

Learning in a Different Language: A Multiple Case Study of Chinese
Graduate Students' Classroom Experiences at University of Victoria

By

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B. A. Hebei Normal University, 1994

M.A. Hebei University, 1997

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ABSTRACT:

The purpose of this study is to illuminate and richly describe five Chinese graduate students' learning experiences in subject area classrooms in a Canadian university. Using a case study qualitative inquiry approach, the researcher conducted five individual interviews, one focus group interview and five follow-up interviews on five Chinese graduate students in the Spring 2007. The findings of the current study indicate that the participants encountered difficulty when they were learning in a Canadian university in a second language environment but also they enjoyed support at the same time. Different strategies that Chinese students employed to deal with the course work were reported. The findings also indicate that instructors played a major role in their learning process. When the instructors valued students' input and selected topics where Chinese students could contribute, students were eager to participate in classroom activities. Discussions and implications are included for both teachers and students in the field of second language learning and teaching and for university administration. In the Canadian classroom, there is a need to address professional development to prepare the instructors in understanding learning experiences of second language learners.

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I was a lecturer teaching English for undergraduate students for eight years in a prestigious Chinese university before I came to Canada. I always had the dream of studying in an English speaking country as I studied English for 14 years in the school with a Bachelor's and Master's degree in English literature. I earned a TOEFL score of 643 (possible total score is 677) and on my writing test (Test of Writing English) I scored five. The highest score in TWE is six. According to Educational Testing Service (ETS), a writing score of five indicates that an essay at this level may address some parts of the task more effectively than others, is generally well organized and developed, uses details to support a thesis or illustrate an idea, displays facility in the use of the language and demonstrates some syntactic variety and range of vocabulary (ETS, Writing scoring guide, 2007). I had confidence that I was prepared to learn in a North American classroom before I came to Canada.

However, when I arrived at Canada and attended my first graduate class, I found it was difficult for me to understand the instructor's lecture. Worse, as a graduate student I was supposed to participate in the classroom discussion, which I found even more difficult. I had difficulty following what my classmates said, and therefore could not effectively participate in the discussion. Even when I understood, as a non-native English speaker, it would take time to phrase my thoughts before I spoke, especially in the formal setting of classroom and with the academic vocabulary and content. Quite often, the topics changed before I had a chance to contribute my ideas. With my cultural

background, I felt it was impolite to drag the attention of other people back to my idea. Back in China, I did not anticipate these difficulties of learning in a second language in my graduate classes.

Although I am more used to the new culture and new ways of learning now, I always have that feeling of learning in a different language, in a different world. I found that the English I learned in China and the English I taught in China are different from English needed to succeed in the Canadian university classroom. Not only that, but approaches to learning in Canadian university classrooms are very different to those in China.

Increasing Population of Chinese Students In Canada

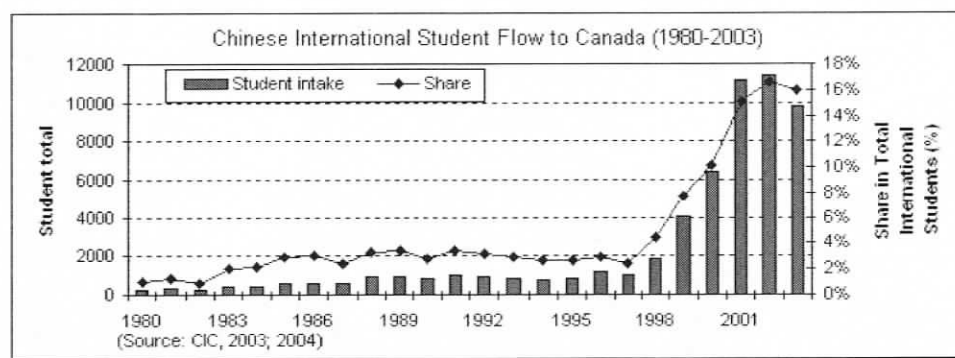
More and more Chinese students come to Canada to further their studies. On January 15, 2007, the Vice Minister of Ministry of Education of Peoples' Republic of China, Qidi Wu, signed a memo with the chairman of Canadian National Research Council Committee to co-sponsor 20 Chinese PhD students or postdoctoral researchers every year to conduct research in Canada (Advanced Ministry of Education of Peoples' Republic of China, 2007). This document indicates that there is growing collaboration in the field of higher education between Canada and People's Republic of China. Such research will be helpful for the universities in Western countries. Canada has established a number of Canadian Education Centres (CECs) in 17 countries in order to promote study in Canada, including leading source countries such as China and Hong Kong (Priorities, Planning and Research Branch, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2003).

When they attract international students to diversify the learning environment, it is also quite important for them to have first hand information for the international students' learning experiences. The current study is especially timely as University of Victoria president, David Turpin and Chinese Education Minister, Zhou Ji signed an agreement on May 8, 2007 making the University of Victoria the first B.C. university (only the second in Canada) to receive preferred status from the China Scholarship Council (University of Victoria, Memo, 2007).

In recent years, Canada has experienced unprecedented growth in the number of foreign students. At the end of 2001, there were over 130,000 foreign students in Canada. One of the principal source areas for foreign students is increasingly concentrated in the East Asian region, including China and Hong Kong. In 2001, these countries accounted for 43 percent of foreign students studying in Canada. Among top source countries, student numbers from China have grown at the fastest rate in recent years. In 2001, Chinese students numbered 20,160 – an increase of nearly ten-fold over 1997 (Priorities, Planning and Research Branch, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2003). In British Columbia, for first time in 2001, there were more foreign students choosing British Columbia as a destination than Ontario, reflecting a shift in the choice of East Asian students. There were 6,987 Chinese students studying in British Columbia in 2001. University of Victoria welcomes 1,300-1,500 international students every year plus 130-150 exchange students.

The following chart indicates the Chinese international student flow to Canada

(Asian Pacific Bulletin, 2007). Over the past twenty years, there has been a dramatic increase of Chinese international student who came to Canada to further their studies. This dramatic increase is due to the rapid economic development of P.R. China. Chinese students can afford to go abroad to study, which was impossible or very difficult before. Another reason for the increase is that Canadian educational institutes are internationalizing their programs to recruit more international students.



Problem Statement

Many studies on the learning patterns of minority students indicate that quietness and withdrawal are typical of Asian students (Caplan, Choy, & Whitmore, 1991; Ogbu, 1987; Trueba, 1990). First, there is a very long transitioning period for Chinese students to become proficient enough in English to succeed fully in university classes. Foreign language learning does not fully develop even after a few years of language study (Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982; Glazer, & Cummins, 1985; Wang, Martin, & Martin, 2002). However, when Chinese students enter North American graduate programs, they are expected to unconsciously produce the language in the classroom settings.

Second, cultural factors such as attitudes, beliefs, behaviours and prior educational experiences are also important factors in the classroom experiences of Chinese graduate students. Researchers pointed out that Asian students' silence is due to their culture (Caplan, Choy, & Whitmore, 1991; Ogbu 1987; Trueba 1990). Fu (1995) in her book "*My trouble is my English*"---*Asian students and the American Dream* expresses her own experiences as a Chinese student. Chinese culture stresses listening more than speaking as being modest is considered a virtue. Chinese culture especially emphasizes the virtue of keeping quiet before authorities to show respect and obedience. As Fu points out, it is a problem for Chinese students in North American classrooms, which are oriented students toward critical thinking.

Statement of Purpose

While there is a large research base about teaching English language learners in the public school system from kindergarten to grade 12, there is a gap in the literature on graduate level English as Second Language (ESL) students' classroom experiences in North American universities. This study uses multiple case studies to explore the experiences of five Chinese graduate students' experiences in classroom settings and to identify issues that are relevant to research and pedagogical practice in this field. The study explores Chinese graduate students' classroom learning experiences at University of Victoria focusing on (a) the use of language in Canada in university classroom settings, (b) the factors that influence their classroom learning experiences including cultural factors and role of instructors in the classroom, (c) the process of Chinese

students reshaping themselves in order to integrate into Canadian academic classroom setting, and (d) experiences of foreign language anxiety.

Research Questions

Creswell (1994) points out that qualitative research questions are open-ended, evolving, and non-directional. They restate the purpose of the study in more specific terms. Specifically, the primary research question for this study is, “What are the learning experiences of Chinese graduate students in classroom settings at University of Victoria?”

This research question will be addressed in detail through the following four sub questions:

1. What are Chinese graduate students' approaches to learning in the subject area classroom in Canada?
2. What, if any, are the responses and coping strategies that the students employ to deal with the demands of learning in a subject area classroom?
3. What are Chinese graduate students' experiences with instructors? How does instructors' instructional approach facilitate or hinder Chinese graduate students' learning?
4. What, if any, are the components and nature of foreign language anxiety identified in Chinese graduate students?

To provide a tentative framework for exploring this question, I developed an

expanded, three part definition of “learning experiences”: characteristics of second language classrooms, cultural influences on learning approaches and instructors’ role in the classroom.

I employed a multiple case study approach. Case study is designed to address a complex issue or problem and is intended to generate in-depth understanding. For this investigation, the case study is a collective one of five Chinese graduate students (Creswell, 1997). The context of the cases in this study is a single campus, the University of Victoria. Therefore, the current study is a within-site multiple case study.

Definition of Terms

EFL students: The term refers to students who learn English-as-a-foreign-language in their home country. In this study, despite the fact that they are currently studying in Canada, Chinese graduate students are referred to as EFL students since they learned English in China and here in Canada they are learning a subject area.

ESL students: The term refers to the students who acquire English as a second language in an English speaking country such as Canada.

Foreign Language Learning (FLL): This term refers to “the learning of a nonnative language in the environment of one’s native language” (Gass, & Selinker, 2001, p.5). Chinese graduate students in this study fall in this category when they learn English in China. Although they learn English in the classroom, their home and social environment is Chinese.

Second language acquisition: Gass and Selinker (2001) define the term as “the learning of a nonnative language in the environment in which that language is spoken” (p.5). It applies to Chinese graduate students who come to Canada to study. They are exposed to an English environment both in class and after class.

Foreign language anxiety: Foreign language anxiety is conceptualized by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning processes” (p. 128).

TOEFL test: The Test of English-as-a-Foreign-Language (TOEFL) is a standardized English test to evaluate the English proficiency of a person whose native language is not English. The TOEFL test measures the ability of non-native speakers of English to use and understand English as it is spoken, written, and heard in college and university settings. The TOEFL is administrated by the Educational Testing Center (ETC) and according to ETC, “More than 300,000 people register each year to take the computer-based TOEFL test. The scores are required for purposes of admission by more than 2,400 colleges and universities in the United States and Canada. TOEFL is also used by institutions in other countries where English is the language of instruction” (TOEFL info, 2007, p.1).

Chapter Two Literature Review

For at least the past three decades, studies about English as a second language students' (ESL) learning experiences in subject area studies have been conducted on various aspects of the issue including, for example, correlations between Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) score and academic grade point average (GPA), classroom participation, choices of disciplines, cultural influence as well as instructors' influence on students' performance (Caplan, Choy, & Whitmore, 1991; Fu, 1995; Ginsberg, 1992; Jin, & Cortazzi, 2006; McMeekin, 2006; Ogbu, 1987; Park, & Raymond, 2004; Spack, 1997; Townsend, & Fu, 1998; Trueba, 1990; Wang, Martin, & Martin, 2002; Zamel, 1995). Chinese students as ESL students are among the largest groups in terms of numbers of students studying abroad as well as being one of the biggest potential international educational markets, yet until recently, their educational background, cultural background and ways of learning were not familiar to most Western instructors (Jin, & Cortazzi, 2006). Canadian universities have to face the question of how to provide successful educational experiences for them, given the apparent differences between North American and Chinese approaches to learning. Stoyhoff (1997) finds that many factors, such as English language proficiency, learning social and affective strategies, instructors' facilitation and cultural background play an important role in ESL students' academic success.

This chapter elaborates the importance of the current project and offers a literature review on factors related to Chinese graduate students' learning experiences in

the North American classroom setting.

Importance of Project

Exploration of Chinese graduate students' learning experiences in a subject area classroom is particularly needed and timely for several reasons. With the number of Chinese immigrants to North America growing, Chinese is the single largest group of Asians in Canada (Li, 2004). Ogbu (1987) points out that at the national level in the United States, Asian-American students did better than other language and cultural minorities on the SAT Reasoning Test administered by the Educational Testing Service in 1980-81. This stereotypical image of the scholarly Chinese students denies the reality of their learning experiences and needs to be challenged. In fact, Chinese graduate students need to apply the English they learned in China to the North America classroom immediately after their arrival, however, we know that there is a very long period between consciously applying the learned knowledge of a language and producing it unconsciously (Vygotsky, 1962) in a way which will lead to maximum success in the classroom. During the transition period, it is important for classroom teachers to know how to best serve them and help them. Chinese graduate students, increasing in number in Canada, require special attention.

With the large number of international students in Canada, the university classroom dynamic is changing. Both faculty members' methods of instruction and subject content play an important role in the process of shaping Chinese graduate students' learning experiences. This study addresses the issue by exploring Chinese

graduate students' learning experiences at University of Victoria.

The concept of foreign language anxiety is also addressed in this study. Many researchers believe that anxiety plays a significant role in foreign language learning (e.g., Aida, 1994; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Sellers, 2000; Young, 1990). The concept of foreign language anxiety and its possible manifestations on Chinese graduate students' learning experiences in Canadian classroom is discussed.

In addition, culture always influences people's way of thinking and learning. Chinese students possess different communication styles, interaction styles and learning styles than Western students. Cultural difference often silences their voices in the classroom and influences their learning experiences (Zamel, 1995). This study also provides insights on the cultural influences on Chinese graduate students' learning experiences.

Findings from this research will have practical applications. They will add to understanding of Chinese graduate students' learning experience in subject area classroom in a Canadian university. Building on the current study of other students' experiences, newcomers will be better prepared for academic success. Instructors and administrators can better facilitate and serve Chinese graduate students' learning process. The findings may also spur further research.

Literature Review

In order to better understand the complexities of Chinese graduate students' learning, it is necessary to examine a number of different topics including: learning in

subject area classroom using a second language, cultural influence on classroom learning experiences and differences between the instructors' role in Chinese and Western classroom settings.

Learning in Subject Area Classroom Using a Second Language

Learning in a subject area classroom using a second language has its own characteristics. In the current study, this characteristic is related to foreign language learning and Chinese students' English learning characteristics (Jin, et. al., 2006; Parry, & Su, 1998; Richards, & Rodgers, 2001; Spack, 1997; Xu, 2001; Vygotsky, 1997; Wang, Martin, & Martin, 2002). The major goal of this section is to identify these characteristics, such as foreign language learning characteristics, Chinese students' English learning characteristics and factors hindering studying subject area in classroom using a second language, foreign language anxiety and present their relationships to Chinese graduate students' learning experiences in a Canadian university.

Foreign Language Learning Characteristics

Vygotsky (1997) maintains that foreign language learning has unique characteristics. The development of speech and speech forms are different from native language learning development. This characteristic inevitably influences classroom participation for ESL students.

Different development of speech and speech form. Vygotsky (1997) compares the difference between first language learning and second language acquisition by saying that the development of the native language begins with the free and spontaneous

use of speech and ends with conscious awareness and mastery of the speech form. In contrast, the development of a foreign language begins with conscious awareness and volitional mastery of language and culminates in free, spontaneous speech. The two “developmental processes move in opposite directions” (p. 221).

Foreign language learning influence on classroom participation. The characteristics of foreign language learning influence classroom participation because the difference of learning a second language compared to learning a first language is that first language learners can speak their language fluently. When they go to school, they learn how to read and write. For foreign language learning, however, the foreign language learners consciously start from the basic vocabulary, grammar and then try to produce free, spontaneous oral speech with the language they mastered (Vygotsky, 1962).

Foreign language learners may know basic speech forms, however, it takes a while for learners to produce free, spontaneous speech with the knowledge they mastered about the language. In Western classroom settings using a second language, communication is essential in classroom participation. Students tend to avoid classroom participation if they have difficulty communicating orally in the target language.

Chinese Students' English Learning Characteristics

Chinese students' English learning has unique characteristics in the following three aspects: learning environment, purpose of learning English, and large classroom size. All these factors have an enormous impact on English learning.

Learning environment. Chinese students learn English in a foreign language environment. Taylor (1987) purports that to learn to use a language; it would be beneficial if the students can learn in an authentic communication environment. In the case of Chinese graduate students, it is a different situation. English instruction during their schooling in China is limited to textbooks and is based on the Grammar Translation Method (Bayliss, & Raymond, 2004). Language teaching of translation-grammar is predominantly used in China for the purpose of helping the students pass different forms of exams. Grammar is taught deductively and with little or no systematic attention paid to speaking and listening. Also, because teachers and students use the same first language, the teacher tends to teach English through the medium of Chinese (Richards, & Rodgers, 2001).

For spoken English, “English corner” is popular in most of the universities. It is a weekly, informal gathering to practice spoken English. Students try to create an English only environment. The relative anonymity for participants also encourages students to speak English, which they are reluctant to do among classmates. More recently, students make use of Internet chat rooms to converse with English speakers. This practice is more popular in big city universities where it is relatively easy to have access to the Internet. However, the problem is that with the emphasis on passing written exams in English learning in China, a lot of students do not put oral communication in English as a priority for English learning.

Equipped with the English they learnt in China and with the English learning

environment in China, when Chinese graduate students go to North America and have to learn in a subject area classroom environment, they face great challenges in applying and producing “free, spontaneous speech” with their limited language proficiency.

