Forming Chinese Identity through Digital Media:

A Study on the Chinese International Students' Chineseness

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Abstract

This research explores the role of digital media in the identity negotiation of Chinese international students (CIS) who moved to Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2022) to provide a new perspective that deepens the existing understanding of anti-Chinese racism and CIS's identity negotiation in Canada. This study analyzes how CIS used digital media tools to make sense of and respond to anti-Chinese racism and the stereotypical representation of Chinese people in North America. Also, it explores the various factors in participants' acculturation and post-graduation settlement plan in Canada. For this study, I interviewed 20 CIS who relocated to Canada and registered at York University in and after 2019, and I also studied their digital media habits to understand the factors that influenced their identity negotiation in Canada. In agreement with the four modes of acculturation (Berry, 2013), most participants show different levels of integration into Canadian society and a determination to stay in Canada or travel outside of China as a long-term settlement plan. In their identity negotiation process, digital media provides opportunities for participants to create new connections, learn local culture and language, navigate Canadian life, receive information, find their voice, form communities and combat injustice. However, digital media also has a negative side that exposes participants to racists and marginalizes CIS from representations in Western mainstream media. Therefore, this research argues that institutional support through digital media from the Canadian government and universities can be crucial to the elimination of social injustice and the creation of an inclusive and democratic society.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Background and Objectives

Due to travel restrictions between 2020 and 2022, many international students who attended Canadian universities during the COVID-19 pandemic began their freshman and sophomore years remotely from their home countries, and they had significant adaptation challenges when they moved to Canada. Studies indicate that many Chinese international students (CIS) faced heightened psychological stress, challenges in identity negotiation, and incidents of anti-Asian racism during this period (Binah-Pollak & Yuan, 2022; F. Long, 2022; Ke et al., 2023). Despite the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic is no longer considered a global threat, the pandemic of anti-Asian racism in North America remains a long-term concern. This qualitative project studies the digital media habits of CIS who moved to Canada between the Fall of 2019 and the Fall of 2022 to interpret their unique experiences of identity negotiation under the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and anti-Asian racism.

China ranked as Canada's second-largest source of international students in 2021 (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2022), meaning a population of 105,666 CIS were still willing to study in Canada during a global pandemic amidst an increase in anti-Asian racism. Along with the COVID-19 pandemic, 643 anti-Asian racism incidents were reported across Canada from March 2020 to December 2020 (Karamali, 2021), and 943 reports were filed across various online platforms in 2021 (Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto Chapter, 2022). Even by 2024, when the pandemic was no longer a severe threat, nearly three in ten (29%) Canadians from racialized communities reported experiencing hate crime incidents (Neuman, 2025). As hate crimes targeting Asians continue to rise, many Chinese individuals report significant barriers to seeking assistance, often noting the difficulty of achieving tangible results from reporting; consequently, these communities remain deeply traumatized by persistent anti-Asian sentiments (Zhang, Wang,

& Yan, 2024). The social isolation resulting from the dual pandemic of the COVID-19 virus and anti-Asian racism led to increasing dependence on digital media for information updates, entertainment, and community building (Saud et al., 2020; Xu & Zhao, 2022). Moreover, the media representations of the pandemic from China and Canada reflected conflicting actions in dealing with the spread of COVID-19. Along with the changing relationships between the US and China, Chinese media criticized Western countries for their lax COVID-19 strategies (Xinwen Yijiayi, 2022). Is it possible that the contrast made between Canada's relaxed approach to managing COVID-19 and China's stringent measures would impact how international students negotiate their identity and their belongingness in Canada and China?

Rather than studying the COVID-19 pandemic as a bounded temporal period, this study treats it as a polarizing historical event that intensified ideological divisions both within China and across Western nations. During and since the pandemic, CIS became more acutely aware of underlying geopolitical tensions and the narrative war between China and the Western world, particularly those led by the US. Heightened geopolitical conflicts, combined with the global pandemic, led to increased everyday experiences of anti-Chinese racism and other anti-Chinese sentiments in Canada, while China also experienced a rise of conservative, populist, and patriotic discourses (J. Yu, 2022; Binah-Pollak & Yuan, 2022). These developments complicate CIS' identification with Canadian liberal ideals like multiculturalism, individualism, and democratic values, while simultaneously strengthening affective and political attachments to China. Therefore, diasporic belonging in the post-pandemic era could become more conditional and strategic, shaped less by aspirations of integration than by experiences of exclusion.

Based on a thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with 20 CIS in Canada, this study interprets the relationship between digital media consumption and cultural adaptation of CIS to Canada during the dual pandemic of COVID-19 and anti-Asian racism.

The main goal of this research is to find the roles digital media consumption plays in identity negotiation for CIS students in Canada. Hence, this study includes an analysis of the impact of digital media on how CIS perceive and respond to the rise in anti-Asian racism during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. This study does not limit participants to discussing any particular media platforms or applications, so CIS in this study mentioned a wide spectrum of media use, from traditional media like video games and television dramas to various social media apps. In order to appropriately reflect the range of participants' media activities, the article uses the more general term "digital media" rather than concentrating on the effects of specific platforms. As part of this study, I analyze international students' online consumption habits and factors of cosmopolitanism to examine their influences on the attitudes of CIS towards anti-Asian racism and their future in Canada. Facing the threats of anti-Chinese hatred during the pandemic, the welcoming environment for racial and sexual minorities, and the hybridity between Chinese and other cultures in the diaspora, the participants demonstrated the identity negotiation and redefinition of what being Chinese means in a multicultural environment. The main research questions are:

- What role does digital media consumption play in identity negotiation among Chinese students in Canada?
    - How does digital media influence the way CIS in Canada learn about and resist the increase of anti-Chinese racism during the COVID-19 pandemic?
    - How do CIS view the representation of China and Chinese people in Western media? How do these representations affect their settlement decision to stay or leave Canada?
    - What socio-political factors affect Chinese students' identity negotiation and their understanding of Chinese identity? To what extent do the factors of gender and sexuality affect their belongingness to Canada?

1.2. Rationale

To understand the impacts of digital media on CIS acculturation and their involvement in anti-racist activities, a review of recent literature provides observations in the areas of digital media and identity formation. This review includes recent studies on the topics of digital diaspora, popular nationalism, double rejection as a result of the intercultural experience, the rhetoric of "the Chinese virus", overseas students' strategy against racism, and the virtual representation of Chinese. These studies show that media representation is an important catalyst of identity negotiation for CIS. Students find support from online connections and learn information and knowledge that help them to adjust to the local surroundings. However, social media also exposes CIS to racist attacks. Prior to their arrival in Canada, some students expect to experience a multicultural and democratic society due to how Canada is represented in Western media. Instead, along with the anti-Chinese sentiment during the pandemic, CIS experience racial discrimination and institutional bias that excludes them from mainstream society in Canada. Existing studies suggest that Chinese students are not prepared to confront racism and participate in social justice movements in Canada. Others also pinpoint the double exclusion from the essentialists and patriotic Chinese nationalists. However, a few studies highlight the use of digital tools for self-expression against the exclusive mainstream discourse (Banks, 2006; Brock, 2020; Dumitrica, 2019; Xu & Zhao, 2022). This study builds upon this existing research to understand the ideological conflict of the CIS in Canada from the digital media perspective.

1.2.1. Media, Belonging and CIS

To begin with, the participatory culture made possible by digital media enables users to join and participate in online transcultural spaces that prepare people for multicultural civic engagement. Digital platforms establish a virtual space of identity formation beyond the host and ethnic communities (Chang & Chang, 2019), so international students can feel free to

detach and re-attach with any identity they find relatable. As one of the most prevalent platforms, YouTube allows the audience and creators to reflect on their experiences and form new belongingness through online engagement (Martin & Rizvi, 2014). Similar to the role television plays in teaching cultural practices and sparking conversations, digital media is seen as a "digital mirror in which identity is explored, shared, and constructed" (Balleys et al., 2020, p. 6). Particularly, teenagers attach to YouTubers, see them as role models, and negotiate their identities through online conversations. As international students in the host country embrace different digital platforms, they open themselves to diversified and mobile identity formation.

Through the interaction between conventions from many cultures and the creation of hybrid relationships, the use of digital media promotes new migrants' acculturation and sense of mobile belonging. The virtual space on social media allows users to access new cultures, helps them form multilinguistic literacy through online conversation, and eventually builds a multicultural competence to work with people from other backgrounds efficiently (Kim & Kim, 2021; Chang & Chang, 2019). Notably, Dumitrica's (2019) research on Facebook demonstrates that the globalized connection on Facebook releases users from territorial limitations and fosters cosmopolitan identities for its users. In addition to that hybridity, scholars argue that digital media allows users to connect with locations at will:

> What emerges from transnational 'hybridization of physical and digital experiences' (Lee, 2010: 267) is a complexly syncretic sense of place, as bits and pieces of 'back home' materialize through laptops and smartphones within the wider geographic and experiential space of 'out here' in Australia, and contribute to the constitution of 'here.' (Martin & Rizvi, 2014, p. 1018)

International students are caught between the present location of the host country and the distant hometown, but depending on how they make use of digital media, they can form new

belongings to local culture while maintaining a virtual belongingness to home. Martin and Rizvi use “digital nostalgia” (2014, p. 1018) to describe this continuity of their national identity through the aid of digital media. For instance, some participants in their research feel at home when they consume Chinese TV dramas through digital media. Scholars contend that the hybrid identities and mobile identities that users of digital media develop also aid in their social and educational adaption to the local context.

Digital media is seen as a rehearsal space for social interaction between international students and host nationals. Li and Peng (2019) study the transition process of international students in the United States and suggest that students experience less acculturative stress as they build online connections with the local community and maintain social ties with their home country. This study not only shows that virtual social support from both hometown and local society are necessary components of a new migrant’s acculturation process, but their increased social ties with local communities are also positively related to reduced stress in acculturation. Similarly, another study portrays social media as a rehearsal stage for international students to practice their interaction with other cultures (Ditchfield, 2020). Ditchfield (2020) recognizes the benefit of the “pre-post stage” (p. 930) on digital media as it provides more time for migrants to “draft, prepare and practice their performances before sharing them with their audience” (p. 930). By providing students with more time for preparation, this buffer zone provided by digital media might give them a greater sense of control and stronger confidence and lessen the stress associated with cross-cultural communication. However, researchers have observed a decline in the quality of digital discourse as metrics, such as likes and shares, begin to supersede meaningful, substantive dialogue (Ditchfield, 2019). Social media users can seek validation or popularity rather than meaningful dialogues. This implies that meaningful cross-cultural interactions, whether they take place online or offline, are still essential to the adaptation of recent migrants.

In addition to social interaction, digital media provides a learning space for international students to practice their linguistic skills and prepare for their interactions with local students. With the vast amount of free content on the Internet, international students can learn to speak and write in English through audio-visual materials (Kim & Kim, 2021). Scholars found that students are encouraged to "seek academic help and support" (Kim & Kim, 2021, p. 5) as they are used to self-regulated learning through YouTube videos. In addition, enhanced language skills and multicultural competence from social media may improve students' learning efficiency and result in overseas education (Kim & Kim, 2021). It is also worth noting that the use of the Chinese platform WeChat is suggested to hurt CIS users' acculturation and language skills, whereas virtual language channels on YouTube are suggested for higher education institutions to help newcomers acquire the necessary linguistic skills (Ju et al., 2021). Meanwhile, in a study about the impact of information and communication technology (ICT) on the writing skills of students, Alobaid (2020) illustrates that students who used YouTube for longer than five months showed improvement in the accuracy and organization of ideas but not in other aspects of writing fluency. Even though current studies and results are limited, exposure to English-based media platforms and content has shown positive influences on newcomers' language skills and education performance.

Nevertheless, exposure to WeChat and other Chinese social media platforms could lead to opposite results in not only linguistic aspects but also ideological and identity aspects. In contrast to those who accept diversified lifestyles and mobile identity, some CIS learn to appreciate their home country more after living in the host country. This study adopts Zhao's (2020) definition of neo-nationalism as enhanced patriotism developed through intercultural experiences. Neo-nationalism often emerges when immigrants reassess their home country after confronting both the strengths and limitations of the host society. Their intercultural

experiences replace earlier idealized images of the host nation with a more critical and comprehensive understanding, leading them to rediscover and increasingly defend their home country. Some CIS even feel the need to behave as ambassadors to promote the positive images of China in their host country. Recent studies during the COVID-19 pandemic reveal that neo-racism and anti-Asian resentment contribute to "bottom-up nationalism" (Binah-Pollak & Yuan, 2022) or "popular nationalism" (F. Long, 2022) on social media. Compared to the state nationalism initiated by the Communist Party of China (CPC), popular nationalism is formed by the Chinese people and is not fully controlled by the government (F. Long, 2022). Aside from the discrimination in the host country, the efficient ways that the Chinese government handled the COVID-19 pandemic are highlighted in Binah-Pollak and Yuan's (2022) research as another reason for the rise of popular nationalism on social media. From late 2020 to early 2022, China implemented lockdowns and travel restrictions to eliminate transmission of COVID-19 virus, so many international students believe that "returning to the motherland was a way to escape the spread of the pandemic in their host societies" (Binah-Pollak & Yuan, 2022, p. 191). This study also suggests that China's efficient pandemic response showcased its status as a modernized and well-developed country, which in turn serves as a powerful draw for CIS considering returning after graduation. However, even though many CIS feel prouder about their Chinese identity, overseas students are not always appreciated in China.

The COVID-19 pandemic reveals and exaggerates the social conflicts between different social groups within host and home countries, so the mobile identity of international students encompasses both privilege and insecurities because of rising anti-Asian sentiment in Canada and populism in China. In a recent study, the research finds that Korean students experience marginalization from both the host national and Korean citizens at home due to racism, racial stigma, and resentment from non-migrant Koreans (J. Yu, 2022). International

students have a complex relationship with their ethnic community as they need to find support from the diaspora for anti-racist support but also may want to keep a certain distance to avoid the social stigma associated with their racial identity. Moreover, international students are seen as a privileged group with transnational resources, connections, and transnational mobility, so they may face resentment from less wealthy groups from their home country (J. Yu, 2022; Binah-Pollak & Yuan, 2022). Binah-Pollak and Yuan (2022) also suggest that "people belonging to China's lower class are more likely to express their dissatisfaction with social inequity in Chinese society" (p. 188), which results in their direct expression of resentment towards transnational students. Additionally, the resource allocation during the pandemic intensified these social conflicts between different social groups within China. Returning international students were seen as a competition for scarce resources, including quarantine facilities and medical supplies; some claim that wealthy international students' mobility takes resources away from the local populace (Binah-Pollak & Yuan, 2022). Consequently, the privileged mobility of international students during the pandemic is intertwined with marginalization.

During the pandemic, CIS were discriminated by both their home country and host country. The anti-pandemic policies in both countries treated CIS as threats to their social stability and national health. Liu and Chung (2023) argue that the hostility from non-migrant Chinese citizens and racism from host countries render international students "in-between citizens" (p. 15), an insecure position unwanted by the two countries they belong to. Scholars use "double othering" (Ma & Miller, 2021; Liu & Chung, 2023) to describe this phenomenon. In particular, the anti-pandemic effort and the travel policies in both the US and China increased the difficulty international students face when they need to travel between countries. Likewise, the return of migrants to China often triggered negative responses, including shock and anxiety from their fellow citizens (Liu & Chung, 2023). International

students also received conflicting messages from their families, their home country, and fellow citizens about their return to China during the pandemic. Even though their individual families may have expected them to return to China because the pandemic was under control in 2021, the government and people considered them a threat because “they represent as a consequence of possibly bringing the virus back home with them” (Ma & Miller, 2021, p. 1599). Therefore, during the COVID-19 pandemic, international students were othered and treated as social threats by both their home and host countries. The next section will explore research that specializes in the racist representation and stigmatization of Chinese in recent years and the use of media in supporting and challenging these narratives.

1.2.2. Media and racism

During the pandemic, digital media has been weaponized as a battlefront between White supremacists and anti-racism activists. The first half of this section will examine the media narrative in the Global North that amplified the concept of the "Chinese virus," aiming to deflect public attention from the failure of government in disease control and shift blame onto China. The second half will go over how ethnic minorities, especially Asian immigrants, have used digital media to combat racism.

During the pandemic, “Chinese virus” and other racialized terms have been used by many Western media channels and politicians, such as Donald Trump, to blame China for the pandemic. Scholars believe that these narratives demonstrate diminished empathy due to the threat of a virus and cause “scapegoating, stigmatization, blaming, and dehumanization of minority groups, as well as the invocation of violence” (Ittefaq et al., 2022, p. 14). Aside from directing the topics of public discussion, the theory of media framing suggests that media representation draws the boundaries for acceptable and unacceptable discourse and approaches to social problems such as the pandemic (Holt et al., 2022). Holt et al. (2022) also proposes that media representation significantly influences public attitudes and generates

feelings of blame for the pandemic towards Asian communities. Moreover, Cui and Worrell (2019) believe that media representation and reality are "mutually constitutive" (p. 236) in creating racial bias. This means the public who has limited relationships with racialized communities depends on media to learn about others, so the misrepresentation can lead to physical consequences of discrimination and aggravated conflicts. These social experiences during the pandemic could lead to chronic negative emotions and severe psychological difficulty for newcomer's acculturation (Lou et al., 2021). With an understanding of the nature and possible impacts of these stigmatizing narratives, many researchers attempt to decipher the reasons behind those narratives.

Xenophobia, populism and anti-communism are suggested as political factor behind the "Chinese virus" or "Communist virus" narrative and the uptick of anti-Asian racism in North America. Grover et al (2020) argue that the term "Chinese virus" is a xenophobic attempt to exclude Asians from the European-dominated immigrant country. As White people remain the dominant racial group in American society, the term "Chinese virus" associates sickness, along with the emotion of fear, with Chinese or other Asian communities to naturalize the belongingness of the dominant group and exclude Asians. Some scholars argue that these terms reveal and enhance the already existing xenophobic stereotype that Asians are "perpetual foreigners" (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020, p. 877) who are never accepted by the local community. Another study traces back to the pre-pandemic period, when global capitalism created "socio-economic oppression and trust deficit" (Elias et al., 2021, p. 786) that undermined the intercultural relationship between different cultural groups. Under those conditions, the life-threatening pandemic and economic failure aggravated racial conflicts and heightened nationalism and populism in the Global North (Elias et al., 2021), which led to enhanced xenophobia toward Asians. Furthermore, the "Chinese virus" is suggested to be a metaphor that associates the pandemic with the Communist Party of China to fulfill an anti-

Communist agenda. The use of "Chinese virus" metaphorically equalizes the spread of coronavirus with the penetration of Chinese people and reinforces nationalistic fear of external invasion to North America (Gao, 2022). These narratives during the pandemic portray Chinese people as a threat to the social and political life of the Global North, and some academics have compared them to a modernized version of "Yellow peril" in techno-orientalist stories. Originated from analysis of popular culture in the 1980s, techno-orientalism associates Asians with advanced technologies but retrogressive humanity (Morley & Robins, 1995). In addition to the comparison between rational Europeans and barbaric Orientals, the techno-orientalism narrative states the fear for Asian people and culture after the rise of Asian technological and economic development.

In addition to the traditional Yellow Peril narrative that represents Chinese people as a primitive source of illness and threat to the modernized civilization of the West, techno-orientalism and the narrative of the "Chinese virus" emphasizes the modernity of China as a second source of fear. In agreement with Darling-Hammond et al. (2020), Elias et al. (2021), and Gao (2022), Zhang (2022) suggest that China is portrayed as "a land of 'degeneration' and 'decay'" (p. 64), while Cui and Worrell (2019) demonstrate that Chinese people are treated as social threats to the dominant Whiteness even before the pandemic. The many detailed COVID-19 news report's on Western media focus on the "South Chinese wet market" as the alleged source of coronavirus reinforces the image of China as a source of disease (Zhang, 2022). Furthermore, China's modernization has been widely acknowledged since the 2008 Beijing Olympics, but Western representation has expressed concern about China as a challenge to their global hierarchy in tandem with this recognition (Cui & Worrell, 2019). While techno-orientalist narratives portrayed the rapid economic and technological development of Japan in the 1980s as a dehumanized ideological threat to Western civilization, the surgical-mask-wearing habits of Chinese people also remind people of the

technological success of China (Zhang, 2022). A foreign traveller in Hong Kong even said, "It was beginning to feel as if we were in a low-budget science fiction movie. There were minimal special effects, cheap surgical masks, and a monster that you couldn't see: the virus" (Zhang, 2022, p. 75). The science fiction metaphor aligns with the techno-orientalist ideal in which Asians are seen as masters of opaque technology, linked to irresponsible technical advancement and an apparent disdain for moral and humanistic considerations (Sohn, 2008). Accordingly, the concern of being overrun by Chinese culture and bodies is reflected in the way that China is portrayed in Western media with a xenophobic narrative.

In addition to orientalism and Yellow Peril narratives, another common Western rhetoric that marginalizes Asians and Asian Americans is the model minority myth (Xu & Lee, 2013; Li & Nicholson, 2021). Model minority seems like a compliment to celebrate the success and hard work of Asian Americans, and this narrative often appears when people compare Asians with other racial groups, especially African Americans.

> In myriad meditations about race in the United States, Japanese and Chinese Americans jointly assumed the position as exemplars of coloured mobility… …Yet through "quiet dignity," "hard work," and an "order of good citizenship higher than the average White," Asian children stayed in school, were not born out of wedlock, and did not grow up to become criminals or "create slums" (Wu, 2014, p. 243).

This quote demonstrates how the racial minority myth frames a specific racial position for Asian Americans within the complex racialized structure among White, Black, Indigenous, Latino, and other ethnic groups in North America. Wu (2014) and Xu and Lee (2013) argue that this narrative can be traced to the 1960s, when the success stories of Japanese and Chinese Americans were recognized and promoted in the US. However, the success of Asian Americans has recently been shown to be exaggerated for the purpose of dividing racial minorities, problematizing other racial groups, and triggering conflicts between Asians and

other communities (Li & Nicholson, 2021). By framing Asians as model minorities, Xu and Lee (2013) argues that Asians are further marginalized as "perpetual foreigners" who never truly belong in North America. During the pandemic, the model minority narrative was also quickly replaced by the Yellow Peril narrative, a shift that recurs whenever Asian countries enter into conflict with the US (Li & Nicholson, 2021). Therefore, the model minority is a myth and an anti-Asian narrative that treats Asians as outsiders and potential threats, similar to techno-orientalism.

In contrast to the Western media's effort to stigmatize China and Chinese people, digital media can cultivate a counter-public to question this dominant discourse. The concepts of Black cyberspace (Banks, 2006) and the libidinal economy (Brock, 2020) portray how minorities use digital media to form an ethnic community and challenge the stereotypes in mainstream representation with their authentic voice. In addition, Dumitrica (2019) regards social media platforms as a decentred and cosmopolitan space of self-presentation and resistance to racist and nationalist narratives. Ethnic minorities can challenge the dominant discourse by constructing storytelling that represents the authentic and diversified images of their communities. Moreover, "digital citizenship" is used by Xu and Zhao (2022) to describe self-empowerment through vlogging and other digital media practices. Similar to Dumitrica's (2019) argument, people utilize digital media to share their everyday lives, cultures and viewpoints online and defy European-dominated social standards. This digital storytelling becomes key during the pandemic and empowers people to cope with anxiety and loneliness, share experiences, and promote anti-racist strategies. Hence, sharing stories and participating in the online community have helped ethnic minorities address the pandemic and the anxiety caused by rising racist incidents. During the pandemic, several studies investigated the impact of social media on the Asian diaspora and highlighted similar functions of empowerment.

Social media has been a double-edged sword that both exposed the Asian diaspora to racist news and content and afforded them a space of empowerment when some Asians started to express their feelings and heighten their awareness of racism (Yang & Tsai, 2023; Chen, Sun & Tao, 2024; Chen, Song & Kim, 2024). During the global pandemic, personal networks on social media amplified exposure to racist content, such as xenophobic mockery and overt racism and led to feelings of isolation (Chen, Sun & Tao, 2024; Shin, 2023). Specifically, Chen, Song, and Kim (2024) argue that Asian individuals are reminded of their marginalized and unwelcome social status when friends share videos expressing anti-Asian sentiments or mocking Asians for eating dogs and bats. Yang and Tsai (2023) found that private messaging and passive consumption of algorithm-recommended timeline on social media correlates with heightened levels of Race-Based Traumatic Stress (RBTS), because users are repeatedly exposed to distressing race-related content in more intimate private settings. As a result, online exposure to or witnessing racism directed at other Asians can contribute to heightened anxiety and psychological distress (Yang & Tsai, 2023; Shin, 2023). Conversely, participation in online communities and other social media activities has been linked to positive outcomes such as empowerment and collective resilience.

Many scholars have examined how Asian Americans engage in posting, commenting, and online activism, finding that such participation fosters greater racial consciousness and solidarity. In Yang and Tsai's (2023) study, many participants used social media to express personal emotions, raise awareness of racism, and both seek and provide support, which are activities that were found to be associated with lower levels of RBTS. Similarly, Chen, Sun and Tao (2024) contend that passive browsing and reading can enhance Asian Americans' awareness of their social environment, while actively engaging in discussions about racial discrimination, seeking community support, and developing resources to challenge systemic racism foster a sense of empowerment and promote better mental well-being. Moreover,

Chen, Song, and Kim (2024) argue that exposure to online racism heightened racial consciousness among Asian Americans while movements like #StopAsianHate fostered pan-ethnic unity and shared racial pride across diverse Asian groups. Although exposure to anti-Asian sentiment can cause distress, such experiences also heighten individuals' awareness of their racial identity. At the same time, social media platforms, particularly those with strong Asian user communities, enable users to recognize allies and potential threats within their networks, reshaping their understanding of community and safety (Chen, Song & Kim, 2024). However, considering the rising conflicts between China and the Global North, especially the recent "Chinese virus" narrative, it is necessary to highlight the unique experiences CIS has compared to other diasporic members.

1.2.3. Racism in the academy

On top of the discrimination faced by many minorities, CIS must deal with academic exclusion and lack of systemic support. International students from non-White regions typically report "less satisfaction and greater difficulty with their host institutions" (Yao, 2018, p. 88) because of "perceived discrimination, unfair campus services and treatment, and negative interactions with domestic students" (p. 88). A study in 2021 uses "academic exclusion" (Wei & Bunjun, 2021, p. 75) to describe the systemic negligence of non-European culture by educational institutions from the Global North. Similar to the tendency to assimilate immigrants and civilize them with European culture, the pedagogy in immigrant countries is also Eurocentric and omits the history and knowledge of other regions (Wei & Bunjun, 2021). Suspitsyna's study (2021) agrees with this argument and suggests that "academic norms and traditions, composition of the professoriate and high-level administration, campus culture, and climate" (p. 51) reflect the same traits of White domination. Likewise, Liu and Chung (2023) summarize international students' roles as "sources of income," "inferior competitors," and "charitable recipients of development and

Western knowledge" (p. 4) in Western post-secondary institutions. This means international students are not seen as equal counterparts of the local students but objectified as cash cows and inferior targets for cultural assimilation. This unequal positioning not only reinforces feelings of marginalization but also underscores the lack of institutional support for Asian students, a gap that became especially evident during the pandemic.

While internationalization is imbalanced and forced on only non-White international students, Western universities also lack systemic support for international students. Huang (2024), Schartner (2023), and Yu (2023) argue that university support in Western host countries is often inadequate and overly generalized, failing to account for the racial and cultural specificities of CIS and largely remaining silent on anti-Asian racism. Chinese students in Australian universities report more difficulties and less support for their mental health, experiences of racial discrimination and financial struggles during the pandemic (Ke et al., 2023). As Huang (2024) observes, despite the surge in anti-Asian discrimination during the pandemic, university support "never really focused on Asian or especially Chinese people" (p. 268), leaving CIS feeling overlooked and marginalized within the institution. Wei and Bunjun (2021) suggest creating a space of "validation and advocacy" (p. 75) as an alternative to isolation and marginalization to encourage peer support and shared resources among international students. The switch to online education during the pandemic exposes the marginalized positions of international students as shown through the absence of support in host nation and loss of interpersonal and offline contacts (Firang, 2020), which is why students are forced to use social media to seek support. Moreover, Yu (2023) critiques theoretical frameworks that portray CIS as passive, obedient, or culturally deficient victims, and proposes a critical approach that examines how global White supremacy and historical anti-Asian racism shape their experiences. This work underscores the need for a new theoretical lens that challenges racially biased educational institutions rather than reinforcing

anti-Asian stereotypes. These studies reveal the exploitative nature of Western universities and unfair power relationships, reflecting the discriminations, systemic inequality and exclusion of minorities from the Global North in the academic settings. International students not only face social isolation and neglect but are also inadequately prepared or educated to deal with racism.

Most studies suggest that CIS often arrive in their host nations with a limited understanding of race and racism directed toward Chinese people, forcing them to learn about them after settling in the host country. Living in Han-Chinese-dominated mainland China, CIS are not marginalized or treated as minorities until they land in a country dominated by European descendants (J. Yu, 2022). Yang (2023) and Yu (2023) describe this condition as "racial innocence," suggesting that many CIS perceive racism as a distinctly Western phenomenon unrelated to their own experiences. Specifically, Yang (2023) points out that CIS often associate racism with overt historical acts such as slavery rather than recognizing its subtle, contemporary forms. Upon arrival, however, various factors contribute to their growing racial awareness and racialization. Exposure to social media coverage of racial justice movements such as Black Lives Matter, interactions within multiracial environments, and immersion in a highly racialized society all help CIS develop a more nuanced understanding of modern racism (Yang, 2023). Similarly, França et al. (2024) and Huang (2024) find that direct experiences of overt discrimination and racial microaggressions further deepen this understanding. As their awareness evolves, CIS must also develop coping strategies to navigate and respond to these racialized experiences, which will be explored in the following section.

Research that has studied CIS to understand their coping methods against racism since the global pandemic confirm that avoidance is the most common strategy. Considering the lack of support in host nations, CIS usually choose an indirect "non-assertive, non-

confrontational, and threat-avoidance" (Ji & Chen, 2022, p. 1968) strategy against anti-Asian racism. Likewise, some CIS understand racism as the ignorance of uneducated individuals rather than a systemic issue (Yang, 2023; França et al., 2024), dismissing or minimizing the impact of racist encounters. Moreover, Wang and Dovchin (2022) argue that international students rarely speak up when they encounter linguistic attacks. Some suggest that international students are "confused and unsure how to respond" (Ji & Chen, 2022, p. 1968) due to their lack of experience in dealing with racism. Another study suggests that Asian Canadians, in general, also tend to treat a racist encounter as a misunderstanding (Lou et al., 2021). In the long run, Wang and Dovchin (2022) concern that the avoidance strategy could lead to naturalization of linguistic racism as an unchangeable fact.

These research projects offer different ways of deciphering the geopolitical and cultural reasons behind the avoidance method. Some studies analyze the cultural and educational environment in China to explain the avoidance strategy. J. Yu (2022) suggests that CIS' confusion and tendency to avoid racial issues stem from their limited understanding of racialization, while França et al. (2024) argue that some students seek to maintain their "privileged" social status as international students, thereby leading them to avoid or dismiss encounters with racism. Meanwhile, Chinese education system has limited coverage on racism and the social conflicts in North America (Liu & Chung, 2023). Additionally, Ji and Chen (2022) mention the language barrier and safety concerns are also possible reasons for their choice of avoidance. They also suggest that international students choose to avoid confrontation because it does not guarantee rewarding outcomes. J. Yu's study (2022) agrees with this more pragmatic perspective and associates their avoidance with the political expression of the Chinese. This study suggests that, compared to social activism in the Global North, Chinese people are less interested in political expression. Furthermore, J. Yu (2022) finds that CIS lack action against racism because they dislike the social movement in the US

and regard activism as an "emotional outlet" (p. 2) rather than a solution to social conflicts. Due to the unique political structure in China, J. Yu (2022) believes that CIS tend to be more "pragmatic, materialistic, and consequently uninterested in politics" (p. 3). Other studies suggest that CIS often maintain a strong Chinese national identity, fueled by patriotic nationalism and pride in China (Yang, 2023; Kwak et al., 2023), so they are less connected with Asian identity and Asian American anti-racism movements. Consider these perspectives, CIS may not be advocating for social changes as ethnic minorities, but they tend to center their personal gains and national identity. It is within these social, political, and cultural contexts that recent studies have found that CIS respond to racists incidents by avoidance. Compare the findings with these studies will provide a more current understanding of how CIS use digital media and how it affects on their anti-racism strategies and their cultural and national identity.

1.3. Literature Review Overview

By relying on stereotypes and biased treatment, racism portrays ethnic minorities as inferior and fails to acknowledge their internal diversity (Hall, 2006; Gilroy, 2000; Spivak, 2010). The use of the "Chinese virus" in 2020 by Western media outlets and the spread of disinformation on social media exacerbated techno-orientalism, xenophobia, systemic othering, dehumanization and scapegoating (Said, 1978; Harris Ali, 2020). Conversely, digital media allow marginalized communities to participate in political discourse and form racialized enclaves against stereotypes and discrimination (Nakamura, 2008; Brock, 2020). The surge in digital media has empowered users to engage in online communities, fostering transcultural spaces for intercultural civic participation (Hayward, 2019; Yu, 2018). Notably, YouTube stands out as a platform that encourages individuals to explore new cultures and shape imagined identities (Chang & Chang, 2019). Hence, it encourages the intercultural

adaptation of new migrants with the interactions between values and norms from different cultures, together with the formation of new identities, relations, and activities.

Although Canada is known for its multiculturalism policies, many scholars criticize the inequality and marginalization of people of colour in Canada (Mackey, 1998; Bannerji, 2000; Fleras, 2010; Yu, 2018; Hayward, 2019). In particular, the assimilation to the Eurocentric dominant culture is one of the many obstacles that CIS face in their acculturation to Canada. Consequently, people of colour form diasporic communities in resistance to the assimilation of the mainstream culture. Most studies on the Chinese diaspora prioritize established diasporic Chinese communities over new settlers (Ang, 2001; Ang, 2004; Siu, 2005; Meer & Modood, 2012). This research aims to understand the distinctive intercultural experience of international students and their awareness of cosmopolitan diaspora life. Unlike China's focus on nationalism, the multicultural Canadian society values the cosmopolitan mobility to adapt in different cultural communities (Berry, 2013; Sobré-Denton & Bardhan, 2013; Gilroy, 2000). Studies on the Chinese diaspora also highlight hybridization between Chinese and other cultures compared to the appreciation of pure Chinese culture in mainland China (Anthias, 2001; Sun, 2016). With the conditions of the global pandemic in consideration, under the influence of digital media from China, Canada, and other regions, CIS have renegotiated their identity and settlement plans in Canada.

1.4. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the analysis and categorization of participants is based on four modes of identity negotiation in intercultural communication. As migrants interact with other ethnic groups, they commonly negotiate their identity to adapt to the local Canadian culture (Drzewiecka & Steyn, 2012). The result of identity negotiation depends on the ways through which migrants decode the local culture: they could accept the Canadian culture as the dominant code; negotiate their identity in between cultures; or choose an

oppositional way to interpret it (Hall, 2018). According to John W. Berry (2013), the identity of immigrants can be categorized into four modes: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. Assimilation refers to the ones who gave up their heritage culture and adopted the new cultural identity, whereas separation describes participants who maintain only their original culture. Assimilated students would choose Canadian culture and abandon their connection with Chinese culture, while separated students would refuse to assimilate to the local culture. In contrast to integration, which refers to those who accept both identities, marginalized people reject both cultures. By these definitions, integrated students embrace both Chinese and Canadian cultures, whereas marginalized students keep their distance from both cultures. As the globalized flow of labour and education brings an increasing number of Asian immigrants to the Global North, the digital diaspora provides a shelter for immigrants and supports their different ways of cultural adaptation.

1.5. Methodology Overview

In spring 2023, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 Chinese international students at York University to understand their intercultural experiences and the result of their identity negotiation in Toronto, Canada. I asked the participants to provide a list of five media platforms and five media content they recommend. Additionally, I implemented a thematic analysis of the interview record and the media content suggested by participants. I believe the combination of interview analysis and digital ethnography will help me study the relationship between consumption habits and their influences on participants' adaptation to Canada. This analysis of their consumption habits illustrates the media factors that reflect their understanding of Canada, other ethnicities, racism, and their relationship with them. The participants are made up of ten women, eight men, one non-binary individual, and one trans-man; four of them self-identified as gay or bisexual. The range of participants in my study

enables me to explore various experiences concerning access to educational and intercultural resources, as well as differences between social majorities and minorities.

Most of the participants showed signs of integration between Chinese and Western cultures. Only five out of twenty informants firmly choose to return to China; most of them want to settle outside of China after graduation. Based on Berry's model of acculturation (2013), only three participants were marked as having a separate way of life in Canada, only one of them was seen as marginalized from the dominant society; and most of them are on a diverse range of integration into the local society. Their acculturation is evaluated through careful consideration of three dimensions: their circle of friends (diversified friends or Chinese only); understanding of and participation in the diaspora, and their recognition of the hybrid Chinese identity through the term "banana." Although most participants show an integrated lifestyle, some of them still show a great sense of pride in their Chinese identity, which complicates this category. Moreover, most participants choose or want to choose a life outside of China. Among the twenty participants, only five of them firmly suggest a plan to return to China, mostly to reunite with their parents and avoid the high expenses in Canada. Of the other thirteen participants, two are still not sure about their plans after graduation, one wants to move to the US for a better salary and lower income tax, one wants to travel between China and Canada in the future, and the other eleven informants choose to stay in Canada mostly for what they perceive as a more inclusive and democratic environment.

1.6. Scope and Limitations

The surge of anti-Asian sentiment alongside the COVID-19 pandemic reveals the social bias and discrimination against people of colour hidden in the multiculturalism of modernized Canada. In the meantime, along with the enhanced economic and political conflicts between China and the US, Chinese media and Western media not only criticize each other's anti-epidemic policies but also reinforce their existing ideologies and nationalist

values. These media portrayals also have an impact on CIS, who use digital media for socialization and academic purposes. Finding the roles that digital media consumption plays in the identity negotiation of CIS studying in Canada will be the primary research objective of this project. CIS's perception and response to the increase in anti-Asian racism during and after the COVID-19 epidemic are examined. The participants show identity negotiation and the redefining of what it means to be Chinese in an intercultural setting where they confront anti-Chinese hatred, experience a welcoming social climate for racial and sexual minorities, and live the hybrid lifestyle in the Chinese diaspora.

This qualitative study aims to understand the distinct experiences of identity formation under the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic and anti-Asian racism of CIS who relocated to Canada and registered at York University between the fall of 2019 and the fall of 2022. The focus of this study creates a geographical boundary that is limited to York University and international students from mainland China. The temporal boundary between 2019 and 2022 limits the participants to reflect what CIS experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The time boundary helps me find informants who were somewhat affected by the pandemic, along with potential encounters with racists during that period. Moreover, this study tried to invite a diversified group of participants who represented different genders, sexualities, and cities of origin. Eventually, there were 20 participants from different sexual and gender groups and diverse cities of origin. Due to the limits of this research, 20 participants were maximum to my capacity.

Given that this research is based on 20 interviews, it acknowledges the limitations of focusing on only students from the Chinese mainland who are at York University. Although I intended to use a larger research sample that include international students from all Chinese-speaking regions in different universities across Canada, the time and budget restrictions limit my options. This implies that rather than reflecting all CIS experiences across Canada, the

findings will be limited to CIS experiences living in urbanized regions close to Toronto. The snowball sampling method could also affect my recruitment because participants are most likely to introduce and attract new participants who share similar backgrounds. It would be more inclusive if this research could attract participants from outside of mainland China, such as Hong Kong and Taiwan, to compare how Chinese identity is formed and renegotiated differently. With a larger budget and a longer period for research, this study could also connect with universities across Canada to discuss the regional differences in acculturation in Canada.

1.7. Structure of the Dissertation

In addition to the literature and methodology sections above, this dissertation begins with a literature review chapter and a methodology section to demonstrate the more comprehensive theoretical foundations upon which this study is based. The literature review chapter focuses on the concept of nationalism, racism, multiculturalism, the diaspora and cosmopolitanism along with studies on digital media's impact on social discourses. The third chapter provides a detailed explanation of the research methodology. Not only does this chapter discuss the advantage of a qualitative semi-structured interview in understanding the lived experience of CIS, but it also depicts the data analysis process.

From Chapter 4 to Chapter 7, I will discuss the findings of this study in different themes. Chapter 4 provides an overview of the participants in this research, including reasons why they came to Canada, the digital media they use, and the four main roles digital media played in their acculturation procedure. This chapter answers the research question about the main functions of digital media in CIS's intercultural adjustment in Canada in social, educational, informational and entertainment dimensions.

Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 both focus on the racism in Canada and the racial identity of Chinese students. Chapter 5 illustrates the participants' encounters with racists in Canada and

analyzes their racial identity to understand how they make sense of and resist racism in Canada with digital tools. This chapter answers the main research question about the role digital media plays in CIS's awareness of and strategies against racism. Similarly, Chapter 6 focuses on racial inequality in Canada in the form of stereotypical representations of the Chinese and their impact on participants' perceptions of the local community and their future in Canada. This chapter is named "CIS and Media War" because it also depicts the conflicting narrative of Chinese media and their Western counterparts to understand how participants interpret their material. While this chapter reveals the impact of biased media representation on participants' attitudes to the concept of race and racism, it also displays participants' integrated identity through their contradictory attitudes in both defending and criticizing Chinese media.

Last but not least, in contrast to mainland China's pure Chineseness, Chapter 7 examines CIS's responses to the ethnic, sexual, and cultural inclusivity of Canada to reveal their hybrid identity and ideological changes. While the previous findings chapters highlight their effort to defend their Chinese identity from racism, the last chapter leans towards the diversity of Chinese identity in contrast to a more conservative nationalistic identity. With some examples of their preferred media content, the last chapter demonstrates participants' openness to intercultural communication, hybrid identity in the Chinese diaspora, feminist ideologies and a more inclusive environment for the queer community (I will use queer community in this dissertation to refer to the LGBTQIA2S+ community). This chapter also includes an overview of the factors that shape their post-graduation settlement decisions in Canada, China or other places, which assist the analysis of informants' identity changes.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

To understand the complexity of the impact of digital media on Chinese international students' identity, this research draws on theoretical work by cultural and media studies scholars to provide basic theories that explain the relationship between media and identity, the media's role in constituting racism, the racism hidden in multicultural Canada and the formation of diaspora as a hybrid space between their connection with China and their life in Canada. This literature review proposes that CIS renegotiate their identity through the nationalist propaganda in China and their intercultural experiences and hybridity of the diaspora in Canada. The literature also shows that CIS experience difficult acculturation and reoccurrence of racism due to systemic bias hidden in multicultural Canada, which challenges their understanding of race. In addition, digital media is not only a tool that a nation-state uses to affect their national belongingness, but it can also be a strong weapon for CIS to defend and express themselves against racism.

In order to establish the groundwork for understanding the media's role in creating and shaping CIS's identity, the first section on identity deals with philosophical conceptions concerning identity and nationalism (Hammond, 1999; Gramsci, 2005; Anderson, 1991). This section also illustrates the nationalism ideologies in modern mainland China to explain the nationalistic identity of CIS and their racial awareness in a society in which they make up the racial majority. It will help explain the frustration and identity shock CIS experience when they first encounter racism in Canada.

The following section applies ideas of Stuart Hall (2006), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2010), and Edward Said (1978), to understand the increase in racist occurrences during the global pandemic. Digital media is introduced here as a weapon for both White supremacists and racial minorities. Based on recent studies on digital media, this study depicts the empowerment of racial enclaves on the Internet and its intercultural space for political

participation (Nakamura, 2008; Brock, 2020; Hayward, 2019; Yu, 2018). This discussion also lays the fundamental ground to interpret the role digital media plays in shaping CIS's identity and attitude towards racism. What is more, this chapter engages with theories by Eva Mackey (1998), Himani Bannerji (2000), Augie Fleras (2010), Sherry Yu (2018), and Mark Hayward (2019; 2023) to analyze multiculturalism in Canada and its limitation, which help illustrate the obstacles for CIS to adjust to their life in Canada.

Following the section on multiculturalism and the struggle to adapt in Canada, an overview of the concept of diaspora (Ang, 2001; Anthias, 2001; Meer & Modood, 2012) helps to explain the parallels and contrasts between international students and immigrants from the Chinese diaspora. This discussion is followed by a cosmopolitanism section to understand the result of the identity negotiation of CIS and their acceptance and resistance to cosmopolitan identity. Both sections are theoretical foundations to analyze how participants' understanding of their identity and relationship with China changes. Interconnected with identity formation and mass media, these theories will be used to analyze the media content and the interview, providing a thorough thematic analysis and categorization of informants.

2.1. Media and Identity

For this study, "identity" will be defined as a process of adjusting how one sees the world and oneself as a result of their lived experiences, which include exposure to various media content, encounters with other cultures and racist incidents. Different results of identity formation can be found in international students as they learn to adapt to cultural surroundings in the host nation and consume media content from diversified sources. According to Norton, identity explains "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (as cited in Fang & Duff, 2018, p. 44). As people grow and explore the world, their identity is expanded according to their knowledge and

experiences. Stuart Hall proposes that identity construction is “an active process of representation or discursive construction” (1992, p. 224). Similarly, Hammond (1999) suggests that the boundary of identity is constantly recomposed and redefined by social groups. Not only can people shape their identity based on the changing social environment, but they can also actively interpret media and popular culture to negotiate their identity. When people consume media, Fang and Duff suggest that they actively “decode the various ideologies encoded in popular culture” (2018, p. 44) and choose to accept ideologies in variable ways. Building on these different perspectives to understand identity, this study acknowledges the effects of experiences in the host nation and popular culture from many cultural backgrounds on the creation of international students' identities.

The early studies on the influence of popular culture on identity formation frame media as a tool of control. Both Gramsci (2005) and Anderson (1991) point out the function of media and other cultural institutions in maintaining power and control over the citizens. The notion of cultural hegemony is to convince civilians of the worldview of the elite groups (Gramsci, 2005). Aside from coercive force, the ruling class relies on intellectuals to reinforce the ideological structure by controlling the press and cultural institutions, including publishers, libraries, schools, and “even architecture and the layout and names of streets” (Gramsci, 2005, p. 16). Moreover, the “imagined community” (Anderson, 1991, p. 5) refers to the identity shared by citizens within the national boundary. This national identity is imagined because “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members.... yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson, 1991, p. 6). To unite a mass population across the nation-state, print and language are two tools that form the base of national consciousness. As print capitalism fixes the use of official languages, mass cultures, such as novels and news stories, “build that image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the nation” (Anderson, 1991, p. 44). In particular, newspapers

and maps enable readers to imagine the boundary of their nation-state and the life of comrades whom they may never meet, reinforcing the imagined bonds shared by citizens. More recent forms of digital media will be discussed later in the racism section to illustrate the role digital media play in shaping one's identity in contemporary society. That said, international students were shaped by media controlled by their home state until they moved to the host nation and received local media exposure. The rest of this section will elaborate on the early establishment of nationalism and the nationalistic identity of mainland China.

The idea of the imagined community and the symbolic boundaries constructed national identity through language and media. In addition to Anderson (1991), who connects language and symbols, such as maps, with national identity, David Morley (2000) proposes that the ability to speak an official language signifies one's inclusion within the boundary of a nation. That said, the linguistic and physical boundaries, such as national borders and immigration checkpoints, draw the line between people who are accepted and the ones who are excluded. According to Das and Poole (2004), "the state is constituted in modernity through the inclusion of man's natural life into the mechanisms and calculations of power" (p. 25). In other words, the national boundary functions as a container for those who are normalized as trustworthy companions in contrast to the others who do not belong to this community. This imagined boundary shows great similarities with the cultural boundaries of China.

With Confucianism at its cultural centre, China has developed a new Confucianism that highlights nationalism and cultural uniqueness. The concept of minzu zhuyi (民族主义 nationalism) was proposed by Sun Yet-sen during World War II when China was threatened by imperialism from Europe (Solé-Farràs, 2014). As this new concept values the "consanguinity (xuetong 血統), living conditions (shenghuo 生活), language (yuyan 語言) and religion (zongjiao 宗教)" (Solé-Farràs, 2014, p. 80), Sun's nationalism unites Chinese

who speak different languages across different provinces to stand against the Manchu government (Gladney, 1994). It also learns from Confucianism to place Han-Chinese culture as the superior Chinese identity against imperialism from the West. As Sun's nationalism ideology played a key role in the anti-imperialism history of China, contemporary China proposed a new nationalism as it faced the commercialization and cultural influences of modern Western countries. After China adopted the reform of opening up in the 1980s, the Chinese government adopted Confucianism at the centre of its new nationalism against Western influences (Solé-Farràs, 2014). Since then, the new adaptation of Confucianism in constructing a new nationalism by the Chinese government establishes a cultural identity as their anti-imperialist strategy.

Furthermore, most CIS from mainland China are under the influence of Chinese nationalism, with Han Chinese at the centre of their identity. With a very limited non-Chinese population in mainland China, CIS from mainland China consider themselves the racial majority and experience shock when they arrive in Canada. Their social status as the racial majority in China creates a proud Chinese identity without the disturbance of racism. As Han Chinese is promoted as the essence of Chinese identity against cultural influences from the Global North, the new nationalism shows the second characteristic of Sinification. According to Solé-Farràs (2014), the new Chinese identity "rejects Han Ethno-centrism" (p. 86) and welcomes all ethnic minorities who demonstrate Chinese knowledge and practice. This strategy of Sinification can be traced back to the origin of Confucianism. Since the construction of the People's Republic of China, the Chinese government has adopted both Marxism and nationalist ideologies, which correspondingly aim to assist ethnic minorities in reaching the universal life quality and creating a homogeneous Chinese identity (Han, 2013). To put it in another way, modern Chinese identity demonstrates Chineseness through the assimilation of ethnic minorities into the Han-Chinese culture, while Han is portrayed as the

modernized standard of China. Along with the cultural and ethnic aspects of the Chinese national identity, the last dimension emphasizes loyalty to the Party-state.

