

**Chinese International Students' Understanding of Career  
and Attitudes toward Career Counselling Services**

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## **Abstract**

Following the policy to globalize Canadian higher education, the demographics on Canadian campuses are internationalized. Chinese international students account for 23% of full-time visa students in Canadian universities. Although career related issues are of major concern for Chinese international students who want to stay in Canada or plan to return to China, studies about their career needs and attitudes towards career counselling are limited. Existing research tends to ignore the dynamic social and economic changes occurring in China and treats Chinese international students as if they were a homogenous group. This research is situated in the premise of social constructionism which emphasizes the importance of social processes, interactions and the centrality of language in the production of knowledge. Eight Chinese international students who were in the senior year of their undergraduate studies in Halifax, Canada were selected to participate in in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Eight themes emerged from the interview data such as, multiple comprehensions of the meaning of career versus job and work; contextualized motivations involved in career planning; less dominant parental roles and growing independent decision making and so on. The research shows that social constructionism provides new perspectives for cross-cultural studies by revealing multiple truths and interrelated contingencies involved in examining career related issues and exploring cross-cultural differences. The study has implications for career counselling and higher education.

### **Acknowledgements**

“When I am down and, oh my soul, so weary;  
When troubles come and my heart burdened be;  
Then, I am still and wait here in the silence,  
Until you come and sit awhile with me.  
You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains;  
You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas;  
I am strong, when I am on your shoulders;  
You raise me up... To more than I can be.”

----Josh Groban

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

A statement from the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC, 2001) indicates that Canada is becoming more and more aware of the importance of international students in terms of their contributions to the Canadian economy and their potential roles as “ future trade partners and decision-makers with an affinity for Canada” (p. 1). The demographics on Canadian campuses have become internationalized following the adoption of policy to globalize Canadian higher education.

In order to continue to compete with U.S., U.K., Australia and other countries in the international student market and, to attract and keep international students, Canada promotes a list of support services for the students (AUCC, 2007). Among these services, “on-going counselling and non-academic support” was positioned as the top one (AUCC, 2007). However, it may be optimistic to expect much utilization of counselling services. Popadiuk and Arthur (2004) pointed out “international students typically do not utilize counselling services as a resource” (p. 126). The potential reasons came from many aspects such as counsellor’s lack of knowledge of international students’ cultural and historical backgrounds, transitional issues, individual needs and so on (Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004).

Because international students often pay a great deal of attention to career related issues, career counselling services were assumed to be more appealing than other counselling services on campus (Leong & Sedlacek, 1989). However,

international students' career needs, career decision making and attitudes towards career counselling services have not received much attention in the existing research. Despite a small body of literature referring to such issues, researchers treat international students as a homogeneous group and typically use uniform quantitative methods (Reynolds & Constantine, 2007). This study thus concentrates on examining the career needs of one subgroup of international students—Chinese international students in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Through the use of semi-structured interviews as a research method, I anticipated that within-group differences would be revealed.

### **Why Chinese International Students**

According to AUCC (2007): “In 2006, there were 48,000 full-time visa students enrolled in undergraduate programs. This represents a three-fold increase from the 14,600 who were enrolled a decade earlier” (p. 5). Asian countries are the main source countries of international students in Canada. Leong and Hartung (1997) indicated that Asian clients are more likely to seek career counselling because they perceive career-related problems as more “circumscribed, concrete, specific, and non-emotionally-based” (p. 189). Asian students might favor career counselling compared to psychotherapy, but underutilization of career counselling services still exists (Leong & Hartung, 1997).

Among Asian international students, Chinese international students are the largest group: “China has been and continues to be the leading country of origin since 2001, in 2004, China accounted for 23 percent of full-time visa students in Canadian universities, totaling close to 15,000 students” (AUCC, 2007, p. 5).

Career related issues manifest as a major concern for Chinese international students who are close to graduation. For those who want to stay and apply for immigration, an essential prerequisite is to secure a local job within Canada. For those who might go back to China, career related issues are also a high priority (Consulate-General of People's Republic of China in Houston, 2004) because simply having foreign degrees is no longer rosy in China (Plafker, 2004). However, studies on Chinese international students' career needs and attitudes towards career counselling services are limited. Some researchers (Leong, Wagner & Tata, 1995; Sue & Sue, 1990) suggested that Chinese students tend to underutilize the counselling services based on several underlying assumptions such as cohesion within the family, distrust of services, lack of bilingual and bicultural staff and existence of bias within counselling services. Brammer (1985) indicated that Chinese people consider counselling services "too slow and unreliable as ways to change behavior" (p. 134), so counselling and psychotherapy might sound negative and alien to them. However, within the last two decades, many ideological and societal changes have taken place in China such as the transformation from communist equalization to market economy freedom, and associated impacts that this kind of transformation brought to Chinese society. The impact of these changes on Chinese international students' understanding and attitudes towards certain issues is missing from the literature.

Also, the styles of career counselling are under debate. Leong and Hartung (1997) suggested that Asian students favor career counselling services in order to avoid psychotherapies which usually require exposing psychological and

emotional issues. Crites (1981), however, argued that career counselling cannot be separated from psychotherapy and other approaches with respect to the dimensions that touch on emotions. Kidd (1998) and Manuele-Adkins (1992) also suggested that emotional and personal issues should be given the same attention as career-related problems in the course of career counselling.

Further, the meaning of career has not been defined consistently either through Western career development theories or through Chinese ideological transitions. In last century, China has transitioned from feudalism to communism to free market economy.

Influenced by political, economical and ideological changes, the meaning of career might be defined differently. Chinese international students who are currently in their 20's were born in 1980's when Chinese economic reforms just started. They were brought up in the waves of transformation that economic reforms brought to Chinese society such as reopening the gate to foreigners, establishing free economic zones, ending "iron-bowl" jobs and so on. And, now they are immersed in Western culture and education. Thus, for Chinese international students, career might have different meaning compared to the older generations' point of view.

Finally, Chinese international students' understanding of career counselling might also be diverse. The needs of Chinese international students for career counselling might undergo shifts from one person to another person or from one period to another period or even from one location to another location. Thus, needs for various approaches to career counselling services in Canada could also

be intertwined with diverse needs of Chinese international students for career counselling services.

Keeping these questions in mind, this study was designed to explore the controversial issues surrounding Chinese international students' attitudes towards career counselling services on campuses.

### **Locating Oneself in the Research**

As Chinese Canadian, I still clearly remember my initial experiences when I first came to Canada to complete my second B.A. degree in psychology. In some of my courses such as social psychology, professors were interested in illustrating cross-cultural or cross-social issues to explain some ideological or behavioral differences. Often, those differences were said to be situated on the premise of collectivism vs. individualism, or Western vs. Eastern. The boundaries were clear-cut and well-defined. However, those so-called Eastern or collective cultures even sounded distant to me—a person who was born and grew up in China. In addition, I was surprised to hear some of my Canadian friends on campuses telling me that I was a Westernized Chinese. In China, I was just no more than an ordinary Chinese person with no outstanding differences compared to others. Since then on, I asked myself, “What are the real differences between being an Asian and a Westerner?” This question motivated me to explore within-group differences in addition to between-group differences in my further studies.

My specific interest in examining career-related issues arose from my life experiences. After I came to Canada, I had switched my undergraduate program three times before I finally decided to major in psychology. Some Chinese

students perceived that majoring in Psychology could not bring a bright future to their prospective career life. For me, my interest overrides other considerations. However, my choice was influenced greatly from my parents' understanding and financial support. Now, when I rethink my choice, I cannot help wondering how other Chinese students choose their majors and what kind of career life they might be happy with in the future.

Also, I am interested in investigating Chinese people's attitudes towards counselling, especially related to career topics. The contemporary image of Chinese people in North America seems to be that of persons who are well adjusted and functioning in the new environment and immune to the attacks of mental illness, even when facing unemployment or underemployment (Sue & Sue, 1990). But researchers (Sue & Sue 1990; Leong, Wagner & Tata, 1995) do not agree. They argue that the low rates of accessing professional psychological help cannot be used as evidence to portray the real status of Chinese mental health. Several suicide cases happened in the Chinese community in Canada. Some such tragedies are caused by career related issues. Due to low rates of admission for professional help, the number of Chinese people suffering from anxiety, depression, and other mental illness is largely unknown. As a student with a lot of uncertainties about my future career life, I deeply feel a similar level of anxiety and stress. Therefore, I am interested in knowing how other Chinese students are dealing with many transitional issues and challenges and what they think of counselling services offered on campuses.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of my study was to explore Chinese students' attitudes towards seeking help from career counselling services on Halifax, Nova Scotia university campuses. Also, examined were motivations for studying in Canada, future plans, family influences, and transformations in their learning and sense of self.

My research questions are:

1. How do Chinese international students understand career?
2. Why did they choose to study abroad and why in Canada and Halifax in particular?
3. How did their families influence their academic and career decisions?
4. What changes occurred in their personal academic lives and future plans with the experience of studying abroad?
5. What were Chinese students' experiences with career counselling?
6. What are Chinese students' attitudes towards and expectations for career counselling and type of counsellor?

This research is situated in a social constructionist theoretical framework that emphasizes the importance of social processes and interactions in the production of knowledge (Burr, 1995; Young & Collin, 2004). In this view, Chinese international students actively reconstruct their identities, values, and beliefs in the course of transitions (Yi, Lin & Kishimoto, 2003). Social constructionism theory would also provide a new perspective within the literature of cross-cultural and career development research related to cultural, language, individual, environment and contextual factors.

Therefore, the questions are not necessarily bound exclusively with the wording “career”. They also encompass motivations, expectations, cultural traditions, individual variables and so on. In this study, I am also interested in knowing why Chinese international students come to Canada and attend universities and make certain types of future plans, how they deal with familial and/or parental influences on their career decisions, and how social identity influences their communication with counsellors.

### **Significance of the Study**

There have been different approaches to career counselling. Arthur and Stewart (2001) argued that effective career counselling approaches should be based on the recognition of both between-group and within-group differences. I hope that this study might facilitate counsellors to access first-hand data on current career related issues faced by minorities in Canada such as concerns about working status, challenges of language and psychological adjustments to the labor market and accessibility to the sources of career related information and services. I also hope that the study might portray different pictures of Chinese international students in terms of their individual comprehensions of diverse issues. By doing do, I hope that counsellors might find information that is useful to them in developing more approachable services for this group of students. Also, I believe that through better tailored services, the distance between Chinese international students and career counsellors will become closer. I also hope that this study can raise people’s consciousness about the need for policy-making in terms of school-to-work transitions, social equality and diversity in the future.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This literature review is divided in three main sections. The first section addresses the theoretical underpinnings of different approaches to career counselling. In that social constructionism will be employed as a theoretical framework in this study, it is necessary to start out with a definition of social constructionism and to explain how it is distinguished from constructivism and other theories in order to establish an understanding of this approach. Then through lenses of social constructionism, the meaning of career will be explored in the later section. Finally, social constructionism will be applied to review attitudes towards career counselling services in the third section.

#### **Theoretical Framework for Career Counselling**

“Constructivism” has been presented in the literature of psychology for over two decades and it grew from the premise of cognitivism and was nurtured by contextualism and postmodernism (Young & Collin, 2004). Because terms “constructivism” and “constructionism” are still muffled by ambiguities, Young and Collin (2004) suggested that it might be appropriate to use “constructivisms” in general. Even though the two terms are often used interchangeably or undifferentially, they still need to be described further in order to build a thorough theoretical framework for this research.

### *Constructivism and Constructionism*

Constructivism posits that each individual constructs reality through cognitive processes. This approach is more interested in cognitive processing and has an individual focus. Social constructionism has many overlaps with constructivism. Social constructionism also views knowledge as constructed by social processes and relational practices. However, these theoretical constructs differ in some ways. In contrast with constructivism which “is generally considered to share positivism’s commitment to a dualist epistemology and ontology” (Young & Collin, 2004, p. 375), social constructionism takes a critical stance towards ‘one truth’ and contends that the world can not be divided into categories and dichotomies (Burr, 1995). In addition, because social constructionism has been greatly influenced by postmodernism, it is more interested in challenging perceived or mainstream viewpoints and discovering new perspectives and meanings behind them (Stead, 2004). Further, social constructionism emphasizes the importance of culture and history in understanding the world. Both culture and history for social constructionism are conceived as dynamic rather than static.

This means that all ways of understanding are historically and culturally relative. Not only are they specific to particular cultures and periods of history, they are seen as products of that culture and history, and are dependent upon the particular social and economic arrangements prevailing in that culture at that time. (Burr, 1995, p. 4)

Moreover, social constructionism addresses the importance of language. For social constructionism, language is not simply an expression of our emotions and

thoughts but a form of action, through which knowledge is constructed.