Goal of learning. In China, part of the goal of learning English is to pass all kinds of exams. If students want to go to college, they have to pass the college entrance exams with English as the major subject. An undergraduate student has to pass College English Test (CET)-Band 4 national level English test to get a Bachelor degree. Those students who want to go abroad to further their study have to take the Test Of English as a Foreign Language. All these tests emphasize vocabulary, grammar, reading and writing (no speaking test is involved at all). At the university level, teachers, books and memorizing still dominate the university classroom (Jin, et al. 2006). Translation and grammar teaching pedagogy is a method which emphasizes that the goal of learning a foreign language is to read its literature. This approach focuses on reading and writing. Passing exams in English is required to complete senior middle school, enter and graduate from college and university. Students are eager to learn English to pass Band 4 exams in order to graduate from university. Learning English in China is essential to further a student’s opportunity to study. Therefore students show high motivation and enthusiasm. Students memorize long lists of vocabulary for every unit in their textbook. For the students to approach a new lesson, the first step is usually to learn the new words list. Students also recite exemplary textbook paragraphs word by word.

Hymes (1982) asserts that communicative competence is the ability to use the

language, which is both linguistically accurate and socially appropriate. The communicative competence theory suggests that language use and effective communication is in the social and cultural contexts in which the language is used, which makes it more difficult for foreign language learners. The goal of English learning in China is not related to the goal of being communicatively competent. However, when the students go to North American classrooms, they have to communicate effectively with their peers and instructors.

Large class size. In China, the lack of instructors leads to large class sizes. Since the late 1970s, learning English has boomed due to the open door policy. On the other hand, those people who were trained as English teachers in the early 1980s have either gone abroad or engaged themselves in business enterprise since China has become open to the outside world. However, a large population of English learners, over 90 percent of all the college students, are taking English as a compulsory course. Most of the students have to meet the minimum requirement of passing the nation-wide College English Test Band 4 (CET4) to be Bachelor's degree holders. Therefore, college students have to learn English in large classes, where they "sit in straight rows facing the teacher, the teacher does most of the talking, and where students and teacher share a common first language, the talking tends not to be in English" (Parry, 1998, p. 298).

There used to be much resistance to the teaching of English in large classes in most of the Chinese universities. Many universities would take many other measures rather than enlarging class sizes. For example, they recruited graduate students to teach

undergraduate students. During my own graduate study in China, I also taught English to undergraduate students at the same university. The recent rapid expansion in Chinese higher education---from 6 million students in 1999 to over 20 million in 2004---has posed great challenges for English teaching (Jin et al. 2006). Currently, enrolling more students and offering more Masters and Doctoral level degree programs are the markers of the academic status and quality of the university. However, low staff-student ratios are difficult to maintain. The result is that universities now increase the classroom size to 60-150 students in each EFL class subsequently: the possibility of teacher-student interaction is slim (Jin, et al. 2006; Xu, 2001).

Factors Hindering Studying Subject Area in Classroom Using a Second Language

Once students arrive in Canada and begin studying in a subject area, two influential factors hinder effective learning in the classroom. First is the speaking speed of native speakers, and second is the poor pronunciation of the ESL students.

Speaking speed. Although university instructors and native speaker students tend to use Standard English, due to a more formal style and the speed at which they speak, it is still difficult for the second language learner to follow. One ESL participant in a study (Spack, 1997) says, "people just speak so fast that I have to concentrate very hard to follow what they are saying, and others speak with accents that I haven't gotten used to" (p.13). Before this participant began to learn in a university subject area classroom, she had experience as an exchange student for a year in the United States. Even with such previous experiences living and studying in the States, she still found it

difficult to understand native speakers.

Poor pronunciation. During classroom discussions, ESL students often pronounce words in ways that are difficult for other people to understand (Spack, 1997). Wang, Martin, and Martin (2002) discuss a Chinese graduate student studying in the United States. Yang had limited English proficiency and had problems in reading, listening and speaking. She frequently used words differently than did native English speakers. She struggled to find the correct word or phrase when participating in class discussions. Because her pronunciation was so difficult for other people to understand, she often held back and did not participate in class activities.

To summarize, since learning English in a foreign language environment in China, (not an authentic communication environment, with the purpose of learning to pass exams instead of communicating), Chinese graduate students are significantly challenged when they come to learn in a Canadian university classroom setting. In classroom settings, studies indicate that students have a hard time following the rapidity of native speaker speech. They also have poor pronunciation that is difficult for native speakers to follow. The result is that in the classroom setting, Chinese students tend to withdraw from participating in activities which involve oral language.

Foreign Language Anxiety

The success of learning in a second language classroom is based upon successful foreign language learning (FLL). Successful learning through reading, writing, speaking, and listening is related to several factors: language learning

approaches, language learning environment, and the instructors' incorporation of students into the classroom. Many researchers have found that anxiety plays a significant role in foreign language learning (e.g., Aida, 1994; Horwitz, & Cope, 1991; MacIntyre, & Gardner, 1991a; Sellers, 2000; Wen, & Clement, 2003; Young, 1990). Educators and researchers notice that many people who are good learners in other situations and who have strong motivation for learning the target language still fail to achieve the goal of learning a foreign language: "Teachers and students generally feel strongly that anxiety is a major obstacle to be overcome in learning to speak another language" (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986, p.125). Foreign language anxiety is conceptualized by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning processes" (p. 128). They integrated three aspects of anxiety into their construct; that is, communication apprehension (CA), test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. Manifestations of communication apprehension include two aspects: one is difficulty in speaking in groups or/and in public, and the other is difficulty in listening to or learning a spoken message (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986).

In the foreign language classroom, students tend to experience communication apprehension. The foreign language class requires students to communicate in a language in which they have only limited ability and in which they have a hard time understanding other people and making themselves understood by other people.

Students tend to experience a fear of negative evaluation as well since foreign language learning requires constant evaluation from the teacher. Students may think they are constantly evaluated by their peers as well (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986).

Of all the skills of foreign language learning, speaking provokes the most anxiety. However, in the North American classroom, participation in classroom discussion and group study is highly valued. Some studies take a different approach by looking at the students' perspectives on anxiety and speaking and found that participants with high anxiety are afraid to speak in foreign language class (Young, 1990). Young (1990) also argued that speaking in a foreign language is not exclusively the source of student anxiety, but that speaking in front of the class is.

Mak's (1997) work investigated communication apprehension, a component of foreign language anxiety, among Chinese ESL learners and suggested that the language distance between Chinese and English contributed strongly to communication apprehension among these ESL students. He did both quantitative and qualitative research through the use of interviews, questionnaires, ranking exercises and classroom sessions. Based on the results from the ranking exercise, research indicated that the language differences between Chinese and English are the main sources of CA for Chinese ESL students. Mak also found that "the learning of a non-cognate language gives rise to anxiety on the part of the student" (p. 93) and "language distance then is an important element in any study of language learning anxiety or CA" (p.95). In the theoretical concept of foreign language anxiety, Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986)

integrated three aspects of foreign language anxiety in their study; communication apprehension is the form of foreign language anxiety related to speaking skills: as Horwitz (2001) reminds us "Foreign language anxiety has been almost entirely associated with the oral aspects of language use" (p. 120). Horwitz found that subjects with high anxiety are "afraid to speak in foreign language class" (p. 129).

Speaking Provokes the Greatest Anxiety. In the four skills areas of foreign language learning---listening, speaking, reading and writing---speaking produces the greatest amount of anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; Young, 1992). Clinicians' experience with foreign language students in university classes and at the Learning Skills Center at the University of Texas also suggested that there are discrete problems caused by anxiety: "principally, counselors find that anxiety centers on the two basic task requirements of foreign language learning: listening and speaking. Difficulty speaking in class is probably the most frequently cited concern of the anxious foreign language students' seeking help at the Learning Skills Center" (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 126). In the foreign language classroom, it is especially anxiety provoking because the students' performance is monitored by instructors and peers all the time and speaking in a foreign language is never as easy as their native language: "people who typically have trouble speaking in groups are likely to experience even greater difficulty speaking in a foreign language class where they have little control of the communicative situation and their performance is constantly monitored" (Horwitz et al, 1986, p. 127).

Language specialists also share the view that speaking provokes the most anxiety.

Young (1992) interviewed the famous language educators and researchers Krashen, Hadley, Terrell, and Rardin. He did a thorough examination of the attitudes towards language anxiety from the language specialists' perspective. The specialists shared their views on foreign and second language teaching and theory as well as offered insights into the theoretical and practical issues of language anxiety. As for language speaking anxiety, Krashen thought that "speaking is particularly anxiety-provoking" (p.163) in all four skill areas. Hadley also shared the same opinion, "I think speaking probably makes people the most nervous because there's the most at stake: not only do you have to create your own utterances but most students feel they have to pronounce them properly" (p.163). Terrell said: "Oh, speaking, absolutely." Terrell mentioned the research a student of his had done on the Natural approach in the interview. Although the teachers did not correct students' mistakes and encouraged students to say whatever they wanted to say, students still reported relatively high anxiety levels for speaking in front of the class. Rardin, however, suggested that any of the four skills can create anxiety in learners. Their perspectives have offered insights for a growing field of research in language anxiety.

Empirical Studies on Foreign Language Anxiety and Speaking Performance. The relationship between different Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety groups and their speaking performance has also been investigated by researchers. The findings of the study conducted by Ganschow and Sparks (1996) indicated that the most noteworthy difference between high-anxious, average-anxious, and low-anxious groups of the

students lay in the tasks measuring phonological/orthographic skills. In their study, low-anxious students were statistically significantly better than high-anxious on all three instruments related to native language speaking ability and foreign language aptitude. They found that the students with low-anxiety levels have basic native language aptitude for learning a foreign language. Within the native language aptitude, the phonological/orthographic tasks are the most noteworthy difference between the anxiety level groups. The earlier research of Ganschow and Sparks (1994) indicated that phonological/orthographic tasks could distinguish the more able foreign language learners from the less able ones. The skills of representing unfamiliar phonological sounds and memorizing are stressed by researchers on the process of foreign language acquisition.

Philips (1992) conducted research to investigate the effect of students' anxiety on oral tests in French. In his research, he used Horwitz's Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) as measurement and then selected the most anxious students. The result of the research indicated foreign language anxiety level significantly influenced oral performance in a negative way. He found out that highly anxious students tend to say less and produce shorter communication units than the students with lower anxiety.

To sum up, previous research indicates that foreign language anxiety level negatively influences oral performance. ESL students experience speaking anxiety in their foreign language learning process.

The studies above confirm common problems that ESL students face in North American universities. ESL learners have difficulty integrating into the Canadian university classroom because of several factors: their on-going process of foreign language acquisition, their different cultural backgrounds and learning approaches, the role of their instructors in the second language classroom and their experience of foreign language anxiety.

Cultural Influence on Classroom Learning Experience

The process of learning cannot be divorced from the cultural contexts (Freire, 1970). In this section, the influence of Chinese culture on interpersonal communication style and on classroom participation as well as written assignments are presented.

Chinese Culture

Culture is defined as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another” (Hofstede, 1997, p. 260). Cultural differences manifest themselves in several ways. Hofstede names four dimensions of culture: power distance, collectivism versus individualism, femininity versus masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance (from weak to strong). Power distance refers to the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations expect and accept that power is distributed unequally. Individualism is contrasted with collectivism, and refers to the extent to which people are expected to stand up for themselves, or alternatively act predominantly as a member of a group. Masculine cultures value competitiveness, assertiveness, ambition, and the accumulation of wealth

and material possessions, whereas feminine cultures place more value on relationships and quality of life. Uncertainty avoidance reflects the extent to which a society attempts to cope with anxiety by minimizing uncertainty.

Chinese people embrace a wide range of social and individual diversity even within Mainland China. Chinese as a population group “characterizes a range of ethnic backgrounds (including the 55 officially recognized national minorities in China) yet share a relatively homogenous linguistic and cultural heritage which is held to be common though it is known to embrace diversity” (Jin et al. 2006, p. 9). The findings in Hofstede’s study indicate that Chinese culture as reflected by subjects from Hong Kong and Taiwan is characterized by low individualism, large power distance, strong uncertainty avoidance, femininity, and long-term orientation. According to Hofstede, cultural differences are reflected in the family, school and workplace. In school settings, the difference affects relationships between teacher and students, among students, and between teachers and parents. Hofstede thinks that Chinese culture influences students’ school learning in the following ways:

1. Large power distance determines that teachers are treated with respect; the education process is teacher-centered. Students can speak in classroom only with special permission from the teacher; otherwise, it is impolite to the teachers. Students cannot openly contradict teachers.
2. In a collective culture students will hesitate to speak up in larger groups. The virtues of harmony and the maintenance of “face” reign

supreme. Confrontations and conflicts will be avoided.

3. Femininity culture determines students' participation in the classroom. Different from masculinity culture, femininity culture students do not want to be visible in the classroom.
4. Uncertainty avoidance leads to the expectation that teachers are experts in the school and have all the answers. Strong uncertainty avoidance cultures foster a belief in the absolute truth of the knowledge that students receive from teachers instead of encouraging the exploration of different answers.

Ginsberg (1992) argues that the problems of Chinese students studying in Australian universities are not primarily linguistic problems; instead, they are challenged by the problem of coping with different forms of thinking and learning.

Chinese Interpersonal Communication Styles

Chinese culture determines Chinese interpersonal communication styles. Chen and Starosta (1996) define the interculturally competent person as one who has the ability to negotiate cultural meaning and employ proper and effective communication behaviours that recognize each person's multiple identities in different environments. Chinese students' classroom experiences will inevitably be influenced by their interpersonal communication styles. These styles are influenced by their past educational experiences, their family, school and larger society. Some common values and rules influence communication styles in daily life. One important philosophy,

Confucianism, is a philosophy that has influenced China for many years. In the philosophy of Confucianism, the proper human relationship is protection of face, dignity, self-respect, reputation, honour and prestige (FitzGerald, 2002; Yum, 2000). The collective notion governing interaction and communication emphasizes the value of harmony within group and respect for authority. This means that during a classroom discussion, harmony instead of argument is valued and respect for the classroom instructor is expected.

Another characteristic of Chinese interpersonal communication style is typically what Hall (1976) described as a high context communication pattern. Implicit communication is important rather than clear verbal transmission. The receiver interprets the speakers' intent without the speaker making direct reference to what she/he means. Implicit communication is listening-centered. Therefore, it is respectful to maintain silence during the conversation in the classroom setting. Silence is a virtue to emphasize listening.

Group discussion so common in Western classrooms would be something new to Chinese students' learning experiences. They are used to learning from the teachers rather than from peers. In Canadian classroom settings, Chinese students must learn how to understand a different culture and employ Western culturally appropriate communication strategies.

Chinese Culture Influences English Learning

In Chinese culture, a high value is placed on education. There is a strong belief

that academic success is due to effort and willpower, not differing ability (Lee, 1996). A culture of learning (Jin et al, 2006) is a taken-for-granted framework of expectations, attitudes, values and beliefs about how to learn successfully and about how to use talk in interaction, among other aspects of learning. A culture of learning frames what students expect to happen in the classroom; how students interpret classroom instruction, the language of teaching and learning; and how interaction can be accomplished in the classroom setting. It is a mutual understanding. Chinese students interpret Western instructors' behaviours through a Chinese interpretive system.

Chinese cultural influence on classroom participation. Many studies on the learning patterns of minority students indicate that quietness and withdrawal are typical Asian student behaviours (Caplan, Choy, & Whitmore, 1991; Ogbu, 1987; Trueba, 1990). Fu (1995) in her book "*My trouble is my English*"---*Asian students and the American Dream* describes her own experiences as a Chinese graduate student. She maintains that the reason for quietness in classroom is due to Chinese culture, which stresses listening more than speaking as being modest is considered a virtue. Chinese culture especially emphasizes the virtue of keeping quiet before authorities to show respect and obedience. She points out it is a problem in North American classroom as it is student centered and critical thinking oriented. Fu attributes the quietness in the classroom to other reasons as well. First, students are uncomfortable with the new culture and need to listen to learn and to observe new things. Second, second language learners need more time to organize their language to speak; however, it takes time to do

that and classroom conversations change topic fairly rapidly. Third, Chinese people are educated to make 100 percent sure that what they are going to say is correct, otherwise it is proper to keep quiet.

Ginsberg (1992) points out that students in China are quiet in class, anxious about listening to what the professors say, pleased to take notes and eager to satisfy their professor's requirements. In the classroom in China, the instructor is the authority. Spack (1997) argues that students from a different cultural background will find themselves out of step in the independent and creative learning environment of American education. The Japanese participant, for example, finds that "being reserved is not something respectable. And I had hard time (and still have) making myself speak up, and sometimes I feel that I'm being too superficial to say everything I feel or think" (Spack, 1997, p. 14).

Chinese communication emphasizes the importance of role and politeness. Teachers and peers are respected (Gao, & Ting-Toomey, 1998). Rulon and McCreary (1986) and Pica (1992) cite students' concern for face that reduces the interactions with peers and instructors in the classroom, mainly because students do not want to embarrass themselves by asking the instructor for clarification when they do not understand something clearly. Parks and Raymond (2004) also document that Chinese students, who want to participate more in classroom are hindered by their concern over the appropriateness of their actions. It is face saving to avoid awkward interaction with native speakers which might make them appear as incompetent.

