

The '*Visa Student Dream*': An Examination of Shifting Trends and Vulnerabilities in Chinese
International Student Populations Within Toronto's Secondary Schools

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the experiences of Chinese international students in secondary schools in Canada, paying particular attention to the vulnerabilities and risks among this population. Along with the pre-existing systemic issues international students face, the COVID-19 pandemic placed these students in an even more precarious position due to the anti-Asian racism and discrimination that manifested itself during this time period. The study employed Critical Race Theory (CRT), specifically Asian Critical Theory (AsianCrit) which prioritizes Asian identity and their experiences with racism to understand and contextualize how prevailing systems of oppression impacted the lives of Chinese international students. Utilized alongside these theories are complementary frameworks like International Student Security (ISS) and neoliberalism to further explore the experiences, vulnerabilities and risks among this population. Multiple constructs were also used like model minority, yellow peril, neo-racism, and racial capitalism to expand understanding and application of theories such as CRT and AsianCrit to this international student population. The principles highlighted within CRT and AsianCrit theories, utilized alongside the frameworks and constructs all built upon each other to provide further insight into how educational institutions continue to operate within a dominant culture paradigm and with whiteness as a norm and how programs are maintained and/or implemented based on assumed notions and ideologies of Asian international students. Interview data was collected from six teachers and six Chinese international students from public secondary schools within the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Findings revealed that neoliberalism has ultimately created unethical and unsafe policies and practices that negate EDI initiatives, and the push towards standardization and individualism perpetuate racial inequities. Standards of success are rooted in Whiteness that validates Western knowledge, with concepts like racial capitalism playing a role

in exploiting Chinese international students. Issues and concerns regarding the academic, social, and housing/guardianship experiences of Chinese international youth were also revealed, as students faced discrepancies between the services and support that was advertised in comparison to what they actually experienced in Canada. Key concerns and gaps in policy and programmatic supports were also identified for international students with the study outlining recommendations and interventions to better support international secondary students during their studies in Canada.

Keywords: Chinese international secondary students; Critical race theory; Asian critical theory; Neoliberalism; International student security; Teachers; Whiteness

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List of Acronyms

Term	Acronyms
Asian Critical Theory	AsianCrit
Critical Race Theory	CRT
Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion	EDI
International Student Security	ISS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

The number of international students enrolled in Canadian K-12 schools has grown tremendously, with the K-12 sector having the largest growth rate of all study levels in 2022, with more students approved for primary and secondary study permits than ever before (ApplyBoard, 2023). From 2016 to 2022, there was a dramatic increase of over 100% of permit approvals, except for 2020 where we saw a dip in numbers due to the pandemic (ApplyBoard, 2023). However, these numbers have rebounded to 80% as of 2022 (Amberstudent, 2023). The leading sending country for international students at the K-12 level is China at 10,865 students in 2022, with the second largest population coming from South Korea at 2,955 (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2023).

However, despite this tremendous growth, as a classroom teacher in the York Regions District School Board (YRDSB), I began to notice the extreme disconnect between Chinese international secondary students within the classroom and their greater community. Many of these students often arrive with aspirations to achieve the ‘visa dream’, as my dissertation title suggests, where they will easily graduate, enroll in a prestigious university, and ideally establish themselves permanently in Canada or America. Despite these aspirations, the reality of my student participants experiences were on the contrary, further exposing them to vulnerabilities within the educational system. Furthermore, there remains limited focused research that investigates the full experiences of international students in secondary schools in comparison to research focused on international students in post-secondary institutions (Kuo & Roysircar, 2004; Popadiuk, 2009; Popadiuk & Marshall, 2011). Amidst the school board restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic, we know even less or have few insights into the

unique perspectives and challenging experiences faced by secondary school international students as they continued to study in Canada during this challenging period.

Thus, while research on international secondary students is limited, what we do know about this population is of concern. First, given their age and stage in life they are vulnerable. They enter their host countries unaccompanied and live with limited supervision or assistance, often exercising fewer liberties due to their status as minors (Popadiuk, 2009). Second, international students have also shared their experience of potential mistreatment or neglect from the guardians (Berg & Farbenblum, 2019; Popadiuk, 2009). These circumstances raise questions regarding gaps in responsibility and quality of care with an apparent need for greater regulation and oversight. Third, within the academic realm, many students with minority or immigrant status are streamed into lower-level programs that perpetuate othering and alienation through systemized separation (Jackson et al., 2013; James, 2001; Kuo & Roysircar, 2006; Wu, 2019). This contrasts with how Canada endorses and perpetuates the global imagery of multiculturalism as a core component of Canadian identity (Ministry of Education, 2015; Ng & Metz, 2015; Tamtik, 2019; Toronto District School Board, 2019), implying inclusive approaches to international education.

Many international youths experience further isolation from the limited opportunities to integrate with domestic students, hindering their ability to achieve a sense of belonging and lacking greater social and support networks (Kuo & Roysircar, 2004; Wu, 2019; Wu & Zheng, 2019). Many issues go unaddressed due to underreporting since international students frequently express a reluctance to share their challenges due to performance pressures and a fear of being sent home (Popadiuk, 2009; Lee, 2015; Wu, 2019). This raises concern as these youth populations can be subjected to exploitation in an unregulated system full of gaps (Calder et al.,

2016; Popadiuk & Marshall, 2011; Sherry et al., 2010). Chinese international students have reported feeling exploited by recruitment agencies and school boards for financial purposes, feeling little to no support despite the high tuition fees they are forced to pay (Cheng, 2019; EduCanada, 2022). Alongside this, Chinese international youths, who comprise the majority of international secondary school enrolments (78.7%), were placed in a particularly vulnerable state as they faced further issues of prejudice and discrimination perpetuated by the pandemic and strained geo-political relations between Canada and China (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2018; Massot, 2019; Trilokekar et al., 2021; Wang, 2020; Zheng et al., 2020).

2. Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of Chinese international students in secondary schools in Canada paying particular attention to the vulnerabilities and risks among this population. There remain vast opportunities to expand our understanding and perspectives of these students, as the pre-existing systemic issues international students face are further exacerbated by the recent global pandemic, COVID-19. The findings of the proposed study will thus contribute to the limited existing literature on this population (Kuo & Roysircar, 2004; Popadiuk, 2009; Popadiuk & Marshall, 2011). It will also contribute to theory in terms of assessing the significance of nationality and international status as a determinant of inequity that may permeate various layers within the education system (Hiraldo, 2010). Finally, the study will shed light on policy and programs to protect the vulnerability of these international youth, bringing forth insight on the internationalization of secondary school students in Canada (Lee, 2015; Marginson et al., 2010; Sawir et al., 2009; Sherry et al., 2010).