Compared to the constructivist approach which focuses on “the meaning-making activity of individual minds” (Schwandt, 1994, p. 127), the social constructionist approach emphasizes the importance of “collective generation of meaning as shaped by conversations of language and other social processes” (Schwandt, 1994, p. 127). In addition, viewed from the perspective of social constructionism, language not only brings recollection of the past or retrospection of the present but also brings new intentions up to the surface or consciousness level which might enable the individual to take actions to shape his/her future in new ways (Richardson, 2004).

### ***Social Constructionism and Career Concept***

Social constructionism is more engaged in inviting us to see “dynamic” and “holistic” worlds as compared to the positivistic approaches constrained by “fragmentation” and “reductionism” (Cohen, Duberley, & Mallon, 2004). Social constructionism is considered to have a capacity to “capture the analytical richness of the career concept” (p. 409). I will take social constructionism as a theoretical frame to portray how Chinese international students understand career and view career counselling services.

### ***Traditional Approaches***

Within the last few decades, the concept of career has remained controversial in Western society. Represented by Holland’s personality theory and widely used interest inventories such as the Kuder Occupational Interest Survey, Strong Interest Inventory, Differential Aptitude Tests and the Guilford-Zimmerman

Aptitude Survey, the trait-factor approach emphasizes that career is a result of matching an occupation to an individual's personality. However, this approach is often criticized as being static and ignoring the person's changes through time and development (Sharf, 1992). Thus, Super (1951) and Osipow and Fitzgerald (1996) among others viewed career as "the evolving sequence of a person's work experiences over time" (Arthur, Hall, & Lawrence, 1989, p. 8). Since its central notion rests on the premise of self-concept, developmental theory is often questioned for ignoring the individual's social roles. In contrast to psychologists, most sociologists would agree on Gysbers's (1984) definition of career as "the combinations and sequences of life roles, the settings in which life roles unfold, and the events that occur in the lives of individuals all through the life span" (p. xiii). This definition was built on the premise of the person—environment interaction model. The later sees the individual as subjective structure and the environment as an objective structure, with these two structures interrelated by actions (Hujer, 1993). However, their view is not fully accepted by psychologists who regard the sociological concept of career as overemphasizing the importance of nonwork roles (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996).

### ***Social Constructionism Approach versus Traditional Approaches***

Although social constructionism does not give us a fixed definition of the term "career", features illustrated by Burr (1995) may facilitate us in building a better understanding of the issues associated with career. These features include anti-essentialism, historically and culturally constructed knowledge, anti-realism and language.

***Anti-essentialism.*** Burr (1995) listed several features of social constructionism. One outstanding feature of social constructionism is *anti-essentialism*. It stands opposite to essentialism, which sees things (includes human beings) as carrying an essence or nature. Through this essence or nature, people can identify persons or things, explain how and why they behave or predict their behavioral tendencies in the future. For social constructionism, “there are no ‘essences’ inside things or people that make what they are” (Burr, 1995, p. 5). Social constructionism is discontent with both “nature” (trait theories) and “nurture” (environmentalism) explanations about the individual. According to trait approaches, personality is generally treated as the nature of human beings who have been programmed according to inborn or inherited biological factors. Personality is seen as stable, coherent and difficult to change. However, from social constructionism’s position, personality is neither fixed nor a single trait that exists inside us but is socially constructed by relationships, situations, historical and cultural variables. Also, social constructionism differs from environmentalism which identifies personality as being determined by social and physical environments that we are born into. From social constructionism, personality is neither ‘definable’ nor ‘discoverable’ nor “given by biology or by the environment” (Burr, 1995, p. 6). Social constructionism indicates that diverse contextual factors are more important than so-called essential reasons for forming or developing people’s personality or constructing knowledge. Those contextual factors include “parental and familial influences, interpersonal relationships,

cultural value, social and economic environment, political atmosphere, and natural changes” (Chen, 2003, p. 20).

***Historically and culturally constructed knowledge.*** Career developmental theories (Super & Cohen, 1970) view human beings as developing through universal stages such as adolescents, adults and seniors. However, this normative pattern does not include ingredients of individual differences and unpredictable events that could cause variances (Young & Collin, 2004). Social constructionism does not agree on predictability. This theory addresses development as an on-going process influenced by diverse factors rather than identifiable stages that appear sequentially. Also, social constructionism highlights influences of culture and history in the development process. In addition, “culture itself is a process, not a set of forces, engaged in by persons in which both innovation and change as well as constraint and reproduction of existing cultural forms is possible” (Richardson, 2004, p. 491). So career decisions and individual’s understanding about career might be greatly influenced by current and evolving feelings or situations. The term *career* is not only recognized by social constructionism as culturally and historically defined. The ever-changing and embedded contextual factors contribute to qualitative changes and discrepancies that may not be predicted by rigid sequences that often characterize career developmental theories.

***Anti-realism.*** Postmodernism has great effects on social constructionism. Postmodernism rejects the idea that there is only one ultimate truth. Therefore, another important feature of social constructionism is anti-realism which asserts that there is no single reality underlying a certain event or phenomenon—“all

knowledge is derived from looking at the world from some perspective or other, and is in the service of some interests rather than others” (Burr, 1995, p. 6). This notion encourages us to scrutinize and reinvestigate the unified common sense, taken-for-granted knowledge. Under the scope of anti-realism, the dominant understanding about career may be constructed by individuals differently (Coupland, 2004).

**Language.** Language is normally considered as an expression of thoughts or simply a communication tool. According to social constructionism, “language constitutes rather than reflects reality and is both a pre-condition for thought and a form of social action” (Young & Collin, 2004, p. 377). It not only depicts past and present experiences; it is also a medium through which individuals organize thoughts and reconsider choices or decisions that were already made (Burr, 1995). In such a way, new intentions might be brought to the surface and personal agency could be stimulated (Richardson, 2004).

These features differentiate social constructionism from aforementioned traditional approaches; they also have implications for the study of career and career related issues.

### **The Meaning of Career**

What is career? How can it be distinguished from work or job? According to Tolbert (1980), career is “the sequence of occupations in which one engages” (p. 31). Work is “purposeful mental, physical, or combined mental-physical activity that produces something of economic value...may produce a service to others as well as a material product” (p. 32) and job is “a group of similar positions in a

business, industry, or other place of employment” (p. 31). In terms of the difference between career and job, Adamson, Doherty and Viney (1998) suggested that “a career is not simply a job” (p. 253). They define career as “something which embraces notions of development and logical progression.” MacMillan (2007) noted that a job just means making money for a person to secure his/her needs for living, but career requires more of his/her emotional investment and attachment and is the part of the meaning of a person’s life. In terms of the difference between career and work, career is not simply defined as work but also encompasses lifestyle including leisure activities.

However, these perceived differences are summarized primarily by career specialists. They are seldom discussed in research studies. Also, without knowing clients’ perspectives on understanding career and career associated issues, educational and psychological professional support may fail to help their clients (Chaves, Diemer, Blustein, Gallagher, DeVoy, Casares, 2004). Thus, “to understand how individuals understand career and account for their careers, a consideration of how people talk about their careers is important” (Cohen, Duberley, & Mallon, 2004).

### ***The Ever-changing Meaning of Career in Chinese Culture/History***

Through the lens of social constructionism which focuses on the on-going cultural and historical process, we also find that the meaning of career has changed several times throughout Chinese history. Career is written in Chinese as 职业. “The first character refers to the duty or office of the (mostly Confucian) official, whereas the second character denotes the hierarchically ordered

categories of scholars, peasants, craftsmen, and merchants” (Etymological Dictionary, 1992, as cited in Schulte, 2003, p. 219). This Chinese character reflects the influence of ancient Confucius doctrine. It showed the hierarchical structure of the society at the time of China in feudalism. After the founding of the People’s Republic of China, career meant “an individual’s total contribution to communism and social improvement” (Zhang, Hu, & Pope, 2002, p. 227). In the past three decades, influenced by market-oriented economy, the idea of career has changed to embrace the question of how to survive in the large population and keen competitiveness. The meaning of career became just as important as financial income or the means to support family’s material well-being (Westwood & Lok, 2003).

However, Westwood and Lok talked about their observations of younger Chinese generations. They indicated that the younger generation of Chinese who grew up in a transitional economic period seem more open to changes and challenges. They suggested that intrinsic factors of career such as interest and challenge might be more emphasized by Chinese younger generations. In 2005, a Chinese national online survey ([www.Chinahrd.net](http://www.Chinahrd.net)) revealed that more than 80% of Chinese participants emphasized that intrinsic factors of work are more essential than extrinsic ones. The intrinsic factors are defined as “meaningful,” “influential” and “sense of achievements” and “recognition.” Included in the extrinsic factors are “income,” “bonus” or “job security.” This finding corroborated Western and Lok’s suggestion that ideological change is occurring in Chinese society. Therefore, Chinese international students brought up in the

Chinese expanding economic development might hold different opinions on the meaning of career compared to older generations. However, living in a different culture might bring some challenges as well as reflections and reconsiderations on the meaning of some issues for Chinese international students. Their motivations for career might thus be further influenced by contextualized situations.

***Combining Cultural/Historical Influences with Personal Intentions in  
Understanding the Meaning of Career***

Social constructionism believes that history and culture contribute to knowledge construction. Chen (2006) suggested that the center of social constructionism worldview on career psychology is subjectivity and “individual intention is first and foremost a representation of one’s subjective world and its related functioning” (Chen, 2006, p. 133). As for Chinese international students, their intentions for going abroad to study could be intertwined with their career planning. Chirkov, Vansteenkiste, Tao and Lynch (2007) categorized intentions for going abroad into four groups: intrinsic, identified, external and/or introjected. If their motivation is intrinsic, “students move to a foreign universities because they find this move to be challenging and exciting” (p.203). For the “identified”, moving abroad is relevant to their personal goals rather than the activity itself; students whose motivation is external were forced to study abroad, due to their parents’ assertions. Students classified as “introjected” choose to study abroad not because they have to but because they feel they should or ought to do this to meet others’ expectations for them. Even though Chirkov et al.’s (2007) study showed that international students could be driven by all types of intentions, the distinct

categorization and positivist epistemology applied in the study might be challenged by social constructionism. Participants' subjective "interpretation and meaning making" is the focus that social constructionism encourages researchers to explore (Cohen, Duberley, & Mallon, 2004).

### ***Transitional Parental Roles in Career Decision Making***

Because of anti-essentialism and anti-realism, social constructionism is open to ambiguities and contradictions (Richardson, 2004). Views on the influences of Asian parents in children's development are conflicting. Familial and parental roles are usually viewed as the predominant impact on Chinese culture and personal development (Leong & Hartung, 1997; Sue & Sue, 1990). Leong (1991) pointed out that the career immaturity of Asian students is often explained by their familial and parents' roles in their decision making and the involvement of parents. When comparing parental influences on the career choices among Asian American, Caucasian American, and Chinese college students, Tang (2002) concluded that the choices of Asian American and Chinese college students are more likely to be influenced by their families.

However, Singaravelu, White and Bringaze (2005) discovered that compared to other groups of international students in the U.S, family influence among Asian international students is less than among non-Asian international students; the role of family might have been secondary to personal choice in terms of career decisions for Asian international students.

Differences might also arise from some ideological changes in China. "Since the beginning of the twentieth century, industrialization has increasingly

contributed to the undermining of the old family system” and “the vast majority of Chinese families have been correspondingly weakened” (Ware, 1940, p. 121). Also, in later waves of Marxism, modernizations, and the market economy, many traditional social behaviors have been shaken by the Westernized and individualistic thoughts and behaviors (Katz, Juni, Shope, & Tang, 1993, Li, Zhong, Lin, & Zhang, 2004). Deutsch (2004) suggested that “in a culture that is rapidly industrializing, urbanizing and modernizing, students touted their rights to make their own decisions” (p. 412).

### ***The On-going Process of How Meaning is Constructed***

Social constructionism’s notion that “the creation of meaning is a process that is embedded in time” (Richardson, 2004, p. 487) also has implications for examining career related issues of Chinese international students. Researchers (i.e. Hsieh, 2007; Qin, 2000) showed that Chinese international students do actively construct knowledge through interactions with the reality or their overseas on-going experiences. The reconstructing processes manifest in their adaptive learning styles (Lee, 1995; Wan, 2001), their enhanced self-confidence (Noels, Pon, & Clément, 1996), their redefined identity (Hsieh, 2007), their rebuilt worldviews (Yang, Harlow, Maddux & Smaby, 2006) and their reactions to social norms and values (Zhang & Brunton, 2007) and so on.

