other parts of the world. Differences in severity of adaptation problems have justified the studies that focus on a particular cultural group. The following section will review studies about Mainland Chinese students in North America.

2.3.2 Adaptation of Mainland Chinese graduate students

Relevant literature about Chinese students' experiences in North America (the United States and Canada) shows four research directions. Some studies focus on the cultural aspects of Chinese students' adaptation (e.g., Mongillo, 1995; Qian, 2002; Tu, 1992); some particularly study the language difficulties that Chinese students face (e.g., C. Chen, 1992; Q. Chen, 1989; L. Zhu, 1993); a few studies compare Chinese students to those from the host culture (e.g., Zheng & Berry, 1991) or compare the experiences of Chinese students from different parts of China (e.g., Ye, 1992); and a few other studies concentrate specifically on academic adaptation (e.g., Feng, 1991; Liang, 2004; Lin, 1998; Wang, 2004; P. Zhu, 1996). I will first review these studies and then summarize the findings.

Cultural aspects of adaptation

Qian's (2002) book *Chinese Students Encounter America* tells many true stories about Chinese students[5] in the United States, including their changing concept of freedom, their research and study, their family life; their financial situation; and their struggles for employment. Though the book is not particularly on academic adaptation, it reveals many academic difficulties such as writing papers in English and raising questions at seminars.

Both Tu (1992) and Mongillo (1995) conducted their research in Canada. Tu explored 8 factors that affected Chinese graduate students' cultural adaptation in the University of Victoria, and found that language was the most important one. Another significant finding was how a strong Chinese community within and outside the university helped with students' adaptation to the Canadian culture. Like Tu, Mongillo

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[5] A small portion of the stories are about visiting scholars.

(1995) also found that language was a serious problem for Chinese students. However, she discovered that language was more about the knowledge of the host culture than pure language skills. Moreover, what made students' adaptation more difficult and complicated was what she called "academic culture", i.e., the "rules, practices, expectations, behaviors of the teaching and learning process which are either implicitly or explicitly agreed upon by those involved in an educational setting" (p. 33). She concluded that academic adaptation should not be studied as a separate issue but as "an integral part of the whole international student experience" (p. 85).

Language difficulties

Studies on language adaptation are mainly about the influence of the original culture and disciplinary differences. Q. Chen (1989) surveyed and interviewed a group of Chinese graduate students at McGill University and Concordia University in Canada about their perceptions of second language teaching and learning. She found that the students preferred information-giving teachers to expressive teachers due to their belief in what constitutes good teachers in the Chinese culture.

C. Chen (1992) was also interested in the language adaptation of Chinese students but with a focus on disciplinary differences. She investigated the language demands and language problems of Chinese graduate students in an American university, and found that oral and written language skills were less demanding for science students than for humanities students; accordingly, science students adapted to academic tasks more easily than humanities students. Like Q. Chen (1989), C. Chen also concluded that Chinese students' language problems were rooted in cultural and pedagogical differences between China and the United States.

L. Zhu's (1993) study is more focused, for her participants were a group of Chinese engineering students at the University of Calgary. By interviewing professors and students who had stayed in Canada for some time, Zhu documented the language difficulties of the Chinese engineering students. Then by tracking some newly-arrived students, she found out how Chinese engineering students developed their English language ability gradually and the coping strategies they used, such as excessive reading, strenuous preparation procedures, and seeking help from experts.

Comparative studies

There are some comparative studies about differences between Chinese students and students from other cultures. However, few studies have been done in the contexts of graduate education. Both of the following studies have a mixed sample of undergraduate and graduate students.

Zheng and Berry (1991) compared Chinese sojourners' (including visiting scholars and visa students) psychological health and coping strategies to Chinese-Canadians and non-Chinese Canadians in Queen's University, Canada. They found that Chinese sojourners experienced more psychological problems than the other two groups, but they tended to use fewer health resources after arrival than pre-departure. The psychological health is correlated with language ability and ease of making friends in a new environment.

Ye (1992) compared the needs and adjustment problems of Chinese students from Mainland and from Taiwan/Hong Kong in the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in the United States, and found significant differences across the groups. Students from Taiwan and Hong Kong reported academic tasks as their most troubling area, while Mainland

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students had little trouble with academic tasks even though language was a serious problem. Their main trouble was to adapt to American lifestyle and values.

Academic aspects of adaptation

All the following studies on Chinese students' academic adaptation cover problem areas such as language barriers, financial difficulties, differences in educational system, and communication with supervisors. However, their findings have variations.

Feng's (1991) small-scale study, which was conducted in a southern American university, found that financial aid was the number one concern for Chinese students. It was the most influential factor for Chinese students' decisions about which universities and which programs to attend. Poor financial situation also accounted for Chinese students' rare participation in social activities, and had a negative impact on their language adaptation and academic achievement.

P. Zhu's (1996) dissertation research focused on the comparison of Chinese students' learning experiences in Chinese universities and in the University of Connecticut. Building upon the cultural differences between China and the U.S., she argued that intercultural academic adaptation was not merely about language but about financial, technical, linguistic, ideological, social and philosophical issues. An important idea she mentioned is "research network", which refers to the personal contacts with people in one's research area. Many Chinese students had such a network in China but had to establish a new one in the U.S. through communicating with professors and classmates within their institution, attending conferences, or having papers published.

Lin (1998) is more interested in how academic disciplines affect adaptation patterns. Drawing on the interviews with 30 Chinese graduate students from different

departments at the University of Pittsburgh, Lin concluded that knowledge in social sciences seemed to be less transferable than that in sciences. In terms of teaching methods, science students did not see much difference between their education in China and in the United States. As for language abilities, students in social sciences and humanities were more concerned about their language proficiency than students in sciences.

Liang (2004) looks at Chinese graduate students' cultural and academic adjustments in the University of Calgary, Canada, from the perspectives of administrators, supervisors, and students. Issues concerning academic adaptation include: language, subject area, course work, ways of thinking and acting, TA/RA experience, student-supervisor relationship, peer relationship, and academic stress. She found that many cultural adaptation issues were connected to academic adaptation, such as loneliness and isolation, permanent residence status.

Z. Wang (2004) applied "sociocultural learning theories" to his dissertation research on the academic adjustment of 4 Chinese graduate students in the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Besides identifying 5 areas of adjustment (i.e., language, learning strategies, educational system, faculty-student relationships, and sociocultural environment), he emphasized the influence of one's previous experience on one's current experience. For example, how the participants' previous curriculum and socio-cultural backgrounds in Mainland China help or hinder their graduate study in the United States.

Ni (2005) investigated how 4 Mainland Chinese doctoral students interpreted their socialization experiences at the University of Virginia. Besides proposing a "degree-goal based socialization model" based on the research findings of his dissertation, he provided information about how Mainland Chinese doctoral students from different disciplines gradually fit into their respective programs. Seven aspects of "socialization preparedness"

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were documented: education and research training, English proficiency, learning style, research area, support system, advisor, and funding.

Summary of the research findings

Chinese students' adaptation challenges during their study in North America can be summarized into two broad categories: cultural aspects of adaptation, and academic adaptation.

In the first group, two frequently mentioned difficulties in the literature are adaptation to western social values/lifestyles, and interaction with local people. Chinese students, especially those from the Mainland, were consistently found to experience culture shock about western ways of thinking and acting (Feng, 1991; Qian, 2002; P. Zhu, 1996). Probably these differences in culture have resulted in their very limited interaction with local people (Feng, 1991; Ye, 1992). Many Chinese students, no matter which part of China they come from, do have American or Canadian friends, but their friendships with them are "business like" (Tu, 1992) and rarely go deep.

Another problem is that most Chinese overseas students lack a sense of belonging in a foreign environment. Studies (e.g., Feng, 1991; Mongillo, 1995; Z. Wang, 2004) have revealed that Chinese students often feel lonely and isolated from the host culture. They have little social life due to cultural differences and/or poor financial situations (Liang, 2004; Z. Wang, 2004). As a result, some of them have psychological health problems, such as lack of confidence and self-efficacy (Ye, 1992; Zheng & Berry, 1991).

As for academic adaptation, language and financial difficulty are two most frequently mentioned issues in the literature. Most researchers agree that lack of English proficiency is the most influential factor hindering Chinese students' academic

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achievement. Many Chinese students, during their first semester or first year, have difficulty understanding lectures, taking notes, participating in classroom discussions, and doing presentations. They also have difficulty in expressing their ideas clearly in writing. In addition, language problems are more salient for Chinese students in social sciences and humanities than those in sciences (C. Chen, 1992; Feng, 1991; Lin, 1998; P. Zhu, 1996). On financial difficulty, most Chinese students do not have financial sources other than teaching and/or research assistantships. Therefore, they live a modest life (Feng, 1991; Tu, 1992; P. Zhu, 1996).

Chinese students also have difficulty adapting to the host educational system and teaching/learning methods (Lin, 1998; Mongillo, 1995; Z. Wang, 2004; P. Zhu, 1996). While the Chinese educational traditions appreciate teacher-centered classrooms, where the teacher is regarded to be the source of knowledge and students receive knowledge without questioning its veracity (Gu, 2001; Paine, 1990); the North American classroom is centered more on students. Classes may include discussions, and it is normal for a student to pose a question while the teacher is talking. Chinese students also have difficulty doing group projects and making presentations, as neither is common in Chinese classrooms.

Another focal area in the literature is Chinese graduate students' adaptation to academic research. A frequently discussed issue is student-supervisor communication. Research shows that rarely do Chinese students develop a personal relationship with their supervisors (Liang, 2004; Z. Wang, 2004). Rather, their communication is restricted to academic talks. Chinese students also need to establish a "research network" by communicating with peers and professors other than the supervisor, attending academic conferences, and publishing papers (P. Zhu, 1996).

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Limitations of the previous research

The previous research about Chinese graduate students' academic adaptation has at least two limitations.

First, most studies sample both master's and doctoral students, and thus have neglected the possible differences in academic expectations between the two levels (see Joint Quality Initiative, October 18, 2004). As a matter of fact, a few studies reviewed in this chapter have indicated some differences (see Naidoo, 1990; Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006).

Second, most previous studies put together students from social sciences and humanities and those from sciences and engineering and thus have neglected disciplinary differences (Becher & Trowler, 2001). Education, as an applied social science and professional field that "differs from other disciplines in the university because of its fundamental developmental role in society" (Donald, 2002, p.196), has its own characteristics; and these characteristics have impacts on student learning experiences. Besides, as most education students were/are teachers or want to become academics, their perspectives on learning strategies, teaching methods, educational systems and so on may influence the learning and teaching orientations of doctoral education. It is therefore significant and beneficial to conduct a study on Chinese doctoral students in education.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research design and procedures of the study. Through describing how this study was conducted, I want to highlight two points: 1) why I adopted a qualitative approach, and 2) how this approach has affected my data collection, data analysis, and results of the study.

3.1　Qualitative Research Design

Many scholars (e.g., Creswell, 2005; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Maxwell, 2005; Silverman, 2005) have pointed out that the research method should be determined by the research problem. If the research aims to describe trends or to explain the relationship among variables, a quantitative approach should be adopted; if the research aims to explore a little-known problem or to understand in depth a phenomenon, a qualitative approach is more suitable. As described in Chapter One, this study aims to investigate the academic adaptation and learning experiences of Mainland Chinese doctoral students in education. In other words, I wanted to explore and understand a central phenomenon rather than the relationship among variables. Also, as I mentioned in Chapter Two, little is known about the academic adaptation of the particular group of students that I wanted to study. Third, qualitative interviewing, my major data collection method, has the advantage of providing "the context of people's behaviour" (Seidman, 2006, p. 10) through the participants' talking and meaning-making of their lived experiences (Maxwell, 2005), while quantitative approach lacks this advantage since variables are usually studied outside contexts.

Setting my eyes on a qualitative design, I first considered focus group interviews as my major data collection method, for my participants were assumed to share many of their cross-cultural learning experiences. However, the following led me to recognize that focus group interviewing was not an appropriate method for my research problem. First, focus group interviewing is mainly for studying the interaction between group members (Berg, 2004; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Researchers using focus groups intend to make use of the agreement and disagreement between the participants for their exploration of a research problem; in contrast, I was more interested in individual learning experiences[6]. The participants' exchange of information would be important and interesting, but it was not the focus of my study. Second, as indicated by researchers (e.g., Krueger & Casey, 2000; Morgan, 1997), the chance for each member in a focus group to speak is often greatly reduced due to the relatively large number of people. This would be detrimental to my study, as I wanted to elicit as many details as possible from every participant. Third, there were not many Mainland Chinese doctoral students (about 10) in the Faculty of Education. So, it was feasible to interview as many of them as were willing to participate. Overall, one-on-one interviews would allow more time and space for each participant to talk; and more importantly, more time and space for him/her to make meaning through talking (Seidman, 2006) in ways that preserved the distinctiveness of each voice. Therefore, I decided to interview each participant individually.

3.2   Data Collection Procedures

This part provides a detailed description of how I applied qualitative approach to my

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[6] I agree with Weidman, Twale and Stein (2001) that "no two graduate...programs are identical, and no two students experience graduate...school in quite the same way" (p. 2).

study. I will also discuss the impacts that my application of research design placed upon the research process.

3.2.1 Research site

McGill University is located in Montreal, Quebéc. Montreal is the second-largest city in Canada, and is known as the second-largest French-speaking city in the world. Though the official language of Quebéc is French, McGill University is the largest of the three English universities in the province[7]. It is one of the ten leading research-intensive universities in Canada (known as *G-10* or *Group of Ten*).

According to the annual reports of the Admissions, Recruitment and Registrar's Office (ARR) of the university, 421 international students (including both undergraduate and graduate students) come from Mainland China in 2006[8]. Mainland Chinese students are now the 3rd largest group[9] among international student population. At graduate level, the number of enrolled Mainland Chinese students in 2006 is 167, second only to the United States on the list of international graduate student population.

Table 3.1 Enrolled Mainland Chinese Students at McGill University in 2006

Level	Undergrad	Graduate	Postdoc	Other	Total
Number	190	167	22	42	421
Rank	3	2	3	1	3

Source: McGill ARR Enrolment Report 2006, http://www.mcgill.ca/arr/registration-statistics/fall2006/

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[7] The other two are Concordia University in Montreal and Bishop's University in Lennoxville.
[8] International students from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan were counted separately in the reports, and students from these regions are respectively 27, 1, and 34.
[9] Students from the United States and France are ranked 1st and 2nd.

The Faculty of Education has a history of nearly 150 years. Currently, it is composed of three departments (Educational and Counselling Psychology, Integrated Studies in Education, Kinesiology and Physical Education) and one school (the Graduate School of Library and Information Studies), all of which offer masters (M.Ed. and M.A.) and doctoral programs (Ph.D.). The faculty has over 2,800 students and more than 800 are graduate students. The ARR annual reports show that in 2006, 221 students were enrolled as doctoral students. The number of doctoral students from Mainland China is not available in any official statistics. However, during the recruiting process, I found that there were about 10 Mainland Chinese doctoral students in the Faculty, either on student visa or holding permanent residency in Canada.