The proposed study will focus on Chinese international secondary students in particular as they represent one of the largest international student populations. Furthermore, I have

observed first-hand in my role as a secondary educator the experiences of Chinese international secondary students. This student population is identified as particularly vulnerable due to the major differences in academic, social, and cultural practices (Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Wu, 2019). Furthermore, the current COVID-19 pandemic has placed Chinese international secondary students in an even precarious position due to the anti-Asian racism and discrimination that has manifested as a result, alongside the rising geo-political tensions between China and Canada. This can ultimately impact their experiences and ability to integrate within a new education system and culture in Canada.

3. Research Questions

The primary research questions guiding the study are:

- What are the discrepancies and gaps between how Canadian secondary schools are marketed to Chinese international students and their experiences once they are within the system?
- What are the key concerns and gaps in policy and programmatic supports for international students' academic, social, housing and guardianship experiences that influence their protection and security?
- What insights do the experiences of Chinese international student population in GTA secondary schools reveal about Ontario's school policies on multiculturalism, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI), and international education? How did the pandemic and growing geo-political tensions between Canada and China impact these policies?

The rationale behind these research questions is that they bring forth insight on various aspects of the overall international secondary education experience of Chinese students in Canada. The first research question allows for a critical assessment of potential discrepancies between what Canada advertises to entice international secondary students and the self-described experiences

of Chinese international secondary students. This can establish an understanding of what these students expected before coming to Canada and where the realities of their lived experiences deviated from their expectations once they arrived here. The second research question analyzes more specifically the experiences within the academic, social, and housing and guardianship domains and what these student experiences reveal about gaps in policies and programs. Finally, the third research question is essential to the study as the experiences of Chinese international secondary school students can establish an understanding of what these potential gaps are within policy and programs suggest about limitations of Ontario's school policies on multiculturalism, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) and international education. This study can provide guidance on the types of support that all international students may need, as it can raise awareness regarding on-going issues and struggles endured by Chinese international students potentially and non-Chinese international students alike. Furthermore, it will shed light on how global challenges such as the pandemic and geo-political tensions impact international education and ultimately the nature of the individual and collective international student experience. Such shifting contexts can leave many (Chinese) international students feeling further isolated, stigmatized, and ostracized during their studies abroad (Nguyen & Balakrishnan, 2020).

4. Secondary International Education: What Do We Know?

International education is a broad term that has developed into a variety of meanings over the years, often used to define the diverse forms of educational and cultural relations among different nations. Though the term is dynamic, there are generally three fundamental aspects that are associated with international education: The international content of curriculum, international mobility of students involving academic research or training, and engagement with education abroad in educational programs or supports (Arum & Van de Water, 1992; Knight,

2014). In contemporary context, international education has a tremendous economic impact and is vital for social prosperity for many Western countries (Altbach & Knight, 2007). For example, international education in Canada is one of the leading factors to Canada's prosperity, with international students accruing an estimated \$21.6 billion dollars in tuition, accommodations, and other various expenditures in 2018 prior to COVID-19 (Global Affairs Canada, 2019). In the post pandemic environment, there is an expected rebound with economic growth cited to continue its momentum moving onward, with international students playing a major role as the Government of Canada has announced plans to support economic recovery through immigration and student enrolment (Government of Canada, 2020; M Squared Media, 2022). The significance of revenue generated by international students on Canada's economy is so immense that it now outweighs other staple economic commodities and services exported by Canada, such as lumber or auto parts (Global Affairs Canada, 2019).

Furthermore, a key factor to the economic prosperity of Canada is the successful marketing Canada has engaged with that has established a global imagery of "multiculturalism" that is often associated with the nation. Canada was one of the first countries to adopt multiculturalism as an official policy in 1971, with the concept having many dimensions but pointed focus on notions of celebrating differences and inclusivity (Wong & Guo, 2015; Ng & Metz, 2015). The values and principles that align with this imagery have frequently been adopted by the Canadian government and education service providers to market Canadian education systems across the globe. This imagery of multiculturalism is essential as it has assisted in international education recruitment, as it has evolved and become a prominent symbol of Canada's national identity. This has ultimately established positive stereotypes that define Canada as welcoming, inclusive, and diverse, contributing to a narrative that is often utilized by

recruitment agencies and organisations to enhance its profile in the international market, supporting these claims with statistics that display Canada's "rich heritage" (Statistics Canada, 2017, p. 1; EduCanada, 2019; Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2022).

As such, Ontario has implemented educational strategies to maintain their recognition as one of the leading destinations for high-quality education, as it accommodates nearly half of all international students living and studying in Canada, with Ontario has reportedly accommodated more than 126,000 international students from kindergarten to post-secondary education (Ministry of Education, 2015). Some of these strategies include the Ontario Ministry of Education's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (2009) that aimed to "embrace diversity [...] and reach our goal of making Ontario's education system the most inclusive in the world," (4) and Learning for All (2013) that was a resource guide designed to support educators in closing the gap of achievement for all students. Ontario's Strategy for K-12 International Education created in 2015 was specifically created in order to enrich diversity and propagate safe and inclusive learning for all students (Ministry of Education, 2015). Internationalization in this strategy was addressed and defined as an "ongoing process of change in the school program and environment, with opportunities to enhance learning through the integration of international, intercultural, and/or global perspectives, cultures, and experiences" (Ministry of Ontario, 2015, p. 12). The Ministry identified four major goals in their strategy in the aim of preparing students for global citizenship: (a) significant increases in international student enrolment in the public education sector; (b) globally enriching Ontario's curriculum; (c) internationalizing learning opportunities; and (d) fostering avenues to post-secondary education, or other living opportunities (Ministry of Education, 2015; Trilokekar & Tamtik, 2020). Ultimately, the fundamental goal of the K-12 international strategy is the promotion of international education

programs for students and educators in Ontario and across the globe, with a focus on recruitment and the value and significance of developing global understanding, skills, and collaboration in the twenty-first century (Ministry of Education, 2015).