Placing the Party and Confucianism at the centre of Chinese identity shows a nationalism that values patriotism. This emphasis on patriotism in Chinese culture adds more obstacles to the acculturation of CIS who intend to immigrate to Canada. Confucianism is known as a hierarchical system because it places the loyalty or zhong (忠) to the king as one of the foundational moralities (Kuo, 2018). Back in ancient China, this loyalty was expected to be directed towards their ethnic polity, and modern Chinese were taught to show their loyalty and patriotism to the party state. According to Solé-Farràs (2014), "nationalist sentiment is officially expressed as patriotism, and the CPC identifies itself with the nation – criticizing the Party is, therefore, an unpatriotic act" (p. 84). To create patriotic nationalism, moral education is strongly emphasized in China as one of the core goals of its education system. Post-secondary institutions constantly host political activities to strengthen the knowledge of the national history, cultural identity, and political ideologies of China, aiming at reinforcing patriotic values among the young generations (Zhuang & Kong, 2022). This loyalty provides an ideological dimension in addition to the cultural and ethnic Chinese identity, so to be a Chinese citizen means devotion not only to Chinese culture but also to the Chinese state. In contrast, the next section will provide an interpretation of the theories that help explain the racial discrimination and stereotypical media representation, and it will also extend this discussion of media's role in shaping identity with an emphasis on digital media as a new tool for racial empowerment.

2.2. Racial Identity

With an understanding of media's impact on reinforcing social norms, media is also used to create an arbitrary and fictional hierarchy of race. This study defines racism based on Stuart Hall's (2006), Etienne Balibar's (2008), Rey Chow's (1993), Paul Gilroy's (2000) and

Edward Said's (1978) work on racism and Orientalism. These theories will aid in the analysis of the various ways that international students comprehend their encounters with racism, process these experiences, and shape their identity and understanding of their position in Canada, taking into account the rise in anti-Asian racism during the global pandemic. In the Global North, the concept of race was created to maintain structures of privilege for Europeans. The acting out of these beliefs is racism – the acts that dehumanize and marginalize people. According to Hall (2006),

> racism, of course, operates by constructing impassable symbolic boundaries between racially constituted categories, and its typically binary system of representation constantly marks and attempts to fix and naturalize the difference between belongingness and otherness. (p. 446)

In other words, the colour of one's skin becomes the impassable symbolic border between the White norm and other inferior beings. He further emphasizes that the category of "Black" ignores the diversity of individuals of African descent in Western countries because "they all look the same" (Hall, 2006, p. 445). It shows that racism creates stereotypes and assumptions based on one's appearance. Although Stuart Hall mostly discusses racism against the Black community, Asians and other minorities are not exempt from hierarchical classification and dehumanization.

To justify the superior position over the world, Eurocentric authority creates ruptures and classes to realize the Eurocentric subjectivity against the other ethnic groups. Racism against Chinese people has its roots in the imperial era. Near the abolishment of slavery, Chinese labourers were imported to North America for low salaries; however, their role in North America was more than simply labourers. They also helped to define the barrier between the free White people and other peoples involved in the colonial encounter. Colonizers envisioned specific roles for each racial group: Indigenous people "as violent

threats to be eliminated" (Lowe, 2015, p. 7); Black people were constrained by slavery; and the Chinese as "diseased addicts, degenerate vagrants, and prostitutes" (Lowe, 2015, p. 8). To fulfill the need for labour in the Southern United States, Chinese "coolies" were hired and considered a free race compared to the enslaved Black people. However, their journey to the colonies was similar to the travel experiences of slaves, and their condition of employment was also next to slavery and not comparable to White people (Lowe, 2015). Even though most people in contemporary society recognize the wrongs of the system of slavery and coolies, the racism that was embedded in and supported those systems continues to exist in new forms.

As an extension of the theories on national identity (Anderson, 1991; Gramsci, 2005), Balibar (2008) and Gilroy (2000) argue that a colonial tradition of marginalization of racial minorities dominates modern society. In spite of its efforts of modernization and liberalization, the Western society dominated by White European culture excludes racial minorities from modernity, so Asian immigrants are represented with stereotypes originating from imperialism. According to Locke, liberalization enables Western civilians to claim their rights to property and stand against the tyranny of sovereign power (as cited in Lowe, 2015). However, this liberty is reserved for Western civilians, and Eurocentric rationalism "banishes the slave experience from its accounts of modernity" (Gilroy, 1993, p. 54). Colonial countries divide humanity into categories of race, geography, nation, caste, religion, gender, and other differences for governance. Consequently, liberal promises of "rights, emancipation, wage labour, and free trade" are reserved for free Europeans but not others who are from different geographic spaces and regarded as "uncivilized, backward, and unfree" (Lowe, 2015, p. 3) and "unfit for liberty" (p. 8). For example, comparing young people of colour with White citizens in France, Balibar suggests that an "internal exclusion" (2008, p. 29), such as discriminations and systemic inequality, excludes immigrants from career and social gains in

spite of their possession of legal rights. The social structure limits the economic development of people of colour and excludes them from the dominant social world to continue the racial hierarchy in modern society.

Furthermore, neo-racism and linguistic racism emerge as more subtle ways of discrimination and inherit a Eurocentric gaze on others, marginalizing and assimilating people of colour. Instead of using biological characteristics as the dominant means of differentiating between people, "neo-racism" emphasizes cultural differences, lifestyles, and traditions to reinforce the superiority of the dominant culture (F. Long, 2022). Similar to traditional racism, neo-racism assumes the authoritative dominant group as the standard, which means people from other cultures are either assimilated into the dominant culture or marginalized (Yao, 2018). Consequently, people of colour who come from a different cultural background, such as China, Japan, or Egypt, experience much more discrimination in North America than those who are from the UK, Australia and other English-speaking countries. Similar to neo-racism, linguistic racism adopts a monolinguistic ideology to confirm the inferior social status of new migrants based on their ability to speak English (Wang & Dovchin, 2022). According to De Costa (2020), linguistic racism takes two forms: linguistic invisibility and linguistic privilege. In their study on CIS in Australia, the English-only rule shows that English is valued as the only language allowed on Australian campuses, which led to the invisibility of the language of ethnic minorities and the privilege of domestic students (De Costa, 2020). As a result, international students could experience structural inequalities, loss of both their identity and confidence, as well as psychological trauma.

As racial minorities in European-dominated countries, immigrants of colour are constantly reminded of their alienness. The othering means that racial minorities are either marginalized or assimilated into the dominant European culture. After living in the host nation for ten years, the question that racial minorities still face is "Where are you really

from?" (Ang, 2001), which is more about their ancestry than their experience in the host nation. This question implies that immigrants are seen as temporary residents who are never fully integrated. Along with the racism and stereotypes, Kim (2011) suggests that the media of the host nation has a limited and inaccurate representation of minorities, which drives the new immigrants to choose ethnic media with connections to their home countries. Specifically, Fleras (2010) believes that Canadian media purposefully creates stereotypes in their representation of minorities: "Projecting mainstream fantasies and fears of the racialized "other" serves a dual function: self-fulfilling prophecies are established, and a blame-the-victim mentality" (Fleras, 2010, p. 65). This perspective emphasizes the schematic stereotypes in constructing a negative image of racial minorities to brainwash minorities with self-fulfilling prophecies and an ill mentality of self-blaming for mistreatment. A discussion of racism and its recent variants will continue in later chapters to provide a better understanding of participants' obstacles in acculturation in Canada.

While racism can explain the anti-Asian hatred during the COVID-19 pandemic, what the Asian community experienced also aligns with the hegemony of European countries forged through Orientalism and techno-orientalism. The Orient originally referred to Arabic communities, but it was later extended to include Asia in general. According to Edward Said, "The Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (1978, p. 1). By distinguishing between the advanced and modern Europe and the primitive and backward Orient, the concept of the Orient is another invention of the West that contributes to the formation of European identity and the maintenance of European dominance (Said, 1978). Earlier depictions of Oriental women also satisfy the European fantasy to conquer by fetishizing Oriental women as quiet and docile, controlled by the male. Said notes, "She [the Oriental woman] never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history. He spoke for and represented her" (1978, p.

6). Moreover, threatened by the massive population of China, the character of Fu Manchu, created in 1913 by Sax Rohmer, helped to create the languages and Orientalist images associated with the Yellow Peril discourse (Sohn, 2008, p. 5). This cruel and cunning figure expressed the fear of the Western public, agitated the anxiety and fear against China, and consequently became one of the stereotypical representations of the Chinese in Western media. As a structure of myth that reflects European fantasy, orientalism adjusts to the changing social and cultural relationship between the West and others.

Furthermore, the portrayal of authoritarian state control in China and the negative image of the "Wuhan virus" are the latest applications of techno-orientalism. After the Second World War, Japan was dedicated to technology development through the absorption of Western modernity, leading to its global dominance over hardware and software markets (Morley & Robins, 1995). Out of the fear of being invaded by Japanese culture and loss of cultural dominance, techno-orientalism materialized through the popular culture genre of cyberpunk which often features advanced and lethal machines and the ubiquity of Asian culture (Sohn, 2008). In cyberpunk films, such as *Blade Runner* and *The Matrix,* White supremacy is no longer the social authority in the depressing world of automation, reflecting their fear of the aggressive development of the Asian economy and technologies (Sohn, 2008). Similarly, the recent development of mainland China and its geopolitical and economic conflicts with the US led to a similar portrayal of a "technological" China against the "human-centred" West. For example, Western media describe the ubiquitous use of surgical masks in Hong Kong as a science film, representing a similar fear of the technological advancement of China (Zhang, 2022). Moreover, the discourse of techno-Orientalism not only reflects the Western fascination with Asian technologies but also portrays Asians as lacking humanity, embodying an irresponsible form of modernity associated with environmental degradation, and serving as potential culprits of apocalyptic

catastrophes within the narrative (Roh et al., 2015). In other words, even though Asians are not depicted as barbaric and backward, they are still dangerous threats that deserve to be watched, contained and controlled. Likewise, the use of the term “Wuhan virus” in Western media shows a similar attempt to describe China as a potential threat. Therefore, since the colonial age, the European authorities have designed ideologies to incorporate colonies and racial minorities, and these pedagogies of associating Asians with diseases and irresponsible modernity inspire stereotypes and discrimination against Asians.

In contrast to the Western dominant power’s maintenance of the hierarchy through ideologies and misrepresentation, the accessibility and interactivity of digital media also create an opportunity as a new tool for minorities to challenge these stereotypes. With its ubiquity and interactivity, social media is considered a virtual public sphere. As both producers and consumers of information, citizens provide independent information that a democratic state requires (Endong, 2018). Compared to traditional media platforms, where intellectuals monitor and decide the content, social media collects news and information from their users so citizens can share uncensored and unedited content. Hence, the invention of digital media and the Internet allows people, especially those from marginalized societies, to speak for themselves and afford new possibilities for fighting racism.

While social media has been seen mostly as a tool of entertainment, it has been the frontline for many minorities to form community and express their opinions. According to Nakamura, access to digital devices and the Internet not only affords weaponization of digital platforms for racist attacks (Nakamura et al., 2021) but also allows women and people of colour the act of “technological appropriation” (Nakamura, 2008, p. 13), which means subalterns with “low social power” (p. 13) can use technologies. During the pandemic, when Zoom became an essential part of people’s lives, Zoombombers took advantage of platforms such as Discord and Zoom to disseminate White supremacy and create an environment

"where people of colour are unwelcome, treated as not-people, and both erased and made hypervisible as racist spectacle" (Nakamura et al., 2021, p. 16). However, with a more diversified population, the Internet contains many spaces that are designed for marginalized users, such as pregnancy blogs or dating sites for racial minorities (Nakamura, 2008), so digital media allow marginalized cultures to be normalized as well. Likewise, Fleras (2010) suggests using social media for racial empowerment because racialized minorities can challenge conventional narratives of traditional media with democratic and egalitarian communications across racial borders; Kuo (2018) proposes that social media are racialized digital enclaves for marginalized groups to form an internal discourse against hegemonic ideas. Twitter is considered a "subaltern counter-public" because it allows marginalized members of society to form "different interpretations and representations of identities and interests" (Kuo, 2018, p. 498). For this reason, hashtags on Twitter are "specific racial and cultural codes" (Kuo, 2018, p. 499) used to connect people who share the same interests and identities. While marginalized groups could be invisible or misrepresented in traditional media, they use cyberspace to demonstrate unique cultures and challenge the dominant view.

The virtual communities for minorities question the stereotypes of the dominant culture with ethnic media. Many scholars value the importance of interactive ethnic media in promoting the voice of racial minorities and challenging racism (Hayward, 2019; Yu, 2018; Lei & Guo, 2022). Black cyberspace, proposed by Banks (2006), allows users to communicate with Black English and refuse the assimilation of the dominant culture. Ethnic radio and publications in Canada have provided ideological guidance for ethnic communities against the early nationalistic nature of official media (Hayward, 2019). According to Hayward (2023), the notion of cultural brokerage may be utilized to analyze how ethnic media translate and integrate cultural aspects across different communities. With a focus on the representational brokerage of ethnic media, ethnic minorities may participate in public

discourse and give voice to their experiences thanks to the empowerment of ethnic media. Likewise, other studies also propose that racialized communities can engage with multiculturalism in Canada by creating more inclusive education and empowering them to exercise their agency through ethnic media (Lei & Guo, 2022). Nowadays, Asian immigrants and CIS also actively participate in cyberspace to form their racial narratives. These studies share the emphasis on the political and cultural roles of ethnic media to enhance the digital presence of minority groups against White supremacy online.

Similar to the ideas of "Black Twitter" and "libidinal economy" by Brock (2020), which de-normalize Whiteness as the default identity with social media, the Chinese in Canada can also use digital media to participate in the public sphere and interact with other cultural groups. In contrast to the dominant group's pejorative interpretation of Black agency, the libidinal economy refers to the use of Black technology "as a space for mundanity, banality, and the celebration of making it through another day" (Brock, 2020, p. 10). "By telling their own stories, on their own terms" (Brock, 2020, p. 3), Black Internet users refuse the monolithic depiction of mainstream media with protean performances of identities. Similarly, the Chinese community is also portrayed with limited and stereotypical images in Western media. With a focus on the function of producing bilingual or English content from a minority perspective, Sherry Yu (2018) highlights the intercultural dialogue enabled by the ethnic media, allowing minorities to be heard in the multiethnic digital public sphere. While Brock's introduction of the libidinal economy encourages Black civilians to share joyful experiences against pejorative images in the dominant discourse, Chinese ethnic media also allows CIS to construct representations of Chinese identity to resist and correct the stereotypes in mainstream media. In particular, WeChat allows CIS to connect with their friends and family in China, and Weibo, RedNote, Bilibili and many other Chinese social

media apps keep CIS updated with popular trends in China. Despite these efforts, CIS still experiences struggles in their intercultural adaptation to multicultural Canada.

2.3. Multiculturalism and Acculturation

To understand the changes in CIS as they adapt to Canadian society, multiculturalism will be highlighted as the signature characteristic in contrast to China. Even though multiculturalism encourages diversity, racial minorities are facing the pressure to assimilate into the Eurocentric Canadian national identity. Multiculturalism is a polysemic term that has been used in different ways throughout academic history, and it is both a fact and an ideal, depending on the specific circumstances (Meer & Modood, 2012). Some general principles of multiculturalism include equal treatment towards the majority and minorities in society, equal access to institutions and lifestyles, and the acknowledgement of historical injustices (Meer & Modood, 2012). Multiculturalism is also the Canadian policy proposed to embrace cultural communities and new immigrants to Canada (Bannerji, 2000). As the first national policy dedicated to cultivating a multicultural society, it was designed with four goals in 1971 (Brosseau & Dewing, 2009): It encourages new immigrants to grow and contribute to Canada, helps immigrants to adapt to Canadian culture and participate in civil society, cultivates intercultural exchange between ethnic communities, and demands the acquisition of at least one of the official languages (Brosseau & Dewing, 2009). The continuously evolving multiculturalism policy has been questioned for its Eurocentric design even as it has encouraged equitable access to social resources.

Many scholars criticize multiculturalism in Canada for its emphasis on English and French cultures and stereotypical representation of non-European communities. As one of its central goals, immigrants are expected to adopt at least one of the official languages. This represents the centralization of English and French cultures, whereas other ethnicities are marginalized into ethnic hierarchies. Eva Mackey (1998) argues that multiculturalism

establishes a Canadian national identity with an Anglo-conformist ideal; Himani Bannerji (2000) regards multiculturalism policy as a political tool to maintain an imperialist structure and portray the ethnic minorities as "others." Both authors point out the unequal treatment and representation of English and French-speaking Canadians and other racial groups. This marginalization could allow for ethnic stereotypes to be developed and maintained. The dominant Western media has also been criticized for its stereotypical, inaccurate, and marginalized representation of Asian communities (Kim, 2011; Hayward, 2019). Hayward (2019) highlights the lack of stable ethnic media for reliable archives of minorities. The unequal access to media resources further isolates ethnic minorities and limits their resistance to assimilation into the dominant culture.

As a result of Eurocentric structural inequality in the form of racism and orientalism, new migrants are expected to speak the local language, learn the culture, and assimilate into local society. In colonized Hong Kong, colonizers forced the colonized and immigrants to adopt the colonizer's language, reinforcing the dominance of European culture (Chow, 2014). Although the social and political contexts are different in contemporary Canada, to be recognized and heard, the competence to communicate in the official language is a requirement for immigrants. Nevertheless, speaking the local language is only a start; racial minorities are still expected to assimilate into the Eurocentric culture. Sharing the same language is the first step for Europeans to indoctrinate their ideologies to minorities (Hall, 1997). Similarly, mainstream media in Canada centralizes White culture as the standard for marginalized minorities to learn from and adapt to. Minorities are portrayed as invasive forces, or the threatening "others," against the ruling class of the Canadian culture (Bannerji, 2000; Mackey, 1998). Augie Fleras (2010) also criticizes the Whitewashing nature of multiculturalism by suggesting that "minorities are rendered acceptable by media if their appearance or actions coincide with mainstream expectations or values" (p. 66). Rather than

treating minority cultures as equally important, these authors question the racial and cultural hierarchy that excludes people of colour and forces them to conform to Anglo-Canadian ideals. When CIS come to Canada, they are also expected to adopt the Canadian lifestyle and learn the languages as the price of acculturation.

To stand against this unequal structure of acculturation, recent studies have proposed a new way to understand the adaptation process by arguing for a reciprocal integration process where both migrants and the local community learn from each other. By seeing integration as a two-way process, scholars treat immigrants and the majority population in the immigrant country as equal, so both groups contribute their efforts to forge a diversified environment and eliminate the possibilities of cultural conflicts (Alencar, 2018; Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019). In a study on refugee integration, Alencar suggests that

> both refugees and host society members play a crucial role in making sure that refugees have access to jobs, education, housing, health, culture and language and that they feel part of the new environment instead of problematizing refugees. (2018, p. 2)

In like manner, for international students to feel welcomed and well accommodated in the host country, the racial majority and educational institutions are required to adopt new methods of teaching, provide specific support that is dedicated to addressing their concerns, and incorporate their culture and opinions as part of the community (Carroll & Ryan, 2007; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). With this ideal of reciprocal integration in mind, international students can develop a range of different ways of interacting with other communities and adapting to the local environment, so this research adopts the four modes of acculturation by John W. Berry (2013) to understand the result of the identity negotiations of participants.

2.4. Formation of Diaspora

International students are mostly seen as temporary sojourners in the host country, so the similarities and differences between students and immigrants of the diaspora will be a

critical part of this research. Among immigrants who share the same ancestry and history, diasporas are formed as hybrid communities to protect them from the oppression of the dominant culture in the host countries (Anthias, 2001; Meer & Modood, 2012). Diaspora, also known as "communities of dispersion" (Ang, 2004, p. 179), refers to the immigrant communities that are outside of their country of origin and are isolated from the local neighbourhoods of the host nations. This term was used to describe Jewish migrants due to their loss of homeland, but now it has been used to describe groups of people who "share a common history of dispersal from a homeland" (Siu, 2005, p. 10), relocate to another land but remain connected to both locations. Even though diasporic communities are displaced from their homeland, their sense of belonging is formed in an intertwined relationship across different cultures and national borders through "ongoing social relations, memories and imaginaries, and cultural production" (Siu, 2005, p. 4). Consequently, the sense of belonging in a diasporic community is a contest between the host nation and the home country.

Considering the racist representation of racial minorities in mainstream media, the myth of home cultivates connections to the homeland and the global diasporic network to nurture the self-esteem of immigrants. Diaspora and ethnic media fulfill the desire to "belong to a respectable imagined community" (Ang, 2004, p. 180). In contrast to the stereotypes in Western media, ethnic media allows Asian immigrants to explore their identity in diversified ways and be proud of who they are. However, it is worth noting that the myth of home is an imagined connection because the original homeland is always changing (Hall, 1994). Immigrants picture a symbolic homeland based on ethnic media, family rituals, and other cultural events, so their imagined homeland could be different from the current condition of that nation.

Given these points, diasporas not only emancipate immigrants from the oppression of the host nation but also allow immigrants to negotiate their cultural identities with multiple

resources. In particular, the Chinese diaspora is “haunted by the Chineseness” (Ang, 2001, p. 32) as a result of immigrants’ desire to connect and the standardization of the Chinese homeland. In response to racism, landed immigrants may develop diasporic nationalism with a reaffirmed connection to home (Kim, 2011). As the Internet unites people across national borders, immigrants use online ethnic media as a source of “information, pleasure, expression, and communicative encounter” (Kim, 2011, p. 104). More specifically, immigrants speak both languages of home culture and host nation, but their consumption of ethnic media re-creates their connection to the homeland, so they isolate themselves from the host nation and live but do not belong to the local community. Moreover, the Chinese are known for their contradictory natures of active migration and strong attachment to home (Kim, 2011). The interactive, participatory culture of the online community enables immigrants to revive Chinese nationalism through media representation. It also liberates them from the national boundaries and empowers them to create “new transnational subjectivity” (Kim, 2011, p. 108). Coupled with the desire to connect with their root culture, the government of mainland China has been investing in global diasporic communities as well.

Since the Reforms and Opening Up in the 1980s, the Chinese government has allowed citizens to travel across borders for education and work, and it also reconnects with Chinese immigrants for the development of the Chinese economy and the cultivation of global cultural impact. Panama has become a cultural battleground between Taiwan and mainland China ever since Taiwan lost its formal recognition from the United Nations to the mainland government in 1971 (Siu, 2005). To maintain their connection with immigrants, Taiwan and the mainland have invested in diasporic communities, such as investing in cultural centres, ethnic events, and public infrastructures in Chinatowns. Correspondingly, diasporic Chinese become the intermediators between “the claimant Chinese states and the community’s nation of residence” (Siu, 2005, p. 22). The goal of the Chinese government is

to not only cultivate “ideological allegiance to and cultural connection with China” (Sun, 2016, p. 12) but also to “lobby for Chinese political and economic interests in migrants’ host countries” (p. 4). For the mainland government, investment in the Chinese diaspora is a critical means to rebrand mainland China in international society.

In contrast to the homogenous nationalism of China, some scholars argue that the diaspora should be a space of hybridity, a space of global and local interaction, a space to challenge assimilation from the country of residence, and a space to emancipate from the homogeneity of mainland China. Meer and Modood (2012) propose an intercultural approach that not only appreciates diversity and intercultural openness but also decentres European culture. This inclusive identity-creation process is in line with the concept of hybridity as expressed by Gilroy (2000) and Balibar (2008). According to Balibar (2008), citizenship is a dynamic process that is constantly challenged and renegotiated rather than a fixed position. This argument makes it possible to broaden democracy to a truly inclusive one. Comparatively, by incorporating local culture, recombining cultural elements, and constructing a global union among the people under oppression, the planetary humanism and new ethnicity were proposed by Gilroy (1993; 2000) and Hall (2006) to redefine race as an unfixed learning process and renegotiate racial relationships through hybridization. To accommodate the host environment, Asian immigrants are forced to abandon part of their connection to home and imitate the dominant group, but these scholars value the agency of racial minorities and regard intercultural engagement as a solution against hierarchical social segregation. With that said, hybrid and intercultural diaspora emphasizes the agency of immigrants to engage with different cultures across boundaries.

As aforementioned, diasporic citizens negotiate their belongingness between at least two countries and cultures, so their identity is intersectional and contingent. As strangers to the host community, immigrants can reveal and demolish the “monolithically constituted

ethnic absolutism" (Anthias, 2001, p. 522), and they hold "an epistemological privilege" (p. 623). In other words, immigrants have a comprehensive and external view as outsiders, so their participation will encourage the development of objectivity. Diasporic communities are under the influence of geopolitics, especially the "collide, overlap, and conflict" (Siu, 2005, p. 25) between the nation of residence, homeland country and other powerful global forces. In contrast to the linear process from strangers to fully belonging to the host nation, Siu (2005) describes diasporic citizenship as an ongoing process that is shaped by sociopolitical fluctuation. Likewise, Kim sees diaspora as the space of "endless hybrid self-creation" (2011, p. 8) to form an anti-essential identity and renegotiate their imagination of home and relations with local and transnational communities. This hybridity in diaspora allows CIS to not only resist the transnational Chinese media influence but also adopt cosmopolitan inclusivity, reflexivity and mobile identity in Canada.

2.5. Cosmopolitanism in the Diaspora

As a result of engagement with diverse cultural communities and the cosmopolitan education in Canada, CIS also adopted cosmopolitan values about cultural openness, reflexivity and mobile status across national borders. Originating from the 18th century, cosmopolitanism was proposed as a universal humanism across state borders, but its specifications have been redefined to accommodate the changing global structure. Before the existence of the nation-state, the concept of cosmopolitanism, derived from "a composite of Greek words for 'world' and 'citizen'" (Anderson, 1998, p. 22), represents a framework to imagine beyond regional particularity of statism. In particular, Immanuel Kant proposes a utopian vision of a cosmopolitan right for all human beings on earth. He believes that cosmopolitanism is the eventual peaceful outcome of conflicts (Anderson, 1998). In the meanwhile, international trade was considered an important incentive for peace. According to Inglis (2012), the spirit of commerce "gains the upper hand in every state … states see

themselves forced, without any moral urge, to promote honourable peace" (p. 15). As the modern world witnesses an even more interconnected economy on a global scale, the capacity and scale of cosmopolitanism have grown through time.

The definition of "cosmopolitanism" has changed over time, but common traits that many authors have emphasized are universal humanity, interconnectedness with the world, openness to diversity, and detachment from particular locations. These characteristics influence how international students are treated in Canada and how they see themselves in the world as well. According to Sobré-Denton and Bardhan (2013), cosmopolitanism portrays human beings as "always changing and as members of always changing communities," so this concept allow people to form "meaningful communicative connections through empathy and with respect for difference" (p. 6). Moreover, Waldron (2015) regards cosmopolitans as parasites who incorporate local practices from various cities across the world, and he believes that cosmopolitans lack belongingness to any particular location. Compared to a definitive identity, Waldron (2015) suggests that cosmopolitan cultural identity is "defined by any bounded subset of the cultural resources available in the world," "a creature of modernity," and the result of experiences in a "mixed-up world" (p. 228). Instead of developing national identity, cosmopolitans detach from local experiences and willingly re-attach to other cultures, multiple cultures, or cultures at a distance (Anderson, 1998). Unlike Kantian cosmopolitanism, which favoured only European elites, modern cosmopolitans can also be non-European and non-elitist, constantly updating their identities through cross-border travel and learning from diverse communities. Together with the hybridity as members of the diaspora, CIS are under the influence of intercultural communication, which could lead to their mobile identity detaching and reattaching to the host nation and home country at will.

In the light of intercultural communication in a culturally diverse environment, cosmopolitanism requires individuals to continually reflect on and criticize themselves. In the

cosmopolitan space where locality and universalism interact and mix, self-reflection is needed to direct the result of identity negotiation. According to Sobré-Denton and Bardhan's (2013) book on intercultural communication in the globalized world, people can only communicate effectively if they approach cultural differences with an open mind. Through self-reflection, cosmopolitans revisit their prejudice and challenge their assumptions (Sobré-Denton & Bardhan, 2013). Rather than depending on national institutions, self-reflection could align with fragmented and plural transnational memories (Beck, 2008). To be specific, African Americans explore "their roots by developing fragmented and staged transatlantic forms of memory and remembrance and related historiographies and self-discoveries" (Beck, 2008, p. 99). By connecting to the transnational history of oppression, some ethnic minorities adopt the cosmopolitan reflexivity to question the collective memory of the nation-state and to detach themselves from it. Similarly, the transnational experience of CIS allows them to learn from new cultures and reflect on or even challenge their existing beliefs. Consequently, openness for diversity, mobile identity and self-reflection are three key qualities I will be looking for in the participants as signs of their acceptance of an integrated and hybrid lifestyle compared to the essentialist Chinese identity.

Chapter 3: Methodology

To answer the research questions, I used a qualitative method and conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 Chinese international students (CIS) to collect the lived experiences of studying at York University during the pandemic. Interviews allow the participants to share stories at their own pace compared to the restricted formats of surveys, so this method provides richer content. At the end of the interview, participants were also asked to share a list of five media platforms (e.g., WeChat, Bilibili, TikTok, Twitter, YouTube and more) and five media content (including social media accounts, TV shows, video games and more) that they prefer. This list provides insights into the platforms and types of media content that appeal to CIS and indicate their ideologies and values. After the data collection, I conducted a close reading of the media recommended by participants and a thematic analysis of the interview transcript. While the thematic analysis of the interview record provides the main sources of data for this study, the media content serves as critical examples that complement the participants' descriptions of their acculturative experience.

3.1. Inclusion Criteria for Participation

This study focuses primarily on CIS who joined York University between the Fall of 2019 and the Fall of 2022. The participants need to meet a series of conditions: Firstly, they should have been enrolled in York University as undergraduate or graduate students since 2019. This group of students spent most of their university life during or after the global pandemic, so they are most likely to have experienced online education and witnessed the increased anti-Asian racism. Participants should also have lived in Canada for at least six months before the interview so that they developed some understanding of Canadian culture. To gauge how traditional gender roles impact the identity negotiation of CIS, I aimed to recruit a total of ten female and ten male participants. The study also welcomed participants who do not identify within this binary. Last but not least, as a Teaching Assistant at York

University during the time of this project, I did not recruit students who were registered in my tutorials to avoid potential conflict of interest.

3.2. Recruitment

To find participants that represent this population, I contacted the university departments that are responsible for providing services to international students, such as York International, as well as other Chinese student-related associations on campus, such as the Chinese Students and Scholars Association. Following the snowball sampling method, after each interview, the participant was asked to share the recruitment poster on their social media. This snowball sampling method located marginalized social groups by borrowing participants' social networks (Cohen & Arieli, 2011). Once there were ten female participants, the researcher only recruited male participants for the rest of the study. After the participants were located, this project proceeded to the second stage, the interview.

3.3. Interview

To compare the media consumption habits of immigrants in different ways of identity negotiation (assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization) (Berry & Sam, 2006), I conducted 20 semi-structured interviews, each lasting 60-90 minutes. The semi-structured interview method allowed me to revise interview questions and adjust the way questions were asked depending on the answers from informants. The interview questions [as attached in Appendix A, pp. 258] were designed to understand the background of participants (e.g., city of origin, length of settlement in Canada, and more), their attitude to COVID-19, governmental strategies, and anti-Asian racism, as well as their digital media consumption habits (such as who they follow and what they prefer to consume). Although participants could choose between Mandarin Chinese and English, most interviews were conducted in Mandarin, as only Participant 16 requested English.

This semi-structured interview method means that the interviews were guided with a list of prepared questions, but it also allowed me to adjust questions based on the reaction from the informants, ensuring their relaxation and more authentic responses. Semi-structured interviews afford in-depth conversations with pre-selected questions and more flexibility compared to fully structured interviews (Jamshed, 2014). The prepared questions offer a structured layout of presenting questions and help researchers start their interviews more efficiently. Moreover, the interview questions are also subject to change depending on each interviewee's response and the feedback from previous informants. When Ledbetter (2018) developed a study on the YouTube community, her interview questions were developed from the research process: "Subsequent interview questions were developed from each interpretive pass" (p. 291). Inspired by this method, after the first interview, I added some sub-questions to clarify the existing questions. If the participants did not understand the question, I also rephrased some questions to explain them. Following the flow of the interview, I added or adjusted the way I asked questions to communicate more efficiently and stimulate more responses from participants. This allows more participation from the informants and a more representative image of the experiences of CIS.

3.4. Analysis of Media Content

Intending to investigate the online identity negotiation of new immigrants, I adopted some methods from digital ethnography to study the virtualized social community. Archived data (Barbosa & Milan, 2019) refers to the preexisting data generated through a participant's online activity. During the interview, participants were asked to share five of their most used media platforms and five accounts or types of content (TV shows, content creators, video games, and so on) that they usually consume. It is also worth mentioning that the introduction of digital media eliminates boundaries of media format and merges different types of content. From traditional mass media such as movies and music records to content

creators of different genres, people can easily access all of them on a laptop or a smartphone. For instance, some streamers also share their gameplay of video games on social media, so audiences learn the story and content of a game without purchasing and playing through it. This means that the boundaries between traditional mass media (such as TV shows and video games) and homemade content by content creators are lost in the age of digital media. Hence, after I categorized participants according to their modes of identity negotiation (assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization), I listed out all platforms and types of content (social media, video games, podcasts, streaming, reality shows, dramas, movies, music, etc.) to find patterns among them. Based on these patterns, I compared four identity groups and conducted analyses to understand the distinctive consumption habits of each group.

3.5. Analysis Method

As this study collected not only interviews with CIS but also archived data that reflects their online consumption habits, I used a thematic analysis along with a theoretical framework for the categorization of participants.

Thematic Analysis. I conducted a thematic analysis in the interpretation of the identity and cultural factors of the participants and the video content they recommended. After reading interview transcripts and video content, I tried to compare participants' responses to recognize and categorize the repeated units of information related to existing theories about CIS. In the coding process, researchers usually connect the codes, which is a small subunit of a theme, with meaningful segments of data (Terry et al., 2017). This process is inductive, also known as data-driven, because the researcher generates the code through a thorough interpretation of the data. With that said, for the comparison of identity negotiation, this research combines several theoretical frameworks (discussed in Section 1.4., pp. 21) to observe the visible contrasts between different types of identification. The four types of acculturation proposed by Berry (2013) is the main framework to categorize participants

based on their choices of integration, separation, marginalization or assimilation into the local culture in Canada.

3.6. Research Procedure

From December 2022 to March 2023, I recruited participants through a combination of offline and online posters along with the snowball sampling method. Due to the time commitment of 60 to 90 minutes, the participants were all compensated with a $20 gift card. I started the recruitment process by distributing the recruitment poster on the York University campus. Then I contacted the international student office, two Chinese student associations on campus, and some administrators from the Department of Communication, Psychology, Engineering, Social Science, Education and so on. I also asked for permission to share the recruitment poster through their email and social media accounts. After being rejected by some department administrators, I wrote to Deans and faculty members and asked them to help spread the recruitment information. Moreover, I not only used my social media accounts to recruit informants, but I also asked all informants to share the recruitment information on their social media accounts after the interview. This snowball sampling method helped me to locate CIS more effectively.

Most participants were recruited through social media; previous participants and faculties at York University directly introduced some of them. The first participant was recruited from my social media account. Then, the York Chinese Students Association (YCSA) helped me share the recruitment poster in several chat groups for CIS at York University. Although the international student office refused to share the poster on their social media accounts, they invited the researcher to one of their social events to introduce the research to CIS in a face-to-face setting. I managed to attract one participant during this event, but out of the 20 participants, this was the only one I recruited through an offline event. Some participants did not disclose how they were informed about this research, and no

participants specified that they were recruited from posters on campus. At least two participants contacted the researcher after seeing the poster on WeChat Moment, at least five were referred to the researcher by professors or previous participants, and at least six participants were recruited through student chat groups. Hence, social media and snowball sampling through participant's social media channels were the most effective methods.

The participants also shared a list of five media platforms and five types of content they prefer. Due to the massive size of interview records, the researcher decided to simplify the data collection and analysis for the archived data. The researcher labelled each platform based on their nationality and languages for comparison on media platforms. Then, if participants included social media accounts or content creators in their list of preferred content, the researcher conducted simple research to look for anything related to COVID-19 and racism on these accounts. For those who did not mention those topics, the researcher collected one of their most popular contents as a sample. If the participants included television shows, movies, video games or other types of media content, the researcher studied their genre, nationality, and main themes as a concise sample of each item. Overall, this data collection only serves to add more evidence to the interview record.

3.7. Methodological Challenges

The research recruitment process took around four months to complete, and York professors and previous participants played a key role in introducing this research to York students. Even though CIS are a significant population at York University, the initial recruitment was not successful until professors and previous participants emailed students they knew or shared the poster on social media to help spread awareness. Both methods function as a selection process that filters out students who are less likely to contribute to social research and attracts those who either have strong opinions or a willingness to share. Considering the time commitment of this study, participants in this research tend to be

students who are passionate about politics and cultural experiences in Canada, and they most likely have better performance in university and stronger ties with their professors. When these students shared the posters, their friends, who may share similar personalities or interests in politics, made up the majority of the informants. To recruit more participants who reflect the diversified opinions of CIS, I would suggest that future scholars conduct surveys that are less time-consuming, provide more incentives, such as course credits, and use in-person recruitment methods to talk to students on campus.

As the most used social media platform among CIS, WeChat Moment also has its limit in research recruitment. WeChat only allows one's followers to see their Moment because they are designed as a private cyberspace. Compared to other platforms, such as Twitter or Weibo, this exclusivity was a challenge for recruitment. That said, Twitter and Weibo are more difficult to use to attract a specific demographic of York University students. The close connection on WeChat is both an advantage and a disadvantage as people feel more intimate and trustworthy reading posters from a friend or acquittance in contrast to strangers on Twitter or Weibo. That said, the student chat groups organized by YCSA helped overcome this disadvantage and enabled the researcher to promote this study to a much larger audience. I believe student chat groups on social media will also be critical channels of recruitment for other studies on international students.

Chapter 4: CIS and Digital Media

My research interests in the use of digital media by CIS originate from my experiences as an international student in Canada. When I moved to Canada in 2011, I met my first group of friends through a chat group on QQ, which was the most popular instant messaging software in China. As an international student without support from families and existing networks of friends, social media was a crucial part of my life for making new friends in Canada and maintaining those existing connections in China. As I became a permanent resident, I moved to Ontario for my master's and PhD programs, and posts on Weibo and WeChat guided me in learning about my surroundings. During the global pandemic, my cohort at the University of Ottawa started an online study group. That weekly Zoom meeting supported me through some difficult times until I finished my master's thesis. Then, when I started working as a teaching assistant at York University, I decided to create a podcast to help CIS like me. The audience's feedback and appreciation gave me greater confidence in my determination to pursue the academic path. Social media played a significant role in my adjustment to life in Canada by allowing me to express myself and assist others, stay in touch with friends, and learn about local events. The findings of this research align with my experiences and confirm some of my hypotheses: digital media plays multiple roles in the acculturation of my participants.

This chapter is structured to serve two essential purposes. Firstly, it offers a comprehensive overview of the participants. Secondly, it delves into the primary functions of digital media in the lives of the participants, including entertainment, information access, socialization, and education.

This chapter begins with an illustration of all the CIS who participated in this research to share their reasons for coming to Canada and their media habits. Among all the reasons why participants came to Canada, the accessible education in Canada, existing connections,

and the possibility of immigration are the top three motivations. While the desire to explore different cultures is also important, some mentioned that Canada is safer than the US. When it comes to media habits, it is noteworthy that a majority of the participants are active users of Western media platforms, such as YouTube and Instagram. They also demonstrate a preference for consuming integrated media content from both China and Western countries.

The second section of this chapter answers the question: "What is the role digital media consumption plays in identity negotiation among Chinese students in Canada?" Digital media shapes the way participants interact with the local society in four dimensions: socialization, information, education, and entertainment. While digital media helps most participants maintain connections with family and existing friends and expand their network after landing in Canada, most participants only make acquaintances from digital media rather than significant connections. Most of their local close relationships and emotional support are built from offline interactions in contrast to online teaching over Zoom. Most participants are from a generation of digital media who navigate and acquire information and knowledge through digital tools, from learning local cuisine to visa applications. This helps some participants to adapt to the local surroundings. Moreover, digital media educates participants on English skills and materials regarding their field of study. Many participants find YouTube and TV shows useful in learning the English language and finding topics to discuss with host national students. Despite many participants using digital media solely for entertainment, especially during the pandemic, the diversified access to cultural products enables them to see things from different angles. Some participants confessed to the influence of cultural products on their perceptions and their acceptance of Canadian values. In addition to the information and socialization functions, the next chapter on CIS's reaction to racism will highlight the role digital media played in anti-racism, including learning about racism, forming an online support community, and challenging racism through digital tools.

4.1. Transition of CIS

Among the reasons for participants to travel to Canada, the less competitive and more accessible education is the most discussed factor, followed by social connections in Canada and immigration opportunities. Several participants had considered other countries but ultimately chose Canada for its safer and more stable social and political environment.

4.1.1. Reasons to Choose Canada

Education. Compared to the competitive national college entrance exam (gaokao 高考) in China, Canada has more accessible education opportunities. Several CIS decided to study abroad because their weaknesses in certain subjects could limit their educational opportunities in China.

> Participant 11: I did not perform well in some subjects in high school, particularly science-related subjects, so I felt that I would not have an advantage in the Chinese education system. Therefore, I decided to come to Canada to learn what I wanted to learn.

Others add that compared to the Chinese system, Canada has less competition and better education resources. Two other informants mentioned that they thought about other countries as well, but due to the time limit for university application, Canada became their best option. The smaller population in Canada, in contrast to China or the US, allows more international students to access high-quality education opportunities that they would not receive otherwise. Similarly, two CIS enrolled in Chinese universities but decided to apply for university again to enhance their competitiveness in the job market. Participant 16 recalled that her major in China was not competitive enough, and along with her mental health issues that limited her performance in the entrance exam, her parents supported her in studying abroad for a second chance. In the following chapters, these participants also shared their preference for the Canadian social atmosphere. Participant 5 began university at an older age, and Participant 16

had mental health conditions, and both felt that their differences from typical Chinese students were more accepted in Canada. Aside from the accessible education for people who are less competitive in China or elsewhere (Participants 12 and 17), the multicultural and inclusive learning environment also provides a more comfortable condition for them.

Connections and Safety. The preexisting social connection is the second most cited factor for relocating to Canada because participants feel safer knowing they will be well taken care of. As an example of social connections in Canada, Participant 15 said, "My aunt and her family have also immigrated, so I have resources here." These teens receive greater support from family or friends living in Canada, so Canada stands out as a destination for studying abroad. What is more, the US has a reputation for social conflicts and gun violence, which are also discussed in the media representation chapter. Participant 11 specified,

> I was not a fan of the United States, so I chose Canada because I felt that the United States was more radical (尖锐) in various aspects than Canada, and I did not like such a radical environment.

Participant 16 also mentioned that her parents did not choose the US because of the news about gun violence in the US. Compared to the image of the US with more explosive social conflicts, including the news on firearm control or racism, students and their parents feel safer choosing Canada for overseas education.

Immigration and Exploration. The last two factors are both related to intercultural communication: Several participants considered the possibility of immigration, while others wanted to explore foreign cultures and a different environment. Among the popular destinations for studying overseas, Canada has the best immigration policy. Participant 3 stated,

> Canada's educational system and the possibility of obtaining a work visa later on allow me to stay and work here, which is why I chose Canada. Comparatively, Canada has the most lenient immigration policies.

Participants 7 and 12 also suggested that the trend to immigrate to Canada convinces them that Canada has a more welcoming environment for Chinese people. Consequently, if participants had the intention to leave China and relocate to another country, Canada would be their first option as a host nation for post-secondary education. In addition, Participant 15 liked travelling as a kid and was interested in foreign cultures and history, which is another reason for his relocation to Canada. Participants 6 and 9 directly addressed the desire to explore other countries and cultures. However, considering that most participants expressed their interest in intercultural communication and the diversity of Canada in Chapter 7, the desire to explore foreign cultures could be shared by many participants.

4.1.2. Digital Media Habits

Along with their desire to travel to Canada and explore a diverse range of cultures, the media habits of these participants also demonstrate their intercultural tastes and tendency toward cultural integration. Their media habits are analyzed in two ways: the platforms they usually use and the influencers or type of content they consume on these platforms. Almost all participants use both English and Chinese digital media platforms, but English platforms have more users than their Chinese counterparts. YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter are the most popular Western platforms, with correspondingly fourteen, thirteen, and seven users among the participants. In comparison, WeChat, Bilibili, and RedNote (Xiaohongshu) have ten, nine, and eight users, respectively, and they are the most popular Chinese platforms in this research. Only five out of twenty participants use more Chinese platforms than English platforms. Among all the participants who prefer Western platforms, Participant 16 is the only participant who uses all Western platforms. Hence, the media platforms mentioned in

this research show the tendency of intercultural communication and preference for Western media over Chinese media.

The media content listed in this research includes influencers and types of content on social media, news channels, video games, TV shows, anime, and movies, reflecting diversified genres and some preferences for content outside of China. Among all informants, only three participants consumed more Chinese media content than English. One participant only listed hobby-related social media topics without naming specific accounts or shows. Out of the sixteen participants who prefer Western media content, four participants listed five groups of content only available on Western platforms or made by Western producers. For example, Participant 17 and Participant 20, respectively, listed five content creators on Western media platforms and five video games and shows produced by non-Chinese teams.

Aside from the origin of this media content, it is worth noting that three types of content are considered signs of integration in this research. Firstly, not only do @Thomas 阿福 on YouTube represent this participant's interest in the Western perspective, but this White influencer's content in Chinese also displays cultural exchanges across borders. Likewise, 志祺七七 (Zhiqi qiqi, @shasha77) and 老高与小茉 (Mr & Mrs Gao, @laogao) are two Mandarin influencers who operate outside of mainland China and produce content on YouTube. Even though their content is in Mandarin Chinese, their accounts are not available in mainland China. Participants who consume this type of content show their interest in Chinese content outside of mainland China and a cosmopolitan reflexivity to compare different perspectives. Lastly, some social media content is made by Chinese people outside of China to guide other CIS in Canada or other host nations. People who follow Chinese influencers or accounts on topics of CIS life, Toronto life, and so on are also considered integrated content regardless of the language in which they are made.

4.2. Four Roles of Digital Media

After providing an overview of the platforms and content types that participants utilize, the second portion of this chapter concentrates on the four aspects of Canadian informants' lives that digital media touched. Through digital media, students build new relationships in Canada while maintaining their existing connections in China. However, some worry about the security issues of digital media, and others find that offline interactions are still scarce. Secondly, social media was essential for participants during the pandemic for news updates, and it remains a key information source for them, guiding their exploration in Canada. Likewise, some participants use digital media to learn new skills related to their programs or learn English to get used to the local surroundings. Lastly, the entertainment function is a major reason why participants use digital media. Along with providing them with content related to their hobbies, it could also provide intercultural material that shapes how CIS sees the world. The next chapter on racism will explore how social media, through its roles in socialization, education, and information sharing, is used to understand and combat anti-Chinese racism.

4.2.1. Social Connections

Digital media primarily influences users' lives by fostering and maintaining social connections. After they arrive in Canada, social media connects students with their families and preexisting friends for moral support and regular checkups.

> Participant 13: I sometimes use social media to keep in touch with other friends who are not in Canada. We may not have seen each other for three years, but we still share videos. I also use Instagram to share current political news with friends who I do not meet often.

This answer is similar to the existing theory that social media features, such as likes, comments, and mentions, can cultivate mutual understanding (Li & Peng, 2019). While

Participant 13 emphasized the importance of maintaining relationships with acquaintances, other participants talked about the new relationships they developed through social media. Existing studies propose that adding host nationals, locals CIS met in the host country, on social media can help CIS build a local support network and generate new relationships (Cao et al., 2018; Li & Peng, 2019). The answer from Participant 3 agreed with this statement as he recalls: "I met some friends online in the York International Department. They had online Zoom events, which is how we knew each other online." Similarly, other participants also used Facebook, WhatsApp groups, WeChat and other platforms to chat with their host nationals or home national connections in Canada. Hence, social media was a significant part of the participants' social lives, especially during the pandemic when they had trouble making new friends.

Aside from socializing with individuals through social media, social media also allows people to form or join online communities. WeChat group, for one, is a method for participants to meet new friends from China. Participant 14 specifically remembered using WeChat groups to "make friends with my classmates or people who went to the same school." Participants' usage of Chinese social media and the online communities of local Chinese speakers are consistent with other studies showing that CIS initially requires assistance from home nationals to navigate in the new community (Gaitán-Aguilar et al., 2022). Moreover, some participants use social media to explore their interests or professional connections across cultural boundaries.

> Participant 16: I started using Discord last year. It is mostly for a queer support group and another group for my friends here, most of whom are also members of the queer community.

Similarly, Participant 7 used LinkedIn to maintain connections in the business school, where professional socialization is emphasized. Social media increases CIS's exposure to and

involvement in local society in the absence of local networks. Similarly, studies suggest that social media use, whether through private conversations with close contacts or interactions with strangers for emotional support, helped Asian Americans and CIS manage anxiety and loneliness during the global pandemic (Chen, Sun & Tao, 2024; Yang & Tsai, 2023). Based on Chinese culture, sexual orientation, or career, these online networks help users navigate Canada with the help of local connections.

Nevertheless, Participants 10 and 11 pointed out the issues of privacy and security concerns along with shortages of online interactions over social media. These participants are not comfortable with making friends on social media for privacy and security reasons. While Participant 11 shared their concern about privacy exposure and security concerns about meeting an online friend, Participant 10 recalled his experiences being harassed online.

> Participant 10: There was this guy who had a name similar to my roommate's. He added me on Facebook and sent me an inappropriate video. When I clicked on the video, it was nudity, and I was shocked. Since then, I have rarely accepted invitations from strangers on Facebook.

This participant adds that some social media apps tried to access his storage, and his concern for privacy made him remove those apps from his phone. These examples show concerns about privacy when using social media can discourage people from socializing with strangers.

Moreover, social media had limited influence on some informants' lives, especially during the pandemic. Participants 11 and 13 suggested that they do not see "friends" on social media as close friends. Participant 13 specified that they only talk to each other when they have the same courses and disconnect promptly afterward. Participant 11 proposed that the online format of course delivery during the pandemic made it worse for people to socialize with others.

> Participant 11: When you take online classes, your isolation from other students will be more severe than before because you do not have any offline communication with them. When we made friends in school, it was usually through hanging out together after class. When you are taking online classes, class ends right after class, and you cannot chat with other people who are sitting next to you.

The experiences of these individuals during and after the pandemic demonstrate that offline encounters are still crucial to strengthening these social ties, in contrast to existing claim that social media creates a support network of home nationals in local society (Li & Peng, 2019; Chen, Sun & Tao, 2024; Yang & Tsai, 2023).