3.2.2   Sampling

Creswell (2005) identified nine frequently used sampling strategies in qualitative research and argues that which strategy to use depends on the research questions. Based on my research questions, I developed my sampling criteria and put them in the Letter of Invitation (Appendix C). First, I only recruited students from Mainland China and excluded those from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, for literature has shown that students from those regions have different adaptation experiences compared to students from Mainland China (see Ye, 1992). I did take residence status into consideration. However, many Chinese students become permanent residents before or after they come to study in Canada either because they want to pay less tuition fees or they want to have more opportunities in job-hunting after graduation (see Liang, 2004). The permanent residence status does not make much difference in their academic adaptation. Therefore, I recruited participants who were permanent residents of Canada. Second, the participants

must have had their undergraduate education in Mainland China, because four years of undergraduate education in an English-speaking country may lead to a different adaptation pattern. However, I did not exclude those who got their master's degree at McGill University or elsewhere outside Mainland China (Hong Kong), as only one participant was pursuing her Ph.D. as her first overseas degree.

I used *snowball sampling* in this study mainly because the whole list of the target population was unavailable and there are not many Mainland Chinese doctoral students in the Faculty of Education. The first doctoral student that I contacted was a female student who was doing translation for one of my Canadian classmates. I sent her an email to invite her to participate, and asked her to recommend someone else who was also eligible. There were two other doctoral students whom I got to know at research meetings. My supervisor also recommended one doctoral student.

In total, I contacted nine students, including one from Concordia University. However, three of them were not interested in participating. I did interview the student from Concordia, but I decided later to remove her in order to avoid possible complications in the data analysis. Finally, all the interview data came from the five participants in the Faculty of Education at McGill University. The demographic information of these students is presented in Chapter Four.

3.2.3   Instrument and data

My main instrument is an interview protocol. The main data are five in-depth interviews. Other data for this study include observation/reflective notes from interviews and student meetings/workshops, demographic information about the participants, online documents and web pages about the research site.

Interview protocol. I used semi-structured interviews in my study. The interview protocol (Appendix B) is composed of seven questions. Questions 1-2 function as lead-in questions with a focus on the participant's previous learning experiences. Questions 3-5 are aimed to directly answer my research questions by asking the participants about their current learning experiences as cross-cultural learners. Question 6 is to elicit the participant's suggestions for the university and their departments to facilitate international doctoral students' academic adaptation. Question 7, the closing question, is for the participants to add anything that comes to their minds in the end.

As the literature has suggested some factors that consistently influence Mainland Chinese graduate students' academic adaptation, I wrote them under each major question as prompts. In practice, the interview protocol was adapted to various versions based on each participant's background and the topics he/she touched upon. A couple of questions were not asked in some interviews since the interviewees had already answered them before they were posed.

Demographic information. Before each interview, I asked the participant to fill out a Background Information Sheet (Appendix E). Gathering demographic information was necessary because 1) this information would help me sort out data at the analysis stage; and 2) the more I knew about my participant, the more effectively I could modify my questions during the interviews.

Notes. I took notes while interviewing each participant about their facial expressions, body language, the atmosphere and location of the interview. I also added notes right after each interview about my general impression and thoughts. These notes provided the context of the interviews and thus helped my data analysis. Taking notes

during interviews is also necessary considering the possibility of technical failure in the recording equipment (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

Some other notes were taken from a Town Hall Meeting for International Students (Appendix F) hosted by the Faculty of Education. The Town Hall Meeting was held to collect suggestions for the Faculty's international student services. At the meeting on February 15, 2006, 16 international students from Africa, South Korea, Mainland China, Taiwan, Japan formed three focus groups to discuss what they were dissatisfied about in the Faculty and the university and how they thought their needs might be better met. After the discussion, the secretary of each group, who was a member of the Education Graduate Students' Society, reported the results of that group's discussion to all present. The host of the meeting, a faculty professor responsible for graduate student life, took notes and later prepared a report for the Faculty and the university. I compared the notes with my interview findings in order to understand my research problem from a broader perspective.

To learn more about the academic cultures of doctoral study, I also took notes from two "the ABCs of the PhD" sessions (Appendix G). The ABCs of the PhD is student-led monthly seminar that is intended to help doctoral students' academic study. I went to a session in August 2006 about doctoral students' identity construction and a session in February 2007 about authorship.

Documents. I downloaded the 2006 annual reports prepared by McGill ARR, which contained enrolment information about international students.

Web pages. I searched the McGill University website for information about the university and the Faculty of Education. I also used web pages about the Canadian universities.

3.2.4 Procedures

Pilot interviews. In order to improve my interview protocol and gain some interviewing skills, I conducted two pilot interviews, one with a Mainland Chinese doctoral student from the McGill Faculty of Engineering and the other with a Canadian doctoral student in Education. The interview language was respectively Mandarin Chinese and English; and each interview lasted for about one hour. Two pilot interviews helped me improve the structure and the language of my interview protocol, and were a good rehearsal of qualitative interviewing.

Interviews with the five participants. The interviews were conducted from the middle of September 2006 to the middle of November 2006. Four were conducted face to face with the interviewees, and one was conducted on a polycom-activated telephone. The interview language was Mandarin Chinese. After an interviewee had set a date for an interview, I sent him/her my main interview questions a few days before the pre-arranged interview date. I did so because I felt some of the questions required careful thinking before answering. I also sent a reminder email to each participant a day before the interview. To reduce technical risks, I always had two digital recorders ready ahead of time.

On the interview day, I reviewed my interview protocol and tested the recorders before going to the interview room. Right before the interview started, I asked the participant to sign the Informed Consent Form (Appendix D) and to complete a Background Information Sheet, which took about five minutes. The interviews lasted for a range of 60-90 minutes. I took notes about the participant's facial expression, body language, interview atmosphere and listened to the interviewee carefully. I varied the order and number of questions in the interview protocol according to the answers given

by the participant. After the interview was finished and the interviewee left, I immediately added my thoughts to my notes.

3.3 Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis lasted from December 2006 to February 2007. Particular time and attention were directed at linking interview data to the literature and other data sources.

3.3.1 Analyzing interview data

Transcribing. In qualitative research, data collection and data analysis are simultaneous (Creswell, 2005; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). I did most of the transcribing work right after each interview because I believed that earlier transcription could give me a general impression about the interview that was still fresh in my mind, and thus could provide practical tips for the following interviews. However, due to tight interview schedules, three interviews were transcribed much later.

All the interviews were listened to and transcribed on my computer. I typed the interviews into a MS-Word document and saved it with the interview date as the file name. My transcription was not a word-on-word transcription. I omitted the content that was obviously irrelevant to my questions. Approximately, 10% of each interview was not transcribed. Instead, I marked these omitted parts with a sentence indicating what the interviewee talked about. Like treating the original recordings, I saved these files simultaneously on my removable disk in case of technical failure of my computer.

Translating. As the interviews were conducted in Chinese and my final report would be in English, translation was a significant issue in the study. I felt that it would not be necessary for me to translate every sentence of the interviews into English since I

was not going to quote every sentence in the final report and it was time consuming to do so. Therefore, I decided to sort out the preliminary themes based on the research questions and then to translate the parts that were related to the themes.

Translation in qualitative research is not merely a technical task but involves the translator's judgement and interpretation (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Temple & Young, 2004). Therefore, a researcher must be fully aware of the bias that a translator brings into a study. Temple and Young (2004) suggested that translation was more about culture than language. They quoted Simon (1996):

> The solutions to many of the translator's dilemmas are not to be found in dictionaries, but rather in an understanding of the way language is tied to local realities, to literary forms and to changing identities. Translators must constantly make decisions about the cultural meanings which language carries, and evaluate the degree to which the two different worlds they inhibit are 'the same'.
> (Temple & Young, 2004, p. 165)

Being a researcher who shares a cultural background with my participants, I felt that I had little difficulty in understanding the meanings my participants made while answering the interview questions in our mother tongue. However, problems occurred when I translated what they said into English. In order to enhance the validity of the study, I translated the interview data attentively and asked the participants to verify my translation. After I emailed my translated version of the interviews to the participants, two participants emailed back their edited versions, in which they slightly changed my wording and added notes and comments to clarify their meanings. I then updated the transcripts based on their responses.

Coding. Marshall and Rossman (2006) suggested that data analysis should be guided by the research questions and the review of the literature, and it was "a search for

general statements about relationships and underlying themes" (p. 154). Before reading through each transcript, I first referred back to the literature and noted down the themes that occurred frequently in previous studies. Then I created five Microsoft Excel files (Appendix I) to record the data collected in the five cases. Each participant was given a pseudonym, and all the people mentioned in the interviews were given pseudonyms as well.

After reading through the text, I followed Creswell's (2005) six-step coding process[10] to analyze it. The five tables shared some common themes, most of which related directly to the literature, and varied in the themes that were not mentioned in the literature. Most of the new themes—those not mentioned in the literature—were first named in the interviewees' words, and were later condensed and changed to my own terms. In a later stage of analysis, the data recorded in table format were converted into a word document that listed all the themes and all the quotes that supported these themes. I will report the findings of the interviews in Chapter Four and link the findings to the other data in Chapter Five.

3.3.2 Analyzing the other data

The demographic information that I collected provided the background of the participants. I have summarized this information and presented it in Table 4.1. I have combined demographic information and my field notes into the "Portraits of the Participants" in Chapter Four. The meeting minutes are supplementary to interview data and they are reported in Chapter Five.

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[10] The six steps are: 1) Get a sense of the whole; 2) Pick one document to analyze first; 3) Coding the document; 4) Group similar codes and reduce them; 5) Go back to the data to see if new themes emerge; and 6) Reduce the codes to get five to seven themes. (Creswell, 2005, pp. 238-239)

3.3.3 Member checking and auditing

As qualitative research is interpretive in nature (Creswell, 2005), divergence in meaning may occur between the researcher and the participants (Barbour & Schostak, 2005). Therefore, verification is necessary. As translation may bring further bias into the study, I emailed the draft of my preliminary findings to the participants and asked them to verify. As only two participants responded, I asked my supervisor and another professor to read my analysis and to comment on it. Based on their comments, I added one theme that I previously missed, and presented both translated data in English and original data in Chinese in the findings section.

3.4 The Researcher's Role

Before and during the research process, I had been thinking about my role in this study. I was a qualitative researcher, a translator, and a graduate student from Mainland China. How did these different roles affect my data collection, data analysis, and the final reporting of this study?

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) regard the qualitative researcher as "a bricoleur, as a maker of quilts, or, as in filmmaking, a person who assembles images into montages" (p.4). Undoubtedly, I was reflexive, had my own perspective and thus brought bias into my research (Creswell, 2005; Fontana & Frey, 2005). For example, it was I who decided which questions to ask of my participants and which not. It was I who, during the data analysis process, selected certain parts to quote in the final report and discarded other parts. I translated what my participants said using my own vocabulary. How could I ensure that my analysis was accurate and complete? To cope with these possible research biases, I conducted a pilot interview to gain interview skills, prepared carefully before

each interview, listened to the interviewees attentively, and arranged member checking after the initial stage of data analysis. I did everything I could to enhance the validity of the study.

As a graduate student from Mainland China myself, I share some culture and experiences with my participants. My "insider status" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006) has some advantages. For example, experiencing academic adaptation myself, I am enthusiastic about and familiar with my research topic. Sharing culture and language with the participants, I may relatively easily establish trust with them. However, one disadvantage is that I may take things for granted (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006) and thus neglect some important points made by my participants. I may also make false assumptions that the participants' experiences are similar to mine. To compensate these disadvantages, my supervisor, who has a different cultural and academic background, acted as the auditor during my data analysis process, to ensure all the conclusions were based on data rather than assumptions.

3.5   Ethical Considerations

I submitted my application for research ethics approval one month before I planned to start data collection for the Certificate of Ethical Acceptability (Appendix A). In the Letter of Invitation, I clearly stated that participation was voluntary and participants could withdraw at any time. Before each interview, I asked the participant to sign the Informed Consent Form and repeated the objectives of my research and confidentiality policies. During the whole process of the study, I kept all the data in a safe place and used pseudonyms where participants' names and other names were needed.

Another aspect of my ethical considerations was how my research could benefit the participants. In order to achieve this, I decided to invite the participants to an informal gathering to discuss the findings of the study[11]. Through exchanging opinions about their doctoral study, they could learn from these experiences, and as a result, might benefit academically.

3.6   Summary

The research method should suit the research problem. I chose a qualitative research design, in particular qualitative interviewing in the study, because my research problem was directed at an in-depth understanding of a central phenomenon.

The research site was the Faculty of Education in McGill University and the participants were five doctoral students from Mainland China. The research data included interviews, notes from the interviews and meetings, demographic information about the participants, documents and web pages about the research site. Data collection lasted for two months and data analysis was finished in February 2007. As a qualitative researcher, I used various strategies to reduce the bias that I might bring into the research, such as member checking and auditing.

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[11] I invited them twice in February 2007 but few of them could make it due to time conflicts. I will invite them again.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

4.1 Portraits of the Participants

The recordings and my field notes have helped me picture the five participants in the following way. Note that my description varies in length and detail because my notes and the information provided by the participants vary.

Jie

I contacted Jie for this project by email several times before I met her in person five minutes before the oral defense of a Chinese doctoral student of the Faculty of Education. She was 26-30 years old and was in her fourth year in the Ad Hoc PhD program of Second Language Education. Jie graduated with a BA degree in English from a university in Northeast China, and obtained her MA degree in English Linguistics in the same university. She came to Montreal with her husband in 2002, when her husband started working as a post-doc fellow. She then applied for the doctoral program in Second Language Education at McGill University and began her study in September 2003. Right before her doctoral program started, she finished her last year's master's study in Montreal and got the degree from that Chinese university. As of the time I interviewed her, she did not have any work experience except some internships and part-time teaching jobs in China. She had a baby during her second year in the program and was living with her husband and son in Ontario. Besides taking care of her baby and her family, she was writing her comprehensive examination. She did the interview on telephone.

Peng

Peng was the only male student that I interviewed. He was 36-40 years old, and was in his third year in the doctoral program in Cognition and Instruction. Like Jie, Peng's undergraduate major was English. After he graduated from a teacher's university in Shandong Province in 1994, he became a college English teacher. After teaching English as a second language for 4 years, he shifted to a human resource company, where he was mainly responsible for language-related corporation training and educational consultation. He provided suggestions to those who wanted to study abroad about what majors and what schools would suit them best. After working in his hometown Shanghai for 6 years, Peng felt that it was time for him to further his own study and thus he came to Canada in 2001. At first, he stayed in Toronto for a few months and took some accounting courses in a college. Then he took a friend's suggestion and planned to apply for a business management program. However, lacking a background in business areas, he soon changed his mind and finally submitted several applications for admission to graduate programs in Education. He was accepted by McGill University and obtained his master's degree in 2004. In the same year, he started his doctoral study in the Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology. As of the time I interviewed him, he was busy working on his comprehensive examination.

Lan

Lan was 31-35 years old and was in her last year in the doctoral program in Educational Psychology. She obtained her bachelor's degree in medicine in Mainland China and then worked as a doctor for a year. As she later became interested in business, she obtained a degree in business and worked in a company after that. Soon her husband went to Hong

Kong to work and she followed him. There, she obtained her master's degree in psychology. In 2000, she followed her husband for the second time to Montreal, where she found a research associate position at McGill University. In September 2001, she started her doctoral study at McGill. As of the day of my interview, she was about to submit her dissertation. She was living in Montreal with her husband and a 3-year-old son.

Yun

Yun was 20-25 years old, and was the youngest among my interviewees. She was in her third year in the PhD program in Cognition and Instruction in the Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology.