Other school boards across Canada have implemented similar International Education Strategy plans, such as in British Columbia and Manitoba, which also emphasize the internationalization of education and the potential benefits it possesses in increasing intercultural learning and awareness (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2015; Government of Manitoba; 2008). However, similar to Ontario, these school boards demonstrate an economic agenda with attention drawn to increased recruitment and marketing towards international students in order to maximize revenue streams (British Columbia Council for International Education, 2017; Government of Manitoba; 2008; Government of Manitoba, n.d.; Trilokekar & Tamtik, 2020). Bamberger et al. (2019) identify that these motivations highlight the neoliberal frameworks that are present in international education, which is the belief that market principles should become the standard for regulation and be implemented in all aspects of society, including education (Bamberger et al., 2019).

5. Secondary International Education: What Do We *Not* Know?

Examining literature on secondary international education policies and practices highlighted the cracks and tensions that are apparent within Canada's public education system. While international education and the experiences of Chinese international students have been explored in different contexts within Canadian post-secondary literature (Calder et al., 2016; Cantwell, 2015; Guo & Guo, 2017; Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013; Scott et al., 2015; Tavares, 2021), there remains a distinct research gap that focuses on the experiences of secondary international students. Within the limited research, findings have identified unique

issues and concerns that are relevant for these student populations in their academic, social and cultural, and domestic domains of their lives. There is also room to explore neoliberalism at the K-12 level, and how the increasing shift of privatization within the public sector in Canada has allowed neoliberalism to secure a role in the governance of education systems (Trilokekar & Tamtik, 2020). Numerous strategies have been implemented to allow for endogenous privatization, which is “introducing ideas, practices, and values of the for-profit sector into public education,” (Winton, 2022, p. 10) to transpire through the establishment of educational markets. As Winton (2022) describes, the organization of educational markets allows for consumers to have the ability to select products based on different information and align with their own preferences, needs, and aims (e.g. athletic and arts based schools, international baccalaureate as the internationalization of education). Market-driven policies are already becoming formally integrated within public education, seen across provinces like British Columbia in *The School Amendment Act* of 2002 that declared an aspect of responsibility for public education funding was the “entrepreneurial activities of school districts” (Fallon & Poole, 2014, p. 303). The introduction of such policies signifies that school boards must become less reliant on governments to provide adequate funding, and if additional revenue is required, they will need to lean on alternative avenues. This not only allows governments to continue to be “off the hook to provide adequate funds for public education” (Winton, 2022, p. 71), but can potentially lead to increased tensions between school boards. The necessity of international education recruitment can encourage boards to think of each other “as ‘the competition’ and to prioritize their own constituents’ needs over those of students, families, and staff in other boards” (Winton, 2022, p. 72).

Much of the literature on the profitability of international students have often been conducted on a post-secondary level (Song, 2020; Stein & de Andreotti, 2016; Stein, 2017; Yao & Mwangi, 2022). Those who come independently as a minors have another added layer of vulnerability that cannot be completely shared with the experiences of post-secondary and graduate international students, such as being exploited from recruitment agencies, or facing neglect or abuse from guardians and homestays (Cheng, 2019; Mok, 2015; Kuo & Roysircar, 2004; Lee, 2015; Popadiuk, 2009; Popadiuk & Marshall, 2011; Tsong et al. 2021; Wu, 2019; Zheng, 2014). First, within the academic and social and cultural domains of Chinese international secondary school students, there is room to expand on the insights of these students' experiences. The proposed study can reveal whether student experiences not only align or differ from previous research, but also if there are any notable differences between students. Within the domestic domains of Chinese international secondary students, there is very limited research on international education services like recruitment agencies, guardianship, and homestay services and the lack of regulation and unethical practices these services are engaging with that place these students at risk. In particular, there is limited research on the exact responsibilities and role of school boards, along with what federal government procedures are in protecting international minors from these international education services.

There is also limited research that explores Whiteness and the dominant culture in secondary educational contexts for international students, especially in examining EDI and racial dialogues on these marginalized students. Much of the discourse regarding Whiteness and implicit biases in educational conversations are framed within White and Black student perspectives (Chin et al., 2020; Chiu et al., 2022; Marcucci, 2020; Quinn & Desruisseaux., 2022; Scott, 2021; Starck et al., 2020; Whitford & Emerson, 2018), with very little discussion focused on

Asian domestic student populations (Chang & Demyan, 2007; Godsil et al., 2014; Hartlep, 2015) and even less to none on the topic of international student populations. This calls attention to the significance of exploring what multiculturalism and EDI truly means in the context of international education. There is little research conducted that focuses on how the dominant culture may be informing these values on the K-12 level, and the ways in which public education fails to recognize international students as a marginalized community, continuing to perpetuate a cycle of oppression and discrimination (Tavares, 2021). The study will also explore whether the term “diversity” has been appropriated within EDI to market the Canadian experience internationally, or if the realities of the data suggest inequitable experiences for Chinese international secondary students within classrooms. While CRT enables this exploration of Chinese international secondary school students’ experiences within domestic, educational, and social contexts in Canada, there is also limited literature focused on the examination of CRT on a secondary education level, as much of the research that explores CRT for this population have been conducted on post-secondary landscapes (Yao, 2018; Yao et al., 2018). The study’s examination of CRT, neo-racism, and the model minority myth can reveal insights on how dominant discourses and Whiteness are perpetuated within practices and policies despite amplified emphasis on EDI in public secondary education.

Finally, there are gaps in literature examining the impact of COVID-19 and the long-standing vulnerabilities that Chinese international student populations experience, and how the pandemic exposed the additional cracks within the system that increased the invisibility of these student populations. While some research is beginning to emerge on the impact of COVID-19 on international students, much of the literature again is focused on post-secondary settings. This study will examine how detrimental COVID-19 was on the overall experiences of Chinese

international secondary students in Canada. This can include insight on how the pandemic exposed additional cracks in the system that increased the invisibility of international students, how international students were potentially disregarded in the new changes implemented, such as the shift to online learning, and the exposure to experiences of racism, discrimination, and anti-Asian hate founded from the coronavirus.

6. Description of Study

6.1. Theoretical Framework

The study utilized Critical Race Theory (CRT) as it applies a comprehensive approach to understanding race, racism, and the idealistic notions prevalent within institutional efforts to achieve diversity and inclusivity that can overlook racial realities (Hiraldo, 2010; Yao et al., 2019). This theory will strengthen my conceptual framework as it advocates against white hegemony and supremacy, and claims of colour-blindness, which are issues that may be overlooked within Canada due to claims of multiculturalism (Yao et al., 2019). Specifically, the study employs Asian Critical Theory (AsianCrit) as it prioritizes Asian identity and their experiences with racism in order to comprehend how these prevailing systems of oppression have impacted their lives (Museus & Ifitkar, 2014). These theories ground the study's analysis of Whiteness and how it impacts Chinese international secondary school students' experiences within domestic, educational, and social contexts in Canada. It can also help develop reflective understandings of racism and how it can potentially shape the experiences of these student populations.