4.2.2. Information

In addition to social media's function in sociability, users utilize their online connections and algorithms to learn about nearby events, safety and travel strategies during the pandemic, and other local information. Participants mentioned three sources of information during the pandemic: online connections or chat groups, news accounts, and algorithms.

> Participant 9: My Chinese friends in Canada on WeChat informed me about the news. On Alipay, you can see the current number of infected people in Canada and the Canadian exchange rate. The other channel is the WeChat public account. They informed me that the virus had mutated again.

This participant summarized the sharing of news through news channels and social circles during the lockdown when offline interaction was limited. Participant 11 added the media stream on their phone sends them news articles they might be interested in.

Based on people’s search history, algorithms on social media or smartphones inform participants about their hobbies and local events. Even if you miss out on the news release,

algorithm recommendations and friend circles can help you get updated on the necessary information, especially during an emergent situation like the pandemic.

These accesses to information through social circles, algorithms, or news channels not only enable students to prepare for the global pandemic and live through it healthily but also provide them guidance on exploring Canada. For example, Participant 2 learnt to use the self-testing kit through social media, and Participant 11 studied the latest regulations to enter Canada with less hassles. Aside from the unique circumstances of the epidemic, people utilize social media as a way to research the area before travelling there. Participant 14 claimed,

> I often look up subjects related to daily living in Canada on RedNote, such as travel advice and details on the food, drink, and entertainment options here. I look for methods for filing tax returns, work permits, and other relevant rules. Sometimes, information about the university can be found there, too.

The accessibility, the vast pool of information, and the diverse formats of information allow participants to search for guidance on every aspect of their life in Canada.

4.2.3. Education

Furthermore, many participants use digital media to improve their language skills and help them study at university. Digital media was critical to the participants' education in Canada during the pandemic. Participant 11 recalled that their professors changed the Zoom meeting schedule so more international students from other countries could join the class. Aside from the dependence on digital tools during special circumstances, digital media can assist CIS in their language learning. Ju et al. (2021) argue that YouTube is more accessible than traditional media distribution, such as TV episodes, so it can be more helpful for acculturation. However, Kim and Kim suggest (2021) that using YouTube might reinforce "cross-cultural sensitivity," language abilities, and global language knowledge. Participants

discussed several ways to learn English from social media content, showing support for the positive role of social media on language learning. Participant 1 and Participant 7 preferred to use Western news and English content on YouTube/Twitch to practice listening and to learn new vocabulary; Participant 2 watched YouTuber's videos to learn slang and topics that initiate conversation with her local friends. The variety of platforms and content available provided informants with rich resources to adapt to the local environment and enhance their linguistic skills.

Together with their enhanced English-speaking skills, informants also use digital media to assist their education in Canada and explore other areas of their interests. Due to the vast collection of knowledge on YouTube and Bilibili, many participants shared their preferences for self-motivated learning through digital media. Participant 8 used YouTube specifically to learn data analysis with R language and other programming knowledge; Participant 18 also learned about new trends in technologies and new skills from digital media; Participant 3 and Participant 4 were more interested in topics of economy, sociology, history and other humanities subjects. Specifically, Participant 8 came from a Psychology major, so digital media offers free resources for her to study outside of her field. From assisting them to understand the course material better to helping them explore things, the CIS in this study have the digital literacy to locate the material through digital tools.

4.2.4. Entertainment

While digital media is a crucial educational tool during the pandemic, many participants also mentioned that it also functions as entertainment and an escape from reality. No matter if it was during the pandemic or the early stage of studying in Canada when they had limited friends, digital media accompanied them through those difficult times. Participant 8 remarked:

> When the pandemic first broke out, I was in grade 12. I was in class every day. During lockdown, I watched videos on Bilibili about gaming. It was a good time-killing leisure; thirty-six hours passed by within a blink. I watched people playing video games, and they usually were very long story-based RPG games; it was like watching movies.

Similarly, Participants 11 and 19 played video games with friends, and Participants 16 and 19 watched tourist videos on social media or foodie channels. Many scholars discussed the role of digital media in providing mental health support and killing time during the pandemic. These answers align with Saud, Mashud, and Ida (2020), who state that social media distracts people from the pandemic, keeps them busy and positive, and increases their immunity through creative activities. Meanwhile, other scholars propose that digital media can be an emotional shelter during the pandemic to relieve stress, express emotions, and enjoy a simpler life (Pearce et al., 2022; Zhu, 2021). Zhu (2021) used *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* as an example of an imagined escape from stressful reality to a virtual land of a simple, happy life. The consumption of video game playthrough videos and travelling videos are similar in providing a temporary escape from reality.

Diversity. Among all the causal entertainment content, the diversified and multicultural entertainment content discussed by the participants is worth noting. In the previous section on digital media habits, participants' selection of media content or influencers already show a diverse range of media products from outside of China. For example, Participant 6 talked about several movies and shows from Western countries, including *Sherlock, Peaky Blinders,* and *Stranger Things,* even though he also listed Chinese content as one of his favourite content. Another type of content that many informants discussed is Japanese popular culture, especially anime and gaming culture. The *Fate* anime series, Ghibli Studio's anime films, and *Danganronpa* were mentioned across the list. These

shows and games demonstrate the variety of cultural influences that dominate the leisure time of participants, shaping their values to be more tolerant of non-Chinese cultures and values.

Along with the variety and diversity of media content they consume, several participants even admitted that digital media shapes their values. The cosmopolitan values of tolerance and fluid identity are seen as results of exposure to this diversified media content. Participant 7 suggests,

> York had an elective course at that time, which was about Western cultural enlightenment. I read a lot of books from that course, and I had those thoughts after reading those books. Another thing is that a game called *Death Stranding* was released in 2019. That game discusses how people should abandon so-called culture and prejudice, cooperate, tolerate each other, and help each other so that our society can continue……When I was playing it, I felt that the world should be like this.

Similarly, Participant 6 learned more about her sexuality and gender through online video content. Participant 13 learned about theories of globalized flow in a course and started to see himself as a fluid part of this global trend, using social media to interact across cultures. Their stories support Dumitrica's (2019) assertion that digital platform linkages foster cosmopolitan capacities and the worldwide trend of deterritorialization. These participants share the realization of the function of digital media in their ideologies, and their actions of consumption and online engagement show a materialization of the cosmopolitan theories. The understanding of cosmopolitanism by the participants will be discussed again in Chapter 7 on the diversity of Chinese identity.

4.3. Conclusion

Shaped by the larger context of increased geopolitical tensions and the COVID-19 pandemic, participants' choices to study in Canada and their daily media consumption were influenced by shifting views of opportunity, safety, belonging and exploration. Under these

context, this chapter demonstrate the motivation of seeking more accessible education, preexisting connections, and opportunities for immigration as the most common reasons for participants to choose Canada as their destination of overseas education. It also shows the integrated media habits of participants along with their role in helping CIS from this research to socialize, find information, learn, and entertain, adapting to the local surroundings.

First of all, participants chose to study in Canada because of its education system (Participants 11, 12, 16 and 17), their existing connections here (Participants 11, 15 and 17), and the possibility of immigration after graduation (Participants 3, 7 and 12). Participants 6, 11 and 14 mentioned that they are interested in exploring other cultures in a safer environment than in the US. This shows the cosmopolitan tendency of informants in their openness to cultural differences and desire for a mobile identity.

Secondly, along with a preference for integrated media platforms from both China and other countries, digital media helps participants gather their social, information, educational and entertainment resources, which consequently shape their worldview toward a more tolerant and open cosmopolitan identity. Social media help participants to make new connections in Canada (Participants 3, 7, 13 and 14), practice English language skills (Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 11 and 18), seek information to adjust to the local environment (Participants 2, 9, 11 and 14), and enjoy leisure time with diverse media content (Participants 6, 7, and 13). Considering their diverse media choices, such as Japanese anime, American TV shows, and intercultural food and travel influencers, these participants are under the impact of cosmopolitan values. As a result, they are able to view things from different perspectives, and some admitted their acceptance of Canadian ideals.

Building on this depiction of the media habits of participants and the four dimensions digital media affect them, the next three chapters will specify the roles of digital media in the anti-racism efforts of CIS, the impact of Eurocentric representation of the Chinese, the

conflicted media narratives of Chinese and Western platforms, and CIS's reactions to diversified media representations and social environment in Canada. After an analysis of the informative and educational role digital media played in CIS's understanding of racism, Chapter 5 will provide an analysis of the racial identity of CIS to depict how they make sense of their encounters with discrimination and prejudice in Canada. Along with an overview of the complex racial conflicts students experience, the last part of Chapter 5 challenges the existing literature as it shows the non-confrontational strategies and use of digital tools by participants to resist racism.

Chapter 5: CIS and Racism in Canada

Some may consider me as one of the lucky CIS because my first encounter with racism happened after I lived in Canada for seven years. However, I can never be certain whether racism was never directed toward me, or whether, as many scholars argue, I ignored subtle racist behaviors like many other CIS. Unfortunately, my first encounter was not my last one. Once I started in a new academic program, we had a choice between two sessions of the same core course with very different schedules. Another Chinese student and I chose course A at the last minute because it worked better with our summer plans. However, during the first class, the White instructor specifically called us out for illegally registering in his class without his permission, which was not the truth. He said we overloaded his session despite there being only less than a dozen graduate students in the program. After his attempt to aggressively kick us out of the class, I lost interest in his session, because this session was with mostly White students and maybe two people of colour. Even though he altered his course schedule to suit a single White student who lives in Vancouver, he never asked other students if they would be interested in swapping sessions with us. Thus, our difficult schedule was not a concern to him. Unlike the assumption that Chinese are less interested in fighting racism, my friend and I connected with the chair of the program, the graduate student association, and all the resources we could think of, but it felt like telling our stories repetitively to a wall. All they could do for us was "to keep a record of the incident for future students." This professor received several complaints from racialized students in addition to ours, yet he received no punishment and even received a promotion that year.

To this day, I still feel the need to conceal his identity when I tell this story, as revealing it could put my career at risk. As a permanent resident who lived in Canada for 14 years, as an international student who is lucky enough not to recognize or encounter racism for eight years, and as a Ph.D. candidate who studies the experience of CIS, I can only

assume others not only have encountered more and worse incidents but also lack the experience and knowledge to handle the situation. My research demonstrates that, yes, other CIS have witnessed or even experienced more and worse. Some got attacked on the bus, some were insulted and humiliated in video games; some got yelled at with the phrase "Go back to China" on the street; some received strange looks or whispers; and some had even more subtle experiences. Like my encounter, most of the time, these incidents are obscure and sudden, and it makes you question yourself: Did I do something wrong? Was that a racist comment? In the scenario where they know they are facing a racist, there are more questions: Should I say something back? Will my words change anything? To help future CIS better prepare for these questions, I believe it is crucial to know what learning methods and strategies worked for current CIS and what failed. While the last chapter displays the four dimensions digital media that affect participants' acculturation in Canada, this chapter focuses on different ways participants learned about racism, racist incidents in their lives, and their coping strategies. This chapter will answer these research questions: 1) Do digital media consumption influence how Chinese international students in Canada are educated about the increase of anti-Chinese racism during COVID-19? 2) How do CIS make sense of the anti-Chinese hatred in Canada? 3) How does their engagement with digital media consumption contribute to their coping strategies against anti-Asian racism?

While the previous chapter highlights digital media's social, informative, educational and entertainment functions for CIS, digital media demonstrates three critical roles in challenging racism. It is an educational and informative tool where people learn about racism, it provides a platform for more secure confrontation and self-expression, and it works as a station of support among the CIS. At the same time, this chapter studies participants' understanding of their racial identity to portray their identity negotiation with a conclusion that they show an integrated identity of both pride in being Chinese and a part of Canada. On

the one hand, some participants developed nationalistic patriotism, popular nationalism, neo-nationalism and even populism after their racist encounters. This means that the hate crimes encourage them to cherish their Chinese roots and connections. Some participants had nationalistic pride and arrogance, while many developed a concern for the overseas Chinese community's wellbeing. When compared with Asian Americans' involvement in social movements such as #StopAsianHate, CIS express more desire to support fellow Chinese peers than other Asian communities and pride in Chinese national identity rather than Asian identity. Alternatively, some CIS are willing to learn from the Black Lives Matter movement, participate in social justice activism, alter this local environment, and tackle the racist behaviour by Chinese individuals to other communities to cultivate a more diverse society.

As participants experienced various forms of discrimination, including physical attacks, verbal insults, online and offline harassment, and microaggression, the first section of this chapter shows that the theories of race were taught to students through the university curriculum in Canada and digital media is used as an informative medium to support this education with experiential knowledge from influencers and news reports. On the one hand, the university educates CIS in curriculum and workshops with a systematic analysis of the roots and nature of racism. On the other hand, digital media informs the participants about local racist incidents during the pandemic and brings them influencers' personal encounter experiences and advice. However, the strategies shared on digital media are not always applicable, so their advice has limited impact on how informants understand and respond to racism. Aside from informing and educating students, digital media also cultivate an environment that tolerates racists, such as being targeted by racist players in video games, so it exposes participants to racist behaviours.

Secondly, participants all show different levels of understanding of racism. However, there are some misconceptions due to the indeterminate nature of racism, the conflicts

between the Chinese racial identity and the Western conception of race, as well as the historic feuds within the Asian communities. In addition to their recognition of various forms of racism in Canada, such as microaggressions, discrimination and stereotypes, students have highlighted the political strategy of Western countries to specifically place the blame on the Chinese regarding the COVID-19 pandemic in order to deflect public dissatisfaction from their administration. However, some participants show conflicts as they automatically assume racism to be historical events against Black people and older generations of the Chinese, ignoring or overlooking the current anti-Chinese racism. This phenomenon could be a result of the recent rising populism on the Chinese Internet along with cyber racism, nationalism, and Han supremacy. Others have discussed their conflicts with non-Western racists. These confusions could hinder their realization of the current impact of Eurocentric racism and cause more conflicts across non-Western communities.

Last but not least, although CIS in this research dislike direct confrontation with racists, they adopt digital tools to challenge racism and form a support network. Participants partially agree with the existing knowledge of "sophisticated egoism" (J. Yu, 2022, p. 2), which means CIS value their personal lives more than participating in social justice movements. The concept of "sophisticated egoism" is frequently used by Chinese nationalists online to criticize individuals perceived as prioritizing self-interest at the expense of national cohesion or ethnic unity (Li & Yao, 2024); studying abroad can be considered a self-centred and disloyal act by some online Chinese nationalists. Nevertheless, some participants show different approaches to addressing racism as they adopt digital media to confront racists indirectly, form online communities through self-writing, and reflect on the racism within the Chinese community to make changes. The findings agrees with existing research that avoidance of confrontation and prioritization of personal lives are preferred coping methods by many CIS. However, the lack of voice and political power, the threat of physical violence

from strangers, and the costs of confrontations are also actual challenges that demand more attention and support. To address racism with those concerns in mind, many participants adopted digital media tools to express opinions and reinforce their nationalistic identity, form a community of support, report racist incidents, and make complaints. These strategies show their passion for making social changes, protecting their community and national images, and unifying the Chinese communities with support and care.

5.1. Sources of Information about Racism

Based on the interviews, I found that my participants educate themselves about the nature of racism, mostly at Canadian universities. However, they learn the latest news about racism and other CIS's experiences through social media. The findings agree with existing literature that CIS have a limited understanding of racism before they arrive in Canada. Although Chinese education teaches students about the history of transatlantic slavery, Canadian universities provide more timely and systematic resources for students to understand the nature of racism, modern inequalities and continual discrimination. Interactions with local connections and encounters with racists in real life also help some CIS to get more holistic perspectives and first-hand experiences of dealing with assaults. In direct response to the first research question, by staying up to date on the most recent racist incidents through digital media, CIS can benefit from influencers' experiences and suggestions for anti-racism strategies. Meanwhile, participants are introduced to the diverse multicultural culture and racial justice ideologies through media content from North America. However, some participants criticize digital media for magnifying racial conflicts, enhancing anxiety for students and providing strategies with limited applications. With these limitations, digital media has some influence in informing and alarming CIS about their safety in Canada. However, Canadian universities have a greater influence on their epistemological understanding of racism.

5.1.1. Through Education

Through Chinese School. Unlike the existing research (Liu & Chuang, 2023; Yu, 2023) that renders CIS clueless about racism in Canada, some informants built a basic understanding of racism before they landed in Canada through history books and Chinese high school curriculums. One participant had a strong interest in history and learnt about racism from reading. Participant 15 suggested that,

> I read many books about history because I have been interested in this subject since I was a child… …World War II was a time when racial discrimination reached its apex, which produced a series of negative consequences. Then, you can dig deeper to unearth the roots of racial discrimination in Central Europe and find the discrimination against the Jews in the Roman period.

In addition to his knowledge of the history of racism against the Jewish community, other participants learnt about racism through the history class about slavery and racial segregation. Participant 16 stated that she "had this general understanding that these black people were racially discriminated against back when they were being traded for money." Although interactions between non-Chinese people and Chinese natives are uncommon in modern China, leaving most Chinese citizens lacking encounters with racists, Chinese history books and textbooks introduce the citizens to the historical racial conflicts in the Global North. As an example, one of the history textbooks for Chinese high schools has an entire chapter on the Civil War in the US and extensively explains the history of slavery as one of its causes (Qi, 2018). However, even these participants who learnt about racism from Chinese education needed to learn new things when they landed in Canada.

As studies suggested, the perspective of Chinese educational material is limited and different from experiencing racism as a victim. Continuing with Participant 16's discussion, she thought, "After the segregation, everything was all right." Her understanding of racism

was in the past tense until she came to Canada and learnt about the racial discrimination people of colour, including Asian communities, are experiencing. Similarly, Participant 18 also illustrated,

> I feel that China emphasizes historical events, and we are just bystanders among other races. However, here, I was involved in a racist incident, so one is the attitude of a bystander, and the other is the attitude of the person who is experiencing it.

These two participants were not educated in China about the ongoing struggles of racial minorities outside of China and experienced an identity negotiation from the normalized mainstream to a racial minority in Canada. Their responses align with Yang's (2023) description of the limited and contradictory understanding of race as overt historical acts rather than modernized and subtle discriminations. In addition to the participants' experiences, Qi's (2018) history textbook also only discussed the historical phenomenon of slavery without the engaging with an in-depth exploration of racism. These examples show remarkable similarities with Liu and Chuang's arguments (2023), which suggest that the growing tension between China and the US causes disjuncture between how these two countries make sense of the concept of race and the racial dynamics in North America. The Han-Chinese-dominated cultural context of China renders CIS most likely the racial majority in their upbringing. At the same time, the Chinese curriculum does not regard contemporary racial discrimination against Asians as necessary knowledge for students. As a result, students have limited exposure to contemporary racial discriminations targeting Asians and a limited understanding of what it means to be Chinese in the global society.

Through Canadian Schools. Similar to findings of recent studies (Yang, 2023; França et al., 2024; Huang, 2024), Canadian university courses, interaction with others personal experiences in the multicultural space directly shape their understanding of racism.

Many participants, especially those who enrolled in a Liberal Arts major, learn about racism as part of their course design. Participant 8 mentioned,

> For example, I am working on an individual project. That course talks about how to do research and so on, and there is a unit that covers the role of inequalities in the academy and how we can improve it. Also, during my previous summer, I was an orientation leader. We had much training on microaggression and other topics in this area, and I feel like I have learned a lot.

This participant is an example of students in Liberal Arts programs in which they receive systematic training to understand the history and theory of race and racial justice actions in daily life. Other participants also completed assignments on the topic of racism for courses in Asian studies, Communications, Social Science and so on. Participant 11 learnt that racism was invented in the past 300 years as "a political scheme to segregate people, create the middle class and aggravate conflicts between communities." Participant 14 was writing her essay on racism when she was interviewed, and Participant 20 recalled that learning about the history of residential schools helped improve her understanding of racism in Canada. These students mostly come from a Liberal Arts program, so social justice is a crucial component of their curriculum. The course material and assignments provide insightful and theoretical explanations that reveal the arbitrary nature of racism and the different unequal treatment of people of colour. Additionally, university sends out monthly emails that include safety reminders and news updates. Participant 4 suggested that she learnt about Black History Month through those contacts, which helped her build her understanding of race when she had limited personal encounters with racists. As an institution in a multicultural country, the inclusive digital and physical environments expose CIS to opportunities to learn about racial differences and other's experiences of racial inequalities. Through course readings,

assignments, activities, and institutional communications, the university helped CIS build a systemic understanding of racial justice.

5.1.2. Through Personal Experiences

Along with the education in China and Canada, other CIS learnt about racism through personal connections and a few of them learnt from encounters with racists in real life. Participant 1 had a good relationship with her landlord, who shared stories of her experiences of working in Canada as an Asian teacher. She told stories about the pressure of working in a university and the challenges she faced from others. Even though her landlord did not use the word racism, Participant 1 made the deduction based on her description and her frustration in telling the story, which helped Participant 1 to understand the different forms and impacts of racism. Together with their lived experiences in a multicultural society, these encounters enable participants to develop a deeper understanding of the subtle forms of marginalization they face as racial minorities in Canada (França et al., 2024; Huang, 2024). Participant 15 also talked to a professor from another Canadian university and learnt about how some White Canadians react to Asian immigrants:

> A professor of linguistics and literature told me that …He hated these Chinese people at first. However, when he gave it a second thought, he realized that there are bad people in every country… …he thought that a race should not be rejected just because of the evil deeds of a few people. This is a good example: Communicate more with others… …People share their true thoughts with you when you show authenticity face-to-face.

Participant 15 believed that one can learn more from others and have more genuine feedback through face-to-face conversations. This is also how he learnt about other people's changing perspectives on the Chinese community, which contributed to his understanding of the arbitrary nature of race. In these two instances, participants spoke with a victim and a former

racist, respectively, to learn about their experiences with racial conflicts, as opposed to researching the theoretical or historical background of racism. Living in Canada enables CIS to engage with people who have experienced racism firsthand and gain insight into its pervasiveness, many manifestations, and even the motivations behind racial discrimination. Following Liu and Chuang's statement (2023), these answers about university curriculums and offline interactions show that CIS built a better knowledge of the arbitrariness, the ubiquity, the impact of contemporary racism and the necessity of the racial justice movement after they landed in Canada. While physical engagements and university are important to these participants, other participants took advantage of online tools to learn about racism.

5.1.3. Through Digital Tools

To begin with, digital media was essential to CIS's lives during the pandemic as an information centre, which includes news updates on anti-Chinese hatred for safety concerns. During the interview, participants were asked to compare their impressions of pre-pandemic Canada with the current situation. Most of them who came before the pandemic recognized an increasing number of reports on anti-Chinese hatred. Participants usually receive news updates through public social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, not to mention the direct encounters with virtual insults on China or Chinese people, and some use private messenger or chat groups on WeChat. Among the media content and channels listed by the informants, only seven channels had direct coverage of racism-related content. Most of them are news channels on YouTube, including BBC, CNN, CBC, and Guancha [观察者网]. Other channels, Superlife [超级生活] and 51.ca [加国无忧], are WeChat public accounts providing Chinese news for Chinese people living in Canada. After an overview of the most popular content and a search for keywords related to racism, CNN, Superlife, and 51.ca provided articles about the increase in racism in Canada and its impacts. CBC and BBC had news on anti-racism efforts. At the same time, Guancha only published a video on the history of

racism in North America. These accounts provided assorted resources that updated CIS about racism incidents, educated them about its history, and promoted the racial justice movement.

Among all the digital media tools available to CIS, Chinese platforms and Western platforms have different advantages: the former allows CIS to receive news updates related to the Chinese community and translate them into Chinese, and the latter provides official reports and global coverage. For example, Participant 2 followed the Toronto Police Office on Twitter to catch up with the official announcement from them. The advantage of direct connection with local institutions guarantees the accuracy of the information CIS receive. Moreover, Participant 17 chose YouTube rather than a specific news channel because "YouTube will bring you global content. It shows that hate crime is happening to not only Europe and the United States, but also many other countries". The global coverage provided them with a broader vision across national boundaries, so they were informed about the rise of anti-Chinese hatred and anti-racism movements around the world. Hence, global news coverage and reliable sources would be the advantage of these Western platforms. Compared to Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and other SNSs mentioned in the interviews, according to Participant 13, Chinese SNSs focus on stories about anti-Chinese racism rather than the discrimination against every minority. Although WeChat is meant for private conversation and an exclusive friend circle, most participants follow Chinese news accounts operated by Chinese companies in Canada to get updates on local news on racism. For CIS, who have limited social circles in Canada and are new to the local environment, both Western and Chinese platforms are critical to building a warning system on racism that is accurate, reliable, comprehensive, legible and relevant.

Even if participants did not follow or search for relevant news, their friends and families are also actively sharing incidents related to anti-Asian racism due to their concerns for participants' safety. According to Participant 10,

> My friends and even my family members told me about the racism incidents at the beginning of COVID-19. In fact, if it were me, I might not know [any racism incident]. During the pandemic, everyone was under lockdown, and you had very few sources of information. In addition, you have to attend classes and complete homework. However, if my friends came across something on Douyin or Reddit, they would send it to me.

It is worth noting that his family in China was more informed about the rise in racist attacks in Canada. Concerning Participant 13 and Participant 15's statements, with limited in-person experience in Canada, CIS's families receive exaggerated news reports in China and grow concerned for their children. In addition to family support, some participants were supported by their local connections. Participant 1 joined a chat group organized by her landlord, who constantly shared news updates and safety tips. At the same time, Participant 10 received emails from professors to warn them about the recent racist incidents. These different methods of accessing news reports about anti-Asian hatred show the significance and the embeddedness of digital media in one's social life. Digital media has become the source of information for this generation of CIS, whether they intentionally search for news or not. Without direct encounters with racists, the vast number of news stories on anti-Asian sentiment can help them understand their marginalized minority position outside of China. As digital media influenced the education about racism and news updates, the online content also contributed to their understanding of racism.

Aside from receiving news updates on the topic of racism, participants in this research discussed several ways of using digital media to learn about the concept of racism through reading about experiences of encountering racism, learning self-protection strategies, and finding a community for support. Many influencers who studied or are studying in an English-speaking country share their encounters with racists, and some of them also offer

their perspectives on how to react to these incidents. Participant 9, Participant 12 and Participant 18 read about victims of racist incidents sharing their experiences on the internet, and Participant 9 gained strength from reading about stories of other Chinese:

> When I encountered problems when I first landed here, I might think my poor English caused them. Maybe because I am not tall, I am a girl, etc. After watching these videos, I feel that it may not be my problem, but that those people may have general discrimination against a particular race.

These stories help CIS construct their racial identity and defend who they are. As CIS recognize the pervasiveness and arbitrariness of racism from watching content creators discuss their experiences with racist incidents and the tactics they used to combat them, they become less self-conscious and more assured of their identity. Furthermore, Participant 3 and others found comfort in the online community during the pandemic because they discovered a significant number of anti-racism posts on Facebook, YouTube and other social media. As an example, on the international student section of Douban, a popular Chinese SNS, CIS vent about their encounter with subtle racism in Germany, including ignorance by coworkers, and receive pages of comments from those who share the same experiences (Jinbuhuan, 2024). For CIS who have limited social and emotional support in the host country, the inclusive environment provides a space to find people who share the frustration, anxiety, and fear facing racism and show them hope and comfort with the anti-racism sentiment. Social media provides a community of education and support for many CIS who have limited knowledge about racism and lack a local support system.

In addition to the support from social media, some participants discussed the positive impacts of diversity in Western media on their understanding of racial justice. Some participants learnt to value racial diversity as they were exposed to the celebration of individuality and cultural differences in Canada.

> Participant 13: The entire Chinese media system has consistently promoted the idea that our Chinese culture is the best, most remarkable, and has the most extended history in the world. Nevertheless, in Canada, you will find that the media celebrates every culture. Chinese culture is fantastic, but every culture is impressive, and there will be a more equal celebration.

Compared to nationalism-oriented Chinese media, Western social media such as YouTube and Instagram allow racial minorities to challenge the White-dominated mainstream representations by sharing their everyday experiences and celebrating their unique cultural performances and racial identities (Banks, 2006; Yu, 2018; Hayward, 2019; Lei & Guo, 2022). Another participant was also encouraged by the content creators who share their music or dance performances regardless of their ethnicity, sexual orientation, or body size. The diversity on Western social media helps CIS to challenge stereotypical mindsets about race and identity. Then, the Black Lives Matter movement also inspired CIS to speak up against racism. Participant 12 disliked the avoidance strategy of most Chinese people, and she believes that the Chinese need to learn from the African American community, uniting and speaking up for themselves. This exposure to the celebration of diversity cultivates a more inclusive worldview and racial justice attitude to counter racism. With Chinese and English-based media at their choices, exposure to inclusive media content allows CIS to build a diversified attitude to cultural differences.

Nevertheless, digital media also causes negative impacts on the mental health of some participants. Although some participants find consolation in the Chinese virtual community, others see social media as a stimulus for online harassment targeting Asians.

> Participant 15: You cannot see one's real name on the internet. Therefore, some things he does not dare say in real life can be said online. Often, some clickbait is needed on the Internet. For example, Chinese media has also magnified [certain

> opinions]. How can ordinary Chinese people be so discriminatory and malicious towards Americans and foreigners?

Participant 15 believed that the internet magnifies the hatred between China and the West. Due to the anonymity of the internet, some people have become more aggressive on social media (Zimmerman & Ybarra, 2016). Participant 15's observation is also similar to the concept of an echo chamber, also known as a filter bubble, on social media. Scholars believe that personalized algorithms on social media only serve users with posts that meet their ideologies so that digital media can cause radicalization of their existing beliefs (Wolfers & Schneider, 2021). This radicalization can also explain Participant 15's observation of more aggressive expressions on the internet. As a result of the constant exposure to aggravated conflicts on social media, several participants find reading online news depressing, especially during the pandemic. Participant 18 confessed that knowing other's encounters with racist incidents through Chinese SNSs made her more anxious, and Participant 16 intentionally avoided searching for "COVID-19" during the pandemic because reading about the anti-Asian hatred enhances her depression.

Moreover, Participant 18 and others became more terrified about potential racist attacks but learnt no useful anti-racism strategies online. Some participants think that social media, especially Chinese WeChat news, is full of complaints rather than pragmatic strategies. At the same time, Participant 19 suggested that even if their strategies are helpful, "when I encounter it, I cannot react to them immediately." Additionally, according to Participant 17, newspapers such as CBC only provide a numeric report of racist incidents without addressing the underlying structural problems, so they do not deserve further attention. To these participants, digital media and online news only provide complaints and statistic reports, triggering their anxiety and stimulating further hatred between different

ethnic groups rather than providing solid solutions to tackle systemic racism. However, they confirm that digital media was one of the significant sources of information for CIS.

5.2. Making Sense of Racism

In Participant 13's words, "If a woman meets many men, she will meet a jerk. As long as you meet more people, you will encounter racism." This quote shows the ubiquity of racism even in a diversified country like Canada. When participants were asked about what they considered as racism, most of them recognized at least some elements of the definition of racism, including racial hierarchy, discrimination, stereotypes, and microaggressions, along with some insights about xenophobia and the scapegoating behaviours of Western media. Many participants also recognized the neo-racism and racism rhetoric along with the stigmatization, scapegoating, and anti-Communist discrimination during the pandemic. However, a few participants ignored the existence of racism or showed confusion about what is counted as racism. Not to mention, two participants demonstrated unique perceptions of the nature of racism as the ubiquitous nature of human beings and the performance of socially weak individuals.

5.2.1. Eurocentric Racism

Assaults. Among different types of racist incidents, physical abuse happened less often to participants but caused more concerns and anxiety. Participant 3 was less fortunate and got physically assaulted on the bus:

> I was writing a WeChat message to my family on the bus, and I did not make a sound, but a passerby next to me, a black man, saw the message I had sent on my phone and attacked me on the head for no reason. I think he attacked me just because he saw Chinese on my phone. This is an act of racial discrimination.

Although most participants did not directly encounter physical attacks, they have likely witnessed such attacks or heard about friends who had such experiences. Participant 7 shared

a story during the interview about a conflict between two Chinese people and several Indian people. The incident happened in Markham, a city favoured by Chinese immigrants. A group of Indians made disturbing noises in a theatre and attacked two Chinese men while calling them racial slurs because the Chinese guys tried to convince them to stay quiet. Participant 7's friend tried to stop them from fleeing from the scene, but he was also attacked and suffered with minor injuries. Similarly, more than half of the participants experienced verbal insults from strangers. As these insults vary from "Go back to your country" to "Ching Chong," informants understand that they are targeted because of their ethnic background. Whether the offenders specified their rationales for insulting and attacking CIS, Participant 3 and Participant 7 recognized the racial factors behind these incidents. Even though Canada is renowned for its multiculturalism policy, participants were aware of and alerted about the attacks against racial minorities in Canadian society. These cases demonstrate that participants understood the anti-Chinese hatred during the pandemic and the physical threats as a result of these sentiments.

Subtle Discriminations. Compared to the straightforward physical attacks, informants in this study mostly shared their experiences of being attacked in subtler ways, including being subjected to the racialized gaze, stereotypes, and microaggressions. Even though the racist intention is not always easy to observe behind these behaviours, participants who were comparatively new to Canada recognize the racial factors of these unfair treatments and power imbalance. The essential components of racism, racial hierarchy and White supremacy were one of the most discussed themes. Even though most participants came to Canada after high school, they recognized the marginalized social status of Chinese students in Canada. According to Participant 15,

> The most apparent phenomenon of racism is discrimination against other races. This is the most negative and worst impression of racism to me. Because racism is to prove

> the strength of your race, and no racist will say that my race is inferior. To prove that my race is vital means to prove the inferiority of others.

Some participants also pointed out that racism usually appears in the form of White supremacy, where arrogant White people assume they are better and more capable than others. With their upbringing in modern China, where CIS were the racial majority, these participants could sense the "othering" treatment in the forms of disrespect and negligence. Hence, these individuals acknowledge that there is a lack of equality between Chinese and White people in Canada.

Furthermore, some informants experienced more direct and specific attacks on campus in the form of inappropriate or White supremacy comments. Specifically, Participant 16 heard a more racially targeted comment:

> In my first year in my German culture class, a girl was talking to someone about Asian people, especially Northeast Asians. She mentioned that people in this area have single-layered eyelids. Moreover, she used the word barbaric.

This comment was not directly used to insult any particular student, but it was still inappropriate and discriminating against a racial community. What's more, Participant 8's encounter also shows the rudeness and arrogance of certain White people.

> Participant 8: Some people cannot help but comment on the politics of China and how our people are doing. He may understand some of our culture, but I think people of other races are definitely not the best group that articulates our culture. It might not be a negative comment, but it certainly feels judgemental.

These attacks also align with the Orientalist worldview: White people are more advanced and modern, whereas Asians are backward and primitive (Said, 1978). As participants pinpoint the racist nature as one insults Asian appearances and judges China as less than them, they show a sensitivity to the racialized comments and the White gaze behind these judgements.

Behind those arrogant assumptions, stereotypes could also be driving offenders to assume they know Chinese politics. Participant 17 and others focused on the stereotypes when they explained what was considered racism. According to Participant 17, "You just assume that one behaves in a certain way and does not consider their education, environment, and personal differences." This comment shows excellent similarities with Stuart Hall's (2006) definition of racism: racial categories are stereotypes that choose certain characteristics of a community to represent all members and neglect the uniqueness of each individual. Participant 8's understanding also aligns with Hall, and she suggests that:

> Racism labels a group based on what they look like, which feels like objectifying others. I feel that it may not necessarily mean that you think that race is worse than you or that you think that race is better than you. That is also a form of racial discrimination… …If you use it as a classification and then divide people in the world into this category, it feels too narrow and unfair to others.

Participants 8, Participant 16 and Participant 17 call the offenders racists because they recognize that the offenders use existing stereotypes of inferior and barbaric beings to judge Asians without trying to understand them. Similarly, some participants find that harmful intentions do not always support stereotypes. Therefore, informants in this research understand the unjust nature of stereotypes and racism, whether the offenders carry a malicious intention or not. Regardless of the offenders' intentions, CIS regard these behaviours as racist because of the hierarchical nature of their attitude.

Moreover, during the interviews, participants noted that, in their experience, racism takes the form of microaggression rather than more direct confrontations, and that this type of racism was ubiquitous on the York University campus. Participant 12 shared her encounters with students from other ethnicities,

> Our department was basically all White. There was a White girl who went to the same class with me. I was chatting with her. I did not particularly understand some of the questions, so I asked if I could follow her on Instagram. She said that would be good, but she did nothing.

Similarly, Participant 19 met peers who were rude towards CIS. While Participant 19 and another CIS were quiet in the class, a Black student asked them, "Where are you from? How come I did not see you before?" Another girl told him that "they probably cannot understand you." Similar to Said's (1978) description of racial hierarchy, these participants were rendered so invisible to the offenders that their opinions were dismissed. Racism is not blatantly apparent in their stories, but Participant 19 and Participant 12 both felt that they were targeted, marginalized and made to feel uncomfortable because of their race during these incidents. Similar to the critiques on multiculturalism by Hayward (2019), Bannerji (2000) and Mackey (1998), participants in this research see Canada as a world of persistent microaggressions, in addition to the abundance of news reports that mostly highlight physical aggressions directed at Asians. These responses indicate that most participants are aware of the racial inequalities underlying Canadian multiculturalism, challenging the theory that CIS ignore or downplay discrimination against them out of pride (Yang, 2023; França et al., 2024). From the racial hierarchy and stereotypes to microaggressions, not only did participants recognize that they were treated as different, inferior, and unworthy of attention, but they associated these unjust treatments with the concept of racism. In contrast to the existing theories that assume CIS are disadvantaged for the lack of formal training on the concept of racism, I believe that the drastic differences between the Chinese-centred nationalistic curriculum and Canadian multicultural society give these informants more sensitive sensors when they face a subtle, unjust environment.

Xenophobic Narratives. In conjunction with the traditional sense of racism, some participants are also aware of xenophobia and the scapegoating strategies during the pandemic and the political and economic motivations behind these sentiments. Rather than focusing on the colour of one's skin, Participant 19 pinpointed the xenophobic mindsets,

> For example, a Canadian wants this job. However, an immigrant worked harder and was better, so the Canadian lost that opportunity. This Canadian citizen will think that you should not come to Canada and that you should be competing within your original country.

This participant believed that the discrimination could be a response to the incoming economic competition with Chinese migrants, especially when house prices continued to climb along with the increasing number of immigrants in Canada. Previous studies (Elias et al., 2021) also discussed the rising xenophobia in North America due to the changing socio-economic environments and the COVID-19 pandemic. As more Chinese people moved to Canada and enhanced the competition in the local job and house markets, the pressure of being othered and blamed for changes in the local environment is seen as racism by participants.

"Chinese Virus". Meanwhile, the scapegoating media framing was called out by Participant 16 and Participant 15 when they were explaining how Western media reacted to the COVID-19 virus. Participant 5 recalled the anti-Chinese posters on the York University campus at the beginning of the pandemic, including "Go back to China," "Chinese virus," and other slogans. Even though Participant 16 did not use racism to describe the media representation, she argues, "There are also those people who diverted their frustration and anger to the Asian community." Similarly, Participant 15 also recognized the need for the government to establish China as an imagined enemy during the pandemic. According to previous studies (Elias et al., 2021), the life-threatening virus and economic failure during the

pandemic forced the government to blame China for the virus so that they could direct the public anger toward an external enemy rather than the government's failure to protect citizens from the health hazards and economic impact of the global pandemic. Participants not only sensed the irrational anger diverted at CIS but also identified the political and economic reasons for scapegoating behind their xenophobic blame during the pandemic.

To some participants, the fear of the Chinese and China was not just about the virus; it evolved into political conflicts between China and other countries. With an awareness of the scapegoating strategy of the Canadian and the US governments, Participant 15 proposed,

> What I have heard the most is that the Chinese eat bats and then spread the epidemic. It is very complicated because it is related to government propaganda… As the first country to experience this, we have to be prepared to be attacked. Because countries like the United States and Canada have poor management, they need propaganda to reduce the pressure of public opinion on the government itself.

Similarly, Participant 14 pinpointed the hostility against China demonstrated through the travel policies of Japan, South Korea, Canada, and other countries that limited travellers from China. According to Participant 14, the Canadian Embassy closing in China during the pandemic was a sign of political exclusion that attempted to marginalize China. Following Gao's (2022) study, the "Chinese virus" is an anti-Communist metaphor that represents the fear of the invasion of Chinese migrants. These participants regard the "Chinese virus" rhetoric as an excuse for othering of the Chinese and political exclusion. These statements demonstrate that some participants understand the nature of racism as the political conflicts between countries, which is why racist incidents appeared during the pandemic to redirect public attention.

Yellow Peril. Together with the scapegoating narratives in the media, some CIS faced harassment in person because of the COVID-19 virus. Due to her origin in Wuhan,

Participant 5 was constantly questioned about Wuhan's lifestyle, particularly the cuisine and public health management, and she recalled:

> My professor asked me if Wuhan people really eat bats. If so, why do they eat bats? Is it a lifestyle? Is it just a custom? I said no; I said it was all rumours. In fact, at that time, I did not know what caused the pandemic, but everyone said it was because Wuhan eats bats, which was outrageous. What I wanted to say was that even if that person eats bats, you cannot say that everyone in Wuhan eats bats… …He asked me about Wuhan every day. I had to call my mother every day to ask how Wuhan was doing. I said I had to update my professor tomorrow, so I need to learn anything new in Wuhan. My mother asked me: Where had he found all these questions? Does he have a problem with Wuhan?

As Participant 5 was bothered by her professor every day, she also had to face the same questions from her African American roommates and sometimes Chinese peers. It was confusing to her to tell if these questions still counted as racism because even Chinese peers had many questions about food culture and lockdown life in Wuhan. Even though Participant 5 could not specify the reason why she felt discomfort being questioned by the professor, the unpleasant and unwanted attention aligns with the rhetorics of Yellow Peril rhetoric of stigmatization (Sohn, 2008). Her confession of discomfort can be seen as her rejection of the stigmatization of a sickening stereotype of the Chinese as a result of the “Chinese virus” media framing. Similar to what happened in the Yellow Peril, informants understand that CIS and China are seen as primitive sources of diseases, and they are treated as abnormalities even if such treatment is subtle, as was the behaviour of this professor.

In addition to the questions and strange attitudes, some participants experienced discriminative attitudes that reflected the othering of Chinese as a modern threat. A friend of Participant 14 received a package from China during the pandemic. Even though it was

reasonable to question the hygiene of a foreign package, the landlord made some vicious speech and demanded that the girl leave the package outside of their house. Participant 14 noted that their reaction was related to the conspiracy theory that China invented the virus to pollute the world. Like the techno-orientalism that depicts Japan as a modernized and dehumanized threat to Western civilization (Sohn, 2008; Morley & Robins, 1995), modern China is also considered by some racists as both a source of disease and a technologically advanced enemy capable of polluting the world (Cui & Worrell, 2019; Gao, 2022). When Participant 14 accused the landlord of discrimination, she recognizes the attempt to avoid Chinese imported goods as if China has a cunning plan to spread the disease.

Continuing with this recent form of racism that depicts China as both a barbaric land of disease and a modern civilization that planned the pandemic, wearing masks by a Chinese also attracts unwanted attention and strange attitudes. Before the mask mandate was official, according to Participant 16, her friend wore a mask on the bus, and someone coughed around her deliberately to make her feel uncomfortable. Conversely, Participant 6 was explicitly asked to wear a mask when he took an Uber ride, while he saw the previous non-Chinese customer was not wearing one. As a modern resurgence of Yellow Peril, these participants realized that they were treated from an Orientalist perspective as barbaric and diseased Asians. Harassments regarding masks continued to late 2022 and early 2023 when participants were interviewed. Participant 2 stated that people would still give her a strange look seeing her wearing a mask: “As if they are asking me, why are you still wearing a mask when the pandemic is over.” These experiences are similar to previous studies: Asians in the US reported racist attacks when they wear and do not wear masks (Xu et al., 2021). Western media outlets reinforced this link between masked Chinese bodies and infectious diseases by frequently showcasing masked Chinese characters, pathologizing their bodies, and using iconic imagery, such as masked images of Mao Zedong and Xi Jinping on magazine covers,

to present them as the face of these crises (Zhang, 2022). Participants recognized these double-standard treatments and the racial factors behind these discriminations, even if they did not use the words “othering” or “racism.”

Linguistic Racism & Systemic Bias. While masks became a political symbol to target Asians, some participants were bothered by racist comments regarding their use of their mother tongue. Several informants shared their stories of being randomly attacked by strangers. Participant 3 was assaulted on the bus for writing in Chinese on his phone and Participant 8 was told that she should speak English because this is Canada, demonstrating an attitude of linguistic racism (De Costa, 2020). The offender focused on their use of Chinese, which shows a signal of neo-racism (Yao, 2018), which encompasses racism based on the ability to speak English rather than skin-colour. In these cases, participants recognize that offenders expect CIS to assimilate into the White norm, starting with the abandonment of Chinese and speaking better English. Their experiences indicate that Chinese and the act of speaking a foreign language are specifically targeted, especially during the global pandemic.

Even for those who adopted English, speaking with an accent can attract online harassment as well. Through reflections on their gaming experience, participants revealed the neglected systemic bias in North America that renders Chinese more vulnerable than other minorities. Participant 4, Participant 6, Participant 7, and Participant 10 were targeted when they were playing competitive online games that require teamwork. Once they exposed their Chinese accent or trace of non-native speaker identity in the chat, they immediately faced insults such as “go back to China,” “Ching Chong,” “Chinese pig,” and so on. Consequently, Participant 7 quit *Rainbow Six* because of the trauma of being intentionally targeted and killed in the game by his teammates. Participants not only understand that these stigmatizing terms are “collective bias” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020, p. 877), but they also expose

systemic inequality in Western media. Participant 10 pinpointed the double standards that protect the Black players and neglect the Chinese community. According to Participant 10,

> I think the protection for Chinese people on these platforms is inferior. For example, if you type the n-word in the game *Rainbow Six*, a game on the Ubisoft multiplayer platform, you will be banned within a minute, and your account will be suspended. However, no matter how you insult the Chinese, no matter what kind of racial slurs words you use targeting the Chinese, your account will not be affected. It is not that you can quickly recover your account, but you will not be banned at all.

This case shows that participants are aware of the enhanced systemic bias targeting Asians (De Costa, 2020) and the lack of systemic support, which is a reason for many CIS to avoid rather than confront racism (Wang & Dovchin, 2022). These experiences align with findings on the lack of social support for Asian digital media users and highlight the need for media companies to take greater responsibility in addressing hate speech and fostering safe and inclusive online platforms (Shin, 2023). Participants' reflections on their gaming experiences show an awareness of the pervasive, systematic bias as a result of the continual racism that weakens the willingness of the Chinese to fight for their rights.

Compared to harassment and attacks in public and cyberspace, the university is considered a safer zone by some participants during the pandemic, regardless of some racist incidents. Two participants respectively encountered professors who made unintentional racist comments. Participant 8's professor described Wuhan as "where the virus came from," but they corrected themselves and apologized for their wording. Participant 6's professor used an article that contained the phrase "Wuhan virus." After Participant 6 emailed to express his discomfort due to the use of the "Wuhan virus" in that article, the professor also emailed the class to apologize for not screening the article closely and to state that he does not support any discriminative views or statements. Their reflections align with the critiques

on academic exclusion (Wei & Bunjun, 2021; Huang, 2024) that happened in Canadian universities during the pandemic. Even if professors were aware of the racism behind specific wordings, their initial negligence proved the racist curriculum in Canada.

Nevertheless, other participants had different perceptions. Participant 2 proposed that "Universities value political correctness, so it is more likely to encounter [racist behaviours] outside the university." Local students on campus could be less likely to commit racist acts or at least conduct less violent acts, while university professors corrected themselves after being challenged by the students. In contrast to the online gaming platform that fostered anti-Chinese sentiment, these participants perceive the university's institutional influence in limiting racist actions. In contrast to studies by Huang (2024) and Schartner (2023), which critique universities for neglecting the racial and cultural specificities of CIS, many participants in this study perceived the university as a comparatively safer space. Overall, when participants discussed racism, they agreed with existing theories: different xenophobic sentiments caused by the global pandemic, political unrest, the labour market, and economic hardships are sparked by factors such as skin colour, wearing or not wearing masks, using Chinese or even having accents. In contrast to the theories, participants have the sensibility to identify racism in Canada. They are aware of this xenophobic public fear of the incoming Chinese population, the arbitrary rules of assimilation (through speaking English or wearing a mask), and the systemic bias and the exclusion of Asians from the multicultural illusions, but the university was considered a comparatively safe space from racists.

5.2.2. Misconceptions

Although all CIS in this research are familiar with the definitions of racism, some of their descriptions show misconceptions regarding the way they understand racism. Bringing with them the training of a Chinese education system that emphasized nationalism, participants formed a racial identity that is different from the perception of the Western

world. Misconceptions in this study vary from the ambiguity of racism, the historical conflicts within the Asian communities, and the ideological collisions between Chinese cyber-populism and Eurocentric racism. While Chinese populism may hinder their ability to acknowledge the precarious position of the CIS in Canada, the complex historical relations between Asian nations may also have an impact on anti-Chinese incidents from other Asian communities rather than Eurocentric racism being the only possible explanation for experiences of race-based discriminations and assaults.

Ambiguity. Among participants who did not recognize the racism in Canada, they all showed different kinds of misconceptions regarding racism. Participant 1 remarked that Chinese people bring very different cultural customs, which contribute to unnecessary attention and anti-Asian racism. She suggested,

> I think the main reasons for the increase in racist incidents are our various behaviours and culture. It is not because of our appearance or face that attracts discrimination against us, but because of our behaviour, culture, or customs……

Although this participant demonstrated an understanding of the textbook definitions of racism, she thinks of racism as something that can be avoided by self-regulation. The quote implies that anti-Asian hatred could be avoided if the Chinese acted cautiously, which can be seen as an agreement to assimilation into Western norms, as suggested by neo-racism (Yao, 2018; F. Long, 2022). Similar to her descriptions, several participants compare racial discrimination with regional discrimination between different Chinese provinces. These participants regarded discrimination as common because they grew up with discriminative Chinese. For instance, Participant 9 shared that "'people from Henan stole manhole covers' is a commonly seen discrimination. There is also discrimination against outsiders." Racism, according to their familiar Chinese discrimination logic, can be defined as prejudice brought

about by minorities' actions that can be eliminated if the minority assimilates to gain acceptance and respect.