Yun won her bachelor's degree in Applied English from a teacher's university in her hometown in China. Her first contact with Canada started in her third year in university. Under an exchange program, she spent one year at a university in Nova Scotia. Finding herself interested in the educational concepts and educational systems in North America, she went back to that Canadian university after obtaining her bachelor's degree. There, she enrolled in a master's program in Human Relations. In 2004, Yun was admitted to McGill University as a doctoral student. As of the time she was interviewed, she was about to finish her course work and to prepare for her comprehensive examination.

Three words can be used to describe Yun: *busy, open,* and *active.* She was always busy with TA jobs, RA jobs or something else. Though I sent her a reminder email one day earlier, she still rushed to the interview room out of breath. She was open because she liked to make friends with Canadian classmates. She told me that she was home-staying with two Canadian women. She was active because she had been a volunteer in the

McGill Buddy Program, a program hosted by the International Students Office to help new students settle down in a new environment.

Hua

Hua was 31-35 years old and she was in her first year in the doctoral program in Culture and Values. She obtained her master's degree at McGill University and then continued working with her master's supervisor.

Hua came from Northeast China and arrived in Canada in 2002 with her husband. Both of them came as landed immigrants. Hua's BA degree was in English Education, and she started teaching in a university in the Northeast right after her graduation in 1995. In the following year, she worked in the United States as a research assistant. After that, she went back to teaching in a few universities in Northeast China till 2002, when both she and her husband decided to go abroad for a change. In her words, their successful immigration to Canada was attributed to her husband, who was always prepared for the future. Before their move, he had a job offer from a Canadian bank and they then had their immigration interview in Hong Kong. As soon as they landed in the new world, Hua's husband started working in Toronto. Hua, bored by staying home, decided to take courses at a college simultaneously for two certificates: one in TESOL and the other in Human Resources Management. When her husband came to McGill to enroll in the MBA program, Hua applied to McGill's MA program. She obtained her master's degree in early 2006 and started her doctoral study in September. As of the time she was interviewed, Hua had just started her course work. But she indicated that she would finish all her courses by the end of the second semester and then go back to Shanghai to do her dissertation.

Her office in the education building was actually for part-time instructors and teaching assistants. When I went there for an interview, I suddenly realized that Hua might be the only person in that room all day long. It was a small room with two desks. Hua's desk was neat while the other desk was covered with paper and documents. When I looked up, there was a hole filled with newspapers in the ceiling. Hua said that those newspapers were for reducing the noise from the ventilator. When the professor in the next room played music, Hua continued, she could remove the newspapers and let out the noise, for she could hardly concentrate with music around. I could always see Hua in the library busy scanning books. She told me that with these scanned pages of books, she could conduct her research at home in China. She missed her husband and two kids in Shanghai. Her laptop background was a photo of her son, who was born in Montreal last year.

Table 4.1 Demographic Information of the Participants

Name	Sex	Age	Concentration	PhD Year	Starting Year	Last Degree	Present Stage
Jie	F	26-30	Second Language Education	4	2003	China	Writing comprehensive
Peng	M	36-40	Cognition & Instruction	3	2004	Canada	Writing comprehensive
Lan	F	31-35	Educational Psychology	6	2001	Hong Kong	Submitting dissertation
Yun	F	20-25	Cognition & Instruction	3	2004	Canada	About to write comprehensive
Hua	F	31-35	Culture & Values	1	2006	Canada	Doing course work

4.2 Academic Challenges that Matter

The following part presents 12 challenge areas that I sorted out from the study. First listed were two areas that were frequently mentioned in the literature. The other areas are organized from those relatively particular to Mainland Chinese doctoral students to those relatively common to all doctoral students. Within this framework, the challenge areas mentioned by more participants were placed before those mentioned by fewer participants. Note that the choice of individual interviews ensured each participant to be a special case, as they had different backgrounds and were at various stages in their study. Accordingly, each of the following challenge areas is actually composed of multiple aspects.

4.2.1 English as a second language

Except Yun, who expressed her confidence in English, all the other participants indicated that they were experiencing language difficulties, especially in academic writing. For instance, Jie complained that her wording in writing was always "different from that of the native speaker" and "too simple". Lan made a similar comment:

Speaking is fine, but I have been troubled by my writing. ...I feel like handicapped. Before you send something out (to journals or conferences), you are never 100% sure (of your language). ...People will easily recognize that you are a second-language writer.

我在口头交流上应该没什么问题，但是到了写东西的时候，我觉得，相对来说这些年一直都有这些方面的困扰。...觉得象一个残疾人似的，handicapped。因为你不能百分之百确认，把你的东西发出去，因为这边全部是英语，人家一眼就能看出来你是 second language。
(Interview, October 5, 2006, pp.3-4)

Language abilities also kept Chinese students from attending academic conferences and getting their works published. Peng articulated that:

I think it's due to language...It's impossible for you to think about (conducting

我认为是语言的限制的问题，语言的局限。因为 (clear throat)又要应付课，又要做你的 study，没

research, attending conferences and publications) while taking courses. You don't have time. You will feel the pressure from the courses, because our English is limited...There was a girl in my lab who was taking 2 or 3 courses while working 2-3 days a week and holding a TA position simultaneously...she was writing papers too...That's beyond me. Fatigue is one thing; I don't think my language ability allows me to do so. I need time to read and to digest my stuff. I (also) spend a much longer time writing a paper than native speakers.

这么多精力。...你在修课的时候室不可能有时间去考虑这个东西的，你真的不可能，因为没有时间。你的课的压力很大，因为我们的语言就这些，我不可能象我们原来实验室的那个女生...一个人兼三四份工作，不可能的。她又要上课，又要做 tutor，又要做 TA, RA，impossible。我觉得我做不到这样。她修了两门还是三门课。然后又参加了一个 project，每个礼拜要去上两三天班，又做个 TA。...然后又要去写文章。累是一个方面，我的语言能力达不到这样。因为我需要时间来看东西，来消化我的东西。而且我写一篇东西的话，我花的时间比较长一点。因为不可能象老外一样，拎起来就写。
(Interview, September 26, 2006, p.11)

All the participants said that they consulted their English-speaking classmates or professors to improve their academic writing (Lan even had a colleague who had helped edit her writings for years); immersed themselves in local cultures by watching TV, listening to radio and home-staying with local people; and all of them put lots of effort into their study. However, most of them seemed to think that the language challenges were impossible to overcome. Hua thought language challenges were due to the fact that Chinese and English belonged to two different language families.

We cannot compare ourselves to those whose mother tongues belong to a Latin language family. Chinese is an oriental language, which is totally different in ways of thinking and in sentence structure. So it's impossible for us to speak English like natives. This is a big problem. This may be one reason why there aren't many Chinese professors in Education here. I haven't found anyone (from China) who speaks perfect English, even though there are some people who are married with native speakers. It is a daydream for a first-generation immigrant to become a professor here. It's impossible.

我们不能跟那个拉丁语系的人比。因为汉语毕竟是属于东方的语系，完全不一样。思维方式、主谓语什么都不一样。所以你要我完全说地道的英语是不可能的，表达得特别特别地道是不可能的，是很大的问题。也许就是为什么没有很多中国人在这里教育方面在这里当教授的很大一个因素。包括我想起很多（语言）挺好的，包括找到"老外"，跟"老外"生活在一起，语言也没有好很多，我一个也没发现。中国第一代移民就在这儿当大学教授，简直是做梦一样。不可能的事。(Interview November 3, 2006, p. 9)

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Peng held that language challenges were rooted in culture as well as the previous education that one received. Regarding the cultural influence on language ability, he said,

English ability is hard to improve for people who received their previous education up to undergraduate in China. ...Your thinking and language are already fixed...it is impossible to speak native-like in a foreign environment. Well, not totally impossible, but very difficult.

这个东西是在中国接受了完整的中国教育的人到北美来以后很难改变的一个东西。...你的思维方式和语言习惯已经定型了...把你放到一个陌生的环境里，你再变成当地人一样，我不是说不可能，而是说很难。
(Interview September 26, 2006, pp.15-16)

He also attributed the language challenges to the English teaching in Mainland China:

Even though we majored in English (in China) and we read English everyday, our exposure to the language is way insufficient compared to our study here. I can imagine how stressed those students feel whose previous majors were not English and who came here as students in social sciences.

即使我们是英语专业的，我们语言训练的强度跟这边是很不一样的，差很大。所以我可以想想那些原来不是英语专业的人，如果来读文科的话，我特指是文科，会很累的。
(Interview September 26, 2006, p. 4)

4.2.2 Financial difficulties

Like what the literature documented, all the participants reported they had financial difficulties. Jie indicated that international students were in a disadvantageous position in funding application, and this position might not change even after they obtained the permanent residency of Canada. Jie said:

I was an international student at the beginning, and there were few scholarships I was eligible for. Then when I became a permanent resident, I was PhD 3,4, which were "embarrassing" time for financial aid application: a bit too late for those (scholarships) for permanent residents.

我那时候进来是 international student，那个时候可申请的奖学金非常少。等我变成移民以后，又到了 PhD3、4 这样比较尴尬的时候，你又申请有点晚了，有些又不允许你申请。
(Interview, October 2, 2006, p. 6)

Concerning the fellowships for international students, the *Graduate Fellowships and Awards 2006-07* (ARR, May, 2006) states that:

> Funding opportunities for international students are *not as plentiful* as they are for Canadians. This is because many forms of assistance provided by the federal and provincial governments are offered to Canadian citizens or Permanent Residents of Canada only (Emphasis added).

As of the date of my interview, Jie was still writing her funding application.

In contrast, Peng, Lan and Yun were luckier as they all had a scholarship to support their study. Peng was holding a McGill fellowship, Lan was holding a provincial fellowship, and Yun was supported by her supervisor.

As a newly admitted doctoral student, Hua was negative about her financial situation. She said that financial compensation was her most important concern while applying for assistantships. She told me that she did not apply for research assistantships because the compensation was much lower than that for teaching assistantships.

Jie was optimistic about her funding application. For her, applying for financial aid was an opportunity for her to "re-evaluate" herself in a new environment.

It is already a good experience to participate in the competition, considering the fact that only a few candidates can win. My application result for last year was not bad. Though I did not get it, the evaluation result turned out to be fine. Five people won and I was the 6th.

能够参加 competition 已经是一个很好的经历。而且我觉得我去年的结果还可以。虽然没申请到，但它给我的 evaluation 还挺好的。因为给了 5 个人，我排第 6。
(Interview, October 2, 2006, p. 15)

I was very depressed after I failed to win a fellowship, and I thought, "Why cannot I win any grants here? I was an outstanding student in China!" Then I realized that it took some time for people to acknowledge you in a new environment; and that I need more time to meet the criteria here.

当然你申请不好那种心情也挺沮丧的：在国内还是挺优秀的，为什么出来什么都没有。但是仔细想一想，确实你...到这儿一个新的环境，得到认可还是需要时间，然后你要达到人家的那种标准，包括原来的学习的环境背景，包括程度，都不太一样。(Interview, October 2, 2006, p. 6)

4.2.3 Outsider feelings

It is not surprising that the participants had outsider feelings being from a difficult culture and speaking a different first language. Peng thought that a few professors discriminated Chinese students for their limited English language proficiency. Lan mentioned that in Québec, not speaking French could be a crucial factor determining whether one could get a working or learning opportunity:

For sure we are in an English university, but this is Québec...If you don't speak French, you will be...neglected. If your English is not proficient and you don't speak French, you'll automatically not be considered for many opportunities.

我们固然是个英语学校，但有很多工作机会。如果不会说法语，你会受到...忽略。你如果本身英语就不是说得特别流利，又加上不会说法语，有很多机会其实就没有了。
(Interview, October 5, 2006, p. 8)

As a doctoral student in cultures and values, Hua made a comment on how cultural differences made her shy to talk in class:

Sometimes I want to speak, actually I am quite talkative, but for some reason I will just hold back. What (the professor) often talks about is all American or Canadian cultures, which are far from my life experiences. If I jump to judge (them), my classmates may think, "Who do you think you are to judge our culture?...It's like the situation when a foreigner is talking about how good or bad Chinese education is, we will think "Who do you think you are to say this? You grew up in another culture!"

有时候我是想说，实际上我比较爱说，但有的时候不知怎么的就不想说了--因为我觉得好象她谈的都是一些美国或者加拿大的现象，离我太远了。如果我去 judge 的话，同学会说：你有什么资格来 judge 我的文化？就象别人，如果别人一起修中文，学中国教育，来个老外说：中国教育怎么怎么好，怎么怎么不好。我会说：你有什么资格来说这种东西？你又不是在这种文化中长大的！ (Interview, November 3, 2006, p.9)

4.2.4 Worries about career paths

It occurred to me during the interviews that a feeling of uncertainty about their career paths was prevailing among the participants. Jie was often thinking of quitting; Peng

almost accepted a job offer from China; and Hua was repeatedly asking herself if a doctoral degree was worthy. Hua interpreted her concern in the following way:

I feel we have a different attitude towards PhD study compared to the local students. They will be able to claim that they will pursue a tenure position after graduation, but our future is unpredictable. You cannot be so sure that you will find a job in North America, and we may have to go back (to China). So if your goal is ...not there waving to you, you may change your mind, wondering "Is it really worthwhile for me to read for this degree?"

我觉得我们读 PhD 肯定和当地的学生不是一个心态。他们读完后会坚定地说：我会拿到一个 tenure 或者怎么样。那我们读完以后，因为我们前途根本就是 unpredictable，你就根本不可能说：我肯定能在北美找到一个工作，可能还得回去或者怎么样。所以说，假如你的目标不是那么...在那儿向你招手，你可能会动摇：我是不是该读啊，该回去...为什么在...我想肯定会存在这些东西。
(Interview, November 3, 2006, p.14)

Peng used a metaphor to describe what he thought about his doctoral study:

When you travel towards a goal, you will keep walking in that direction, for you know your goal is ahead. However, you will be distracted by other things. Your route is not a straight line but a curved one. How distractive these distractions could be depends on how realizable that goal is...As I said, (I don't know) whether a PhD degree can help you find THE job; whether what you have learned is useful in the future.

你在往一个目标前进的时候，你知道前面有一个目标，你会大方向是一直往前走的，但是你肯定会受到别的东西的干扰。你肯定不是直线的，肯定是弯曲地往前走，但是方向肯定是往前走的。但是这些干扰对你有多大的作用，在于你的目标实现的可能性有多大。比如说，我刚才说的，你读 PhD 是不是真能找到这份工作，你所学是不是将来真的能够所用。
(Interview, September 26, 2006, p. 18)

4.2.5   Course work

As the literature indicated, my participants found doing presentations and taking part in class discussions most difficult. At the same time, most of them were fully aware and understood that being less talkative in class was rooted in Asian cultures. Peng even went further to analyze how the western ways of thinking were different from the oriental way:

Sometimes they (western people) talk for nothing...It's a matter of the way of thinking...our thinking is linear: You ask a question and I will answer it, straightforward. ...But they will "rotate" around the question instead of hitting the target.

很多时候他们是在 talk for nothing...这就是思维方式的问题。因为我们的思维是直线型的：你问一个问题，我肯定想办法直接正面回答，我们不会去绕着圈子说。很多时候他们在绕圈子，并不是在回答问题。
(Interview, September 26, 2006, p.7)

Hua and Lan mentioned another challenge they had to deal with, that is, the reading load for courses. Lan said that reading did not make much sense for her until she started to prepare questions for her comprehensive examination:

I felt I didn't understand the readings when there were lots of readings for the courses. This situation changed when I went to read for my comps questions, I started to understand what I was reading.