More specifically, AsianCrit can be used to analyze the ways that Chinese international students are racialized in their academic, social, and domestic domains, and the forms of discriminatory policies or unclear boundaries they experience studying abroad (Museus &

Ifitkar, 2014). The risks and vulnerabilities that COVID-19 exposed Chinese international students to, with many of these student populations becoming scapegoats for society and being harassed and stigmatized for wearing medical masks (Ma & Zhan, 2020; Yao & Mwangi, 2022), highlights how quickly Chinese international students can go from Model Minority to Yellow Peril. CRT and AsianCrit is foundational for the study to analyze how these shifting narratives not only contribute to the maintenance of White supremacy, but how systemic layers of Whiteness continue to shape public education systems within Canada (Museus & Ifitkar, 2014). This is especially valuable in examining the additional barriers these students face, such as language difficulties, the struggles in adapting to Western learning styles, challenges in fostering meaningful friendships with domestic students, and the shortcomings of homestay families and guardianship (Cheng, 2019; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006; Wong et al., 2010).

Alongside this, I utilize neoliberal frameworks to examine the increasing neoliberal agenda within public education, as school boards are pursuing revenue sources in the form of international education in response to funding cutoffs from governments. This neoliberal agenda within education has increasingly led to education being served as “internationally tradable commodities” (Elnagar, 2021, p. 33), with international students being viewed as consumers (Marginson et al., 2010). This ultimately has implications on their human security as the desire for profit from schools and a lack of regulation and involvement from governments lead to gaps in quality of care, human agency, and increased risk of exploitation. Alongside this, scholars have criticized the notion of neutrality and individualism, which is the idea that each person is determinant of their own success or struggle and is often utilized to disregard group-based racial disparities (Ullucci & Battey, 2011). These concepts play a role in perpetuating an unjust system as it is ultimately inequitable and does not take into consideration the differences of each

individual. These concepts will be further expanded upon in chapter three where an overview of the basic tenets of CRT will be discussed and how they operate within education.

The foundational understanding of CRT, AsianCrit, and how neoliberalism is entwined with public education will be crucial for the effective implementation of direct solutions International Student Security (ISS) advocates for. ISS aims to improve standards of protection and human security for international students to ensure that international student populations experience lasting improvements (Marginson, 2012). Establishing this understanding will build the roots that ISS can draw on to examine Chinese secondary school students' formal and informal network experiences in relation to educational, governmental, and private organisations (Marginson et al., 2010; Sawir et al., 2012). This is extremely important as active human agency has been associated with increased ability for individuals to be flexible and adapt with change, essential for “academic success, emotional happiness and intercultural relations” (Marginson et al., 2010, p. 61).

The use of CRT and AsianCrit as theories, along with associated frameworks like neoliberalism and ISS, and complementary constructs like model minority myth, yellow peril, neo-racism, and racial capitalism will bring forth unique and significant contributions. First, CRT and neoliberalism are not often positioned in relation to one another. Neoliberalism is a framework that focuses on market-driven ideals and practices, with broader objectives that move away from society to reflect the notion of “free, responsabilized individuals” (Winton, 2022, p. 18). Winton (2022) introduced political theorist Wendy Brown, who discussed that neoliberals reject the idea that governments should pursue pre-determined strategies that include efforts towards social justice. Instead, neoliberalism should focus on the individual, and how it is ultimately their responsibility, not the governments, to meet their needs and ensure their own

success. Failure to do so is then understood as the individual's own "consequence of poor choices rather than inequitable policies, structural inequalities, racism, sexism, or other societal factors" (p. 18). On the other hand, CRT recognizes how racism is more than just individual bias and prejudice. Instead, it is a social construct and a systemic issue that is entrenched in policies, laws, and institutions that perpetuate white privilege and supremacy and maintains social inequities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Hiraldo, 2010; Leonardo, 2013).

The conversation is no longer focused on how the government is failing to protect these vulnerable students, but rather, how individuals are at fault for their own failure or inability to meet the standards of success. However, success is often rooted in Whiteness that validates Western knowledge and values (Knaus, 2018). This framework perpetuates White privilege as it continues to prioritize White interests that benefit Western nations and sustains racialized inequities. Thus, the use of neoliberalism and CRT in conversation with each other will enable new perspectives, as race and Whiteness are not often examined within the context of neoliberalism to understand how they interact with each other. CRT will draw upon how neoliberal driven practices and policies function with issues of race and Whiteness, revealing nuanced understandings of how the dominant culture and White supremacy is perpetuated within educational institutions, policies, and practices. The use of CRT and neoliberalism will explore systems of oppression and address ways to dismantle the dominant culture of Whiteness through systemic change (Hiraldo, 2010; Pechenkina & Liu, 2018). This will also build off one another to identify the vulnerabilities and risks among Chinese international secondary youth, how these student populations can potentially be racialized in every aspect of their academic, social, and domestic domains, and expose the exploitative nature of recruitment agencies and homestay

programs in order to determine what areas of new or reformed policies need to be implemented to better regulate international education and protect these vulnerable youths.

6.2. Methodology

Given the use of my theoretical framework of CRT and AsianCrit which aims to critique social injustice and prioritize the voice of the marginalized individual, a qualitative approach is essential to thoroughly explore the intended research questions and develop a more comprehensive interpretation and account of the social phenomena under study (Creswell, 2014; Fischer & Guzel, 2022; Lim, 2024; Naeem et al., 2023). The study had multiple data sources, which included a brochure and EDI analysis, along with student and teacher participant interviews that ensured that the research problem was thoroughly investigated and had multi-faceted understanding (Lim, 2024). The aim of the study was to examine the experiences of Chinese international secondary school students studying in GTA public schools.