Chinese culture influence on written assignments. Culture also influences the classroom writing assignment. Townsend and Fu (1998) conducted a study on 13 Chinese graduate students to investigate how they approached writing tasks. The researchers hoped to provide teachers with insight into the cultural assumptions and values that lay behind students' writing. The researchers found that there is a different way of writing and a different standard of good writing in these two academic cultures. A good writer in Chinese does not mean one who has the ability to clearly express the ideas. Rather, good writers emphasize the language forms more than anything else in their Chinese writing. They also found that Chinese graduate students felt frustrated by learning to write in English. From the Chinese graduate students' perspective, the most important thing in writing is to display artistic ability. When they learn to write in English in China, they translated their Chinese way of writing into English. They were trained to write from models, and to memorize phrases and classic poetic lines in their native language. When they transfer these skills into English writing in Western classrooms, they are not successful. Chinese students felt confused when they wrote for classroom assignments.

Ginsberg (1992) argues that students from different cultures bring different purposes to thinking, and different approaches to reading and writing an essay. Different cultural styles of thinking and reasoning lead to different writing styles. In Chinese composition, information related to the major point may come indirectly. Chinese students may "use a background-before-main-point presentation of ideas" (Jin et. Al,

2006, p. 18), but this inductive pattern can be misunderstood by Canadian teachers when they could not find the main ideas where they expect them. The instructor in Canadian universities will judge the assignment according to Canadian academic writing criteria and find that it is hard to judge the students' assignment without the writer's opinion expressed in the composition. However, the Chinese way of writing is that it is not right to challenge other people's opinions.

Ginsberg (1992) also points out the most serious problem in writing assignments lies in the different concepts of plagiarism. In Chinese and Japanese culture, it is a compliment to the writer to use their words in your own work, and it is expected that the reader can find out the sources by himself/herself to indicate that both the reader and the writer is knowledgeable, instead of the writer letting the reader know where the origins of certain parts of the writing. In the Confucian heritage, "sources did not need to be mentioned, even in anthologies---it is assumed that they would be recognized by educated readers" (Jin, et al, 2006, p. 19). However, such products are defined as plagiarism in Western cultures. Conflicting ideas about individual authorship, origination and originality, ownership and plagiarism are challenges for Chinese students working in Western classrooms.

In summary, Chinese culture determines Chinese students' interpersonal communication styles. It also influences their approach to learning, classroom participation, and written assignments.

Differences between Instructors' Roles in Chinese and in Canadian Classroom Setting

Jones (2004) maintains that although linguistic and cultural differences are important, the way in which a subject is presented to students has a profound impact on learning. Teaching pedagogy inevitably influences the classroom learning experience. This section will focus on the differing roles of instructors in Chinese and Canadian classroom settings.

Chinese Instructors' Role in Classroom

The Chinese teacher is a model of authoritative learning, an expert, a knowledgeable moral person who has answers to the learners' questions. Teachers also demonstrate how they learn and make a model for students (Jin, et al, 2006). Therefore, in the Chinese classroom, the predominant role for students is to listen and watch carefully and make a strong effort to learn and remember. In China, it is called "Peking Duck Stuffing way of teaching", it is like filling Peking duck with food, and the students try to absorb the knowledge the teacher is teaching.

Jin and Cortazzi (2006) also points out that in China, the teacher decides the knowledge and students are not expected to challenge their teachers. The students accept and learn the knowledge the teacher teaches. The teacher has the authority to lead the students into the learning process. Chinese students tend to relate to their teachers with respect. They have great humility. If in the classroom, students speak out to answer questions or question the teachers without first getting approval from the instructors, a Chinese teacher would find them to be impolite and lacking in respect. Such behaviours

would also be interpreted as an attack on the teachers' competence. Observation, memorization and replication of the teachers' lecture are the ways of learning. The Chinese students usually work diligently to learn what the instructor teaches in class unquestioningly.

Spack (1997) conducted a study on the difference between Japanese and American education systems, which caused difficulties for Japanese students to learn in a second language environment. This reflects the situation in the Chinese education system. In Japan instructors will lecture for 50 minutes at a time. In some Japanese university classes, there are over 100 students in the same classroom and the instructors use a microphone to teach. These practices occur in China as well. As previously discussed, Spack (1997) maintains that a student who learned in such situations would have difficulty adapting to many North American classrooms.

Instructors' Role in Facilitating Students Learning in Western Classroom

Bailey and Pransky (2005) argue that there is no such a thing as a culturally neutral classroom. Culturally and linguistically diverse students are disadvantaged if the instructors do not build on the diverse orientations they bring to the process of learning (Hollins, 1996).

Instructors' role in the Western classroom. Ginsberg (1992) maintains that in Australian universities, lecturers may adopt a more casual, informal style of lecturing. Students are encouraged to question and challenge as well as argue with their instructors. What happens in Australian university classrooms reflects Canadian classroom

situations as well. Townsend and Fu (1998) suggest that interaction among students and teachers is crucial to language learning of non-native English speaker students in the second language classroom. Studies also indicated that students benefit greatly from ample opportunities to interact with instructors and peers. The students' comprehension level will increase with interaction and negotiation of meaning (Gass, & Varonis, 1994; Pica, 1992).

Different tasks will influence ESL students' frequency of interaction. The frequency of interactions is affected by different tasks assigned in the classroom setting. In general, studies noted that tasks involving pair or small group work rather than teacher-centered lecture generate student interest. These tasks require students to produce more output (Gass, & Varonis, 1994; Pica, 1992).

Instructors' attitude influence on written assignment. Zamel (1995) presents an instructor who successfully helps an ESL student in writing by persisting in his attempts to focus the student on content issues, to respond to the student seriously and to push him to consider the connections between the writing assignment and classroom reading. In the second language classroom, an instructor's understanding that students need multiple opportunities to adjust to the new learning environment is essential. It makes a difference whether the instructors have the attitude of "I am certainly not in a position to teach English in my class" (Zamel, 1995, p. 509) or, rather, demonstrate tolerance, patience and encouragement to the students who are in the process of adjusting to the new classroom learning experiences. Instructors' expectations for students also influence

their approach to creating written assignments. Harklau (1994) finds that Chinese students are expected to undertake activities that require single word or phrase responses in fill-in-the-blank and short answer formats in secondary mainstream classroom rather than the writing of more extended compositions, which are expected for native speakers. This different written assignment for Chinese students indicate that some instructors have different expectations for written assignments from Chinese students which results in fewer opportunities for Chinese students to practice their writing. Instructors' expectation and attitude can significantly influence classroom written assignments.

Instructor influence on classroom participation. Teachers' way of instructing can greatly affect the classroom environment (Fu, 1995). Teachers can set a more intimate tone for their classes, which is important for the establishment of a positive classroom environment. Parks and Raymond (2004) conducted a longitudinal qualitative study with 18 Chinese students from the People's Republic of China registered in a Master's in Business Administration (MBA) program in a Canadian university. They found that students' perceptions of the professor's attitude significantly influenced their participation in the classroom. Instructors' attitudes and teaching styles encourage the students to participate frequently in class discussion when students think that the professors encouraged their participation. By assuring the students that they were conveying good ideas, in turn, the students will try their best to share their ideas in classroom discussion.

Another instructor's attitude helpful for Chinese students is to be self-effacing

and modest. This will help students to participate in the classroom. For example, a professor, who answers a question on how to make a certain type of slide for PowerPoint, might tell students: "Actually, at the beginning, I do not know how to do it either. It took me one month to do it" (Parks, et al., 2004, p. 243). The instructors' modest attitude helps students release their embarrassment. The instructor downplays his experience and says it took a long time for him to learn something. This attitude lets students feel that it is not intended to embarrass the students when they find it difficult to learn certain things.

Teaching style is another factor which influences students' participation. Parks and Raymond (2004) observe that most of the professors in the MBA program employed a transmission mode of teaching; that is, their teaching is comprised of formal lecture with some opportunities for questions. Chinese students classroom participation in these classes is quite limited. However, when a more socioconstructivist approach to teaching is employed, Chinese students participate more in the classroom. In the classroom where various types of activities are constructed to require students' participation, students can be more involved. Students may also participate more in the classroom when they feel that the professor values their ideas. Young (1990) points out that teachers can ease second language learners' anxiety in speaking in the classroom, and a "relaxed and positive error-correction attitude can greatly reduce language anxiety" (p. 552).

To summarize, instructors' role is different in Chinese and North American classroom setting. North American instructors can influence Chinese students'

classroom participation and written assignments in significant ways.

Research Gap

In the past several decades, much research has been conducted in the field of learning experiences for students who study in a second language environment. Researchers are aware that there are different characteristics in native language and second language acquisition. Instructors play an important role in the process of facilitating students' learning experiences, culture influences learning approaches and classroom experiences, and foreign language anxiety "can interfere with the acquisition, retention and production of the new language" (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991b, p. 86). The findings of researchers indicate that Chinese graduate student's learning experiences in a Canadian classroom may be influenced by the above-mentioned factors.

Some studies have been done on the Chinese students studying English in China as well as ESL students studying overseas. Previous studies have examined communication apprehension among Chinese ESL learners, sources of foreign language anxiety for Chinese students, relationships between foreign language anxiety and language performance in different age groups of learners and the relationship between anxiety and learning difficulties (Bai, 2003; Chen, & Chang, 2004; Li, 2004; Mak, 1997; Xiu, 1998; Yuan, 2003).

In China, learning English is required from middle school to university. Nowadays, Chinese people tend to learn English from kindergarten. Chinese students are the largest population in the world who study English as a foreign language.

According to Jones (2004), the cause of language anxiety in the Asian context hasn't been sufficiently investigated and the Asian group is one of the largest groups that learn English as a foreign language. Still, after so many years of learning, the students have a hard time communicating in English in North American classrooms. However, research conducted specifically on Chinese graduate students' learning experiences when they go abroad to learn in English as second language environments are relatively sparse.

No study has been done to investigate especially classroom learning experiences of Chinese students who have finished their English education in Mainland China and entered into graduate school in Western countries directly; that is, without taking additional English courses. The need to expand the scope of research in this area is imperative as many Chinese students enter English-speaking countries to further their studies.

With their limited resources on communicating in English learnt in China, what are the learning experiences encountered by Chinese graduate students in a subject area classroom environment at University of Victoria?

Chapter Three Methodology

In a qualitative inquiry, initial questions for research often come from real-world observations and dilemmas. They may also emerge from the researcher's direct experience (Marshall, & Rossman, 1995). In the current study the research question emerged from my own present experiences in a Canadian university as a Chinese graduate student as well as my past experiences as a university-level English instructor in China. I used the qualitative research approach of multiple case studies to investigate five Chinese graduate students' classroom learning experiences at the University of Victoria. The purpose of the study was to understand and gain a more in-depth view of classroom learning experiences of Chinese graduate students. The five participants in the current study are Chinese graduate students who finished their college education in People's Republic of China and have come directly to Canada to pursue a Master's or Doctoral degree.

Qualitative data was collected on these students from two individual semi-structured interviews and one focus group interview. After an initial individual interview and a focus group interview, a follow-up interview was conducted to clarify data and to collect more data as well. I employed an inductive analysis approach for data analysis, as this approach can discover overarching themes that emerged from the individual data and from across the participants. Each of these aspects of the method is addressed in detail below.

In the current study, a sociocultural theory was employed to guide the research

design. The most fundamental concept of sociocultural theory is that the human mind is mediated (Lantolf, 2000). The site where social forms of mediation develop is the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky (1978) originally proposed this concept and defined ZPD as the difference between what a person can achieve when acting alone and what the same person can accomplish when acting with support from someone else and /or from cultural artifacts. Some researchers have assumed that the ZPD necessarily involves interaction between an expert and a novice in which the expert eventually transmits an ability to the novice (Wertsch, 1998). In the current study, it refers to the role of instructor in the process of Chinese graduate students learning subject area knowledge using a second language.

More recently, several scholars have called for a broader understanding of the scope of ZPD and include more than just expert/novice interaction (Swain, & Lapkin, 1998). ZPD is then thought of as the collaborative construction of opportunities for individual to develop their mental abilities (Swain, & Lapkin, 1998). Teaching in ZPD implies developing a sensitivity to students' current abilities and their potential development. Also it implies that learning is "developing an ability to engage with or participate in a particular environment, whether it be the classroom or another cultural setting" (Lantolf, 2000, p. 25). The learners, with support from the teacher and other learners, must assume control of their own participatory activities. Teaching must become much more flexible than it currently is (van Lier, 1996).

Sociocultural theory is increasingly being applied to various second language

acquisition studies focusing on classroom teaching and learning (John-Steiner, & Mahn, 1996; Wells, 2000) in discovering how learners acquire interactional competence, including the acquisition of vocabulary, syntax, and pragmatics. According to Vygotsky (1978), learning is a socially situated activity. What a learner at first accomplishes only in a social settings, she or he will eventually be able to do independently. Vygotsky's theory is based on children's development and he purports that the child's cultural development appears on the social side and then it appears on the psychological side. Social relations or relations among people genetically underlie all higher functions and their relationships. While Vygotsky focuses on children, this principle is being successfully applied to second language acquisition context. Social processes allow language to become a cognitive tool for the individual.

One of the theory's premises is that knowledge is negotiated among participants in socially-constructed activities. This premise addresses the issue in second language classroom. From a sociocultural perspective, a classroom is a social setting where interactions happen consequently. The research stems from its potential to transform second language classrooms and increase social and academic success for linguistically and culturally different students. In the current study, students using the second language start at different points for learning. They are disadvantaged compared to mainstream counterparts due to their lack of English proficiency and cultural knowledge. Learning results from learners' participation in the discourse of the class. The level at which ESL students participate in the activities of their classrooms is closely tied to their feeling of

belonging. Language is a way of expressing one's identity and belonging. Therefore, the way ESL students can produce language in the English learning context determines the level of their participation in the classroom academic and social activities. If the diversity of ESL students is accepted and respected, it maximizes the possibility of providing an equitable access to the school's learning. Rather than being individuals who are constrained by their mutual lack of comprehension, teachers and learners are afforded opportunities to mediate and assist each other in the creation of zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) in which each party learns and develops.

Research Design

Qualitative Research

From a sociocultural theory standpoint, it is appropriate to choose qualitative research design when the researcher believes that reality is subjective and multiple as seen by participants in a study. Multiple realities exist in any given situation: the researcher, those individuals being investigated, and the reader or audience interpret a study differently (Creswell, 1994; Guba, & Lincoln, 1988). These realities emerge with categories identified during research process (Creswell, 1994). Morse (1994) also states that using a qualitative paradigm is appropriate when: (a) the concept is "immature" due to a lack of theory and previous research; (b) the available theory may be inaccurate, inappropriate, incorrect or biased; (c) a need exists to explore and describe the phenomena and to develop theory; or (d) the nature of the phenomenon may not be suited to quantitative measure. Researchers in qualitative study are concerned primarily

with process rather than outcome or products (Patton, 2003). Qualitative researchers are interested in meaning---how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structure of the world (Patton, 2003). The heart of a qualitative work is the opportunity to know a few people well (Henstrand, 1993). The qualitative researcher needs to report faithfully these realities and rely on voices and interpretations of informants.

I chose qualitative multiple case study approach to answer my research question. In the present study, the learning experiences of Chinese graduate students in the Canadian education environment were explored. Given the complexity of the phenomenon under study, it is desirable to obtain a more in-depth description of their own experiences by using a qualitative research design. As a researcher, I believe that there are multiple realities in their learning experiences and that reality is subjective. It is how the participants made sense out of their experiences that is investigated.

Case Study

Within the qualitative paradigm, I chose case study design for this study because case study is designed to address a complex issue or problem and is intended to generate in-depth understanding (Yin, 1989). It is a detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject, or one particular event (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995, 2004; Yin, 1989) and is used to “answer specific research questions (that may be fairly loose to begin with) and which seeks a range of different kinds of evidence”, evidence “which is there in the case setting, and which has to be abstracted and collated to get the best possible answers to the research questions” (Gillham, 2000, p.1). A case study is also used as an

exploration of a “bounded system” or a case over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context. This bounded system is bounded by time and place, and it is the case being studied---a program, an event, an activity, or individuals.

The case can be only studied or understood in context (Gillham, 2000). Goode and Hatt (1952) observe that it is not always easy for the researchers to exactly specify the boundary of a case, such as, where the child ends and where the environment begins. Stake (1988) presented an example of bounded system, “For instance, take a child with learning disabilities as the bounded system. You have an individual pupil, in a particular circumstance, with a particular problem” (p. 255). Gillham (2000) also points out that the case merges in with its context so that it is difficult to draw precise boundaries.

Nunan (1992) states that case study method is particular suited to help practitioners enhance their understanding about their students “through a detailed study of one particular student” (p. 89). Case study has the benefit of being able to put to immediate use for a variety of purposes, including staff development, within-institution feedback, formative evaluation, and educational policy making. In this sense, case study reports can serve multiple audiences (Adelman, Jenkins, & Kemmis, 1976).

The current study employed case study features. First, the purpose of the study was to achieve an in-depth understanding of Chinese graduate students’ complex classroom learning experiences. Multiple sources of information (individual interviews and a focus group) in data collection provided the detailed examination of Chinese

graduate students' classroom learning experiences at University of Victoria. Second, each student was an individual case, a Chinese graduate student who attends the University of Victoria working towards a Master's or Doctoral degree. Three, the cases were bounded in a particular circumstance (learning under a second language environment), in which a student may or may not encounter difficulty in their learning process. The case can only be studied in relation to the context. Finally, the results of current study can be put to use by multiple audiences, including students themselves, instructors, researchers, and university administrators. Most importantly, the findings can help classroom instructors to have a better understanding of Chinese graduate students and help them to better facilitate their students' learning experiences.

In summary, the current study is a within-site multiple case study. The context of the case in this study is a single campus, University of Victoria.