阅读量比较大的时候，就觉得没怎么理解。反倒是后来自己做自己的 comps 的时候，带着问题去读书的时候，才知道读了些什么东西。
(Interview, October 5, 2006, p. 4)

Hua also found herself catching up on the course readings all the time. When she found she could not, she just gave up her efforts:

I couldn't catch up after 2-3 books...and next week we'll start the 4th book, which I haven't even found it in the library. I sit in the class like in a dream. I don't have energy...because he (the professor) progresses really fast. I have just started previous book when he talks about the next one!! So now I...have stopped preparing before the class...It doesn't make any difference whether I finish the book or not before going to the class.

才读了两三本我就读不下去了...下个礼拜就该谈第四本了，我连借都没借到。我就在那儿开始上课，做梦一样。实在没有精力。因为他谈得很快。你还没看完这本书，刚看，他下一本书就开始了。所以...我基本不怎么准备...我觉得读不读去听他讲没什么区别。
(Interview, November 3, 2006, p. 10)

Previous curriculum also played an important role in the participants' adaptation to their doctoral study. Peng took many courses while doing his master's degree at McGill, and he told me that due to this "taking courses was not a big deal" (Interview,

September 25, 2006, p. 7) during his doctoral study. Yun indicated that she was active in classroom discussions because she had overcome this challenge during her master's study in Nova Scotia. In contrast, Lan "took a long time to get into the field" (Interview, December 4, 2006, p. 4) because she did not have a relevant background.

4.2.6 Research network

In this thesis, *research network* refers to all the activities that directly or indirectly help to further a doctoral student's research. Accordingly, a research network is composed of supervisory relationship, communicating with the professors other than one's supervisor, working in a research team or with peers, attending academic conferences, and getting oneself published.

From the students' perspective, each supervisor varied in supervisory style. However, all the participants seemed to be satisfied with their supervisor's quick feedback to their inquiries and the supervisor's support for student learning. And all the participants indicated that they learned a lot from their supervisor in terms of research methodology and field knowledge. However, the participants seemed to disagree upon the roles of the supervisor in student learning. For example, both Jie and Lan thought that the supervisor-student pair was more like two colleagues than one teacher and one student. Lan described this relation by comparing the supervisor to a teacher in China:

Chinese students...tend to treat teachers like family members, who help them manage everything. It's different here. You and your supervisor are merely partners working together. So don't expect too much of him, do everything yourself. ...Your supervisor may give you some suggestions, but don't expect him to design your

我们觉得对老师的感觉，就好象是家里人一样，什么事情都可以帮你考虑的话，这边环境是完全不一样的。就是你完全就当作你们只是一个合作伙伴关系。你对他不要有任何期望，然后想着什么事情就依靠自己就行。...他可以给你一些意见，但你不要指望他可以帮你做研究设计，能帮你怎么样。...博士锻炼出来，就是要能自己独立做研究，能够申请 funding。这样你出来才有自

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research or to do something else. ...PhDs are supposed to conduct research and apply for funds independently. You will feel better if you treat yourself as an orphan, who has nobody but yourself to rely on. You may even graduate earlier.

己的那个...所以你要抱着一开始就象自己是个没爹没妈的孩子，你反倒一切就比较坦然。...而且谁也不指望，你反而会快一点。
(Interview, October 5, 2006, p. 10)

In contrast, Yun seemed to "rely on" her supervisor to "keep (her) on track:"

He will keep you on track by challenging you and pushing you. (For example) I didn't plan to do anything academic during my short stay in China this summer, but he suggested I do a pilot study. Without his push, I would have spent the whole vacation wondering around and thus would have lost an opportunity to get something published.

就是他会 keep you on task，他会 challenge you，然后 push you. 本来我这次暑假回国不准备做任何学习上的东西，结果他说，回去是个好机会，做 pilot study。他要是不 push 我这一下，我这个假期可能就没有这个出来，没有这个出来的话，就会少一个发表文章的机会。
(Interview, October 26, 2006, p. 8)

Peng was very negative about what he perceived as a pattern of changing supervisors. In his opinion, the student should try to adapt him/herself to the supervisor's style:

Some students in my department changed their supervisor every year, and almost all the professors were their supervisors before...It's impossible for the professor to 'put up with you'. You are a novice, why does the professor have to suit you and meet all your needs?...What I heard is that this person...is too conceited...he thinks he has some gift, his thoughts are superb, and the supervisor may not be as good as he is. If so, why did you become his doctoral student in the first place?

我知道系里面有很多学生，导师，系里基本上每个老师都找过了，老师每年都在换，基本上每个老师都换过了...都希望对方迎合你，这是不可能的。...你是个 novice，人家怎么可能迎合你，怎么可能按照你的要求来做...我听到的就是这个人的做法，就是他...太自负，这种关系很难处的...就是他认为自己有一套东西，对问题有见地，老师不一定还如你。既然如此，那你为什么要读他的 PhD？(Interview, September 26, 2006, p. 10)

Concerning how to get along with one's supervisor, Peng indicated that "mutual understanding" was the key. By contrast, Jie believed that the students could have some power and control in student-supervisor relationship. However, to achieve this, she said,

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the student "must try all means to make the supervisor realize the value and importance of his/her research" (Interview, October 2, 2006, p. 17), for the supervisor may not be very positive about that research topic at the beginning.

As for communicating with professors other than one's supervisor (NS professors) my findings were similar to what the literature suggested. That is, the participants had very limited communication with NS professors. Peng thought this was because the NS professors and he did not have a common topic to talk about. On the other hand, some participants thought this communication was necessary and important. For instance, Jie thought that "some committee professors' research areas" were even closer to her research topic than her supervisor's.

In regards to working in a research team or with peers, I found cultural differences stood out as a significant factor. Most participants reported that they were getting along well with their peers, but they tended to get closer with Chinese classmates and kept a business-like relationship with other students. One exception was Jie, who told me that she communicated a lot with her supervisor's other students, either Canadian or from other countries, within academic borders and at personal levels. Lan was the only one who sometimes worked in research teams. For her, working in teams was not an easy job and often she found herself struggling with two different concepts of team work: western ways of competing for resources and leadership and eastern ways of being conservative and modest:

...the professor won't say "You are in charge (of this project). Instead, he'll say "You will do it together"...some students will make themselves the leaders and (assign tasks to others)...then you will be

...老师不会说：这件事你来...他会说：这件事你们大家一起来做。但分工的话，有的人自然而然就把自己当领导：你做这个，他做那个。但你就会觉得：我年资高啊，是不是应该由我来分配这些任务。
(Interview, October 5, 2006, p. 9)

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thinking, "Well, I am more senior, and I should be leading the team".

...If the professor has 3 or 4 projects in hand, you should know how to choose a task you are interested in and how to follow it up; this is important. ...If you don't compete (to get yourself involved in a project you are interested in), the professor may think you are not very positive towards your work. If you try whatever you can to get yourself involved...you are acting against the Chinese culture. It's a dilemma for me.

比如老师有 3—4 个 project 在手的话，你应该怎么样跟老师选择你感兴趣的 task 啊，或者怎么样去跟进啊。这也是我觉得比较重要的一个方面。因为我觉得文化不同的话，有时候你如果不主动去争取的话，老师以为你工作不积极啊。如果你要拼命去争取的时候...我不知道...好象中国的文化又不是这样的。所以在这个...有点进退维谷的感觉。
(Interview, October 5, 2006, p. 9)

All the participants considered conferences an indispensable part of doctoral study. However, Hua had not been to any due to financial reasons, and Peng indicated he did not have time for writing conference papers. Jie, Yun and Lan were all very positive about attending academic conferences. Jie excitedly shared with me her experience of going to various conferences:

Conferences are really helpful. My dissertation topic, which I have decided...well, on its way being decided...actually was inspired by the *** and ***conferences. I went to some presentations and then suddenly I linked together everything that I did before. Another thing is, you can meet with people who share research interests with you, including some big names in your area. ...Also I feel I am learning some networking skills.

我觉得开会对人帮助很大。包括现在确定的...差不多确定的...我的 PhD 研究项目，也是今年开***和***那个会上受的启发，应该是。我去听了一些 presentation，然后...就突然间把我以前的东西联系到一起。...然后开会的时候还有一个重要的就是...跟你有共同爱好的人，你能见到他们，包括一些非常有名的人。...我觉得我...还会了一点这方面的技巧，就是 networking 这种技巧。(Interview, October 2, 2006, p. 11)

Getting published was obviously more difficult than going to conferences. Among my participants, only Peng published an article co-authored with his supervisor. When

asked about publications, Lan told me that she felt it too challenging for her to write journal papers because of time constraints and the progress of her research project:

I don't have journal publications yet. One thing is that I feel (journal papers) are more challenging and I don't have time; another thing is that, at this stage, now I can only write about the experiments which I have got some results instead of theoretical ones. So I am thinking of doing a systematic summary of my dissertation after I submit it and then get it published in a journal.

没有 journal 的 publication。因为一个我觉得它门坎比较高，没有那么大块儿的时间去努力准备。第二一般这种 journal 的 publication，象我们目前这种状态，只能写一些实验性的，有研究成果的，写不到那种理论性很强的。所以我想等论文结束以后做一个比较系统的总结，然后去发表到这种 journal article 上面。
(Interview, October 5, 2006, pp.6-7)

In addition, she was not confident about her "academic productivity":

...how to be academically productive during the study...first, if your supervisor has projects going on, you may co-write something with him. If this is not the case, I would doubt the student's academic productivity. It's important to strengthen the cooperation between colleagues since nobody can stand alone...

怎么样能让自己(在读博士期间) 多产一些，第一，要教授有课题才行，如果和教授合发表文章那很好。但如果没有这种条件，自己怎么样做到多产，其实也值得商榷。还有怎么样加强同僚之间的合作。因为有的时候一个人的力量其实蛮弱的。(Interview, October 5, 2006, p. 7)

4.2.7　TA/RA experiences

When asked about their experiences as teaching or research assistants, all of my participants unanimously took these experiences as beneficial for their study, research, and future profession. Hua recalled how she overcame nervousness after her first TA position:

TA-ships gave me a lot of experiences. I taught before and I was not afraid of talking (in front of students), but I never spoke English (in front of English-speaking

我觉得 TA 实际上能给我很多经验吧。...实际我以前当过老师，我是敢说话。但没有拿英语...教中国人我敢去，当着外国人，怎么去教他们呢？所以我觉得他能够给我 confidence，给我

students)...It was fine for me to teach Chinese students English but I didn't feel comfortable to teach native speakers. So the TA-jobs I did and I am doing have given me confidence and experiences...Now I can speak at any time and on any occasion; and unlike before, I don't worry about whether (the students) can understand me or whether what I said is correct.

experience...现在可以张嘴就说，不象以前挺胆怯，想："哎呀，我说的他们能听懂吗？我说的对不对？" 现在没有，不用再去想了。
(Interview, November 3, 2006, p.13)

All the other participants told me that TA and RA assistantships helped their doctoral study. For example, Yun learned how to create a coding framework while working as a RA and Jie learned a quantifying scale which she used later in one of her own studies. Hua regarded TA-ing as an opportunity to learn about the undergraduate education in Québec.

Besides the apparent benefits of financial compensation, the participants also linked their TA/RAships with their future professions. Lan told me how she carefully "chose" some assistantships from those she was qualified for:

I TA-ed twice, mainly to obtain work experience and teaching background. ...The courses I TA-ed were chosen after my careful consideration. Both courses were about statistics and research methods, for I felt I was better at these areas. Also, we will teach courses if we want to stay in academies; I think I will teach courses like those I TA-ed. I chose RAs too. (The professors) select me because I have relevant background; I select them because I am interested in their research projects.

TA 我做过两次，其实主要是为了拿工作经验和背景...我做的两个 TA 都是关于统计和研究方法方面的。我做这两个 TA 主要是因为我觉得我在统计方法啊研究方法上比较强。以为我们以后...如果想做 academic 的话，可能会去教一门课嘛，我觉得我大概能去教这方面的课，所以去做 TA。RA 也是我会选...当然他们选我也是因为和我的背景比较相关，我选他们也是因为我比较感兴趣那些研究项目。
(Interview, October 5, 2006, pp.7-8)

Also for professional considerations, Yun was holding an assistantship that had nothing to do with her research project, but might help her future profession as a part-time researcher in faculty development.

In addition, the participants TA-ed or RA-ed in the hope of getting something published. Yun told me that she did not have any publications till she started to work as a research assistant.

On the other hand, Yun recognized that assistantships might not always be beneficial:

Three times are enough, since you won't want to run on errands all the time...If you have enough funds to support yourself, it doesn't make much sense to TA for several times.

做过两三次以后就差不多了，因为你不需要每次都做一些琐碎的事情…如果你资金足够的话，完全没有必要去做很多次 TA。
(Interview, October 26, 2006, p. 13)

4.2.8 Differences between doctoral and master's studies

When addressing the differences between doctoral and master's studies, the participants gave two different views. Peng, who obtained his master's degree in the same department at McGill University, thought doctoral study and master's study were very different:

During my very first semester, I realized that the professors in the department were expecting much more from you as a PhD student than when you were a master's student. You could feel that though you were taught by almost the same professors, they asked for more in your thoughts that you expressed in classroom discussions or in your writing. ...Another aspect is the 'academic ideology'. The academic community treats PhD students and master's students differently. They think it is your decision to enter the PhD program; since you made this decision, you have

我的第一个学期，PhD 给我的感觉是，系里边和 professor 对你的 expectation 远远高于 master 学生。在课堂上，基本上都是原来那些老师。...你会觉得他们对你的 expectation...比如说上课，讨论，对你的见地，写文章的一些观点，他会要求很多。...一方面就是理念的问题...就是这个 academic community，你所在的 academic community 对 PhD 学生和对 master 的 expectation 是完全不一样的。他认为你进 PhD，这是你自己的选择。既然你已经选择了，你就要把你将来的 PhD 工作作为一份 career 来做了已经。所以从那个时候，他们对你的要求就不一样了。接下来的训练就是他们要把你培养成他们那样的人。
(Interview, September 26, 2006, pp.3-4)

made PhD your career. ...From that moment, their requirements for you become different. The next step for them is to train you to become someone like them.

Jie agreed that doctoral students were "expected to meet higher standards", nevertheless, she held that the differences between these two were not that distinctive:

It's really up to you to determine how far you want to go in your own research. PhD students are expected to meet higher standards. Well, the standards are higher, but you may fulfill the minimum requirements. Standards for master's students are lower, but there isn't a ceiling for it. You can go higher and do as well as you can.

但这个要求全凭你自己。PhD 要求所谓的高，是，它的要求高...你可能就满足它的 minimum 的要求，你 master 要求低，但你可以做得更好啊，没有高的限制，对吧？所以你可以往深的做，往好的做。
(Interview, October 2, 2006, pp.5-6)

Hua thought that one important difference was that doctoral students had more research experience and knew more about research methods.

When (master's students) are talking about research methods, you will know that you read those books while doing your (MA thesis) research. ...For me, now I am reading research methods again, but I have a focus on what I will be doing in the future...they (master's students) are just starting to learn what is "focus group" and what is" interview".