In addition to seeing racism as a result of CIS's actions, rather than recognizing the "model minority" (Gibson et al., 2023) label as a harmful stereotype, Participant 1 viewed it as a favorable social impression. Asian migrants are portrayed in the model minority stereotype as a group that succeeded by working hard and being diligent. This myth conceals systemic inequality and places the blame for failures on individuals, despite the label's apparent positive connotations (Gibson et al., 2023). Participant 1 argued:

> From my impression, people of other races have a good impression of the Chinese. After all, the Chinese are more diligent and down-to-earth.

From her quote, she shows a strong sense of pride in her Chinese identity, but this pride could lead to ignorance of racism. Two participants added that some Chinese students often misuse racism. Participant 17 believes that new arrivals might mistake a situation for racism:

> Someone who has just come here might deal with things in a way that is more appropriate in China. People here may not understand him well, and they may have some adverse reactions. Do you think this is discrimination? It might not be that serious. It might just be a misunderstanding.

Similarly, Participant 7 also believed that some students were too sensitive:

> A professor talked about the general patterns of personality of each race, and he mentioned that Asians are more reserved and unwilling to quarrel with others. My friend thought that was racism. I thought it was not that big of a deal. This is the impression that Asians give to everyone in this society. If you feel upset, start by changing yourself, and it might not be as severe as racism.

What these two incidents expose is the complex grey area of racism, where things are hard to define by theories. Cultural differences can lead to miscommunication, and the blurry line

between observation and stereotypical assumptions can be confusing. Participant 7 even suggested a solution of changing oneself to change the stereotypes about the Chinese, which is similar to Participant 1's argument of improving to get accepted. Scholars suggest that, under the influence of Confucianism and the competition of foreign Western and non-Western cultures, Chinese nationalism requires minorities to embrace the Han-Chinese culture to be accepted (Zhang, 2020). The nationalism in China could train them to embrace the dominant culture wherever they go. That said, these participants overlook the existence of racism and its impact, which could be the result of their understanding of racial conflicts as simple as learning from the locals to be accepted in a different city in China.

5.2.3. Nationalism

Following the growth of Chinese identity in modernized mainland China, some participants are further away from Participant 1 and Participant 17's disregard for racism because they see Eurocentric racists as inferior beings. Participant 15 saw racist verbal insults from strangers as "attacks by crazy dogs," which also shows pride and confidence in their Chinese identity. Participant 4 also thought that only the socially marginalized in Canada would conduct a racist act: "In my opinion, the psychological behaviour of racial discrimination falls into the behaviour of verbal insult. It is not strong in itself. Racists just gain self-identity by putting others down". As these statements suggest that Participant 4 and Participant 15 consider themselves superior to the racists, they also reflect similar attitudes identified in recent studies (Yang, 2023; França et al., 2024). By attributing racism to the ignorance or poorly educated individuals, some CIS downplay the structural inequalities that marginalize Chinese people and instead exhibit tendencies toward Chinese supremacy. The origin of "Chinese supremacy" can be traced to campus racism among Chinese university students in the 1980s (Dikötter, 1997). Campus racism later developed into modern cyber-racism in China, valuing a more advanced and homogenous China against foreign cultural

influences (Frazier & Zhang, 2014). Both campus racism and cyber-racism value Han Chinese culture as a superior race in competition from the West. Along with Participant 17 and Participant 7, these participants adopt a method of disregarding the anti-Chinese racists by ignoring or belittling the anti-Chinese hatred.

Based on these participants' descriptions, we can observe a collision between the Chinese understanding of racial identity and the Western definition of race among these informants. When Participant 15 shared his view on racism, he started with the history of racism in Europe and what happened to the Jewish community in the Second World War. However, when it comes to modern racism targeting the Chinese, he showed both recognition of the political narrative of the "Chinese virus" and a rejection of the existence of anti-Chinese racism. Participant 15 believed that anti-Chinese racism only existed in the 1970s and 80s because Chinese people are wealthy enough now not to be disrespected.

> Participant 15: Because if you have money, you can bring benefits to their local area, and you spend it locally. You consume, and people want to make money from you, so they have no reason to discriminate against you.

This cognitive gap in Participant 15 showed that he ignores the anti-Chinese sentiments targeting the Chinese community and only considers histories of anti-Jewish actions and anti-Chinese racial segregation as racism. In the meantime, Participant 7 suggested that the Chinese also have discriminative stereotypes against South Koreans: Chinese netizens commonly mock Koreans for their kimchi-centred food culture. According to Zhang's (2020) study, Chinese netizens connect Han supremacy with inspirations from the recent Western populism to defend the Chinese identity. On the Internet, bottom-up online racism depicts China as the superior country compared to the inferior non-Western nations and the receding Western power (Zhang, 2020). Similarly, recent studies show that some CIS maintain a strong sense of national identity based on patriotism and pride (Yang, 2023; Kwak et al.,

2023). This attitude became especially visible in 2021, when China demonstrated its technological achievements in managing the pandemic. Consequently, they distance themselves from the image of being "weak" or discriminated against as Asians. These participants demonstrate a tendency to emphasize their Chinese national identity while reproducing certain elements of populist arrogance and discriminatory discourse. As some participants show discriminations against others in the form of Chinese supremacy, they also ignore the systemic inequality against Chinese people in Canada. Together with Participant 17 and Participant 7's tendency to downplay the influence of anti-Chinese racism, these participants are able to recognize racism targeting Black people and racist acts of the Chinese. However, some of them have trouble identifying the anti-Chinese sentiment as racism.

5.2.4. Intra-Asian Tensions

On the other side of Chinese netizens' mockery of Korean food culture, other Asian communities also discriminate against the Chinese as well, and these inter-Asia cultural conflicts are also mixed up with Eurocentric racism. Aside from these encounters between Chinese and North Americans, CIS also receive microaggressions or racist attacks from other Asians, sometimes other Chinese. Compared to the better organized activism movement initiated by Black communities, historical and geopolitical conflicts between Asian communities cause various forms of disputes. Several participants encountered rude Asian servers, whether in Korean or Chinese restaurants. Participant 6 attempted to speak Chinese to a Korean server, and the guy rolled his eyes immediately before she switched to English. These situations aggravated during the pandemic, especially around the topic of the COVID-19 virus. Participant 9 had a Korean roommate who emphasized the association between China and the virus, and they would react strangely to the topic of Wuhan. Moreover, some Chinese service providers also treat Chinese customers worse than others.

> Participant 9: Many Chinese restaurants and banks in Canada may treat White people, other ethnicities, and Chinese people differently. Even if I have been here for four or five years, I still encounter waiter with an attitude or bank clerks who roll their eyes when they see your appearance.

Similarly, Participant 12 confessed that, even though his concierge is Indian rather than White, he would treat Chinese residents differently from White people and showed sloppiness to Chinese residents only. Other racialized communities treated these participants differently from White customers, giving the impression that White people are superior to the Chinese.

By identifying these microaggressions and racist incidents, these participants recognized that not only White people accept a hierarchical system that European descendants are more advanced than the Chinese, but some Asians also accept this value system and treat people differently based on the colour of their skin. Participants regarded these Asians as racists because the Chinese are treated as inferior to White people or themselves. However, their actions resemble the Chinese populism that treats non-Western communities as inferior to others and Western nations as competitors (Zhang, 2020). Similar to the development of a Chinese-centric racial identity in modern China, these discriminations could be influenced by the complex past between Asian countries. These confusions could damage the solidarity of the Asian communities and prevent them from uniting and resisting Eurocentric racism and systemic inequality. In addition to the indeterminate nature of Eurocentric racism, Chinese populism and nationalistic upbringing could hinder their abilities to recognize the marginalized social positions of the Chinese and their strategies to defend themselves in Canada. Based on their experiences, populism and the eventual history between Asian countries could have also entangled with Eurocentric racism to complicate the anti-Chinese sentiments in Canada.

5.3. Responses to Racism

Despite almost all participants mentioning the priority of self-protection and conflict avoidance, most participants recognized the necessity to take action against racists when they feel secure. Their action plans include speaking up for themselves when they receive insults, returning the insults at the offenders, actively searching for online anti-Asian content and arguing with them, as well as contacting police and relevant institutions for support. Some participants brought up the need for mental health support for people who experienced racial harassment, and they pinpointed psychological counselling, friends, and community support. The last topic discussed was Chinese people's racist discrimination against other communities and the importance of respecting other ethnic groups.

5.3.1. Confusion

Two of the participants in this research were not sure what to do when they faced racism. According to previous research (Lou et al., 2021; Wang & Dovchin, 2022), I assumed that many CIS had limited access to education about racism in China, and I believed that they would consequently have trouble fighting racism. However, only two participants were clueless about what to do when they encounter a racist. According to Participant 9,

> I do not know, because how do you deal with that? **This is not our problem**. You cannot tell us to paint our skin white. Even if we paint our skin white, will Black people still say that our skin is not dark enough? How do you suggest anything on this?

Even when she did not know any resistance strategies against racism, she had a clear understanding of the nature of racism as an arbitrary and imagined bias that one cannot stop as an individual. This answer also emphasizes that the structural bias against Asians is beyond the scale of personal effort. Similarly, although Participant 1 indicated some

understanding of racism, her answer fits with existing theories (Lou et al., 2021). According to Participant 1,

> We need to communicate first; Chinese people's language skills are not particularly good, which is a big problem. To deal with this problem, I think we must first show our good side and not irritate others too much.

Compared to others, her attitude to racism is humble and idealized. Even though she takes the initiative to resolve miscommunication through conversation, she still assumes that the Chinese have to behave well to be accepted. These participants' statements agree with the theories that some CIS are not trained to resist racism and have some misconceptions regarding the structural inequalities that affect Chinese individuals in Canada. In addition to these two participants, some participants want to ignore verbal insults, and others prioritize protecting themselves for various reasons rather than simply rejecting participating in anti-racism activities.

5.3.2. Non-Confrontational Strategies

Three out of the twenty participants, only a tiny percentage of them, would neglect verbal racists for three different reasons, but they all demonstrate pragmatic personalities rather than fear. Participant 20 came from a perspective of efficiency, and she treated racism almost like insanity: "I think the more you pay attention to them, they may become more excited. Why should I care?" Likewise, Participant 11 found racists impossible, or a waste of time, to argue with:

> I believe that racism itself serves politics, and people who are so easily incited by politics are probably people who are not that accomplished on a cultural and psychological level. For me, there is no need to talk to them because it is useless. If a person has a discriminatory attitude towards you, it means that he is stupid enough. If he is stupid, you cannot communicate with him rationally. Emotionally,

> you are his enemy, so there is no way to communicate with him. It is not that we should not; it is that we cannot help it.

Both participants calculated the cost of fighting with these racist comments from strangers and decided it was a waste of time to argue and try to change racists. Along with their pragmatic view to see the limited effect of individual efforts of arguing with racists, they also show a Chinese-centric populist attitude, as previously discussed. In the same manner, Participant 15 decided that it is not worthy to argue with them. As mentioned earlier, he used the analogy of "mad dogs" to describe racists. He suggested that if you are not injured or harmed economically, "a big heart is the best way to fight racism. Blind pursuit of revenge only aggravates racism". He emphasized the potential elevation of an incident and its potential threats. With the concept of "sophisticated egoism", scholars argue that Chinese students are trained to focus on their personal success "rather than taking social responsibility to optimize what they can do for society" (J. Yu, 2022, p. 2). This participant prioritized personal profits over collective good. It is also worth mentioning the unique attitude of Participant 10, who had a change of heart from fighting back immediately to being more tolerant. He understood that racism might be caused by a bad day or previous conflicts with other Chinese people, so he saw racist insults as catharsis or venting. Instead of returning the attack, he wanted to be the bigger person and move on with his life. These participants evaluated the costs of confrontation and concluded that ignoring racists was the most cost-efficient strategy for dealing with racism.

Moreover, almost half of the participants valued self-protection in addressing racism, and some pinpointed the Chinese community's lack of social power and the possible threats of gun violence. When informants were asked to share their strategies against racists, most of them suggested that they would choose avoidance if the offenders were much more potent than them. Participant 9 argued that scolding back at the offender should only happen when

you feel safe rather than when offenders are strong and in a group. Moreover, Participant 14 highlighted the reason for her choice of avoidance due to the lack of power: “Right now, it is true that the Chinese make a large population in Canada, but we do not have that much power and abilities as we like to think, so there is no way to contend with racism.” This statement shows similarity with Participant 11 and Participant 15 on the limited changes an individual can make to fight racism. Considering the lack of social influence, participants worry that if they get into trouble, their incidents will not receive attention because the Chinese are not politically important. As teenagers who have limited connections in Canada, they have reasons to feel threatened. Additionally, Participant 4 and Participant 14 both mentioned the possibility of being pointed at by a gun, and they would not try anything risky when they felt threatened. These statements are similar to Ji and Chen’s (2022) theory that CIS choose a non-confrontational coping method against racism because of safety concerns and non-rewarding outcomes. Participant 19 even suggested that scolding a racist could make you more vulnerable in court for arguing with unreasonable people. This statement highlights the lack of systemic support that consider the need and cultural specificities for CIS in Canada (Wang & Dovchin, 2022; Huang, 2024; Schartner, 2023). Interviews reveal that participants’ hesitant approach to confronting racists stems from their insecurities about their safety and social standing in Canada.

Even though avoidance and escapism were mentioned by more than half of the interviewees, they would choose to fight back at the offenders when the timing is right. To do so, participants started with the strategies of evidence collection and planning for safer routines. Participant 13’s statement continues the concern for gun violence:

> I think relevant evidence must be preserved, which is the most important thing to do. Canada has the freedom to hold guns; I would not recommend that my friend conflict with others in person.

Again, informants in this research indicated pragmatic concerns for their rights. These answers show that avoiding racism is participants behaving cautiously for their best interests. Furthermore, Participant 2 remarked: “Stay away from the chaotic neighbourhoods. For example, if there is a chaotic area of downtown, stay away from that place”. For CIS who are new to Canada, conducting research and avoiding specific neighbourhoods would be the first step to avoid encountering racism. These methods also agree with existing theories that international students use indirect and avoidant strategies to resist racism (Lou et al., 2021; Wang & Dovchin, 2022). These strategies are meant to prevent the potential hassle of racism encounters and contribute to the cautious, discreet, and pragmatic style of passive responses to racism in this research. Similar to existing belief, CIS are more passive and avoidant when they encounter racists; most participants chose non-confrontational strategies out of full consideration of their political influence in Canada, concern for safety, the cost of argument with racists, and even plan for their routes to avoid unnecessary encounters.

5.3.3. Confrontational Strategies

Although avoidance and other passive strategies are common among the participants, most of them wanted to defend themselves and fight back. Unlike the existing theories about the passive and avoidant attitudes of CIS (Lou et al., 2021; Wang & Dovchin, 2022; Ji & Chen, 2022), some informants in this study were willing to speak up for themselves when they feel secure. Informants’ initiatives include trying to communicate, treating violence with violence, and reaching out for institutional support. This involves the use of digital tools to help them express their feelings, challenge racist narratives, and form a community of support. These strategies show both trust in the justice system and the law of the jungle in racial relations. Compared to Asian American’s anti-racism strategies (Chen, Song, & Kim, 2024; Yang & Tsai, 2023; Shin, 2023), these participants’ arguments align with popular nationalism, which describes bottom-up and self-motivated nationalism (F. Long, 2022) and

national identity driven by patriotism (Yang, 2023; Kwak et al., 2023). From informants' support to other Chinese to their online strategies to challenge racists, participants are self-motivated by their national pride to fight racism.

In contrast to the passive approach and safety concerns, many participants believed in the local justice system and the power to speak up for oneself. Despite Participant 1 showing some confusion about racism, she also shared a story of her mentor as a good example of speaking up for oneself.

> Participant 1: My mentor, our Chinese teacher, argued with the director of the language department and said that if he hears such remarks next time, he will report this to the principal. I think if something happens in Canada, I can justifiably fight for some dignity for myself.

Hence, even though Participant 1's other claims indicate misconceptions about the structural inequality that marginalizes Asian individuals, this example shows that Participant 1 understood the nature of racism and the systemic support she can harness. Her attitude reflects one perspective among most participants, which is that Canada is a diversified country that values justice and equality, so they have the trust to seek legal support.

In contrast to Participant 1's good faith in human nature, more participants chose combative measures and addressed racism as an intentional attack. Among participants who return verbal insults to racists, Participant 8 did not think it would make any changes, but she found it essential to express one's feelings. Even though yelling at racists will not eliminate racism, her suggestions focus on the well-being of CIS and use it as a venting channel for self-expression and stress relief. Comparatively, Participant 6 thought of racism as unreasonable, so there is no room for rational strategies. According to Participant 6, "When it comes to racial conflicts, if someone calls me a 'Chinese pig' and if someone insults me, I am sure I will yell back at them… …There is no point in reason with this kind of person." This

attitude is similar to Participant 5 and Participant 12. While Participant 12 suggested that one cannot tolerate racism, Participant 5 believed that avoidance will only attract more hatred as one shows softness. He remarked: “If you just leave it alone, this will happen again, and people will think [Chinese people] are easy to bully.” These statements indicate a return to the law of the jungle within human nature. Following their logic, when one Chinese avoids racists rather than fights back, racists will fixate on the impression of the Chinese being an easy target and harass other Chinese. These arguments provide a concern for the big picture and the well-being of the Chinese community compared to the previous studies, where CIS ignored racists because confrontation does not guarantee favourable outcomes (Ji & Chen, 2022). Instead, participants suggested that the Chinese as a community can only find peace when they learn to express and defend themselves.

In addition to the reliance on the law of the jungle, other participants chose to fight back from a nationalistic perspective, especially on the Internet. Participant 4’s statement shows both signs of nationalism and appreciation of strength. According to Participant 4,

> If you insult me about my nationality, I will definitely fight back. Just like when I was playing games, I ignored them because I was at a disadvantage, and after I won, I scolded him. When your strength increases, you will have the confidence to respond to extreme opinions and hostility.

Not only do these answers show his nationalistic determination and zero tolerance for insults toward his people, but they also indicate that he values strengths as the key to challenging racism. This concern for the Chinese identity agrees with the neo-nationalism that people grow a stronger attachment to their national identity after encountering other cultures (Zhao, 2020). Along with his tolerance and a burst of retaliation out of nationalism in a video game, Participant 5 also took the initiative to challenge anti-Chinese hatred on the Internet. Every time Participant 5 came across a racist post, she would share it with her friends and invite her

friends to “destroy them.” In contrast to other participants who avoided specific topics on the Internet, Participant 5 actively searched for racist content to track them down and attack these posts. This coping method aligns with the concept of digital citizenship proposed by Xu and Zhao (2022). As Participant 5 used digital media to express her attitudes and argue with racists, she reinforces her connection with her Chinese identity. Compared to the findings of J. Yu (2022), some participants in this research show a strong sense of nationalism. Their coping strategies are deeply rooted in a sense of national pride, reflecting the intensified Chinese identity that emerged during the pandemic, as discussed by Yang (2023). Contrary to studies that portray CIS as politically indifferent, and unlike Asian Americans who often emphasize pan-Asian solidarity, both participants actively used online platforms to confront racist comments and assert their pride in a distinctly Chinese identity.

When it comes to offline encounters with racism, participants recognize the need to reach out for institutional support from universities and the police. Like in Participant 1’s story, most participants appreciated the multiculturalism policy in Canada and trusted the system when they faced attacks. Aside from her hobbies of searching and fighting online racism, Participant 5 also emphasized using legal methods to protect oneself:

> Protect your rights reasonably. I think you should send an email to the school or the government because, as far as I know, Toronto’s laws highly value diversity. If you are subjected to racial discrimination and you have evidence, I think it is reasonable to submit it, and that would be the most effective way.

Similar to her suggestion, Participant 13 added that CIS should reach out to every institution and raise public attention to get justice. According to Participant 13,

> I think they should try to involve as many people as possible. For example, suppose they are Chinese and are being discriminated against. In that case, I might suggest

> telling the Chinese Student Association about this matter and then adding more deans from the faculty in the CC of the email, etc.

Even though reporting racism does not require confrontation, this coping method shows participants' dedication to racial justice. These participants' emphasis on institutional support and the detailed strategies to raise awareness confirms the neglected social status of CIS and their lack of social power, so it is necessary to make sure their stories are heard to get results on their requests.

Along with the strategies against racism, participants also mentioned mental health support for racism victims and self-reflection on racism among the Chinese. When participants were asked about their advice for friends who encountered racism, many of them, regardless of gender, recognized the need for mental support. Participant 17 remarked:

> If we are attacked, if we are sure that it is a purely racial attack, then I think timely psychological counselling is more important because we need to tell our friends that this is the world we live in, and it is full of everything. We cannot be distracted because of other people's words. Psychological counselling must be the priority.

Not only did Participant 17 reveal the arbitrariness of racism and its potential damage to one's confidence and identity, but she also stressed the critical role of emotional support for each other within the Chinese community. Moreover, with a history of mental health struggles, Participant 16 highlighted the critical role of community support in case of potential trauma.

> Participant 16: A counsellor or therapist is the person who is more likely to have the knowledge and capacity to help best deal with the situation and the trauma that arises from those situations. Other than that, I would suggest that they look up maybe support groups on social media, say Facebook group, Twitter, or Reddit. They could

> probably find a support group and talk to others about this situation and get some help, or maybe get a general sense that I am not dealing with this alone.

Likewise, other participants also suggested that they would at least try to be there for their friends after encountering racism. Participants recognized the grand scale and ubiquity of racism beyond any individual's capacity to address it, and it can feel depressing, intimidating, and dangerous, mainly when someone survives a physical attack. While previous scholars believe that CIS are trained with a "sophisticated egoism" (J. Yu, 2022), using the rules to their advantage rather than the collective goods, informants show a social responsibility to form an online space of mutual support among CIS. Not only do these participants show the solidarity of the Chinese community in supporting each other at difficult times, but they also propose a new way to use digital media to resist the influence of racism. This strategy is similar to the concept of constructing a virtual ethnic network of support (Nakamura, 2008; Kuo, 2018; Yang & Tsai, 2023). Through self-writing, sharing experiences, and seeking and providing help, participants provide an online strategy against racism by facing these challenges in solidarity and forming an online ethnic community.

Last but not least, the introspection on the racist values in Chinese culture was briefly mentioned by some participants. Their arguments contest the concept of sophisticated egoism as well as the underlying Han supremacy in Chinese populism. In another part of the interview, Participant 15 compared the differences between China and Canada. He concluded that people could get punished for using the N-word in Canada, but one will not be punished for discrimination against any racial or ethnic minorities in China. Even though China is made up of the majority of Han Chinese and 55 minority groups, according to Participant 15, the anti-discrimination work in China is not as appreciated as in Canada. In spite of his populism tendency in previous discussions, he is well aware of the drawbacks of Han-centric nationalism in China. Similarly, after studying in Canada, interacting with other groups, and

facing the threats of increasing racism against Chinese, Participant 17 developed an inclusive awareness to challenge the racist values in the Chinese mindset. He suggests,

> We must also do it ourselves and eliminate any racial discrimination from our minds. I think if more people have this kind of thinking, racism will be alleviated. However, I do not think it will fully cure racism; it is an inherent idea.

Even though he ended his answer with a pessimistic note, his attitude partially resonates with Participant 1, who argued that CIS should try to communicate and avoid misunderstanding, as both of them believe that kindness can eventually lead to more peace between different racial groups. These reflections tackle not only the Eurocentric racism in Canada but also the Chinese racism and populism sentiments that treats non-Western communities as inferior and Western communities as declining competitors (Zhang, 2020). Even though they believed racism can be hard to eliminate entirely, their attitudes suggest that one can start by changing oneself and making peace from small deeds. They believe small changes will eventually accumulate and pass on the influences. Participant 15 and Participant 17's arguments demonstrate some agreement with Chinese populism, but they offer to initiate changes from within the Chinese communities against racism and Han supremacy. They also proposed a different perspective to the existing argument of passive CIS and sophisticated egoism with the care for social justice for all communities. Their arguments also indicate the integrated identity through the collision between Chinese nationalism, in terms of national pride and competition against the West, and intercultural peace through self-reflection and communication. This is a good start to disentangle the confusion between Eurocentric racism and historic grunge between minorities so that people can join in the solidarity against systematic inequality in Canada.

5.3.4. Settlement Decisions

While Chapters 6 and 7 provide a deeper analysis of the factors shaping these decisions, this section responds to previous studies examining the impact of the dual pandemics of racism and COVID-19 on Chinese international students. When asked how the rise of anti-Chinese racism and their pandemic experiences influenced their post-graduation plans or decisions to remain in Canada or move elsewhere, nearly half of the participants reported that these factors did not play a decisive role in their settlement choices. The other half expressed a preference for staying in Canada during crises such as the pandemic, citing confidence in the Canadian government's management of the situation, without referencing the impact of racism. These responses align with previous research, which finds that "racism and discrimination experienced by CIS in Canada have relatively little impact on their post-graduation mobility plans, with the pandemic itself being a more significant factor" (Kwak et al., 2023). CIS demonstrate resilience in the face of racism and maintain optimism when planning their futures in the host country.

5.4. Conclusion

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, CIS' lives in Canada were impacted by an increase in anti-Chinese racism, structural exclusion, and knowledge of China-West tensions. At the same time, growing nationalist and populist discourses in China also had an impact on their feeling of identity, understanding of race and belonging in Canada. By comparing the findings with theories, this research shows some similarities between the informant's experiences and previous research findings, but it also reveals some discrepancies. As a result of their experiences in Canada, participants demonstrated an integration mode of identity negotiation, characterized by a renewed sense of Chinese identity and active participation in local activism and critical engagement with racism within Chinese culture. Compared to Asian Americans' engagement in pan-Asian solidarity and

anti-racism activism, CIS who resist racism in this study are more directly motivated by their Chinese national identity. The discussion will focus on digital media's role in racial justice, the way participants make sense of racism, and CIS's strategies against racism to demonstrate the unique experiences of these participants during the COVID-19 pandemic in Toronto, Canada.

5.6.1. Digital Media's Role in Anti-Racism

Scholarly attention has rarely focused on how CIS learn about and cope with racism. To address this, this research investigates the dual role of digital media, examining its function as both an educational tool and a space for community formation, alongside its capacity to exacerbate racial inequality and mental health challenges. This research first suggests that participants use digital tools as a complement to the theoretical education on racism in Canadian universities because they provide experiential knowledge. The findings of this study suggest that many informants depended on digital media as a dominant source of information and racism-related news. Not only does digital media grant participants access to news updates during the pandemic lockdown and allow them to share and receive reminder messages with friends and families (Participant 1, 2, 10, 13, 15 and 17), but it also provides them with other CIS's encounter cases and advice, anti-racism content, an online community of support, exemplary social justice movements, and inclusive content of a multicultural society (Participant 3, 9, 12, 13 and 18). In particular, Participant 12 and Participant 13 learned to appreciate cultural diversity and respect other racial groups. Participant 3 and Participant 11 shared that they learnt to protect themselves and build awareness of racism in Canada through their digital media consumption. Their experiences agree with previous studies on the usage of social media to foster cosmopolitan identity and exchange information (Dumitrica, 2019; Saud et al., 2020). The timeliness, accessibility, and vast database enable

CIS to learn about racism, get updated information, and prepare to defend themselves as they begin their journey in Canada.

In addition to its role in helping CIS make sense of racism, digital media was critical in CIS's battle against racism because it has been used for self-expression, resisting racist content and forming communities. Participant 5 actively searched and argued with racists on the Internet to express her upset and defend her Chinese identity. This case aligns with the theory that digital media can actualize digital citizenship and help adjust to changes, face challenges, and develop self-empowerment and self-resilience (Lei & Guo, 2022; Yu, 2018; Xu & Zhao, 2022; Yang & Tsai, 2023). Similarly, Participant 16 and others also stressed that online communities could provide a safe space of support for those who suffered racist attacks. These discussions confirm digital media's function of individual expression and everyday activism, allowing marginalized communities to express values, challenge racism, unite their community over the digital space, and stay positive during the pandemic (Xu & Zhao, 2022; Saud et al., 2020; Kuo, 2018; Yang & Tsai, 2023). The use of digital media helps informants to express themselves, resist the dominant racist ideologies, and support their peers. However, the overload of information and racist comments can also have negative influences on CIS.

Thirdly, this study underscores the negative effects of digital media exposure to racism and systemic inequality on participants' mental well-being. Some informants, such as Participants 16 and 18, felt stressed by the vast number of anti-Chinese news and tried to avoid searching for COVID-19-related content. Ma and Miller (2021) propose that CIS are under high levels of anxiety and pressure due to "discrimination from media, fear of COVID-19, and mixed messages from their social connections" (p. 1598) about their belongingness in Canada. Scholars such as Chen, Song and Kim (2024), Yang and Tsai (2023), and Shin (2023) conceptualize social media as a double-edged sword: while it provides vital online

spaces for expression and community building, it simultaneously intensifies racial trauma by exposing users to pervasive anti-Asian rhetoric. The racist encounters experienced by Participants 4, 6, 7, and 10 in online video games, combined with a lack of protective policies, highlight the pervasive racial inequality within digital spaces. Participant 15 mentioned the exaggerated hatred towards the Chinese in Western media, while Participant 10 and Participant 16 discussed their anxiety from reading online news about racism and COVID-19. Furthermore, Participant 17 found advice from social media limited, and Participant 7 and Participant 19 even regarded it useless and burdensome to apply when they encountered racism. Similarly, Participant 4, Participant 8 and many others discussed the influence of university education, especially for those who study Liberal Arts majors, in building a more systemic understanding of the root and current status of racism as well as racial justice movements. Their feedback emphasizes the role of university curricula and activities in preparing, educating, supporting, and protecting overseas students. Thus, for these individuals, the digital sphere holds limited value for CIS regarding racism. The direct exposure to racism in digital spaces like online gaming, coupled with the pervasive spread of misinformation and emotionally taxing negative news, renders it an unreliable and often traumatic source of insight. This finding resonates with Chen, Song and Kim's (2024) duality, as social media offers CIS experiential knowledge on racism that supplements their Canadian university education, and provides a space to challenge racism and form supportive communities.

5.6.2. Understanding Racism

The second key theme of this research is to find the source of information for participants to learn about racism and the result of what racism means to them. This research begins by arguing that Canadian universities equip CIS with systematic knowledge and theories about the racial inequality in Canada, while digital media serve as important sources

of information and experiential learning from other immigrants. Previous research on CIS and racism suggests that Chinese students are not educated about or well-prepared for racism (Liu & Chung, 2023; Lou et al., 2021; Wang & Dovchin, 2022; Yang, 2023; Yu, 2023), which is true in some participants. Many participants pinpointed the differences between racism education in Canada and China: Canadian universities helped many students build a clearer systematic understanding of racism and a contemporary overview of hatred against all communities. Even if some of them understood the root of racism through Chinese history books, Participant 18 still highlights that it would feel different from the perspective of a potential victim in Canada. They align with J. Yu (2022) and Yang (2023) that, due to upbringing in a Han-Chinese-dominated society, many CIS did not understand what it felt like to be a minority until they came to Canada. Along with the information on the Internet, Canadian universities use theoretical curricula, assignments, leadership assignments, as well as routine communications regarding racial justice to cultivate a diversified environment where CIS can systematically learn and practice their understanding of race. Agreeing with existing theories that CIS would still need to learn more about racism after they relocated to Canada, the findings of this research add that Canadian universities and digital media can respectively provide systematic and experiential knowledge to help CIS understand their racial identity comprehensively.

Compared to existing theories, most of the participants can recognize different forms of racism or sense the different treatments to the least, and some participants also recognize the political propaganda behind the scapegoating “Chinese virus” narratives. Even if they might not know the exact academic terms to describe the different types of racist behaviours, Participant 1, Participant 5, Participant 8, and many informants shared their encounters with other races where they felt judged and belittled. Participant 1 discussed her argument with an Indian student,

> A Hong Kong girl said that she usually likes to read. The Indian guy said, if you read these books, can you repeat what you read? The Hong Kong girl said that she read this book purely for fun. Then the Indian made a lot of comments, saying that when he read, he had to write it down. He said that doing so helped him learn the language. I think his statements contained an attack on this girl. Although he is also Asian, I think his comments and actions towards this Hong Kong girl may be discriminatory.

Similarly, Participant 5 felt judged when her professor constantly asked about Wuhan in class during the pandemic. Participant 8 also mentioned that people from other cultures enjoyed commenting on Chinese politics as if they knew better. These examples prove that participants can sense the marginalization and Eurocentric exclusion in academic settings. It is worth mentioning that Participant 6 and Participant 8 both had professors who used wording or resources that contained the "Wuhan virus," but they both apologized when they realized their mistakes. Mainly, Participant 6 recognized the wording and emailed the professor for clarification, showing both an awareness of racism and the courage to confront it. Interviews indicate the desire for racial justice in most participants and that most of them are alerted about their sensitive social positions in Canada.

Furthermore, along with one participant who identified the scapegoating behaviour of Western media, some participants complained about the biased treatment during the pandemic, especially the politics around facial masks. Participant 15 pointed out that the public accumulated anxiety and fear from the failure of the government to control the pandemic, so Western media adopted a scapegoating strategy to blame China. His statement aligns with the studies on the phrase "Chinese virus" and the racism phenomenon of treating Chinese as a social threat (Gover et al., 2020; Elias et al., 2021; Gao, 2022). Additionally, some participants also experienced different treatments related to wearing masks. Participant 6 was explicitly asked to wear a mask, while Participant 2 and Participant 16 were either

given strange looks or deliberately coughed at for wearing a mask. Their awareness of the racism in these behaviours demonstrates their recognition that Chinese are treated as a threat to their health (Gover et al., 2020). Their experiences also prove early writings on the association between wearing masks and receiving racist attacks: Asian people encounter racism for both wearing and not wearing masks (Xu et al., 2021). Like the media framing of scapegoating strategy, masks are only reminders of disease and excuses for attacks, but what they target is people who share the visual characteristics of the Chinese.

While most discussions of racism remain on anti-Chinese behaviours, some participants also show different levels of confusion, including the ambiguity of racism, the historical conflicts within the Asian communities, and the ideological collisions between Chinese cyber-populism and Eurocentric racism. Some participants show misconceptions about what is considered racism due to its indeterminate nature. As they compare racism with discrimination in China, they often neglect the racist attempts of the model minority narrative and the neo-racism narrative of assimilation. Meanwhile, some participants also shared their encounters with racists from non-Western communities. The complex history between China and other non-Western countries intertwines with Eurocentric racism in Canada, so they could hinder participants from understanding its nuanced differences and origins. It could also lead to more conflicts among racial minorities and damage their unity against systematic injustice in Canada. Moreover, the case of Participant 15 is unique and conflicted as he demonstrated a complete understanding of racism-related theories but believed contemporary Chinese are not targets of discrimination as China has become one of the superpowers. He represented a type of informant whose identity is caught between the Chinese and Canadian definitions of race. On the one hand, Participant 15 acknowledged the racist history against the Jewish community in the Second World War and the Chinese in Canada in the 20th century, as well as the racist scapegoating behaviours against the Chinese during the

pandemic. On the other hand, he and many participants overlook the recent anti-Asian racism or even reject its existence. These participants demonstrate signs of Chinese cyber racism and its connection with Western populism (Frazier & Zhang, 2014; Zhang, 2020). Some participants criticize racism as an act of cowardness rather than seeing themselves as pure victims. Specifically, Participant 4 believed racism is an act by socially marginalized people, while Participant 15 treated verbal insults from strangers as an attack from a "crazy dog." Their attitude shows a Chinese-centric identity that values Chinese nationality as superior to the underdeveloped non-Western communities and the descending West.

5.6.3. Action against Racism

The last part of this research aims to understand how CIS at York University resist racism during the pandemic. Most research on CIS and their responses to racism suggests that CIS and even some Chinese descendants tend to avoid confrontation. The findings agree with them as most participants value their safety and achievements more than participating in activism against racism and confronting racists in public. However, it is worth noting that many participants use different methods to resist racism when they feel secure, such as online expressions, reporting encounters and so on.

When it comes to encounters with racists in public, participants showed the tendency of pragmatic analysis of the cost of confronting racists and choose avoidant strategies because they understand their lack of voice in politics, the systemic bias, and the possibility of gun violence. According to previous studies, CIS usually choose indirect and avoidant responses to racism (Lou et al., 2021; Wang & Dovchin, 2022). Most participants chose to ignore verbal attacks and plan their routes to avoid troublesome neighbourhoods. Participant 20, Participant 15 and more informants chose to ignore verbal insults due to the cost of further resistance. According to Ji and Chen's (2022) study, CIS tolerate racism because they believe activism does not guarantee results. Similarly, some informants in this study

suggested that they find it not worth engaging with verbal racial slurs from strangers, so they choose to live their lives rather than be distracted by insults from strangers. Informants highlighted the cost of responding to racism: either their time arguing with racists (Participants 10, 11, 15, and 20), the lower social status of Chinese people (Participants 11, 14 and 15), their safety under the risk of being physically attacked or even gun violence, or the possibility of escalation of events (Participants 4, 9, 14 and 19). These answers agree with the "sophisticated egoism" proposed by J. Yu (2022) in the form of a pragmatic analysis of the situations. J. Yu (2022) suggests that CIS "are trained to leverage rules for personal advantage, rather than taking social responsibility to optimize what they can do for society" (p. 2). Participant 2, Participant 15, and many participants chose to avoid racist verbal insults for rational considerations, showing that the cost of responding to verbal insults is not worth the rewards to their individual lives. Their responses agree with J. Yu (2022) that CIS have reduced political expression and understand the limited effect of individual actions. Their pragmatic coping strategy for verbal racism suggests that many CIS in this research understand the cost of confrontation with racism entirely and choose to prioritize their safety and goals over arguments with verbal insults.

Nevertheless, compared to the passive and avoidant coping strategies in previous research, many participants in this study propose different ways of indirect strategies against racism. It is vital to point out that most participants suggest that they will yell back at the offender when they feel safe about the environment. Aside from Participant 5, who hunted for and argued with racists online, Participant 15 wrote about his friend's experiences of encountering racism and not receiving help from other Chinese people to call for Chinese people's solidarity. Participant 6 wrote to a professor after noticing the racism in a course reading despite the power imbalance in their relationship, and many participants emphasized keeping evidence of racism encounters and reporting them to the university or the police

when necessary. As mentioned in the previous section, digital media has also been used as a platform of solidarity and mutual support. These cases show different solutions compared to J. Yu (2022) on the lack of political and individual responsibility of CIS and Ji and Chen (2022) that Chinese students find the racial justice movement pointless. With a clear understanding of the potential risks of public confrontations and the absent political voice of CIS in Canada, CIS in this study are contributing to this battle with racism in ways that make them feel comfortable and safe.

Rather than being politically disinterested (J. Yu, 2022; Ji & Chen, 2022), participants in this study show a strong sense of pride in their nationalistic ideals and willingness to support their peers. Some of them even take inspiration from the Black Lives Matter movement and reflect on racism within the Chinese community. A critical statement of J. Yu's article (2022) suggests that CIS demonstrate sophisticated egoism, are politically indifferent, and treat activism as a pure emotional outlet and ineffective ways to address racial inequality. Instead, Participant 5 and Participant 12 believed that tolerance of bullies and racism will only encourage their behaviours, Participant 6 suggested that the irrational stupidity of racism can only be stopped by showing the power of the Chinese, and Participant 4 and Participant 5 also demonstrated their passion for defending their national identity. Additionally, Participant 12 was inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement and the call for solidarity of the Chinese community to combat racism together. Individual resistance to racism may have limited effort in eliminating racism over the globe. However, these participants believe that the eye for an eye is an effective way to improve the image of Chinese people and defend the community over the long run. Moreover, Ji and Chen (2022) suggest that confrontation does not guarantee ideal outcomes, so students could be discouraged from dealing with racism. However, Participant 8 emphasized the positive impacts of arguments with racists on mental health, emphasizing that CIS need to act against

racism as a means of expressing their emotions and bolstering their sense of identity and confidence. That said, their confrontation with racism differs from that of Asian Americans in the diaspora, as their identities are more grounded in Chinese nationalism compared to a broader Asian solidarity.

In contrast to Asian Americans' active participation in social justice movements (Chen, Song, & Kim, 2024; Yang & Tsai, 2023; Shin, 2023), most participants in this study were less likely to identify with a broader Asian identity; instead, their responses to racism were primarily motivated by a strong sense of Chinese national identity (Yu, 2023; Kwak et al., 2023). Expressions of Chinese national identity are evident both in their dismissal of racial inequality and in their strong sense of national pride. While Yang (2023) expresses concern that minimizing racism as mere acts of ignorance reflects CIS' tendency to overlook broader systemic inequalities, Participant 2, Participant 15, and many participants similarly downplayed their own experiences of racism. Their tendency to attribute racism to ignorance may also reflect an effort to protect their perceived privileged status as international students in a friendly Canadian society, minimizing the humiliation they experienced from racist encounters (França et al., 2024). However, not all participants minimize racism, and Participant 4, Participant 8, Participant 12 and others chose to address discriminations to defend their Chinese identity. While J. Yu (2022) suggests that some CIS view racial justice movements and protests as ineffective, none of the participants in this study actively referenced #StopAsianHate or other Asian-focused activism. Influenced by strong ties to their homeland, regular exposure to Chinese-dominated media, and social circles primarily composed of Chinese peers, many CIS in this research expressed varying degrees of pride in their Chinese identity. Their patriotism and nationalism motivate them to build community, confront racist comments, and share experiences with fellow Chinese peers. Additionally, some participants also discussed the importance of challenging racism in the Chinese

community and building connections across racial groups, which can be a start to making changes on a larger scale. These suggestions not only challenge the stereotypes assumed that CIS are indifferent to politics but also resist the recent racism and populism tendency among Chinese netizens. Hence, through the aid of digital media, these participants show a passion for participating in the social justice movement, forming an online support community for each other and challenging racism in less confrontational but meaningful ways.

As this chapter focuses on CIS's understanding of race and participation in the anti-racism movement with an emphasis on digital tools, the next chapter will continue the discussion of racism as underlining systemic inequality in contemporary Canada. Chapter 6, titled *CIS and Media War,* will begin with a comparison between the participants' attitudes towards Chinese media and Canadian media's portrayal of each other. While this comparison illustrates the participants' critical reflection skills and agreement with Western ideologies, the rest of the chapter analyzes CIS's responses to media representation of the Chinese. By recognizing the remaining influence of imperialism in the illustration of the Chinese, the next chapter will depict its influences on participants' future settlement plans in Canada.

Chapter 6: CIS and Media War

As a teaching assistant for the introductory course to Communication Studies, one of the icebreaking questions I like to use in my tutorial is "What is your favourite TV show?" My answer to this question is typical – the show *Friends*. It is typical because that show is likely every CIS's answer. Still, I cannot remember how many times I watched its first episode and repeated every line to learn to speak in a North American accent before I came to Canada. To this day, I can still recall the lines from the first scene. Movies and shows from the US or the UK became my go-to entertainment throughout the years. This was great for my social life as I could easily socialize with people from any country as long as they also enjoy Hollywood movies and TV dramas; during the COVID-19 pandemic, the six friends in New York, 1994 and tons of other fictional characters also were the only ones who were there with me through the lockdowns. While my hobby helped me make friends and find peace during some isolated times, it also attracted some critique. One time, a friend of mine tried to persuade me to watch a popular Chinese movie. I tried to find a better way to say I was not interested in that particular movie, so I said I was not a fan of that cast. With some familiarity with my interests and hobbies, my friend sneered and called me pretentious. In fact, the celebration of Chinese entertainment products has become a recent trend, along with Chinese movies, TV shows, video games, and other products gaining popularity in the global market. Aside from showing one's patriotism by expressing their devotion to Chinese popular culture, digital media is also the carrier of the ideology and values of their producers. My interest in non-Chinese popular culture is not well-liked, and during the epidemic in China, people were also not fond of the CIS like me. In the last chapter, CIS shares their experiences of being targeted by Canadian racists and stigmatized with the "Chinese virus." In the meantime, anti-CIS sentiment went viral in China because people worry that CIS will return to China with the COVID-19 virus; some even call CIS "Virus spreaders." As CIS are caught

in between two worlds, media content from the West and China represents these two worlds and influences their audience on how they see themselves and their belongingness to China and Canada.

Continuing the discussion from the last chapter that specifies CIS's different ways of learning about and reacting to racism through digital media, this chapter studies the influence of discriminative representation in Western popular culture on CIS's identity negotiation and plans in Canada. Given the conflicting portrayals of China in Western media and Canada in Chinese media, this chapter is named "Media War" to depict the ideological tensions that influence the way CIS views China and Canada, as well as their future in Canada. Hence, this chapter will answer three questions: 1) What meanings do CIS assign to Canadian and Chinese digital media content? 2) How do CIS view the representation of China and Chinese people in Western media? 3) How does it impact CIS's decision to stay in or leave Canada? These questions will lead this research in understanding the overlooked relationship between different digital media content and CIS's identity. As the Internet gives CIS instant access to Western portrayals of Chinese people throughout history, this study examines CIS attitudes and responses to these shifting Western popular culture representations of Chinese people. In particular, this research highlights the variables influencing their choice to settle in Canada or elsewhere and the outcome of their acculturation. Meanwhile, as informants showed the ongoing impact of nationalism in addition to their cosmopolitanism of critical thinking and openness for intercultural interaction, most informants negotiated their identities in an integrated manner. Most participants expressed their enhanced nationalism by criticizing the Western narratives on China and Chinese people, including biased reports on Chinese politics and stereotypes in Hollywood products. However, rather than separating themselves from the local society for stereotypes and biased narratives, the friendly offline socialization with other cultures helps them learn more about the diversity in Canada and develop an attachment to it.

The first section reveals participants' reactions to Western narratives about China and the Chinese narrative of Canada. This research shows an integrated mode of acculturation and a cosmopolitan reflexivity (Beck, 2008; Sobré-Denton & Bardhan, 2013) among many CIS toward the battle of media narratives between Canada and China. In a digitalized world where CIS rely heavily on digital media for socialization, entertainment, and information, many of them develop a sense of skepticism towards media content from both their home nation and host nation. Some participants (Participant 2, Participant 5, Participant 12 and Participant 14) cultivated cosmopolitan critical thinking skills as they use digital media to compare the representations of Chinese media and Canadian media to learn things from different perspectives. On the one hand, most participants agreed with the existing argument that Western media treat China as a partner with risk. This means that participants disliked the negative representations of China in political events but also recognized that China is seen as a potential economic partner. On the other hand, most participants believed that Chinese media also have biased framing of Canada, including exaggeration of negative news, inadequate reports on Canada and overlooking of its complexity. Others question the credibility and quality of Chinese media content and the influence of censorship.

To understand the impact of Western media exposure on participants, the first section also deciphers the two types of reactions in most participants as responses to Western narratives. Many participants found the political representation of China hard to accept and different from their impression. Many participants agreed with the values they were trained in China, which is why most are offended by the representation of China in Western media. In contrast, a small group of participants aligned with Western media and disliked the management style of China. Some participants pointed out the different democracies in China and the West; one participant was in self-question because he worries that what he learnt in

China will be proved wrong. These reactions show the implication of exposure to conflicting narratives from China and Canada in some participants' understanding of China.

The second part of this research studies the representation of Asians in the Western entertainment industry and how participants understood them. Similar to the negative representation of China, almost all participants found the representation of Asian immigrants upsetting. With a discriminative history, they argued that many Western narratives contained discriminative stereotypes and Eurocentric aesthetics. Their observation aligns with the critiques on multiculturalism in Canada for its systemic bias and exclusion of the Chinese as the social norms (Mackey, 1998; Bannerji, 2000; Fleras, 2010). Although all participants acknowledged the stereotypes, not everyone had a pessimistic attitude toward Western media products. The second group of participants tolerated these stereotypes because they found clickbait and misunderstandings very common in any culture. Even though stereotypes can be Eurocentric and misunderstandings, some participants believed that stereotypes can convey authentic truth about the Chinese. The last type of participants had a positive attitude towards the current representation of Chinese because they found more representations and better images than in the past. They thought that these improved depictions may have a favourable impact on Chinese immigrants' social and romantic lives by influencing how the community perceives them.

Last but not least, this research studies the impact of Western representation on CISs' decision to stay or leave Canada and their acculturation in Canada. The representation on Western screens has limited influence on participants' identity negotiation and less on their settlement decisions. Some participants are affected by these representations when they make decisions about settlement and acculturation, and they would be more insecure if Western media were discriminative. Nevertheless, most participants suggested that they value their experiences in reality more when making settlement decisions, even if they are not happy

about the representations. It is worth noting that some participants acknowledged that assimilation is never their only option, and they would adjust their adaptation based on their linguistic and ideological engagement as well as personal connections with locals. Many of them chose to integrate at a level they find suitable, while some chose to stay in a Chinese community rather than assimilate into mainstream society.

6.1. Western V.S. Chinese Media

Participants in this research recognize the biased framing of China on Western media and similar biases of Canada on Chinese media. They learnt to follow digital media in English and Chinese to critically analyze social events and deduct their understanding of truth. The critical reflection skill and ability to switch perspectives show the influence of cosmopolitanism on them (Beck, 2008; Sobré-Denton & Bardhan, 2013) and, consequently, signs of integration into Canada.

6.1.1. Western Media

As participants shared their impressions of how Western digital media and their Chinese counterparts frame one another, almost all participants started to identify the negative images of China on Western platforms. Participant 7 burst out:

> Of course, they would say bad things about China. No need to think about it. It must be bad. It can be as bad as it needs to be. They always associate China with political oppression, economic poverty, and the lack of culture and cultural dissemination.

With his intuitive reaction, this participant demonstrated frustration or even self-mockery about this all-around negative depiction of China. Similarly, with or without a specific example, Participant 15, Participant 7, and Participant 1 also shared that they sense a negative image of China through the lens of Western media. This negative impression of China aligns with contemporary studies on the depiction of China from a Western perspective. While Cao (2012) suggests that China has been depicted as an enemy of the West since the Cold War,

Lucenti's recent study (2024) proposes that the US-China relationship is regarded as a conflict for the world's soul in addition to being a political and economic struggle. With that argument, Lucenti (2024) highlights the pressure on the US to defend and advance its national identity and values. During the pandemic, a study suggests that 71% of *New York Times* news reports conveyed a negative sentiment toward China (Yang et al., 2022). Nevertheless, some scholars believe that the framing of China oscillates between a political enemy and a potential economic partner (Ali & Bahar, 2019; Y. Long, 2022; Hongyu et al., 2023). Despite Participant 7's response, Participant 8, Participant 10, Participant 16, Participant 20 and many participants in this research agreed with that argument. The next section will delve into this observation of China as a risky partner.

Advanced Economy. Based on the participants' observations, Western media recognizes the success of modernization and economic development in China. Participant 10 shared his experiences using Facebook,

> In fact, you can find positive images of China on Facebook. For example, China is a very friendly, advanced and developed country. The probability of finding such results is actually quite high, maybe 60% to 70%.