Instrumental Case Study

Stake (2004) points out that there are two forms of case study research design. One is the intrinsic case study and the other is the instrumental case study. Intrinsic case study focuses on the uniqueness of the case; on the other hand, instrumental case study refers to the examination of a particular case, mainly to provide insight into an issue. In an instrumental case study, the case is of secondary interest, and it plays a supportive role for the issue. The case facilitates our understanding of the issue.

In this study, I am not interested in the case---the individual person involved; instead, the interest is the issue---experiences each participant encounters while studying

in a Canadian classroom environment. Therefore, I chose instrumental case study as the research design.

Multiple Case Studies

Multiple case studies are employed when there is even less interest in one particular case and the researchers study two or more subjects, or settings (Bogdan, & Biklen, 2003). A number of cases may be studied together and jointly in order to investigate a phenomenon or population (Stake, 2004). It extends instrumental study to several cases. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) suggest that multi-case studies take a variety of forms. They can primarily be single-case studies but indicate less intense, less extensive involvement at other sites for the purpose of addressing the question of generalizability. Or, multi-case studies can be done by comparing or contrasting between and among cases. Individual cases in the collection may or may not be known in advance to have the same characteristics and share the same experiences.

Under the current study, the multiple case studies employed followed Bogdan and Biklen's (2003) suggestions. The study was done by comparing among cases. I did not know in advance whether the individual cases would share the same experiences or not. The reason for choosing multiple case studies approach is that, there are different expectations for language proficiency in different disciplines of graduate programs, which is indicated by different TOEFL scores on admission requirement. I am interested in looking at the three major fields of Chinese graduate enrollment instead of only one case. Multiplicity of viewpoints was presented in these three different fields and alternative

interpretations were presented. In addition, although the main purpose of the study is to investigate within case themes among five cases, a cross case comparison is also made in an attempt to “build a general explanation that fits each case of the individual cases, even though the cases may vary in their details” (Yin, 1989, p. 108).

Five cases were studied jointly in this multiple case study in order to investigate Chinese graduate students’ learning experiences in a subject area classroom environment using a second language. I was interested in both redundancy and variety of these particular cases and in developing a rich description of their experiences as well as emerging themes.

Research Site and Participants

Research Site

Marshall and Rossman (1995) recommend four principles of ideal site: (a) easy entry, (b) rich mix of the processes, people, programs, interactions and structures of interest, (c) possibility of building trusting relations with the participants in the study, and (d) assurance of data quality and credibility of the study.

The site selected for this study is a large university on the Western coast of Canada, the University of Victoria. The university is located in a city in which the majority of the population is Caucasian. The site for this study was chosen following principles recommended by Marshall and Rossman (1995). At the time the data was collected, information from the International Office of the University of Victoria showed that in the academic year of 2006 winter session, of 518 international students, 137 of

them were from P. R. China. University of Victoria is a comprehensive university and has various disciplines that Chinese graduate students enrolled in, which indicate a rich mix of interests. It was likely I could build trusting relations, as I was familiar with this university and its people. Employing random purposeful sampling strategy, the data quality and credibility of the study could be assumed. Therefore, choosing University of Victoria as the research site was appropriate.

Participants

Achieving the greatest understanding of the important phenomena depends on choosing the case well (Yin, 1989). Stake (1995) also points out that in instrumental multiple case study, “balance and variety are important”. He maintains that “opportunity to learn is of primary importance” (p. 6).

Random purposeful sampling was employed in current study because of the large potential sample (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and in order to choose the case well. It was purposeful in the sense that selecting is based on the participants’ different background on learning experiences in the classroom. Due to the relatively large potential sample (137 Chinese international graduate students) and to avoid the problem of studying among my friends, in case the individual withholds information and slants information toward what they want me as the researcher to hear, the participants were recruited campus wide.

In this study, all of participants are Chinese graduate students who are from Mainland China and study at the University of Victoria. The guiding principles for

sampling were: diversity in discipline and participant's willingness to share. The five participants were selected according to the following criteria: (a) they had finished their college education in P. R. China and study here in Canada in Faculty of Graduate Studies at University of Victoria; (b) the participants had never attended any formal English language study in Canada; (c) five students were chosen from three different faculties: two from science, two from business and one from education. The choice represents the percentage of Chinese graduate student at University of Victoria. Most of Chinese graduate students are in the science department and MBA or economics department. There is a relatively lower ratio of Chinese graduate students in the Faculty of Education; and (d) they agreed to participate in the study. The participants' length of staying in Canada would be very little, because as graduate students, they usually take courses within the first year.

Role of the Researcher

Qualitative research is interpretative research (Creswell, 1994). The biases, values, and judgment of the researcher are important and must be declared. Such openness is useful and positive (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 1987). I position myself as a member of local Chinese community, a teacher who taught students learning English as a foreign language in China, a graduate student learning to conduct research as well as a researcher having an informed theoretical framework. My background experiences likely have shaped my interpretation of the data. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) maintain that cultural identity facilitates fieldwork. I had the same ethnic and cultural

background with the participants. I understood participants' language and cultural background, which put me in a position of understanding the way they speak and their interpretations and gave me an in-depth understanding of participants' customs and values. It was easier to establish trust and rapport. Baxer and Babbie (2004) argue that rapport is the mysterious necessity of fieldwork. It would be easier to establish a dialogue with the interviewee rather than a question-and-answer exchange. My background and experiences put me in a unique position to conduct research based on this topic.

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) recommend that researchers reveal their personal experiences and argue the possibility of the researcher entering into the study totally divorcing their research from their personal experiences. Researchers should be conscious of how their past experiences, status, beliefs and values shape and enrich their research rather than trying to eliminate their previous experiences. They maintain that all researchers bring their own specific background to a study, including training in a particular field, knowledge of different topics, a particular standpoint, and theoretical approaches. This shapes what approaches are taken and what issues are focused on.

I bring ideas and experiences I gained during my past experiences as a teacher as well as a graduate student into the current study. My personal and professional experiences have influenced my research question, the way I have conceptualized the research, the design of the research and the interview questions. Furthermore, I interpreted the data through perspectives influenced by my cultural and educational

backgrounds. Before I began the study, I assumed that participants might have difficulties in different aspects of their classroom learning experiences, especially in the area of English listening and speaking ability. At the beginning of data analysis, I paid more attention to the data about their difficulties. However, I also noticed that some participants addressed a broad range of learning experiences including relationship among classmates. In the Faculty of Education, because a lot of my classmates are full time teachers, I seldom have opportunities to interact with them. Relationship among classmates is something I never thought about when I started the inquiry. I reported both frustrating and pleasant experiences of the participants in the thesis.

I believe throughout the research process, my own values, experiences, interests and cultural identity shaped the research (Bogdan, & Biklen, 2003), on the other side, the research also affected me and changed me into a more experienced researcher and knowledgeable teacher.

Data Collection Procedure

Recruiting Participants

The recruiting processes were the following: (a) recruit letters were posted in different buildings on campus at the University of Victoria and at university family housing; (b) I met Chinese graduate students in the Chinese church and through Chinese Scholar and Students Association events and invited them to participate in my study; and (c) further contacts were made to make sure that they understood my study and the expected time commitment.

Individual Interviews and Focus Group Interview

The key characteristics of case study are the multiple sources of evidence and data, each with its strengths and weakness (Gillham, 2000). The current study explored the research question from the following different sources of evidence: semi-structured interviews and focus group. The interview technique has the strength of sharing confidential and quite personal experiences. Focus group has the strength of generating more ideas because members help each other to generate new thoughts.

Semi-structured interview: The first phase of the study was semi-structured interviews. Gillham (2000) claims that the overwhelming strength of the face-to-face, one-to-one interview is the richness of the communication that is possible. It can be the richest single source of data if well done. Semi-structured interview is the most important form of interviewing in case study research.

Baxter and Babbie (2004) describe semi-structured interview as a protocol consisting of the questions the researchers want to ask. Usually the questions should be open-ended instead of close-ended. The qualitative interview is an interaction between an interviewer and a participant “in which the interviewer has a general plan of inquiry but not a specific set of questions that must be asked using particular words and in a particular order” (Baxter, & Babbie, 2004, p.325). Ideally, it is the participants who do most of the talking. Semi-structured interview still give the interviewer the freedom to ask questions in a different order thoroughly planned according to the proper flow of the conversation as well as the opportunity to paraphrase questions for the participants. The

interviewer can probe for additional details as well. Baxter and Babbie (2004) suggest probing for details. The interviewer can prompt the interviewee to elaborate more on unfamiliar terms or consequently speak more. “Can you tell me more about that?” “Can you give me an example of that?” (p. 338) are examples of prompts. Semi-structured interview techniques may also constrain the naturalness of questions. The opportunity to probe and prompt can close the gap in data collection and make conversation more natural. Delimiting the issues to be explored in advance will keep the interview focused.

Semi-structured interviews provide the researcher with the assurance of getting comparable data across participants (Bogdan, & Biklen, 2003). In a multiple case study, an interview protocol provides comparability across cases. Additionally, a protocol helps to best use the limited time available in the interview. It makes the interview more systematic and comprehensive in data collection. It also reduces interviewer’s bias when several interviewees are involved. “The purpose of qualitative interviewing is to capture how those being interviewed view their world, to learn their terminology and judgments, and to capture the complexities of their individual perceptions and experiences” (Putton, 2003, p. 348).

Another advantage is that trust is relatively easy to establish in a one-to-one interview. Participants are more likely to disclose their experiences in a face-to-face and one-to-one interview. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) maintain that getting to know each other, building a relationship and putting the participants at ease are very important in interviewing. Rapport and trust are more likely if the interview is conducted by a

researcher with same background as the participants. Relatively, it would be easier for participants in this situation to express themselves through responses to interview questions.

After soliciting the participants (how each individual participant was solicited is described in the students' profiles in Chapter four), I arranged with them a schedule for the individual interviews at the participant's convenience. All the interviews and focus groups were conducted in my office in the MacLaurin Building as the participants felt it was convenient to be interviewed there. I discussed information about the study and explained the consent form to all the participants before they signed the consent form. My oral explanations were provided in Mandarin Chinese and all the forms were in English. I offered to answer any questions and address any concerns that they may have during the process of conducting the study. I assured that they understood the right to withdraw at any moment and to have their data deleted from the findings, or, used in the findings with their written approval (I would have provided a written form for their approval in that circumstance. However, no one withdrew from the study). It took approximately 40 minutes for each interview. When I interviewed students, I used digital equipment to audiotape their responses, which gave me the chance to go back to the interview data.

In this study, the semi-structured interview was the dominant strategy for data collection. The interview addresses the topic at hand and draws from the informant's emerging world view (Bogdan, & Biklen, 2003). Before conducting the interview, I

prepared an interview question protocol (see Appendix A). The interview questions were formulated based on the following sources of information: (a) research questions for current study, (b) literature review conducted for the study, (c) my own experiences as both a teacher and a graduate student. Additional interview questions in the brackets are possible prompts and probes. The interviews were conducted in Chinese to ensure participants' understanding and to allow participants to more fully and clearly explain their ideas. To provide the participants the opportunity to tell his or her story personally, I did not control the interview content too rigidly (Bogdan, & Biklen, 2003). The order and wording were not used exactly as provided in the protocol, but rather were decided as the situation evolved (Patton, 1990). During the process of interview, although I have developed interview protocol, I seldom interrupted my interviewee during a conversation, for the sake of flexibility and richness in information. Sometimes, I used prompts and probes to clarify the answers. I encouraged my participants to talk so that I could probe more deeply, and at the same time, I got comparable data across the participants so that I could categorize the data when I analyzed the data. I developed insights on how participants interpret their classroom learning experiences at the University of Victoria by gathering descriptive data from participants.

Focus group interview. The second phase of the study was the focus group (Fontana, & Frey, 2004). Fontana and Frey (2004) advocate the advantages of group interviewing. The focus group interview is quite efficient for producing rich data that are cumulative and elaborative, stimulating for respondents and so aid in recall and have a

flexible format. Focus groups can generate large quantities of material from participants in a relatively short time. They can provide special data which cannot be produced through individual interview because of their synergistic potential. Thus, the interpretive process can be taken beyond the bound of the individual memory and expression. Another purpose of conducting focus group is to stimulate talk and get a general understanding of a range of perspectives on the research questions from multiple participants (Bogdan, & Biklen, 2003).

However, the researcher needs to pay attention to the distorting force of group dynamics in focus group setting. Three problems need special attention (Merton, Fiske, & Kendall, 1956): (a) the interviewer must keep one person or several persons from dominating the group; (b) the interviewer must encourage quiet respondents to participate; and (c) the interviewer must obtain responses from the entire group to ensure the fullest coverage of the topic. A major problem with focus group is that participants may not share important personal experiences because they are too embarrassed to share it in the group setting (Bogdan, & Biklen, 2003). This problem is ameliorated by addition of the two semi-structured interviews. The participants can share their experiences in the one-to-one interview.

For the focus group, I arranged a time with all five participants as soon as I got the five participants by making phone calls. Because we needed all the five persons to meet together, I told them that, if possible, they made a commitment on the schedule. Nobody changed the schedule of focus group afterwards. We met in my office in the

MacLaurin Building on a Sunday afternoon. I discussed information about the study again and got their verbal consent to continue to participate in the study. In addition, I explained the additional ethical consideration for focus group and asked them to sign a promise of confidentiality form (see appendix B) for the focus group discussion.

In this study, the participants all have the same background and share the same experiences of learning in a second language classroom environment in the same university. A focus group generated experiences from the participants. Group interviewing helped aid participants' recall of their experiences and stimulate descriptions of their experiences, which were shared by members of the group.

The focus group was conducted in Chinese and lasted about one hour. The purpose of conducting the group in Chinese is that in a group setting, when Chinese people meet and only Chinese are involved, they tend to speak Chinese. Speaking Chinese can also establish rapport among strangers. I introduced myself again in the group setting, and asked them to introduce themselves. Then participants took turns to speak for the first round. After first round, the participants had freedom to speak whenever they like and it is more like a conversation. The focus group discussion was quite free flowing. The same questions as the research questions were asked when we began the focus group interview. However, I also needed to encourage all the participants and make sure it is their views that are presented (for guide see Appendix C). When I noticed that a participant remained quiet for a while, I specifically asked her opinion to encourage her input.

Follow-up interview. A follow-up interview provides the opportunity to clarify the previous responses and gather more new data.

Participants were contacted for a follow-up interview after the focus group interview. They were encouraged to further discuss their classroom learning experiences at University of Victoria. If I found that participant mentioned something during first interview and focus group, but did not elaborate the issue, I specifically asked relevant questions. Other than that, I just encouraged the participant to have a further discussion. The follow-up interviews were conducted around 10-12 minutes for each participant.

Data Analysis

Inductive Qualitative Analysis

Inductive qualitative analysis was pursued during the process of data analysis. Patton (2002) maintains that inductive analysis involves discovering patterns, themes, and categories in one's data. Typically in the early stages, especially when developing a codebook or figuring out possible categories, patterns and themes, Patton emphasizes the importance of being open to the data and calls it "open coding". Once patterns, themes and/ or categories have been established through inductive analysis, the final stage of qualitative analysis may be deductive in testing and affirming the appropriateness of the inductive analysis, including carefully examining deviate cases or data that don not fit the categories developed.

Inductive analysis requires that the researcher is comfortable with developing categories and making comparisons and contrasts. It also requires that the researcher be

open to possibilities and see contrary or alternative explanation for the findings.

(Creswell, 1994). In the process of analysis, the researcher has to reduce a voluminous amount of information to certain patterns, categories, or themes and then interprets this information. Tesch (1990) called this process “de-contextualization”. Creswell suggests that researchers form categories of information and attach codes to these categories.

Tesch (1990) provides eight steps especially for analysis of interview data: (a) read through all the transcriptions; (b) pick one interview, go through it, write down the main idea on the margin; (c) complete it for several informants, make a list of topics. Cluster these topics and form these topics into columns; (d) take this list and go back to data.

Abbreviate the topic as codes and write the codes next to the segments of the text; (e) find the most descriptive wording for your topics and turn them into categories.

Reducing your list of categories by grouping topics; (f) make a final decision; (g) assemble the data material belonging to each category in one place and perform a preliminary analysis; (h) recode, if necessary.

In current study, the data analysis process followed Creswell’s (1994) and Patton’s (2002) principles on case study data analysis. I also employed what Tesch (1990) recommended on the procedure in data analysis. The data was sorted out chronologically first, then translated into English and transcribed. I immersed myself in the data, reading and rereading, so I could have the overview idea of the data and then have a close idea of the data. I went through each interview and highlighted statements relevant to research questions, ignoring repetitions, digressions and other irrelevant

materials (Gillham, 2000). Once I was familiar with the interview data, I went back to the first transcript again to find out if there are statements that I failed to highlight. Then I returned to the beginning again, and went through the highlighted statements to make my own comments. I read through the text and make margin notes from initial codes, then classify the codes into categorical aggregations and established patterns of categories. Once the preliminary coding categories were established, I assigned them to the units of data, modified them and read through my data once again. The process of analysis of data is reduction of coding categories. Decision to limit codes is imperative (Bogdan, & Biklen, 2003). Then the data were categorized. After I categorized the data, I met with my supervisor to have a discussion on the categories. I re-categorized the data based on my understanding of my supervisor's suggestion. I analyzed each transcription independently first and then compared them in two different faculties.