### **Attitudes towards Career Counselling Services**

Career counselling has a long history in North America. It has been primarily dominated by the trait-and-factor approach for almost a half century (Crites, 1981). “Trait matching career counselling consists of diagnosis, psychometric

information, and occupational classification and information” (Mckay, Bright & Pryor, 2005, p. 98); the underlying assumption of trait matching career counselling is that people live in relatively unchanging environments and their sense of self remains stable over time (Campbell & Ungar, 2004). Later, the developmental approach (Super, 1951) defined career counselling as “the process of helping persons to develop and accept an integrated and adequate picture of himself and of his role in the world of work, to test this concept against reality, and to convert it into a reality, with satisfaction to himself and benefit to society” (p. 92). However, from social constructionism’s perspective, the trait-approach ignores the factors of individual and sociolcultral changes, and the developmental approach’s focus on the individual’s work role oversimplifies his/her other roles involved in career issues (Brott, 2001). Further, although sociologists and environmentalists are aware that an individual’s occupational role can not be separated from other roles (Campbell & Unger, 2004; Mozdierz, Lisiecki, Bitter & Williams, 1986), social constructionism argues that Western theories are still mainly obsessed with an individualistic focus rather than considering the environment at large such as globalization, ever-changing economic and social development (Collin, 1997). In social constructionism theory, environment cannot be analyzed separately as an external entity in relation to the individual; individuals are embedded in contexts (Collin, 1997; Richardson, 2002).

***Impacts of Ideological and Societal Changes on Attitudes towards Career  
Counselling Services***

As discussed previously, within the last two decades, many ideological and societal changes have taken place in China. A widely-accepted explanation for Chinese people to mistrust professional help services is because the Chinese family-bounded tradition (Leong, Wagner & Tata, 1995; Sue & Sue, 1990). However, recent research (Goh, Xie, Wagl, Zhong, Lian, & Romano, 2007) showed that both Chinese high school and university students hold positive attitudes towards professional counselling services. But the study also points out that student counselling services are still limited in China today—even in Shanghai and Beijing, the two largest cities, only 50% of schools from elementary level to university level have counselling services. Based on this analysis, as for Chinese international students coming from the mainland of China, the probability of underutilizing counselling services could be attributed to many potential reasons. For many Chinese international students, counselling services do not take into account their prior attitudes or knowledge about career counselling and thus, may be perceived as distant or detached. In addition, the lower admission to counselling services might be caused by their unfamiliarity with such services rather than their distrusting outsiders of the family.

***Contradictory Views on Emotional Expression in Cross-cultural Counselling  
Settings***

Contradictions emerged about Chinese students' preferences in counselling styles. On issues around emotional expression of Chinese or Asian clients, cross-

cultural psychologists have different views. Some researchers (Leong & Hartung, 1997; Sue & Sue, 1990) believed that Chinese clients were more inclined to handle personal and emotional issues within rather than outside of the family because disclosure of these issues might bring shame and disgrace to their families. Based on respect for Asian tradition that values self-restraint rather than self-disclosure (Leong, Lee & Chang, 2008), counsellors are advised to purposefully avoid “talk-cure” and be cautious of exploring emotional topics when counselling Asian clients (Paniagua, 1998). However, for Chinese international students, other researchers disagreed with this standpoint. A body of literature suggested that international students experience similar stresses and confusions as local students (Arthur & Hiebert, 1996; Chen, 1999, 2004; Cleave-Hogg, 1996; Halamandaris & Power, 1997; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004). Also, as the first generation to Canada, international students might endure greater mental health difficulties than second and third generations (Sharir, 2002). Spencer-Oatey and Xiong (2006) and Chen (2004) reported that Chinese students do suffer from psychological stress or experience social adjustment difficulties. Yi, Lin and Kishimoto (2003) revealed that academic difficulties, confusion about the future, relationship problems, loneliness, and low self-esteem could also cause international students to develop depression and anxiety. Some international students may experience reentry transition issues, and the variety of issues associated with reentry transition may cause worries, anxieties towards their home countries and a sense of loss after leaving the host country (Arthur, 2008). Arthur (2008) found out that international students need to talk about these feelings. Yi

Giseala and Kishimoto (2003) advocated that “it is important for academic and career counsellors to assess each international student’s overall functionality even though their initial presenting concerns may not be personal issues” (p. 339).

### ***Non-directive Approach as an Counselling Style***

In terms of directive<sup>1</sup> or non-directive<sup>2</sup> counselling styles applied in career counselling settings, the viewpoints are also diverse. A number of researchers (Atkinson, Maruyama, & Matsui, 1978; Leong, Lee, & Chang, 2008) suggested that because Asian cultures highly value conformity, obedience and subordination to authority, Asian Americans prefer the directive counselling styles to non-directive styles. However, Arthur (2008) challenged that the directive counselling style is not preferred by all international students. She said “as students gain experience with the host country, they may become more comfortable in working in more collaborative ways” (p. 284). Lau (1995) suggested that directive styles might also be replaced with non-directive style following the development of a relationship between the counsellor and students. Lau also believed that non-directive styles have long-term rewarding effects.

### ***Divergent Preferences towards Counsellors***

Researchers have different predications for Chinese people’s preferences with regard to counsellors. In counselling Asian clients, Paniagua (1998) said that

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<sup>1</sup> Thorne (1947) indicated that “The concepts of directive and direction also imply straightforwardness, i.e. straight, leading by the shortest way to a point or end. Directed movements of an organism are those which are observed to be related to a specific stimulus or goal. Direction is an attribute of behavior indicative of specific function and variously expressed in terms of needs, drives, goals, purposes and other concepts descriptive of integrated behavior” (p. 161).

<sup>2</sup> Non-directive counselling styles emphasizes its exploration of latent and affective-compulsive components since unconscious factors are treated as important determinants of behaviors (Thorne, 1947). In counselling settings, non-directive counselling styles often filled with ambiguities and emerged as unstructured processes which work on clients’ emotional aspects of behavior rather than giving clients immediate solutions (Leong et al, 2008). Further, non-directive counselling encourages the individual through verbal or nonverbal expressions to find him/her way to the solutions best suited to him/her (Combs, 1945).

counsellors need to show their professionalism by exhibiting their certificates or awards in order to enhance clients' trust and preferences. Mao and Jepson (1988) found that Chinese students expressed a preference for counsellors with the same racial<sup>3</sup> background. Leong and Hartung (1997) suggested that the lack of racially diverse bicultural staff might be another reason for underutilization of career counselling services by international students. However, Hom (1998) revealed that more acculturated students were more likely to express a preference for an Anglo-American counsellor over an Asian-American counsellor. Sue and Sue (1990) indicated that there are mixed findings regarding clients' attitudes towards the identity set of counsellors. Arthur and Stewart (2001) state that clients do not have uniform preferences for types of counsellors in multicultural counselling settings.

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3 "Historically, race has been viewed as capturing biological variation within human populations" (Williams, 2001, pp. 4831), however, this view is built upon biological empiricism which asserts that people who look alike are a same race (Barbujani, 2001). Quintana (2007) argues that race is not a simply biological term; it is also socially and culturally constructed.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter will begin by exploring why I chose a particular approach to my research study. I will then discuss how the study was designed and conducted. After this, I will demonstrate how ethical considerations had been considered throughout the study. Finally, I will discuss the issue of credibility.

#### **Methodology and Method**

Before choosing which method to use for a study, it is important for researchers to distinguish method from methodology. Lather (1992) noted that method is a technique for gathering empirical evidence while methodology is a theoretical framework guiding a research project. Methodologies usually consist of the following paradigms: positivism, postpositivist, constructivism-interpretivism, critical-ideological (Ponterotto, 2005). Further, methods can be divided into two main categories: quantitative methods and qualitative methods (Langenbach, Vaughen & Aagaard, 1994).

Compared to quantitative methods, qualitative approaches are more likely to explore and discover the in-depth understanding and perceptions of an individual (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Interview is one of the key qualitative methods (Polkinghorne, 2005). It is defined as a “technique of gathering data from humans by asking questions and getting them to react verbally” (Potter, 1996, p. 96). However, Fontana and Frey (2005) indicated that because interviewing is “contextually and historically and politically bound” (p. 695), hence interviewing

is an unavoidable active and intentional process rather than “the neutral exchange of asking questions and getting answers” (p. 696). In addition, interviewing is valued as a way to “obtain descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena” (Kvale, 1996, p. 5-6).

This research inquiry is based on a social constructionist theoretical framework which looks into deep layers of individuals’ specific cultural and social experiences as well as cultural and contextual factors in order to present multiple aspects of certain phenomena. The advantages of interviewing include revealing rich and thorough information for data interpretation, and knowledge of the context of social interaction between the researcher and the participants. For these reasons, the interview was selected as the key method employed in this research study.

Thus, this study used a qualitative interview method in order to portray a detailed account of Chinese international students’ beliefs about career and their attitudes toward seeking help from career counselling services.

### **Research Design**

In this section, I will list specific questions asked in the interview. Also, I will introduce the participants and explain how they were selected. Then, I will describe the procedure of interviewing them. At the end, I will explain how data was collected and analyzed. The languages used in the interviews will be mainly English. If there are some words or phrases participants feel the need to express in

Chinese, I will translate these into English in the transcripts and ask a language specialist to verify them.

### *Interview questions*

The Interview questions were divided into two groups: one group of questions explored participants' understanding of career, and another group investigated their attitudes toward seeking help from career counselling. The questions are as follows:

#### Part A: Understanding of career

- (1) What are your experiences in Canada in terms of life, studies and work?
- (2) Could you tell me what brought you to Canada?
- (3) What factors influenced you to go to the university?
- (4) Could you tell me about your plans after completing your university degree? Is it the same as you planned before you came to school? If not, what happened to change your mind?
- (5) Would you describe some previous and current work experiences? If you do not have any work experiences, what kinds of work experiences might you want to have in the near future?
- (6) Suppose that there were two jobs available for you after you graduate: one is very challenging and not well-paid, but it might help you to ground yourself in the field you are interested in and another one has relatively better pay but is not related to your major or predetermined goal. Which one would you be more likely to take and why?
- (7) According to your understanding, are there differences among "job"

“work” and “career”? If yes, would you describe them to me? How do you evaluate the importance of “job” “work” and “career” over your short-term plans and your long-term plans respectively?

(8) As a Chinese, how do you view the opinion that Chinese people are good at certain areas of work, especially those related with math, science, or engineering?

(9) How do you view your familial and/or parents’ suggestions or decisions for your study and career?

Part B: Attitudes towards seeking help from career counselling.

(1) Have you or a family member or friends had any experiences with career counselling either in China or in Canada?

(2) How do you view career counselling and other counselling services?

(3) What would you expect from career counselling?

(4) Besides “career” topics in career counselling, what other concerns or issues might you want to reveal or expose in a career counselling setting?

(5) How do you evaluate counsellors?

### *Participants*

In this study, participants were selected<sup>4</sup> from the pool of Chinese international students in the senior years of their undergraduate studies in a major

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<sup>4</sup> In my study, I mainly follow the definitions and strategies proposed by Polkinghorne (2005). “Selection of participants” rather than “sampling” in term of collecting qualitative data is suggested by Polkinghorne (2005) because “sampling carries the connotation that those chosen are a sample of a population and the purpose of their selection is to enable findings to be applied to a population” (p.139). Rather, qualitative studies are less concerned with generalizing to a larger population and more concerned with understanding the experience itself. Thus, in my qualitative research, I adhere to the term of “selection of participants” instead of “sampling”.

Atlantic Canadian urban centre. I chose senior undergraduate students for the following considerations:

1. They might be more interested in and concerned with the topic of career and be more familiar with career counselling services than their freshman counterparts since career-related issues are more relevant to their upcoming situations.
2. After spending some years in Canada with new social-cultural and living environment, they might have comparatively richer experiences and more reflections on personal changes and developments.

I primarily used the “snowballing”<sup>5</sup> technique in the process of selecting participants for the present study. Polkinghorne (2005) asserted that “to select participants from a particular subgroup whose experience is expected to be somewhat alike... (would help researchers) to describe the experience of a particular subgroup in depth” (p. 141). Chinese international students could include students from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and mainland China. However, ideologies in these three regions might be slightly different for political and economic reasons. In this study, I first generated a list of possible Chinese participants with different majors in order to maintain diversity and then concentrated on those Chinese students from mainland China.

My participants were eight Chinese international students with ages ranging from 21 to 28. Six were soon to graduate with their first undergraduate degrees.

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<sup>5</sup> The snowball strategy described by Polkinghorne (2005) is slightly different from other researchers who simply said that the respondent is helping to find others through his/her social networks. According to Polkinghorne (2005), researchers might need to first generate a list of possible respondents and try to maintain its diversity. This strategy also shows the feature of “purposeful selection” in qualitative studies.

Two participants already had their first B.A. or B.S. Degree in China before they came for their second undergraduate degree in another major. They were currently enrolled in different universities in Halifax. The number of female to male participants was 3 to 5. They were interviewed individually and face to face. The great advantages of conducting a face-to-face interview are effectiveness, and likeliness of responses (Shuy, 2002).