Through his experiences on Facebook, he finds that more than half of the discussion on China admits its economic influence. In like manner, Participant 1 watched a video of a Western reporter sharing the modernization of Shenzhen by reporting about a subway line. She believes that some Western media are willing to report fair and positive news about China, even though these positive reports are rarely known in the West. Her example focuses on an economic or modernized development in China, which aligns with Participant 10 and existing scholarship. Similar to Participant 1, Hongyu et al. (2023) argue that economic news about China is more likely to be represented in an unbiased way. As China becomes an integral member of the globalized world, Yangyang Long (2022) believes that media portrayal of

China points to its growing power and the ideological rivalry between China and the West. Therefore, participants share the attitude of these existing scholars and identify the depiction of China as a powerful economic player along with its political threats.

Political Threats. Unlike the somewhat positive media depictions of the chance to work with China in the global market, the participants also noted the negative representation of ideological differences between China and the West. These political representations depict China as an imagined enemy and a source of fear. Participant 15 argued that,

> Every country needs to establish an imaginary enemy. It does not necessarily mean that the people of this nation or this country really hate this country. The same as not all Chinese people hate Americans, but you need a shared target online.

This participant points out both Western and Chinese media have propaganda roles, so Western media portrays China as a political target. While Participant 10 and Participant 20 believed that Western media worries about the oppressed labourers and the lack of democracy, Participant 10 also mentioned that China is considered a political enemy and a country of low happiness. Participant 8 and Participant 16 shared that China is portrayed by the West as "an authoritarian country with human rights issues". They realize that even if the Western world admits the success of the Chinese economic and technological development, they will still find ideological and political reasons to portray China as "the other." This narrative also aligns with the techno-orientalist depiction of Japanese economic success as a result of sacrificed humanity (Morley & Robins, 1995). From the participants' perspective, Western media implies that the achievement of China is based on inhuman or undemocratic approaches that are against the Western ideal. The political conflicts between the West and China that are depicted in Western media's reporting eventually create China as "the other".

Many participants shared different negative political images of China on Western screens, that portray China as "the other." The existing literature highlights an identity

conflict between China and the Western countries led by the US, portraying an ideological battle (Lucenti, 2024; Hongyu et al., 2023). Lucenti (2024) specifically discussed the former US president Trump's "Wuhan virus" narrative that depicts China as "the other." Similarly, Participant 3 and Participant 6 both recalled the Chinese air balloon event from 2023. The US government claimed that they shot down a surveillance spy balloon from China in February 2023, and they suggested that the balloon captured imagery and transmitted information to Beijing (Bertrand, 2023; Chadwick, 2023). However, the Chinese government suggested that the balloon was a civilian weather monitor device. Participant 6 suggested:

> Media like the BBC will also have an even worse evaluation of China. In fact, like the recent air balloon incident, the comments from major foreign media are harsh and negative.

Their answers imply that Western media will always choose a negative framing and exaggerate an incident regarding China to create an ill image. Another recent topic is the manipulation of Canadian elections by the Chinese government. Canada's public investigation into foreign electoral influence has yielded significant allegations, including claims of coercion from China (Yousif, 2024). Two intelligence assessments from 2019 and 2022 show that Chinese officials were involved in funding Canadian political candidates ("Two high-level memos," 2023). Participant 12 remembered reading much criticism of China when the news of the manipulated elections broke. He believes the accusations are mainly the product of Western media malignancy and are unlikely to be accurate. By pointing out the negative speculation of the Western media on China-related news, these participants agreed that Western news has an anti-communist frame (Ali & Bahar, 2019). According to Ali and Bahar (2019), the US media framing of China frequently employ Orientalist narratives, depicting China as a threat to the US, particularly on issues such as cyber

espionage and territorial conflicts; recent instances like the air balloon and election interference also demonstrate this anti-Communist political narrative.

Among different approaches to portraying China negatively, participants believed that Western news stories during the COVID-19 pandemic intend to frame China as an epidemic disaster. China followed a strict lockdown policy at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and a zero-COVID policy until late 2022, which are different from the policies among Western countries. Many participants recalled the Western media criticizing China for the lockdown policies and framing China as the opposite of democracy. For example, Participant 16 argued,

> When I look at the comment section about this quarantine policy, I feel like people assume the Chinese government is authoritarian. They think China is forcing people to stay home with force and legal repercussions. I think that is not very objective.

To this participant, the media and online comments took a biased lens in reporting the Chinese policies and exaggerating their implication. Participant 2 and Participant 19 added to her statement as they recall that Western netizens regard those restrictions as signs of authoritarian regimes and the loss of personal freedom. Their answers reflect the different attitudes people have towards the COVID-19 virus. They pinpointed the Western media's use of political language to associate China with the image of an oppressive or authoritarian country where individual happiness and freedom are sacrificed for stability. Therefore, participants retained their trust in the Chinese government and demonstrate some understanding of the COVID-19 policies and the necessity of lockdown policy.

Even though China is portrayed as an authoritarian country in managing the COVID-19 pandemic, informants think Western media also exaggerate both the degree of lockdown policies and the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some participants recalled the depiction of China as a source of disease. For instance, Participant 8 talked about the news

stories at the beginning of the pandemic: “I remember seeing those videos, there was blood spurting out, several litres of blood were sprayed out, and there were ID cards everywhere in Wuhan that no one came to claim. There seems to be no such news in China”. She finds that news about China's anti-epidemic efforts is different and more negative in the West than in China. Moreover, Participant 18 remembered that some news channels focused on COVID-management as a disaster in China:

> CP24 often reports on different rounds of lockdown in Shanghai, what kind of disaster it has caused, and how many people have been unable to leave their homes.
>
> Many of my friends in Shanghai are unable to get groceries, and some are unable to go out in their communities and miss their chemotherapy. However, Western media still has exaggerated reports on these incidents.

Even though this participant also knew people who experienced inadequate resources due to the zero-COVID policy, she still trusted that the situation was not as bad as Western media portrayed. It shows that this participant had a strong disbelief in Western media, and, as do many CIS, regarded these reports as exaggerations rather than a faithful report of reality.

Refusing Western Representation. Along with disbelief in Western reports of COVID-related news, many participants find the Western media’s reporting on China hard to accept in general. Some regard them as reflections of Western propaganda. Participant 5 and Participant 6 had strong trust in the Chinese upbringing and find China to be a great country, so it would be hard for them to accept the Western portrayal of the negative sides of China. Participant 5 suggested that she has never thought of what the Western media says, and she could not understand them. Participant 6 also mentioned that he grew up listening to the celebrations of China and socialism; it was shocking to hear negative news about China. These answers show the cultural shock some CIS suffer due to the collision of their Chinese nationalist upbringing with the Western perspectives on China that they are exposed to when

they become CIS. Some participants regarded this criticism as a representation of Western propaganda. Participant 11 refused to accept some of the news stories and suggested,

> I think their judgment is seriously influenced by Western propaganda. However, it does not particularly matter to me because I cannot change what they think. Moreover, the second thing is that I think this unfairness has existed for too long, and I think everyone is used to it. Although you are very angry, you may still feel that there is nothing you can do about it. After all, that is what they think.

He pointed out that Western media has followed their propaganda and used a biased lens to report on China for a long time, and it would be hard for CIS to resist and challenge those dominant voices in Canada. This answer confirms the research on Western representation of China as an imagined enemy and political hazard to the Western way of life (Ali & Bahar, 2019; Lucenti, 2024; Hongyu et al., 2023). Again, participants agreed with existing theories that Western media intentionally frame China as the opposite of Western ideology. However, it can also be noted that participants are heavily influenced by the Chinese media framing of a nationalistic, patriotic and positive China, which further aggravates the ideological conflicts they experience in Canada.

When it comes to the COVID-19 pandemic and the anti-epidemic tactics of the government, participants continued to criticize Western media for their misinterpretation of the Chinese collectivism-based policies. Some participants believed that Western media use individualistic values to judge the collectivist culture in China, leading to bias and misunderstanding. Participant 4 argued that China unites every citizen to fight the pandemic together, but the West only reminds each individual to take care of themselves. Participant 4 and Participant 16 agreed that people in China are willing to cooperate with the government because they value collectivism, and the government implemented stricter and more extensive public health measures. Participant 15 also believed that “Chinese people values

collectivism and are willing to make sacrifice for the collective good". Speaking from the viewpoint of Chinese citizens, these participants acknowledged that, contrary to the individualistic Western media, the Chinese are prepared to give up some liberties for the greater good. In contrast, Participant 13 suggested,

> People in the West follow the individualism ideology and value their freedom over lockdown policies. However, collectivism and individualism both have their pros and cons that need more analysis.

Similarly, Participant 20 argued that the Chinese easily cooperate with the government on national decisions, but Canadians have a hard time obeying the government. These participants show some agreement with the Chinese government on their initial plan of lockdown policies and dislike some of the individualistic values on Western media. They criticized those in Canada who rejected lockdown policies and prioritized personal freedom over public health measures. Although it seems like they are speaking for the Chinese government, Participant 16 and Participant 13 both indicated some degree of critical thinking on the balance between individualism and collectivism in this scenario. Their response suggests that CIS in this research recognizes the ideological conflicts behind the critiques on Chinese anti-pandemic strategies and shows both agreement with collectivism in China and individualism in the West.

In agreement with previous scholars (Yang et al., 2022; Cao, 2012), some participants criticized the Western media for their exaggeration, demonization and biased framing. Participant 15 used the Xinjiang Cotton Controversy in 2021 as an example to discuss the ideological conflicts, misunderstanding and exaggeration of Western media. In 2021, the US government accused China of violation of individual freedom and forced labour in Xinjiang cotton industry (Britten, 2022). H&M, Nike, and other Western brands expressed their

concerns about alleged forced labor and were consequently boycotted by the Chinese market (Westcott & He, 2021).

> Participant 15: The per capita growth of people in Xinjiang is several times higher than before. If there are genocides and massacres, their birth rate cannot be so high. Now that the total fertility rate is so low, there is no need for China to do such a thing. At most, I think there is spiritual assimilation, not physical oppression. I think this is the difference between China and Western media reports, in my opinion. It is difficult for Westerners to understand it. In fact, most Westerners have been assimilated, so they cannot accept the concept of a country having two ways of life.

To Participant 15, Western countries, like the US, have a hard time understanding the multiple ways of life and diversity in China due to the differences in cultural context. Moreover, some participants criticize Western media for their untrue content and misinterpretation that have been created without lived experiences in China. Participant 12 and Participant 17 suggested that people can make narrow-minded judgments about China because they lack experience living there to understand the social and cultural background. Participant 2 used the Chinese idiom "renyun yiyun (parroting; 人云亦云)" to suggest that some people make their judgements based on biased media portray. Due to their transnational experience studying in Canada, Participants 2, 12, and 17 understood that one needs to live in a country and learn their culture and society before one makes a comprehensive and fair judgement of that country. However, they believe that most people in the West are making judgements about China based on the words of others, which are often biased, exaggerated or even forged.

Some participants suggest that false and selected stories from Western media malign China, which exacerbates the lack of knowledge of the country. Many participants criticized Western media for slandering China. Participant 4 had been reading Western news since 2019

and can easily identify photoshopped pictures forged by Western media on Chinese media because they “will do anything to discredit China.” Continuing the political and ideological differences between China and Canada, this participant thinks that Western media fabricates material to demonize China. Similarly, Participant 12 and Participant 11 mentioned the election manipulation and Xinjiang cotton news as examples of Western media’s attempts to make up stories with “random photos and sensational captions” (Participant 11) to demonize China. Participant 11 also remarked that the giant panda in Memphis Zoo getting abused gained no attention on Western news even though animal abuse is a serious issue in the West. These examples draw attention to the fact that Western media report on China's unfavourable political developments, which appear flimsy to Chinese audiences while ignoring stories that represent the US in a bad light. In a timely manner, Participant 15 and Participant 1 both criticized Western media for their selective coverage of Chinese stories. In the Xinjiang cotton story, Participant 15 believed that the West selects ideological differences and reports them with sensational headlines to attract attention, but their ways of reporting distort the truth. Similarly, Participant 1 believed in the rationality and authenticity of most Western reporters. However, she also accused them of selecting only negative news and failing to represent the positive sides and complexity of China. These informants argued that Western news platforms, even while they may be reporting on actual happenings, are biased in the content they choose and the picture of China they wish to project, regardless of whether the articles are created for political or commercial purposes. Informants viewed Western media through two distinct lenses: fabricated news and carefully chosen material. Both of these perspectives add to the Western media's diminished trustworthiness.

Agreement with Western Media. In contrast to the informants who criticized and questioned Western media on their authenticity and credibility, some CIS in this research

were influenced by Western media on different levels. Some participants resonated with the Western narrative on the inadequate diversity in China. Participant 15 mentioned that,

> China and Canada have very different protections for ethnic minorities. Although China has fifty-six ethnic groups, China is still a Han-dominated country and is not as inclusive as multicultural Canada. The N-word is a taboo in Canada, but it is not in China. In China, if you insult an ethnic minority, no one cares. You will not be punished for racial discrimination in China, but you will be in Canada. Chinese people do not take this seriously, so Western media often use this to attack China.

This participant points out the different attitudes between China and Canada towards the protection of minorities and suggests that Western media was not making it up but exaggerating existing social issues. Participant 3 and Participant 10, on the other hand, compared the political systems of Canada and China to suggest that election systems work very differently. Hence, they partially agreed with the criticism of Western media that China has its limitations in democracy or at least a different understanding of democracy. These participants followed the perspectives of Western media and found some of their arguments valid based on their knowledge of China and its differences from other countries.

Last but not least, Participant 6 specifically said that he is not willing to find out if Western accusations against China are true or not. He suggested,

> I actually do not want to delve into the authenticity. I am really scared. What if one day they prove to be true? I do not want to believe them. I prefer to believe in the education I have received since childhood. However, I feel my beliefs have been challenged.

Even if this participant wanted to retain his belief in the narrative generated by Chinese media, he was self-questioning and fears that Western criticism could be true. These viewpoints show how the narrative conflicts between Chinese and Western media affect the

CIS, leading some informants to accept Western values and begin to doubt the information they learn from Chinese media.

6.1.2. Chinese Media

While Western media is considered biased for their flimsy evidence, selective coverage, and political agenda, Chinese media is also suggested to report on mostly negative Canadian news, if not ignoring Canada, and is disliked by Participant 4, Participant 7, Participant 16 and others for biased framing. Similar to the negative portrayal of China in Western media, Mageau (2023) also suggests that Chinese media covers mostly negative Canadian issues, such as wildfires. Among all the topics participants shared, Chinese media criticize Canada mostly in two ways: exaggeration and negligence. Chinese media frequently exaggerates news from Canada and highlights issues such as the use of marijuana, political hostility, and Canada's role as the US's subordinate or ally.

Exaggeration. Some participants learnt about the reasons for the legalization of marijuana usage in Canada and found the mockery and stigmatization from Chinese media troublesome. Many participants mentioned that Canada has a nickname, "Jiamada (加麻大)". In contrast to its official translation, "Jinada", this homophonic pun, replaces "na" with "ma," which stands for marijuana. The infamous nickname shows the Chinese attitude toward the decriminalization of weed in Canada. However, Participant 4 and Participant 7 suggested that the reality of marijuana use in Canada is very different from the exaggerated reports in Chinese media, which associate marijuana with the increasing homeless population and other social security concerns. While Participant 7 talked to a friend from the tobacco industry to understand the impact of drug use on Canadian society, Participant 16 read a book on marijuana's influence on Vancouver.

> The author argues that there are psychological reasons that people are addicted to drugs, and one cannot expect to force these people to come off drugs without

> addressing their psychological trauma. While the system is not yet adequate to address those issues, decriminalization and legalization of soft drugs can help at least provide these people with a safer environment before they can get help to address the issues that are causing them to be susceptible. I feel like this is something that's not often talked about by the general public, and it is definitely not in China.

Despite recreational drugs being a controversial topic in China, these participants conducted their research to learn the reasons behind the decriminalization of marijuana in Canada, and, in so doing, recognize the limited perspective of Chinese media. As a result, these CIS criticize Chinese media for exaggerating of security concerns and a lack of comprehensive understanding.

Aside from the debate about weed, Chinese media also portrays Canada as either a subordinate or an ally of the US. Many participants thought of the news about Meng Wanzhou as an example of Chinese media's coverage of Canada, which is a reason why Canada is less likable to China nowadays (Participant 17). In 2018, Meng Wanzhou, Huawei's CFO was arrested in Canada under the demand of the US government. She was accused of defrauding HSBC about Huawei's business dealings in order to violate US sanctions against Iran. Meng was arrested in Vancouver and faces extradition to the United States ("The Meng Wanzhou", 2021). Some recall that China used this case as evidence to associate Canada with the US. Participant 12 said some media use "running dog (走狗)" (which has a meaning similar to "minions" in English) to describe the relationship between Canada and the US. Participant 17 suggested, "China represents Canada as a US ally. Since China and the US have long maintained intense competition, so does Canada. As a result, China has a negative opinion of Canada". Meng Wanzhou's case serves as a reminder of Canada's political position as an ally of the US, although Canada is seen as a less threatening sidekick rather than as, like the US, a true rival to China. According to Participant 10 and

Participant 20, rather than reporting on the diversity of Canada and its political differences compared to the US, China usually focuses on a narrower image of Canada as a subordinate to the US with limited political autonomy. These participants added to this image of Canada being influenced by the US on political decisions and its intense relationship with China. Due to Meng Wanzhou and the increasing conflicts between China and the US, these participants acknowledged an attitude to present Canada as a less concerning part of the rivalry between China and the US.

Negligence. From the Chinese news reports on marijuana and Meng Wanzhou, one can already find the negligence of Chinese media. Considering that the state media in China have a huge influence on how people view Canada, Zhu's study (2013) proposes that the contemporary Chinese narrative of Canada focuses on non-political icons like Celine Dion rather than Norman Bethune, which reflects a depoliticizing tendency. Some participants thought Canada has a positive image in Chinese media. For example, Participant 6 said that Chinese media portrays Canada as a friendly country in contrast to the US. Participant 15 added that Canada is represented as a country rich in natural resources and with limited threats. However, its proximity to the US makes it hard for it to be portrayed in all positive images. On the contrary, many participants speak about the Chinese media's limited reporting about Canada. Aside from murders and government issues, most news about Canada is on immigration and investment (Participant 10, Participant 6 and Participant 3). In particular, besides its so-called subordinate relationship with the US, Participant 8 suggested that Chinese media reports on the nice living conditions and benefits of living in Canada, as well as Canada's good-looking former prime minister Justin Trudeau. Even though discussion on the prime minister is usually political news, this participant's impression that Chinese media focuses on the former prime minister's looks shows a depoliticalized tendency in the representation of Canada such that a political figure is turned into an amusement. This

impression of depoliticization aligns with Zhu's study (2013) and other participants' answers, indicating the impression of a harmless Canada.

Similar to the critiques on the misunderstanding of Western media, some participants believed that the negligence and belittling of Chinese media are driven by lack of knowledge. When informants were asked about the attitude Chinese media hold against Canada, some mentioned the mockery, such as the nicknames "Jiamada" and "running dog", and criticized Chinese media for its ignorance of Canadian culture. One participant read a post on Weibo about an incident that happened to a student couple in Toronto; part of the story mentioned that they spent $3000 CA on rent. This unimportant detail attracted at least 100,000 views. Participant 11 suggested,

> Chinese people's main concern is that the entire affair is phony since they do not know anyone whose monthly rent is 3,000 dollars or 15,000 yuan. They have no interest in the story. I found it absurd that they assumed that the narrative was made up and did not exist based on their lack of investigation.

In conjunction with Canadian audiences who misunderstand China based on biased media reports, some Chinese also refused to understand the cultural differences between the two countries and make judgments based on their own experiences. As the cultural differences hindered China from understanding Canada more comprehensively, Chinese media was also seen as less credible than their Western counterparts.

Credibility. Many participants compared Western and Chinese media and concluded that Chinese media is under more influence of censorship by the government and produces less reliable news. During the pandemic, many participants preferred Western news to Chinese news because of the vague and censored information. Participant 12 believed that both Western and Chinese media are influenced by their government. However, she believed that Chinese media has less reliable data, and Western media shows clearer statistics and

debates between different voices. Participant 2 and Participant 5 recalled that they used to search for Chinese news on Western websites because negative news would be blocked in China. Participant 14, on the other hand, believed that both Western and Chinese news are not authentic. She argued that Chinese media is more censored, whereas Western news is unreliable due to the different political stances of news platforms. By comparing different ways Chinese and Western media are restricted, participants showed a shared concern about the authenticity of all the news material, Chinese or Western. Participant 14 was not the only one who dislikes both Chinese and Western media either, the next section illustrates the problems that these media share.

6.1.3. Shared Issues

Among the reasons above, CIS, in this research, criticize digital media as a whole for the insults towards each other, the propaganda, and the sensational nature of social media. As participants illustrate, Chinese media and Western media both try to focus on each other's negative news rather than report on a more just and fair representation. Participant 7 pointed out that he disagrees with any side,

> "The US is known for the mass shooting as a tourist scene," "all Canadians are drug addicts," and "China is full of oppression, concentration camps, and organ sales." Regardless of my nationality, I am a firm believer in fostering understanding among people and minimizing perceived tensions and friction, so I would not say I like inciting confrontation in any form.

Participant 19 agreed with him that Chinese and Western platforms are both filled with critiques of each other's governments. These participants pinpointed the deliberate creation of conflicts between China and the West and propose a more civilized way to unite across national boundaries. Moreover, some informants believe that because social media is primarily about seeking sensations, these tensions are inherent to the platform. Participant 15

believed that the more dramatic you are on social media, the more attention you receive, which is his reason that explains negative and discriminative news from both China and the West. In like manner, Participant 17 shared that algorithms on social media direct people's attention based on their preferences, so people are also fed with content that appeals to them. These participants used the logic of social media users and algorithms to explain why people receive more exaggerated news about other countries. Hence, according to informants, the attention-seeking nature of social media combined with news agencies' propensity to select unfavourable stories for the goal of propaganda leads to increased conflicts between countries.

6.2. Representation of Asians

Aside from the discussion on how Western media represents China and how Chinese media portrays Canada, the participants were also asked to share their impressions of Asian characters in Western popular culture. Based on their experiences watching Western films and television shows, CIS in this study concurred with earlier researchers on exclusive multiculturalism that ethnic minorities are not treated equally to White people (Mackey, 1998; Kim, 2011; Hayward, 2019); Participant 5, Participant 15, Participant 16, Participant 17 and others viewed representations of Asians as prejudiced, Eurocentric, and insufficient. Despite many participants being offended by these narratives and refusing Western entertainment, Participant 2, Participant 5, Participant 8 and Participant 12 learned to appreciate the positive sides of Western media content and recognize the authenticity and improvement of content. Western movies, or Western media, will be used to refer to Eurocentric mainstream media products from North America in this section.

6.2.1. Impressions

Early Stage. Tracing to early Hollywood narratives of Fu Manchu and Chinatown, some participants are aware of the historical and continual negative representation of Chinese

people in Western media. With his familiarity with history material, Participant 15 suggested that Chinese people were not represented positively because of the image of Fu Manchu that emerged in the Qing Dynasty. Many researchers have illustrated the discriminative past of Western media and criticized their products of Fu Manchu, Yellow Peril, the association of diseases with Asians, and other demeaning narratives (Sohn, 2008; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Elias et al., 2021; Gao, 2022; Zhang, 2022). Moreover, Participant 5 acknowledged that Western media had unfavourable images of the Chinese and China due to the history of illegal immigrants. Based on knowledge from a literature class, Participant 17 recalled that

> One hundred years ago, their impression of the Chinese was that they came here to build railways or that Chinatown was dirty, chaotic, and full of gambling. At that time, Chinese were only allowed to engage in lower-level jobs… However, things are much better now, and the culture is more open now.

Both participants show their familiarity with the narrative of Chinese immigrants since the early age of the media industry in North America and associate it with the illegal immigrants and chaotic Chinatown in the early 20th Century. Although Participant 17 thought that recent Western media portrays Chinese people with more inclusivity, which will be discussed in the following section, many issues remain with other participants.

Eurocentric Narrative. Among all the topics discussed in interviews, contemporary narratives of Chinese people include several stereotypes, one of them being nerdiness, or more specifically, the typical image of male Chinese immigrants being unattractive and inarticulate nerds who are good at math. Participant 16 suggested,

> Most representations of Asian males are nerdy people who may be short or overweight and only care about their grades.

Participant 18 made similar claims regarding the representation of Chinese immigrants as having unattractive appearance and specializing math. With a nerdy personality as the central

stereotype of the Chinese, Chinese men are not associated with any sexual fantasy. In addition, Participant 15 emphasized that the Chinese people in general are considered bad at expressing themselves and obsessed with money. Other participants also mention the recent trend, especially after the release of *Crazy Rich Asians*, that assumes Chinese are all from wealthy families. Sharing the same observation of "smart Asians," Participant 10 suggested that Chinese immigrants in movies work at poorly paid jobs that require intelligence, such as tutors. Through their descriptions, Chinese men are portrayed in Western media as intelligent, nerdy aliens who lack sexuality, and Chinese people in general are portrayed as diligent, inarticulate, and greedy.

In addition to these stereotypes, other participants discussed the Eurocentric perspectives that sexualize Chinese women and use untrue appearances to represent all Chinese. Participant 4 directly pointed out the narcissism she observed,

> I think the West is sometimes arrogant towards China. For example, in some Marvel movies, although they are made about China, the habit of speaking Chinese and the pauses and changes in pronunciation and intonation are completely out of character for most people's lives. Their movies represent the ideal Chinese world in their mind. I think it is very narcissistic behaviour. Even though I watch them, I find them absurd.

Although her arguments focus on the linguistic differences between Marvel movies and the reality in China, she highlighted the Eurocentric arrogance dominating Western entertainment products, which also leads to the sexualized images of women and stereotypical appearances. Many participants criticize Western movies for the "Chinese eye" casting choices. While Participant 11 stressed that Chinese women in Western movies have yellow skin colour and small "Chinese eyes," Participant 13 mentioned, "*Shang-Chi*'s Simu Liu and Aquafina have both drawn criticism because their appearances are extremely clichéd." These arguments reflect the differences in aesthetic standards and imagination of what the Chinese look like in

the eyes of Chinese people and the West. Another less discussed but important observation comes from Participant 16, who argued that, in contrast to the unattractive images of Chinese men, Asian women are often sexualized in Western media. She said: “Asian women are either this demure, submissive little creature or an overly sexualized figure in qipao.” This observation agrees with existing knowledge on the Western tendency to sexualize Asian women as submissive subjects for the sexual fantasy of European men (Said, 1978). In contrast, Sun (2024) argues that recent Asian American films, such as *Crazy Rich Asians*, have challenged orientalist representations of Asian women by portraying more independent female protagonists; however, their narratives remain largely confined to the domestic sphere, while Asian men are disempowered and sometimes disappear from these films. This article suggests that this tendency reflects a Eurocentric gaze that “feminises the East, making it a more passive object for gaze and misinterpretation” (Sun, 2024, p. 195). Participants’ responses also contest the notion that Chinese international students display “racial innocence” (Yang, 2023), perceiving race as a Western construct disconnected from their own experiences, or that they minimize the impact of racism due to nationalistic pride (Yang, 2023; França et al., 2024). Rather, most participants recognized that the Eurocentric imagination of Chinese men and women was different from the reality of CIS. This observation shows the ignorance of Western media and the lack of authenticity, which is also related to the discussion on the inadequate representation of Western media.

Inadequate Representations. Another shared observation of Western narratives of Chinese immigrants is the stereotypical and marginalized representation. A Vietnamese American actress suggests: “It’s very frustrating because I don’t think that the roles aren’t out there, they’re just not written” (as cited in Paner, 2018, p. 22). Many participants agreed with this quote and argued that Western shows rarely have any representation of Chinese people, let alone Chinese people as protagonists. Using the TV show *Friends* as an example,

Participant 18 suggested that the Chinese character in the show was only a supportive role and introduced to meet a diversity quota. Participant 13 also mentioned that White actors remain dominant in the market even though ethnic minority actors were also hired just to show diversity. They talked about many Chinese supporting characters whose purpose was to make the show appear more diverse rather than providing Chinese actors greater room for character development. In relation to the representation of Chinese culture, Participant 4 remarked,

> Western films and television shows depict China's bureaucracy and dictatorship or highlight the country's scientific and mathematical prowess. They have no interest in our culture. Whenever Chinese people are seen, they always represent an ideology rather than a particular aspect of Chinese culture. Whether it is the Qin, Tang, or Song dynasties, I have never seen Chinese people dressed in their traditional attire in Western films or TV shows.

Many Chinese teenagers embrace their Chinese identity and protect the Chinese tradition by purchasing traditional outfits (Mo, 2024), which could explain her focus on traditional outfits as a signal of respect for Chinese outfits. Likewise, Participant 19 focused on the representation of the Chinese community. She suggested that Western movies always depict Chinatown as the stereotypical image of Chinese communities, whereas other Chinese who are part of the local society are rarely represented. In other words, participants believed that Western producers need to not only learn more about Chinese immigrants but also represent the authenticity and complexity of Chinese culture and experiences in Canada. Therefore, CIS in this research captured the discriminative, Eurocentric, and inadequate representations of the Chinese, but Participant 5, Participant 12, Participant 13 and others adopted a positive attitude to make sense of these representations.

6.2.2. Reactions

While most participants were upset about these Eurocentric or inadequate representations of Chinese immigrants, Participant 15, Participant 18 and other participants tolerated these issues because clickbait and misunderstandings are unavoidable to them. Participant 5, Participant 12 and Participant 13 tried to focus on the positive side and found authentic stories and more diversified representations of Chinese communities in recent years.

Resistance. Most participants criticized the many issues of Western representation of the Chinese community, as demonstrated in the last section, and some participants found various ways to deal with these representations by avoiding Western programs. Participant 6, Participant 18, and Participant 20 illustrate their dislike and anger toward these representations. Participant 18 emphasized that she refuses to watch any Western movies and TV shows because of how Asians are represented, and Participant 20 specified that recognizing the insults of her racial identity in these media content will definitely trigger her discomfort. They represent a group of CIS who avoid Western media due to its disrespectful narratives of Chinese immigrants. At the same time, some participants become indifferent and adapt to the situation. Participant 10 suggested,

> Belonging to a minority group and the bottom of the food chain, you cannot do much when you are insulted like this. I also think that not all Canadians think so. I think this only represents the views of a small number of people. That is how I comfort myself.

Living in Canada and acknowledging the limited political power of the Chinese, this participant represents an indifferent attitude to Eurocentric narratives after accepting reality. In comparison to these attempts to resist or fail to resist Western media, the next group of CIS has a more inclusive attitude toward Western media.

Tolerance. Participants who tolerated the Western narrative of Chinese immigrants generally show two tendencies: they either accept the nature of the media industry or understand the commonality of misunderstanding. Participant 2, Participant 3 and Participant 4 agreed that exaggeration is an unavoidable part of creative writing, especially in comedies. Participant 4 suggested: "I always believe that the media needs such an attention-grabbing function because they rely on this to survive." Similarly, Participant 2 suggested that stereotypes meet the understanding of the public audience and make it easier for them to accept and enjoy the media content. They thought the media industry has an economic purpose rather than a political or malicious one, so they embraced the stereotypes and false perception so that their programs match what most public knows about the Chinese. Meanwhile, other participants expected misunderstandings to be a common phenomenon of cross-cultural communication. Participant 15 used a Chinese idiom "those who do not know are not guilty (不知者无罪)" to explain his accepting attitude.

> Participant 15: They are unaware of the stereotypes, and they are unable to travel to China for an extended period to experience Chinese culture. They are only able to learn from books, the media, and others who have visited China. This second-hand knowledge might be offensive instead of accurate, but you cannot blame them.

In addition, Participant 18 believed that stereotypes and discrimination are part of the upbringing of Western civilians. With an understanding of the limited access to foreign cultures in Canada or China, these participants saw miscommunication as an unavoidable process in the creation of media products. Due to their understanding of the nature of the media industry and cross-cultural communication, this group of participants show a more tolerant attitude toward Western media.

Positive Attitude. Unlike the pessimistic argument that stereotypes are dangerous for their incompleteness rather than their inaccuracy, many participants were optimistic about

growing diversity on Western screens and believed that stereotypes are not always harmful. Participants proposed an array of stereotypical representations based on authentic lifestyle of Chinese immigrants:

> Participant 2: Chinese immigrants are economical and budget-conscious; they do not like to participate in children's school activities, and they tend to take care of the elderly. I think these are true.
>
> Participant 5: The older generation in these shows has a traditional value: Chinese people must marry Chinese people. That is very similar to my mother; she always reminds me that you are absolutely not allowed to date a non-Chinese boyfriend… …I like the representation of conflicts within immigrant families. After they immigrate, their children are born locally and tainted with some local habits, so there will be many conflicts between first-generation immigrants and their children.
>
> Participant 8: I remember that in most TV dramas, Chinese immigrants always want their children to go to the Ivy League and then become lawyers or something. This is a stereotype, but I think it is representative.
>
> Participant 12: Stereotypes are about things that are imprinted in the genes of the Chinese. For example, we care about the family and heritage. You may call them stereotypes, but they are part of us, just like Chinese people love rice.

These answers mostly focus on the family values of the Chinese, particularly the bond between parents and children and expectations for their future. Participant 5 used her mother as an example to show the traditional views within Chinese families, which is why she agreed and accepted these stereotypes. Participant 12 used “neutral” to describe his attitude towards these authentic stereotypes, which could explain why these participants had an optimistic view of the representation of Western media. Rather than feeling offended, they have a neutral tolerance for these representations for their authentic narratives.

Furthermore, with recent shows such as *Fresh Off the Boat, Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings* and *Everything Everywhere All at Once* as examples, other participants are embracing the more diversified representations of the Chinese. Participant 6 and Participant 17 agreed that recent media content is less discriminative, even though the Chinese are not valued as much as White people. They represent a group of CIS who appreciate the enhanced inclusivity of Western society. From *Shang-Chi* and *Fresh Off the Boat*, Participant 3 suggested there are more diversified images of the Chinese as well. Although he sees the controversy around *Shang-Chi,* he acknowledged the positive influence of more representation on the living conditions of the Chinese.

> Participant 3: After watching the movie *Shang-Chi*, some people in the comment section will think: This leading actor is so handsome. In the dating market, the image of Asian men is also linked to handsomeness. This is an influence of movies on people's aesthetics.

In contrast to the negative association of nerdy and unsexual images with Asians in the past, this informant captures the positive influence of enhanced diversified representation of Asians on the social and romantic life of Asian immigrants. Similar to Participant 5 and Participant 12's answers, Participant 13 enjoyed *Everything Everywhere All at Once* for its vivid and relatable narrative of the mother-daughter relationship. Aside from the cultural influence of movies, participants accepted these representations when they sympathized with the characters on Western screens and saw their lives being represented. CIS, in this research, recognized and appreciated increased representations of Asians on screens with diversified and relatable images. Along with the tolerance for authentic and non-malicious narratives, many informants had a neutral or positive attitude toward the Western media industry.

6.3. Settlement Decisions

With some understanding of how informants understand and react to the image of Chinese immigrants on Western screens, the last section of this chapter delves into the relationship between Western representations and the participant's settlement decisions to stay or leave Canada. This chapter starts with a discussion of the negative impact of digital media on participants, which means they distance themselves from the local community. Secondly, among those who care less about Western media representations, some participants find alternative options of separation or marginalization as a result of cultural differences. Thirdly, a significant group of participants evaluate Canada based on their real-life experiences rather than digital media usage and build bonds within local communities.

6.3.1. Direct Impacts

The first type of participants cultivated caution and rejected local communities when they are exposed to stereotypes and discriminative content from Western media industries. Some participants admitted that they have a bad impression of a community if its media content involves discriminative content. Participant 9, Participant 11 and Participant 14 agreed that their impression of a country can be influenced by its media industry. Participant 11 remarked: "If I think they have a bad first impression of me before I met them, I will find it more difficult for me to integrate into this group." Participant 3 added that the nerdy and inarticulate images of Chinese immigrants will contribute to discriminative behaviours in Western society. While Participant 11 showed the concern that media reflects discrimination in that community, Participant 3 worried about the impact of discriminative content on behaviours in reality. Additionally, Participant 7 shared his father's reaction to media content from the US: "My dad's impression is that Americans are more racist and are more aggressive towards Chinese people, but Canada might be more inclusive." These answers reflect concern about the entangled relationship between discrimination in reality and on

screens. In general, these participants became less willing to integrate as a result of the negative representations, which increase their defensiveness and feelings of insecurity about their interactions with the local community.

6.3.2. Other Factors

Languages. Together with the negative impression of Canada due to discriminative media content, some participants isolated themselves from local communities with different factors considered. This group of informants pinpointed the choice of living in Canada without integrating into the local life as a result of linguistic and cultural differences. Although Participant 15 found the Eurocentric representation upsetting, he relied on language and values when he builds connections in Canada.

> Participant 15: Whether you can hang out with them is essentially what gives you a sense of integration. Whether or not your value aligns with theirs is the most representative aspect of your bond. That requires linguistic skills. Who I hang out with depends on my language, origin, mindset, and ideologies.

Participant 13 agreed with his answer and pinpointed the various linguistic communities, such as the Mandarin Chinese, the Indians, the Spanish, and the Cantonese speakers, as a result of the multicultural environment of Canada. Their answers reflect a separate way of constructing linguistic communities as an alternative way to avoid assimilation into Canadian society. Similarly, Participant 18 proposed that "I do not have to integrate into the West or White community." Due to the diversified Canadian society and the significant population of Chinese immigrants, some participants regard integration into the West as one of the many options rather than the end goal. Instead, linguistic communities have become a separate way of living in Canada.

Real Life Experiences. Rather than judging a community or a country based on their media content, some participants learned to conduct research in real life and used their own

experiences to decide their relationship with the local community. Instead of relying on the media, some people learn to evaluate it critically and take advantage of its benefits as they see fit. Participant 7 said,

> No media can shape my values and outlook on life unless I conduct in-depth research and find that what he said is right. Otherwise, these media are of no use to me at all. Even if someone tells me Korean BBQ tastes terrible, I will still want to eat it first to see if it is true.

Participant 17 added that he only reflects on the weaknesses illustrated by Western media rather than allowing it to affect how he behaves. These participants have a skeptical attitude towards media content and rely only on their personal experience to evaluate the authenticity of the message. Moreover, many informants shared Participant 17's attitude to think about their future in Canada based on lived experiences rather than media. Participant 1 and Participant 19 both suggested that they evaluate their possibility of staying in Canada based on their local connections and lived experiences. Participant 2 and Participant 4, respectively, suggested that TV dramas are mostly fictional and only conversation starters. Instead of accepting the ideological values of the media content, these participants merely use them as incentives to cultivate local connections. These participants shared results similar to those of previous studies (Cao et al., 2018), which indicate that online interaction is not a valid measure of assimilation into the host culture. Most people in this group chose an integrated way of life to enjoy both local and Chinese culture. Meanwhile, two participants were not fans of local media content and were never affected by it. In particular, Participant 5 thought that multiculturalism in Canada only serves as an empty vessel. He argued that Canada allows migrants to celebrate their different cultures but presents no local culture. Participant 5 showed a lack of knowledge about Western media content, which has limited influences on their acculturation in Canada. Compared with the various types of media representations of

Asian communities, Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 4, and more evaluated their settlement decisions in Canada based on their personal experiences and local connections.

6.4. Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst, intensifying pre-existing geopolitical tensions between China and Western nations. While this environment exacerbated systemic anti-Chinese racism in Canada and amplified nationalist and populist narratives within China, this polarization formed a challenging context for CIS when they negotiate their identity and sense of belonging. Within this climate, digital media enabled participants to access diverse and often opposing perspectives, helping them make sense of geopolitical conflicts and critically interpret their social realities in Canada. This chapter explores the Western and Chinese media factors that influence CIS's identity negotiation. The media war between the Chinese and Western media cultivates an integrated mode of identity for most participants as they criticized both Chinese and Western media and compare them to make sense of the full image of a story. On the one hand, participants had popular nationalist critiques on the biased report of China and the stereotypes and discriminations against the Chinese. On the other hand, their identities were rarely influenced by Western stereotypes in media but were shaped by the multicultural environment in Canada. This analysis starts with an overview of CIS's attitude towards Western representation of China and Chinese representation of Canada to explore how they make sense of information and form their identity. Similarly, the second section analyzes different ways CIS reacts to the Western representation of Chinese immigrants in North America. This chapter ends with an analysis of the impact of Western media representation on informants' settlement decisions and their acculturation methods in the local environment.

6.4.1. Western vs. Chinese Media

This chapter's main research question is to analyze the meanings that CIS gives to digital media material on Chinese and Western platforms. This study suggests that participants criticize both Chinese and Western media for biased framings, including exaggeration, misunderstandings, and negligence, as a result of propaganda and ideological conflicts. Many participants developed the habit of comparing English and Chinese news to understand the same stories from different angles and deduct their truth (Participant 2, 5, 12, and 14). Participants found that both Canadian and Chinese media exaggerate news stories about each other: China is questioned on Western platforms for spying on Canada, interfering with the election, and over-management during the pandemic (Participant 3, 6, 8, 10, 12, 15, 16 and 20), whereas Chinese media portrays Canada as a land of marijuana and the subordinate to the political agenda of the US (Participant 4, 7, 16 and others). Many informants criticized the credibility of the digital media content from both sides because they found obscure content produced by reporters who have limited experience in the other country (Participant 7, 15, 17 and 19). These informants believed that one has to live in China or Canada to understand the social and cultural background and consequently generate a comprehensive understanding of the other country. Both Western media and Chinese media were criticized for inadequate reports. On the one hand, participants disliked the Western perspective on China as it selects certain content that favours their narratives and portrays an unfair image of China without an understanding of its diversity (Participant 4, 13, 15, 16 and 20). Chinese media, on the other hand, has limited news coverage of Canada, as if Canada deserves no political attention (Participants 3, 6, 8 and 10). Informants recognized the political agenda behind news coverage, especially when China is portrayed in the West as an imagined enemy; Chinese media is also seen as less credible for censorship (Participants 2, 5, and 14). The criticism and comparison demonstrate the quality of critical reflection and

openness to changes, which are signs of cosmopolitanism and integration. Their reflexivity enables them to question the official narratives, opening opportunities to learn across cultural boundaries.

With all these biased framing into consideration, most participants, such as Participants 2, 16 and 19, agreed with existing research that China is portrayed as a political hazard, albeit a hazard that offers some economic opportunities (Yang et al., 2022; Cao, 2012), whereas Canada is depoliticized in China as an ally, if not a "running dog", to the US (Participants 12 and 17) (Zhu; 2013; Mageau, 2023). Participants found most Western news reports on China unfavourable, including the air balloon incident, the Meng Wanzhou case, and the lockdown policy during the pandemic (Participants 3, 6, 8 and 18). Although some media recognize the Chinese economy and technological development, Participants 8 and 18 complained that Western media cultivate a fear towards the Chinese government for "authoritarian management" and threat to the Western lifestyle. Meanwhile, Chinese media depoliticizes Canada representing it as a source of amusement rather than representing political content about the country. Similar to Zhu's (2013) argument, Participant 8 recalled that the Chinese news report on former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau focused on his appearance, demonstrating Chinese media's tendency for depoliticization. Participants 10, 12, 17 and 20 also believed that the Chinese media overlooks the complexity of Canada and its relationship with the US and simplifies it into a "subordinate" to the US.

Caught in between their upbringing in China and their reality in Canada, most participants were refusing both narratives of Chinese and Western media. The majority of them chose to partially agree with certain content from both narratives, while Participant 6 showed his struggle when he was exposed to Western media. Numerous informants, such as Participant 2, 5, 6 and 12, expressed that they find it difficult to trust Western media because of the differences between portrayals and their experiences in China. On the contrary, in

addition to the biased representation of exaggeration, misunderstandings, and negligence, some participants revealed the propaganda conflicts of both China and Canada (Participants 7, 15 and 19). Participant 7 stated that he dislikes biases in both Chinese and Western media because there is a need for better communication and collaboration across national boundaries. As they are constantly exposed to the Western media, some CIS adopted Western perspectives and certain critiques of China. Participant 6 felt it is hard to face the Western narratives, but he started to question what he learnt about China since he was young. This shows the impact of Western media on challenging the existing beliefs of Chinese students.

6.4.2. Western Representation of the Chinese Community

When participants were asked about their impressions of the Western media industry, similar to existing research (Mackey, 1998; Bannerji, 2000; Kim, 2011; Hayward, 2019), all of them complained about the Eurocentric representations of Chinese immigrants, which include stereotypes, discrimination, and arrogance. A few participants recalled their knowledge about the early stage of the Western media industry, in which the Chinese are portrayed as illegal immigrants from a land of disease and evil schemes (Participants 5, 15 and 17). Even though contemporary Western popular culture is more inclusive, participants still pinpointed its Eurocentric perspective. According to Participants 4, 10 15, 16, 18, Chinese men are constantly portrayed as unattractive nerds, while Chinese women are sexualized for the fantasy of Western men. Along with the discriminative casting with "Chinese eyes," Participants 11 and 13 believed that these representations reflect the arrogance and narcissism of the West, which means they only illustrate China based on their imagination rather than reality. Lastly, many informants, such as Participants 13 and 18, suggested that Chinese actors only play supporting roles in Western productions. This means that Chinese immigrants are marginalized and underrepresented on Western screens.

Many participants condemned the White dominant and discriminative representation of the Chinese on Western screens, but some participants learned to tolerate Western representation and found positive influences from them. Although many participants believed Western media continues their Eurocentric perspective and marginalizes Asians in their narratives, Participants 5, 12 and 13 were less bothered by those narratives. They believed that stereotypes are necessary in storytelling and that misunderstandings are unavoidable in communication. Similarly, Participants 2, 5, 7 and 12 could resonate with certain stereotypical representations and recognize them as authentic reflections of the Chinese. These representations are mostly about the family values of the Chinese, especially parental expectations for their children and their relationship and conflicts with elders. The last type of informants, such as Participants 3, 6, 12 and 17, appreciated the recent positive changes in Western media as more shows and movies, such as *Shang-Chi* and *Fresh Off the Boat,* provide more representations of Chinese immigrants. These participants believed that these increased and more diversified representations can have positive influences on changing public attitudes towards Asian communities.

6.4.3. Settlement Decisions

The last section of this chapter analyzes the influence of Western representations of the Chinese on CIS's settlement decisions and acculturation in Canada. As many participants adjusted their attitude towards the local communities based on media narratives, some chose to separate from the dominant Western society and only socialize with the Chinese. In contrast, others enjoyed their connections with local communities in reality regardless of what the media said. The first group of informants, led by Participants 9, 11 and 14, believed that Western media reflects the discrimination of Western society towards Asians, so they would be more cautious about their engagement with the locals if they saw disrespectful content in Canada. Other participants disregarded media representation and used their

personal experience as the dominant way to judge the local society and decide how they settle and adapt to Canada. Some participants valued those who share the same ideologies and language backgrounds, and they chose to join or form a Chinese social circle because assimilation is never the only option for them (Participants 13, 15 and 18). The last type of participants preferred to evaluate their personal experiences rather than the screens (Participants 1, 2, 4, 7, and 19). One of them saw media content as pure entertainment and incentives for engagement with others rather than reflections of ideology. This group would evaluate their reality in Canada to determine where they want to settle after graduation. Most of them integrated into local communities at different levels, even though they might eventually return to China after graduation.

This chapter continues the discussion of racism as underlining systemic inequality in contemporary Canada, and it adds an overview of the changing Chinese identity after exposure to Chinese media and Canadian media's portrayal of each other. While Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 revolve around how Chinese students defend their Chineseness against racism, the next chapter will emphasize the hybridity of Chinese identity. Chapter 7 will begin with CIS's different responses to Canadian values to show their acceptance and rejection of various aspects of Canada. After this overview displays the features of diversity that participants embraced, Chapter 7 will discuss the hybrid Chinese identity as a result of integration in Canada and gender and sexuality as important parts of participants' identity. Lastly, Chapter 7 will provide an overview of all the critical factors that influenced participants' settlement in Canada or elsewhere after graduation, highlighting diversity as one of the key factors.

Chapter 7: CIS and Diversity

A few years ago, I ran a podcast about CIS's experience in Canada. Prior to International Women's Day that year, a female acquaintance from high school returned to Canada, having completed her master's program here and worked in China for a number of years. I decided to invite her and another female friend for the International Women's Day special episode to learn about their experiences working in China and Canada. During the conversation, they stressed that the job-hunting and working experiences in China are unfair for women, especially in comparison to Canada. My high school friend shared that she had twenty job interviews in China that year, and all but one company asked about her age, her marriage status, and her family planning in the near future. She remembered that one interviewer humbly asked her at the end: "Do you mind if we ask you something personal?" She was aware that she would be wasting her time and energy invested thus far if she chose not to respond. The only company that did not ask her these gender-specific questions was an American company in China. Although gender discrimination is forbidden by law, most companies in China ask about women's marriage status and family planning (but not men's) to eliminate young women who might take maternity leave. Even though it was not a pleasant interview process for my friend, she still had greater opportunities as a single woman compared to newly married women without children. One of her friends was recently married, but this new marriage status made her less desirable in the job market; married but childless women are the lowest tier of this food chain. Moreover, moving to Canada allows not only women but also the LGBTQIA+ to live an honest life in a safer and more supportive environment. Under increasing pressure, queer organizations and activities ceased to exist about the same time as the Chinese government closed down WeChat accounts discussing queer issues in 2021 (Liang, 2023). Many participants who are identified as sexual minorities also admitted that their sexual orientations and gender identities are important reasons

motivating them to settle in Canada. However, regardless of their gender and sexual identity, CIS living in Canada and accepting Western lifestyles and values may lead to rejection by their home country.