比如他们谈 methods 和 methodology 的时候，你脑子会想：我做 research 的时候读过这些东西。象我现在又回来读 research method 这些东西。我以前做完了，我会偏重于将来我做什么东西...他们才刚开始学什么叫 focus 什么叫 interview。
(Interview, November 3, 2006, pp. 13-14)

4.2.9　Isolation

Some participants felt isolated though their department had been trying to enhance the interactions among graduate students and professors, such as the Research Exchange Forum (Appendix H), a regular presentation session for professors and graduate students

to share research ideas; and the "ABCs of the PhD", a regular workshop for doctoral students to discuss topics of their interests. Lan told me how she felt after losing many contacts that she made at the beginning of her study:

Students in different programs have little connection. And many of my former classmates just "disappeared" when I became a senior student. For these years I have always been there in my lab, but I have no idea where the other people have gone; they just "disappeared"!	但就是发现上下同学的关系，如果不是一个program，大家都比较疏离。而且后来到了高年级，很多同学就不见了，也不知道到哪儿去了。象我就是这么多年，一直在实验室里经常出现，但是我就是不知道其他同学都跑到哪儿去了，有时候读着读着就不见了。 (Interview, October 5, 2006, p.8)

Hua, as a first-year student, assumed that the lack of communication was due to the fierce competition among students for funding and publications.

Suddenly you will hear someone say that she/he's got funding or she/he is applying for funding, or has got something published...We are competitors. If you publish papers, you are more likely to find a job in the future...(when) you get funding, your life will be changed. So many things are going on secretly.	你突然发现有个同学说：我得到 funding 了；或者说我申请 funding 了；或者我的什么东西发表了。...因为大家都是 competition，都是竞争的，如果你能发表几个 paper，将来找工作有利...或者你拿到 funding 了，你自己的生活也能改变了。所以很多东西是在 secretly 进行。 (Interview, November 3, 2006, pp.4-5)

All the participants indicated that they needed more communication with their peers and professors. For Jie, who was living in another city, this isolation meant loss of her confidence in academic ability.

I feel it hard to concentrate. I don't know where I am in my research and sometimes I even doubt my ability to do a PhD. I want to know how my peers are doing. Well, I've been out of an academic environment.	现在有点这种感觉，觉得自己很难静下来。自己到了哪步也不知道，到底行不行也不知道，然后也不知道别人做得怎么样。就是...没有一个交流的环境。(Interview, October 2, 2006, p.4)

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4.2.10 Pace of the PhD

Except Lan, who was finishing her study soon, and Hua, who had just started her study, all the other participants were concerned about their time management for doctoral study. Yun regretted that she did not manage her time very well for the passing semester:

Time management is a problem. When you have 4 courses in a semester, you know you have a lot to do; but when you only have one course or don't have courses at all, you will feel it hard to manage your time. ...Take this semester as an example. I did lots of extracurricular things and left my research project completely behind.

我觉得 time management 是一个问题。就是当自己一学期上四门课，很多东西要做；但当一学期只一门课的时候，不上课的时候，这时候 time management 会很难。…比如这学期，杂事做得很多，自己的研究基本上没有怎么太关注。
(Interview, October 26, 2006, pp.3-4)

Peng was very much pressured by the "pace of the PhD". He talked about why he did not have time for conferences and writing papers:

First you have to find a topic, and then you need someone to collect data. But you are taking courses.... you just don't have time to do these. Now I am done with the course work and I want to (get something published), but there comes my comps and after the comps, my proposal. You need to start your doctoral research one step after another. If you don't want to delay your graduation, you have no time for publications.

首先你要定一个 topic，还有找相应的人来 collect data。你在上课的同时，你哪儿有时间来搞这个？对不对？你没有时间去搞这个。比如说现在课都学完了，我想做一些东西，马上就是 comps。Comps 完了马上就是 proposal，你要做你的 study，一环扣一环。你如果不是想把你的周期拉得很长的话，你根本没有时间去做这个。
(Interview, September 26, 2006, p. 13)

Jie warned that doctoral students had to set deadlines for themselves, or they might lengthen the time to completion. She also indicated that doctoral students in social sciences were more likely to quit because social sciences required more time-management skills of students. She compared the disciplinary differences between social sciences and sciences:

You must manage you time very well. Many students in social sciences work as they study, and the funding for us is limited, unlike science and engineering students, whose job is their study, and they live on their study. They spend the whole day in the lab working and writing papers.

...把你自己的时间安排好。因为好多社科的人都是要一边工作一边学习...funding 又比较少。理工科人员...他们就是完全 PhD 是个工作，是他们的生活基础，他们就把它当成一个工作去做，所以他要全天在实验室，全天在写文章什么的。
(Interview, October 2, 2006, p.14)

4.2.11 Motherhood and doctoral study

As Lan mentioned during the interview, there are a lot more female doctoral students in the Faculty of Education than male students. Among the participants, three are mothers. When I asked them how being a mother influenced their study, they all agreed that taking care of the child delayed their work, occupied some time that they should have used for learning, and distracted them from their research. However, none of them complained. As Lan said, she sacrificed something for being a mother but she was very happy:

You'll have less time for academics when you have a whole family there. But if you feel that both are important, you won't complain. If I were alone, I would have finished my study in 4 years, but it's been 5 years and a half now. This is fine for me: You choose your life, and you live it. ... You may be busier (than single students) but you have the happiness that they don't have. ...If you want to have both, you have to sacrifice something.

有家庭的话，相对来说在学术上放的时间会少一点。那如果你觉得是必然的事情的话，你也不会抱怨了。...比如说，没有家庭，我肯定四年就能完成 PhD，那有家庭的话，可能要五年半完成。这个我也比较接受，因为你选择这样的生活，你就必须要接受。...你忙碌了，你也会有比较开心的一面。...什么都想有的话，你就必须要有所牺牲。(Interview, October 5, 2006, pp.11-12)

Hua, whose husband and two children were all in China, decided to conduct her research in China, in order to stay with her family. Jie, another mother, was living with her husband and her newborn baby in anther city.

4.2.12 Adjusting research directions

Soon after being admitted, Yun found herself in a difficult situation: the concentration that she planned to work on was not available any more in the department. To make things worse, the professor who agreed to be her supervisor would retire in the following year. She recalled how panicked she was at that time:

It was hard to accept (that I had to change my research area)...You were eagerly expecting to explore an area, but suddenly found you had to step away from it...you had already done lots of work (in this area) and literature review and you felt you were confident...suddenly you had no choice but to give all this up and start all over again. The process was bitter...

发现这个比较难以接受，因为一开始你很热情地想要 pursue 一个方向，后来发现和这个差距很远，你要慢慢转。一开始方向你发现自己已经做了很多 research，literature review 这些东西，你觉得应该没有问题了。但现在突然那个要完全摒弃不做了，要重新找 literature，发现这个读的过程很痛苦…
(Interview, October 26, 2006, p.6)

It took quite a while for her to finally find a new supervisor and settle down. Unlike Yun, Lan seemed to be more flexible about adjusting her research direction:

Many people are idealistic, having beliefs and expectations. So was I when I came into (the program). But soon I found they were hard to realize. So I had been changing the direction of my research...you have to be flexible. PhD only lays the foundation for your future research, and it doesn't mean you'll follow your current track forever...so don't restrict yourself, allow several options.

也可能有的人比较理想化，刚进来的话，就有很强的理论观念。我刚进来的时候也带有，但发现这边就不可能实现。那我就不停地转自己的研究方向。…要比较灵活一点，这样比较好一点。其实我觉得 PhD 也是一个…也是为你以后的研究奠定一个基础而已，不是说你以后就一定要向着那个方向发展。…所以让自己的选择性多一点，不要太局限。
(Interview, October 5, 2006, p. 10)

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4.3   Tastes of the Doctoral Study

During the interviews, I asked each participant to comment on their doctoral study. It is interesting that in spite of the difficulties and challenges, they all expressed positive views. The following part presents the participants' "tastes" of the doctoral study separately, as they came from different PhD years,

Jie: Co-existence of happiness and hardship

Obtaining both BA and MA degrees in Mainland China, Jie told me that learning at McGill as a doctoral student was an "eye-opening experience". Yet she continued to comment that doctoral study meant both happiness and hardship for her:

PhD study brings me unique happiness and life experiences that nothing else can bring...though sometimes it is just a little satisfaction...Hardship is something you have to go through no matter what you do...	我觉得读 PhD 给我带来的快乐和人生体验还是挺独一无二的吧，我觉得...干其他事情不能给我这么大的...有的时候是一点点小小的成就感，有的时候是...必须经历的一些东西，就是困难啊挫折啊，在哪一行都会经历到。 (Interview, October 2, 2006, p. 13)
I think (the challenges) are inescapable for...not only for me...but for every PhD student...This is part of the PhD study. The whole process is a learning process. Only after you have experienced it may you have a clear idea about it. There's nothing to fear and nothing to regret.	我觉得这是必须的吧，每个 PhD 学生都要经历的，不是我一个人。有些可能是我自己一个人的问题，有些是每个 PhD 可能都要经历的。而且这也是 PhD 学习的一部分。...这个过程就是学习的过程。学过来之后你可能才...清楚。我觉得没什么可怕的，也没什么可遗憾的。 (Interview, October 2, 2006, p. 13)

Peng: Making research your career

Peng thought his doctoral study was going on smoothly since it was "an extension" of his master's study. In his opinion, being a doctoral student meant making research as one's career now and for the future:

What does it mean to make research your career? It means you do research by yourself. ...Doing research is very tedious and very independent because other people may not be interested in what you are doing. ...It's lonely, isolated.

什么叫把 research 当成你的 career？就是你自己在那儿做。做 research 是一个非常非常单调的一个事情，或者说非常 independent 的一个东西，因为你的方向不见得所有人都感兴趣。...很孤独，很孤立的。
(Interview, September 26, 2006, p.23)

Lan: I'm lucky

Finishing her dissertation soon, Lan was very satisfied with her study. She repeated "I'm lucky" several times during the interview. However, she emphasized that academic environment and the supervisor's support were crucial for student learning:

I feel that in the department, ...the individual supervisor's support is very important. And whether the whole academic environment is harmonious and vibrant affects this student too.

我自己感觉就是系里面，...导师对一个学生的支持度有很大的关系。还有这个学术环境融洽不融洽、活跃不活跃啊，对学生的激励也比较大。
(Interview, October 2, 2006, p.2)

Yun: So far so good

As of the time of the interview, Yun had not started preparing her comprehensive examination yet. She told me that in terms of "pure" learning, she did not have any difficulty. She commented on her doctoral study in the following way:

So far so good. ...(I) took many useful courses... TA-ed and read a lot. I have touched on a wide range of areas and felt my vision of knowledge has been broadened. I started to have a clear idea about what I am doing, this is important. I've become confident in some areas in which I know something that other people don't know ...I'm quite satisfied...

应该觉得 so far so good 吧。...学了很多课程。我觉得这些课很有用处，...也做了一些 TA 的工作，然后读了很多东西。然后涉及领域也很宽泛，基本上是感觉自己的知识面是比原来扩大很多。而且也知道自己在做什么。所以这点比较重要。而且对有些方面还比较自信，比如说我知道某些领域的东西别人不知道之类的。所以还是比较满意的吧...
(Interview, October 26, 2006, p.3)

Hua: A huge commitment

As a first-year student, Hua still had 4-5 years to go for her study. Probably for this reason, her comment was "it's time and energy consuming and you are not sure if you can make it" (Interview, November 3, 2006, p. 14). Despite this, she still thought highly of her doctoral study at McGill:

For sure I won't regret. It is a treasurable experience, and it has helped my growth in knowledge and in other aspects. It is a good experience. Even if I finally fail to get my degree, I won't take these years as a waste of time. After all, I have been studying and reading everyday.	我肯定不会后悔，我会觉得这是一种挺难得的经历。而且它能帮助我，不管是在知识方面，还是在各个方面，都会成熟。这种经历是很好的。我肯定不会说：真后悔啊，上 McGill 浪费了那么几年。即使没把 PhD 拿到手，将来我也不会说浪费了好多年。不管怎么样，你每天都在学东西，每天都在读东西。 (Interview, November 3, 2006, p.16)

4.4   Voicing the Suggestions

When asked how the university could better facilitate their academic adaptation, the participants suggested a tutoring service in the faculty to help all international students with their academic writing. Also, they hoped that English-speaking students could help Chinese students improve their language proficiency.

As all the participants experienced financial difficulties, it is not surprising that the participants were urging for more funding opportunities for doctoral students, especially international students. At the same time, Peng pointed out that a bigger issue behind the funding problem was the reputation of the university:

Funding...ultimately affects McGill's academic reputation and its long-term development. ...The financial status does not match its reputation...It's ridiculous that a school with such a good reputation cannot provide financial support to all its PhD students.	经费...最后影响到 McGill 将来的学术地位和它的成活能力。...McGill 的 reputation 和它的 financial status 是不相符合的。没有一个学校，它有这么好的 reputation，但提供不了它的 PhD 学生的 financial support。这是很 ridiculous 的地方。 (Interview, September 26, 2006, p.19)

The participants also expressed their concern for enhancing communication among students and between students and professors. For example, Lan suggested that communicating with senior doctoral students and professors would help novice doctoral students decide their future research topics:

It would be better if senior students can tell junior students about doctoral learning strategies for courses...(the communication among students) may help you in your choice of future research topic or direction.	比如读 course work 的时候如果有一个高年级同学交流...介绍一些象学习方法这种，可能就会比较有帮助。...如果有学生平时的交流的话，就会对你以后课题的选择、研究方向的确定就会有帮助。 (Interview, October 5, 2006, p.4)

As a senior doctoral student herself, Lan was also concerned about the academic atmosphere of the Faculty of Education. She thanked the ABCs of the PhD, which had greatly helped all doctoral students' academic adaptation. However, she mentioned that it might be better if the faculty "pushed" professors as well as students to present at the Research Exchange Forum so that a sounder academic environment could be gradually established:

I feel a good academic environment is a must for a program. Not only should students be pushed to present (at the Research Exchange Forum) but also should the supervisors. Students should be required to come to the campus regularly to participate in activities like this. Then an academic atmosphere will be established gradually...	我觉得 program 的话，应该形成比较强的学术环境，不仅 push 学生去 present，导师也应该去 present 啊。然后也应该要求学生，比如你在读课程期间，你要经常到学校来，去参加这种活动，然后形成一种气氛。...这种学术气氛需要逐渐培养嘛... (Interview, October 5, 2006, p. 7)

Peng was concerned about how academic staff could help students with publication. He admitted that doctoral students should be independent during the learning

process, but he insisted that it was the responsibility of the supervisors and other professors to help students get something published:

Supervisor and other professors have the responsibility to help students get something published...this is their responsibility ... As a student, a novice, we know very little (about publication). It is far from enough for the faculty to only give a few lectures. We never published anything before. We need hands-on experience...and we need instructional suggestions.	老板或者 professor 有义务帮助学生做 publication。有义务帮助他们，而不是让学生在那儿...我们是作为一个学生，一个 novice，什么东西都不懂的。并不是你给我开几次讲座就可以了，我们要 hands-on experience...需要一些指导性的意见。 (Interview, September 26, 2006, p.21)

4.5 Summary of the Findings

The participants in this study varied in their background and stage in the doctoral program, which resulted in their different opinions on their academic adaptation. Therefore, each participant was a special case. However, they did share some adaptation experiences in 12 areas: *English as a second language, financial difficulties, outsider feelings; worries about career paths; course work, research network, TA/RA experiences; differences between doctoral and master's studies; isolation; pace of the PhD; motherhood and doctoral study;* and *adjusting research directions.*

The participants' overall comments on their studies were all positive. However, they believed that the university, departments and faculty members could do more to facilitate their academic adaptation, such as providing tutoring services on academic writing, offering more financial aid to international students, enhancing communication among students and between students and professors; and assisting students with publication.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I will interpret the interview data by linking them to the literature and to the other data that I collected. First, I will compare my findings to the two theoretical models that I presented in Chapter Two, to show how and why these models fit and do not fit the present study. Then I will take a closer look at the 12 themes/challenge areas in order to find the adaptation pattern of Chinese doctoral students in education. Finally, I will discuss the implications of the present study and recommend future research directions.