Profiles of each of the eight participants are highlighted in Table 1.

*Table 1.* Profiles of participants

	Name (pseudonym)	Gender	Age	University (1, 2, 3)	Education	Field of study
P.1	Jessie	Female	$\geq 25$	1	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Nutrition & IT
P.2	Liang	Male	$\leq 25$	2	4 <sup>th</sup> year	Commerce
P.3	Linda	Female	$\leq 25$	3	4 <sup>th</sup> year	Finance & H.R.
P.4	Mingming	Female	$\geq 25$	1	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Hospitality
P.5	Ping	Male	$\leq 25$	3	4 <sup>th</sup> year	Commerce
P.6	Qiang	Male	$\leq 25$	3	4 <sup>th</sup> year	International Business
P.7	Yangyang	Male	$\leq 25$	1	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Business
P.8	Yvon	Male	$\leq 25$	1	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Business

### *Procedure*

For the social constructionist paradigm of inquiry, Schwandt (1994) suggested that:

the act of inquiry begins with the issues and/or concerns of participants and unfolds through ‘dialectic’ of iteration, analysis, critique, reiteration, reanalysis, and so on that leads eventually to a joint (among inquirer and respondents) construction of a case (i.e. findings or outcomes). (p. 129)

In addition, Fossey Harvey and McDermott (2002) suggested that to meet the demands of appropriateness and adequacy, several (four to five hours over three interviews) hours of interviews be requested in order to provide sufficient information. Therefore, it was advisable to take more than a one-shot interview to “produce the full and rich descriptions necessary for worthwhile findings” (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 142).

There were three interviews for each participant in this study. The first interview was unstructured because the unstructured interview encourages discussion and promotes the relationship of trust and interaction between the researcher and the participant (Schwandt, 1994). The second interview was semi-structured because it aimed to capture specific data that the researcher was interested in (Schwandt, 1994). The last one was for clarification and reassurance. The specific procedure for this research was arranged in the following order:

1. In the first interview, the researcher and the participant got to know each other and the process of the interview followed an unstructured format

similar to daily conversation style. At the end of this first session, the research questions were initially introduced to the participant.

2. In the second interview, the researcher and the participant explored the participants' experiences in more depth, and the interview was conducted in the semi-structured format with a focus on the exploration of specific questions.
3. In the third interview, the researcher clarified some ambiguities through asking further questions.

The first interviews lasted half an hour on average, and the second and third interview took around one hour each. All conversations in three interviews were audiotaped.

Even though the questions were predesigned, “reflexivity on the part of the researcher is essential” (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 317). The sequence of questions and wording were altered depending on the situation.

From a social constructionism perspective, locating oneself in the research is important for creating the social interaction through which knowledge can be constructed. (Gubrium & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005). In this research, my own cultural and personal background helped me approach participants and helped to establish rapport easily. After the information letter was sent out, most of participants contacted me by phone or email. Having known my intention for this research and especially my background as a soon-to-graduate student who also came from mainland China, they expressed their interest and willingness to participate. Some of them even actively helped me to look for more qualified

participants through their own networks. The predicted number of participants thus grew from six to eight.

Also, in this study, social constructionist interviews demonstrated conversations as meaningful ways to build the social interaction in which knowledge is constantly evolving (Gergen, 1999). The information revealed at the beginning of the first interview was mostly about participants' names, cities they came from and undergraduate programs they were studying. Except for one participant who had been interviewed before and automatically elaborated his story, the rest of them appeared a little bit nervous at the beginning of the interview. However, from a social constructionist approach, the space of interview should be shared between the researcher and respondents (Gubrium & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005). As the researcher, I shared my stories and discussed some issues that most Chinese in Canada might be concerned about. Participants gradually took over the conversations and started unfolding their stories and sharing their insights. In the second interview, participants became more comfortable and were more likely to lead the discussion to deeper layers such as reviewing their past and sharing personal stories that they associated with certain questions. Through the final interview, some answers were elaborated further and some doubts that emerged from the second interview were clarified. The first interview typically lasted half an hour. The second one was around one hour. The last interview usually took twenty minutes.

Through the interviews, participants preferred to talk in English. Social

constructionism believes that language functions within social roles (Gergen, 1994). Also, because “the participant is not neutral on entering the interview but has been socialized according to multiple roles that can not be predicted” (Gubrium & Ljungberg, 2005, p. 708), the social roles that participants embraced might have affected their choice of language. For example, (1) they might consider their roles as students first and Chinese second and/or (2) they might regard their roles as participants in a traditional type of academic research and/or (3) they see themselves as people with an ability of conveying ideas clearly in English and so on. Sometimes, participants inserted a couple of words or phrases in Chinese. I provided several alternatives for translations of the specific words or phrases for the participant to choose in order to make sure that the English version was as close as possible to the meaning of their Chinese expression. This process of translation and confirmation was a joint process between the participant and me. The joint outcomes also provided “a credible level of understanding” (Schwedt, 1994, p. 129). Also, their expression sometimes differed from standard English. However, I considered their unedited quotes to be more authentic so made the decision not to transform them into standard English but to report them as spoken.

### ***Data collection and analysis***

Because my study focuses on revealing different personal experiences that help participants construct the meaning of career and exploring their attitudes towards career counselling, an appropriate approach to data analysis is one that is meaning-focused (Fossey, Harvey, & McDermott, 2002). The general process of my data analysis included the following steps:

1. Transcribed all audio-taped content into written scripts.
2. From the written scripts about each participant, picked up the frequently-appearing words, phrases, themes.
3. Coded the words, phrases and themes and emotions.
4. Summarized drafts for each participant and sent to them for validation.
5. Revised each draft based on the feedback and suggestions from the participants.
6. Compared the written transcripts of different participants; searched for the similarities and differences among the transcripts in terms of words, phrases, themes.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This study satisfied the ethical requirements for conducting a research project at Mount Saint Vincent University. The study contained minimal risks, and participants' confidentiality was well protected throughout research process.

Participants received an information letter to introduce the nature of this research study, how the data would be collected and what ethical considerations would be included. After participants reviewed the information letter, they had a better picture about the study's objectives, method and significance. Then they made decisions to contact the researcher or not. Further, before starting the first interview, participants were presented with a Consent Form. The form restated what participants' involvements would be in the study and clarified their rights during the study once again.

With regard to participants' involvement, they were informed that the format of interviews would be three face-to-face personal interviews and that each interview would be audio-taped. They were reassured that their participation was totally voluntary and that they could refuse to answer any questions for any reason and also withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. Contact information for the researcher, her thesis supervisor and the Chair of the University Research Ethics Board (UREB) of Mount Saint Vincent University were also provided in the form in case participants had any questions or concerns about the study.

Along with the consent form, participants were also presented with a Confidentiality Form. In the Confidentiality Form, participants were informed that their names would not be revealed on the audiotapes and transcripts. Also their institutions were not revealed but identified only as Halifax University 1, 2 or 3. Participants were also guaranteed that the researcher would not share any information that could be used to identify a particular participant in her transcripts or on any written report. Pseudonyms were used. Since the recruitment of participants was primarily based on the snowballing technique, some participants might know that some of their friends and acquaintances were also involved in this study. Thus, in Confidentiality Form, all participants were reminded to avoid undesirable behaviors which might cause identities of other participants to be exposed to a third party.

The consent forms, and confidentiality forms were stored in a locked cabinet in my apartment and all audio-tapes, transcripts and backup CDs were placed in a

second locked cabinet. Computer files were kept in the computer with access control. If some participants who haven't seen the transcripts were interested in reviewing transcripts, I gave them the opportunity to do so. Participants who were interested in the results of the study were provided with a summary by mail or email. Upon completion of the thesis, plans were made to shred all forms and written transcripts and to erase audio-tapes, backup CDs and computer files.

**“Credibility,” “Transferability,” “Dependability,” “Confirmability”**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) listed four criteria appropriate for assessing the quality of qualitative research studies. They are “credibility,” “transferability,” “dependability,” and “confirmability.”

As suggested by Lincoln and Guba, “credibility” can be achieved by triangulation and “member checks.” “Member checks” entail asking participants in the research to indicate their agreement or disagreement by showing research materials and reports to them. Another researcher (Silverman, 2000) refers to credibility as “respondent validation” which implies that researchers should refine the tentative results by checking with participants. Credibility can be accomplished by the repetitive and cyclical nature of the research process (Merchant & Dupuy, 1996). Since my study was generally guided under Seidman's (2006) design of the three-interview structure and my participants were given the opportunity to review transcript summaries, I believe that this study met both the requirements of credibility and respondent validation or “member checks.”

“Transferability” can be achieved by providing rich descriptions of contexts in order to help readers to judge the applicability of findings to other situations. This criterion can also be understood as referential adequacy as indicated by Eisner (1991). Referential adequacy means that the researcher must provide deep descriptions beyond the surface to portray a rich account of participants’ experiences. Thus the reader will have access to the deep layers of the study. In this inquiry, context was not directly examined but contextual factors were reflected indirectly through analyzing participants’ stories.

The criteria of “dependability” can be achieved by “auditing.” Professor Wang’s assistance with auditing and double checking the translation of some Chinese words and phrases participants used in the interviews greatly helped me to improve the dependability of the study. This step also reinforced the study’s “confirmability.”

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that assessment of research from the constructivist paradigm should include an additional criterion—“authenticity” which is viewed as an ability of researchers to reveal different realities. The purpose of the study was to reveal the diverse conceptions and perceptions of international students on the meaning of career and career counselling services.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

Data collected from the first interviews to the third interviews were organized into themes (sharing the same or similar topic). Eight themes primarily emerged from the interview data: (1) Multiple comprehensions of the meaning of career versus job and work, (2) Contextualized motivations involved in career planning, (3) Holistic reasons for studying in Canada, (4) Less dominant parental roles and growing independent decision making, (5) Processes of re/constructing knowledge and re/framing selfhood, (6) Attitudes toward career counselling services, (7) Diverse needs for career counselling services, (8). Non-fixed preferences for career counsellors. These themes are intentionally reported in the present tense to capture the social constructionist process. They serve as a snapshot in the moment for the evolving stories of the eight participants.

#### **Theme 1. Multiple Comprehensions of the Meaning of Career versus Job and Work**

Different responses are generated by participants when they are asked to describe what career means and how it is distinguished from job and work. For some participants, career meant an industry or vocation, such as the food industry, service industry, health care industry and so on. This view is predominately functional; that is, it focuses on a group of related tasks. Although it has functional dimensions with her reference to industries, Linda's view of career is more holistic. She addresses emotional and personality dimensions and appears to view career as part of one's identity. She says,

You are doing it for your whole life in those industries, maybe not in the same company. But you really love it. You have a lot of skills and experience and you want to contribute a lot of time to those things. That is career.

Others associate career with pursuing interests, developing talents, and adopting lifestyles. Participants also differ in the level of generality that they apply to the notion of career, job or work. Some participants regard career as a bigger and broader term compared to job and work. For example, Ping says that career stands for “a broad future and a person’s life”; job is a title such as catering supervisor that he has in his part-time job; work is a set of tasks that he must perform in that job. Jessie speaks similarly, “Career is a big thing. It is related with your future, what your life will go into. If you choose this kind of career, your life will relate with this.” Yvon also has a similar standpoint. However, instead of using tangible cases to illustrate the difference, Yvon uses metaphor to explain the relation between job and career as targets toward an ultimate goal. He says,

The career is like a goal, you have to catch the goal. Your whole life is gonna follow the career. But the job is like a target, every period of time, you have a target. When you catch the target, means you got it. Then make new target. You are like hunter. You shoot the target one, two, three, four, five [etc]. And then, when you look back, you see your targets and you catch a lot of targets that becomes the career.

For some participants, such as Yangyang, his view of career is far-reaching and extends to the idea of building a legacy. He says “career is something I can spend my whole life to do that. I can leave something for my children.”

Finally, even though some participants distinguish career from job and work articulately, career, job and work may still be ambiguous. “They sound the exact same meaning to me.” Qiang makes no distinction at all.

Multiple comprehensions, contradictions and ambiguities are not only present in defining the meaning of career and career versus job and work. They are also shown in many related issues such as perceptions about the local culture, human relationships, future plans and attitudes toward career counselling services.

### **Theme 2. Contextualized Motivations Involved In Career Planning**

Motivations for getting started with one’s career, and specifics about how and why to start it are reflected in contextualized situations. For some participants, such as Yvon, career decisions must be coherent with his interest development. He says,

I am thinking I am still young. Not well-paid is fine to me, I don’t really care. But I want to learn something new, something fresh not always doing something thing again and again, same thing again and again. I don’t like to do that. So, I will choose the challenging one but might not well-paid; that keep my interest.

This view may not be separated from his family support. Although Yvon does not reveal a lot about his familial background, his supplementary personal stories implies that his financial situation has never been a concern.