The list of coding categories is developed according to Bogdan and Biklen's (2003) suggestions on the following categories: (a) setting/context codes, (b) definition of the situation codes, (c) perspectives held by subjects, (d) subjects' ways of thinking about people and objects, (e) process codes, (f) activity code, (g) event codes, (h) strategy codes, (i) relationship and social structure codes, (j) narrative codes, (k) method codes. I also coded categories from literature review and research questions. The categories I developed are listed in Chapter four.

I went back and forth with the data to identify the themes. Finally, I summarized the themes from the interview into descriptive statements. Then I went back to the

transcript and got a quotation from each participant as the theme statement. After finishing one interview, I compared across the different cases to find out similar and different themes of participants in different disciplines.

Credibility, Transferability, and Conformability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed three constructs for qualitative research: credibility, transferability, and conformability. Credibility means that the inquiry is conducted in such a manner to ensure that the inquiry was accurately identified and described. The inquiry must be “credible to the constructs of the original multiple realities (1985, p. 296). My commitment to credibility is “to understand the world as it is, to be true to complexities and multiple perspectives as they emerge, and to be balanced in reporting both confirming and disconfirming evidence” (Patton, 1990, p. 55).

Qualitative research’s transferability or generalizability to other settings may be problematic (Marshall, & Rossman, 1995). Designing a study in which multiple cases, multiple informants, or more than one data gathering method are used can greatly strengthen the study’s usefulness for other settings.

When I conducted the interview and collected the data, I paid attention to see what the participants experienced and their feelings. To ensure the credible and accurate data, I consulted with the participants to clarify meanings and interpretations. I reported both sides of the experiences.

Conformability stresses the need to ask whether more data could confirm the findings of the study. To make sure of the reliability of the data, the interview data was

examined after a period of time by the researcher and the comparison was made the degree of the agreement of the initial categorization and the second one.

Member check was observed in current study following Baxter and Babbie (2004)'s suggestion. Baxter and Babbie suggest that member check process includes both coding categories and subsequent analysis work. I went back to participants with my translation, and transcription during the initial data management and then during data analysis, seeking their feedback.

Triangulation can be achieved by comparing the coding categories the researcher developed in the interview as those in focus group (Baxter, & Babbie, 2004). With the procedure of member check and triangulation, the conformability and the credibility of all aspects of data analysis were enhanced, including coding categories development.

The result of data analysis included three parts---individual case profiles, themes within the cases and themes across the cases. After presenting individual pictures in the first two steps, the final stage was to present the group picture---seeking the common patterns and themes across the cases.

Ethical Considerations

A number of procedures were used to ensure that appropriate ethical standards were maintained during the study: (a) informed consent, (b) privacy and confidentiality, (c) review by Institutional review board (Christians, 2004) (See Appendix D for consent letter).

Limitations and Delimitations of Current Study

This study confined itself to individual interviews of Chinese graduate students at University of Victoria.

The limitations of the interviews are that they provide “indirect” information filtered through the views of interviewees. This information is provided in a “designated” place rather than the natural field setting, which would influence participants’ comments. In current study, the interviews were conducted in my office. It was relatively formal instead of informal conversation. With MP3 players to record their responses and presence of the researcher, their responses may have been influenced. Also, the researcher’s presence may influence the response. Creswell (1994) maintains that not all people are equally articulate and perceptive. It was reflected in focus group interview that some participants were eager to share their experiences while some participants were relatively quiet and more reserved. In current study, two participants from MBA program were more articulate than the other three participants. However, I tried my best to encourage the other three participants to express their opinions in focus group interview. The data collected was more from the enthusiastic participants, which in turn, influence the findings of current study.

Chapter Four provided detailed results on students’ profiles, themes within each case and theme across cases. A discussion was presented to further illustrate the results of current study.

Chapter Four Results and Discussion

This study was designed to investigate Chinese graduate students' classroom learning experiences in a Canadian university. This purpose was accomplished through a qualitative research design. Two students in an MBA program, two students in Department of Electrical Engineering and one student in Faculty of Education were interviewed individually in the spring of 2007. A focus group interview was then conducted. Finally, follow-up interviews for five participants were conducted. The researcher obtained students' opinions and experiences on their classroom experiences at the University of Victoria. In this chapter, I provide profiles of the participants; discuss findings, and provide interpretations of the participants' learning experiences. The results of the study are therefore reported in five sections: (a) students' profile, (b) steps of data analysis, (c) themes within cases, (d) themes across cases, and finally (e) discussion.

Students' Profile

The students' profile consists of the following parts: (a) how I recruited this particular participant, (b) this student's background information, for example, his/her major in China, which program the student is from in Canada, TOEFL score, age, working experiences; (c) what the student does in spare time; (d) his/her general comment about overall learning experiences and English proficiency level.

Tan

Tan (all names are pseudonyms) is a twenty-five year old male MBA student,

who came to the University of Victoria at the end of June 2006. He read the posters advertising this study on campus and was interested. He contacted me and I invited him to participate. He finished his Bachelor's degree in China at the end of June 2004 and then he worked for about two years before he came to Canada to continue his study in the MBA program. He has a very outgoing personality. He enjoys a lot of different activities in his spare time, for example, playing soccer, playing computer games, but he spends most of his spare time in playing *Majiang* (a traditional Chinese game) with his Chinese friends. His TOEFL score is 570. On the MBA program website, it clearly indicates that 575 is the minimum requirement for international students to enter the MBA program. Tan understood his situation and took the initiative to apply for a face to face meeting with a professor in the MBA program. After the interview, the professor told him that it was not necessary for him to take the TOEFL test again because the professor thought that Tan's English was good enough to function in the program. Later, Tan took the Graduate Management Admissions Test (GMAT) and got admitted into the program.

Tan appears optimistic about his English abilities. He thinks that he functions very well in listening, speaking, reading and writing. He feels that he has a talent for English learning and he doesn't think he works hard on English learning even back in China. He mentioned that he could easily pass Band-4 and Band-6 (college English national examination) tests in China. He did not talk too much about the details of his English learning experiences in China. However, he emphasized that a lot of

opportunities to interact with other people helped improve his English ability.

Tan was interested in my study because he thinks that every student has the responsibility to improve MBA program. He has participated in a lot of focus groups in the MBA program to talk about international students' learning experiences. In the MBA program, the professors and instructors will frequently contact the students to talk about their experiences in the program. They asked about students' learning experiences and sought the students' advice and suggestions to better serve them. Now Tan has the job of coordinator in the MBA program in the summer to help the international students to better getting used to a new learning environment.

Ying

Ying is a twenty eight year old female education student. As I am a graduate student in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction in the Faculty of Education, I know all the Chinese graduate students. I phoned all the Chinese graduate students and invited them to participate in my study. However, several students needed to take summer courses. Because of the intensive nature of the summer course (to finish a 1.5 credit course within three weeks), they did not volunteer to participate in current study. Some students took the summer off to work full time or go back to China. Ying was the only one who was willing to volunteer to participate in current study. In her spare time, she watches movies, listens to music, does physical exercise and plays computer games.

She is very active in participating in different activities. She also establishes friendship with not only Chinese students but also with native speakers. With her native

speaker friends, she communicates both in school settings and at their houses. She graduated in 2001 from a famous foreign language university in China. She was the top student in her undergraduate study and got the job of working as an English instructor in the same university after her graduation. It was very competitive to be a university teacher for those who only have a Bachelor's degree in the year 2001. Usually, most instructors already in the university hold a Master's degree and instructors are required to have a PhD degree in 2001 to be qualified as the new instructor. Her TOEFL score is 630.

Ying is confident about her English ability. Although she mentioned that when she first came here she had some difficulties, she adjusted to the new learning environment quite soon. She reported that a lot of her listening and speaking challenges were related to her lack of specialized vocabulary. She did not take this problem very seriously and believed that it took a while to develop the vocabularies of technical terms, such as cognitive. She had a relaxed attitude towards her study in Canada and maintained that it was understandable if an international student could not get the same good grade as native speaker. In the Faculty of Education, she said international students were working with their second language and also had to compete in writing with native speakers.

Xiaoxiao

As I was not familiar with MBA student, and, except for Tan, no one in MBA student volunteered to participate in current study, I asked Tan to introduce someone

else to me. Tan recommended Xiaoxiao and I think Xiaoxiao's experiences were proper for current study as she got her college education in China and came here for a Master degree study. Tan invited Xiaoxiao to participate and arranged the time for us to meet for the interview. Xiaoxiao graduated in 2004 from bachelor degree and worked in China for a year as an accountant while she applied for MBA program at the same time. Xiaoxiao is now a twenty-five year old female MBA student who came to the University of Victoria at the end of 2005. Her discipline was finance and tax collection in her undergraduate study in China. Her TOEFL score is 613.

She thinks her learning at University of Victoria is very enjoyable. She emphasized that she felt especially grateful for great improvement of her ability to communicate with other people and her ability to make a presentation. Of course, her business knowledge expanded at the same time. She enjoyed working with her classmates and felt that they were very helpful. She communicated with her classmates, including native speakers, a lot in the MBA program.

When she first entered the program, she encountered a lot of difficulties, especially in the area of listening and speaking. At the very beginning, it was the listening ability in English that hindered her learning. She even mentioned that she had thought about dropping the program. It was very helpful to her when she found out that she was not the only one who could not understand the lectures and discussions. In China, the purpose for her to learn English was to pass all kinds of written exams and she did not pay much attention to her listening ability. To make it up, here in Canada,

she watches TV a lot. She likes to watch CNN news for the purpose of practicing English listening. Another thing she enjoys in her spare time is to chat with her friends and spend some time with them.

Tao

Tao is a twenty-nine year old male engineer PhD student, who came to the University of Victoria at the end of August 2006. He got his Master's degree in 2003 in China in the field of electrical engineering. He read the poster on campus and was interested in this study. He just finished his course work and he felt it was a good time to meet other Chinese student. Another reason he was interested in current study is that he has a relative in China who works in the similar area as the researcher and he wanted to have an idea on how graduate student in the Faculty of Education in Canada conduct studies. He contacted the researcher and the researcher invited him to participate in current study. He worked three years in China in a world famous foreign investment company before he came to Canada.

Tao is a hard working student. When the researcher asked him what he usually did in his spare time, he said he did not feel that he had any spare time. All his time was spent on studying. His TOEFL score is very high, 657. The total possible score of paper version TOEFL test is 677. He is learning a lot at the University of Victoria. He thinks that instructors in Canada are very serious about teaching and believes his classmates also study very hard. He also finds the instructors here very knowledgeable and have a high academic status; that is, content they teach is more in depth and up-to-date than in

China. In this competitive learning community, he tries his best to learn all he can.

Tao doesn't have many English-speaking friends. He says he has only two or three English-speaking friends at most. He spends most of his time communicating with Chinese-speaking friends. In the Department of Electrical Engineering, the faculty and students are from all over the world, including many Chinese graduate students. Tao communicates in English with his officemate who took the same courses. After class, they have a discussion on what they learned in the classroom. Eighty percent of their communication was based on their study and assignments. Twenty percent of the time they spent chatting about daily life. They speak together only in their office.

Qu

Qu is a female electrical engineering PhD student. I met her in a friend's party and invited her to participate in current study. At that time, the posters inviting involvement on my study had been around on campus for about two weeks and I only had one volunteer (Tao) from science background. Before she came to Canada, Qu had a Master's degree in the field of electrical engineering. She said she hadn't been a student for about 15 years. She was not comfortable to give her age or her TOEFL score.

In her spare time, she goes shopping and goes to the parks with her Chinese friends. She doesn't have any English-speaking friends. In her opinion, English was not very important in her discipline because most of the time she spent working on a computer instead of interacting with human beings. As long as she did a good job on conducting research, she could survive. However, writing in English was frustrating for

her, even in the fixed format of journal article writing.

She pointed out the importance of previous knowledge to have successful learning experiences in the Department of Electrical Engineering. The courses she chose were based solely on her research interest, as there were no mandatory courses. Her supervisor recommended the courses that she should take, however, it was she and her supervisor together who made the final decision. Her instructors included both Canadian and Chinese instructors who all spoke English in the classroom. She found the teaching method was similar for both Canadian teachers and the Chinese teachers; that is, they gave lectures and the students listened.

Data Analysis

I employed process of analyzing data as described in Chapter Three. This section on data analysis here is to report the specific results with three steps employed in analyzing data. The three steps were: careful reading of the data and identification of units of data, sorting the initial coded units into categories, integrating categories and identifying themes.

Once I had gathered the data, the first step in the analysis was that I carefully read each transcript of the interviews and focus group, and then identified the units of data, pieces of field notes, transcripts that fell under a particular topic (Bogdan, & Biklen, 2003). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), a unit has two characteristics. First, a unit is heuristic in the sense that it enables the researcher to have some understanding. Second, it was the smallest piece of information about something that

was interpretable in the absence of any additional information. These units of data conveyed a particular meaning, and then were assigned to a preliminary coding category. The data units were informative in the sense that the data enlightened me on some specific issues related to current study. I identified the units for coding. These units may be a few words, phrases or a single sentence or several sentences and even paragraphs (Bogdan, & Biklen, 2003; Lincoln, & Guba, 1985; Miles, & Huberman, 1994).

The second step in the data analysis to create coding categories that represented a particular topic. I created some *priori* categories (Miles, & Huberman, 1994) according to literature review, theoretical frameworks and research questions. There were seven *priori* categories: challenge, success, instructor, strategy, additional support, culture and things needing to be improved at University of Victoria. Units of data were assigned under each coding category (Bogdan, & Biklen, 2003). I created a table with all the *priori* categories and the assigned units of data. This provided me an opportunity to review the *priori* categories that I created and modify them. These categories reflect the components of themes that emerged from data and can be found extensively in the data in different participants.

After I created *priori* categories, I developed new descriptive categories (Miles, & Huberman, 1994). New descriptive categories combined some categories that had similarities among units of data. I also added new categories that were ignored in the *priori* categories. The units of data that had similar meaning were grouped under one category. The new category foreign language anxiety was added. The following table is

the categories that I developed during process of data analysis with the descriptions of each category.

Table 1. Code Categories

Categories	Descriptions
Classroom Learning Experiences	The participants' perspectives on their challenges and successes in their classroom learning, their strategies to deal with the course load and their limited English proficiency, additional support from classmates and the program
Instructor	The participants' opinions on what the instructors do to facilitate or hinder their learning in the classroom
Culture	The participants' behaviors they described that reflect their cultural tradition or cultural background
Foreign Language Anxiety	Foreign Language Anxiety includes

participants' communication apprehension,
fear of negative evaluation and fear of
tests.

Step three was that I used these categories to define a frequently occurring topic as the themes in the five different cases and in the two across cases, MBA program and Department of Electrical Engineering as well as themes across all five cases. I could not do a cross comparison in the case of Faculty of Education as I only had one case. Some categories may apply to a single participant and some categories may run across two or more of the participants. A further examination of units of data and coding categories enabled me to find patterns among them and to establish the themes. The following sections will describe the themes within cases and themes across cases in detail.

Themes Within Cases

As Ryan and Bernard (2003) pointed out, theme identification is one of the most fundamental tasks in qualitative research, however, at the same time, it is also one of the most mysterious. Theme within case in the current study were identified by frequency of their occurrence in the participant's discussion and report in the individual interviews and focus group. It was also identified by the length of its occurrence. Dey (1993) maintains that researchers' decisions about what topics to cover and how best to query informants about those topics are a rich source of a priori themes. Themes in this study

were therefore inevitably influenced by the researcher's own experiences. The overarching theme may cover several different categories listed in the previous section.

Tan

1. *"In my opinion, the MBA program might be different from other graduate programs."*

Tan reported that the MBA program was very supportive in facilitating international students' classroom learning in the following aspects: providing opportunities to interact with native speakers, offering a bridging program for a month for international students, providing a computer lab and student lounge to create a learning community, surveying students' opinions about services in MBA program, and having a free tutor two hours every week for every international student to enhance students' English ability.

First, the MBA program provided opportunities for international students to interact with native speakers during their courses and also during social activities. Students had to take 18 courses together. In the first semester, the students had to take seven courses. With courses both in the morning and in the afternoon, Tan reported that, "We have classes every day, which gives us a lot of opportunities to interact with both Chinese students and native speakers." Social activities were helpful for the students to improve their spoken English and listening ability. Tan mentioned in the interview that

MBA program also organized a lot of social activities. We have social activities almost every weekend. A lot of social activities are mandatory. You have to be there and participate in these activities. In these social

activities, people chat with each other.

Tan perceived that the intense course load and a lot of social activities benefit Chinese students to improve spoken English and listening ability.

Second, to address the needs of international students, the MBA program offered a one-month bridging program and five days departmental orientation. The program was named Business Leadership Development. According to Tan's understanding,

Actually, it is a preliminary class in the MBA program. Within a month, every professor will have an opportunity to teach you, you have an opportunity to meet all the professors in the MBA program. They will have a chance to give you a lecture.

The bridging program introduced the new learning community. In the focus group interview, Tan further reported on the orientation program,

In the MBA program, international students will begin three to five days earlier than domestic students. These days provide an opportunity for international students to learn how to make a presentation, get a brief idea of the program and develop skills in making presentations.

The bridging program and orientation program facilitated international students, including Chinese graduate students, to experience classroom learning in the new learning culture.

Third, Tan spoke highly of the advantage of students having their own computer lab and student lounge, which he perceived as support for a learning community.

Whenever he had a question, he could go to the computer lab or the student lounge and ask his classmates instead of seeing the instructor. He said,

In the MBA program, we have a student lounge. It is a place where all the students study. We have a printer and photocopier there for us to use. And we have a computer lab. So actually we have two places to study. The student lounge is for MBA students only. A lot of students study there. If

you have any questions, you can ask your classmates there instead of seeing the instructor. Generally speaking, all your problems can be solved with your classmates. Because we have our own lounge, we can meet frequently.