The study examined international education brochures and EDI policies from the three largest school boards in Ontario, which were Toronto District School Board (TDSB), Peel District School Board (PDSB) and York Region District School Board (YRDSB) to establish an understanding of how they endorsed international student programs and valued EDI policies or initiatives. The rationale in analysing the international student brochures was to develop an understanding of how international student programs are being promoted within the three major school boards, and the kinds of support and services are available for students. This will be essential in exploring my intended research question that aims to identify the discrepancies and gaps between how Canadian secondary schools are marketed to Chinese international students and their experiences once they are within the system. The EDI policy statements examined from the three school boards websites will also reveal how EDI is being applied in school practices

and considerations, what goals school boards are committed in supporting, and which marginalized students are recognized within EDI policies and decision-making. This exploration will develop an understanding of students' experiences and what they reveal about EDI, and whether international students are visible within Ontario schools EDI policies.

Following this, in-depth interviews with Chinese international secondary youth and teacher participants, with the rationale for investigating Chinese international students within the GTA is due to the culturally diverse school districts. Teacher participants were also interviewed as they were potentially able to identify gaps on a secondary level regarding how educators, policies, and practices disregard international students concerns and circumstances. In this study, Chinese international secondary school participants and their lived experiences studying abroad in GTA secondary schools were examined in order to understand the commonality of these experiences in order to establish meaning of this phenomenon.

Through this approach, the study was able to reveal the discrepancies and gaps with how Canadian secondary schools were marketed to Chinese international students and the realities of their experience once in the system. The insights of individual Chinese international student populations lived experiences, alongside teachers' insights and observations, helped identify overarching concerns and gaps within policy and programmatic supports for international students. The study brought forth understanding of what aspects of international education on a K-12 level need policy and systemic restructuring, and how to better regulate international education to better support and protect international youth. The study highlighted Chinese international secondary students' experiences during the pandemic, revealing how racism shaped their experiences, and how these marginalized students remain invisible in educational policies and practices.

7. Dissertation Organization

This dissertation consists of seven chapters, with literature review following the introductory chapter. The literature review in Chapter 2 provides an overview of relevant literature that examines international education and the experiences of Chinese international students in both post-secondary and secondary institutions within the academic, social, cultural, and domestic domains on their lives. Chapter 3 outlines the core constructs of my theoretical framework which consist of Critical Race Theory (CRT), Asian Critical Theory (AsianCrit), and International Student Security (ISS). This chapter will also provide a description of relevant constructs such as the model minority myth, yellow peril, and neo-racism and how they engage with the theories and apply to the study of Chinese international students.

Following this, Chapter 4 introduces the methodology and study design, where the qualitative approach is described and how these approaches work alongside the theoretical framework to explore the research questions. The interview protocol, rationale for interview questions, research positionality, and data collection procedures will be discussed. Chapter 5 provides an overview of research findings where dominant themes across the international student brochures and participant data (students and teachers) were identified and highlighted. These themes were later critically analyzed in Chapter 6 to further identify broader overarching themes that define and shape the experiences of international students and their vulnerabilities during and post COVID-19.

Finally, chapter seven provides a conclusion, offers recommendations, and possible questions for future research. Additionally, the chapter provides various recommendations that address responsibilities of each actor within international education, such as federal and provincial governments, international student services like recruitment agencies and homestay programs, and

school board accountability. The last chapter ends with an overview of this research study's contributions and proposes new questions for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

An overview of relevant literature will be presented to underscore the significance of this study's investigation. International education and the experiences of Chinese international students have been studied in various contexts within Canadian post-secondary institutions. However, there remains a distinct gap in research that prioritizes the experiences of international students in secondary schools. (Calder et al., 2016; Cantwell, 2015; Guo & Guo, 2017; Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013; Scott et al., 2015; Tavares, 2021) The limited research available underscores the unique needs and issues that international secondary school students face during their studies, such as struggles within the academic, social, cultural, and domestic domains of their lives (Cheng, 2019; Mok, 2015; Popadiuk & Marshall, 2011; Tsong et al. 2021; Wu, 2019; Zheng, 2014). Furthermore, the literature reveals that there may be concerns that cannot be universally shared by all international students. For one, secondary school international students must contend with their limited status as minors within their host country and may face neglect and abuse from guardians and homestays (Kuo & Roysircar, 2004; Lee, 2015; Popadiuk, 2009; Wu, 2019). When analysing the relevant research, reoccurring concerns and issues became apparent, allowing for the identification of relevant themes within the experiences of Chinese international secondary school students, these include: (1) an overview of the push and pull factors for the growth in Chinese international students, (2) experiences with their academic transition, (3) social and cultural assimilation, (4) poor support structures within educational and domestic domains, and (5) an analysis of their experiences during and post COVID-19.

As stated previously, limited research is available regarding Chinese international secondary students as their status as minors may pose a challenge for data collection depending

on the age of consent standards for each educational institution. Alongside this, there is no available research that examined Chinese international secondary students and Chinese domestic students' relationships and interactions. While the primary focus is to examine Chinese international secondary school students' experiences, for purposes of this review I will also include available research on post-secondary Chinese international students as needed. I include this research also because there can also be many similarities drawn between post-secondary and secondary Chinese international students' experiences studying in Canada, such as their experiences adjusting to the academic, social, and cultural changes studying in their host countries, alongside issues with recruitment agencies and homestay services. Furthermore, while I aim to prioritize research focused on Chinese international students' experiences within Canada, I will also include literature on student experiences within the United States and other countries that align with Western standards, culture, norms, and values. Ultimately, this chapter will highlight the overarching issues, concerns, and gaps within support systems and structures for these vulnerable student populations.

1. International Chinese Secondary Students: Push and Pull Factors

In Canada, there has been a 31% increase in international students from 2021 to 2022, demonstrating a noteworthy growth of 43% over the previous five years of international student enrolment, and approximately 170% over the last decade (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2022). For international students at the K-12 level, the leading country for enrolment is overwhelmingly China at 10,865 students in 2022, with the next largest population consisting of South Korea, substantially lower in numbers, at 2,955, and other countries following as seen in Table 1 (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2022).

Table 1

International students in Canada by country at secondary level

Country	International Student Numbers
China	10,865
South Korea	2,955
Vietnam	2,765
Germany	2,745
Japan	2,560

“Push” and “Pull” Factors: Why Canada?