Linda comes from a comparatively a wealthy family. She emphasizes the importance of work experience.

Right now, as a student who is going to graduate, everything is new for me. I am not looking for the money. You know you have tons of times to make the money after those years....So I will learn more knowledge in work experience even it is not well-paid, but I will use it for my later life, and that experience will bring me more opportunities to get a better job.

She feels that her career path will be an expression and extension of her interests that she is already following in her major. However, for other participants, career decisions are not simply based on one's intrinsic motivations.

Jessie, also with a supportive and wealthy family, thinks that career must be realistic—a stable job and regular income even though it might not be in her interesting major or interest area. She says that this view has been constructed upon her current situation. She is a mature student with B.Sc. in Computer Science in China and worked there for one year before she came to Canada for her second Bachelor degree. The original idea to come here was to learn something new and interesting. Because after she worked in a software company for one year, she felt fed up with her previous major. She started to pursue nutrition as her second degree once she came to Canada in order to have a completely refreshed lifestyle after she graduated. However, age associated issues becomes more and more of concern. As she is in her late 20's, her parents are more likely to see her settling down. She also feels guilty for taking money from parents at her age.

However, in Canada, it is difficult to find a job with a degree in nutrition compared to her previous degree in Computer Science. She feels a little puzzled and hesitated about her choice on Nutrition. She is thinking she might take advantage of her previous degree in Computer science and work experience in the course of finding a job in Canada even though she does not like it.

Extrinsic factors are also important for other participants. For Mingming, also a mature student, her financial situation is a primary reason for her to make a certain career decision rather than considerations of age. Her tuition fees are still largely dependent on her income through working in a restaurant. She says,

For me right now, I have to choose second one (high-pay but may not related to major) because of my personal reasons. I need the money so I have to choose the high pay.

However, extrinsic motivations are not necessarily limited to money or financial status. Career choice manifests a sense of purpose. For instance, Yangyang defines his motivation for getting a job as meeting the requirements of immigration. “I think the most important thing influencing my decision will be the immigration. That’s the most important thing.” Yvon says.

The theme of contextualized motivation is evident in lines of participants’ excerpts. Mingming, Jessie and Yangyang indicate that intrinsic factors might replace extrinsic motivations in the long term.

Mingming: I mean in the future, after I solved my problems, I would like choose the first one—get a challenging job but you can learn a lot. And it encourages you to go for the future.

Jessie: After that [I have been working many years], when I were forty or fifty, I might change the work area to what I am interested in because I don't need to worry about the money at that time, I hope.

Yangyang: In the future, as what I said, I want to start with my business, maybe online business something like that....I think the most important thing right now is graduation and immigration. In the future, I can think about career and my business, something like that.

Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are expressed. Some career/job decisions are pragmatic and influenced by the immediate need to meet living expenses. Others are able to take a long term view. Although their motivations for choosing a career or job differed, overall, these participants reveal a well developed sense of purpose and a future orientation. They are willing to suspend immediate interests and satisfactions for future gains. Participants are willing to make sacrifices in the present with hopes of better choices in the future.

### **Theme 3. Holistic Reasons for Studying in Canada**

Explanations for becoming international students in Canada include different background reasons such as academic pressures, educational opportunities, familial influences, personal intentions, teachers, peers, safety, environment, language and so on. These considerations range from general to specific—from going abroad to coming to Canada, then finally locating in Halifax.

### *Going Abroad*

Motivations for going abroad may be influenced by family members and finalized by personal intentions. For instance, both Mingming and Linda address that family influences already have an impact at an early age.

Mingming: From I was very young, probably, also got impacted from my uncle. My uncle has lived in Japan like almost twenty years. In my family, he is the first person to go abroad. So when I was young, I thought I would be that kind of person to go outside to see what the differences are.

Linda: I would say my family prepared me to go to abroad when I was in primary school. So, at that time, I've known that someday I will go to abroad. However, they also believe that their personal intentions make a difference in their decision making.

Mingming: A year after a year, becoming more and more mature, I was not satisfied with just living in one county. I want to make my life different.

Linda: And others are because I really want to see different people. Coming here, I met people from Africa, from Europe, and from North America of course. You talk to them and learn their knowledge. It's a good experience.

Mingming's attitude reflects her openness to new experiences. Whether or not they express this idea directly, all participants appear to have an open-minded attitude.

Besides family impacts and personal willingness, peers' influences also impact participants' interest in going abroad. Half of Jessie's friends have gone to

different countries. Their stories raised Jessie's curiosity for going abroad. A similar story also happened to Linda.

Like all of my friends want to go abroad or even have a traveling or whatever to see the world since we are still young. So I think yes, that's my dream, why not go to abroad and live for a few years.

Further, academic pressures for getting into university in China play an important role in their motivations to go abroad because it is very competitive for Chinese students to get into universities in China through the National University Entrance Exam. For instance, Qiang's initial idea of going abroad was stimulated by this pressure.

As you know, the graduation exam in China is really strict and it's really difficult to get into university. If you didn't get into a better university, you would get less chance to get a good job in the future.

In addition, Western pop culture also attracts participants to go abroad.

Yvonne says,

You know these days in China. China, this country is influenced by Western culture like American movie, or American fast food and or American Basketball, NBA...those kinds of culture stuffs influence China a lot. So, it's...at that time, I was thinking it must be very fun and interesting to study in a foreign country.

### *Coming to Canada*

When they are asked about why they choose Canada as their destination, participants talk about more embedded issues. For Qiang, getting a visa and living expenses was his major concern.

For European countries, I heard the living expenses are very expensive and for America, it's hard to get the entry visa. So I chose Canada.

For some participants, academic reputation and potential opportunities for personal development are major reasons. Linda compares Europe and North America. The difference she perceives is, "Europe is more about arts" versus "North America is more about Business." For Liang, besides considerations on prospective personal development, he adds the concerns about safety issues.

I choose Canada at that time based on two reasons. The first reason is the security reason because when I chose to study abroad, my parents just gave me some options, like Australia, U.S.A, Canada, Britain and Germany. So when I just chose North America, because North America is economic center of the world because I want to be a businessman in the future, so I am interested in business object. So, I think in North America, there might be very good opportunities for my future work. And I am not choosing U.S.A. because the September 11 event just happened one year before, my parents like many parents all think that go to U.S.A is not safe. Canada is much safer than U.S.A. So I came here.

Canadian culture also enhances the position of Canada. Mingming identifies Canadian culture as multi-cultural and peaceful.

He [my uncle] was visiting scholar in Vancouver. He told me how good and how peace Canada is. So, that's why I come here. And also, as we all know, Canada is one of peace country in the world and also is like multicultural... that's why...It is for me very fast and quickly to fit in the society.

Jessie regards Canadian culture as equality and freedom.

The people in North America, when they work...I think the people here in workplace are not controlled by others. In China, the employees are more controlled by people. [If] the supervisor doesn't like you, you would not go for higher job inside.

These appraisals of Canadian culture are positive and introduced a way of life that the Chinese students are interested in exploring. Mingming's experience of fitting into Canadian society quickly reflects the reality of multiculturalism in Canada where embracing diversity is more than empty talk. Feeling welcome is especially important for students living so far from home.

### *Locating in Halifax*

In deciding on which city they finally locate, work /internship/co-op opportunities provided by the local schools are considered. Liang transferred from a university in another city to University 2 in Halifax. The reason that brought him to Halifax is that University 2 offers a co-op program. Liang sees that the co-op program as a valuable opportunity for accumulating major-related work experiences that might give him advantages in the job market. Also he extends benefits to his long-term goal; as he says,

I think it is very good for my future because what I want to take the business program is I want to be a businessman in the future. I want to open my business; I mean ten years later or fifteen years later after I accumulate enough experiences and capitals. So to do the co-op program is good for my future.

Besides co-op programs, an English-speaking environment is another asset. Qiang had spent several months in Vancouver before he came to Halifax. When asked why he moved to Halifax, he says, “In Vancouver, there are many Chinese, so my language environment was Chinese spoken environment. I came here. There was a big change. Very few Chinese here, I got a lot of opportunities for speaking English here.

For Linda who used to live in a big city in China, she chooses Halifax at the first place because she wants to change her lifestyle somehow. She describes her feelings about different living environments before and after.

I really don't want to go to a big city because I am from \_\_\_\_\_ ( the name of my city) which is a big city. I know there are some, you know, global problems, like traffic jam those things. So I thought “Yeah, I want to really change my...my life just going to a small city kind of quiet and kind of every thing slows down and really have some time to do research, to study because I know that big cities always have so many entertainments, you know, shops, cinemas, restaurants, so finally I came here.

In addition, educational equality of the school is also accentuated. For instance, Jessie addresses such an issue in her excerpt.

University 1 has Nutrition that I can take. Because I am from southern China, people in my city pay a lot of attention to the food, such as how they combine the food to affect health. I think Nutrition is a good major which I can choose to help my parents, my family and my friends around me, so I take Nutrition in University 1. I also like the small class here.

The choice of moving to Halifax meet a variety of personal, academic and future employment needs for these Chinese international students. These needs range from opportunities for work experiences, an English-speaking environment, a less hectic and distracting lifestyle and a quality program in a small class environment.

#### **Theme 4. Less Dominant Parental Roles and Growing Independent Decision**

##### **Making**

Although Chinese traditional culture is perceived as parents having a dominant role in familial issues, especially the ones regarding their children's personal development, conversations with participants do not reflect this tendency. On the contrary, the excerpts shows that ideological movement towards less parental involvement and more independent decision making is happening in most Chinese families. Linda reveals that since she was a child, her parents had started teaching her to make decisions by herself. This kind of familial education is also normal for other participants' families. For example, Liang says,

Since like I was seven years old, I mean, since I can read paper or read words, most of time I think by myself. My parents are open-minded parents. They respect my choice, even my choice is not mature or is not thinking well. But

they respect my choice or respect my opinion. So since I was young, I formed a habit of thinking by myself.

He also suggests that the older he is, the less his parental influence him. He is proud of his independence,

I was mostly influenced by my previous experiences, like the experiences to communicate with my friends, to communicate with parents, to study from the books, I mean, to read books like history, biography books, or read from news, current news, history news or some kinds of news. And all those experiences, all those things I learned from the books combined together and formed the mind that is right now.

Some others might not be as assertive as Liang is. However, they all indicate that they are the persons who make final decisions, and their parents mostly respect their decisions. For instance, Ping says,

I think, the career I chose is same as the major I chose, they will respect my decision. My family is democratic. Also it's my future not theirs. My parents can give me some suggestions, but final decisions are made by me.

Their overseas experiences reinforce their belief in making decisions by themselves and relying less on parents. Qiang says that before he came to Canada, his parents did influence him a lot, but after he came to Canada, they do not any more. Yangyang, the only one among the eight participants, says that most of his previous decisions were determined by his parents before he came to Canada. However things changed after he came to Canada. He talks about this transition due to changing circumstances:

First, I will respect their decision. That's why I start with my accounting major. But finally, I found that I am not really good at that. So I changed it to the marketing... the situation here, I understand best. So they must listen to my idea.

Jessie shares similar experiences by stating,

They [my parents] gave me more suggestions on my first degree because at that time, they were in China. I was young, I didn't know which major I actually like because it [Computer Science] is popular. ...After I came to Canada, my parents said, "Because we are not there right now, we don't know what exact position you are in." So they said, "You have to decide by yourself and you can ask the people around you or your professor or you can do some researches on line and just do what you like." Right now, I make the decision by myself because they do not know the society here.

To build and maintain this relationship needs communication such as Mingming illustrates, "if I chose this one [choice], I will explain to them. They would say, if you know yourself very well and you think you can do it and you will do it very well." Also, it takes mutual respect; for instance, Jessie thinks that her parent's suggestions are still worthwhile to be thought of because "they are older than me, definitely. They know things more than me. They can give some suggestions on how I can communicate with people."

Sometimes, it is unavoidable that parents' thoughts and children's ideas are not exactly matched. In dealing with those differences, participants show their wisdom and maturity. Liang and Qiang give good examples. Liang says,

Every time, my parents give me suggestions, I will think about. If I think it's probably right, I might adopt it. But if I think my suggestions are against theirs, I will keep it and see what happens in the future. But sometimes, if I made wrong, I will probably review it and readopt theirs again.

Qiang also states,

For example, history is my biggest interest, I extremely want to take it but my parents didn't want me to take it. They want me to take accounting. I will take a look at strength and weakness about each major and about future. You know decision is not based on your interests, it should be based on your future. If your parents want you to take accounting major, they want you to have better future or something. So, I will take a look at strength and weakness of each side, and then decide. I think my parents will support my ideas and interests.

Participants' growing independence is not surprising. Realistically, it would require an independent attitude and parental support to be able to move so far from home in the first place. The geographic and cultural distance between the students and their parents contribute further to students' independent decision making. Students express a sense of pride in their growing independence. Yet, a continued close relationship with their parents is important when offered. Parental suggestions are still given some consideration.