5.1 Revisiting the Theoretical Models

Assuming that Chinese doctoral students in education experience cross-cultural adaptation in their study, I reviewed two theoretical frameworks about cross-cultural adaptation in Chapter Two. In the following part, I will apply the findings of this study to these theoretical models.

5.1.1 Kim's (1988, 2001) communication model

The core of Kim's (1988, 2001) communication model is the "host communication competence", which is composed of language competence, knowledge about the norms of the host culture, and the ability to act in effective appropriate ways. The theme *English as a second language* found in the present study is an equivalent of "language competence". The other two components, i.e., "knowledge about the norms of the host culture" and "the ability to act in effective appropriate ways", do not make much sense for the present study

unless a "sub-environment" (Kim, 2001, p. 78) is specified. In this study, the sub-environment is apparently the academic environment: the university, the faculty and the departments where the participants study. Accordingly, the "personal communication" and "social communication" between an ethnic group and the host environment are largely reflected through the participants' communication with their supervisors, with other professors, and with their classmates.

Kim's (2001) environment variable consists of three factors: host receptivity, host conformity pressure, and ethnic group strength. As I presented in Chapter Four, all the participants expressed satisfaction with their learning experiences when they were asked to comment on their study. Therefore, the host environment is quite "receptive" to Chinese doctoral students. The host conformity pressure means "the extent to which the environment challenges strangers to adopt the normative patterns of the host culture and communication system" (Kim, 2001, p.79). In this study, the following themes may reflect the conformity pressure: *course work, research network, differences between doctoral and master's studies*, and *adjusting research directions*. For example, taking part in classroom discussions (*course work*), attending conferences and getting oneself published (*research network*), meeting higher academic requirements (*differences between doctoral and master's studies*), and being flexible about one's research directions (*adjusting research directions*) are some "normative patterns" for doctoral students in education.

"Ethnic group strength", which refers to whether an ethnic group can "offer its members an ethnicity-based subculture within the larger host environment" (Kim, 2001, p.81), is not salient in this study. Though most participants tend to make friends with Chinese students rather than Canadian students, Chinese students have not formed a

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"subculture" due to their small number of population. Therefore, "ethnic group strength" does not apply to the present study. In a similar way, Kim's "ethnic inter-communication" and "ethnic mass-communication" do not apply either.

Another component in the model is "predisposition", which is composed of "preparedness for change" (voluntary, planned or involuntary, unplanned), "ethnic proximity" (ethnic backgrounds) and "adaptive personality" (openness, strength, positivity). The "adaptive personality" was not investigated in the present study. As for "preparedness for change", all the participants in the study come from a culture that respects academic achievements (Ozmon & Craver, 2003), and they entered their doctoral study fully planned. In terms of "ethnic proximity", generally speaking Chinese culture emphasizes harmony while western culture emphasizes "conflict" (Ozmon & Craver, 2003). As a result, Chinese culture discourages "striv[ing] after anything but let things come naturally" (p.105) while western culture advocates competition. In this study, this cultural difference is reflected by one participant's dilemma when she had to compete for leadership within research teams.

Overall, at least one theme, i.e., *motherhood and doctoral study*, is not addressed in the model. It does not have a direct relation with the "host communication competence"; rather, it is connected to the academic discipline that the participants study: that women outnumber men in the field of education makes motherhood an important issue for the present study.

5.1.2 Berry's (1997) acculturation framework

In Berry's framework, the "society of origin" and the "society of settlement" are equivalent to Kim's (2001) "ethnic proximity" and "host environment". Most of the

individual variables derived from these two components are relevant to the present study. For example, previous education and cultural distance affect the participant's academic adaptation. The participants who had their master's education in Canada tend to experience fewer difficulties in taking courses and participating in classroom discussions. Some participants had difficulty dealing with leadership in research teams due to Chinese traditional morality of being modest. Some variables related to the "society of settlement" are also highly relevant to the present study. For instance, in academic areas, social support can be interpreted as all types of support from the educational institution, such as tutoring services for non-native students, financial support, supportive academic atmosphere, and communication-enhancing workshops (e.g., the ABCs of the PhD, Research Exchange Forum).

The process line in the model fits this study as well with *life events* being doctoral study, *stressors* being challenges and difficulties, *coping strategies* being those that Chinese students use to fulfill academic tasks, *stress* being challenges that Chinese students do not or cannot cope with very well (e.g., *English as a second language*, *outsider feelings*, and *worries about career paths*).

Nonetheless, as Berry's framework is based on studies on immigrants, sojourners, and refugees while the present study on a small group of Chinese doctoral students (a sub-group of sojourners), some variables in the framework are irrelevant, such as physical changes (urbanization, population density) and biological changes (new dietary intakes, exposure to new diseases).

To summarize, both frameworks have components that fit the present study and components that do not. This lack of coherence is mainly because both models focus on cross-cultural adaptation within a broader context, the whole society; while the present

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study only focuses on academic adaptation within certain doctoral programs. Though societal context does have an influence on doctoral student experience, a more immediate influence comes from the institutional context; and the most immediate, from the departmental/disciplinary context (McAlpine & Norton, 2006). The academic institution is where doctoral students are socialized into "novice professional practitioners" (Weidman, Twale & Stein, 2001), and disciplinary training is how this socialization is realized (Delamont, Atkinson & Parry, 2000, Reich & Reich, 2006). The following section examines how disciplinary cultures influence doctoral student experience.

5.1.3   Disciplinary cultures

Becher and Trowler (2001) identified four disciplinary groups according to (1) characteristics in the object of enquiry, (2) the nature of knowledge growth, (3) the relationship between the researcher and knowledge, (4) enquiry procedures, (5) extent of truth claims and criteria for making them, and (6) the results of research (pp. 35-36). By the nature of knowledge, education is categorized under applied social science or the "soft applied" group. Academic disciplines represent different cultures (Reich & Reich, 2006). For instance, "doctoral work in the social sciences depends on a more individualized relationship between a student and his or her supervisor (or panel of supervisors in some cases)" (Delamont, Atkinson & Parry, 2000, p.161) whereas "natural and health sciences favour more team-based research" (McAlpine & Norton, 2006). In terms of dissertations, the focus of social science is to "describe and explain the world of human experiences" while the focus of science is "to classify, organize and describe the material world" (Parry, 1998). Doctorate means "being a member of a disciplinary community" and the pursuit of

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a doctoral degree is a process of "disciplinary socialization" (Becher & Trowler, 2001, p.47).

Golde, Walker and their associates (2006) suggested the doctorate in education has the following characteristics (pp. 246-247, adapted):

1. The feminization of the field is a trend.
2. Educational students have often worked as teachers before pursuing the doctorate, so doctoral work often comes at the middle, not the start of the student's career.
3. It is assumed that most recipients of the doctorate return to or remain in their prior workplace, perhaps with an increase in salary or responsibility, rather than seek an academic position.
4. A large number of students self-finance their educations or are funded by their employers.
5. Most students are part-time.
6. Only 1/3 of the students have an undergraduate degree in education, and thus students have diverse backgrounds.
7. Students define a research project in consultation with their advisor and carry it out relatively independently, often in their work setting.
8. Research methods are learned in class, not while apprenticed to a research project.
9. Dissertations usually follow a "five chapter model", and few dissertations are ever published.

The findings of the present study represent some of these features in that most participants are women (1); some participants have teaching experience (2); some have an undergraduate degree in a different field (6); and most of them work individually with their supervisor rather than with a group of colleagues (7). However, as the above list is based on the situation of American doctoral students, some of the features are not supported by the present study. For example, Chinese doctoral students worry about their career paths, and they do not have a position to return to after graduation (3). Chinese doctoral students are all full-time (5) and do not have an employer to financially support their study (4). As a result, many have financial difficulties, especially at the beginning of

their program. The similarities and differences have made Chinese doctoral students in education a unique group, which, though within the same discipline as American or Canadian students, may face more challenges during their study.

5.2   Rethinking the Academic Challenges

Applying the findings of this study to the two cross-cultural frameworks has indicated that the academic adaptation of Chinese doctoral students in education is neither a pure cross-cultural adaptation nor a pure disciplinary socialization. Revisiting the themes presented in the last chapter will help find the adaptation pattern of Chinese doctoral students in education.

Of the 12 challenge areas, four are mainly related to the cultural differences between the two countries (*English as a second language, outsider feelings, worries about career paths, research network*); four are closely related to disciplinary cultures (*differences between doctoral and master's studies, isolation, adjusting research directions, motherhood and doctoral study*); and the rest fall between these two categories (*financial difficulties, course work, TA/RA experiences, pace of the PhD*).

Challenges related to cultural differences

English as a second language, outsider feelings, and worries about career paths

According to the results, the participants' outsider feelings and worries about their career paths are connected to each other, and both are due to cultural differences between the two countries. For instance, Lan mentioned that compared to Canadian students, Chinese students were more likely to miss work opportunities for not being able to speak French

and not speaking English very well. Hua thought that low English proficiency placed Chinese students in a disadvantageous position while looking for academic positions after graduation.

Language has been repeatedly reported in the literature as the No. 1 difficulty for Chinese students in English-speaking countries. The present study has revealed that Chinese doctoral students in education do encounter language challenges even though three participants obtained their master's degree in Canada and one from Hong Kong, where English is the main language of instruction in higher education. Language challenges affected many of their scholarly activities during the doctoral study, such as taking part in classroom discussions, getting published, fulfilling teaching assistant tasks. In addition to documenting the challenges, the present study has also found that the Chinese doctoral students lack confidence in improving their language ability, and they attribute their language problems to the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education in Mainland China.

Language problems are rooted in cultural differences. According to literature (see Hu, 2002; Rao, 2002; Wen & Clement, 2003), it is due to cultural constraints that China's current EFL education lacks the ability to prepare learners with sufficient communicative skills to study abroad. Specifically, communicative language teaching approach cannot be practiced very well in Mainland China due to the deep influence of Confucian traditions, which regards the teacher as authority and advocates respect for authority. Chinese students are more used to lecturing than alternative ways of learning such as group work, role-play, games, information gap etc. For this reason, language may continue to be a challenge for future Mainland Chinese students in North America.

<u>Research network</u>

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, research network in this study refers to supervisory relationship, communication with professors other than the supervisor, working in a research team or with peers, attending academic conferences and getting published. Although many of these challenges are common to all doctoral students—for example, at one session of the ABCs of the PhD, two Canadian students named publication a challenge for them—Chinese students feel a strong link between these challenges and cultural differences. For example, they realize that their supervisor is not like a traditional Chinese teacher, who takes care of everything in their study, but like a colleague or a partner. When doing research, they have to compete for a position with peers, though competition is not encouraged in the traditional Chinese culture. They network with people at academic conferences though conferences are still not very common in China.

Challenges related to disciplinary socialization

<u>Differences between doctoral and master's studies</u>

In this study, though the participants disagreed upon whether doctoral students always do better in fulfilling academic requirements than master's students, they did agree that doctoral students are expected to meet higher academic standards.

According to the Dublin Descriptors (Joint Quality Initiative, October 18, 2004; Appendix G), PhD study is different from master's study in five aspects: knowledge and understanding, applying knowledge and understanding, making judgments, learning focus, and communication. While master's study mainly focuses on how to utilize knowledge to solve problems, the doctorate requires a systematic understanding and application of areas

of expertise to make original contributions and to promote technological, social and cultural advancement.

Though the differences between master's and doctoral study exist in various disciplines, the process of entering one's field of study is discipline-specific, shaped by the disciplinary culture:

> Disciplinary culture dictates how members should behave (conform to professional norms), which methods of inquiry are acceptable, and how and when to discuss issues. Furthermore, disciplines provide a language or vernacular to use when theorizing and discussing relevant issues. Indeed, the cultural variation amongst disciplines includes differences "in epistemology, in what is viewed as knowledge, and in opinion over what sort of knowledge is possible. They differ over what is interesting and what is valuable" (Bauer, 1990, p. 106) (Reich & Reich, 2006, p. 52).

One participant expressed a similar point of view when he mentioned that the professors in his program aimed to train him "to become someone like them" (Interview, September 25, 2006, p.4)

Isolation

Most participants in this study had been working solely with their supervisor. Although one reported that sometimes she was involved in research teams, she thought the relationship among fellow students was loose. This finding is consistent with the literature, which suggests that isolation is a challenge for all doctoral students in social science disciplines (e.g., Dinham & Scott, 1999; Hawley, 2003; Hockey, 1994). Delamont, Atkinson and Parry (2000) argue that teamwork is just not a tradition for doctoral students in social sciences. The tradition, instead, is that

The social science PhD student is treated as a potential intellectual equal. Students choose their own topics for their own theses, they choose their own theories for their theses; they choose their own methods for their theses. The thesis is seen as an individualized project, which is a one-off, and even the candidate's lifework. (p.156)

They point out that this discipline-specific tradition results in two types of isolation: social isolation—being lonely; and intellectual isolation—working alone on their topic. And this situation is worsened by "a fragmentation of research interests within social science departments" (p. 161). Mongillo (1995) and Liang (2004) reported the loneliness of Chinese graduate students in Canada, while the present study found "intellectual isolation".

Adjusting research directions

Two participants mentioned their experience of adjusting research directions, and they held two different attitudes: being frustrated and being flexible. One participant was frustrated because she had to find another area she was interested in; another participant allowed options for herself because she took Ph.D. as merely a foundation for her future research career.

This challenge is related to the disciplinary cultures of social sciences. For science students, their thesis topics are usually chosen by the supervisor or the head of the research team/lab (Delamont, Atkinson & Parry, 2000). In contrast, social science students choose research topics on their own. As supervision only provides limited guidance for the choice of a topic (Hawley, 2003), this freedom contains a potential danger of picking a topic that is later found to be already researched, or a topic that the

student later loses interest in. As a result, social science PhD students are more likely to adjust or change their research directions than science PhD students.

Motherhood and doctoral study

Except Mongillo's study (1995), which mentioned how women doctoral students balance family and student life, none of the previous studies about Chinese graduate students documented the relation between motherhood and doctoral study. As feminization is the trend of the field of education (Golde, Walker & Associates, 2006), motherhood is in this sense disciplinary. Hawley (2003) might be biased when she claimed that "no matter how efficient a woman may be, she cannot conduct household business as usual and pursue the doctorate at the same time" (p. 153), but no one can deny that doing a doctorate while taking care of young kids is challenging. Of the four women participants in the study, three were mothers. Two had a baby under 1 year old and one had a child of 3 years old. They were all happy loving mothers, who did not complain about the time and energy that they spent in taking care of children. However, they did admit that motherhood delayed their work and sometimes distracted them from study.

Challenges between the categories

Financial difficulties

The present study echoes with the literature, which frequently reported financial difficulties as the toughest challenge for Chinese graduate students in North America (e.g., Feng, 1991; Liang, 2004; Mongillo, 1995; Tu, 1992; Z. Wang, 2004; P. Zhu, 1996). Additionally, the present study has found that funding opportunities are related to the

residential status of the student. International students have fewer opportunities than Canadian citizens and permanent residents of Canada.