Research reveals that one of the most significant social shifts within China over the past few decades is the rise of the “middle class,” which is characterized by an increase in professional and civil employment and privatized businesses (Cheng, 2019; Farrugia, 2014). This growing middle class has slowly led to a sense of insecurity and anxiety surfacing across China, as many individuals began to feel uncertain of the social climate and opportunities that would be available within their home country. As a result, these social changes can explain the push for Chinese students to choose to study overseas (Cheng, 2019; Choudaha & Chang, 2012). Many middle and upper-class Chinese families can provide more opportunities for their children in hopes of procuring distinction and individual merit through global education. This trend has ushered in a new era where Chinese youths choose to leave their home countries and families to independently gain an education across the globe (Cheng, 2019; Mok, 2015). Numerous terms have been created to describe these student populations, such as “unaccompanied minors” or “unaccompanied sojourners” (Kuo & Roysircar, 2006; Popadiuk, 2009). However, the more

commonly recognized term to describe these international students is “parachute kids” denoting how “they are dropped into the new culture on their own or with minimal adult supervision,” (Popadiuk, 2009, p. 230; Shih, 2016). Chiang-Hom (2004) discussed how these “foreign-born youths” (p. 143) have been displaced from the comforts and familiarities of their homeland and abruptly placed in an unknown culture.

Another push factor identified within the literature is internal circumstances associated with their home countries (Tamtik, 2018). Many secondary students are being sent to study in Western countries in an attempt to avoid difficult circumstances in their home countries, such as intense educational competition, limited career opportunities, or even escaping various political or educational conditions (Cheng, 2019; Mok, 2015; Chiang-Hom, 2004; Wu, 2019). That said, the prevailing purpose of studying in Western countries is the opportunity to achieve success in countries that are commonly perceived as holding high positions within the global hierarchy, making Western education highly desirable in the education market. While Western education is regarded as universally valuable, education from other countries often garners limited or qualified worth (Stein & de Andreotti, 2016). With this understanding, families of these Chinese international youths see “parachuting” to these Western countries as a potential “investment that will have a predictable future payoff that outweighs the difficulties and challenges for both parents and their children” (Chiang-Hom, 2004, p. 145; Tsong et al., 2021).

Tamtik’s (2018) study reinforces this major theme, where a major push factor for parents’ to send their children to study abroad was to advance their future careers and secure a better, more successful future for them. Wu and Zheng (2019) further this point by explaining that the decision to send their children to study abroad was often made after counseling with relatives, friends, and educational recruitment agencies and services. Wu and Tarc (2021) highlighted one

of their Chinese international secondary school participants who stated, “My parents thought that it is ‘worthwhile’ to invest in international education for my ‘brighter future’ and life in cities” (p. 8).

While many “push” factors are internal, several “pull” factors are often external factors in Chinese international secondary school students’ decision to study in Canada. While Tamtik (2018) identifies that a prevailing theme for participants' decision to come to Canada was founded on the perceived high quality and standard of Canadian education, other pull factors limited their decision, such as availability of information from recruitment agencies and services, or visa restrictions. Tamtik’s (2018) study exposes that many Chinese international secondary students felt that they “‘had no choice’” (p.1058). Contrary to perceptions regarding the role of parents in the final decision, the students divulged that recruitment agency options and regulations and visa and immigration process considerations are the main push factors. One student in the study shared, “‘My agency didn’t allow me to choose’” (p. 1058). Tamtik and O’Brien-Klewchuk (2020) revealed in their interviews with parents of international students in K-12 that the easier visa and immigration process was a factor in their decision to study in Canada. In their study, one parent shared, “‘We chose Canada partly because of the easier visa process than in the USA’” (p. 10). Another parent in Tamtik’s (2018) study mentioned that “‘it’s easier to immigrate to Canada than to the US’” (p. 1057) following post-secondary education. Furthermore, while research has indicated that many of these student populations decided to study in Canada to gain better Western educational qualifications (Tamtik, 2018; Wu, 2019; Wu & Tarc, 2021; Wu & Zheng, 2019), Wu and Tarc (2021) also showcase that some students’ chose Canada due to the perception that it is easier to achieve high academic results in comparison to China. One student stated, “‘I could not resist the temptation when Chinese

educational service agencies showed the pictures in which many students who did not study so hard were still admitted by high-ranking universities in Canada” (p. 7).

However, Mok (2015) discussed how many families who decide to send their children to study abroad often do not understand or recognize just how difficult it may be for these unaccompanied minors to navigate unknown territories during some of the most significant years of their development and identity formation. Sending children to study abroad and forcing many to become independent at a young age can impact and ultimately change the bonds children possess with their parents. In some instances, both parents and children can foster “a bitter feeling of being so far apart from each other” (p. 693) that has left many parents developing a sense of guilt towards their children (Zhou, 1998). Chiang-Hom (2004) discussed the difficulties these youth face studying abroad, as prior to studying overseas, these youths spent many of their developmental years in a culture that greatly contrasted with the practices and values of their host country, such as being educated in different languages and learning structures and being involved in their understanding and customs of youth. Upon entering their host countries, these youths quickly transition from being “masters of their own culture... [to finding] themselves categorized and ridiculed as racialized minorities” (p. 143) by their domestic peers. Though all foreign-born youth from immigrant families may face these struggles growing up in Western societies, youth who arrive in their teenage years may face heightened issues, as they may lack familiarity with the customs of the society or possess little proficiency in English to adequately express themselves or be understood. These factors can ultimately impact their academic transition, social and cultural assimilation, language and communication challenges, experiences with support structures, and their overall experience being an international student before and following COVID-19 in Canada.

2. Academic Transition

Academic stress is likely to be intensified for international students as a result of the additional stressors, including second language anxiety and the adaption to a new socio-cultural environment. Much of the literature focused on Chinese international secondary students identify various factors that contribute to the academic challenges they face during their adjustment to their host countries. These factors include differences in academic cultures that result in a perception of lower engagement by teachers, poor interactions with staff and administration, and the pressure and expectations of high performance from international students themselves.

2.1. Differences in Academic Cultures

Wu (2019) discussed how Chinese international secondary school students experience immense pressure to adjust their learning behaviours and styles to match the dominant culture of the host society. Wu and Tarc (2021) further noted how these dominating Euro-centric and American customs and values became representations of the “social and cultural capital of middle and/or elite classes” (p. 4). This causes many Chinese international secondary students to feel “compelled to immerse themselves into the host society” (p. 4) to access or achieve such capital. Those who struggled, or were unable to do so, felt increased otherness within their host nation and experienced other negative feelings associated with failure or lack of belonging. This can demonstrate the degree to which practices and programs in Canadian educational systems continue to perpetuate a Eurocentric curriculum, teaching approaches, and assessment tools aimed to assimilate students to Anglo-Canadian standards and customs (James, 2001). Wu (2019) argued that as newcomers, these student populations are “at a disadvantage when they are pushed by teachers to understand unfamiliar Western social and cultural knowledge [...]” (p. 3). As such, Wu (2019) calls upon educators to support the learning needs of their Chinese

international students who come from diverse cultural backgrounds and are “situated in vulnerable positions in learning” (p. 3) rather than enforcing the dominant Western learning requirements and expectations perpetuated throughout the educational system from the host country.