#### **Theme 5. Processes of Re/constructing Knowledge and Re/framing Selfhood**

Participants talk about their experiences of studying and living in Canada. Some of them were high school graduates before they came to Canada; some of

them are mature students who already had a university degree in China. They differ in age and life experiences and other aspects. However, all of them share experiences of how they were reforming their learning skills, reconstructing future plans, rebuilding a sense of self, and reshaping their social attitudes after they came to Canada. From the following excerpts, I find out that whether they are freshman or mature students, female or male students, it is a remarkable life experience studying in a new socio-cultural environment and living far from family.

### ***Re/form learning Skill***

Learning skills are gained in many areas—at school, at work and in the living.

#### ***At school***

Some participants just graduated from high school in China before they came. The biggest transition for them is to adjust to university learning styles. Linda has comparatively good English communication skills. She talk about that besides having to deal with foreign languages, the importance of preview and review is what she learns from her university life. Yvon, who graduated from a same high school as Linda, says that even though he feels that his English is not bad at the beginning, he finds, “I entered the university, when I go to the course, I feel that my English skills still need improve because there are some lectures I couldn’t catch it.” So the same as Linda, he learns to preview before the class and review after the class. These studying skills are summarized into “self-governing” by Yangyang. He says,

In China, teacher tells you everything and what you should do, but here, you must manage your own time schedule and decide which courses you are going to take and sometimes, you learn the materials by yourself. Here, the learning style is more self-governing.

Some other participants who already had a university education in China before they came are impressed by Canadian universities' emphasis on developing students' research ability. Jessie shares her cross-cultural experiences by stating,

They [Chinese teachers] just say “you should do this,” “you can not do that,” “[If] you understand what I am saying in the class, it will be enough.” We just have few assignments in the class, not much. We do not have midterm, only final exams. If we passed the final exams, we pass everything. Usually, we just work hard before the final exams. [We usually only worked] three weeks before [final exams]. [But here is] totally different because you have to work by yourself. The things are not only from the lectures. You have to go for research by yourself. Go Internet, something. They [Canadian teachers] just set up a topic. But the topic is so wide-ranged. So you have to do the research and pick the point by yourself to finish one assignment, just one assignment. Usually, for example, in Nutrition, we have four or five essays and reports to write. Twice a week, we have to submit a report. So how can we finish the report? We have to go to research and read book. It's not in the lecture. Also, it has two midterms.

Whether they are high school graduates or mature students, it is evident that knowledge learned in Canadian universities is valued and appreciated by international students. Ping describes one of his experiences in his staff training course.

There was one management course called staff training course, the professors assigned us to play role play. You might play the manager of a company, and another person might play the counterpart. He might have done something wrong; how could you direct him and how could you make him realize that he did wrong and accept the fact that he did wrong? I played manager role. Another one played the counterpart who did wrong. First, I didn't directly point out what he did wrong and I just pushed around, no, I didn't push around, I should say I kind of bringing up the good things he did and gave him a confidence on what he did. Firstly, I didn't give the hard time. I just keep him in a good mood. Secondly, I moved on to the thing he did but I can't say what he did wrong. You can't just complain on thing he did wrong. The thing I did was kind of asking him to reflect what he did and asked him a few questions such as "how do you think you did?" "Do you feel something wrong?" "If there is something wrong, how would you like to improve it in the future?" All kinds of directions were coaching him instead of directly saying "you did wrong." Based on instructions, you can work well with your co-workers or subordinates.

This type of education combining textbook knowledge with life cases is widely confirmed by all participants. As Mingming highlights, “I can use my knowledge to practice.”

### ***At work***

Some participants have experiences with doing part-time jobs or co-op programs. Through these experiences, participants feel that they learned many social and communication skills as well as utilized their textbook knowledge. Linda had some part-time jobs on campus. She says, “those [part-time jobs] teach me a lot about customer service skills and interpersonal skills.” What most she learned from the jobs is that “when you are frustrating or when you feel pretty sad, you still have to smile to others, which means, you respect others.” For Liang, his co-op work experience in a non-profit organization solidifies his initial understanding on Canadian culture. He says, “this kinds of work experience makes me know more about multicultural Canada and the cultural background and just enhance me to know that people should spend more time to help people and contribute time or money to the people who need help.” Through another work experience of opening a small business in the city, he realizes that the operation of a business is a concrete project. He concludes his entrepreneur experiences by saying,

Normally for the young people, they will think open a business is probably easy. But when you open one, you know it is very hard. But I think this kind of work experience can come with me for the whole life and it will be very good for my future business work and business subject.

Ping used to be a very shy person, according to his own description. However, through working in service industry, he changes a lot. He has to force himself to speak with his co-workers and customers. He evaluates, “It’s a pretty good opportunity for me improve my language skills.”

Another important changed attitude is their ways of treating money and life. Jessie says,

Through this job [working in restaurant], I know I have to work hard to get a degree in Canada [thus] I don’t need to pay more to get the degree. Also, [it’s] kind of motivation for speeding up my further study in Canada.”

Yangyang says, “[the part time job] taught me work hard and accept those painful thing.”

### ***In living***

Living in another country and being away from their parents, participants come across different challenges. Most of participants are the only child at home. The situation of only child in Chinese families is described by Yvon,

I am the only-child in my family. Except my study part, cooking, wash my clothes, go to school, pretty much my parents cover everything. They helped me do everything. I am sure I am not the only person that parents take care of everything. That’s the whole China’s situation. Because of the only child policy, their parents treat their child as prince or princess. So, they don’t want their children do much about their own work except study. They want their children study very well. They want their children go to a famous university and get a good job.

Some basic survival issues, such as cooking and shopping and so on are the things that they were not used to doing in China. Linda says,

I never ever cook in my home before. You have to go to grocery store. I never imagine I go to grocery, have grocery shopping. Never ever! So those stuff, you know, look pretty like small thing in daily life. But it's real life.

Yvonne: I feel since I came to Canada, I learned doing a lot of stuff all by myself. As I mentioned in last conversation, China has the only-child policy. So when I was in China, my parents pretty much help me do everything. But in here, I have to do everything all by myself. At beginning time, it was a challenge for me. But I got used to it. I learned a lot of things, for instance, cooking, doing laundries, try to catch the bus. I don't have a car at beginning time, so I have to take the bus every time. You know, in the winter time, it's pretty horrible to wait for the bus. It's really cold there.

They are not only learning from their needs for survival but also they learn from their environment and people around them. Yvon talks about how he learned from the children of his home-stay family.

The home-stay family, they also have two children there. We are about the same ages. I learned a lot from their children. I always like watching, or just seeing what they are doing. After they done in the school, they always spent a certain time on doing laundry or help their parents to cut the grass in the garden, or they help their parents to take the dog go for a walk. I always feel and learn the way of Western culture.

Liang is struck by the way of Canadian students' independency. He says "Their [Canadian students'] cost of living is half or over half supported by themselves." He says,

Those events are made to be shocked in mind. We are same people just different color in skins but their way of thinking or we are just educated in different cultures, we choose different way of personal lives. So, sometimes, you know, it really makes me shame. Those guys at my age, they can support themselves but why I can not or why we can not. It's hard for me. At that time, like this event shocked in my mind. I was thinking if they can do that one, so I can. We are same people.

The spirit of independency that is shown in Canadian students and their relationship with parents is recognized by Mingming. She shares her observations on this issue by saying,

There is money issues treated differently in Western society. One of my friends, she borrowed 20 dollars from her parents one day. And she told me, "Ok, today I borrowed 20 from my parents, I have to work and pay back to my parents." I was shocked, like how come? Before, I think parents have the responsibilities to pay your daily life. You know, in China, or Asia, parents work hard to pay their children to come to foreign countries for the higher education or for something else. I think it's good for them to know how hard to make money, how hard life is. Think about, consider about their parents. Probably in the future, I would loan money to my kids and tell them "You need to be independent. Don't depend on others or anyone else.

### *Re/shape Attitudes towards Social Issues*

More than three years of studying, working and living in a new environment and culture changes some of their international students' social attitudes. Liang used to hold a belief that one's academic and career goal overrides personal life. But now, he says, "It's important to find a balance point to make a balance with your personal life and your personal goals." His attitudes towards lifestyle are also reshaped, as he says,

They (Chinese parents) can just contribute their money to buy a lot of things for their children and make their children living environment better, to remedy their children. It's different from here. I mean, here, most of parents, and many families choose to stay with their children and to give up their advance opportunities for their career life because they think their personal life is limited. Sometimes the people take the time to do this thing, it means, you have to give up other thing. Most people here think it is most important for personal life, much important than make million or they have very good advance opportunities in career life. So this thinking of life or this lifestyle has influenced me a lot.

Linda indicates that in the big city where she lived, "We never smile to strangers. We never can be waiting for a person who may just walk slowly before you. We were just passing her or him." But since she came here, she finds that "people are very friendly, and people look at each other, really smile even strangers. That made me kind of being polite to others." She learns to "respect people and smile to people" and "having time of waiting others." She highly

values her changes by stating, “That made me whole mood, my emotions kind of relax not that rush, not stressful any more.” A similar reflection is also expressed by other participants.

### *Re/fabricate Plans for the Future*

Personal experiences in Canada change their pre-designed future plans. Among diverse future plans, the frequent topic participants talked about is immigration. Some participants change their previous plans. For Jessie, her previous plan was to get the degree and overseas work experiences and then go back to China. But now, she wants to stay and immigrate. The reasons for making such a change are different for each participant. One of the reasons for Jessie is to meet local job market requirements. She says,

Immigration will help me to find a job easier in Canada. Because I am an international student, some companies might say “You might not work in my company for a long time, we could not hire you.” If I immigrate to Canada, I can get more job or better job and better pay.

For Yangyang, what really matters for him are the environment and life style in Canada.

I think, I’d better stay here and find a job. The environment is better than in China. The air is cleaner....I am already here for 5 years. So I am already used to this lifestyle, you know. If I go back to China, it will be harder to me.

However, some participants who had planned to stay in Canada changed their minds. Pressures from language, acculturation and academic work cause Yvon to rethink his previous plan about immigration.

Before I came to Canada, I planned to complete my university degree in Canada, and then I would spend couple of years to get a job which is related to my major. Then I am gonna immigrate here. Because my major is Hospitality Management, I was thinking probably in the future, I am gonna travel a lot and go and see different countries there. If I can immigrate in Canada, probably it's easier for me to travel because of the visa stuff. You know, Canada can deal with 125 countries and Canadian people can go there without any visas. But Chinese policy is pretty different from Canada. That's my plan before.

He pauses, and then continues, "But, honestly, I just want to graduate as soon as possible. You know, studying abroad is a lot of pressures on me. Language, the culture, everything..."

Another important factor that makes some students change their plans is the consideration of the situation back home. One of the significant findings through interviews is that the situation in China may influence students' decision making for future career development. For Jessie, changes that happened in China are not satisfactory. So she affirms her will to stay in Canada.

Jessie: First, when I first graduated from the university in China, there were not many university students, so I can easily find a job and get a better pay. But now, no. Too many students graduated from university right now because.... not only bachelor [but also] master degree and PhD degree. Just I said before, people graduated from PhD do the job that college students can do. Even it is not fair, but it happens, it always happening in China.

However, some participants talk about their feelings about situations in China more positively. They see a lot of potential opportunities in the Chinese economy. The bright future about Chinese economic development encourage them to choose to go back to China one day. As Yvonne says, "I think my country's economics goes well. I may go back to my country to get a job." Ping says, "Chinese economy is booming and has a lot of opportunities so I might have more chance."

But not all participants change their minds. The previous plan for the future has never been changed for some participants. It is even reinforced. As Qiang elaborates,

I never think about immigrate. Even I stayed here for five years but I still have the feeling that here is not my home, China is my real home. My parents, all my relatives are there, all my closest friends living in China, language and environment...everything is right for me. I never think about staying here for rest of my life.

For some others, the future is still uncertain. The choice of either staying or leaving is not easy to pick because so many issues are involved. For Linda, factors that make her decision fluctuate are prospective job opportunities, parents, family, environment and friends.

At that time, I thought I am going to come back to China after I finished. Now, I think more. I think more ...reliable. I am thinking, if I go back to China, what kind of job can I get or if I stay here, can I get a job? What kind of job I can get. I compare those two situations and see which the best one for me is. Also, I think there are always opportunities that you can get what you

try to get. So...First, I think, right now, I would say where I can get the job first. If I can get job from both sides I mean both countries [laugh] it will be great. I am still thinking of my parents, I will think about them first because they are getting older and I will think which is the best city or best country to live. Because I think I won't move a lot after I get a job or maybe, you know, get a family, [I] won't have a lot of opportunities to move any more. So I would say which will be the best place, compare the environment, compare people, and compared friends. Where can I live happier?