Along with the growing tension between China and the US during and after the pandemic, as shown in the last chapter of the media war, Chinese and Western media are suggested to create unfavourable and biased representations of each other. After living in Canada, consuming content from both Chinese and Western media, and socializing with Chinese and non-Chinese peers, CIS in this study indicated their acceptance of at least some ideologies of Western society, which made them different from the nationalist or sometimes populist Chinese. In the introduction of the last chapter, I mentioned that people who enjoy Western entertainment products can be unwelcome in China. Many phrases are invented to describe those who favour Western lifestyle or ideologies, such as "muyang quan (慕洋犬 or West-loving dog)" and "banana (香蕉人)." "Muyang quan" pronounces exactly the same as "shepherd dog (牧羊犬)" in Chinese, but it is written as "West-loving dog" as it is used to describe those who admire Western culture and "betray" their country for individual enjoyment (Wangshangsiwei, 2022). "Banana," which is one of the key topics of this chapter, is also weaponized to refer to Chinese people who grew up in the West and gave up their Chinese heritage, especially the Chinese language. Some participants mentioned that their family had warned them to "not become a banana" before they came to Canada. Both phrases demonstrate a hostile attitude towards the influence of Western culture and a determination to protect the authenticity and purity of Chinese culture with mainland China as the cultural centre. The emphasis on pure Chinese culture differs from the hybridity in the Chinese diaspora, where CIS and immigrants interact with other cultural and ethnic groups. Hence, the diversity of Canada and the diversified lifestyles of Chinese communities in Canada set different routes for CIS in comparison to the more nationalist settlement in mainland China.

Furthermore, feminist, queer and ethnic minorities are three different aspects of diversity that could be considered signs of Western political correctness and “White left” (political left wing) to some Chinese conservatives. Participant 15 commented that caring for the socially weak is a Western country’s way of showing their morality and superiority over other countries. Mainland China exhibits a form of homophobic nationalism that “uses nationalism to justify homophobia” (Wang, 2023, p. 143). As a result, LGBTQIA+ accounts and keywords are banned on Chinese social media platforms, and some local governments have introduced a “masculinity curriculum” in schools, aimed at ensuring “the survival and sustenance of the Chinese nation” (Wang, 2023, p. 144). As an example, the lesbian character in *Everything Everywhere All at Once* was also described as having a “Westernized lifestyle” in a movie review on one of the most influential Chinese media (Wang, 2023), suggesting a tendency to reject and other the queer community in China. The contrasting approaches to feminism and queer rights between China and Canada reveal a fundamental divergence in cultural values and political ideology. Consequently, for many CIS, their evolving attitudes toward feminism and queer culture in Canada represent a conscious departure from the ideological frameworks prevalent in China, becoming a core component of their new identity.

With the keyword diversity, this chapter focuses on themes of the Chinese diaspora and diversity. The previous two chapters demonstrate the challenges of racial discrimination and unfavourable representations of the Chinese in Western media that hinder CIS’s acculturation in Canada and identity negotiation as Chinese. Conversely, this chapter focuses on participants' understanding of and reactions to the diverse side of Canada in contrast to the nationalistic and collectivist home country. It studies the CIS’s attitude to not only the hybridity between Chinese and non-Chinese cultures but also their understanding of the identities and social statuses of women and sexual minorities. This chapter shows an integrated mode of Chinese identity for CIS as Canadian values of inclusivity and

individualism collide with conservative values. Most participants in this research demonstrated an acceptance of the inclusive social climate in Canada, particularly its diversity of ethnicity, gender, and sexual identities. Most of them, except Participants 7, Participant 9, Participant 18 and Participant 20, revealed different levels of integration of Western values and hybrid Chinese identity, in contrast to the essentialist Chinese identity articulated through nationalism; some CIS, like Participant 15 and Participant 17, even admitted a cosmopolitan mobile identity. In addition to the inclusive environment for ethnic and sexual minorities, the human-centred and individualistic values demonstrated through lifestyle, workplace, and COVID-19 policy are factors that attract participants to stay in Canada in the future. However, Participant 2, Participant 8, and many others still appreciated their Chinese political and cultural identity, and Participant 19 and others questioned the inclusivity and equity in Canada.

This chapter will start with a section on participants' perceptions of Canadian values and how they changed after studying in Canada. Most participants spoke highly of the diversified social environment because of its inclusivity towards ethnic minorities, policy and social support for sexual and gender minorities, as well as its tolerance for different lifestyles. Participants 6, Participant 7 and Participant 15 and many participants are influenced by the local culture, which makes them friendlier and more receptive to intercultural communication and diverse ideologies. Human rights protection and work-life balance are two other things that attract most participants, which shows their acceptance of the Canadian values that emphasize personal will and individuality. However, many participants also criticized certain Canadian values, and political correctness was one that attracted the most criticism. Participant 11's and Participant 15's answers criticized Canada's policy framework as inequitable, arguing it prioritizes refugee protection at the expense of its own citizens' welfare and disproportionately favors feminists. On the other hand, Participants 19 criticized

Canada for its ineffective diversity policy and elitism in immigration policy. The individualism in Canada is also suggested to lead to inefficiency in Canadian society. Lastly, Participants 16, Participant 17 and others compared Canadian and Chinese values, and they learnt to use critical thinking to evaluate these values to reveal their pros and cons.

The second section of this chapter answers the question, “What is the participants' perception of their identity among the Chinese diaspora groups in Canada?” This section is made of three parts: the concept of the “banana”, the hybrid identity of participants, and their connection with the diaspora. Firstly, most participants recognize that the term “banana” describes Chinese who accept Western education, speak Western languages, and follow Western values. As most people saw the need to defend Chinese heritage from the Western culture and cultivate pride in Chinese identity, showing their agreement with the rhetoric of Chinese nationalism, Participant 11 and Participant 13 also recognized the political intention of this phrase, which shows some openness for a hybrid Chinese identity. Although participants may dislike being called “banana”, Participants 7 and 20 admitted that she was influenced by Western culture in various ways. The second part of this section studies the hybrid lifestyle of participants. Most participants in this study chose an integrated lifestyle rather than separate or marginalized. These participants were at least somewhat affected by Western culture. Participants 1, 5 and 15 believed that intercultural communication can be critical to the development of Chinese culture and personal growth. They learned from their Canadian peers and work efficiently with non-Chinese students in school. Participant 10 even believed that one has to accept some Canadian values to stay in Canada. However, separated participants, such as Participants 18 and 20, suggested that their social circles are primarily made up of Chinese. Many also agreed that there are linguistic and cultural differences that separate them from local Canadians. Only Participant 16 marginalized herself from Chinese or non-Chinese social circles due to personal history. The last part of this section studies

participant's acceptance and adaptation to the Chinese diaspora in Canada. Most participants recognized the location-based or interest-based Chinese diasporic groups in Toronto, but more people felt disconnected from the diaspora than those who are connected. They either felt a strong sense of belonging to China or believed that only immigrants, rather than CIS, constitute the diaspora, thereby continuing to imagine themselves as Chinese travelers in a foreign land. However, Participants 15, 17 and 18 indicated a more advanced understanding and accepted a cosmopolitan identity as an international traveller.

The third section demonstrates how participants of different genders and sexualities understand the feminist and queer-friendly environment in Canada. Most participants, such as Participants 3, 6 and 9, found the social climate in Canada to be more supportive of women and the queer community. On the topic of women's experience in Canada, they discussed the more advanced feminism movement, education on feminism, positive media coverage, progressive activism, legal rights, support at work, and more respectful social norms. Likewise, they also talked about the support for the queer communities, from social norms to policy support, which allows the queer community to not only accept themselves but also develop their community and future family in Canada. In general, they believe that Canada is a safer environment for women and queer members. However, Participants 13 and 15 criticized feminism in Canada for insincerity and excessive propaganda, which their tendency of populist positions. There is also criticism about inadequate care and support, especially the remaining sexualization of women in commercials (Participant 16).

Similar to the reasons why participants came to Canada in Chapter 4, throughout this chapter, the discussion on their values and identity will include an analysis of the six major factors that motivate their settlement decisions in Canada, China or elsewhere. These factors are multiculturalism, feminism, lifestyle, career, COVID, and relationships. Participants 4, 12 and 13 wanted to stay in Canada for the diverse and welcoming environment where they feel

safe to be different, to express their sexuality freely, to be supported as women, and to learn from and interact with other cultures. Hence, multiculturalism and feminism are two key advantages of Canada. Moreover, Participants 4, 6 and 17 noted a contrast between the competitive learning and working environment in China and the abundant resources and welfare for each individual in Canada. The democracy and individualism of Canada are not the only lifestyle and career factors that participants identified as reasons to stay in Canada; they also noted the more humane experience during the global pandemic. However, Participant 18 wanted to move to the US or other countries because of the small job market and high taxation in Canada. Last but not least, family and social relationships are critical factors in CIS's settlement, too. While Participants 7 and 14 chose to stay in Canada for their partner, Participants 8 and 19 considered moving back to China for their parents.

7.1. Canadian Values

Most participants show an integration mode of acculturation as they not only accept the inclusive environment and the individualistic and human-centred lifestyle but also maintain attitudes of collectivism and national pride for being Chinese. Informants enjoy many aspects of the Canadian lifestyle, including the welcoming environment for racial and gender minorities, the emphasis on life quality and work-life balance, and the appreciation of individual needs. Along with the participants' list of favourite media content, this section will also illustrate their personal growth to become more open to cultural and ideological differences and enjoy a less competitive Canadian life. However, Participant 5, Participant 15, and others pointed out parts of the diversified ideologies they disliked. These topics include anti-abortion, political correctness, and inefficiency.

7.1.1. Inclusivity

Multiculturalism. Among the various values discussed in the interviews, many participants appreciated multiculturalism and diversity in Canada, which includes support for

ethnic, gender and sexual minorities, and others. Unlike some other Western countries and China, some participants believed that Canada has a multicultural environment where people are encouraged to cultivate their ethnic culture and achieve true integration, as Canada is also adapting to the Chinese community. Compared to her experiences studying in the UK, Participant 1 confessed that,

> I think in Canada, especially for Chinese and Chinese Americans, our Chinese communities are relatively large, so you can actually preserve the independence of your culture in this community. Someone told me that you can live in Markham without speaking English for the rest of your life.

This example supports Mark Hayward's (2019) proposal for an ethnic common place where Canadian racial minorities can gather and foster their cultural community. Her example of Markham, Toronto, demonstrates the adaptation of Chinese immigrants in Canada and the formation of an independent cultural community that cultivates the continuation of Chinese culture. Moreover, Participant 19 suggested that the multiculturalism of Canada can be seen from the policies that support Aboriginal communities: "The Indigenous people have their own culture, and you rarely see other people rejecting and denigrating them. Canada has always encouraged Indigenous people to express themselves, such as through dances." Similar to the example of Participant 1, both of them believed that minorities are encouraged to develop and celebrate their culture and differences in Canada. Their answers show a disconnection with the Canadian history of colonization and the cultural assimilation policy in attempting to erase Indigenous culture, such as the Canadian Indian residential school system. These participants saw intercultural environment in Canada as a tolerant and welcoming ground for true integration. These opinions, however, disregard the colonial and discriminatory histories of Canada.

The way participants describe the multicultural environment of Canada aligns with the two-way process of social integration. According to Wessendorf and Phillimore (2019), a two-way process of social integration only happens when migrants and the cultural majority both change and adapt to each other. Many participants named Chinese news accounts on WeChat as important sources of information, not to mention RedNote, Weibo, and other Chinese social media. As discussed in previous chapters, not only do Superlife, 51.ca and other WeChat accounts provide local news updates in Chinese during the pandemic, but CIS also share their experiences in Canada, socialize, and learn about how to react to racism from Chinese social media. The Chinese ethnic media in Canada aligns with the ethnic media infrastructure that grants autonomy to minorities (Hayward, 2019).

Many participants agree that Canadian society cultivates a tolerant environment that encourages people of different communities to live in peace. Both Participant 2 and Participant 6 discussed the coexistence of various ethnic groups in Canada, and Participant 6 talked about how people of colour work together in school. In a similar fashion, Participant 20 argued:

> I agree with the inclusivity of multiculturalism. Because our family is tolerant and believes that all kinds of ideas and cultures in the world are meaningful. It would be great to create an environment where everyone can live in harmony regardless of race and nationality.

Participants enjoyed the social surroundings of Canada not only because Chinese culture is allowed to grow here but also because they were exposed to different cultural groups and lived with them peacefully. This multicultural environment is not only experienced in reality, but some participants also prefer media content that celebrates diversity. Some informants enjoy intercultural media content that records content creators travelling and encountering other cultures. Participant 7 suggested two examples: Blondie in China and Hezhimeng (和之

梦). These are Australian and Japanese producers, respectively, who visit China to make content on Chinese cuisine cultures and social issues. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Participant 7 spoke highly of the video game *Death Stranding* because it promotes cultural inclusivity as the core message of its storyline, which changed the way he sees the world. The interview record and recommended media accounts demonstrate that informants agree with the Canadian multicultural environment for its intercultural engagement and harmonious coexistence of different ethnic and cultural groups.

Inadequate democracy. On the contrary, some participants criticized Canada because it did not meet their expectations of a diverse and democratic country. In Chapter 5, I discussed the racial discrimination participants have encountered in Canada, such as online harassment in video games and verbal insults from strangers. When informants were asked about their impression of Canadian values, some suggested that Canada is not as diverse and just as they thought. In addition to participants who shared their personal experiences of being discriminated against, Participant 16 and Participant 9 focused on the inadequate resources and measures in helping the Indigenous communities. Participant 16 argued,

> I feel like what is happening now is more performance than actual actions. I think what is happening is not quite enough. I believe there are some issues with minorities in general. However, I think in the case of the Indigenous community, it has to be taken into consideration that they have to deal with generational trauma.

Her response draws attention to the insufficient steps taken in the reconciliation process, which serve as an excuse for not providing for the needs of the Indigenous people. Likewise, Participant 9 conducted research on the contemporary life of the Indigenous people for an assignment, and she argued: “They face several forms of discrimination, and it is even hard for them to obtain enough water. It appears they are taken care of at first glance, but they are not.” Participant 9 highlighted the lack of basic resources for life support for some

Indigenous communities, which demonstrates the severity of the racial inequality in Canada. They agreed that the reconciliation campaigns create an impression that Canada is providing Indigenous people with the respect they deserve, but more action still needs to be taken.

Along with the attention on the Indigenous community, other critiques contend with the unjust or even elitist Canadian policies. These participants questioned the democracy in Canada because it could not achieve real equality. Participant 10 said,

> I believe that democracy in Canada has not been achieved. Their democracy seems to me more of a political tool or a way to appease the majority. I do believe that Canada is a highly inclusive nation. The Canadian Charter also says that it is our responsibility as the majority to look out for the feelings of the minority. Conversely, it appears that their democracy has not been effectively implemented in terms of attending to the feelings of the marginalized minority.

This response implies that the majority rule in political decision-making renders marginalized minorities less influential in these decisions. Similar to Participant 16 and Participant 9's comments on the political show of the reconciliation, Participant 10 also pinpointed the gap between a democratic ideal and the lack of real influence by minorities. By the same token, Participant 19 used elitism to describe the immigration policy in Canada because people spend decades if they want to immigrate to Canada and only the most educated have a chance to gain Permanent Residency. She recalled that a friend who performed excellently in university moved to a marginalized province because he wanted to apply for immigration. This is her example of the harsh immigration rules and the reason why she finds Toronto a less desirable settlement option. She said, "It is common for every country to set standards, but it should not be the rule of Canada that claims to be inclusive." While Participant 19 spoke for those who have less education or financial resources, Participant 16, Participant 10, and Participant 9 revealed the performativity of the democracy of Canada.

Analysis of Contradiction. Despite most participants recognizing the anti-Chinese hate crimes, systemic racism and discrimination, many of them still saw Canada as a multicultural environment that encourages them to be who they are and learn to accommodate them. This cognitive gap between the awareness of structural inequality and the multiculturalism impression can be the result of their limited perceptions, the comparison with other countries and the complexity of diversity in Canada. Firstly, most participants lived around the urban area of Toronto and spent a tremendous proportion of time on or near the university campus. In Chapter 5, their encounters with racists mostly remain verbal, and one informant believes that the campus is a safer space for them. Additionally, most participants admit that they had pleasant experiences socializing with host nationals in Chapter 6. Most participants note Markham, Chinatown, and other areas as physical manifestations of the Chinese diaspora, showing their familiarity with the Chinese communities in Toronto. The privileged and filtered life in the most internationalized city in Canada could expose them to more friendly Canadians and a city that has been home to many Chinese populations. This means that most informants in Toronto lived in a highly multicultural environment which may limit acts of racial injustice.

Moreover, this perception of multiculturalism can be a result of the comparison between Canada and other countries, especially China and the US. Many mentioned in Chapter 4 that they selected Canada as the destination of their overseas education because of its good reputation of being a friendly cultural environment in contrast to the US. Likewise, participants mostly came from China, where foreign visitors are not common, and Han Chinese are the majority of the society. The comparison between Canada with China or other Western countries could make Canada stand out as an inclusive and multicultural land. Last but not least, given the diversity of Canada, it is not surprising that opinions and attitudes on ethnic minorities vary widely, even contradicting one another. In addition to Canada's

multicultural narrative and large immigrant population, the supportive atmosphere that participants encountered is just as genuine as the ongoing institutional prejudice. Even if the pandemic exposes the exclusion hidden under the multicultural surface (Mackey, 1998; Bannerji, 2000; Hayward, 2019), many people in Canada believe in and support multiculturalism, particularly in universities and around cities like Toronto, as reported by informants.

Gender Equality. Aside from the tolerance for Chinese communities and cultural diversity, many participants expressed their support for sexual minorities. In comparison to their experiences in China, most participants recognized that Canada has a fairer environment for women and the queer community. Even though Participant 5 argued that her gay friends in China are very open about their sexuality and came out to their parents with little hassle, she also admitted that Canada still has a more tolerant environment for them. Participant 6 agreed and added that Pride Month and other queer activities show the openness of Toronto and Canada, but "Chinese people feel sexuality is not something that should be openly discussed." Most informants shared this acknowledgement that the queer community is freer and more protected in Canada. Likewise, many participants appreciated the values of gender equality in Canada. Participant 2 remarked:

> I remember a discussion a few years ago. A girl was raped, and the local police chief gave a speech: You do not want to be raped and do not dress like a slut. There was a protest saying that she was raped, and it had nothing to do with what she wore. What you should restrict is the behaviour of these rapists, not shame all girls. Sometimes, there is similar news in China, and people will still blame the girls first.

With this comparison, she highlighted the different social attitudes shaped by the influence of feminism in China and the West. Participant 8 added that even though she found some activists overly extreme, she believed that feminism in Canada is heading in a better direction

than China. These participants recognized the different stages of the feminist movement in China and Canada, and Canada has a more friendly environment for women. The discussion of participants' acceptance and criticism of feminism will be further specified in Section 7.3 of this chapter. However, a few participants point out the ideological conflicts. Participant 14 and Participant 12 suggested that only young and more progressive people can enjoy their lives here. In contrast, those who are more conservative may have difficulties adjusting to the diversity in Canada. The ideological conflicts can be seen in the later section on participants' criticism of Canadian values. Along with the factors of gender, sexuality and ethnicity, participants like Canada because it is more tolerant of differences due to its multiculturalism.

Tolerance to Differences. Some participants felt like outsiders in China due to their age, values or appearance, but they are less marginalized in Canada. As the multicultural environment in Canada allows people to celebrate their unique cultural heritage, informants believe that Canadians are more open to differences. In comparison to China, Participant 9 suggested that "even if I rant about capitalism online, Canadians will not care because they are tolerant of different opinions." While Participant 9 emphasized the ideological tolerance of Canadians, Participant 5 shared her anxiety about age:

> I think Canada accepts everyone equally, and it will also accept someone like me who is older and wants to study for a second undergraduate degree. I can study in China, but I will face much pressure. For example, people will definitely ask why you came to study. Especially for women, if you are going to college at the age of 24 or 25, people will question you: Why are you still studying at such an old age? Why don't you get married?

These participants agreed on the lack of a Canadian expectation of conformity in contrast to China. Participant 5 pinpointed the social norms in China to follow a more rigid life journey of completing university, finding a job and getting married, especially for women. Instead,

both participants felt that people were allowed to do things differently in Canada or even challenge the mainstream values. Two participants mentioned that they believe Toronto would be a suitable place for them to settle after graduation because of its diversity and tolerance. Participant 4 felt that his idealist thoughts are heard and more accepted in Canada compared to China. In addition, Participant 16 mentioned that she was bullied in China for her albinism features, but she feels safe and integrated into the crowd now that she is in Canada. Multiculturalism and support for diversity make Canada an inclusive environment, so informants who were marginalized in China feel more tolerant of being different and of being who they are. The inclusive environment also influences the informants' behaviour around others.

Along with the inclusivity of Canada, many participants believed that Canadians are more friendly than others, and they learnt to be friendly and inclusive as well. One of the participants associated inclusivity with the friendliness of Canadians:

> Participant 15: I really enjoy how often individuals in Canada say "thank you" and "sorry," which is a sign of the country's inclusivity. By employing these two words, you may sometimes prevent disputes. They do not consider apologizing or showing respect to be demeaning actions. In contrast, I can see that saying "thank you" is not something that people in China like doing.

By associating courtesy with inclusivity, this informant saw the courtesy of Canadians as a secret to the harmonious intercultural communication here. Participants 6 and 13 also mentioned examples of holding doors for someone behind them and not honking on the street as proof of Canadian courtesy. As a result, Participant 15 believed that he is more willing to help others and even say compliments to strangers on the street. Aside from the pragmatic purpose of avoiding conflicts, participants generally learned to consider the feelings and needs of others, which can be seen as a further influence of the inclusive culture in Canada.

Impacts on CIS. Several informants concurred that coming to Canada has made them more accepting of other people; some learnt to value other cultures, some learned to tolerate contradictory beliefs, and more of them learned to empathize with others. Compared to her experience in the UK, Participant 1 suggested that Toronto is more international and allows her to adapt to Western society in a better way. She believed that the multicultural environment in Toronto is better than living in a small English town and that it will help her to understand and adapt to Western culture. Likewise, Participant 5 became less discriminative and more accepting of other ethnicities.

> Participant 5: I think it was mainly because of my roommate that I started to accept chatting with Black people and making friends with Black people. After I found out that she is a nice person, I realized that not all Black people are as bad as some stereotypical news reports.

In Chapter 5, many participants show an inadequate understanding of racism due to their upbringing in China. Similar to the description of cosmopolitans who have moral and cultural openness for other cultures (Sobré-Denton & Bardhan, 2013), these informants extended the discussion of the racial awareness of participants and demonstrate the positive influences of intercultural communication in Canada on the cultural openness of international students.

The inclusivity of Canada grants people access to intercultural lifestyles and diverse options for cultural experiences. Along with the tolerant environment for Chinese immigrants due to multiculturalism, certain individuals report favourable encounters with intercultural communication in Canada. As Participant 11 built friendships with Indian peers in the business school, he remarked,

> According to my Indian acquaintances, the public opinion in their nation has made their relationship with China worse. They do not view Chinese people as their

> enemies while they reside in Canada. Quite the other; they believe that their values are, for the most part, shared by the Chinese.

Similar to his experience socializing and building connections across cultures, Participant 15 also suggested that he enjoys interactions with Arabic, African, European, and South American communities, which are experiences he would never have in China. These illustrations demonstrate how students who were taught cosmopolitan principles of international openness find interest in Canada's multiculturalism. Cosmopolitan education also enables the participants to be more flexible with their settlement decisions compared to the binary of China or Canada, so their desire for cultural diversity may drive them to explore the US (Participant 18) or move between Canada and China (Participant 15). Participant 18 enjoyed the lifestyle of an international traveller, and she states, “I want to travel to other countries and live as an immigrant. I want to see how people in other countries live.” As this answer also shows a desire for intercultural communication, cultural diversity can be a reason for participants to settle outside of China or at least travel between China and Canada.

Furthermore, some participants gradually learnt to accept and tolerate different values as they were exposed to the different ways of life in Canada. Considering the more conservative Chinese upbringing, Participant 7 admitted that he thought of things as either black or white: “I thought gay people were disgusting, and I thought marijuana users were purely bad guys. However, now I do not care about them anymore as I become more tolerant”. As he engages with others more in Canada, he transitions from a binary perspective of the world as good and evil to acceptance of many lifestyles. This change aligns with the result of cosmopolitan education and demonstrates a cosmopolitan attitude to see the world as a space of differences (Tarrant et al., 2014). Similarly, Participant 11 suggested,

> I felt I had a really strong identity as a Chinese when I first moved to Canada. I was unable to accept criticism from others. I realized now that there was no point in

arguing. You cannot wake a person who pretends to be asleep. I gave up disputing with them, even if I still disagreed with their hatred and prejudice toward China.

This statement confirms existing knowledge on cosmopolitanism: cosmopolitans arise from diverse environments and cross-cultural exchanges (Tarrant et al., 2014). Although Participant 11 had a more pessimistic attitude in giving up his argument and attempts to convince others, he accepts the existence of conflicting perspectives in a diversified environment. Other participants showed the cosmopolitan factor, humanity and concern for all, through their empathy for others.

In addition to tolerating people who are different from them, some participants learnt to think from other's perspectives and sympathize with their positions. Many informants demonstrated their ability to sympathize with social minorities as a result of their journey in Canada. Participant 10 mentioned that when he sees people throwing tantrums on the street, he realizes that he used to have an arrogant perspective in judging them. Instead, he would try to understand their difficulties now. While other informants describe Canada as a more inclusive space for them to be different, this informant showcases the impact of that inclusivity on how he behaves. Participant 8 also pointed out the influence of Canadian education on her identity: "Everyone is different. If you reject diversity, then if one day you become a minority, then others will exclude you." She was not the only one who could put herself in someone else's shoes, but Participant 19 also suggested that she learnt to understand people rather than insist on her existing beliefs and aggravate the conflicts. These participants indicate the ability to critically reflect on their own beliefs and show empathy to others, which are qualities of cosmopolitans (Tarrant et al., 2014). Their changes could also relate to their experiences as racial minorities in Canada, which teaches them to be considerate of others who are also marginalized.

7.1.2. Lifestyle

Social Activism. Continuing the discussion of inclusivity for cultural, gender, and other minorities, a few participants highlighted the emphasis on social equity in Canada. Participants illustrated several different factors related to the topic of social justice, including social activism and equal rights. Participant 14 recalled several protests in downtown Toronto, such as the protest organized by truck drivers during the pandemic and the Ukraine protest against Russia. She suggested: "At least they are speaking for their interests, and even if there are conflicts, at least these issues are discussed. I think most topics can be discussed." In her observations, Canadian citizens can participate in social debates and raise awareness for minority communities who need help. This support for social activism is different from the theories that Chinese students are disinterested in politics and see activism as only a venting method (Ji & Chen, 2022; J. Yu, 2022).

The conversation on the Canadian way of life also touches on social benefits. Participant 12 emphasized the social benefits in Canada and uses the term "communism" to describe it. He saw the benefits for low-income citizens and free health insurance as features of the ideal communist society and equal rights for every citizen. In like manner, Participant 15 preferred Canada because of the Canadian health care system. He proposed that it is more affordable to see a doctor here than in China. These participants favoured Canadian policies because of the greater rewards and the just distribution of resources that allow people of different social classes to have their voices heard and live a decent life. The use of "communism" shows their perception of Canada as a country with great social welfare and equity, even though their home country, China, is a socialist country. Along with their critiques on the utilitarianism and competition in China and the injustice in other Western countries, the word choice, "communism," reflects their appreciation of the social equity and

fair distribution of resources in Canada. Along with equity, work ethics was also one of the most discussed topics.

Work-life balance is one of the most talked-about features of the Canadian way of life, not only in this study but also in my previous research on the identity negotiation of CIS across Canada (Zhao & Ebanda de B'beri, 2022). Among these two research studies, participants share the preference for a less competitive work environment and clear boundaries between work and personal life. On the one hand, Participant 12 and Participant 13 stressed the overtime culture in China and the exploitation of labour.

> Many conveniences in China are based on the oppression of people, treating people as a resource. For example, the recent term "human mine (renkuang 人矿)" sees people as resources to create collective convenience and efficiency.…… The boss treats his coworkers or subordinates as a resource, using them when needed and discarding them when not needed. It is very similar to colonization.

The key term "human mine" emphasizes the overwhelming work culture and its consumption of personal life by Chinese companies. The Chinese market is well-known for its 996 work schedule, in which employees work from 9 am to 9 pm, six days each week. (Siying, 2021). Even though the Supreme Court makes it illegal to work over 72 hours a week, many industries continue this unethical culture (Siying, 2021). This toxic work ethic influences how people are treated in the workplace. Participant 13 compared the different management styles in Canada and China: Managers may consider subordinates' career development and assign tasks accordingly in Canada, whereas people are expected to finish tasks regardless of the quality in China. Compared to the toxic competition in the workplace and the unhealthy management style, participants prefer Canada, where their rights are protected. On the other hand, participants agree that Chinese people grew up in a more competitive environment and internalized the pressure. Participant 13 mentioned, "In China, we usually think that school or

work is the most important thing, so our lives may be put in second place." As he pinpoints the competitive lifestyle in China, Participant 2 added that she observed that people in Canada are in university not only for education but also for experiences of connections, school activities and more. Consequently, Participant 2 and many other CIS learned to appreciate their leisure time and enjoy the journey instead of spending all their time on study or work.

Under the influence of their education in Canada, many participants learn to take care of themselves while they work towards their goals. Compared to the more rigorous and tough management style in the Chinese education system, students believe that Canadian instructors are more considerate of their health and personal growth. Participant 20 suggested that she was not confident due to her ill performance in certain subjects in China, but Canadian instructors pay attention to their students' mental health rather than simply their grades. Both Participant 19 and Participant 20 observed the contrast between the strict educators in China and the encouraging educators in Canada, but they also appreciated the focus on personal happiness in Canada. Under these conditions, Participant 10 and others admitted that they learnt to adjust their pace and work at a reasonable workload because "as long as I tried my best, as long as I had no regret, I will be fine." After their education in Canada, these participants recognized utilitarianism from their upbringing in China. They transitioned to a more balanced work ethic so they could enjoy life and pursue their objectives at the same time.

The less stressful, less regulated, and less polluted environment in Canada is so appreciated by many students that they would consider staying in Canada. Firstly, compared to the competitive academic and work environment, Canada has a calmer pace of living. While Participant 19 and Participant 16 shared the care for mental health as an important

reason for them to like Canada, Participant 4 preferred Canada because she encountered less judgements and social expectations.

> Participant 4: First of all, I'm at ease here because I feel less gazed at. Friends and society are the main sources of the gaze, which is very intense in China. You have to waste a lot of energy debating ideologies with others. Here, there are too few people, and no one pays attention to you.

The social environment in Canada creates less pressure for this participant than the social and peer pressure in China. Participant 4 also said that he could not afford to buy a house in China, but it would be possible with the benefits for new immigrants in Canada to do so. This answer is related to the resources in Canada; Canada has a more human-centred environment and less competition, which is why many CIS feel less stressed. This comfortable social environment is accompanied by the less polluted natural environment, which is the second key qualities about Canadian life. At least three participants expressed their love for the views in Canada and the smaller population, which enables them to enjoy the environment with less competition or disturbance. Combined with work ethics, less competition, and the "communist" description, these informants understand Canada as a country with great social welfare and reduced competition and social stress.

7.1.3. Individualism

Individualistic Work Culture. The concept of individualism and collectivism appeared in several ways during the interview, and many participants preferred individualism in Canada over collectivism in China. Apart from the conversation over work ethics in Canada, some participants believed that individualism is behind the Canadian work culture and motivates people to fight for their benefits and rights. Participant 13 and Participant 17 both mentioned that individualism appears in the form of work distribution.

> Participant 13: To me, Canada has a very individualistic culture. If I completed my job this week, I had the entire week to myself. I do not have to consider if I should contribute more to the community since I have finished the tasks that I was assigned.
>
> Participant 17: In China, you are expected to take the sentiments of the group into account when working or studying in a group. Everyone prioritizes finishing the group's responsibilities, and overtime is the norm in China. Everyone will do it even if nobody is happy. If anything is outside the scope and time of my employment in Canada, people usually refuse to work on it and express their intent more bluntly.

Both informants focus on individual responsibilities at work and the freedom to refuse overtime. While Participant 13 used individualism to describe the individualized tasks at work, Participant 17 added the element of group work and sacrifice of personal needs to accommodate for the group responsibility. The CIS in this research believe that the Canadian workplace protects individual rights and respects employee's time.

Outside of the workplace, participants find individual willingness is less interfered with in Canada by social norms and group activities. Participant 10 and Participant 20 recalled the group activities when they were younger. They remarked that Chinese schools require students to go hiking, do morning exercise, watch the flag-raising ceremony and attend the pep rally before the university entrance examination. During these activities, personal willingness is rarely taken into consideration, whereas Canadian schools have no mandatory activities as such. What is more, Participant 8 added that the social norms would also require you to consider other people's feelings:

> In Canada, you only have to look after yourself; back home, you have to think about other people. Most likely, your loved ones might believe that your success is related to them or that your failure embarrasses them.

These participants felt that they have to work hard in China not only for themselves but also for people who are related to them. Unlike the mandatory group activities, social norms morally constrain one's activities with mental stress. Compared to the compulsory team building and expectations of others that make up Chinese collective culture, participants felt free to act based on their will in Canada.

Furthermore, the individualistic education and work environment are important to informants when they consider their future in Canada. Like the preference for less competition in Canada, many participants found the job market in Canada less competitive and more rewarding than in China. As Participant 5 found more opportunities in Canada as a female graduate who is a few years older than her peers. Even without these special circumstances, some participants prefer to work in Canada.

> Participant 17: In terms of natural resources as well as learning resources, Canada has an advantage over China. Individuals in Canada may receive somewhat more resources on average than in China, and the level of competition is marginally lower.

Many students had similar conclusions after talking to their friends and people who worked in Canada and China. Learning from their experiences, these students also concluded that working in Canada is more rewarding than in China. Participant 15 spoke with a friend who graduated from the US and worked in Beijing for seven years. That friend suggested that, even if he is an entrepreneur who was successful enough to buy a car and real estate, his life quality in China was not ideal, so he moved to Toronto. Participants 12 and 17 also believed that they would live an easier life with a decent salary and less work pressure in Canada. Moreover, a participant chose Canada for the academic resources and the potential academic career in Canada. Participant 1 suggested that her research interest is in Canada, which is why she thought about going back to Canada once she finishes her program in China.

> Participant 1: My goal is to learn more about Canada's past, present, and future and promote them in China. As far as I know, China has conducted insufficient and superficial studies on Canada. Many instructors have conducted studies, but it is rudimentary because of their inadequate proficiency in English.

This informant revealed the limited research on Canada from a Chinese perspective, so there still could be more research to be done and more resources for Chinese researchers and employees in Canada.

Nevertheless, career and Canadian policies are reasons for participants to choose the US over Canada as well. Some participants complained about the high taxation and limited income in Canada compared to the US. Participant 18 argued,

> I have never been to the US, and I am not sure if I should settle there, but I want to live and work there for a while. The American wage is double what it is here. My classmate who went there told me about this. Opportunities for advancement and growth are greater there, whereas there are fewer opportunities, lower salaries, more taxes, and intense competition in Canada.

Participant 1 also added that the high-income tax is a limit on the development of the economy and a restriction on young people's careers and motivations for the future. Even though Canada is more comfortable and less competitive than China for some participants, these two participants highlighted the limitations of the Canadian economy and show other non-Chinese settlement options. Young people would benefit more financially from relocating to the US, where employment opportunities are greater and take-home pay is higher. Whether they choose to stay in Canada or move to the US, these options show participants' economic consideration for their career development and an appreciation for the individualistic work culture in North America.

Collectivism. Moreover, participants compare the patriotic culture in China and the multicultural culture in Canada as different ways of forming belongingness. Both Participant 11 and Participant 19 noticed the lack of patriotism education in Canada.

> Participant 19: In China, it seems like everyone has to love their country, and not loving their country is a moral defect. During my university studies in Canada, no class told me that I had to love Canada. In China, parents usually always give you all the good things; children eat the center of the watermelon, and parents can only eat the less sweat edge of a watermelon. It seems to be different in Canada.

Not only did this participant talk about patriotism, but her main concern was making sacrifices for other people, whether it be for their nation or their children. She believes that Chinese culture encourages people to value their family and nation more highly than themselves. Her argument is also consistent with previous studies that the ideology of the Chinese nation-state is equalized as the centre of Chinese national identity (Solé-Farràs, 2014). They agreed that the Chinese collective culture internalizes the national spirit as the inner voice and the driving value of citizens. Additionally, Participant 11 extended the notion that patriotism is not taught in Canada. They believed that collectiveness and belongingness to Canada are formed through Canada's inclusivity: Canada is beloved because people found a second chance and acceptance here. What is more, one participant had a unique argument to describe China as individualistic and Canada as collectivist. Participant 15 understood these two concepts from their promotional materials: Chinese media emphasizes individual characters, such as Lei Feng (雷锋)[1], and expects people to learn from these heroes who sacrifice for others; Canadian media never emphasizes any individual idol, but it values each group of ethnic communities or queer communities. Although this participant had a unique

[1] Lei Feng was a soldier in the People's Liberation Army and a role model in the Chinese Communist Party's nationalist pedagogy. He is known for his selfless acts and contributions to the people.

take on what individualism and collectivism mean, his arguments agreed with other participants that Chinese collectivism emphasizes specific role models. However, Canadian individualism avoids heroic figures and allows each individual to be represented and respected. Through the topic of patriotism and the relationship between groups and individuals, these participants analyzed the different formations of national identity in China and Canada.

Individual Goals. Under the influence of individualism in Canada, some participants try to live their lives regardless of the mainstream values. Participant 5 tried to contest her family's expectation for her to get married.

> You can accomplish anything you want at any age; I remind my mother all the time. However, they disagree with that. They believe that I must return home and get married. They told me I could return to Toronto after being married, but I am now required to do so. They believe that marriage is necessary at my age. However, there is no expected age for getting married in Toronto.

Instead of following the social and familial expectations, Participant 5 learned to challenge the traditional values and live her own life. Furthermore, another student considered the contrast between individualism and collectivism on a macro level. Participant 4 suggested,

> After coming here and learning about the history of Western philosophy, I pay more attention to the individual. Western philosophy emphasizes the individual. What is my value? How do I get along with the world? I think the Chinese Marxists generalize the concept of the collective and generalize it to how our nation and country get along with the world. In China, there are more grand narratives, while here, there are more existentialist ideas about how individuals get along with the world.

Instead of focusing on the grand narratives of national existence and conflicts between countries, the individualized narratives in Canada taught him to think for himself and

reconsider what he could do with his life. From a sociological and philosophical standpoint, these informants agree on the shift to put their objectives ahead of the collective ones.

Disadvantages. Nevertheless, not every participant fully agreed with the contrast between Chinese collectivism and Canadian individualism above, and some also critically reflected on the weakness of individualism. Although Participant 10 criticized the stress of collectivism in China, he also points out the downside of individualism in Canada. He suggests, "I think it would be hard for me to fit in if people did not work together. I find this to be quite conflicting." Participant 18 agreed with him by pinpointing the lack of social connections in Canada due to the emphasis on individual achievement and personal feelings. They see the loss of belongingness to a community and social circle as the cost of individualism. What is more, Participant 18 also believed that, unlike Canada, China emphasizes individual sacrifice for the collective good. However, she also believed that collectivism is only taught by schools, but most people plan for their individual future instead of the collective honour. This showcases the complexity of the coexistence of individualism and collectivism in modern China.

The influence of collectivism can be seen in their reliance on social and family relationships as one of the factors for their settlement after graduation. Of the five participants who mentioned this factor in terms of their future settlement in Canada, three participants wanted to return to China for their parents, and two participants wanted to stay in Canada because of their life partner. Participant 14 and Participant 7 suggested they are planning for their future life in Canada because their boyfriend or girlfriend is Canadian. On the contrary, Participant 19 suggested,

> Canadian immigration policy favours elites. I am not an elite, though. It will take me ten years, maybe even longer, to obtain a permanent residency. I have to support my

> parents in moving here after I become a permanent resident. How am I going to afford it? I believe that going back to China is preferable.

Likewise, Participant 8 wanted to go back to China because her parents prefer to stay in China; Participant 2 worried that special circumstances like the pandemic will happen again, and she will not be able to see her family in China. Family connections in China are a major factor in these participants' choice of Canada. These answers reveal that family values are still influential in the settlement decision of these CIS, but some may choose to stay in Canada if they have developed future family plans with their partners. Neither choosing Canada nor China, the collectivist family values remain an important part of their identity.

7.1.5. Critical Thinking

Like the responses to news material in Chapter 6, many participants had both complimented and criticized Canada, which shows their enhanced critical thinking skills as a personal change in Canada. While a few participants admitted that they learned to compare Canada and China to reflect on the pros and cons of both cultures, some participants also suggested that Canadian education teaches them to implement critical thinking. Specifically, Participant 17 criticized multiculturalism for being a diversity quota rather than a just and equitable system. However, he also suggested that multiculturalism in Canada promotes a friendly environment of coexistence, signifying a positive direction for social development. Similarly, Participant 16 evaluated the benefits and shortages of individualistic values in Canada. In fact, many participants in this chapter reflected on their feelings about Canada from multiple perspectives, which showcases their comprehensive perceptions and reflexivity. Many scholars emphasized reflexivity as a cosmopolitan trait and a capacity to weigh opposing viewpoints while being able to adjust in the face of conflict (Sobré-Denton & Bardhan, 2013). Some participants suggested that the multicultural environment and the wide access to different information in Canada motivate them to think independently and

reflexively. Participant 13 emphasized Canada's free public sphere as a valuable educational setting for fostering critical thinking. Participant 3 and Participant 8 also revealed that the multicultural environment encourages them to question arbitrary conclusions and compare different perspectives. These responses indicate that critical thinking and reflexivity are cosmopolitan qualities that students learn through intercultural communication and transnational education, especially in the diversified Canadian environment. As people live in this diverse environment with endless options for integration or separation, this next section will focus on the reformation of Chinese identities.

7.2. Hybrid Chinese Identity

During the interview, there are three parts related to the formation of Chinese identity in Canada. The first part analyzes their social circles to understand the level of their social integration; the second part asks participants to share their perception of the “banana” (xiangjiaoren); and the last part continues to decipher their understanding of the Chinese diaspora and their relationship with it.

7.2.1. Social Connections

As shown in the section above on Canadian values, many participants value the multicultural environment and opportunities to engage with different cultural communities in comparison to China or other Western countries. This section demonstrates that most participants have an integrated social circle, varying from a few non-Chinese friends to being surrounded by non-Chinese. However, even Participants 5 and 18 who enjoyed the company of non-Chinese peers admitted the cultural differences and other obstacles to integration, not to mention that Participant 16 felt marginalized from both Chinese and Canadian social life. The coexistence of preference for Chinese friends and desire for intercultural communication shows an integrated mode of being Chinese in Canada.

Preference for Chinese Friends. Not only do participants who are separate from Canadian culture prefer their Chinese friends, but most students in this study prefer Chinese friends for shared language and cultural background. Participant 6 noted that "although people behave in a friendly manner, it can be difficult to assimilate into their circle." Participants 9 and 18 added that it feels easier and faster to form friendships with Chinese people than with people from other cultures. As they agree that it is more comfortable to socialize with Chinese peers, others proposed the shared language as a critical factor in forming connections. Participant 15 quoted from the Philosopher Wittgenstein,

> Language can hasten the intimacy between people. Language shapes your thoughts, so you will undoubtedly be closer to Chinese people than to foreigners. I am not as close to some of my foreign friends as I am to my Chinese friends, for instance.

Participant 1 also recalled that it was difficult for her to express certain things in English, so she saw language as an obstacle as well. To these participants, language limits the depth and range of conversations and makes it harder for friendships to form across different linguistic groups. Considering the older generation of immigrants who barely spoke English, Participant 6 also suggested that it would be understandable for people to immigrate to Canada but separate from mainstream society. As her answer partially explains the formation of the Chinese diaspora, language, as suggested in Participant 15's answer, is closely connected with culture, which becomes the second obstacle.

When asked about their social connections, informants listed several examples of the cultural differences between Chinese and non-Chinese people. Most participants discussed their upbringing, popular culture, entertainment and other habits as examples of cultural differences. Participant 12, Participant 11, and Participant 16 talked about board games, tastes in food, and TV shows and films, which are three areas that they find difficult to negotiate with non-Chinese friends. Even if a non-Chinese friend shares the same hobby with them, it

is still harder to communicate with them than with Chinese friends because they grew up with different cultural products. Participant 18 stated,

> We can understand each other because we come from similar cultural backgrounds and the same trauma. People from other nations, for instance, most likely cannot understand the trauma of growing up with exam-focused education in China.

The pressure of competition and the shared childhood trauma can form a bond between survivors, which becomes a unique relationship that others can hardly replicate. Moreover, Participant 5 dated a Chinese student who grew up in Canada and found differences in their financial habits. She remarked, “I will pay for dinner today, and you can pay next time. What is the difference between dating and hanging out as friends if you split the bill on every date?” Even if they both speak Chinese, she recognized that social expectations are different in the dating culture in Canada, which led to the end of their relationship. Through their experiences of talking, playing, and dating people from other cultures, CIS in this research encountered cultural obstacles of different upbringing and social norms. However, most participants made friends from other cultures and experienced some changes in their identity.

Integrated Friend Circles. Aside from different levels of integration, people socialize with other cultures for various reasons: some believed that cultural development requires transcultural communication, some aimed to gain personal growth through cultural openness, and some disliked the habits of certain Chinese students, so they expand their friend circles. The first type of participants indicates support for the idea of cultural hybridity, which means people interact and learn from other cultures to challenge cultural purity and ethnic essentialism (Anthias, 2001). As a Chinese language teacher, Participant 1 argued,

> Chinese culture needs to be integrated with other cultures, and vice versa, if it is to become global. I observed a teacher using chopsticks in the office today while I was

> eating lunch. He was White. He said, "Yes, I use chopsticks because they are very convenient." In my opinion, this is a positive development.

This participant believed that the development and promotion of Chinese culture on the global stage requires localization and adaptation, which means Chinese and Canadians should learn from each other. Her advice agrees with the concept that integration into Canada happens when Canada is adapting to Chinese immigrants and when the integration becomes a two-way process (Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019). Not only did the Chinese community shape the local culture and bring Chinese food culture to Canada, but these participants also learned from them and redefine Chinese culture. Likewise, other participants demonstrated the reflexivity and critical thinking of a cosmopolitan (Sobré-Denton & Bardhan, 2013) as they compare Chinese culture and other cultures to rebuild their understanding of the world. Participant 4 remarked, “If another culture participates in the comparison, you will know where we are better than them and where we are not good enough and can learn from them.” These participants view Chinese culture as a dynamic phenomenon that spreads while absorbing local culture, as opposed to viewing it as a static entity or an inviolable canon.

Another group of participants chose to adapt to the local social life because they desired to extend their perspectives for personal growth. The answer from Participant 20 brilliantly represents this group.

> Participant 20: I think it will be beneficial to interact with other cultures because it is a way to broaden your horizons. When your horizons are broader, your thoughts about yourself or your future will be clearer, but of course, it may be more confusing.

Her response highlights the tensions that arise in cross-cultural interactions and demonstrates a viewpoint that is in line with the notion of cosmopolitanism. According to Waldron (2015), chaos is the default state of the world that fosters the emergence of cosmopolitan shared values. Even though most people experienced cultural shocks, they would learn from these

conflicts and see things more comprehensively. Other participants were more pragmatic about what they could learn from non-Chinese friends. When her neighbours offer to help her write essays, Participant 5 gained from their friendship, and Participant 15 discovered Persian cultural customs after being invited to a New Year's celebration. These participants took advantage of these intercultural opportunities to strengthen their knowledge and skills that they may not learn in other ways.

Aside from an active perspective, some participants believed that integration into the local social life is unavoidable if you want to settle in Canada. This is similar to the idea of hybrid and dynamic Chinese culture, but participants saw it in almost a passive way. Some participants mentioned that they make non-Chinese friends because they could not find Chinese students in their program. Chinese in Canada frequently find themselves in a stage, where they can only make friends who are not Chinese. Consequently, many believed that Chinese students should embrace and make changes to the local environment. Participant 10 shared,

> I might attempt to engage more with the local culture despite the fact that it might make me uncomfortable. To start with, this is a way for me to experience diversity, which is something I believe is crucial. It seems highly contradictory to me if someone moves to a diverse country like Canada but still rejects diversity and refuses to display their culture to others. I believe that if you are an immigrant, you should contribute to the diversity. You cannot simply live independently in your world. This will damage the reputation of the Chinese people.

Participant 7 agreed by adding, "You may not become them, but you have to understand how things work in Canada." They serve as examples of the connective borders of cosmopolitanism, which enable individuals to project themselves beyond cultural borders (Rumford, 2012). To contribute to the development of a diversified society in Canada and

enhance the public representation of the Chinese, they proposed that people need to embrace hybridity and participate in the local society. Their statement can also relate to the limited political power of the Chinese, discussed in Chapter 5. If Chinese people want to be represented in Canada and challenge anti-Chinese racism systematically, engagement across cultural communities is necessary. What is more, Participants 15 and 14 believed that people will gradually change as they live in Canada. Due to the surroundings in Canada and China, Chinese immigrants in Canada will eventually grow to be different from those who have lived in China for most of their lives.

Furthermore, a group of participants preferred to socialize with non-Chinese peers because they were tired of certain Chinese students' habits. Three participants criticized Chinese students in different ways:

> Participant 14: I think I get along well with my Vietnamese and Korean friends because I can speak bluntly to them, while Chinese people may require more effort [弯弯绕绕].
>
> Participant 10: If you team up with Chinese people, people may be very formalistic. Sometimes, when you are with Chinese people, there may be some friction, especially when there are people with strong personalities in the group. When you team up with people from different cultures, you distribute and finish the tasks with no unnecessary friction.
>
> Participant 4: I always feel that people of other ethnic groups are very energetic and polite. If you speak slowly, they will wait for you to finish speaking or correct your views…… They also treat you based on your strengths and are more rational and objective. If you contribute to the team, they will recognize you.

Participant 14 and Participant 10 both suggested that some Chinese people can be hard to work with, but it could be easier when people have to communicate more straightforwardly

across cultures. Considering that Participant 4 also preferred non-Chinese peers due to better work ethics, their answers imply that cross-cultural communication forces students to speak straightforwardly and behave kinder and more rationally. What is more, some participants responded that they do not care about ethnicity and instead chose non-Chinese friends based on their shared hobbies. Participant 13 recalled his experience, "While I acknowledge that there are differences between our lifestyles, I believe that finding common ground is the foundation of the entire process." He also pointed out the radical nationalism of some of his peers. He reported feeling alienated from peers who used derogatory terms for other cultural groups. This sense of distance, and the fissure it reveals within the CIS community, stems from nationalist and populist attitudes, thereby providing a concrete example of the broader phenomena discussed by Yang (2023) and Kwak et al. (2023). While these participants showcased the cosmopolitan quality of openness to diversity, the hobby-based and teamwork-based social circles are also easier to maintain because they have a common ground or a shared goal to pursue.