2.1.1. Perception of Lower Engagement: Confucian Heritage Culture. Many Chinese students have distinct learning styles and approaches stemming from a shared cultural heritage rooted in Confucianism. Confucian education involves cultivating the self for personal improvement and consideration of others. This form of education values academic achievement, diligence in the stride toward academics, and the belief that every individual can attain success through effort rather than innate ability (Rao & Chan, 2009). Many of these Confucian values have been passed down for generations, as a result, a majority of Chinese families continue to manifest these beliefs and attitudes towards learning and education. Activities, learning approaches, and principles with Confucian roots that Chinese students may possess can conflict with many of the teaching and learning practices that Western education values. Zha and Shen (2018) elucidate readers that Confucian tradition and knowledge is “closely linked with social and political life” (p. 449) which encourages “moral responsibility toward others and collective well-being” (p. 449). As a result, many Confucian learners may “sacrifice their faith in academic freedom to serve the interests of the people and the government” (p. 448), rather than pursuing individual knowledge or interests as is often the norm in Western societies.

In previous literature, many Chinese students have been characterized as the opposite of their Western peers, with dominant depictions of Chinese students as passive and obedient learners, and much criticism of their rote learning styles and approaches (Henze & Zhu, 2012). Distinct learning styles among Chinese students arise from the shared cultural heritage rooted in

Confucianism. Watkins and Biggs (1996) coined the term “Chinese learner” to refer to many of these students who originate from East Asia, such as the People’s Republic of China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, Korea, and Japan, as students from these countries all have connections with Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) that can foster qualities of a Chinese learner (Saravanamuthu, 2006).

Many traditional Confucian learning approaches have faced immense criticism in literature, often regarding the emphasis on studying extensively in the learning process which has been adapted into rote learning with an emphasis on memorization (Clark & Gieve, 2006; Henze & Zhu, 2012). However, there is a paradoxical understanding of the Chinese learner, as, despite the criticism of the less favourable learning styles and spaces of Confucian learning approaches, Rao and Chan (2009) reveal that many Chinese international students often excel and even outperform their Western peers in academics, particularly in Mathematics and Sciences. Thus, despite criticism of the learning approaches within CHC, it is apparent that “there are things going on in the fine-grain which are clearly adaptive [...] that engages higher rather than lower cognitive processes (Biggs, 1996 as cited in Rao & Chan, 2009, p. 63).

Rao and Chan (2009) have emphasized that it is important to recognize that Chinese students who may utilize memorization as a learning approach are not just undertaking superficial or passive engagement but can memorize with critical understanding. In Confucian education, memorization is “placed alongside understanding, reflecting, and questioning as basic components of learning. Understanding can facilitate memorization, and memorization is seen as a precursor to deep understanding” (Rao & Chan, 2009, p. 6-7). This is also important in generating a sense of what particular motivations and needs Chinese learners may want or require in their academic experiences (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006). Gu & Schweisfurth (2006)

emphasize how examining the Chinese learner in various contexts can allow educators to foster an awareness and understanding of their Chinese learners in their classrooms, and to move beyond Western stereotypes and dichotomies of Chinese traditional learning that is often criticised or misinterpreted.

2.1.2. Poor Interactions with Staff and Administration. As Wu (2019) mentions, the lack of teacher understanding and awareness of their Chinese learners in the classroom may result in many Chinese secondary school students experiencing struggles with their attempt to grasp the importance of self-exploration and critical thinking central to Western ideals. Popadiuk & Marshall (2011) stressed how feedback from teachers in the form of a “‘bad grade’ and ‘red ink’” (p. 233) may be extremely deterring for international students, as these forms of feedback only result in constant disappointment and feelings of uncertainty in their abilities. Furthermore, language challenges and the ability to communicate and convey oneself in English have been seen to have a significant impact on Chinese international secondary students in their successful adjustment and experiences in Canada. Smith and Khawaja (2011) emphasize how the level of international students’ English competency can be reflective of the level of self-esteem developed and the increased interpersonal relations with domestic students and staff. In Popadiuk and Marshall’s (2011) study, a Chinese secondary student expressed the negative feelings they felt when their teacher struggled to understand their explanation for why they were late, which resulted in them giving up and feeling “‘really embarrassed and scared’” (p. 230).

Experiences like these circumstances, where the lack of effort in understanding international students from teachers or administration in schools, may force many other international students to simply “give up” on their attempts to communicate and be understood. This can be seen in Zheng’s (2014) research of international students in TDSB secondary

schools that revealed that almost half of 3,990 international students (49%) declared they sometimes or rarely/never felt comfortable discussing problems with their teachers. More than half of international students (53%) felt even less comfortable discussing their issues with guidance counselors, and the greatest number of international students (69%) feeling uncomfortable reaching out to principals and vice-principals to discuss their problems. This data is greatly concerning, as these individuals are expected to be dependable support and care structures for international students, especially for Chinese international students who arrive unaccompanied and often with limited resources or services that meet their academic and personal needs.

Furthermore, Wu (2019) argues that the overemphasis on students' responsibility and student-directed learning negatively impacts the relationships Chinese international students develop with their teachers. Wu's (2019) student participants expressed that the "requirements for students' self-governance in learning went beyond their learning abilities" (p. 11) as they not only struggled with English language competency but also did not possess social and cultural knowledge of Western societies. As such, they "desperately yearned for substantial learning support from their Canadian teachers instead of being pushed to blindly and aimlessly probe by themselves" (p. 11). Wu's (2019) study further illustrates the need for educators and administration to develop intercultural awareness of Chinese international secondary students' circumstances with their academic learning. Educators need to interact with Chinese international students consistently to understand the forms of support and accommodations¹

¹ For English language learners, accommodations are strategies and practices implemented by teachers to allow students to meet the curriculum expectations. Providing accommodations allows equitable access for students to learn and demonstrate learning but does not alter curriculum expectations (Government of Ontario, 2024).

students require, to develop an understanding of their language and learning progress, and to adapt learning expectations, goals, and outcomes to align accordingly.