Liang notes that staying in Canada may be one of his options. However, it will be finally decided by needs for his personal development. Ping, who has a dream of advancing his degree, says "If I want to continue my higher education [MBA], the tuition fees will be reduced to half. So definitely, I will apply for immigration if I want to step into MBA program." However, he adds, "I haven't decided yet where and which school I should stick with in the future. Things can not be certain".

From the interviews, it is suggested that the future career plans are constantly shaped or changed by their on-going experiences. For some participants, such as Qiang, his initial idea is the same as his current plan. However, his personal experiences actually justify his initial plan.

### ***Re/build the Sense of Self***

New environment and experiences also provide some participants with opportunities for rebuilding the sense of self. Ping failed the National University Entrance Exam in China. This experience makes a great impact on his life. He

thought he was “not a very good student in China.” He determined to make changes, so he decided to go abroad to study in order to get a new environment and start new. He exclaims, “I did what I expected.” Ping has outstanding English communication. When asked how he made it, he talks about the stories of how hard and diligently he devoted himself to studying in the school and learning as much as possible from the work and life. He is very proud of recollecting how his confidence grows through these years’ experiences in Canada. He also addresses that his character made a positive transition by stating,

Because my dad has a quite strict rule, I did have a quite few friends in China. But here I feel I was set free. I started opening myself apart and make friends so especially when I started working with my co-workers in catering, more and more you get involved with people, more you feel you come to be outgoing not like before.

Yangyang notices that the similar changes happen to him. He says, “I used to be very shy and did not want to talk in public. So that’s big difference from now.”

The experiences of living and studying in a new environment and culture bring a great impact to international students in different arenas of their lives. From an academic perspective, they adjust their singular learning style from the exam-oriented one to a combination of both formative and summative style. They also experience new learning styles in the classroom such as role play, discussion and presentation which they had rarely experienced in China. They appreciate the chances of applying knowledge and skills learned from the school to their work and life. Through interacting with local students and people, they enhance their

language ability and learn to be more independent than before. Further, this new cultural environment encourages them to express their friendliness and become more open to strangers. All these on-going experiences influence their decision making processes and empower them to be positive about who they are and what they want to be.

### **Theme 6. Attitudes toward Career Counselling Services**

Regarding the question of what career counselling services are about, the answers are diverse. Some participants have “never heard about it.” The reason might be that career counselling is still a relatively new term in Chinese society. Liang explains the status of career counselling services in China,

In China, in my city, there are not too many people who are doing this job. Maybe now, it’s becoming more popular. In my experience, or in my opinion, not too many people, so my friends are not doing the job with this one because it’s a not popular climate in China at least in my city.

Since most participants have no clearly informed knowledge about career counselling services in China, their attitudes towards career counselling services are largely informed by their initial experiences of dealing with career counselling services in Canada. Jessie had an unhappy experience with some job agents who defined themselves as career counsellors. Since then on, she can hardly develop a trustful feeling about career counselling services. She says, “Two years ago, some job agents, they opened a lecture in University 2. They were saying you have to pay 30 thousand US dollars for them to process. After you find a job and you

have to pay ten percent or twenty percent every month for them.” Her reaction is “they were cheating people.”

Linda has a positive attitude toward career counselling services since one of her friends works in “a hunter company”; career counselling services identified by her are quite different from any theoretically defined career counselling services.

Being one of few who have actual experiences with career counselling services on campus, Mingming tells her story and shared her attitudes towards career counselling services.

A lady working there [career counselling center], she gave me a lot of suggestions. At first, I didn't even know the format of resume and model that a person needs to follow to write, so I hand the resume to her, she fixed my resume and pointed out that there was something wrong and how I should do it and how I should show my personal characteristics and advantage and hide my disadvantage. I think that's about the first [interview]. The second time, she reviewed my resume and asked me some professional questions such as what your expectations for your future are, what your habits are and what kind of jobs you will be interested in. I think it's very professional and based on my answers; she gave me the suggestions and told me that I need to prepare this and that in case there are something happen in the future. Third time, she helped me to do the job hunting and we went through the internet to find some information about job. Then she said, “now send your resume to those companies and if you get a feedback and come back again and we will

do practice before your interview and we'll think about some questions that the employers might ask you.

The interviews show that the attitudes towards career counselling services are largely influenced by participants' personal experiences or knowledge about career counselling services. If their experiences are limited, their attitudes are more likely to be distant or detached or biased. If their experiences are rewarding, their attitudes are more likely to be positive. Within the group of eight, only one has an experience with university-based career counselling.

### **Theme 7. Diverse Needs for Career Counselling Services**

When asked about their expectations for counselling services that they might encounter in the future or their suggestions for further improvement about the services that they have experienced, participants illustrate different needs for career counselling services. During these discussions, they address issues of counselling style and comfort with expressing emotions in counselling situations.

#### ***Indirect and Direct Counselling Style***

From the interviews, participants also talk about their preferences on different counselling styles. Some participants suggest that they like explicit directions. He is also expecting some explicit directions. Ping says, "If I was at certain age or stage, he should give a general job title for me and provide me with general long-term solutions." Mingming has the same need for explicit directions, as she says, "they can give me some suggestions. People go there for help if they can resolve the problems." Qiang expresses his need in more details.

First of all, they can help you with your resume and cover letters, that's the first thing. And second thing, you may get some directions or positions or jobs that you can look for based on your previous experience or educational experience, thirdly, they can give suggestions about the complex in the life both intangible and tangible complex. And that's pretty much about what I think about counselling.

Some others prefer indirect ways. For instance, Liang says that he will love to hear counsellor's personal stories so that he can learn something from them. As he states,

Normally, most counselling services provided the basic ability or personal skills for your career life, how to look for a job, how to get an interview. But sometimes if you meet very good counsellors, they have a very rich experience, and very rich life stories, they probably can teach you or share their work experiences or personal experiences with you. Then, you can learn much more useful stuff on how to deal with your career life in the future.

***Expectation on Emotional Expressiveness or Staying behind the Line***

Most participants reveal that the process of looking for a job or designing a career path is not simple but integrated with variety of issues and concerns. For Linda, she is more concerned about her parents' aging issue, and several other issues that might happen to her in several years. Similar to Linda, Yangyang thinks that finding a job is not a single issue but a complex one, as he says,

Because looking for a job is big thing in life, a lot of things involved in the process. You have to make a lot of decision regarding on your family or

friends, or current financial situation....I prefer to talk about my current situation and help me find a better way to deal [with those issues]. The current situation I mean is the situation that parents and girl friends are all involved.

When further asked if they would like to talk about their emotional struggling with career counsellors, they both say yes.

Even though Liang agrees that career decisions involved many considerations, he feels that it might be risky to express his feelings on issues not directly related with career. He states, "It's not necessarily to talk in the career counselling services." He prefers to talk with his parents or friends because "they [parents and friends] can protect the privacy." Jessie also says that she would be more likely to express her emotional sides to her family because "[emotional issues] can be listed on the family problem." She further explains, "I don't think "[career] counsellors can help me a lot. Even they do a lot, it's still family problem. Probably they can help me with financial problem but not family problem."

Others do not expect to see career counsellors expressing their emotions in front of clients as Mingming says,

I don't want them to become very soft. They need to be like other people standing in front of you and give you suggestions not like friends sit besides you....You know, in the real world, it's very competitive and they will base on your information and give your suggestions.

However, some participants regard seeking professional help and discussing issues with career counsellors as a correct way to solve the problem. Yvon especially value the importance of sharing his emotional concerns and other worries with career counsellors. He says,

I will prefer to reviewing [emotional and daily issues] in career setting because when I was applying for a job or going to career counselling, I was not in right mood or I had a big pressure during that time. I think it's very necessary to concern about and tell those very situations to the career counsellor. Probably they can help me out or give me some advices about that. *And you know, those are very private things.* People don't want to show their emotions or their own business too much but in my opinion, I think, as a client, we need to mention about those to career counsellor. It is a big difference between you just hand in your resume or work experience and you say something about yourself, so your career counsellor can get more information about you and they can help you to figure out what is the best choice for you.

Participants differ in their comfort level of expressing and share their emotions and personal concerns with career counsellors. Linda, Yvonne and Yangyang appear to be more likely to launch topics with regard to their emotional struggles and personal difficulties in dealing with career related issues. Others tend to be comparatively conservative on the movement to deeper and more private discussions.

However, from this study, it is still hard to pinpoint what exact factors contribute to their differences. The difference might arise from their school education such as Linda and Yvonne had their high school education at a bilingual school in China. They might be familiar with some Western norms and don't feel distant or alien to self-disclosure encouraged by Western culture. It might also be influenced by participants' life experiences. For instance, for Yangyang who used to be very introverted and who had problems communicating with others, since he starts playing guitar and traveled on road shows, he has come to enjoy talking with people and sharing feelings with them. Differences in sharing emotions might also come from family and early childhood education. For example, although Ping speaks English with little Chinese accent and has good relationships with his local co-workers and schoolmates, he still prefers restraining his emotions in front of career counsellors and not sharing his personal issues in the career counselling setting. His "strict" principal father repeatedly mentioned in his excerpts might have influenced his choice to keep his emotional weakness or softness to himself.

### **Theme 8. Non-fixed Preferences for Career Counsellors**

Participants mention *professionalism* several times in their interviews. Different people have different ideas on what professionalism is. For Mingming, professional counsellors offer you some suggestions "base on your personality and base on your interest and background." She regard the counsellors that she met with as being professional. As she says, "My advisor first asked me what

kinds of jobs I want, she relates to what I learn right now and she asked me what kind of person I am, and my daily life.”

For Linda, she imagines professionalism as not simply teaching people how to write a resume or cover letter. She says

Because what I put on the resume and cover letter, I can learn it from the internet, I can learn it from books. But internet and books cannot tell me what kind of person I am and what kind of personality I have. So I need some professional people to tell me that you are what kind of person I am, and in which industry I may have a better career.

She also implies that career counselling can be complementary to online psychology tests, “I know there are some psychology tests online but I do not really like it because I think they are more like robot. You may get 10 to 20 of 100 percent, 20 to 30, I may get 10.5, you know, at the curve. So I need some counsellors who tell me some specific things that fit me.”

Besides professionalism as identified by Mingming and Linda, Professionalism also mean time-efficiency. Jessie says, “Professionalism is...” she pauses and continues,

Before I leave my resume there, they have to know what I want and what I need, what my background, what my most powerful techniques, what my quality is, they have to understand me first then find a job for me. They should give me feedback as soon as possible.

Professionalism, according to some other participants’ view, is explained to be “an approved ability of successful finding a job for others before.” It also

manifest as a “counsellor’s knowledge in terms of issues of payment, job titles, work relationship or career path.”

Regarding the identity of the counsellor, participants also give different answers. Some participants say that they would feel attached to career counsellors who had had similar experiences to them.

Qiang: He [career counsellor] will have similar experiences with mine.

We will have more things in common. He will know what feelings I have. Probably he went through some psychological stages as me.

For some of the participants, share experiences and knowledge of their background are also considered to be an important trait in a career counsellor. Yangyang says “they [career counsellors] are involved with this process before and similar situation.”

Some indicate that they would choose a career counsellor who is also Chinese and had the similar life experiences with them.

Yvonne: In my case, I was born in China and grow up there. I would like to choose some one who has same or similar experiences with me.

For example, there were three counsellors, one is local Canadian and second one is Chinese born in Canada, so they look like Asian people, but actually the way of thinking and their education are about

Canadian. I won’t choose these two, I will choose the third one which is a person who grow up in China, immigrate to Canada or whatever, I think, at this point, we have some common things, and we can feel

each other. I believe he or she will help me a lot. So I will choose the third one.

Linda: If when the person [career counsellor] came here when she was a teenager or twenty years old, right now she is forty years old, she has 20 years living here and she has enough social experiences of being here. She knows this place and from the previous experience, she knows what I am talking. If she took education here, either undergraduate or graduate from here, she learned skills here. I think that is important. From my experience, the finance that I learned here is totally different from China. I went back to China, went to one of my friend's class that was her finance class. The finance class they call is actually the accounting thing I learned here. A lot of things I asked here, she didn't know at all. So we are in the same year, we should learn same thing. So if the person who takes education here, she will know things better here. I think that is best one I will choose.

Others might like Caucasian to be their career counsellors in order to help them to construct a better understanding about local society and culture.

Ping: I think as long as they are career experts, I don't mind those kinds of things. Honestly speaking, if one day, I go to career counselling services, I might prefer Caucasian. They were born in here and grow up here, they might have better understanding on local situations here. I don't mean Caucasian, I mean the local people, so I

think they will give me better directions on my future career and help me gain some local work experiences.

For some people, racial or social identity is not important for a qualified counsellor.