At the end of my study, I went over to their student lounge and understood why students study there. It is a big room, and like the library's group study room, it is divided into different areas. Students can either study alone or in a group. Computers, printers, even a microwave are provided in the lounge. In Tan's perception, the learning community helps students achieve their goal of successful classroom learning experiences.

Fourth, MBA program sought students' opinions about the program to improve it.

Tan proudly said in the interview that,

In our program, frequently, the professors and instructors will contact with the students to talk about students' experiences in the program. They ask about your learning experiences. They seek your advice and suggestions to better serve the MBA students.

Tan was proud of MBA program as the program valued students' input. He presented the survey as proof that MBA program paid special attention to international students' learning experiences and addressed their needs to be supported in facilitating their learning experiences.

Fifth, MBA program supported international students by offering a free tutor to help editing students' final report as well as tutoring English pronunciation and presentation skills. In the interview, I asked Tan about where he could get help on campus if he had difficulties in English. He said

In MBA program, we have a tutor for international students. She is a graduate from Faculty of Education. We do not have to pay for her as the MBA program has paid. The most important service she provides is to

edit our papers. She's a very good tutor and that she will proofread for us. For writing paper, definitely, Chinese students will have difficulties. It is very important to have a tutor to help us for revision and editing

Clearly, Tan indicated that he perceived the free tutor as an important factor of facilitating his learning process using a second language.

In summary, the themes which emerged from Tan's data clearly indicated that MBA program was supportive in different aspects for Chinese graduate students' classroom learning experiences.

2. *"I think relationships among classmates hinders my classroom learning most."*

The second theme in Tan's case is bad relationships among classmates. When I asked Tan the question, "what hinders your learning most in your classroom learning?" I assumed that he might say something about his English ability, or his instructor or even assignment. I was surprised when he said, "I think relationship among classmates hinders my classroom learning most." When I read the interview transcript, I found that Tan had mentioned about relationship among classmates again and again in different interviews and in different aspects on influence of his classroom learning experiences.

First, bad relationships with classmates influences Tan's classroom participation.

He said,

Bad relationship sometimes happens not only after class, but also in class. For example, just as I mentioned, when you do not like some people, you subconsciously do not like their ideas. Whatever they say, you will disagree with them. When you propose your opinion in class, if other people agree with you, it is kind of encouraging. However, if you have a bad relationship with your classmates, when you proposed the idea, they intentionally pay no attention to you or your opinion. You will feel disappointed

Second, bad relationships on the project teams influence project or assignment. Tan particularly mentioned that,

Sometimes for the teamwork, the deadline is very intense. There isn't much time for us to finish the project. The team dynamic is sometimes on the verge of blowing up. Everyone in the team is very nervous. On some teams, two key members will quarrel with each other. In this situation, you worry about that whether your team can finish by the deadline. It has happened that the team members just told the instructor that the team did not work. They had to get rid of someone in the team. They could not cooperate with each other. Sometimes, although there are five team members in a team, four of the team members will hand in what they have done within the team and do not care about the one left. And the project they handed in was not even completed.

He felt worried when the team did not work. He thought that the purpose of team project is that MBA program trained the students to work in a team and learn to cooperate with each other. However, when team did not work due to bad relationship on the team, it negatively influenced his learning process and assignment.

Third, relationships among classmates determined who would take the leadership role and the result of teamwork. In the interview, Tan mentioned that,

If someone has a very strong personality in your group, he wants to be the leader. Sometimes, we have a good relationship among the team, for example, once we have a project where we had to compete among different teams. In our group, we have two Canadians, one from Beru, and two Chinese. We have very good relationships among the team members. And everyone felt that he made a contribution to this group. The project is divided into five parts. Every part is very important to this teamwork.

Tan felt that team dynamic influenced leadership and division of the job responsibility in the teamwork:

In the MBA program, there is too much teamwork. There are always

conflicts among team members. There is always someone who wants to take the leadership. They're always someone who thinks he is perfect and what others do is bad. You will feel frustrated because of different working styles. You have to learn to understand each other. This is what MBA program tries to train students.....Because of this relationship, I like tests better.

In focus group interview, Tan gave us a clear picture of what his class looks like and therefore the reason he mentioned relationship again and again was revealed. In his class, the relationship between international students and domestic students was not very promising. This year, some of the project groups were comprised of domestic students or international students only because,

in our class, because of the bad relationship between international students and the domestic students, the supervisor could not do anything but agreed that international students are on same team, and the domestic students are in a different team. I think this happened because our classmates are very young. And they do not know how to have a good relationship with other people. In the classroom, you can see that there is line divided between two groups of people. On the left, it is international students. On the right, it's domestic students.

He even suggested that around 15 students chose global or exchange program this year because of bad relationships among students in the class. "They do not want to see each other again. It is good for them to leave and go to the exchange program."

In summary, the relationship between domestic students and international students was not smooth and it influenced different aspects of Tan's classroom learning experiences.

Ying

"If I am interested in the topic, I learn a lot."

First, Ying reported that interest played an important role in her classroom

learning and interests influenced her learning outcomes and class participation. When asked what makes her learn best in the classroom learning, she reported that, "If I am interested in the topic, I learn a lot." She mentioned that the best way that she can learn was that,

If I like the research area in the topic and in the classroom, the instructor gave a lot of reading materials. Good reading material includes different opinions on the same topic from different aspects. In this sense, I think I get a chance to open my mind. Two assignments in this course are also from two aspects, one focused on theory, and one focused on practical teaching. The assignments help me to have a deeper understanding about the topic. My ability to conduct the research and writing has been improved.

This is her ideal learning experience, however, this is based on the fact that "if I like the research area." To Ying, interest played an important role in her learning outcome. On the other hand, if the classroom was focused on theory only, she did not like it and she felt that she did not learn much.

Because of the importance of interest in her classroom learning experiences,

Ying did not care much about the instructional method. In her perception,

I do not care much about whether the class is dominated by teachers' lecture or student's discussion. I think both works for me. I think students sitting there and listening is not a passive process, you can listen and to think and to try to comprehend at the same time. If you have a question, you can ask the instructor. And I think for a discussion method, if I do not have anything to say, or someone else has already expressed my opinion, It is not a good method in this sense.

To her, sitting and listening to instructor's lecture was not a passive learning process while discussion did not necessarily mean an active learning process. However, instructional method did not matter much to her in the classroom learning: it was the

topic that mattered.

Second, interest influenced her class participation. When she was not interested in the topic that was under discussion, for example, if the discussion focused on K-12 education in Canada only, “however, I do not have this background; sometimes it is difficult for me to follow what they are talking about.” Without interest and previous background knowledge, her classroom participation was negatively influenced.

In summary, interest played an important role in Ying’s classroom learning experiences and influenced her learning outcome and classroom participation. Ying’s data is not as thick as the students from MBA programs and Electrical Engineering Department. Part of the reason is that she was not as articulate as the other four participants. However, she is the only one who was willing to participate in current study in the Faculty of Education. Another reason is that, because there was only one participant from the Faculty of Education, there was no one in the same Faculty to trigger rich discussion in focus group interview. In the focus group interview, all the rest of the participants had another student from the same department to generate discussion and therefore had more data afterwards.

Xiaoxiao

1. *“The difficulty I feel in learning, I think it is not because I am at the University of Victoria, it will happen if you go abroad to study. The difficulty lies in my English proficiency.”*

The first theme reported in Xiaoxiao was difficulty in learning because of her

poor English proficiency. Although her TOEFL score is not low, she found that she had a difficult time understanding native speakers' speech and expressing her ideas in English fluently. Xiaoxiao thought that challenges were inevitable. The most frequently mentioned comments in her interview, focus group and follow-up interview data were about difficulty in learning because of her poor English. She commented that these difficulties would happen no matter which university the student went to, as long as the student went abroad to study.

English proficiency was associated with all aspects of her classroom learning experiences. It was closely related to the classroom discussion and participation. When talking about the difficulty in her learning experiences, Xiaoxiao said: "I feel difficulty in learning, but I think it is not because I am at the University of Victoria, it will happen if you go abroad to study. The problem is my English proficiency, especially in the area of communication." During classroom discussion and debate, she felt that

Because of my limited oral English, I am at a disadvantaged position when I argue with the native speaker. I think both my listening ability and the speaking ability are not good enough and influence my discussion with my peers.

When she was asked about which ability, listening ability or speaking ability hindered her participation in classroom discussion, she maintained that she had different experiences in different stages. She reported, "At the beginning, it is the listening ability. When you stay at the Canada for a while, you can understand what other people are talking about. Now, I think it is my speaking ability that hinders my discussion and participation in the classroom." In the process of group discussion, sometimes she

simply gave up proposing her opinions and arguing with her peers “I give up unwillingly because I do not want to argue anymore with my poor spoken English.”

Xiaoxiao’s English proficiency negatively influences effective communication with her peers, especially when she first came here. She reported that:

When I first came here, the English I spoke, the native speakers do not understand. And I do not understand what they say; I do not understand their English as well.

and because

I do not understand the lecture; I do not have a deeper understanding of what is talking about. It is because of my poorer listening ability.

Because of her poor English proficiency, she even thought of dropping the program. She only felt relieved when she knew that other international students did not understand as well. She gave a vivid description of what happened in the first month in the focus group,

When I first came here, I think my listening and spoken English are very poor. I’m very frustrated and even think of dropping the program. I still remember the first day I came to school, after a whole day, I do not understand a thing and I feel very frustrated. In the classroom, a girl from Taiwan, spoke to me from very faraway and silently. I can see what she said from her mouth shape: ‘Do you understand?’ I shook my head and she shook her head as well. I feel relieved when I realized that I am not the only who can’t understand.

The reason Xiaoxiao could not understand was because of the speaking speed of native speakers and their different accents. She commented, “They speak so fast that I do not understand”. She also mentioned different accents in Canada. “Some international students have accents when they speak English, even some instructors have accents. I do not understand the way they speak English.” The second reason lies in her

way and experience in learning English in China. She mentioned in the focus group:

In China, when we take the entrance exam for college, there is no listening and speaking test. In Band 4, there is a listening test, but no speaking test. When I prepare for the examination, I never prepare for listening part because it is useless to prepare. I can't get a good grade on it anyway. It pays off if I spend more time on reading and grammar. For TOEFL test, it is helpful to learn the strategies for tests from New Oriental School. I got good marks in the listening part, however, I do not understand a lot of the listening materials in the TOEFL test.

She did not pay much attention to the listening ability while she studied English in China.

Xiaoxiao also emphasized that her poor spoken English negatively influences her classroom participation: "When I want to express my idea, I need to take time to think about it and then express it in English, however, with the time I need, other students have already expressed what I'm going to say." In the interview, she also mentioned that her poor English influenced her classroom participation because

I do not have the confidence to speak in English. When you express yourself, the teacher will ask questions related to your opinion at the same time and try to communicate with you, I feel bad when I have to spend time to phrase my opinion out and let the instructor and my classmates wait for me

It is clearly indicated in Xiaoxiao's interview data that when she answers questions or expresses her ideas in the classroom, she needs time to think about how to say it in English instead of unconsciously speak it out. Therefore, her poor ability in English speaking and listening hindered her classroom participation and discussion in small groups.

2. *"I have to choose which one I will focus on."*

The second theme is that Xiaoxiao developed strategies to survive in the MBA program with her poor English proficiency. Her strategies focused on how to deal with the heavy course load and deal with classroom discussion as well as how to improve her English.

With her limited English proficiency, she felt that it was difficult for her to handle all the course work. She developed strategies to deal with those course loads.

First, she found a way to prioritize courses. In the interview, she mentioned,

I will rank the courses according to my personal interest and my own background. I feel it is very helpful when I manage my time. I think if it is on accounting and finance, it is very important. When I took these courses, I'm interested in learning and I have confidence in learning. For some courses, such as the information technology and commercial law, I think it's irrelevant and unimportant. I won't spend a lot of time and energy on it.

She reported that, "The course load is too much. I can't handle it all at the same time. I have to choose which one I will focus on. I will focus on the one I'm interested in, or one in which the teacher is very strict. There are some courses I do not pay attention to."

Second, she studies very hard. She reported in the focus group that, "I remember that before the final exam, I only sleep eight hours in three days." She studied very hard to keep up with her classmates. She said, "Chinese students in my class all work very hard. It motivates me to study hard when I see other people study very hard." Third, she tried to get some related knowledge in advance before she went to the classroom. She said: "I will read the book before the class, then I have a rough idea of what the instructor is talking about in the class." She found reading the textbook before class was very helpful

for class discussion and participation. She reported later about what she did when she felt she did not know what to say in class. "As long as you read the textbook before class, you will know the topic and then you will have something to say."

She tried different ways to improve her English proficiency, especially in listening and speaking ability. She reported in the interview in order to improve her listening ability, "I watch TV a lot, I like to watch CNN news for the purpose of practicing of English." To improve her spoken English, she communicated with native speakers in different environment such as classroom setting, computer lab and during social activities. For example, she interacted with her classmates and found that they were very helpful.

Tao

"I think the difference between teaching in Canada and back in China is huge".

Tao had the experiences of being a graduate student both in China and in Canada; therefore he compared instruction in two different countries. In Tao's opinion, although it looked like that the way of instruction in the Department of Electrical Engineering was similar to the instruction back in China in that the instructor would give a lecture and the students just sat in the classroom, took down notes and did the assignment afterwards, the difference was actually very significant. He used the word "democratic" (*mingzhu*) to describe the classroom atmosphere in Canada. Tao indicated that there were differences in the following four aspects between Chinese and Canadian classroom instruction: serious working attitude, students work hard, knowledgeable instructors and

ample opportunity for communication. It was these differences that he enjoyed in his classroom learning experiences in Canada.

The first difference lied in the attitudes of the instructor. Tao reported that, In Canada, both instructor and students are very serious about their teaching and learning, especially a graduate student. The instructor teaches seriously and the students learn diligently. In China, instructors and students do not work hard (*hun*) in the graduate programs.

In Tan's perception, this serious working attitude in Canada motivated his classroom learning.

Second, the students worked very hard in Canada. In Tao's opinion, "In Canada, the students try to understand everything. In China, the students just try to pass the examination." He also mentioned about the different attitudes towards grades. In Canada, he thought that

They try to get A+ in all of their courses. As far as my classmates concerned, and the friends I talk with, they all want to get A+. In China, as long as you can pass, it is ok. I can get a Master's degree. There is no difference between 70% and 90%.

He added

In China, the purpose of a graduate program is to get a Master's degree. If you can pass the examination, you can get the degree. There's no difference if you are a good student or an average student. If I'm a good student, I get a job after graduation. If I'm an average student, I still get a job after graduation. As long as I can pass the examination, I can get the degree and get a job. There's no point for me to study hard.

A more competitive and hard working attitude in Canadian classroom learning motivated his learning.

Third difference is that he believes instructors in Canada are more knowledgeable than instructors in China. The reason he thought that was,

Even Chinese instructors in Canada are educated in North America and have a Ph.D. degree. They have a high standard of academic knowledge. In this sense, it is different from the instructors in China. They do not know much in their own area; therefore, they do not know how to teach. There are some very knowledgeable professors in China as well, but they may not teach, or because they are very few, they are not able to teach all the students. In the University I went to, in China, there are only two or three very high standard and knowledgeable teachers. The rest of the instructors, 60%, are just so so.

Having knowledgeable instructors was the reason that he felt he learned a lot in Canada.

The fourth difference Tao reported was due to the different approach to instruction in Canada compared to China. In the interview, Tao reported that,

After the instructor entered the classroom, she will put on the PowerPoint slides. Then she begins to teach. The instructor tries her best to teach. She uses PowerPoint slides and writes a lot of information on the blackboard at the same time. She will write the main points on the blackboard.

This way of instruction was similar to the Chinese classroom. Nowadays, Chinese teachers would use PowerPoint as a supplement to their instruction. However, he emphasized that, "It's more democratic in the classroom. The instructor frequently communicates with the students. Students can ask questions. In China, we do not have this habit and this atmosphere"

Qu

"English hinders my study."

Qu reported that English is an issue for her, especially because she had to take courses right after she came here. "At the initial stage, listening and speaking are difficult. I feel it is difficult for me to understand English and speaking in English is

difficult as well. Listening is more important and more difficult than speaking.” She said that because of her limited English listening ability, sometimes, she had difficulties in the classroom learning setting.

Qu emphasized that it was difficult when the students first arrived at Canada, I think the most difficult part is when you first come here, you do not have many friends; you do not have anyone to turn to when you have difficulty. You do not have many opportunities to communicate with others since you do not have any friends. At that moment, it is worse because your English is not good

However, as a PhD student, she took courses during the first semesters. She found that, “I have difficulty in following the classroom instruction. I think it is an issue because of my English.” She commented that if it were in Chinese, of course she could understand it.

She thought that, in the Department of Electrical Engineering, it is important that students have background knowledge of content that is teaching in class. Below she describes the difficulty in her classroom learning experiences:

If you are not familiar with the content, and your English is not good enough to understand every word, and you do not know the meaning of certain vocabulary, you cannot follow the instructor. I do not think the instructor can do anything to help me understand in the classroom if I do not understand. I think it's the impossible for the instructor to help you. If you know the content, or the context, you may be able to guess the meaning. But if you have no idea what the content is, it's impossible for you to guess and understand.