For Chinese doctoral students in education, financial challenges are both cross-cultural and disciplinary. In Mainland China, rarely does a university student apply for funds. Most funds are automatically "given" to students based on academic merit. As a result, most Chinese students lack the knowledge about funding application. Locating funds is challenging as well since Chinese students are not familiar with the funding resources in Québec or in Canada. Language proficiency further worsens the situation. Thus financial difficulties are associated with cultural differences.

Funding issue is also associated with disciplinary characteristics of education. Education does not offer many teaching or research assistantships (Golde, Walker and Associates, 2006). When some are available—as is the case in the present study—the income is far from enough to cover a student's expenses for study. As one participant mentioned, she even did not bother to apply for RA positions, for the pay was just too low.

Course work

The participants reported that they experienced difficulties in taking part in classroom discussions, doing presentations, and dealing with reading load; all of which the literature documented as well (e.g., Feng, 1991; Liang, 2004; Mongillo, 1995; Ye, 1992; L. Zhu, 1993; P. Zhu, 1996). These challenges are due to the differences in educational concepts and educational systems between the two countries. In a Chinese classroom, most of the time the teacher lectures and the students listen, and few presentations and few classroom discussions are involved. It is thus not surprising that Chinese students in Canada are shy to speak in class. In addition, in the classroom in educational departments, what is

discussed is usually related to the local situation. Lacking the background knowledge of the host educational system, Chinese students may find it hard to join discussions. At the same time, students in social sciences usually have more interactive activities in classroom than those in sciences. In this sense, course work challenges are also disciplinary.

TA/RA experiences

The participants mentioned four major benefits from TA/RA experiences: financial compensation, personal growth, gaining experiences for future profession, and possible publication opportunities. It is worth noticing that while research assistantships are usually the primary financial source for Chinese graduate students in sciences, they are not a primary financial source for the participants, who were all in education. Compared to the literature, the learning aspects of assistantships seem to be more outstanding.

TA/RA experiences are related to cultural differences. As TA/RAs in education, Chinese students need to know about the local culture, values, and educational system. As one participant mentioned, TAing was an opportunity for her to learn about the Canadian undergraduate education.

TA/RA experiences are also connected to disciplines. First, students in education usually hold a RAship for several months while students in engineering often hold it throughout their study. Accordingly, the RAships have different impact on student learning. Second, the nature of assistantships varies across disciplines. A TA in education marks student essays, thus more language ability is required; whereas a TA in engineering marks the calculation results, he/she may only take care of the accuracy of numbers and equations.

<u>Pace of the PhD</u>

Pace of PhD, or time management, is a challenge for all doctoral students. At one session of the ABCs of the PhD, two Canadian students unanimously named it as a challenge for them. Doctoral study means self-imposing deadlines (Hawley, 2003). The present study has found that the pace of the PhD for Chinese students is connected to both cultural difference and disciplinary characteristics. First, due to language barrier, Chinese students spend more time on course work, in searching for literature, writing research proposals, and writing journal articles than students whose first language is English.

Time management is also related to the characteristics of social sciences. Unlike most students in sciences, whose work progress is connected to that of others; social science students usually work alone. Consequently, they do not have someone to remind them of deadlines. They have a more flexible schedule, but may need more skills to manage their time.

Summary and conclusion

The above analysis has shown that, some of the challenges are mainly due to cultural differences; some are due to the characteristics of social sciences or the field of education; others fall between cultural differences and disciplinary characteristics. Academic adaptation for Chinese doctoral students in education is a double process of cross-cultural adaptation and disciplinary socialization. The intertwining of cross-cultural adaptation and disciplinary socialization has made academic adaptation harder for Mainland Chinese students than for Canadian students. Consequently, Mainland Chinese students have to put more effort into fulfilling their academic tasks. The following figure maps out this intertwining adaptation:

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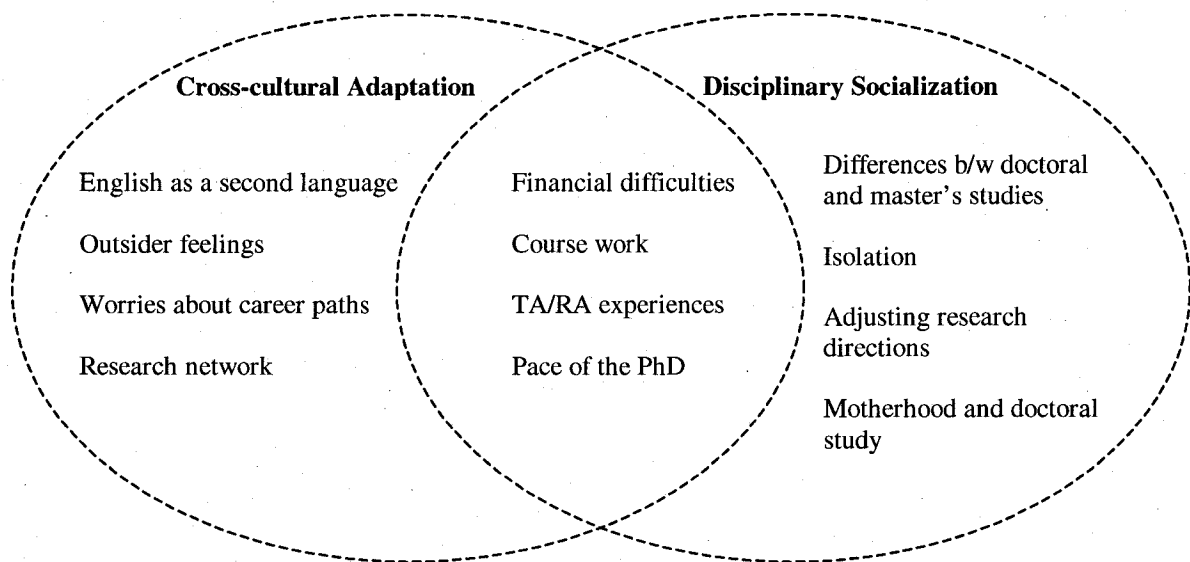
Figure 5.1 The Possible Adaptation Pattern of Mainland Chinese Doctoral Students in Education

Note that the borders of the ellipses are in dashed lines. This is because some challenge areas are inter-related with and influence each other; their positions are thus not fixed. The positions of the challenges may also vary from student to student.

5.3 Implications

While the literature tends to turn to cultural differences for explanation of the challenges and difficulties that Mainland Chinese graduate students encounter in North America, this study has suggested that disciplinary cultures can be an alternative explanation in the case of Mainland Chinese doctoral students. They experience disciplinary socialization as well as cross-cultural adaptation. Accordingly, it is recommended that departments, supervisors and faculty members address and facilitate both aspects of their adaptation process. Particularly, they should pay attention to the challenge areas that fall between the categories.

5.4 Future Research

Of the 12 major challenge areas that this study has revealed, two were barely mentioned in the literature (*adjusting research directions* and *worries about career paths*), and one was not sufficiently documented (*TA/RA experiences*). Future research is hence needed to address these areas.

Adjusting research directions

My review of the literature indicates that little research exists in this area[12], and little has been known about 1) what factors lead to the changes in social science doctoral students' research directions, 2) what is the impact of the adjustment, and 3) what role supervision plays in guiding students' choice of research topics.

Worries about career paths

The literature shows that little research has been conducted on Chinese students' worries about career paths except saying that they worry about job hunting in the host country (see Liang, 2004; Mongillo, 1995). With a changing trend all over the world from doctorates working within academia to them working outside (McAlpine & Norton, 2006), more studies are needed to track Chinese students' career paths after they receive the doctorate.

TA/RA experiences

The present study seems to imply that teaching assistantships and research assistantships give different experiences to Chinese doctoral students in education. For instance,

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[12] A number of studies have been done about dissertation topic selection though, for example, Issac, Koenigsknecht, Malaney & Karras, 1989; Krathwohl, 1994; Useem, 1997; Woodbury, 1993.

TAships enrich cultural knowledge (e.g., about local undergraduate education) while RAships enrich research knowledge (e.g., developing a coding framework and learning a quantifying scale). The two assistantships also differentiate in work mode. A RAship often means working collectively, while a TAship usually means working individually. I assume that in education, probably in other social science disciplines too, these two assistantships have a different impact on students' academic life; and the impacts may vary across different cultural groups. Also, as I presented earlier in this chapter, the nature of RAships and their impact on doctoral study vary across disciplines. These issues may be further explored by future research.

5.5   Limitations and Delimitations

This small-scale study has the following limitations. First, as all the participants were from the doctoral programs in education at McGill University, the findings only provided an incomplete picture of the learning experiences of Mainland Chinese doctoral students in Canada. However, this study was intended to be a start for more studies in Canada. Second, as a study focusing on the "process" of academic adaptation, a longitudinal research design could have been more suitable. It is true. However, the "process" in this study was represented through the students' reconstructions of their experiences during the interviews. Besides, I invested considerable time in writing the interview protocol and improving my interviewing skills; hence I was able to link the participants' previous learning experiences with their doctoral study smoothly during the interview, and allow enough time for them to talk about their adaptation process. Additionally, the participants came from different stages in doctoral study from first year to last year, which made "catching the process" possible.

5.6 Closing Notes

A couple of days ago, I bumped into a newly published journal article about Chinese graduate students' learning experiences in North America. The authors strongly believe that Chinese students "have little exposure to western cultures and beliefs" and this explains their academic struggles in North America. This claim troubled me for a while, for the present study is telling me that that is not the truth. With the impact of globalization, mass media and the Internet, Chinese students nowadays already have lots of knowledge about western societies before they study overseas. Cultural barrier does provide some explanation for the challenges they face in other countries, but it is not the only explanation; or it would be very hard to interpret the common challenges for both Chinese and Canadian students in the present study. Disciplinary socialization is an alternative lens when looking at Mainland Chinese doctoral students' experience in Canada, and I am sure there are other lenses that can help us understand intercultural student learning experiences. With all the possible perspectives, our vision of doctoral education will be greatly broadened; and certainly a broadened vision will benefit policy makers, educational institutions, faculty members, and of course students.

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APPENDICES

Interview Protocol - Chinese

> 1）Sign Consent Form （2 份）。重申研究目的、保密条款、采访时长（45-60 分钟）。
> 2）填写 Background Information Sheet，收回。
> 3）检查录音设备，打开。
>
> 4）灵活**调整**问题**顺序**；语言简洁；认真**听**！
> 5）Catch the **markers** for follow-up questions!

1. **可以介绍一下你的教育背景吗？**
   - *为什么当初选择到麦吉尔大学教育系和现在的专业读 PhD？*

2. **能对你目前为止在 McGill 教育学院的 PhD 学习经历做个综合的评价吗？谈谈你总体的感受。**

3. **从开始读 PhD 到现在，你在学习上遇到过哪些问题、困难或者挑战？能告诉我几件给你印象比较深刻的事吗？**

   提示：
   - *经费，学费*
   - *语言*
   - ***学习(修课－课堂/资格考试)***
   - *换专业；同专业课程的相关程度*
   - *相处:a) 和其他老师 b) 和同学*
   - ***科研(导师/发表论文/学术会议)***
   - *TA/RA （工作和科研关系）*
   - *心理健康*
   - *歧视或偏见*
   - *女博士：不同于男博士的困难或问题*

   > **Probes**
   >
   > *1） 能更具体一些吗？*
   > *2） 然后呢？*
   > *3） 后来怎么样了？*
   > *4） 能举个例子吗？*
   > *5） 我不是很懂，能再说一遍吗？*
   > *6） 能再说清楚一点吗？*
   > *7） 对不起，打断一下，你刚才说...*

4. **这些困难和问题现在都解决了吗？如果解决了，是怎么解决的？如果还没有，你打算怎么处理？**
   提示：
   - *求助途径*

5. **你有没有想过为什么会碰到你谈到的这些问题？你怎么看待这些经历？**
   提示：
   - *教育制度*
   - *教育理念*
   - *教学方法(老师的角色)*
   - *学习方法(学生的角色)*

6. **为了帮你更好地完成学业，你对教育学院、你所在的系和学校分别有什么建议？**

7. **结束语：除了上面谈的，你还有其他想补充的吗？**

（致谢，给小礼物。说明可能邀请他/她参加 verification 和 group discussion。）

Interview Protocol – English

---

1) Sign Consent Form (2 copies). Repeat the purpose of the study, ethical issues, and the length of the interviews (45-60mins).
2) The participant fills out Background Information Sheet, collect it.
3) Check the recorders and turn them on.

4) **Reorder** the questions, brief language, **listen carefully**!
5) Catch the **markers** for follow-up questions!

---

1. **Could you tell me about your educational background?**
   - *What made you choose McGill and the current program?*

2. **Could you comment on your doctoral experience up to now in the Faculty of Education?**

3. **Could you tell me about the difficulties, or challenges that you have ever experienced since you started your doctoral study? What are some incidents or moments that have greatly impacted your study?**

   Possible issues:
   - *Financial situation*
   - *Language*
   - *Learning experiences (course work/classroom/comprehensive)*
   - *Major change, curriculum relevance*
   - *Relationship with other professors and peers*
   - *Research experience (supervisor/publications/conferences)*
   - *TA/RA experiences*
   - *Psychological health*
   - *Discrimination/Prejudice*
   - *Women: special concerns*

4. **Were those problems solved? If yes, how did you handle them? If not yet, how are you going to cope with them?**

   Possible issues:
   - *Sources of help*

5. **In your opinion, what has caused these difficulties/challenges?**

   Possible issues:
   - *Education system*
   - *Educational philosophies*
   - *Teaching methods (teacher's role)*
   - *Learning strategies (student's role)*

6. **How do you think your department, faculty, and the university may better help you in coping with the difficulties/challenges that you have mentioned?**

7. **Closing question: Is there anything else that you would like to tell me?**

   (Thank the participant, give the present, inform the participant of future verification and group discussion.)

APPENDIX E

BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET

Dear Participant:

The following information is confidential and is collected only for research purposes. Please complete it before the interview starts.

Thank you!

Sincerely,
Shuhua Chen

Name: _____

Sex (F/M): _____

Age (check): ____20-25 ____26-30 ____31-35 ____36-40 ____over 40

Department: _____

Concentration: _____

How long have you been in Canada? _____

When did you start your current program? _____

From which country did you obtain your last degree? _____

Which part of China do you come from? _____

What requirements have you completed towards PhD (check)?

_____ course work

_____ comps (or equivalent)

_____ dissertation proposal

McGill

Feb 15, 2006

Faculty of Education
McGill University
3700 McTavish Street
Montreal, P.Q. Canada H3A 1Y2

Faculté des sciences de l'éducation
Université McGill
3700 rue McTavish
Montréal (Québec) Canada H3A 3T3

Facsimile/Télécopieur
(514) 398-1527

International Students' Town Hall Meeting
February 15, 2006

Questions and issues to consider

What people, groups, services and organizations were helpful/useful

- Before arriving at McGill?

- After arriving at McGill

What people, groups, services and organizations were not helpful/useful

- Before arriving at McGill?

- After arriving at McGill?

What services/resources are missing?

What services/resources should be changed?

Notes from the Town Hall Meeting

Time and date: 11:00 am – 1:00 pm Feb 15, 2006
Location: Room 539, Education Bldg.
Number of participants: 17
Countries of origin of participants: Africa, China (1 from Taiwan), South Korea, Japan, etc.
Programs: Second Lang.; Culture and Values; Educational Studies; Psychology/Counselling

We were given 4 discussion topics on the handout sheet, which are:

(1) What people, groups, services and organizations were helpful/useful?
(2) What people, groups, services and organizations were not helpful/useful?
(3) What services/resources are missing?
(4) What services/resources should be changed?