Jessie: I don't think that either ethnic or ethnic identity will affect me to choose counsellor. It's their job to do the professional things. As long as they know my inquiry, it's ok. They just find a good job that fit me. It's ok.

Mingming: I never mind the situation. It doesn't matter. I trust them if they already have accepted counselling education and background, so they know in which way they can help me. So it doesn't matter with ethnic or ethnical identity.

There is no consensus on career counsellor preferences among the eight participants. Some emphasize the importance of professionalism. Others focus on the counsellor's experiences. Some participants value a career counsellor with similar experiences as well as an understanding of their cultural background. However, for other participants, a career counsellor who has insightful knowledge of local society and culture might be more desirable than the one with a same ethnic or social identity as they are.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION**

In the previous chapter, I discussed the following themes:

1. Multiple comprehensions of meaning of career versus job and work.
2. Contextualized motivations involved in career planning.
3. Holistic reasons for studying in Canada.
4. Less dominant parental roles and growing independent decision making.
5. Processes of re/constructing knowledge and re/frame selfhood.
6. Attitudes toward career counselling services.
7. Diverse needs for career counselling services.
8. Non-fixed preferences for career counsellors.

Within the first theme, participants talked about their own understandings with regard to the meaning of career. The concept of career ranges from the functional dimension to the emotional one. As compared to researchers' (e.g. Adamson, Doherty & Viney, 1998; MacMillan, 2007; Tolbert, 1980) definition of the meaning of career, participants' construction and way of framing the meaning of career are individualized and diversified. Different concepts of career implicitly or explicitly manifest their ideas about their future lives. Also, diverse concepts of career also entailed social constructionism's anti-essentialism (Burr, 1995). In addition, participants' emphasis on the emotional and personality dimension of career also revealed aspects of the sociocultural changes that have been influencing the Chinese society for a couple of decades. Although the participants elaborated their knowledge about the meaning of career affirmatively,

they still appeared slightly concerned and bewildered about upcoming career choices they might face in the near future. However, this feeling of uncertainty can not be simply seen as a transition from school to work (Mortimer, Vuolo, Staff, Wakefield, & Xie, 2008). This study reflects that participants' feeling of uncertainty mostly grew from their considerations of many issues such as parents, family, political and economical environment and individual interest. Thus, the feeling of uncertainty can also be marked as a symbol of maturity which reflects a sense of responsibility and thoughtfulness.

The second theme revealed that both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations were involved in participants' decision making on their career pattern. Extrinsic motivations were most illustrated as participants' current financial situation, future economic status, and parents' expectations. Intrinsic motivations mainly reside in personal interest and value judgments. Most participants suggested that they would feel unhappy if their career life was just driven by one kind of motivation. This study shows that extrinsic and intrinsic motivations can be interchangeable in some situations. It also shows that the contextualization of knowledge highlighted by social constructionism (Burr, 1995). Further, the most impressive aspect of this theme is participants' sense of purpose as well as their future-oriented spirit in confronting challenges and overcoming difficulties.

In the third theme, it is hard to classify participants' intentions for studying in Canada into clear-cut groups as proposed by Chirkov et al. (2007). Participants' reasons for studying in Canada have been influenced by different reasons such as family influence, personal intention, academic pressures in their homeland,

attraction toward Western and Canadian culture, prospective employment opportunities, the local living environment and so on. Each of these reasons does not exist independently as a major cause for an individual to come. For instance, family influence largely overlapped with personal intention. A multitude of pressures from the Chinese education system intertwined with their longing for Western learning style and life. Potential job opportunities in North America are connected to participants' desires for a nice and clean living environment. All these factors were integrated with international students' final decision to come to Canada. Chirkov et al. (2007) theory is much too structuralist to capture this complexity in motivations. On the positive note, the choice, based on their thorough analysis and preparations, empowered them to go through challenges and difficulties in the period of a series of adjustments.

A body of existing literature suggests that familial and parental involvement has a negative impact on Asian students' career choices and has been regarded as one of the important factors for intergenerational and family conflicts (Constantine & Flores, 2006; Leong, Kao, & Lee, 2004; Ma & Yeh, 2005). However, the fourth theme shows that although differences sometimes exist between the individual's intentions and parents' suggestions, students and parents can normally reconcile the differences through communication and mutual understanding. Moreover, Li (2002) revealed that both Chinese immigrant parents and children agree that parental expectations have a positive effect on individuals' personal, academic and career development. In this theme, participants in the present study acknowledged their parents' suggestions as valuable and positive

for their personal, academic and career development. As researchers (Amundson & Penner, 1998; Hughey & Hughey, 1999; Young & Friesen, 1992) suggest, parents' advice should also be given enough attention or be brought to discussions in current career counselling contexts.

A distinctive feature generated from above theme one to theme four is that Chinese international students pursue personal goals through their individual decision making process. Lau (1992) indicated that Chinese are no less individualistic than Americans. However, generally, cross-cultural studies still reflect “positivism through the essentialism, the use of culture as a moderating or antecedent variable and generalization” (Stead, 2004, p. 395). With regard to positivist approaches on understanding career in different cultural groups, collectivism and individualism are often mentioned as two opposite camps. Collectivism is defined as a worldview based on the “assumption that groups bind and mutually obligate individuals” and “the personal is simply a component of the social, making the in-group the key unit of analysis” (Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002, p. 5), in which “in groups can be included family, clan, ethnic, religious, or other groups” (Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002, p. 5). Individualism is defined as “a worldview that centralizes the personal—personal goals, personal uniqueness and personal control—and peripheralizes the social” (Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002, p. 5). However, Draguns (2008) indicates that it was difficult to separate individualism and collectivism. He points out that individualists may have collectivistic needs to avoid their “loneliness” and “alienation” and “some people in collectivistic societies feel stifled by social

pressures and obligations and have a sense of being thwarted in the realization of their personal aspirations” (p. 28). According to social constructionism theory, this dualism tends to “oversimplify complex phenomena” (Stead, 2004, p. 396) and limits the breadth and depth of culture. In this study, as Mingming stated, “I think, for the foreigners, we all have the Asian face— we have black hair and black eyes. They think we are Asian or Chinese. They think Asian people, or Chinese are all the same. But for the individuals in the group, we are different persons.” These within-group differences are most evident as contradictions and multiple truths in meaning constructions in terms of their understanding of career, motivations for work, personal goals and so on. Thus, it is inappropriate for counsellors to stereotype clients with regard their racial or ethnical membership (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996).

The fifth theme is a crucial one in this study in this study because it describes the process of participants’ adjustment in terms of their academic, work and life since they came to Canada. As the result of a series of adjustments, changes happened to their social attitudes, future plans and senses of selfhood. This study shows that Chinese international students actively shape their worldviews, personal plans and attitudes towards many issues. The fifth theme corroborates the social constructionist point of view that knowledge and meaning are constructed constantly within contexts (Burr, 1995; Richardson, 2004). In this study, participants’ adjustment processes cannot be seen as simply switching from one culture to another, or transitioning from one stage of life to another stage of life. It is a complex manifestation of social cognition, interactions, personal

history, cultural background, and series of social, political and economic trends. Also language plays an important role in the time of transitions. For most participants, the English language was considered not simply as a tool of communication or a subject of study. For instance, as for Ping, his good command of English is more likely to be considered as a proof of his determination and action for changing his situation and increasing his self-esteem. As Ping described,

Because I know if you can speak the language here, you can do well. So I spent quite probably half a year at least to increase my vocabulary. As I said before, if I can't understand what my home-stay father said, I always asked him to write down things in a piece of paper, so I can pick up things I don't know. I have my own personal notebook for collecting all vocabularies I don't know before so it's a good technique for me to learn faster.

This finding also demonstrates the social constructionist notion that language constitutes reality. In addition, these shaping processes are integrated with students' resilience and personal agency. Resilience is an ability of resuming and protecting the individual, family and community from adversity (Werner, 1995) and empowering him/her to overcome obstacles (Freeman, Stoch, Chan, & Hutchinson, 2004; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). For example, when dealing with stresses in transitions and acculturations, Ping chose to face the stressful situation and deal with it; some participants chose to talk with friends; others do exercises such as jogging; others prefer cooking, playing music, or reading books.

Even though students showed a certain degree of resilience, in theme six and theme seven, some still expressed greater or lesser needs for professional help. However, in talking about their perceptions of career counselling services in theme six, students displayed confusions or misunderstandings about accessibility and expenses with regard to career counselling services. Some of them didn't know that universities actually offer this type of service. Some even couldn't believe that this service is available for free. But this finding does not coincide with the idea that Chinese people do not trust career counselling services because of traditional Oriental culture with family-bounded characteristics (Leong, Wagner & Tata, 1995; Sue & Sue, 1990). Goh et al (2007) indicate that student counselling services are still limited in China. This study shows that lack of previous experience and knowledge about career counselling service, participants' attitudes toward the concept and purpose of career counselling services are most likely distant. After they were introduced to a basic knowledge about what services career counselling center normally provide for university students, most participants showed a great interest and expressed a willingness to visit it sometime in the near future.

Whiston and Oliver (2005) indicated that career counselling is not well distinguished from career interventions which include many objective forms, such as workshops, career classes, computer applications, and self-administered inventories. This is reflected in students' definitions of career counselling services. It also shows students' lack of experiences with career counselling services. Mingming's experience with career counselling services is similar to what

Brandt's (1977) discussed— attending sessions on career-related topics, completing a career workbook filled with structured exercises, learning how to write a professional resume and cover letter.

One of the widely applied services in career counselling centers seems to be the psychometric test. The psychometric test is based on trait analysis. "Trait represents a disposition to behave expressing itself in consistent patterns of functioning across a range of situations" (Pervin, 1994, p.108). Trait analysis is the core of personality theory (Pervin, 1994). However, the consistency of traits is challenged by participants in this study. As Linda complained,

I know there are some psychology tests online but I do not really that because I think they are more like robot. I may get 10 to 20 out of 100 percent this time, next time I may get 20 to 30, you know, at the curve.

Thus, besides the formatted counselling process or techniques, in theme seven, students expressed their different needs for counselling styles. Some participants would like to share their personal stories with counsellors and some feel that it is important to express their emotions in front of counsellors. Not all participants would like a straightforward directive counselling style as some cross-cultural psychologists (Atkinson, Maruyama, & Matsui, 1978; Leong, Lee, & Chang, 2008) recommend for cross-cultural skills.

Finally, theme eight revealed that not all participants have preferences for the same racial or ethnic background as themselves suggested by Mao and Jepson (1988). Some international students would prefer local counsellors who would better explain local cultural tendencies. This finding supports findings in Hom's

(1998) research. Although some students prefer talking with a counsellor born in the local Canadian culture and some expect to have career counsellors with similar cross-cultural experiences, all were interested in gaining lessons from the positive experiences that the counsellors might have had. This finding implies that career counsellors can have a more prolonged or extended influence in the lives of international students than the counsellors might expect.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, I offer some recommendations in the following areas:

1. Cross-cultural research in counselling studies should keep current with social and cultural changes happening to the groups of people, from particular counties or regions. Cross-cultural counsellors could combine contemporary approaches with some consideration of cultural and traditional influences rather than simply follow the ancient doctrine and philosophies in examining and analyzing issues of concern.
2. The within-group differences reflected in this study once again suggest that it is unreliable to generalize Chinese international students as one group of people. They do not have the same thinking, behaving and adjusting patterns with regard to their study skills, living abilities and ideologies. As for counsellors who want to provide Chinese international students with effective and efficient assistance, it is important to build a thorough understanding of the individual's background, social attitudes, and characteristics and so on rather than adopting a biased view of the individual by using a potentially stereotypical cultural lens.

3. In terms of the parental and familial involvement in Chinese students' decision making, counsellors should pay attention to and show respect for the familial and parental advice. If students' personal intentions conflict with their parental expectations, counsellors should offer an insightful analysis on both sides' arguments and opinions and try to illustrate strengths and weaknesses of both sides to students.
4. Changes in students' future plans, social attitudes, and behaviors, in addition to students' motivations, current financial condition and personal situations, should all be regarded as important factors when counsellors are helping students to figure out their career goals or design career development plans.
5. Universities should organize orientation programs several times a year to introduce career counselling services to Chinese international students so that more Chinese students can get to know what career counselling services are and what kind of help is available.
6. The standard trait tests widely applied in career counselling centers should be employed cautiously. Counsellors should review each answer with students. Also, counsellors should ask students to be aware of the probability of unreliability and inform students that their test results cannot be simply transferred to their decision-making.
7. When counsellors, especially local Caucasian counsellors, are counselling Asian students, they should not be over concerned with the possibility of cross-cultural distrust and barriers. A local counsellor should consider himself or herself

as a mentor for international students in their learning process; a bicultural counsellor should consider himself or herself as a role model from whom the students would like to learn.

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