She had difficulty in listening, speaking and writing in English. When she tried to speak in English, she mentioned that she had to think hard which word to use before she spoke. She found it was difficult for her to understand phrases when listening to

English. She thought sometimes she knew all the words, but she did not understand what they mean when they become a phrase.

Themes Across the Cases

Themes across the cases will have three sections, first is the theme in MBA cases, then the themes in Electrical Engineering cases; at last, it is the themes across five cases. The first two across cases analysis is focused on similarities in the cases in the same disciplines. I identify the similar themes in the data and make a cross case comparison. As there is only one case in Faculty of Education, it is not included in the comparison. The final part, themes across five cases cover both similarities and differences in their learning experiences.

Themes in MBA Cases

"I will buy you a cup of coffee." In the MBA program, two participants in current study both reported that instructors were very supportive in encouraging students. These Chinese graduate students, in particular, participate in the classrooms and meet the instructors after class. They enjoyed the harmonious relationship between instructors and students instead of the hierarchic teacher-student-relationship in China.

First, instructors encouraged students to participate in the class discussion. They made special efforts in selecting topics, valuing students' input and grouping students heterogeneously. In the MBA program, the way of instruction was different from the traditional Chinese way of instruction. Tan and Xiaoxiao mentioned that they were not in a position to compare the instructional methods because they only attended

undergraduate study in China and they were not sure about graduate program instruction in China. They reported that in MBA program, instructors just lectured a little bit in class; most of the time in the classroom was spent on students' discussion. In the classroom, students would contribute their ideas while the instructors gave lectures. To encourage Chinese graduate students' participation, Tan reported that,

Some instructors who are familiar with Asian students, or with Chinese students will direct some questions to encourage you to participate in the classroom. For example, they will ask some questions about China, and when you are answering the questions, you will feel that you have confidence.

Some instructors would choose a very general topic, as Tan mentions,

They never ask a question that has specific and exact right answer. For example, a question 'What's the economic situation in China?' 'What's the economic situation in the world?' This kind of question, everyone can say something about it.

The instructors' careful selection of topics made Chinese graduate students feel comfortable particularly during classroom discussion. Instructors also valued students' input. Tan said,

They also encourage you by putting whatever you said on the blackboard. Sometimes, although you did not say anything important or even related, they still write it down on the blackboard. So you will feel very good to express your opinion.

Xiaoxiao said,

Every time when you answer a question, they (the instructors) never say you're right or wrong. Instead, they will encourage you to participate in the classroom discussion, by saying that: 'what you said is very good, however, we may also consider...' They never directly point it out that you made a mistake. Or they may say: 'what xxx says about the issue is very good....'

The participants felt that instructors were supportive and helped establish students'

confidence in encouraging classroom participation by valuing students' input.

In the first semester, at the very beginning, the instructors would group the students heterogeneously for team work and classroom discussion. The team consisted of international students, including Chinese graduate students and domestic students. This grouping took students' interpersonal dynamic into consideration and provided an opportunity for Chinese students to mingle and communicate with domestic students instead of sticking with Chinese graduate students only.

Second, instructors in the MBA program encouraged students to meet them after class. This encouragement was reflected in their welcoming attitude towards the students and their flexible meeting time. Tan said in the interview that he met instructors frequently. "We see the instructor not only for the assignment, but also we chat with the instructors a lot". He mentioned that when he went to see the instructor during lunch time, "if the instructor is not busy, and you come over to meet him, he will say: 'Let's go, I will buy you a cup of coffee.'" This kind of attitude really encouraged students to meet instructors after class.

In the MBA program, the instructors provided flexible office hours to meet the students. When the students wanted to meet the instructors, usually, they did not have to make an appointment with the instructors. Tan said "Usually, I do not make an appointment with the instructor. I just drop by his office; knock at the door, and ask if he has time to have a chat." When Tan felt that if he had a very important thing to discuss with the instructor, he would make an appointment. Xiaoxiao also mentioned that

The instructors do not have office hours, all of my classmates and I go to see the instructor whenever we want. We go to his office and ask if he has time at that moment. If he does, I'll chat with him for a while. I feel that the instructors like to interact with the students after class and have a chance to communicate with students. They really encourage us to go to see them after class.

In summary, the instructors in the MBA program played a supportive role in Chinese graduate students' learning experiences.

Electrical Engineer Cases

"The instructors in Canada are very serious about teaching." It is interesting that the theme that emerged from the cases in the Department of Electrical engineers was also related to instructors. The participants reported that instructors in Canada were very strict and had serious (*renzhen*) working attitudes as well as taught up-to-date (*qianyan*) knowledge.

The instructors were very serious (*renzhen*) about teaching. Tan reported that he felt he learned a lot from the instructors, "The instructors in Canada are very serious about teaching. It is different, in this sense, back in China. In China, the instructors are not very serious (*hun*) about teaching." He also felt that instructors were strict with students and expected students to study hard. Qu also mentioned that she "thinks the instructor in Canada is strict and rigorous. They are more strict and serious in their working attitude than those in China."

Qu emphasized the knowledge the instructors taught in the classroom was quite up-to-date and instructors paid special attention to practical application of knowledge.

Qu mentioned that,

In China, the instruction is focused on theory. And also, in China the knowledge is not up to date, in a sense, it is dated. The textbook and the instruction in Canada tries to follow the most up-to-date knowledge. In China, we won't be able to do this. But I think the theory research in this area in China is more advanced than the theory research in Canada. However, they did a good job in updating the knowledge and to put it into practical application.

In summary, Tan and Qu found that instructors in the Department of Electrical Engineering provided up-to-date knowledge and have a very professional working attitude.

Themes Across Five Cases

"It is challenging but enjoyable experiences." According to the participants, they encountered difficulty when they were learning in a Canadian university and also enjoyed support at the same time. Three of the five participants expressed that they felt they had difficulties in English in their learning process. Two other participants also expressed their concern regarding transition to a Canadian classroom English requirement, although they felt that they made transition smoothly and easily. These difficulties mentioned lay in the areas of speaking, listening and writing. This was because of the traditional methods of English instruction in China with a focus on teaching English grammar, translation and reading to pass different levels of examinations instead of improving students' listening and speaking ability. The participant from MBA program, Xiaoxiao, especially expressed her concern on speaking and listening. She reported that her limited oral English and listening ability hindered her participation in classroom discussions and debates, put her in a disadvantaged

situation, and negatively influenced her effective communication with her peers. The reason that she had difficulty may also be attributed to her purpose for learning English back in China: to pass different forms of examinations. As for the listening part in the TOEFL test, she just went to the New Oriental School in Beijing (a famous private school for English examination preparation) to learn the skills for passing the test without the ability to understand. Three participants also mentioned that it took a while for them to get used to English learning environment. Difficulties arose especially in the initial stages of their course work. When they first came here, they could not understand English and had difficulties in speaking English. It was quite understandable that they had difficulties in the classroom learning setting. In Department of Electrical Engineering, the participants had more concern with their writing ability. As PhD students, they had the obligation to get their papers published in journals, and even with the fixed format of academic writing and journal articles, they found there was difficulties and they needed additional support from their supervisors.

In the study, participants from MBA program especially expressed their gratitude about support that the program had provided for the International students. The support that MBA program provided was in different areas. It provided opportunities for Chinese graduate students to interact with native speakers, offered a bridging program (a program that named Essentials of Business and Leadership (EBL)). Students have an opportunity to familiarize themselves with MBA program; and build competencies in areas such as creative decision-making, accounting, finance, IT, strategy, statistics,

economics, marketing, people management, and presentation skills.) for a month for students, provided computer lab and student lounge for a learning community, surveyed students' opinion about services in the MBA program, and offered a free tutor two hours every week for every international student. However, the other three participants did not have an opportunity to enjoy this degree of support from their departments.

Discussion

The findings of the current study addressed the main research question "What are the learning experiences of Chinese graduate students in classroom settings at University of Victoria?" Overall, they felt challenged, especially at the very beginning stage of their study. It seems that they all adjusted to new learning environment eventually, although they still struggle to improve their English. Although domestic students may also feel challenged during transition to graduate school, international students' experience is more extreme due to culture and language barrier. The sub research question "What, if any, are the responses and coping strategies that the students employ to deal with the demands of learning in a subject area classroom?" are answered in the following four areas: (a) study hard and read related books, references, PowerPoint slides before and after class. They spent most of their time on studying and they even reduced their sleep at the end of the term in order to finish the assignments; (b) consciously improve their English by watching TV, communicating with native speakers. It seems, though, participants in the Faculty of Education and MBA program more consciously work on their oral communication skills. Just as Tan said, "I can learn all

the MBA knowledge in China. The reason I came to Canada is to know their culture and improve my English communication ability.” (c) connect to previous knowledge.

Participants in the Department of Electrical Engineering emphasized the importance of connecting to previous knowledge. They reported that previous knowledge significantly facilitated their learning. One participant, Qu, specified that she tried to shift her research area as closely as her previous research area in China; and (d) prioritize the tasks. Although only one participant, Xiaoxiao mentioned that she prioritized the tasks based on the level of importance, her own interests and background as well as course load, I include it in the discussion here as she found it extremely helpful for her to finish her course work. With a heavy course load and limited English proficiency, she had to spend much time to finish a course. For example, before she made a presentation, she needed to write down every word she was going to say and memorized all the things she prepared.

The sub research question “What are Chinese graduate students’ experiences with instructors? How does instructors’ instructional approach facilitate or hinder Chinese graduate students’ learning?” was investigated in depth. All the participants maintained that instructors played a major role in their learning process. This insight echoed Fu’s (1995) opinion that teachers’ way of instructing can greatly affect the classroom environment. The MBA program participants were eager to participate when the instructors valued their input and selected topics in which Chinese students could contribute instead of focusing on management of hockey only (topics that only Canadian

students have previous knowledge). Topics were also important to Ying, the participant from Faculty of Education. She was interested in participating in discussion when the lecture was on both theory and practice. When the course is dominated by theory only, she backed off from classroom discussion. It is challenging for her, though, that the classroom discussions mainly focused on the K-12 public school system on Canada which she doesn't have any background knowledge. As a graduate student in Faculty of Education myself, I have a similar issue. Most of Chinese graduate students in the Faculty of Education are ESL teachers at university level. They did not have previous knowledge on elementary and middle school.

For the participants from Department of Electrical Engineering, even if they took a course with instructors from China, they reported that the instructor was different from their counterparts in China. The classroom atmosphere was more democratic and instructors adopted a more casual and informal style of teaching and students were encouraged to ask questions without getting approval from instructors. Ginsberg (1992), Townsend and Fu (1998) had similar findings. They maintained that instructors' working attitude and teaching style facilitated their learning process.

The question "What, if any, are the components and nature of foreign language anxiety identified in Chinese graduate students?" As for foreign language anxiety identified by participants, it is interesting that all the five participants experienced all three aspects of foreign language anxiety. Xiaoxiao said she had a fear of negative evaluation anxiety. Tao mentioned he was anxious about tests, as he wanted to get A+

for all of this course work. The other three participants felt that communication apprehension was the anxiety they felt most. Although it is difficult to define the extent of their anxiety level, it echoes the literature indicating that students tend to have foreign language anxiety when they learning a foreign language (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986). This continues even when students are learning in a second language environment because they are constantly monitored by native speakers.

To sum up, this study confirmed the literature that says that using a second language influences classroom participation. Chinese students' English learning environment, goals for learning and large class size hindered their communication ability in English. They have to work hard to improve their listening and speaking ability after arriving at Canada. The speaking speed of native speakers was an issue for the students; later on, the difficulty shifted to the area of spoken ability.

In the data analysis process, I found that my initial theoretical framework accounted for most of the Chinese graduate students' learning experiences. The theoretical framework in the current study was developed according to a literature review of different aspects of learning experiences in ESL students' context and served as a guide for current study. The research question was investigated through this theoretical framework and interview questions were developed partly based on the theoretical framework. The theoretical framework was expanded to fit with certain findings that emerged from the data. According to Yin (1993), "the good use of theory will help delimit a case study inquiry to its most effective design" (p. 4). Yin (1993) also

purported that in case study research “theory development as part of the design phase is essential, whether the ensuing case study’s purpose is to develop or to test theory” (p. 27).

However, the theme that is unique in the current study is that participants elaborated a lot on the support from the MBA program to help Chinese graduate students’ learning in the classroom. The students perceived that their English skills and learning processes were facilitated by these supports. Ample social activities helped Chinese graduate students to practice their English listening and speaking skills. They had opportunities to communicate with native speakers and understand the Canadian culture in these social activities. This improvement in communication ability in English can be transferred to the classroom-learning environment. With ample support to be immersed in an English speaking environment, their English improved greatly. The Bridging Program for International Students provided an opportunity for the students to begin to be oriented to a different way of instruction as well as different expectations and requirements. The bridging program also targeted Chinese graduate students’ need in the area of making presentations by teaching them to present. The computer lab and students’ lounge provided students with a learning environment and more opportunities to interact with both international students and domestic students. The students also had a free tutor. The tutor not only helped edit their assignments, but also helped them to improve their presentation skills and corrected their pronunciation. The tutor service provided the students with the opportunity to improve their written English as well as

spoken English. The unique value of current study is to address the impact of the poor relationships between international students and domestic students in the MBA program. It indicates that not only instructors are important for the participants' classroom learning experiences; peers and classmates also influenced the participants' classroom learning experiences. The role of peers and classmates need further study.

Learning in a content area classroom in a foreign country using a second language can be challenging both culturally and linguistically. In order to gain a better understanding of the implications that findings in this study have for the practice of facilitating learning in a Canadian content area classroom learning environment, it is important to re-examine the role that foreign language learning, instructor and culture play in these five Chinese graduate students' learning experiences. My area of focus has been on the students' perspective on how these factors influenced their learning process and how they coped with their learning tasks at the University of Victoria.

This study investigated five Chinese graduate students' classroom learning experiences at University of Victoria. The multiple case study approach was employed and it was found to be a valuable research method for investigating a complicated issue. The data collection of semi-structured interview, focus group and follow-up interview has the advantage of providing privacy (the individual interviews) as well as triggering participant's memory (focus group). The students opened their hearts and shared their experiences in their classroom learning process at University of Victoria. Data collected in three different ways---semi-structured interview, focus group and follow-up interview, provided a reliable picture of the classroom learning experiences of Chinese graduate students at University of Victoria (Baxter, & Babbie, 2004).

Contribution of the Study

The present study made contributions to the literature in the following two

aspects.

First, the study used a multiple case study approach to investigate five Chinese graduate students' classroom learning experiences in a western Canadian university in three disciplines for the first time.

Second, previous studies on Chinese students were on Chinese students' English learning environment, English instruction in China, and their goals for English learning, (Bayliss, & Raymond, 2004, Jin, et al. 2006). The studies on overseas students were either not specifically on Chinese students (Spack, 1997) or on Chinese graduate students in the United States (Wang, Martin, & Martin, 2002). The current study investigated five Chinese graduate students' classroom learning experiences in a comprehensive Western Canadian university in a city composed mainly of Caucasians. Similarities and differences in the themes of their learning experiences by five participants who differed in their subject area were reported in the findings. This study took into account the various aspects involved in the process of learning; for example, the instructors' role, cultural influences and Chinese students' approaches to English learning. With the limited number of participants, there is no possibility of generalizing the findings and implications of current study to all Chinese graduate students. However, findings of the study provided insight on the their difficulties in their learning experiences, the areas that they found difficult included their instructors' expectation of their English proficiency, their perceptions on the role of instructors in Canada, and the lack of sufficient support from graduate programs. The current study has implications on

how to teach Chinese graduate students in a Canadian university setting as well as the importance of providing strategies for Chinese graduate students to deal with the learning process while they study overseas. The implications are based on the study of these five participants.

The current study re-emphasized what we've already learnt about learning in general, that is, the important role of instructor-student-interaction, active classroom participation as well as healthy peer interaction.

Insights for Consideration for Instructors

This section addresses the implications that findings in this study have for better facilitating learning experiences based on these five students' experiences.

Pedagogically, we need to consider what teachers can do to ease students' learning process. The implications and recommendations for improvements lie in two different areas: integration of socioconstructivist approaches into classroom teaching and professional development on cultural sensitivity,

Integration of Socioconstructivist Approach into Classroom Teaching.

The findings of the current study indicated that when the instructors employed a more constructivist approach, the students took a more active role in the classroom learning. Social constructivism argues that the most optimal learning environment for students is a dynamic interaction between instructors and learners. The tasks in the classroom based on social constructivist theory provide an opportunity for learners to create their own truth due to the interaction with others. Social constructivism thus

emphasizes the importance of culture and context in understanding what is happening in society and constructing knowledge based on this understanding (Derry 1999; McMahon 1997). Social constructivist theory also valued the importance of interaction, meaningful tasks and importance of constructing knowledge based on culture and context. The following suggestions on teaching practice are based on social constructivist theory.

The findings of current study echoed what Parks and Raymond (2004) observed. They found when the professors employed a transmission mode of teaching; Chinese students' classroom participation was quite limited. Parks and Raymond advocated a more socioconstructivist approach to teaching. Socioconstructivist teaching includes three characteristics. First, the instructor welcomes different ways of thinking and invites different perspectives. In the current study, the students felt comfortable to participate when they noticed that the teachers were able to acknowledge the existence of diversity in the classroom and valued this diversity. Just as Tan mentioned he felt comfortable when the instructor chose diverse topics for discussion including the economic situation in China instead of focusing only on Tim Horton's and Hockey. The invitation of diverse knowledge also indicated that the instructor valued students' input. In general, teachers need to provide a friendly and safe environment for students. Since making mistakes is inevitable when the students are using a second language in the content area classroom, the teachers have the responsibility to create a supportive atmosphere so that the students are not afraid of expressing themselves using a second

language in front of classmates and teachers. In the study, findings indicated that when the instructor employed an attitude of acceptance and valued the students' input, the students would participate more in the classroom discussion. The students felt safe participating in the classroom discussion when the instructors had an inviting attitude for second language students and valued everyone's participation thereby promoting meaningful learning.