The last group of participants have trouble fitting into Chinese and non-Chinese worlds in Canada, so they are categorized as marginalized. As a result of personal history and personalities, two participants show some signs of marginalization from social life. For example, Participant 16 recalled her experience in Canada and China:

> I think in this case, I, as a sample, is not very contributive because my personal experience with being bullied while growing up in China has made my social skills very poor. So, in general, I just have trouble making friends, whether they are Chinese or non-Chinese…… I am a person who indiscriminately avoids socialization with all kinds of people because of my current mental health situation. However, when I have the energy, I do not personally differentiate between different groups. It just depends on who I happen to be talking to.

Comparably, Participant 10 said he has trouble interacting with both non-Chinese and Chinese students. These participants shared some unique experiences, and Participant 16 received more support and acceptance of her mental health conditions in Canada, which could be a reason why they both prefer to live in Canada in the future. As Participant 16 suggested, living in Canada also allows her to switch between different modes, from being marginalized from everyone to integrating regardless of ethnicity.

7.2.2. "Banana"

As the last subsection displayed the diverse social lives of informants, the subsections on "banana" and the Chinese diaspora will further explore the integrated identity of these participants in the different ways they understand Chinese identity. This part will illustrate four ways participants understand the word "bananas", which shows how they see Chinese identity. These four perceptions of "bananas" correspondingly focus on the influence of Western education, discrimination against Chinese culture, "banana" as a political tool, and a more neutral take on this concept. The first two perceptions show the influence of Chinese nationalism on these participants, and the reflection of the "banana" as a political tool shows their openness to diversity and hybridity, so these mixed views can be seen as signs of integration between nationalism and intercultural openness in forming their Chinese identity.

Western Influence. Most participants recognized the word "banana (香蕉人)" in its literate meaning of Chinese immigrants who are influenced by Western culture, but they highlighted different aspects of the influence. Some participants emphasize the Western influence on languages:

> Participant 1: Due to my experience teaching Chinese in the UK, I have had the opportunity to see a large number of British children, including mixed-race British children whose parents may be Chinese but whose children are non-Chinese speakers.

> Participant 14: Despite the fact that my coworker's family speaks Chinese to her, her circle of friends and her education and upbringing have all been mostly Canadian.

These participants valued the ability to speak Chinese as a criterion to see if someone is authentically Chinese, so by this standard, most "bananas" are descendants of immigrants. Moreover, some participants valued ideologies more than languages, which complicates the understanding of what makes a "banana". Participant 8, in particular, suggested,

> Although Canadian-born Chinese look like Chinese, the culture they have been exposed to since childhood is pure Canadian culture or perhaps White culture, so there is a mismatch between their appearance and their inner self. For example, many generational immigrants follow a foreign value system.

As many participants supported the criterion of ideology as defining who is considered a "banana", it becomes easier to accuse someone, especially an international student, of being a "banana" when they agree with an ideology that is more popular in the West. This is also related to the next criterion, self-discrimination.

Self-Discrimination. In addition to being influenced by Western culture, some people used the term "banana" to describe those who behave as if they are White and superior, which means they learn to discriminate against the Chinese even though they are of Chinese descent. While Participant 19 used "banana" for those who worship non-Chinese things, Participant 10 disliked the negative connotation of this concept but still agreed with its rationale:

> I have indeed met some typical banana people here. For example, he obviously does not speak English very well, but when he talks to you, he will speak in foreign languages. He obviously does not know much about the Western world, but he still pretends to be advanced.

These participants described Chinese people who treat non-Chinese culture as being more valuable than Chinese culture and who feel and behave superior to native Chinese. This is consistent with the term "banana" being used to describe Westernized individuals who despise Chinese culture. On the contrary, Participant 10 also highlighted that someone who reflexively contemplates the pros and cons instead of idolizing Western ideologies mindlessly is not a banana. This answer differentiates those blind and arrogant believers of non-Chinese values from others who have cosmopolitan values. If the first group has vague standards, this group of informants has a more specific criterion, which depicts a result of colonization and assimilation of the West. From this angle, the “banana” can be seen as China’s symbolic strategy of resisting Western colonization. The first two types of understanding of what it means to be “a banana” show participants’ agreement with the nationalistic strategy for Chinese throughout the diaspora to remember their root culture and defend their nationality against assimilation.

Negative Connotations. Although many informants suggested that the “banana” can be a neutral way to describe experiential or ideological differences, some found it implying negative meanings, as depicted above. Others recognized the political propaganda behind the “banana” as well. While many participants suggested that they would be offended if someone called them a banana, two informants deciphered this phrase:

> Participant 11: The “banana” was used to describe Chinese immigrants who support Western countries politically rather than China. It has been generalized to include anybody who criticizes China or compliments other countries.

According to existing scholars, the Communist Party of China treats the People’s Republic of China as the cultural centre of the greater China of all Chinese people (Anthias, 2001; Sun, 2016). As an early examination of Chinese immigrant identity, Kwong’s (2001) study highlighted the use of the term “banana” among Chinese Canadians, referring to being

"yellow on the outside, but white on the inside" (p. 24). The term "banana" has been loosely adopted to defend the perceived purity of Chinese identity against those seen as influenced by Western culture and values. Equally, Participant 13 said,

> We were told not to become a "banana" before we came here. However, I have been thinking: Who defined the "banana"?..... I believe there is a naturalization in China that everyone should contribute everything to the country. The "banana" is an outlier.

This answer reveals the political purpose of this phrase in maintaining the loyalty and nationalism of the collectivist culture of China. This comment also aligns with previous scholars who argue that "the nationalist sentiment is officially expressed as patriotism" (Solé-Farràs, 2014, p. 84). To put it in another way, the "banana" has been used recently on the Internet to demonize and label people who they find disloyal to China. Recently, Chinese mathematician Hong Wang gained attention for giving lectures in Beijing, but online nationalists criticize her for studying and working in the US and label her a "banana" (Mao, 2025). Similarly, these participants' answers explain the political intention to protect Chinese culture and China and demonize the negative feedback. Their explanation can be seen as signs of reflection and disagreement.

Neutral Understanding. Despite the politicization of that term, some informants still believed that the "banana" is a neutral fact, a result of history. Some students used the term the "banana" to describe the contradiction between heritage and educational background, while others think of the past when China was weaker than Canada. Participant 15 and Participant 18 used it as a neutral label to identify those who are more "Westernized," but Participant 15 admitted that many use it negatively. On the other hand, Participant 17 reflected on the history of immigration to Canada to explain why people assimilate to Canada:

> There may be fewer "banana" people in our generation, but there were more in the past because China was relatively weak at that time. Therefore, he would try his best to cater to the culture here. I think they are a product of history, social environment, and individuals, and they do not have a degrading or complementary meaning.

This participant showed a more considerate and empathetic attitude when rationalizing the formation of the "banana". Considering the political and social environment in the past, assimilation to the West and abandonment of Chinese culture could be a necessary step of survival for Chinese immigrants. As they reflected on the reasons behind this cultural phenomenon of the "banana", this group of informants demonstrated more openness to different formations of Chinese identity. Hence, the understanding of the "banana" shows a hybrid identity with both support for the continuation of Chinese culture and openness for diverse formations.

7.2.3. The Chinese Diaspora

While the last part displays the informants' attitudes toward people who are affected by Western ideologies, this section illustrates their understanding of and belongingness in the Chinese diaspora. Many informants, such as Participants 1 and 12, admitted their continual connections with China and regard themselves as visitors rather than members of the diaspora. Participants 4, 13 and 16 recognized their mobile identity or established belongingness to the local society, so some students in this study showed integration into Canada and the Chinese diaspora.

Definition of the Diaspora. Most participants defined the Chinese diaspora in Canada in terms of locations where Chinese people gather, and some understood the Chinese diaspora as specific interest groups. Many participants listed several places that are famous for their Chinese communities as examples of the diaspora. According to informants, in the Greater Toronto Area, Chinatown, Markham and Richmond Hill are well-known for their

huge Chinese population, whereas Richmond near Vancouver is known for their Chinese population. Participant 8 specified,

> In Toronto's famous Markham and Richmond Hill, there are many Chinese people, and they gather there and form a community to support one another. But the diaspora is not only a Chinese thing, Italian and Korean towns work similarly.

Similarly, Participant 1 added that "Richmond near Vancouver can be a paradise that is independent of the mainstream society." As ethnic minorities in Canada, these participants emphasize the advantages of residing alongside others who share their history, as it gives them a sense of belonging and support. Meanwhile, others describe diasporic groups based on hobbies, careers and religions. Participant 17 understood diaspora as communities formed by a specific cultural group: "They all have their groups. Not only Chinese but also Black groups, White groups, and so on." Additionally, when it came to defining the term "Chinese diaspora", Participant 2 mentioned the Shanghai student associations and other regional student groups in the university as an example; Participant 7 thought of social groups where Chinese international students organize events; and Participant 19 and Participant 20 recalled the Christian Church of Chinese people in Canada. These participants show their familiarity with the diverse ways Chinese people gather, form communities, and support one another. As Participant 17 and Participant 7 said, these groups can guarantee that Chinese people can find trustworthy partners in business or find entertainment activities that suit their habits among their ethnic groups.

Connections with China. While most participants are new to this concept of diaspora, a few of them have a better understanding and recognize the delicate connection of the diaspora between Canada and China. The recognition of location and interest-based diasporic groups is easy even when informants never heard of diaspora. Still, two participants specify the need to connect with China in the diaspora.

> Participant 1: I believe that many Chinese Canadians have strong links to China in addition to being dependent on Canadian society for existence. Specifically, commercial cooperation and business interactions are far more widespread between the diaspora and China than they are with other Western nations. Businesspeople will connect the Chinese and Canadian markets and build up opportunities in China. They seem to have ties to China and are not just dependent on the Chinese population in Canada for their survival, I noted.

This answer pinpoints the transnational business ties and career opportunities among the internationalized diaspora of Chinese people. It agrees with the definition of diaspora as links between homelands and diasporic communities: not only do people in the diaspora seek connections with their homelands, but their home nation also seeks collaboration opportunities with their former residents (Sun, 2016). The connection between the diaspora in Canada and China provides Chinese Canadians more leverage to compete when they are less competitive than the local mainstream corporations. Comparatively, Participant 12 noted that "Chinese permanent residents in Canada still love their homeland, and they only move to Canada for a more comfortable lifestyle." Even if he also recognized the link between China and the diaspora, this answer is closer to long-distance nationalism (Anthias, 2001). He pointed out that, as a result of enhanced nationalism and patriotism education in mainland China, many Chinese people in Canada remain loyal and patriotic to their homeland. Hence, these participants recognized not only the link between the diaspora and their homeland but also the long-distance nationalism as opposed to the more hybrid and integrated lifestyle.

Disputes among Diasporans. It is worth noting that certain participants capture the tensions that exist among the diasporic groups. These gaps are between immigrants from various generations; between people from various Chinese areas, and between employers and workers. Participant 11 addressed the changed digital media habits of immigrants:

> The older generation of immigrants may rely more on internet forums for conversations regarding news, weather, and other topics related to life experiences. With their narrower circles, the new generations form more intimate WeChat groups.

Under the influence of the changes in media habits, it would be harder for different generations of immigrants to interact and form a united online community. Similarly, Participant 13 pointed out the differences between Mandarin speakers and Cantonese speakers and between Canada-born Chinese and new immigrants. The linguistic differences can influence how they behave around other Chinese people. He uses the example of Cantonese people being more friendly and joining random conversations in Cantonese, but Mandarin speakers are more cautious and have more boundaries. Moreover, the last note from Participant 13 is about a concern shared by Chinese international students.

> International students often know better than to work for a Chinese company since Chinese employers are notorious for being dishonest. Weibo users claim that Chinese people face the greatest bullying from their peers.

This answer reveals the conflict between Chinese employers in the West and international students. As reported by these informants, the large Chinese community in Canada is marked by cultural divides and internal conflicts that hinder participants' integration.

Identity in the Diaspora. With an overview of how CIS in this research understand the concept of the diaspora, the last part of this section illustrates the three ways participants find their position within the diaspora between Canada and China. Participants were asked to share how they feel about their relationship with the diaspora in Canada and whether they see themselves as "banana" or not. The findings suggest that many participants, such as Participants 10, 15 and 18, have different understanding of "diaspora" and do not see themselves as members of the diaspora even though they are living outside of China.

Participants can be categorized into three groups: a group of denial, a group belonging to Canada at different levels, and a group of cosmopolitans.

Denial. The first group of participants found a limited association with Canada or the Chinese diaspora, and they mostly still identify as Chinese. Informants listed several reasons to explain their feeling of not belonging to the diaspora, including denial of Western values, pride as a Chinese, connection to their home country and their legal status. Some participants believed that the local culture barely changes them, or they dislike Western ideologies, so they are not "bananas" or they do not belong to the diaspora. Some participants appear to be influenced by online nationalist and populist discourse from China and consequently perceive liberal ideologies as opposed to Chinese identity. While Participant 10 expressed his doubts about Canadian democracy, Participant 18 contended that Liberal Arts students are more likely than students in other majors to be exposed to and impacted by Western ideologies. Although most participants in the first section of this chapter expressed their appreciation of local values, certain participants resisted these ideologies and retain the values they were taught in China. Meanwhile, some participants were proud of their Chinese identity and Chinese culture. In contrast to Participant 18's answer, Participant 15 argued, "My roots are in China. We, Liberal Arts students, attach great importance to patriotism and humanistic feelings, so we know very well who we are and where we come from." Likewise, Participant 12 suggested that he appreciates some values and lifestyles in Canada, but his connection and belonging to China can never change. On different levels of impact by the local cultures and values, these participants maintain their loyalty and their pride in Chinese culture, which will always remain part of who they are.

Furthermore, some students cited their reasons for not belonging to Canada as having social and legal ties to China. While two participants illustrated their disconnection with local society, certain participants shared that they value the social and familial relations in China as

an important part of their lives, along with some discussion of legal status. Participant 6 and Participant 10 both believed that they feel no or little belongingness to Canada. Participant 10 said that he had some contact with local people and a basic understanding of their culture, but he never felt belonging in Canada. Participant 14 and Participant 19 both valued their social and familial connections in China. Different from previous participants who emphasize their patriotic heart, Participant 19 suggested that she misses home but not China. This comparison of limited social connections in Canada and family in China means that these students are tied to China more. It shows that close social connections and support remain critical to these students' feelings of belongingness. Meanwhile, Participant 14 added that she still holds a Chinese passport, which limits her legal status in Canada. Among the few participants who think of themselves as international students rather than immigrants, Participant 9 mentioned that she always knew she would go back to China. This means that not only do some students have expectations based on their motives in Canada, but their power and rights can hugely influence their sense of belongingness in Canada.

Belonging. While restricted cultural, social and legal connections in Canada can prevent some informants from being a part of the diaspora, others found themselves as a member of the diaspora. Certain informants felt so because they understand diaspora quite literally as a fact rather than a mode of belongingness. Still, some found themselves building connections with Canada and having some features of a "banana" or a member of the diaspora. Participant 4 and a few others mentioned their sojourner status as international students, and their limited economic or social connections here are proof of their belongingness to the diaspora. They understood the phrase as people who leave their home country and live in a foreign environment. In comparison to the previous group, they did not display their intention to stay or go, but they considered the diaspora as a temporary mode of life.

On the other hand, many participants either recognized their changes or were told they had changed and were affected by Canadian values. Participant 13 and Participant 16 mentioned their queer sexuality as reasons to be considered outsiders to Chinese culture, so they see themselves as in between two cultures. Participant 13 specified that he feels on the way to becoming a part of the diaspora. Similarly, Participant 15's mother called him a "banana"; he believed that his criticism of certain Chinese policies and his critical thinking skills were the reasons for her accusation. Participant 20 also agreed with multiculturalism and the less competitive environment here than in Chinese society. These participants showed different levels of belongingness to the local culture because of their identity and their agreement with the local values.

Mobile Identity. This group of participants mostly found belongingness to the Canadian environment, but they also recognized their mobile status to travel between countries. Participants had different ways of understanding their mobile identity. Both Participants 8 and 11 affirmed that they are both Chinese and Canadian, and neither identity diminishes the other. Participant 8 also mentioned that she likes to switch between different cultural communities at will, experiencing both the diversity of various nations and the safety of her Chinese roots. Her description matches with existing theories that new generations of migrants enjoy their status between two cultures and their identity in two different locations (Anthias, 2001; Tarrant et al., 2014). Nevertheless, one participant described himself as having global citizenship, which is why he does not have a sense of belonging to the diaspora. Participant 17 suggested,

> I think I will be a global citizen if I live in Canada in the future. I'm Chinese, but I don't need to put myself in a diaspora. I can be Chinese wherever I am. It doesn't matter if I live in Canada, China, or Sweden. There's no way to change your Chinese

> identity. Hence, you have to be open-minded about your identity, have confidence, and actively participate in various things.

Although he refused to accept his identity in the diaspora, his affirmation of global citizenship and the mobility to switch between different identities align with the definitions of the hybrid identity of a member of the diaspora. Despite Participant 17's emphasis on his Chinese identity, this group of participants portrayed their recognition of a hybrid identity in absorbing cultures across national boundaries, indicating their cosmopolitan quality.

On the contrary, even though some participants admitted to having the mobility to switch identities freely when they are in China or Canada, they also worried about being marginalized by both nations. Participant 14 suggested,

> For instance, you can demonstrate your Canadian citizenship through a Canadian passport, but you may not truly feel that way about yourself. However, you have to renounce your Chinese identity, and you will feel like you no longer belong there.

This concern about being rejected by China became a reality during the pandemic. Specifically, Participant 5 recalled the Chinese netizens calling CIS virus carriers, blaming CIS for spreading the virus in China. At the same time, Participant 11 mentioned that some Chinese see immigrants and international students as "others." Both examples confirm the populism tendency on the Chinese Internet during and after the global pandemic. This last group of participants acknowledged the downside of cosmopolitanism: even if they have the mobility to switch between Chinese and Canadian identity, they could be rejected by certain populists in China or racists in Canada, as described in Chapter 5.

7.3. Gender and Sexuality

Along with participants' acceptance of a hybrid or even cosmopolitan identity in Canada, most participants, irrespective of their gender or sexual orientation, recognized that diversity in Canada fosters a more accepting and encouraging atmosphere for queer and

female CIS. The coexistence of criticism of feminism and appreciation of the support for women and the queer community show an integrated attitude in participant's understanding of gender and sexual identities. This section will start with a discussion of feminist development in Canada, including feminist education, media coverage, the comparison between feminist activism in Canada and China, the rights and freedom of women, and the gender-friendly environment. A similar discussion of the support for queer communities, such as social acceptance, policy support, self-acceptance, and the contrast between different values, will follow it. At the end of this section, I will also illustrate the critiques on the development of feminism in Canada from patriarchal and heteronormative perspectives.

7.3.1. ***Feminism***

Many participants illustrated their appreciation of the more neutral and systemic education on feminism and the fair media coverage of feminism in Canada, which means Canada cultivates a welcoming environment where people have better access to education about what feminism is. Certain participants blamed the lack of education on feminism as the reason for social conflicts revolving around gender in China. Participant 7 noted,

> I think that the best way to promote these values is not through social media, not through official media, but through education. Chinese universities have almost no education on feminism. The reason why Beijing Foreign Studies University has education on this topic is because they are the pioneers of women's rights in China, so 90% of female students studying at Beijing Foreign Studies University have some ideas about women's rights. Other universities do not have any basic courses on feminism, resulting in almost zero awareness of this matter among Chinese people. I blame the lack of basic education for the current conflicts in society.

Participant 10 added that people barely have any understanding of feminism in China: "When people talk about it, they have a backward and primitive perspective, but Canadian university

has a non-binary perspective to discuss feminism". Both answers point out the lack of systemic education and the underdevelopment of feminism in China, while Participant 10 specified the more progressive feminism education in Canada.

Furthermore, some participants compared the media coverage of feminism in Canada and China. Participant 9 proposed that feminism and queer are two forbidden topics in Chinese media, whereas women can do whatever they want in media products created in North America. Similar to the promotion of homophobia as essential for the survival of Chinese civilization (Wang, 2023), driven by nationalism, some Chinese media outlets demonize feminism and portray it as a foreign influence undermining the unity of the Chinese state (Xu, 2025). For some Chinese individuals, supporting feminism may even be framed as "betraying the nation" (Xu, 2025, p. 5). In contrast, among the social media accounts and media products recommended by the informants, Participant 4 listed one feminist Chinese content creator on X. In particular, @Estellaluu comments about a Chinese internet trend: "Seeing more and more videos of women going viral for imitating cringy men subtly illustrates that gender is not natural but a learnt performance" (Quzhuiyizhilu, 2023). This is an example of people learning about feminist ideologies through new social media. It is worth noting that some of these content creators are CIS themselves, studying outside of China and sharing their knowledge and experiences with others. Along with giving participants a glimpse into a world in which women and men are treated equally, Western media also provide the opportunity for CIS to use it to spread their knowledge and experience.

In addition to education and media representation of feminism, some CIS in this research criticized the feminist movement in China. Participants mostly found the feminist movement in China primitive and unnecessarily aggressive. Among the three participants

who agree that the conflicts on social media between feminists and conservative forces are explosive, Participant 7 suggested,

> China, in my opinion, is experiencing the emergence of a new feminist age, but activists are unsure of where their movement will lead. They are aware that women are oppressed and constitute a minority in society. Still, they are unable to find a solution, and they begin to vent on the Internet, inciting outrage. As a result, China is currently experiencing significant disputes on this topic.

His answer aligns with Participant 10 and Participant 19, and they pointed out the confusion of feminist activists in China due to the lack of systemic education and its online form of activism. Moreover, according to Participant 19, women frequently complain about males on social media, which tends to overstate the activities of a small percentage of men, and men similarly criticize all women for the conduct of a small percentage of women. This answer complements the other participants in depicting the potential causes of online disputes around the topic of feminism. The chaotic activism on the Chinese Internet is in contrast with the freedom and rights that women enjoy in Canada.

During the interviews, participants discussed several aspects of feminist achievement that enhance the rights of women in North America. On the one hand, from a legal perspective, women have more participation in politics, more protection in marriage, and more protection against harassment. Here are several comments from the participants:

> Participant 20: Women's rights in North America were discussed earlier than in other regions. As a result, women's participation in politics is equal to their ability to vote, which is now a common thing.
>
> Participant 7: Women usually have the upper hand in divorce cases; this suggests that women are treated with more care and support.

> Participant 8: In Canada, if you show prejudice towards women, you risk being permanently banned or forced resignation, whereas the consequences of harassing women are downplayed in China.

In contrast to Participant 19's experiences of being sexually harassed in China, Participant 8 pointed out the greater protection for women from sexual harassment in Canada. When participants compare their experiences in China and Canada, they discover that women in Canadian society receive more support, which protects them and enables them to contribute to society on par with males. As a result, Participant 14 noticed a lot of women participated in some activism parades as leaders, which is how she recognized the stronger voice of women in Canada.

Together with the advanced feminist movement, the Canadian social norm is more inclusive and respectful toward women who behave different from the cultural norm. Aside from Participant 5, who felt more included when she studied at York University at an older age, Participants 1, 9, and 2 agreed that women have more choices about marriage in Canada. Participant 2 said,

> In China, finding a decent guy to marry and starting a family is the ultimate dream, regardless of academic pursuits or other activities. However, things are drastically different in Canada. No one will judge you if you choose not to get married. You hold greater significance.

They recognize the social expectations in China for women to spend their lives taking care of a man and their children, so there are expected routines or even schedules for women. Participant 14 was even told, "If you are my child, and you dye your hair like that, I will kick you out." This quote highlights the patriarchal social conventions that lead some parents to demand that their daughters be submissive and "good girls," even to the point when colouring your hair a vibrant colour is viewed as improper or rebellious. These answers demonstrate the

societal constraints and limitations placed on women, which restrict their identities and lead to stigmatization when they defy expectations.

The last aspect of the conversation on women's rights in Canada focuses on the work environment. Informants discussed two main topics: equal opportunities compared to men and less discrimination in recruitment. Many participants agreed with the anecdote in this chapter's introduction, and Participant 5 recognized:

> Chinese businesses emphasize age. They consider the possibility that a woman may take maternity leave at this age. If she is single, she may get married and start a family, which would not be beneficial to the business. They are more inclined to pick a male employee over a female one if the man has comparable qualities.

On the contrary, Participant 18 suggested that there could be diversity quotas in Canada that help women compete with men. Consequently, women in Canada have the same employment prospects as males, which implies that hiring decisions for them are more frequently made based on qualifications. Some participants also thought that working in Canada offers them more opportunities for promotion. Participant 20 said, "It is still quite uncommon to find a woman working as a manager in China. Although there is less of a status gap between men and women in Canada." What is more, Participant 9 believed that if she puts in the same amount of effort as males, she will be rewarded with the same managerial power. Their answers depict the fairer working environment in Canada reflected in their recruitment and promotion, making Canada more comfortable for them than China.

7.3.2. Sexuality

Comparable to how feminism and women's rights are respected and supported in Canadian society, the queer community is treated better and is more accepted in Canada than in China. Many informants were aware of Canada's greater acceptance of the queer population. For example, Participant 2 and Participant 14 highlighted that same-sex marriage

is legalized in Canada, and people of different age groups support queer people as well; Participant 4 saw posters in the university for queer group events, encouraging people to see them as a normal part of society. In China, Chinese sexual minorities used to promote sexual equality and organize pride events through social media, but these social media accounts were blocked along with queer organizations events being cancelled (Bernot & Davies, 2023); gay-themed Chinese TV shows are also censored, along with the removal of gay characters of the screen (Feder & Fu, 2016). In contrast, several participants listed *Modern Family* as one of their favourite shows. *Modern Family*, which debuted in the US in 2009, has a varied cast of characters, including a gay couple raising their adopted daughter while navigating social expectations and obstacles. Participants' perceptions of how sexual minorities are treated differently in China and North America are influenced by the representation of these groups.

Family Values. Similar to the family values that constrain women in China, the queer community experiences not only restrictions in the digital world but also challenges of social expectations in China. The emphasis on traditional family values in China makes it harder for people to accept their children who self-identify as queer. Even if Participant 18 disagreed with the other participants by suggesting sexual minorities are considered cool in China, she admitted that “the patriarchy rather than the political system creates an oppression over the queer community.” She also acknowledged that sexual minorities attempt to escape from China and their parents. Participant 4 complemented her answer,

> Due to the strongly ingrained Chinese concept of preserving the family line, people who are not cisgender and heterosexual have unpleasant spiritual lives and can face suppression from their parents and elders.

These two participants depicted the conflicts between traditional values and the sexual freedom of sexual minorities. They recognized the oppression of the patriarchy in sacrificing

the personal freedom of sexual minorities for the continuation of a family line, along with the influence on parents and the consequential oppressions. In comparison, Chinese queer students desire to move to Canada and live in an environment where they can be themselves. Their experiences in Canada further support their perception of the country's queer-friendly atmosphere.

Social Acceptance. Compared to the influence of the patriarchy in China, along with granting sexual minorities the same rights as heterosexuals, Canada's majority population also embraces sexual diversity in public life, encouraging people to be more straightforward about their sexual identity. Previous studies suggest that people move to Canada to seek sexual freedom but experience intersectional discrimination and marginalization (Poon et al., 2017; Sadika et al., 2020). Even though some discussed their encounters with racists, as illustrated in Chapter 5, most participants depicted a tolerant and supportive environment for sexual minorities. Hence, the few queer participants in this research did not experience the intersectional discrimination described in the other studies. Participant 3 and Participant 7 recalled that homosexuality is seen as a sickness in China, and Participant 7 recalls that most people would say, “Stay away from me” or call him sick. However, in Canada, Participant 6 argued that people might repress their surprise and prejudice, and Participant 19 believed that what one does in their private life is not relevant to Canadians. Other participants use examples of pride parades to show encouragement for sexual minorities. Participant 20 suggested,

> In my opinion, Canada at least promotes the existence of the queer community and celebrates Pride Month and other occasions to show that we embrace you. In China, on the other hand, there are not many significant events that demonstrate support for them. However, I believe that these groups genuinely require this type of assistance.

This contrast shows the systemic support in Canada to recognize and welcome the existence of sexual minorities, which is what they need when they feel lost and confused. Furthermore, Participant 13 mentioned that self-identifying as a sexual minority might increase one's chance of being hired in Canada; Participant 1 recalled the unisex washrooms in Canadian universities that support people who are non-binary; and Participant 7 supported the diverse pronouns as progress. To illustrate inclusion in the workplace and academic setting, these participants provide a list of specific instances where sexual minorities are politically and socially supported and treated fairly. They also demonstrated how the needs of gender minorities are considered in Canada in addition to non-heterosexual minorities, allowing all sexual minorities to feel comfortable coming out in Canada.

Self-Acceptance. Compared to the more conservative and sometimes discriminative social environment in China, participants acknowledged that they feel easier to come out as sexual minorities in Canada. Participant 11 specified that he would probably not have realized his non-binary identity if he had not received an education in Canada. While this participant recognized the self-awareness due to education in Canada, others captured its influence on their decisions to come out as sexual minorities. Participant 16 said, "If I choose to disclose [my sexuality] to a random person, I do not have to worry about them making a rude comment about that." Likewise, Participant 3 suggested that he feels that he accepted his identity in China, but he would not show his identity there. Participants who are sexual minorities agree with them and confess that they are more open about their sexuality in Canada compared to China. What is more, Participant 10 remarked,

> I have acquaintances who identify as sexual minorities, and if we get along, I can sense that they frequently put up with unfair treatment and tolerate it in China. They are more inclined to stand up for themselves here, though. They are more willing to take action, and they may correct you if your words or behaviour bothers them.

These answers reveal that sexual minorities are normalized in Canadian society, so people are more comfortable being who they are in public and speaking up for themselves when they feel offended.

7.3.3. Settlement

Many participants admitted their choice to settle in Canada for the support of their gender and sexuality. Although one straight informant suggests that China has also become more tolerant of the queer community, most participants, including the queer participants, admitted that the inclusive environment of Canada attracts sexual minorities to move here. Participant 12 disclosed his transgender identity and suggested,

> My wife and I believe China is not a long-term option for us. We can live comfortably there if we are wealthy, but I think we need some legal protections. However, this will not be feasible in China even after 50 years.

Participant 16 and Participant 13, who both identify as queer, agreed with him and feel more comfortable to be themselves here. In a similar manner, many female students were attracted by the friendly environment for women in Canada, even if not all of them are staying here. Participant 9 emphasized that the social norms in Canada allow her to dye her hair and dress however she likes; Participant 5 stayed in Canada because she believes there are more career opportunities for her as a female student who is older than others; Participant 19 stated that she and her friends concur that the feminist movement creates a more comfortable way of life for women in Canada. Given that the preceding section illustrated their observations on Canada's more equitable recruitment of women, increased freedom and rights, and improved governmental support, it is sensible that they found the diverse lifestyle in Canada more alluring.

7.4. Criticism and Debates

Although most participants appreciate multiculturalism and the inclusivity of Canada, many also criticize it for its excessive political correctness and the challenges to existing values. In contrast, others expected more from Canada and pinpoint the limitations of its democracy. In the meanwhile, some participants complained about the inefficiency of the Canadian lifestyle due to its emphasis on individualism. Likewise, while the majority of participants acknowledged that a friendly and inclusive atmosphere is beneficial for women and sexual minorities, some participants expressed disapproval towards Canada's diversity. A few concerns focus on the potential side effects of friendly policies for the queer community, and some of them form debates on the right amount of feminism.

7.4.1. Excessive Political Correctness

A few participants criticized Canada's political correctness, and their concerns were related to Canada's equity and fairness. One of them believed that excessive political correctness leads to abuse of power. Participant 15 suggested that “Saying negative things about Black people will be considered racial discrimination, even if it may be because this Black guy talks loudly [did something wrong].” He was concerned that the protection for minorities is misused by people as an excuse to avoid responsibility or even as a privilege. Similarly, Participant 17 heard rumours about the diversity quota in job hunting:

> They will not tell outsiders about this, but most of them have a quota. On the surface, it seems fair to ensure a diverse working environment. However, the workforce becomes a puzzle game of race, and it is not based on your ability or contribution.

This informant is convinced that the workplace in Canada is no longer recruiting people based on their skills but on the colour of their skin. Even though his argument is based on word of mouth rather than personal experience, he raises concerns about fairness in the job market. Moreover, other informants compare their immigration experiences with refugees,

which is a reason why they dislike the Canadian government. Participants in my earlier research condemned Canada for its tax expenditures on refugees (Zhao & Ebanda de B'beri, 2022). In a similar vein, Participant 7 said that people became lazy and stopped contributing to society because the Canadian government gave money away to refugees. This complaint also relates to the distribution of public resources and questions the fairness of political correctness in Canada.

7.4.2. Downside of Diversity

Another group of participants discussed several incidents of ideological conflicts, and they demonstrated that the diversity of Canada cultivates challenges to CIS's values. The first participant in this category had a cultural shock when she discovered that a newspaper in Canada was established by Falun Gong, which is considered a cult in China. Participant 9 remarked, "This made me wonder if Canada's multiculturalism would breed some horrible things. If everyone tolerates it, it will grow stronger." Canada's policy towards diversity and inclusion allows a religion that is considered a cult in China to be developed here, so this informant is concerned with the potential hazard of indulging extreme religions and political agendas. While Participant 5 complained about the non-monogamous relationship of non-Chinese friends who have romantic relationships with multiple people, Participant 11 felt uncomfortable with the anti-abortion propaganda, especially their disturbing images as promotional posters. Participant 5 had less political concern and is more concerned with the challenge to traditional family values that Canada's diversity policies may pose. That said, Participant 11 had a similar example as Participant 9, as they both worry about the political and social influence of diverse ideologies. Even though these attitudes could be seen as expressions of cultural shocks, they also show CIS's reflection on how diversity in Canada challenges Chinese social norms. The critiques of diversity also include some disputes around feministic values in Canada.

7.4.3. Questioning Feminism

Similar to the concern about multiculturalism and ethnic minority rights, some participants see the diversity in Canada as a political show. Participants mentioned the inadequate actions and excessive political correctness in video games to show the contradiction between the promotion of queer rights and reality. Participant 20 suggested,

> Stressing the queer community in media again and again is a performance. It will get more challenging when they acquire rights. It lacks sincerity. I believe that rather than talking about it nonstop, you ought to actually assist them.

This participant points out that queer stories may be told through Western movies and shows, but real actions that enhance their rights are limited. Specifically, Participant 10's answer helps explain what Participant 20 meant by saying that it is "more challenging when they acquire rights." He argued, "Some of the politically correct components in the games I play annoy gamers and do not seem to benefit these communities, in my opinion." He identified increased hatred towards sexual minorities in his gamer communities due to the added queer characters in video games. These answers stress the side effects of enhanced conflicts between conservatives and sexual minorities when media representation of minorities increases.

Furthermore, two participants argued that Canadian feminists are not doing enough to support women. One of them focused on the overly sexualized representation of women, and the other one condemned the emphasis on family values in Canada. Participant 16 remarked,

> I think in China, the general attitude to sex, at least for people who are not yet adults, is that sex is just like a taboo topic. However, in Western content, such as comedy shows or sitcoms that are set in high school, these protagonists would sometimes be really sexualized.

This participant expresses a concern that the representation of youth is sexualized in Western media. Moreover, Participant 18 was disappointed at the feminist movement in Canada since women still devote too much time to raising a family. During a conference of female vice presidents, she recalls that these women mostly discussed their difficulty raising children while working a full-time job. Instead, she expected feminists to fight for women's rights in life, in work, in school, and for all equal opportunities. Her views appear to be more in line with the early feminist movement's demands for equal access to education and professional advancement than with the more recent feminist movement's calls for legislative changes to support women's dual responsibilities at home and at work (Iannello, 2010). This conversation confirms the perception of previous participants who believe that some feminists from China are more radical and different from the feminist movement in North America. The first two types of participants questions the feminists in Canada because they find Canadian feminism ineffective in achieving the goal of liberating women from social inequality. They may agree with the goal but not with the current plans and methods to achieve them. However, the next group aligns with the critiques of diversity and political correctness from a conservative perspective.

The last group of participants considered the feminist movement to be excessive and to have the wrong intention, while two participants believed that more work needs to be done. Two male participants were very upset about the feminist movement and considered it an attempt to replace the patriarchy. They both describe feminism as a reversed chauvinism:

> Participant 4: In my opinion, if someone introduces themself as a feminist, I probably ignore them. But if they immediately say that they are a feminist and an equal rights activist, I think they are a true feminist. Because feminists are actually chauvinists, except that they want women to be in power instead of men, it's the same.

Participant 15: I think feminism has deviated from its original concept. Feminism is actually equal rights, but many people now present it as a replica of patriarchy.

These students criticized the feminist movement because they believe women are gaining more power and privileges in society rather than simply fighting for equal rights. Their answers reveal a rejection of the more radical feminists and only recognize the feminists who aim for equal rights; however, it is not clear who decides what equal means. Participant 15 continued by saying that he was disgusted by the excessive representation of sexual minorities in media and that people should stay within their circle of life rather than influencing mainstream representation. His answer confirms the arguments from the previous group: some CIS are offended by the representation of sexual minorities. It also shows that the diversity in Canada has limited influences on him and that he still considers sexual minorities irregular or abnormal.

7.4.4. Inefficiency

In addition to criticism of diversity in Canada, many participants disliked the inefficiency. Among the many complaints about the low efficiency of the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) and the Canadian government, some of the participants point to individualism and diversity as reasons for inefficiency. Participant 13 believed that the TTC drivers are less punctual than Chinese or Japanese bus drivers because of the flexibility of individualism. He also suggested that individualism leads to low efficiency, gun violence, and weed usage in Canada, rendering it a less ideal choice for some Chinese immigrants. His ideas showcase the ideological conflicts revolving around the idea of individualism and personal freedom. By creating a connection between individualism and a lack of security and substance abuse, this participant pointed out the side effects of the celebration of individualism in Canada. Similarly, Participant 14 suggested that Canadian employees have the right to be flexible, so work-life balance becomes a constraint on the efficiency of

Canadian society. These participants recognized the sacrifice of efficiency when everyone was allowed to work shorter hours, which is in comparison with the 996 work ethics in China.

Compared to the stressful and competitive work environment in China, the work ethics and attention to diversity are seen as obstacles to a more developed and efficient economy. Participant 15 argued,

> Many believe that there are more than two genders. For instance, there are several options for gender in Canada rather than just men and women. This is the negative effect of political correctness. Being politically correct will complicate your life and reduce your productivity.

This participant used a conservative perspective that sees the feminist movement as a disturbance of society. His answers highlight the difficulties associated with diversity and multiculturalism, just as those of the other two participants. In contrast to the collectivist and Han-Chinese-dominated Chinese society, the massive opinions and cultures that need to be taken into consideration are seen by some CIS as the reason for the inefficiency of Canada. Along with the complaints about TTC and inefficiency in Canada, some informants, like Participant 15, prioritized economic development and efficiency rather than human-centred concerns or diversity. Given their upbringing in the competitive marketized China, some CIS were driven by utilitarianism and economic values. For these purposes, some participants could prefer a more conservative perspective in society rather than supporting inclusivity and human-centred individualism as discussed in previous sections. This is similar to the later discussion on feminism, where some participants worry about the disruption women and sexual minorities cause to the traditional way of life.

7.4.5. Chinese Conservatism

Students in this study show three types of reactions to diversity and multiculturalism, which include support for women and sexual minorities in Canada: most informants agreed with the support, a few participants criticized it for its inadequacy, and a few others disliked it from a conservative perspective. These reactions coincide with the complexity of the feminist movement in China, during which social media becomes the main field of self education, and people are less educated about feminism in educational institutions. Participant 15's conservative perspectives agree with his previous populist comments in Chapter 5. Even though he came to Canada at a young age, received both high school and post-secondary education in Canada, and claimed to enjoy intercultural communication, he still agreed with the nationalist, utilitarian and patriarchal heteronormative worldview. Although most participants were open to intercultural engagement, some of their answers reflect the growing populism in China in addition to the economic growth and the emphasis on nationalism through the renaissance of Confucianism values. Their conservative critiques of women and sexual minorities, or even the individualist work ethics, agree with the Confucianist patriarchal social structure for social stability.

Among their critiques of diversity and individualism, I believe the competition-driven environment in China also influenced students in this research. Earlier, Participant 5 said that she did not think she could be friends with Black people until she came to Canada. Along with the discussion in Chapter 5 about students' limited exposure to other racial groups and life as the racial majority in China, these informants demonstrate that some Chinese had or still have a Chinese-centric worldview. The self-driven popular nationalism and recent populism could give them the arrogance to treat Western countries as competitors and other racial groups as less than them (Zhang, 2020). Similarly, more than one participant complained about the social welfare refugees receive. Participants 7, 15 and 17 were

concerned that even if Canada values diversity, it does not guarantee a fair environment for them, considering the sacrifice they made. As individuals who worked hard and made a tremendous financial investment to study in Canada, Participant 7 questioned the fairness of political correctness because he believed that it undermines their hard work or shows a lack of appreciation for their hard work by Canada. In voicing these ideas, some participants show that they still believed in social competition in China rather than in distributing resources to the socially weak. These informants believed it is unjust that the money they pay in taxes will go toward helping refugees. Even though the existence of a "racial quota" or "privilege" for minorities benefits the Chinese as well, they still have a concern that they are at a disadvantage due to the pursuit of equality. The return to national identity brought about by interactions and competition with other racial groups in Canada (such as refugees), the economic goals of efficiency, stability, and development, and the evaluation of justice based on individual accomplishment are some of the factors that may have caused their conservative viewpoints. Despite the few participants who chose a conservative worldview over work ethics, cultural diversity and gender equality, most participants agreed with not only the diversity of Canada but also the social equality ideology that empowers sexual and gender minorities.

7.5. Conclusion

CIS negotiated their identities during and after the COVID-19 pandemic against the backdrop of growing anti-Chinese racism in Canada and a surge in conservative rhetorics in China, which created a conflict with the liberal values that are prevalent in Canadian society, such as feminism and multiculturalism. The rise of nationalist narratives in China could also make them more aware of their position as travellers rather than members of Canadian society, navigating both local and transnational social and political environments. At the same time, living in Canada highlighted both the possibilities and limits of multiculturalism,

democracy, and movements like feminism and LGBTQIA+ advocacy, which shaped how participants understood themselves and their connections to Canada. This chapter explores the impacts of Canada's emphasis on social diversity in its policies on participants' identity negotiation. This discussion of identity revolves around participants' understanding of the purity and hybridity of Chinese identity and their relationship with China and Canada, including their future settlement decisions. This chapter begins with an analysis of CIS's attitudes towards Canadian values to understand how they make sense of them and how participants have changed through their time in Canada. The second subsection focuses on two aspects of social connections: hybrid identity as the "banana" and the Chinese diaspora. They demonstrate the different results of identity negotiation and various types of relations with Canada and China. Meanwhile, the feminist movement in North America creates a more comfortable social atmosphere for women and the queer community, so this chapter includes an analysis of the participants' experiences of different gender and sexuality in Canada. This chapter ends with an overview of the six factors that influence the participants' settlement decisions in Canada or elsewhere.

7.4.1. Reactions to Canadian Values

The first goal of this chapter is to analyze the various reactions to Canadian mainstream values and their impacts on CIS in this research. This study proposes that most participants enjoy the diversity of Canada because their ethnicity, gender, sexuality, or differences are accepted in Canada. The attention to individualism also creates a more comfortable lifestyle of work-life balance, which is highly valued by the participants. The integrated identity of the participants shows in the conflict between appreciation for diversity and individuality and some critiques on the diversity's challenge on traditional family values and an economy-driven social norm. The conversation about the inclusivity of Canada starts with its tolerance for Chinese immigrants, intercultural relations, and the different ways

people live in Canada. Participant 1, Participant 19 and other informants expressed their appreciation of the Chinese diaspora in Canada, where their cultural heritage is maintained and celebrated. Participant 6 also felt that they are encouraged to choose to separate from or to assimilate into English-speaking mainstream society at will because they can always move to the Chinese-speaking neighbourhood. It should be noted, however, that all participants in this study live in an urbanized international city, Toronto, where a huge Chinese population and other ethnic communities reside. The choice of separating from the English-speaking society may be more feasible in Toronto than in areas of Canada do not have such high numbers of international residents. Their status as students also means that they spent most of their time in a more protected environment on campus (which is also noted by Participant 2 in Chapter 5). These factors can contribute to their positive perceptions of the friendly and inclusive environment of Canada. Moreover, individualism in Canada enables a more friendly and less competitive social and working environment where different personalities are more encouraged than in China. From the reasonable workload to the social benefits that support minorities, participants enjoy individualism in Canada.

Although some participants disagreed with the challenges to traditional family structure, the tolerance for refugees, feminist actions, or inadequate democracy, most participants are influenced by the cosmopolitan education in Canada. Consequently, many CIS in this research admitted that they became more tolerant of differences, friendly to others, less competitive, and more reflexive. Several participants experienced cultural shock due to the conflicts between Canadian policies and attitudes regarding diversity and the traditional values from their Chinese upbringing in areas such as attitudes toward polygamous relationships (Participant 5), anti-abortion (Participant 11), or religions that are considered cults in China (Participant 9). Moreover, participants split into two groups on feminism and diversity in Canada: one group disapproved of the recent feminist actions and the refugee

policy (Participants 4, 7, 15 and 17), but another group criticized Canada for inadequate democracy due to elitism in immigration policy (Participants 10, 16 and 19). Others complained about the inefficiency, which they believe is the result of individualism in Canada (Participants 4, 13 and 20). Despite these disagreements and criticism, most participants are affected by cosmopolitan education. Their openness to Western cultures and intercultural communication increased, along with their awareness of minorities and non-mainstream beliefs, decreased competitiveness in work and improved critical thinking abilities. The enhanced critical thinking skills also relate to the habit of comparing Western and Chinese media content discussed in Chapter 6.

7.4.2. Hybrid Chinese Identity

When participants were asked about their impressions of the "banana", their social life in Canada, and the Chinese diaspora, many participants showed some levels of integration into the diversified social environment in Canada, and they accepted the hybrid, mobile Chinese identity rather than maintaining a pure Chinese identity. Although there are some linguistic and cultural barriers, many participants have an integrated social life where they can explore other cultures, learn from others through comparison, and develop and promote Chinese culture (Participants 1, 4, 5, 15, and 20). Most importantly, Participant 7 suggested that people must accept at least some local ideologies to live in Canada, which could explain why most participants show different signs of integration. Participants 5 and 15 pointed out the personal benefits of exploring different cultures and compared them with Chinese culture to cultivate their intercultural skills. Participants 10 and 14 were familiar with the weaknesses of Chinese peers, and they found it easier to work with and learn from non-Chinese peers more straightforwardly. However, Participant 16 chose to be marginalized from both Chinese and Canadian social circles due to personal history.

As an example of the hybrid Chinese identity, the banana is understood to be a term that describes Chinese people who embrace Western culture and give up their Chinese languages and values. However, Participants 11 and 13 pointed out the political agenda and stigmatization of this term, while Participant 5, Participant 15 and others demonstrated some acceptance of the hybrid lifestyle. Likewise, many participants agreed that they are part of the diaspora, along with their acknowledgement of the location-based and interest-based diaspora in Canada (Participant 1, 2, 7, 17, 19 and 20). Most participants displayed an understanding of the key definitions of the banana and some understanding of the diaspora. They recognized that Chinese people who grew up with Western education may lose their ability to speak Chinese and agree with Western values. Participants 8, 10 and 19 also pointed out that "banana" is used to describe people who abandon their Chinese identity and discriminate against the Chinese. However, Participants 11 and 13 reflect on the political goal of purifying Chinese identity and defending it from Western cultural invasion. Although many informants, such as Participants 6, 10 and 18, rejected Western values and were proud of their Chinese identity, Participant 7, 14, 15, 16 and 20 admitted that they are affected by Western cultures and somewhat identify as "bananas."

On the other hand, participants recognized that Chinese people gather around neighbourhoods such as Markham, Ontario, and form religious, hobby, or interest-related groups to support each other in Canada. These diasporic groups allow people to remain connected to Chinese culture or China and provide them with a place to escape from mainstream society. Participant 9, 14 and Participant 19 believed that they are not members of the diaspora because they still belong to China, especially with their legal status. However, Participants 8, 11 and 15 built some connections here and enjoyed their mobile identity to identify as both Canadian and Chinese.

7.4.3. Women and Queer in Canada

The majority of informants showed integration into Canada with their appraisal of its inclusive environment that accepts the queer community and supports women better in media representation, policies, and social norms. However, Participants 10 and 20 criticized the overpromotion of feminist values and inadequate actions in supporting its movement, while Participants 4 and 15 questioned the agenda of feminists. Given how far the feminist movement has progressed in North America, Participants 7 and 10 recognized that feminism is well taught in universities and fairly represented in media. In contrast, the Chinese feminist movement is still in the beginning stage, so Participants 7, 9, 10 and 19 were aware of the diverse opinions and radical conflicts on the Internet. Compared to Asian countries, women in Canada have more social and legal support. Along with the fairer recruitment process and promotion opportunities at work, women are given more options and fewer social expectations for marriage and childbearing. Likewise, same-sex marriage, social acceptance, and the lack of patriarchal expectations create a more friendly environment for sexual minorities. Even though some scholars argue that queer people of colour experience intersectional marginalization (Poon et al., 2017; Sadika et al., 2020), this research suggests that queer participants mostly find Canada a more comfortable place where they are free to be who they are in public.

That said, diversity and individualism also received some critiques from both progressive and conservative perspectives. Participant 10 and 20 criticized the inadequacy of feminism and equal right movements in Canada because repeated representations of the queer community generate an illusion that they are taken care of, which makes it harder for them to fight for more benefits. Participant 16 also pointed out the sexualization of young women in Western media as a failure of the feminist movement. Similarly, Participant 18 criticized the feminist movement in Canada because she expects women to strive for more work

opportunities rather than rights in the household. In contrast, several male participants, such as Participants 4 and 15, regarded radical feminists as reverse chauvinists because they only recognized feminists who appeal for equal rights. Participants 10 and 15 also criticized the representation of sexual minorities in mainstream media as a disturbance to the mainstream lifestyle. These participants show signs of a perceived supremacy over other ethnic groups, utilitarian goals of economic growth, and a desire for social stability. These critiques demonstrate the lack of theoretical understanding and inadequate education" about feminism and equal rights in addition to the reattachment to Confucianism and populism as a response to intercultural communication. Even if Participant 15 and many CIS lived in the diverse environment of Canada for a long time, they could still believe in patriarchy and heteronormative narratives.