Then we were broken down into 3 groups, each of which had a secretary, who is a member of EGSS, to collect information and to report orally to the meeting later. Discussion lasted for about 45 minutes and reports lasted for about 30 minutes. The chair of the meeting (I missed his name) recorded the group reports on paper.

Summary of group discussions
:

Group #1 (my group):	1. The Buddy program. The program does help some international students, however, it seems that the relationship established between students is "fragile": people stop contacting each other after the new student has settled down.
	2. Awareness of cost of living: Before coming to the university, students should be informed in a more detailed way of the cost of living in Montreal. The amount given in the admission package should be a range (instead of ONE figure) since the expenses depend on where students live and how students use their money.
	3. The university website: It is not very user-friendly. Some links do not work, which causes inconvenience for international students when searching for information.
	4. Knowledge of Quebec educational system: It would be better if ISS office or some relevant offices provides a training session to let the students know about the Quebec educational system. It is of particular importance for students in Education. Or else, they may be shut out from class discussion.
	5. Survival French: it is hard for a student who does not speak French to live in Montreal, where all road signs and everything written are in French. A booklet providing some survival French would be helpful.
	6. Funding opportunities for international students are minimal.
	7. Work-study program: the processing time is too long, and the staff in charge of the program may ask embarrassing questions.
	8. Health clinic: Staff are not friendly; some are rude.

Group #2:	1. The Buddy program: some volunteers are not friendly or helpful. We need more "buddies" from Education. 2. University website: good source of information. 3. Professor information: The package provided by international office is very helpful; however, more information is needed about the professors: what professors are easygoing and who are not. 4. Personnel training: some staff are not friendly. 5. Cultural center (?): it is good and useful. It provides lots of additional information. 6. Financial support is very limited. 7. Publishing: the professors should "push" students more for paper publishing. 8. TA job: tedious, not transparent. 9. People of color: no black professor.
Group #3:	1. The Buddy program is good. 2. The school website is good and useful. 3. Library staff are friendly and helpful. 4. Immigration Canada and other immigration offices are hard to deal with. 5. Thesis and supervisor: it would be better if the departments give more information. 6. Funding: little funding for international students while much more for Canadian citizens. 7. Writing tutoring: We need such programs for international students whose first language is not English. 8. TA selection: should be more transparent.
Other:	One woman (from Africa, black, currently a PhD student in DISE) brought up the issue of equal treatment by the department and by professors and more respect for students of color. Story #1: She was forced to move out of her office within a week without any explanation. However, the office has not been used till now. Story #2: She applied for a TA position but was told that she was not qualified. Story #3: She was interested in an academic conference and wanted to know more about it. When she asked a professor about it, the professor told her he did not know about the conference. However, when she managed to get to the conference, the very professor presented his paper. Story #4: She abandoned her first supervisor because he wanted her to write on crime in Africa, which was a sensitive topic in her country, and might cause her trouble or even got her into prison. Then for two years she could not find a supervisor because (according to her) all the professors she asked said they did not know enough about Africa to supervise her. The department did find several professors as a supervising team/committee, but the committee was disbanded soon for some reason (the major professor retired and the others could not provide funding?). She said she had wasted two years.

AUG 29, 2006   ABC's

Dublin descriptors contrasting Master's and PhD

Adapted from:
http://www.jointquality.org/content/ierland/Complete_set_Dublin_Descriptors_2004_1.31.doc

5 aspects	Master's	PhD	Examples - visible and invisible
Knowledge and understanding	Provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing or applying ideas often in a research context	Includes a systematic understanding of their field of study and mastery of the methods of research associated with that field	- Paper = reference list - Growth of Endnote all the notes (populating) - Literature review/school - Review manuscripts (help tell the story better)
Applying knowledge and understanding	Problem solving abilities applied in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary contexts)	Ability to conceive, design, implement, and adapt a substantial process of research with scholarly integrity; A contribution that extends the frontier of knowledge by developing a substantial body of work some of which merits national or international refereed publication	- Ethics - RA ships Research TEAM working with people writing research proposal - giving feedback → significant to each other - the way of communicating your idea - people who good at specific things
Making judgments	Ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgments with incomplete data	Capable of critical analysis and synthesis of new and complex ideas	- Contribute society
Learning focus	Study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous	Able to promote, within academic and professional contexts, technological, social or cultural advancement	SUM = require systematic understanding and application of their field expertise, make original contributions to promote technological, social or cultural advancement
Communication	Their conclusions and the underpinning knowledge and rationale (restricted scope) to specialist and non-specialist audiences (monologue)	With their peers, the larger scholarly community and with society in general (dialogue) about their areas of expertise (broad scope)	

The ABC's of the PhD

Time: 12:00-2:00 pm, August 29, 2006
Place: Rm 233, Education Building
People: 3 Professors and 22 graduate students
Professors: Dr. Roger Slee (Dean of the Faculty), Dr. Robert Bracewell (Associate Dean), and Dr. Lynn McAlpine; 4 master's students and 18 doctoral students in different years from Year 1-5.

I.   Introducing to one another
Drs Slee and Bracewell introduced their roles in the faculty and some doctoral students introduced themselves. The introduction was not finished for some reason.

II.   Things to learn when the PhD program starts
1. Sally (fake name), a second year PhD student from the ECP Counselling named several things she wishes she had learned in her first year, and the differences between master's and PhD studies.
   a. At the doctoral level, classes are smaller. Emily had 27 people in her class as a master's student and has only 7 now as a doctoral student.
   b. PhD students are working all the time, supervising master's students sometimes. PhD students have more responsibilities and busier.
   c. PhD students have to budget time.
   d. Have to separate school life and family life.
   e. PhD students have freedom in doing assignments, e.g., they can pick and choose what to do. One tip is to use the courses to get a research topic for the thesis.
   f. Don't compare yourself to other students because each phd student has her own schedule to follow. Tips: Make use of the supervisor as a source of information and help; pay attention to emails.

2. Linda's (fake name) experiences (second-year doctoral student from DISE)
   a. Administrative duties one has to do, such as sitting on different committees.
   b. Constant constraints to attend conferences
   c. Finding funding
   d. Establishing one's portfolio including publications, teaching, and other activities
   e. Finding referees to help your application for funding
   f. Journals you need to approach
   g. Arrange your time
   h. Building networks: EGSS and PGSS, setting up study groups

3. Allison (doctoral student representing PGSS) provided information about locating funds for study: www.coursecalendar.mcgill.ca, and other information about sitting on PGSS. If one is interested in higher education and policies, she can apply for a PGSS position. PGSS has 93 committees such as Equity committee, committee for graduate students' report. www.pgss.mcgill.ca

4. Jessica (second-year master's student representing EGSS, passed around the EGSS Handbook 2006. She also introduced the EGSS conference, VP nominations, and EGSS travel grants (3 times a year) and A-M travel grants awarded by GPSO.

III.   Quiz on knowing the Faculty (attached). In groups of 3 or 4, we answered questions about the Faculty of Education. This activity lasted for about 10 minutes. (There were 4 people in my group: 1 has just finished her master's study, me, 2 year in masters, and two new doctoral students. I seemed to be the most well informed person in the group.)

Dr. McAlpine asked for the answers to the questions and some volunteered to answer them. During this process, other issued were raised, such as how to search for information in the library, and what the Media Services was for. Dr. McAlpine mentioned the EndNote program. Dr. Bracewell mentioned how the library innovated the online journals (now almost all articles are available on line in PDF.). A doctoral student recommended "google scholar" search.

IV. Differences between Master's and PhD studies

We were given a blank sheet to write any difference we could imagine between master's study and PhD study. We had 5 minutes to discuss and then Dr. McAlpine asked some to name the differences to all the people. Then we were given a handout of table listing the differences.

V. Closing remarks by Dr. Lynn McAlpine

Lynn brought up the issue of Identity construction for doctoral students in education.
In Medicine, new doctoral students will attend a "white coat" ceremony to mark that they are entering the field. Though in education we do not have such a ceremony before entering the field, we have one when students finish their degrees. She showed us a convocation cloak in two colors, green inside representing education and red outside representing McGill.

VI. Feedback quiz

We were given a quiz to comment on this session. We were asked mark on a scale of 1(not useful)-5 (very useful) how we thought about this time's ABCs of the PhD.

Winter 2007 Term

A B C s of the Ph D
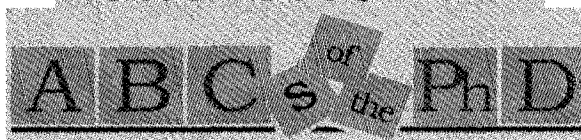
"Determining Authorship Credit: who goes first, who goes second? Should I be on the list?"
February 16, 1-3pm
Faculty of Education, 233
Have you ever struggled with the issue of authorship? Have you ever asked why am I not included or how did they decide where to place my name in the author list? Come and explore these and other questions that graduate students often feel powerless to address when working with faculty. We will review recommendations for how authorship is determined when publishing research, and you will receive practical guidelines and tips for negotiating authorship and working through student-faculty collaborations.

"I'll never be published!" – "Yes, you will!": An insider's view on how to do so successfully
March 9 or 10 (within the EGSS conference)
Increasingly, doctoral students are expected to publish in refereed journals before they complete their studies. Yet, the experience of trying to get published can appear daunting. A panel of editors of peer-reviewed journals as well as students with successful experiences in publishing will offer strategies for you to try and and answer any questions you may have.

"To do this week: grant application, paper to submit... preserving my sanity": Stress busters in a successful Ph.D. process
April 20, 1-3
GSLIS (McLennan Library, TBA)
There is no denying that a Ph.D. is stressful. Learn strategies to manage the stress and get some answers from those at the McGill Student Health Services.
- What kinds of university policies and support systems are in place to help professors help students?
- What are some strategies for helping you with your own general mental health as you negotiate the PhD and all the other activities in your life?

**Two more sessions are presently being planned for Spring 2007*

A Sample Coding Table

Case	Challenges/Difficulties/Experiences Q3			Strategies Q4	Reflections (Reasons) Q5	Overall Comments Q2	Suggestions Q6	Background
Peng	Themes from Literature	1	Language				Publication	Peng is the only male student that I interviewed. His undergraduate major was English, and he became a college English teacher right after he graduated in 1994. After teaching in a college for 4 years, he obtained a position in a--in his words--human resource company, taking responsibilities such as language-related corporation training and educational consultation. He gave those who wanted to study abroad suggestions concerning what majors and what schools suited them. After working in Shanghai for over 6 years, Peng felt it was time for him to further his own study. So he came to Canada in 2001. He stayed in Toronto for a few months and took accounting courses in a college there. Then he planned to apply for a business management program. However, lacking relevant background, he changed his mind to applying for a graduate program in Education. He was accepted by McGill and obtained his Master of Education in 2004. In the same year, he started his doctoral study in the Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology.
			skills unrelated to culture (Q3La)	Reading books and googling		So far so good; smooth; an extend experience of (graduate study).		
			skills involving cultural elements (Q3Lb)	Students cannot do much	Influence of culture on language	independence and loneliness in academic research		
		2	Financial difficulty (Q3F): obtaining aid from schools, supervisors, RA-TAships	government loans for permanent residents; graduate fellowships (p.19)	Previous education in China		Funding vs. reputation and long-tim development (Q6F)	
		3	Educational system (Q3Es): teaching-learning philosophies; presentations, discussions, critical thinking		disciplinary difference (Q5Dd)			
		4	Supervisor (Q3S): supervisor-student communication		mutual understanding p. 10			
		5	Academic culture (Q3Ac): rules, practices, behaviors of the teaching and learning process which are implicitly or explicitly agreed upon by those involved in an educational setting (Mongillo, 1995, p. 33)		Classroom: Asian students are less talkative. (Q5C)			
					Teaching about publication			
		6	Research Network (Q3Rn): conferences, communication with other profs and peers					
		7	Previous Curriculum (Q3Pc): relevance of previous curriculum to current program					
		8	Prejudice (Q3P)	Try to bear it Q4P				
	Themes not mentioned in literature	1	Worries about career prospect					
		2	Time management Q3T					
		3	Teaching Assistant Q3TA & Q3RA					
		4	Writing comps					
	different from literature	1			Differences bw PhD and Master studies (Q5PhD)			

A Sample Page of Coding (By Theme)

1. language barrier (What)

Jie	1) p.3 My language in English **writing** is too simple. 2) p.8. In a situation in which you are not familiar with the topic and in which native speakers are the majority, you are not confident enough to speak fluently. 3) p.8. Writing matters the most in writing the comps.
Peng	2) p.11. (talking about attending **conferences and publishing papers**) I think it's due to language...It's impossible for you to think about (conducting research, attending conferences and publications) while taking courses. You don't have time. You will feel the pressure from the courses, because our English is limited. We cannot hold 3 or 4 part-time jobs (and take courses) like locals. ...There was a girl in my lab who was taking 2,3 courses while working 2-3 days a week and holding a TA position simultaneously...she was writing papers also...That's beyond me. Fatigue is one thing; I don't think my language ability allows me to do so. I need time to read and to digest my stuff. I spend a much longer time writing a paper than native speakers...language vs. academic activities (research) 2) p.12. (Publication) The format of academic writing is very clear, no more than literature, method, data and result. If you are familiar with the literature, you will have no problem in writing. It...does not involve creativity. Unfortunately, English is not our mother tongue, and there is a big chunk of literature there we do not know...and no data. I really want to submit paper to journals, but I have no data. Language affects research activities
Lan	1) pp.3-4.Speaking is fine, but I have been troubled by my writing. ...I feel like handicapped. Before you send something out (to journals or conferences), you are never 100% sure (of your writing language). ...People will easily recognize that you are a second-language writer.
Hua	p.7. I don't think language is a problem but culture is. I am open and ...I often keep an eye on the mass media, TV shows and news, so it's not difficult for me to talk about some events at school. But sometimes culture plays a role...say, she (Sara) sometimes tells us a joke and I don't have a clue, I understand every word but cannot catch the funny part of it.

2. Financial difficulty (Q3F)

Jie	1) p.6. Not many (scholarships) for international students. When I became a permanent resident, I was already PhD 3,4, which were "embarrassing" years for application: too late for those (scholarships) I was eligible for. 2) p.6.My supervisor has been encouraging me to apply for funds, and many of my classmates have won certain fellowships. When you see the people around you have got something, you will also want to give it a try. (peer effect) 3) p.14.It is already a good experience to participate in the application, considering the fact that only a few candidates can won it. My application for last year was pretty good. Though I did not get it, the evaluation result turned out to be fine. 5 people won it and I was the 6th. (Jie) p.14.(talking about PhD attrition rate)I don't think this is because social sciences are more difficult, but that PhD study is so "independent" that a PhD student must have a strong self-control ability. You must manage you time very well. Many students in social sciences work as they study, and the funding for us is limited, unlike natural science doctoral students, whose job is their study, and they live on their study. They spend the whole day in the lab working or writing papers.
Peng	1) p. 5. I came here as a permanent resident, so I am eligible for government loans. Honestly, I didn't think of reading for a PhD. (When his master's study was close to a finish, one day his supervisor asked if he wanted to stay for PhD). I told him frankly, 'I am very concerned about funding. I cannot make it without financial aid. I cannot afford more debt." And he said he was applying for a grant and would give me financial aid if he got it. ...But unfortunately he didn't. ...Then with some luck, I won the McGill Major in my second year. application
Lan	1) p.3. I didn't have financial aid when I came in, but it's understandable since...the Education Faculty has been like this. I knew at that time that one of my supervisor's students had left for