Professional Development on Cultural Sensitivity

These five Chinese students are deeply influenced by Chinese culture. Findings from the study also indicated that the participants were influenced by Chinese culture in the process of classroom discussion participation and meeting the instructors. The findings of the current study reflected the current professional literature on the issue of cultural influence.

The participating Chinese students' culture is characterized by strong collectivism. In the classroom participation, it is reflected in the fact that they would consider other people. They may hesitate to participate partly because of limited English proficiency. The other reason is that they are afraid of wasting both the instructors' time and their classmates' time, which was demonstrated in current study. They had concerns that what they said was irrelevant to other students. It is a reflection of a collective culture. If the instructor was sensitive to the cultural issue and explicitly indicated encouragement to participate, students would contribute more actively in classroom.

The five students only went to see the instructors after class when they felt that

they were invited. This finding echoed the literature on Chinese culture of large power distance (Hofstede, 1997). Ying mentioned in the interview that, "If I'm not sure about the assignment expectation, or I do not quite understand the assignments, 99% I will go to see the classmates." However, when she felt that the instructor was happy to meet the students and explicitly mentioned that he/she was willing to meet the students, she would go to see the instructor. Tao also mentioned that he would feel embarrassed to let the instructor know that he did not understand the lecture and the assignment. He would prefer to discuss it with other students. In the MBA cases, both participants went to see the instructors and chatted with the instructors a lot because they reported that the instructors encouraged them by saying, "I will buy you a cup of coffee."

Insights for Considerations for Chinese Graduate Students

Different Purpose of Learning English in Canada

The purpose of learning English in China is to pass examinations. Some students do not pay much attention to developing their listening and speaking ability. However, according to the findings from these five participants, when the students learn in Canada, a purpose of improving listening and speaking ability is necessary for learning. Tao commented that improving communication ability was his aim while he studied in Canada.

The participants all highlighted the importance of communication. The traditional way of English instruction in China did not provide the students much opportunity to practice their spoken English. Usually, the instructors in China will teach

English in Chinese, which leads to problems in an English-only language environment. One of the participants in the MBA program, Tan, reported that he went to “English corner” frequently back in China and therefore was not concerned about his spoken ability. However, he felt that the purpose for him in going to Canada was to improve his communication ability even more. In Engineering, the participants reported that the way of instruction in the Department of Electrical Engineering was similar to the Chinese way of instruction. The instructors lectured and the students listened. It seemed to them that listening skills were more important than speaking skills because they did not have opportunities to communicate. However, they valued the importance of communication ability. Qu reported that, “Although I feel communication is the most important aspect, to be frank, I never have an opportunity to communicate with native speakers. I only meet with my supervisor and most of the time sit there and listen. I do not feel that my ability to communicate improved since I came to Canada because I speak Chinese and mingle with Chinese people”. The participants in the Department of Electrical Engineering reported that because there were a lot of Chinese students around, there were ample opportunities to speak Chinese instead of English. The Chinese students shared the same offices or accommodation, met each other quite often, which led them to speaking Chinese all the time.

Strategies for Classroom Learning in a Foreign Country

The findings of this study indicate that these Chinese students employed a lot of different strategies to deal with the course work with their limited English proficiency.

Xiaoxiao pointed out that she ranked the courses according to her opinion on their importance and difficulty level. She focused on the courses that she could deal with; that is, she chose the elective courses that were similar to her background. Other participants turned to the strategy of hard work. During the busiest times, they slept less than five hours a day and they spent most of their time studying. The following responses from students illustrated this point.

At the end of the term, a lot of Chinese students in the MBA program will stay up late to one to two o'clock in the morning to study (Xiaoxiao)

We all study very hard. I think that is the same. I always stay up late in the evening (Tan)

I do not have any spare time, all my time is spent on studying (Tao)

Since these Chinese graduate students have good reading skills, Reading was frequently used as a strategy to deal with course work. They pre-read what was going to be taught before class. This provided them a chance to identify unfamiliar words and gave them background knowledge. When they could not understand in the class, they would review powerpoint slides, textbooks and reference books after class. Xiaoxiao reported that, "I will read the book before the class, then I have a rough idea of what the instructor is going to talk about in the class". While some participants claimed that they understood the lectures, it might not be because of their adequate level of understanding in English, but rather be a result of a lot of preparation, which is likely unnecessary for English speaker. In some classes, one participant even reported that he could predict what the instructor was going to teach because he was so well-prepared with the background knowledge. Reading as a strategy facilitated Chinese graduate

students understanding in the classroom and compensated for their sometimes inadequate listening comprehension.

To improve their listening skills, three participants reported that they watched TV and communicated with native speakers. They also maintained that when they first came to Canada, their listening skills were weakest. In order to understand the instruction, listening skills are the most important when the students take courses. With time passed by, listening skills could be improved while the students were immersed in the English only environment in the classroom setting. MBA students commented that they had classes every day and with the learning community provided by the MBA program, their listening ability improved within a short period of time. They also employed the strategies of watching CNN news and attending social activities to communicate with native speakers.

Therefore, for the newly arrived Chinese students and students in China who are preparing to study abroad, they may need to consider that learning English is not for the sole purpose of passing examinations. Instead, they should improve their listening ability and communication ability at the same time. On the other hand, once they are in a Canadian university, they should learn to take advantage of this opportunity and try to create an English environment by attending different social activities and communicating with native speakers instead of remaining isolated within Chinese community.

Insights for Consideration for University Administration

With the limitation of only five cases included in the current study, the conclusion can not be generalized to other Chinese graduate students. Further research is needed for the purpose of generalizability. However, the current study still provided some insights for university administration to consider. The findings of the interview and focus group clearly indicated that there were some services that these five students felt very helpful and there were also some services that this group of students found inadequate. I would like to list the following recommendations for university administration to consider.

1. The Writing Center would be more helpful if it could provide editing services. None of the five participants had ever been to the Writing Center for help. Part of the reason is that in the MBA program, there is a free tutor and the tutor helps editing students' assignments and final reports for their project. The other three participants either did not know about the services or did not go to the Writing Center because they thought it was not helpful if it did not provide editing services. One of the participants, Qu, felt frustrated when her supervisor pointed out a mistake and did not correct it for her because she did not know how to correct it. In this sense, it was not helpful for the students if Writing Center just tried to help with the structure because students did not experience difficulties writing in the fixed format of assignments. At the graduate

- level, students can figure out the structure by themselves.
2. Free, not for credit English courses need to be provided to international students in order to improve their listening, speaking and writing ability. Qu mentioned this as a recommendation. She found that her English ability is not good enough to function well in the graduate school, however, there is no possibility for her to upgrade her English skills. At the graduate level, it should be noted that students still have difficulties in the above-mentioned areas. When they first arrive at the university, they can be placed into different levels of English courses with proper assessment.
 3. The Co-op program is very important to international students to gain working experiences in Canada. According to the participants in the MBA program, half of the Chinese students could not find a good Co-op position; instead, they were assigned a position by Co-op coordinator. The assigned positions usually are just entry level positions, which did not give them an opportunity to use their knowledge. For example, Xiaoxiao was assigned a data entry position for a tax company. Her job was simply to enter the data for tax preparation purpose. All the participants thought that they can benefit more from a quality Co-op position.
 4. More financial support needs to be provided at the university level. Three

of five participants did not have any financial support. The two PhD students from Department of Electrical Engineering however got either a fellowship or a research assistant position. The students in this study thought that more financial support would benefit them. They could then concentrate and focus on their studies if they are relieved from financial pressures.

5. Academic units should be involved in the orientation program. It would benefit all international students with their transition period if they could have an opportunity to get a bridging program at workshops from the departmental level. For example, the students all mentioned that the most difficult time for them is the very beginning of their program. According to the students in the study, they thought that it would be beneficial to the students if they could have an opportunity to meet their future instructors, get an idea of how to make presentations and become familiar with the classroom learning environment in Canada. Also, some presentation workshops should be provided so that the students can get an idea of the form and at instructors' expectations. It would also help the students to get used to their instructors' personal accents, speaking speed and lecturing style.
6. The university administration should consider organizing different social activities with native speakers to provide opportunities for international

students to improve their listening and speaking ability. Chinese students represented in current study tend to stick together, especially in the program where there are a lot of Chinese students. They tend to speak Chinese together and in this sense, have a poor English-speaking environment although they are in Canada, especially if they have family members in Canada. Because Chinese culture values modesty and is very conservative, the students tend not to create opportunities to meet native speakers and establish friendships with native speakers. The university administration should recognize this issue and help students by providing some opportunities to mingle with native speakers. The effort will make a real difference in students' possibilities of improving oral communication ability and therefore facilitating their learning process.

7. Mentor programs should be established at the department level to guide international students through their new cultural learning environment. For example, two students in MBA program found that a mentor in their own program is very helpful for them to get adjusted into new learning environment. It would be beneficial if the mentor program could be expanded to different departments and programs.

A Final Word

Xiaoxiao was the only one who was going to graduate soon when I conducted the study. She was a second year student. Just as I was completing the writing of this

thesis, I heard that Xiaoxiao found a professional job. During the interview and focus group, Xiaoxiao mentioned that she did not have confidence in her English proficiency and she did not have much work experience, even in China. She thought she would have a hard time finding a job. All the Chinese students (including Chinese international and immigrant students) in MBA program graduating in 2007 have found professional jobs. Tan, the other participant in MBA program, said because of the fact that every Chinese student found a job; he had confidence that he could locate a professional job after his graduation.

The rest of the participants still continue their journey in the learning process at University of Victoria.

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Appendix A Interview Question Protocol

Interview Protocol

Date:	Time:
Place:	Interviewee:

In this research, there are four categories. You can say as much as you can and you don't have to answer the questions if you don't feel comfortable answering. The four categories are: subject area classroom using a second language characteristics, culture, instructor, and foreign language anxiety.

Please tell me about yourself

1. Age/ last time go to school/ single or married/ what do you do in your spare time?/
English speaking friends, where and how many?/Attended institutions/previous degree and discipline/hometown in China/TOEFL score
2. Tell me about your classroom experiences of learning at UVic? (Do you enjoy studying here , why or why not? What are your impressions about learning at UVic?)

Subject Area Classroom Using a Second Language Characteristics

3. What helps you learn best about your class? (When do you feel have most confidence/comfort? What happened when you feel most comfortable, give me an example)
4. What hinders your learning most while you are in the class? (what do you fear most? What are the difficult parts of your study at UVic? Give me an example when you

think you can communicate effectively with the instructor and your peer in the classroom? Give me an example when you can't or you didn't communicate effectively? To what extent you can communicate? Give me an example of your engagement in classroom and to what extent your engagement will significantly determine your mark in the course? Engagement includes working in small group, asking and answering questions, interacting with professors. What are the reasons for your failure of communication, if there is a failure?)

5. Do you have difficulty in following instructions from professors and instructors and discussions in your classes? Give me an example, please. What do you think are the reasons for these difficulties? How can instructors better serve your need?)
6. Do you speak in class? In yes, for what? How do you feel? What do you usually do when you feel don't know what to say in class? (Can you tell me an example of a successful experience and a notable failure?)

Instructor (Talking about the instructor in general, please don't mention the instructor's name)

7. Tell me about you're a typical classroom? (process/ regular pattern) instructors' way of teaching? (Say something about how you and your instructor work together? Go and see them and ask them questions? Do the instructors pose a lot of questions? Do they tend to dominate class time extensively? How does the instructor encourage you to participate in the classroom and seek for advice for the assignment? Do you get office hours? What differences have you found for the teaching here and back in

China?)

8. Do this instructional method work for you? How?
9. How to interact with other Chinese and non-Chinese students in classroom and after?
10. What do you think about the class size here? (Do you think it is big or small? Which do you like?)
11. Do you understand the instructions in class activity and for the assignment? (If not, what do you think are the causes? Do you like the class activity? Why or why not? what do you think about homework and tests?)
12. Think of an example about an instructor that you learned a lot? And about an instructor that you didn't learn a lot?

Culture

13. Have you talked about your experiences with other people? What experiences have you shared with?
14. Do you know where you can go for help if you have difficulties with your English language ability, including speaking, reading and writing? (Name the services you know on campus and please tell me if you have been there)

Foreign Language Anxiety

15. Of these three parts: communication, negative evaluation and test, which one do you feel most anxious about? To what extent? What are the sources of such anxiety and difficulty.

16. Do you worry about your grade at school in china and here? Why? How grade/assignment/test influence your learning?

General questions:

1. What do you do to deal with your difficulties? What worked and what did not? Your overall effort to adjust to the UVic classroom?
2. Any recommendation for future Chinese students ?
3. If you have any advice to UVic for a better learning community? (Co-OP)

Appendix B Promise of Confidentiality in Focus Group Form

This form is intended to protect the confidentiality of what members of this discussion group say during the course of this study. Please read the following statement and sign your name indicating that you agree to comply.

I promise that I will not communicate or talk about information discussed during the course of these focus groups with anyone outside of my fellow focus group members and the facilitator.

Name

Signature

Facilitator signature_____

Appendix C Focus Group Discussion Protocol

1. First, there are no right or wrong answers. I am interested in understanding your classroom learning experiences.
2. Second, I want you to feel comfortable saying your experiences, good or bad.
3. It is important that we have a chance to know everyone's experiences in this room. You shouldn't feel that you have to agree with everyone else if that is not how you really feel.
4. Fourth, we ask that you talk one at a time so that we can be sure to hear everyone's view and get him or her on tape.

Question for the focus group:

What are your classroom learning experiences at University of Victoria?

Appendix D Consent letter

To whom it may concern,

I, Zihan Shi, a graduate student of the University of Victoria, enrolled in the Master's program in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, am conducting a thesis about Chinese graduate students' classroom learning experiences at University of Victoria. THE TITLE OF THE THESIS IS: LEARNING IN A DIFFERENT LANGUAGE: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY OF CHINESE GRADUATE STUDENTS' CLASSROOM EXPERIENCES AT UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA. This thesis is a part of the requirement of the Masters degree in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Deborah Begoray. If you have any concerns or questions, please feel free to contact Dr. Deborah Begoray at dbegoray@uvic.ca.

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate and understand the learning experiences that Chinese graduate students encountered in their academic setting while they study at University of Victoria. The procedure will be a multiple case study design.

I will conduct focus group and two interviews to participants. During the interviews and focus group, your responses will be MP3 recorded. I will be sure to protect my participants' confidentiality and identities. But with the nature of focus group, it is impossible for me to protect your identity during the discussion among participants. However, a focus group confidentiality form will be signed by the participants to protect your privacy. My supervisor Dr. Deborah Begoray and I will be the only two people

listening to those tapes. I will be the only person keeping them. All of my notes and MP3 files will be used for this thesis. For the purpose of getting this thesis published, I will safely keep all the data for five years at home. THE PAPER DATA AND THE MP3 PLAYER WITH THE RECORDING DATA WILL BE KEPT IN A FILE CABINET WITH A LOCK IN MY HOME. THE DATA IN THE COMPUTER WILL BE PROTECTED BY A PASSWORD ON MY PERSONAL COMPUTER. AFTER FIVE YEARS, ALL THE PAPER DATA WILL BE SHREDDED. THE DIGITAL DATA IN THE COMPUTER AND MP3 PLAYER WILL BE ERASED. However, I am expecting your understanding that some people may have clues to identify my participants after reading my report, for example, a relative of my participants, etc. It is beyond my capability to prevent this from happening.

I am asking your permission to include your responses in my Master's thesis written report and related scholarly publication. Your permission to be involved in this study must be voluntary. At any time, if you are feeling uncomfortable, you may withdraw. Let me assure you that no consequences will arise from your withdrawal. This is considered minimal risk research. Your consent is greatly appreciated. THE RISK OF PARTICIPATING IN CURRENT STUDY IS CONSIDERED MINIMAL RISK. THERE ARE NO KNOWN OR ANTICIPATED RISKS TO YOU BY PARTICIPATING IN THIS RESEARCH. THE BENEFIT OF PARTICIPATING IN THE PROJECT IS TO HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO KNOW OTHER CHINESE STUDENTS WHO HAVE SIMILAR CLASSROOM LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND CAN HAVE A

CHANCE TO SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCES WITH OTHER CHINESE GRADUATE STUDENTS. YOU CAN ALSO GET SOME KNOWLEDGE ABOUT STRATEGIES IN LEARNING IN A SUBJECT AREA CLASSROOM USING A SECOND LANGUAGE. If you are interested in reading my report, feel free to let me know and I am more than happy to email it to you. YOU MAY VERIFY THE ETHICAL CONCENTS OF THIS STUDY, OR RAISE ANY CONCERNS YOU MIGHT HAVE, BY CONTACTING THE ASSOCIATE VICE-PRESIDENT, RESEARCH AT 250-472-4545 OR ETHICS@UVIC.CA.

I am available at your convenience to answer any concerns or question. I may be reached at zihan@uvic.ca or 250-384-1997. Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of agreement with my thesis. Thanks for your time and consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Zihan Shi

I give my consent to participate in Zihan Shi's Master's thesis for the faculty of education of the University of Victoria.

Name

Participant's Signature

Date

(A copy of this consent letter may be kept by

you.)