7.4.4. Settlement

Throughout this chapter, I discussed the different reasons why participants choose to settle in Canada, China or elsewhere. The six most discussed factors in the interviews were feminism, multiculturalism, lifestyle, the COVID-19 epidemic, career, and family. People choose to settle in Canada mostly for five reasons: the support for women and sexual minorities, the multicultural environment, the career options, the less stressful lifestyle, and their experiences during the pandemic; the last two factors both reflect their pursuit of a more individualistic and human-centred management style. In this chapter, participants showed strong support for cultural diversity (Participants 11, 15, and 16), sexual and gender inclusivity (Participants 11 and 12), individualistic work ethics and equitable social benefits (Participants 5 and 6), which overlap with the factors about Canada that attract them. Although Participant 17 planned to settle in the US for better job opportunities and less income tax, these choices all demonstrate their acceptance of Canadian values and integration into the local society at different levels. On the other hand, Participant 2, Participant 19 and

others chose to go back to China to live with their families, even though they accepted some aspects of the hybridity or values in Canada.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1. Research Objectives

This research explores the role of digital media in the identity negotiation of CIS who moved to Canada between 2019 and 2022 to provide a new perspective that deepens the existing understanding of anti-Chinese racism and the identity of the CIS. Although the global pandemic may have become less of a daily challenge, the surge in anti-Chinese hostility it provoked exposed the systemic inequality, racism, and exclusion that persist beneath Canada's official discourse of multiculturalism. For those CIS who came to Canada seeking high-quality education and opportunities to explore different cultures in an inclusive and democratic society, the inequality can be unexpected due to the inadequate reports and knowledge about Canada before they came here. While CIS have to learn to deal with racial discrimination in reality and stereotypical representations of Asians on Western screens, they are also excluded by their home nation when some essentialists treat them as "bananas", or even traitors to China, for their exposure to Western ideologies and betrayal of the homeland. The pandemic thus signifies a new stage of heightened tension between China and the Western nations along with intensified ideological differentiation within the Chinese diaspora. While some CIS adopted more cosmopolitan perspectives, others turned toward conservative discourses as a way to cope with anti-Chinese sentiments and geopolitical conflicts. During these difficult and increasingly polarized time, digital media became a resource and a site of risk for CIS. As racists weaponize digital media to attack CIS, digital media also provides opportunities for CIS to acculturate, find their voice, and combat injustice. By conducting 20 semi-structured interviews, this dissertation answers these research questions:

- What role does digital media consumption play in identity negotiation among Chinese students in Canada?

- How does digital media influence the way CIS in Canada learn about and resist the increase of anti-Chinese racism during COVID-19?
- How do CIS view the representation of China and Chinese people in Western media? How do these representations affect their settlement decision to stay or leave Canada?
- What socio-political factors affect Chinese students' identity negotiation and their understanding of Chinese identity? To what extent do the factors of gender and sexuality affect their belongingness to Canada?

8.2. Theoretical Importance

Situated in the context of heightened awareness of anti-Asian racism and intensified geopolitical tensions following the COVID-19 pandemic, this research contributes to scholarship on CIS, ethnic media, and the Chinese diaspora. Beyond complementing existing theories on the exclusive multiculturalism in Canada and CIS's strategies for coping with racism, this study highlights the evolving role of digital media under these historical conditions. It examines digital media not only as a site of ideological contestation shaped by geopolitical conflict, but also as a set of tools with practical implications at governmental, institutional, and individual levels. In doing so, the research demonstrates the potential of digital media to support future CIS in their adaptation processes and to contribute to efforts aimed at addressing racial injustice in Canada. Building on these findings, this research also contributes to the contemporary studies of identity formation and pinpoints the limitations of Berry's acculturation model (2013) and conventional diasporic frameworks. Instead, it argues that a mobile Chinese identity better captures the fluidity and transnational connections defining the modern CIS experience.

8.2.1. Multiculturalism in Canada

The analysis of CIS experiences in Canada and the role of digital media contributes to the development of existing theories on multiculturalism and ethnic media since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Compared to prior studies that criticized Canadian multiculturalism, most participants in this study described a dual experience of marginalization and tolerance. As Asians, they faced discrimination, harassment, and systemic exclusion, especially in contrast to their racial majority status in China. At the same time, they received support from anti-racism activism and engaged with Canada's diverse cultural landscape, experiencing the country's ideals of inclusivity firsthand. Canada's inclusivity extends not only to racial minorities but also to queer communities, women, and others who may feel like outsiders in China. In other words, participants who felt marginalized in China found a sense of belonging in Canada. Additionally, research on Canadian multiculturalism often emphasizes the exclusionary behaviors and rhetoric of the European settler–dominated society. In contrast, the informants in this study highlighted racial and cultural tensions among ethnic minorities within Canada. For example, in Chapter 6, some participants reported experiencing discrimination from other Asians. Unlike prior research emphasizing the dichotomy between European descendants and people of colour, this study underscores the complexity of racial dynamics and historical tensions among Asians in the experiences of CIS. Although this study did not explore the broader complexities of racial experiences among people of colour, it suggests new perspectives for examining race through the lens of Asian history in future research.

8.2.2. Digital media

Moreover, although the functions of digital media are limited in shaping understanding of race, socialization, and post-graduation settlement, participants confirmed that ethnic media influenced their acculturative experiences and their resistance to racism.

The key findings highlight the limitations of digital media's impact on CIS, suggesting that it serves as an assistant tool rather than the primary force shaping their identity. I emphasize this assistant role because digital media primarily supports the theoretical understanding provided by university curricula with empirical examples and broadens students' social networks, albeit without fostering intimate connections. That said, its interactivity, connectivity, and accessibility make digital media a powerful aid in forming virtual ethnic communities and negotiating CIS identities. Consistent with scholarship on ethnic media and its capacity to empower identity formation (Yu, 2018; Brock, 2020; Hayward, 2023), participants in this study used social media to support other Chinese individuals and voice opposition to racism, thereby reinforcing their national identity and forming ethnic enclaves. In short, despite its limitations, digital media plays an irreplaceable role in the identity formation, civic engagement, and anti-racism efforts of CIS.

8.2.3. Chinese identity

Furthermore, this research contributes to the contemporary identity studies by pinpointing the limitations of Berry's (2013) acculturation model and conventional diasporic frameworks. Instead of adhering to static categories of integration, this study argues that the concept of a mobile Chinese identity (Kwak et al., 2023) more accurately captures the digital fluidity and transnational connections defining the modern CIS experience. Throughout the findings, this study demonstrates the changes in participants' Chinese identity through dealing with the external threats of racism, reflecting on the conflicting narratives between Western and Chinese media and developing a mobile and hybrid Chinese identity in the host nation. Rather than separating themselves from Canadian culture or fully assimilating into the Canadian culture, most informants demonstrated aspects of various ideologies that are considered both Chinese and Western. The majority of participants in this study were integrated into Canadian society because they showed, in addition to utilitarianism,

patriotism, nationalistic ideals and pride in being Chinese, the ability to practice critical thinking as a cosmopolitan, openness to intercultural changes, inclusivity to women and queer communities, and a mobile or hybrid Chinese identity. It is also worth mentioning the gendered tendency that a few men show more agreement to conservatism out of populism and utilitarianism, whereas women and queer communities prefer to support diversity and challenge the patriarchy. With sixteen out of twenty participants marked as integration, the acculturation model (Berry, 2013) lacks the nuance to understand the complicated intercultural experiences, identity negotiation and belongness of CIS in this study.

When they face anti-Asian hate crimes, critiques towards China and stereotypical narratives of the Chinese community in Western media, most informants, such as Participants 4, 5, 6, 11, 15, and 18, reconnected with their nationalist upbringing and defended China and the Chinese community from these attacks. Participants 4 and 15 also disregarded racist incidents, viewing themselves as superior to the ignorant perpetrators. This reflects a form of arrogance shaped by Chinese populism and the privileges of being overseas students. Such responses highlight the risk of minimizing racial inequality in Canada. Alongside their limited engagement with pan-Asian social justice movements, this study highlights the differences between CIS and Asian Americans, emphasizing nationalism as a key motivation in identity negotiation, even when participants exhibited tendencies toward an integrated identity in Canada. Unlike Asian Americans, Canadian CIS' ways of coping with racism and racialization differ from Asian Americans' focus on a broader Asian identity. Their limited participation in pan-Asian activism and tendency to avoid confronting racism can be traced to a mobile, sojourner identity (Participants 1, 14, 15, and 20). This orientation prioritizes flexible, personal adaptation over the formation of a fixed, collective political identity rooted in North American racial solidarities.

Aside from enriching theories on CIS experiences with racism, the exploration of Chinese identity in this study offers new perspectives on CIS relationships with the broader Chinese diaspora. This research is among the first to investigate CIS understanding of and sense of belonging to the Chinese diaspora in Canada. Chapter 7 examines the fluidity and dynamism of Chinese identity, revealing how participants' ideologies transform within a multicultural environment. Their processes of identity negotiation and racialization emerge as multifaceted and often marked by contradictions. Their sense of self was deeply shaped by sustained engagement with Chinese nationalism, which fostered a sense of solidarity during the pandemic. At the same time, cosmopolitan and feminist ideals emerged in some participants' critiques of China's policies toward women and the LGBTQIA2S+ communities. Most women and queer participants emphasize the inclusivity of Canadian society, reflecting how intersectional experiences shape their identity formation. Their pursuit of an inclusive environment stands in tension with some nationalist rhetorics in China that often promotes homophobia and anti-feminism (Wang, 2023; Xu, 2025). In contrast, most participants embrace a mobile Chinese identity: an identity marked by a strengthened sense of connection to China (Kwak et al., 2023), limited engagement with a broader Asian identity (Yang, 2023), and the flexibility to reassess their life in Canada or relocate elsewhere when necessary (Kwak et al., 2023). By navigating the tensions between systemic racism and multicultural inclusion, CIS develop a hybrid and evolving sense of Chinese identity that bridges their lived experiences in Canada with their belonging to the wider Chinese diaspora.

With the complex tension explained, this study proposes that Chinese international students may prefer to identify with a mobile Chinese identity rather than a broader Asian or Chinese diasporic identity. Unlike Chinese immigrants in the diaspora, CIS' enhanced connection with Chinese identity suggests that they typically identify as mobile Chinese nationals, build social circles primarily with other Chinese people, and maintain frequent

communication with those in China. Despite fitting the definition of a diaspora through their dispersion from China, many participants still regard themselves as Chinese nationals rather than diasporic subjects (Participants 5, 9, 11, 12, 15 and 18). Through emphasis on the traditional Confucianism values and the development-driven utilitarianism, some informants, such as Participants 4, 11, 15 and 17, showed that they disagree with some of the progressive movements of individualistic work ethics, feminism and queer activism. Along with the intercultural social circles across cultural communities, many participants believe in the fluidity of Chinese identity as a result of engagement with others. In particular, Participants 15, 17, and 18 demonstrated a mobile identity that allows them to switch between identities and relocate across the globe as needed. Consequently, this study demonstrates that Berry's (2013) acculturation model and the theories of diaspora have limitations in capturing the complex intercultural experiences of CIS. Because their ongoing connections with China often result in a weaker affiliation with broader Asian and diasporic identities, the concept of a mobile Chinese identity helps redefine their sociocultural status within host nation.

8.3. Key Findings

This section will answer each of the research questions based on the content from the four chapters on findings. Chapters 5 and 6 addressed issues of racial injustice in Canada, ranging from the racial consciousness of CIS and anti-Asian racism to the marginalization of minorities in Canada. As they answer the first sub-question, Chapter 6 answers question two with a second focus on Chinese identity under the influence of conflicted media portrayal of the West and China. Chapter 7 answers question three by discovering participants' understanding of hybridity and the Chinese diaspora, along with their future settlement plans after graduation. Last but not least, through the four finding chapters, we can see digital media's impact on CIS's acculturation, including their understanding of race, inequality and

Chinese identity. Hence, I will reconnect with each of these chapters to answer the main research question about the roles of digital media in CIS's identity negotiation.

8.3.1. How does digital media consumption influence how CIS in Canada learn about and resist the increase of anti-Chinese racism during COVID-19?

Considering social media's dual role as both a potential site of exposure to racial hostility and a gateway to resources for socialization, information-seeking, entertainment, and education, CIS in this study used digital media to learn about and to resist racism in Canada. Numerous informants, such as Participants 6, 7, 8, 11, and 19, agreed with existing research (Liu & Chuang, 2023; Yang, 2023) on their insufficient knowledge of racism in China and that they did not consider themselves to be a racial minority prior to their relocation to Canada. Compared to education in China, education in Canada provides a more systemic understanding of racial inequality. Most participants recognized that their exposure to social justice topics in the university curriculum (Participants 6, 7, 8, 11, and 19), and to anti-racism events on campus (Participants 4, 8, 14, 16, and 20) and encounters with racists (Participants 1 and 15) revealed the social injustice and racism in Canada.

Digital media provides more visualized examples and up-to-date information of racism for CIS's safety. As a source of entertainment, information and education, digital media enriches the understanding of racism that CIS gain through the Canadian curriculum by creating a comprehensive and empirical understanding of their racial position in Canada. Due to information provided by social media, students learnt about anti-Asian sentiments from news articles and other social media users' posts (Participants 1, 2, 10, 13, 15, and 17). Due to the reliance on digital media for entertainment, participants recognized stereotypes in Western representations (Participants 1, 7, 8, 10, 15, 16 and 20), the racist threats from video games, the systemic flaws that exclude Asian gamers (Participants 4, 6, 7, and 10), and the political propaganda behind Western narratives of China (Participants 1, 11, 12, 15, and 19).

In addition to the theories and historical facts learnt from schools, these functions of social media help CIS to build a more concrete, relatable and visual understanding of their marginalized status in Canada.

Although digital media played a supportive role in CIS's understanding of race, it was crucial to their fight against racism. Participants tried to learn anti-racism strategies from other CIS and fight racism from a distance on the Internet. From an educational perspective, Participants 3, 9, 12 and 18 tried to learn strategies from influencers or other CIS who share their experiences online. However, Participant 19 proposed that, despite learning these strategies, she froze when she faced racists in real life, suggesting that students still need to practice these strategies to be able to effectively respond in the face of in-person racist harassment. Online, however, the interactive capacities of digital tools allowed participants to fight back against online harassment and racist posts and to propose a safe ethnic community for the Chinese. Compared to the argument that Chinese students avoid racial conflicts and care more about their achievement rather than social justice (J. Yu, 2022; Ji & Chen, 2022; Lou et al., 2021; Wang & Dovchin, 2022), Participants 4, 5, 13 and 16 showed the will to fight and defend their community, and they expressed that will mainly through online tools. Consistent with research on Asian Americans (Chen, Song, & Kim, 2024; Chen, Sun, & Tao, 2024), these participants used private channels for news updates and venting (Participants 1, 2, 3, 9, 10, 12, 13, 15, 17 and 18), and public platforms for group formation and anti-racism activities (Participants 4, 5, 13 and 16). While Participant 5 fought racism by arguing against hate messages with their friends, Participants 13, 16 and 17 emphasized the importance of expressing their feelings and reporting the hate crimes to seek institutional support. Likewise, some informants found inspiration from the Black Lives Matter movement and the encouraging messages from anti-racist activism, so they learnt to form an online community of support for the Chinese (Participants 12, 16 and 17). Hence, along with its complementary

role in students' understanding of race, digital tools made it easier for CIS in this research to support each other, express their voices, and participate in the social justice movement.

Despite offering spaces for information, community, and expression, this study confirms that digital media's role in perpetuating racial inequality remains a primary concern for CIS. Participants 4, 6, 7, 10, 16 and 18 reported direct exposure to racist encounters on the White-dominated internet, from anti-Chinese comments to harassment in online games, which contributed to significant stress, anxiety, and other negative mental health impacts. These experiences, along with the pervasive spread of misinformation and a lack of online protection, often rendered social media an unreliable and traumatic source of insight. This affirms the "double-edged sword" paradigm (Chen, Song & Kim, 2024; Yang & Tsai, 2023; Shin, 2023), where platforms that can foster community for CIS simultaneously intensify racial trauma through exposure to anti-Asian rhetoric, underscoring that the internet remains a contested and often harmful space for racialized communities.

8.3.2. How do CIS view the representation of China and Chinese people in Western media? How do these representations affect their settlement decision to stay or leave Canada?

The conflicting narratives of Western and Chinese media confused some participants yet also encouraged many to critically reflect on their knowledge and form independent judgments by comparing the two. This behavior reflects the development of a cosmopolitan perspective. Most participants recognized that media messages reflected the growing hostility between China and the West, noting that both sides often presented exaggerated and biased perspectives shaped by their political positions (Participants 7, 12, 15, 16, 17 and 18). Consequently, Participants 6 felt confused when exposed to Western media, as it challenged their existing impressions of their home country. However, many informants, such as Participants 2, 5, and 14, developed a habit of comparing Chinese narratives with Western media messages. This practice enabled them to view the same story from multiple

perspectives and construct their own understanding of reality. Their critical engagement with both Chinese and Western media demonstrates their analytical thinking and openness to diverse viewpoints, qualities that reflect a cosmopolitan outlook and signal their integration into Canadian society.

Although digital media can shape how some students perceive a sense of community, its influence on their overall sense of belonging and post-graduation decisions about whether to stay in or leave Canada remains limited. All participants were aware of the stereotypes and sometimes discriminations in Western representations of the Chinese community and China. Participants 4, 11, 13, 15, 16, and 18 mentioned several portrayals of Chinese people, such as unattractive nerds, sexualized fantasies, and the emphasis on "Chinese eyes", to criticize the arrogance and narcissism of the European gaze. Nevertheless, some participants noted positive changes, highlighting greater inclusivity and improved representations of Chinese individuals in Western media compared to the past. Some informants argued that stereotypical portrayals of Chinese family values and parental expectations, among other stereotypes, may have some basis in reality (Participants 2, 5, 8 and 12); however, the real issue lies in their inadequate and inappropriate representation (Participants 4, 13 and 18). Others observed an increase in productions featuring Chinese stories, such as *Shang-Chi* and *Fresh Off the Boat*, which offer more diverse and multifaceted portrayals of Chinese people in contrast to traditional stereotypes (Participants 3, 6 and 17). These recent media representations gave some participants a sense of hope. In the face of stereotypes or hostilities against the Chinese in their representation in Western media, Participants 3, 9, 11 and 14 suggested that they would find it hard to trust and settle in a community if the media representations were discriminative. However, most informants, such as Participants 1, 2, 4, 5, 17 and 19, made their settlement decisions in Canada based on personal experiences rather than media representations. They generally emphasized the entertainment function of digital

media, viewing it less as a factor influencing their decision to stay in Canada. Instead, their positive interactions with local friends played a more significant role in shaping their intention to stay in the country. Thus, their sense of belonging to Canada stemmed primarily from intercultural experiences, reflecting a process of integration. Even Participants 1, 2, 8 and 19 who planned to return to China showed signs of integration into local communities through their diverse social circles and flexible, mobile identities.

8.3.3. What socio-political factors affect Chinese students' identity and their decision to stay or leave Canada? To what extent do the factors of gender and sexuality influence their decision?

Most participants demonstrated varying levels of integration into Canadian society and expressed interest in living outside of China. Caught between the inclusivity of Canada and the celebration of a "pure" Chinese identity in mainland China, many participants showed both interest in and understanding of hybrid identities in the Canadian context. Firstly, most participants held a positive attitude toward intercultural communication. Although existing literature (Mackey, 1998; Bannerji, 2000) and the informants' responses in the previous sections highlight racism embedded in Canadian multiculturalism, participants in this study show strong resilience. Consistent with Kwak et al. (2023), racism did not appear to significantly influence their future plans in Canada or elsewhere. Even when marginalized in mainstream media and social circles, some informants, such as Participants 13, 15 and 18, indicated that assimilation into the dominant European settler culture is not their only option for living in Canada. Instead, these participants embraced the possibility of a more separated and independent lifestyle within the Chinese diaspora. This reflects their understanding that an inclusive society requires not only the assimilation of Chinese international students but also adaptations from the host country (Anthias, 2001; Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019). This flexible and integrated approach aligns with the strengthened sense

of Chinese national identity observed during the pandemic (Yang, 2023). At the same time, most informants spoke highly of Canada's inclusive environment, which allowed them to interact across cultural boundaries. While Participants 6, 9, 11, 15, 16, 18 and 20 preferred spending time with Chinese-speaking friends, most informants, such as Participants 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, and 10, expressed openness to intercultural friendships to varying degrees. Several participants, such as Participants 4, 5, 10, 14 and 18, enjoyed collaborating with non-Chinese peers, appreciating both the productivity and the directness of communication. Likewise, Participants 1, 3, 4, 7 and others acknowledged that they grew to accept Western values such as individualism and feminism, contributing to more hybrid social expectations than those typically found in mainland China. Participants 11 and 13 also recognized the political agenda behind the term "banana," viewing it as a strategy to preserve a notion of "pure" Chinese identity against Western influences. Echoing Participant 1's belief in cultural exchange as the future, many informants, such as Participants 7, 14, 15, 16 and 20, expressed interest in hybrid and fluid identities rather than an essentialist notion of Chineseness.

Despite research criticizing Canadian multiculturalism as being exclusive rather than inclusive, CIS in this study appreciated Canada's inclusivity and individualism, as reflected in their embrace of feminism, cultural diversity, work-life balance, and the Canadian lifestyle. Most participants who identified as sexual minorities cited Canada's tolerance of the queer community and the celebration of queer pride as reasons to stay (Participants 3, 11, 12 and 13). These informants also mentioned knowing people who came to Canada because of same-sex marriage, equal rights, and the country's welcoming social norms. Many female participants also reported feeling safer and more supported in Canadian workplaces and society (Participants 1, 2, 5, 9 and 14). Compared to the hiring processes and working conditions in China, they preferred working in Canada because it offers more equal opportunities in job hunting and promotions, as well as stronger policies to protect their

rights. Although Participants 7, 15 and 17 expressed disapproval of feminist beliefs in Canada, their settlement decisions were unaffected by the nation's support for women and sexual minorities. Several participants, such as Participants 4, 10, 12, 13, and 16, also noted that tolerance of diversity was a significant factor in their decision to reside in Canada, alongside the equality afforded to women and sexual minorities. Some participants felt that their unique circumstances, such as pursuing university studies at an older age (Participant 5), were accepted in Canada due to its more inclusive approach to diversity and individualism, while others appreciated the opportunities to travel and engage with cultures beyond China (Participant 15, 17 and 18).

Aside from diversity, economic and individualistic factors also play an important role in their settlement decisions. Another reason informants choose to stay in Canada is the availability of career opportunities and less competitive work environments. Participants 4, 5, 6 and 17 valued the work-life balance, as well as the relatively less competitive education and workplace conditions in Canada. The work-life balance and the less regulated media market are aspects of Canada's individualistic and liberal lifestyle that participants appreciate. In other words, they felt that their personal lives were not overshadowed by work while living in Canada. In Kwak et al.'s study (2023), 40% of participants viewed Canada as a temporary home, expecting to return to China eventually, an outlook that contrasts sharply with the participants in this study. Beyond differences in sample size and research method (survey versus interview), the contrast between Toronto and Nova Scotia may also help explain this discrepancy. Given that participants in both studies prioritized career as a key factor in their settlement plans, the more robust job market in Toronto likely contributed to the observed differences. However, economic considerations can make their decisions unpredictable. While participants above found Canada less competitive and more economically rewarding

than China, Participant 18 preferred working in the US, where they could pay lower taxes and potentially earn higher salaries.

Likewise, family is a critical factor influencing informants' decisions to return to China or stay in Canada. Participants 7 and 14 chose to remain in Canada because they have romantic partners here, whereas Participants 2, 8 and 19 decided to move back to China to be with their parents. The diversity and immigration policies of Canada also play a role in CIS settlement decisions. Participant 19 criticized the increasing standards and costs associated with immigration, highlighting issues of inequality and elitism. Due to the significant investment of time and money required to become a Canadian and reunite with family, she felt it was not worthwhile to settle in Canada. This perception contributes to the view that Canadian immigration policy favors only the wealthiest candidates.

8.3.4. What role does digital media consumption play in identity negotiation among Chinese students in Canada?

Alongside an integrated media preference among most informants, this study suggests that digital media influences informants' identity negotiation and acculturation in Canada across four dimensions: socialization, entertainment, education, and information exploration. As participants left China and their preexisting social circles to study in Canada, social media enabled them to maintain connections with family and friends in China while building new relationships in Canada (Participants 3, 7, 13 and 14). However, social media has limitations in fostering deeper and more intimate relationships to Participants 11 and 13. Online course delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic was particularly restrictive in this regard, as these CIS still preferred to socialize and engage in activities with peers and friends in offline settings. Nevertheless, from exploring local leisure options to accessing news during the pandemic, social media remained a crucial source of information for participants (Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 18). The vast amount of information shared online helped them understand

their surroundings and adapt to life in Canada. Similarly, participants used digital tools to improve their language skills (Participants 1, 2 and 7). Although some researchers criticize platforms such as YouTube for their limited effectiveness in language learning (Ju et al., 2021), participants demonstrated that these tools could help practice listening, learn slang, and discover ways to improve English proficiency. Participants 3, 4, 8 and 18 used digital resources to enhance academic performance by watching tutorial videos and accessing additional online materials. Meanwhile, participants relied more on digital entertainment during particular circumstances, such as their initial arrival in Canada and the global pandemic. Most informants, such as Participants 11, 15, and 19, consumed popular culture content through social media influencers or traditional media such as TV shows and movies, allowing them to stay connected with events in China while being exposed to an intercultural lifestyle. Across these four dimensions, digital media content plays a significant role in shaping the experiences of CIS in this study.

The use of digital media affects participants in a conflicted way: it heightens their awareness of marginalized social positions while also fostering greater inclusivity through exposure to diverse content. This tension means that digital media simultaneously reinforces their connection to Chinese identity and broadens it through engagement across cultural boundaries. On one hand, beyond learning about racial inequality at university, participants gained empirical knowledge from online encounters with racists, news stories, social media posts on racial conflicts, and representations of stereotypes and prejudice (Participant 1, 2, 10, 13, 15 and 17). These digital experiences helped them understand the scale and depth of the inequality that marginalizes Chinese people in Canada. Digital media was also used as a tool to defend and express their Chinese identity, by connecting with and supporting other Chinese individuals and challenging racist content online.

On the other hand, most participants in this study showed interest in media platforms and content from both China and abroad, indicating openness to hybridity and fluidity. Participants not only regularly used Western platforms such as YouTube and Instagram but also explored diverse media content. Participants 6, 7, 8 and 16 mentioned preferences for inclusive media, such as the transnational influencer Blondie in China, the US TV show *Modern Family*, or the Japanese video game *Death Stranding*. These examples demonstrate participants' cosmopolitan openness to diversity, and a few even acknowledged their appreciation for cultural openness and human-centered values akin to cosmopolitanism. In Chapter 7, participants also discussed their embrace of the outcomes of Western feminist movements (Participants 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 14 and 18), their desire for cross-cultural friendships and exploration (Participants 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 12), and their enjoyment of the inclusivity of marginalized groups in Canada (Participants 5, 12, 13 and 16). In conclusion, digital media not only enables participants to reaffirm their Chinese identity in response to racist harassment and pressures to assimilate to European ideals, but it also fosters cross-cultural engagement that cultivates cosmopolitanism and hybrid Chinese identities.

8.4. Applications

As this research deepens our understanding of the experiences of CIS facing racism in Canada, it highlights the need for educational institutions to enhance their services and foster a just and inclusive environment for all visible minority students. Coming from a Chinese-dominated society, many CIS have limited education about contemporary racist incidents in Canada. Compared to students in other disciplines, those in the Liberal Arts appear to have more opportunities to explore and understand systemic racism through their coursework. Considering CIS' lack of social support in the host nation (Huang, 2024; Schartner, 2023; Yu, 2023), universities should provide systematic courses, workshops, and other support necessary to not only Liberal Arts students but also students in every program. In addition to

the existing services offered to students, such as email reminders and social events, Canadian universities should adopt digital media resources that inform and educate CIS about racism in Canada, foster connections among Chinese students and between cultural groups, and provide mental health and legal support tailored to the needs of racialized students. To help CIS feel more accepted, cared for, and supported within both the university and Canadian society, institutions can strengthen their relationships with these students through the use of digital media tools, potentially available in Chinese. When CIS feel secure and supported, they are more likely to perform well academically and actively participate in the collective effort to combat racism.

Along with educational institutions that directly support CIS, media companies and the Canadian government also need to improve their systems to foster a just online environment. As discussed in the cases of Participant 4, Participant 10, and others who encountered racism in video games, Participant 10 highlighted the double standards within these platforms. While the use of racial slurs targeting the Black community often results in account bans, racial slurs against Asians frequently go unpunished. Rather than viewing attacks on Chinese video game players as isolated conflicts between gamers, these findings reveal systemic bias against Asians. To truly build an equitable online community and advance racial justice, media corporations such as video game platforms must implement stronger policies to address racist behavior, regardless of the targeted group. Creating a racially just and genuinely inclusive society requires collaboration among media corporations to consider the needs of users from all backgrounds, listen to their feedback, and continually improve support systems. Beyond reducing racist incidents in online games, such changes would empower CIS with the confidence and institutional support needed to confront racism, enabling them to speak out against injustice both online and in real life. On a broader scale, systemic bias exists not only in digital spaces but also in the practice of multiculturalism in

Canada. The Canadian government must provide greater support to CIS and new immigrants by fostering not only a multicultural environment but also genuine conditions for intercultural integration, in which both newcomers and locals adapt to one another. Such intercultural interactions enable communication and understanding across cultural boundaries, rather than maintaining coexistence within separate and isolated cultural groups. This two-way integration could be facilitated through more Chinese-language social media channels and video tutorials to assist CIS in adapting to Canada after arrival, accessible online systems for reporting racist incidents and learning about racism, and government-funded social events and activities conducted in Chinese.

8.5. Challenges and Limitations

While this research contributes to the study of the Chinese diaspora and digital media, its findings are subject to several challenges and limitations. Many of these challenges relate to the digital media preferences and acculturation patterns of the informants. The diversity of participants' media habits complicated the analysis process, and it was often difficult to determine whether participants were integrated into or separate from Canada due to the nuanced nature of identity factors, such as media preferences, social circles, and connections to the diaspora. Although these challenges were eventually addressed, some limitations remain, particularly regarding the research methodology. The following section provides recommendations for future studies.

8.5.1. Challenges

The first challenge this research faced was categorizing digital media as either Western or Chinese, because some participants consumed Western media content on Chinese platforms and vice versa. This categorization was intended to analyze both the media platform and the content, in order to understand which countries and values influenced CIS. However, many Chinese social media accounts translate Western shows and posts for

Chinese platforms, while Chinese media producers also share their content on YouTube and other Western platforms for promotion. To address this, I decided to ask participants for a list of five media platforms and five media content items they would recommend, instead of the original plan of listing only five platforms. While this adjustment helped clarify the differences between preferred platforms and content, I soon realized that the content itself was also complex. Although my initial plan focused on social media preferences, many participants consumed traditional media formats, such as TV shows, movies, or video games, through new digital tools. For example, some participants watched live streams of influencers playing video games as a new hobby, illustrating how boundaries between different media formats have blurred in the digital age. Given the large volume of interview transcripts, I ultimately decided to use digital media content as illustrative examples to support the overall analysis rather than attempting a full-scale content categorization.

Moreover, even though I used the four modes of acculturation proposed by Berry (2013), including assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization, it was still difficult to categorize participants due to the complexity of their identities. I ultimately analyzed their social circles, attitudes toward the diaspora, and engagement with hybrid identity ("banana") as the three main criteria for determining their primary mode of acculturation. Most participants exhibited some signs of integration, making integration the most common mode in this study. One possible reason is that CIS who come to Canada tend to be more curious and open to intercultural engagement compared to those who have never left China. However, being categorized as integrated does not imply complete satisfaction with Canada; some participants maintain strong attachments to their Chinese identity or offer criticisms of Canadian society for various reasons. This suggests that the traditional model of acculturation may need revision to capture the diverse ways individuals integrate into a host

nation. The complexity of identity will also be addressed in the next subsection, which discusses limitations of the sampling process.

8.5.2. Limitations

In addition to the challenges outlined above, there are limitations in the research methodology that constrain the findings of this study. The first limitation is the use of snowball sampling and the self-selection of participants, which likely contributed to the high proportion of integrated participants. While snowball sampling allowed for the rapid recruitment of participants who met the study criteria, it also tended to draw individuals from similar social networks, resulting in participants with comparable backgrounds. Additionally, because the sample was small, only 20 participants, all were from mainland China, with no representation from Taiwan, Hong Kong, or other regions. Meanwhile, participants' integration tendencies could be influenced by self-selection: those who chose to participate may have stronger political opinions or more outgoing personalities than those who did not. Future research could conduct larger-scale surveys to assess whether these limitations affected the results.

The second limitation is that the impact of digital media and Canadian experiences on identity negotiation is difficult to isolate. Participants may have grown up in open and inclusive families, attended diverse international schools, or had other formative experiences in China that laid the foundation for their integration into Canadian society. This research also only captures the digital media influences reported by participants, with most discussion focusing on the outcomes of identity negotiation. Future studies could compare individuals who never left China with those who immigrated to Canada, as well as heavy digital media users with lighter users. It would also be valuable to examine values such as hybridity and cosmopolitan care across CIS, new immigrants, and individuals who have spent most or all of

their lives in China. Larger-scale surveys could reveal greater contrasts in values and more pronounced differences in the understanding of Chineseness.

8.6. Future Research

Aside from the survey for a comparison between people in mainland China and CIS who studied in Canada, more research could be done on the Chinese queer community and the Chinese diaspora. This research focuses on different factors that influenced CIS's integration in Canada, while gender and sexuality are two influential but less discussed factors. Not only is the feminist movement in China in its budding era, and there are restrictions on the queer social rights movement in China, but there is also extremely limited research on the factors of gender and sexuality as reasons for people's settlement in Canada. I found only one research studying the gender factor in comparison between Canada and China (Ge et al., 2019). With the new awareness of female rights and equality, new generations of CIS showed their decisions to choose Canada after graduation in this research, so I believe more research could be done to understand their experiences in China and Canada. Similarly, there were a few studies that investigated the experiences of gay immigrants in Canada (Poon et al., 2017; Sadika et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2021) and one study on queer CIS in Australia (Zheng, 2023). The studies on gay Chinese immigrants in Canada reveal unexpected intersectional discrimination, but my participants believe they are welcomed and better off in Canada. In the future, I plan to study queer students and new immigrants from the larger China (including mainland, Taiwan, and Hong Kong) to understand their experiences in Canada. That said, the comparison between mainland China and other parts of the larger China also deserves more attention from the researcher. Under different government regimes and changing relationships with the Chinese government, overseas students and new immigrants from these regions could have different intercultural experiences and unique understandings of their Chinese identity. Last but not least, it is worth noting that several

significant studies published since the completion of this research have continued to study the racial identity and anti-racism strategies of Chinese international students. Notably, works such as França et al. (2024), Ham (2024), Hou (2024) and Hou (2025) provide a contemporary context that extends the findings presented here and suggest promising directions for future inquiry.

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Appendix A

A. General information

1. How long have you been in Canada?
    - 请问你来加拿大多长时间？哪一年来的加拿大？
2. What program are you studying in?
    - 现在在约克大学哪一个 program 里面学习？
3. What gender and sexuality do you identify yourself with?
    - 你的性别和性取向是什么呢？
4. Which city did you come from?
    - 你来自哪个城市呢？

B. Identity negotiation

5. What are the most important factors that encourage you to come and stay in Canada?
    - **来加拿大的理由？**
    - 加拿大最吸引你让你留下的地方有哪些呢？
6. What are some media platforms you consume regularly (social media, B 站，抖音，YouTube…)?
    - 在加拿大留学的时候，有没有一些使用媒体的习惯？会使用那些媒体平台呢？
7. What kind of media content (live streams, TV shows, etc.) do you consume on a daily basis in Canada?
    - 在加拿大的时候经常会看得媒体内容包括什么呢？
8. Do you use more Western media or Chinese media?
    - 在加拿大的期间，如果相比较中文的媒体和英文的媒体的话，你会相对来说用哪一边比较多一些？

- Do you consume any Western or non-Chinese media (TV shows, video games, or YouTube) on a daily basis? If so, what are they?
- 西方-非中文-电视剧等等
- Have you used any media tools (such as social media) to learn about Canadian culture or make friends here?
- 有试过用一些比如说社交媒体或者是 YouTube 等等这些软件来学习加拿大的文化以及交朋友吗？（风土人情，美食等等）

9. How is China represented in the media you consume? (If they prefer Western media)
   - 你用西方媒体比较多的话，那你觉得中国在这些媒体上是怎样的形象？
   - Do you agree with that representation? How do they align with China, you know, in reality?
   - 你同意他们的展现么？这些报道跟你印象中的中国是相似的还是有区别？
10. How is Canada presented in the media you consume? (If they prefer Chinese media)
    - Do you agree with that representation? How do they align with Canada, you know, in reality?
11. What are some mainstream values in Canada that you agree with? What are some mainstream ideologies that bother you?
    - 在加拿大的一些主流的价值观，你觉得有哪一些是你觉得会有认同感的？（多元-种族、性少数、宗教；个人主义）
    - 那加拿大有没有一些比较让你不太认同的一些价值观念？文化冲突
    - Has your time living in Canada changed your values and perspectives?
    - 那你觉得在加拿大生活的这段时间，你的价值观念和对事情的态度有改变吗？你的想法有什么变化？

12. How do you understand the word “racism”?
    - 请问你怎么理解种族主义 racism 这个词？
    - What is your experience and perception of anti-Asian racism in Canada?
    - 在加拿大的期间，你有经历过或观察到过针对亚洲人的种族主义吗？
    - Do you think the anti-Asian racism has increased in Canada during the pandemic?
    - 疫情期间，你有没有感觉针对亚裔的种族主义变多了呢？
    - How do you learn more about anti-racism incidents?
    - 你是通过什么途径了解到针对亚裔的种族主义呢？
    - Does any of the media you consume help you feel better or worse about racist incidents in Canada?
    - 你平时使用的媒体有没有帮助你更好地理解和应对种族主义？或是改变你对种族主义的看法？
    - If one of your friends encounters discrimination or another kind of racist incident, what would be your suggestion for them?
    - 如果你的朋友遭遇了种族歧视或者其他的种族主义的攻击的话，你会对他们有什么建议呢？
13. Have you made Chinese friends in Canada? Have you made non-Chinese friends in Canada? How close were you to them?
    - 在加拿大的时候有交到过一些中国的朋友吗，或者讲中文的朋友？
    - 那你有交到过一些非中国人的朋友吗
    - 你会觉得亲密程度上有区别吗
14. Are you familiar with the concept of “diaspora” (the Chinese community in Canada)?
    - 你对 diaspora 这个词熟悉么？离开自己母国游离的移民群体

- 你觉得自己算吗？
- Are you aware of the Chinese diaspora in your city of residence?
- 你觉得在你留学的城市，中国人或者华裔有没有这样的社群呢？

15. Have you heard of the term “xiang jiao ren” (“banana”)? This term is usually describing Chinese descendants who look Asian but agree with a Western mindset.
    - 你有听过香蕉人这个词吗？你会觉得是贬义嘛
    - 你觉得你算吗？
    - What do you think of the hybrid cultural performances of Chinese Canadians?
    - 那你觉得这种融合了多种文化的现象，你怎么看待呢？
16. Have you seen any recent Western movies, TV shows, or games regarding China or Chinese immigrants?
    - 那你有接触过一些西方的电影或者电视剧，或者是你看西方的新闻，有没有一些关于中国或者中国移民的一些展现？
    - How do you like the representation of Asian culture on them?
    - 你怎么看待这种展现方式？
    - Do these representations affect your sense of belongingness to the local society?
    - 这些媒体上对中国和华裔人群的刻画会不会影响你对当地社会的印象？
    - 会不会影响你在这个社区的融入感？
    - 你觉得适合中国人居住么？
17. Are you familiar with the feminism and LGBTQ+ discussion and representation in Western media?
    - 对于西方媒体上女权主义和 LGBTQ 酷儿群体的展现这些你有关注吗？

- Do you feel more comfortable with your gender and sexuality when you live in China or Canada? (as a woman) How are they different?
- （那你觉得身为女性和异性恋的女性，）在加拿大跟在中国的生存体验有区别吗？哪边的价值观和态度你觉得更舒服？

C. Life in pandemic

18. How do you feel about living in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic?
    - 你觉得在加拿大的整个的社会氛围来讲对于疫情的态度是什么样？
    - Did you experience any social isolation during the lockdowns? If so, how did you deal with it?
    - 在加拿大你有在疫情期间经历过隔离和 lockdown 吗？
19. Did you use any digital media platform for information and entertainment during the pandemic? What platforms were they?
    - 那你当时有用一些数字媒体或者是用一些像 YouTube 这些软件来消遣或者是获取信息吗？
    - How are these media platforms framing the COVID-19 virus?
    - 这些媒体平台对 COVID-19 病毒呈现怎么样的态度？
    - How do these platforms illustrate the COVID-19 policies in Canada and China?
    - 这些媒体平台对中国和加拿大的新冠政策都是怎么呈现的呢？（认同还是质疑？）
20. What do you think of the strategies for dealing with the pandemic in Canada and China?
    - 那你觉得西方媒体和中国的媒体对于 COVID-19 这个病毒的报道是有区别的吗？

- Do you think Canada should be opening for international travel without mandatory testing on all travellers?
- 对于加拿大对待疫情的态度，比如放任国际旅行或者没有像过国内之前定期的新冠检测，你是怎么看待加拿大的政策呢？
- Are you aware that China has been persuading people to be cautious of international travel and limiting the number of new passports? What do you think of it?
- 对于中国之前的清零政策你有了解么？你怎么看呢？
- 对于中国现在的新冠政策的变化你怎么看呢？

21. When you study in China remotely, have you built any social connections with teachers or peers in the university?
    - 疫情期间，你有没有在中国上加拿大网课的经历？或者在加拿大封城期间上网课呢？
    - 上网课的期间有没有跟教授或者同学保持联系？有没有结交一些朋友呢？
    - Have you connected to any non-Chinese peers or professors?
    - 上网课的时候有没有跟非华裔的同学和教授保持联系呢？
    - What are some media tools that help you maintain connections?
    - 有没有使用一些社交媒体来联系你的这些人际关系？
    - What are some media tools that helped you understand Canada when you were studying in China remotely?
    - 如果你在中国远程上课过，有哪些媒体工具帮助你了解加拿大呢？
22. Has your experience during the pandemic changed your perspectives on your plan to stay or leave Canada?

- 你之后会不会选择留在加拿大？疫情期间的经历有没有让你的选择产生动摇？

During the interview, participants will be asked to share a list of digital media content that they consume on a daily basis, especially what they consumed during the lockdown and in response to the pressure of anti-Asian racism. After the researcher categorizes participants according to their stage of identity negotiation, the researcher will list out all media platforms and types of content (social media, video games, podcasts, streaming, reality shows, dramas, movies, music, etc.) to find patterns among them.

Appendix B

Table 1. Demographics and settlement chart

	City	Gender	Field of Study	Sexuality	Settlement	Reason of Settlement
P1	3rd	Female	Literature	Straight	Canada	Finish school in China
P2	3rd	Female	Geography	Straight	China	Family
P3	5th	Male	Sociology	Bisexual	Canada	Pandemic economy
P4	6th	Male	Econ	Straight	Canada	Social norms
P5	New 1st	Female	Econ	Straight	Canada	Career
P6	New 1st	Male	Econ	Straight	Canada	Career, less competition
P7	1st	Male	Marketing	Straight	Canada	Girlfriend
P8	New 1st	Female	Psychology	Straight	China	Parents
P9	4th	Female	Econ	Straight	China	Life plan in China
P10	New 1st	Male	Commerce	Straight	Undecided	Diversity in Canada
P11	1st+	Non-binary	Marketing	Straight	Canada	Diversity
P12	New 1st	Trans-Male	Kinesiology	Straight	Canada	Liberty; queer rights
P13	New 1st	Male	Communication	Gay	Canada	Queer rights
P14	3rd	Female	Commerce	Straight	Canada	Boyfriend; human rights
P15	New 1st	Male	History/Philosophy	Straight	CA/CN	Cultural diversity, benefits
P16	2nd	Female	Not available	Pansexual	Canada	Multicultural and diversity
P17	New 1st	Male	Biology	Straight	Any country	Less competition
P18	New 1st	Female	Computer Science	Straight	US	Tax
P19	New 1st	Female	Math	Bisexual	China	Too high a cost to stay;
P20	3rd/5th	Female	Digital media	Straight	China	Never planned to stay;

Table 2. Evaluation of acculturation

	Friends	Diaspora	Banana	Acculturation
P1	Some CBC	Interested in studying Canadian diaspora	Support intercultural communication	Integrate
P2	Diversified friends	Recognize Toronto diaspora	-	Integrate
P3	Diversified friends	Recognize Toronto diaspora	-	Integrate

P4	Enjoy working with other ethnic groups	Self-identified as part of diaspora	Critical thinking and reflection	Integrate
P5	Diversified friends	Still has Chinese values	-	Integrate
P6	Mostly Chinese	Self-identified as part of diaspora	Not Canadian, but enjoy diversified options here	Integrate
P7	Have more diversified friends	Self-identified as part of diaspora	Support integration	Integrate
P8	Have some diversified friends	Self-identified as part of diaspora	Claim not banana, but mixed culture	Integrate
P9	Diversified friends	No; will go back to CN	Still very Asian	Separate
P10	Diversified friends	Maybe, not belonging here yet	Still very Chinese	Integrate
P11	Mostly Chinese	No; only intl student, mobile identity	Still identified as Chinese	Integrate
P12	Diversified friends (even in CN)	No, still CN	Not banana	Integrate
P13	Diversified friends	Self-identified as diaspora **- hybrid**	Not banana yet	Integrate
P14	Diversified friends	Not immigrant yet	Somewhat influenced - not choosing CN	Integrate
P15	Diversified friends	No; rooted in CN	Being seen as banana - critical thinking	Integrate
P16	More CN than others	Not immigrant yet; but likely in the future	Could be considered by others	Marginalized
P17	Diversified friends	No, still CN and a cosmopolitan	Not banana - race is not a label	Integrate
P18	Mostly Chinese	Yes; enjoy travelling between countries	Not banana, rooted in China	Separate
P19	Both	No, still feel like CN	Critical thinking	Integrate
P20	Mostly Chinese	Partially, not assimilated	Being influenced by inclusivity here	Separate

Appendix C

Table 3. Digital media tools

	Platform				
P1	微信	YouTube	QQ	Tencent video	Kugou Music
P2	微博	小红书	豆瓣	Instagram	Reddit
P3	Instagram	YouTube	Bilibili	Snapchat	Reddit
P4	Bilibili	Instagram	Twitter	Steam	YouTube
P5	微信	Instagram	王者荣耀	抖音	爱一番
P6	Netflix	微信	抖音	riot	steam
P7	小红书	Twitter	YouTube	FaceBook	LinkdeIn
P8	微信	小红书	Netflix/Disney+	Youtube	Bilibili
P9	微信	TikTok	YouTube	Netflix,	Instagram
P10	抖音	贴吧	Reddit	Steam	Twitter
P11	Bilibili	Twitch	Twitter	Weibo	YouTube
P12	抖音	小红书	Bilibili	YouTube	Instagram
P13	Instagram	微信	小红书	抖音	Bilibili
P14	Instagram	微信	Netflix	小红书	抖音
P15	微信	Bilibili	YouTube	懂球帝	Instagram
P16	YouTube	FaceBook	Instagram	CBC Gem	Discord
P17	微信	YouTube	Whatsapp	Twitter	FaceBook
P18	小红书	微信	YouTube	Instagram	Twitter
P19	Bilibili	YouTube	小红书	Instagram	FaceBook
P20	Bilibili	YouTube	微博	Twitter	Instagram

Table 4. Most popular media platforms

Top five Chinese media	Number of participants	Top five Western media	Number of participants
WeChat 微信	10	YouTube	14
Bilibili 哔哩哔哩	9	Instagram	13
Red 小红书	8	Twitter	7
TikTok 抖音	6	Netflix	4
Weibo 微博	3	Facebook	4

Table 5. Account/content

	Content					CN vs W
P1	今日说法	新闻直播间	BBC News	CNN News	DW News	2:3
P2	Blogto	Yoga with Adrienne,	TED-Ed	Instagram @oops_ohemma	Pamela Relief	1:4

P3	志祺七七	观察者网	SaifShawf	DrewDurhil	Cheap	2:3
P4	Bebetterforeva	Harr1erDuBois	吉普赛蹦 @Ichocolatbonbon	去追一只鹿 @Estellaluu	Uoftmetaverse	0:5
P5	狂飙	去有风的多地方	陈情令	你的名字	风吹半夏	4:1
P6	英雄联盟	apex	狂飙	LPL	rainbow 6	1:4
P7	Blondie in China	和之梦	VideoGameDunkey	YongYea	Lunamos	1:4
P8	公众号：英国那些事儿	公众号：海边的西塞罗	公众号：白岛岩心	逍遥散人	Modern Family	1:4
P9	金铲铲之战	老高与小茉	脑洞乌托邦	Netflix	哈尔的移动城堡	1:4
P10	英雄联盟	怕上火暴王老菊	Apex	原神	Steam games	2:3
P11	League of Legends	World of Warcraft	COD	Apex Legends	Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six Siege	0:5
P12	Basketball and sneakers	Car	@enzo	@甲甲	Food and entertainment	-
P13	女皇异闻录 5	blogTo	崩坏 3	小岛大浪吹	South China Morning Post	3:2
P14	加拿大超级生活	nasa	万花筒梅花六	王鹤棣	加国无忧	2:3
P15	新闻联播	小约翰可汗	袁腾飞	老高和小茉	小岛大浪说	4:1
P16	Tuca & Bertie	CBC News	Edvasian (YouTuber)	Sarah Z (YouTuber)	Jessie Gender	0:5
P17	YouTube 阿星探店	YouTube CBC News,	YouTube Thomas 阿福	YouTube The Food Ranger,	YouTube Mark Wiens	0:5
P18	Apple News	端传媒	多伦多生活	豆瓣艰苦留学组	discord 学校相关的频道	1:4
P19	光遇	英大吉	slay of spire	Rachel & Jun's Adventures!	vee kativhu	1:4
P20	Fate 系列的动画；	爱，死亡，机器人	Nijisanji EN	Hades	弹丸论破系列	0:5