2.1.3. Pressures and Expectations of High Performance. Many student struggles are further magnified by the immense pressure to achieve high academic performance, as many international students attend educational institutions with the expectancy of attaining the same level of academic success or better than in their home country (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Cheng (2019) highlighted that a common goal for parachute kids studying in host countries is to excel in their academics, so much that their “academic performance constantly hangs above their heads [...]” (p. 8). Furthermore, many of Cheng’s (2019) student participants appear to possess a shared preconception that education in Western host countries like the US would be easy, a belief commonly shared amongst students back in their home country, which proved to be “one of the biggest myths” (p. 9). Instead, many admitted that the pressure and amount of work was equivalent or in some cases higher than what they faced back home. These students may also feel immense pressure from their families to succeed, as their education in their host countries is seen as “an investment or even sacrifice by their parents” (Tsong et al., 2021, p. 156), which can compound their stress and result in many international students to restrain themselves from revealing their true emotions or struggles to not worry or distress their parents (Mok, 2015; Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

This narrative of parents’ sacrifice and investment was also highlighted in Wu and Zheng’s (2019) study where Chinese international secondary school students from Canada highlighted the academic pressure from parents, as one student stated, “My parents and I invested so much money and energy in my international education, so we expect high returns” (p. 12). Another student from Wu and Zheng’s (2019) study also shared the loneliness they felt

as “nobody could understand my pressure. My parents, relatives and friends always talk about my success [...] I feel so tired and truly have nobody to share my daily worries and pressures” (p. 15). Wu (2019) also emphasized that there was “great study pressure” (p.12) which “converges with Chinese filial feelings and family expectations to push them to work harder” (p. 12) expressed by their Chinese international secondary students. Wu and Tarc (2021) discussed how their Chinese international secondary students studying in Canada also felt academic pressure from the expectations of their parents for their prosperous family future, and that international students from middle-class families stated that since “their families invested all savings and income in their international education and had higher expectations for the ‘investment return’ that exerted more pressure on them” (p. 6). Confucian traditions and values are foundational to Chinese families, as features of Confucianism like family obligation and hard work and discipline often bleed into “the Chinese perspective toward education” (Chun, 1996, p. 30) and amplify pressures for students. This includes the notion that hard work in academics brings honour to the family, the necessity of monitoring academic work by parents to ensure success, and that there is little need to implement discipline as misbehaviour equates to dishonour of the family (Chun, 1996).

3. Social and Cultural Assimilation

International students have expressed difficulties transitioning to their Western host countries as students are unfamiliar with the social and cultural values, norms, and lifestyles in Euro-American contexts (Kwon et al., 2017; Kuo & Roysircar, 2004; Wu, 2019). With the typical challenges faced by many at this developmental stage, Chinese secondary international students may face further issues and concerns associated with differences in culture and values, and emotional adjustment from being separated from their country of origin at such a young age

(Kuo & Roysircar, 2004). Acculturation can be defined as the process of adapting to a different culture, and Kuo and Roysircar (2004) discuss that the process of acculturation involves emotional and cultural transformations that comprise of learning to live in new cultural and social environments while being socialized in a different context. A significant consequence of acculturation is acculturative stress, which involves a decrease in the status of health for individuals who are in the process of acculturation. Kuo and Roysircar's (2004) results reveal that in a study of three cohorts of Chinese Canadian adolescents in Toronto, Chinese international students possess the lowest acculturation level with the highest acculturative stress in contrast to Chinese students who were born and raised in Canada. In reviewing the literature, the social and cultural assimilation challenges Chinese international secondary students often face include (non)-interactions with domestic students, how they are perceived by domestic students, lack of social capital, racism, and loneliness and isolation.

Cheng's (2019) research also reveal that many Chinese secondary international students have expressed a spectrum of "unfriendliness" (p. 8) that students have experienced from domestic peers. These interactions range from simple mockery or jokes to even ignorant and malevolent prejudice. More than one Chinese international student in Cheng's (2019) study shared how domestic students mocked their accent and that pre-established labels such as being an "ESL student" is often recognized as a negative characteristic. Student participants shared that many domestic students inherently adopted the assumption that Chinese international students all struggle with English and cannot make friends. One Chinese international student that Cheng (2019) interviewed recalled an incident where their local peers suspected them of cheating on an English test due to their high academic scores. They informed them, "You are an international

student, and we are local students. How can you get a higher score in English than we do? [...] What can I do? I can't really argue with them" (p. 8).

Students also experienced "jokes" said to them by local students. However, while some jokes were innocent enough, other jokes were too antagonistic to laugh off. One student participant in Cheng's (2019) shared that a domestic student would often shout comments like "go back to your communist country," (Cheng, 2019, p. 8), because the student felt "it was 'cool' to use the word 'communist'" (p. 8). Experiences like these can lead students to feel a sense of hostility from their domestic peers. Many have expressed how they felt they had to accept these "jokes" and "ridicules" as harmless with limited capability to rebut or defend themselves. In some cases, the jokes could be "too much" to brush off lightly, and these occurrences leave Chinese secondary school students reluctant to associate or communicate with local students which negatively impacts their acculturation (Cheng, 2019). This was seen when one Chinese international student revealed to Cheng (2019) that in their previous school, they were suspended for numerous days because they were involved in two fights with local male students who had played practical jokes on them. This suspension hurt their adaption because despite him not being "hostile toward local students [...] [they were] still reluctant to have much association with them" (p. 8) as a result of past experiences. Furthermore, Long (2022) examined the experiences of Chinese post-secondary international students and discovered that the majority of students often faced instances of discrimination with behaviours commonly associated "with a Western 'superiority complex' and the COVID-19 pandemic" (p. 170). Long (2022) explains that the "hierarchical dichotomy between the West and non-West (e.g. "superior" and "inferior") is systematically manifested in many educational institutions of the Western world" (p. 165). Many of these students shared that domestic students often possess an "ingrained superiority complex"

(p. 170) that could be easily felt across their interactions. As a result of this cultural hierarchy, Cui (2019) highlights that Chinese Canadian youth are often perceived as powerless and unwanted, making them more likely to be victims of bullying and discrimination.

4. Poor Support Structures: Homestay Programs and Guardianship

Another area of concern identified within the literature is the struggles Chinese international students experienced with their homestay programs and host families that impaired their relationship and experiences with their host country. Concerns regarding the highly unregulated industry of international education were expressed in Xing and Zhou's (2018) interview with Moy Wong-Tam, the executive director of the Centre for Immigrant and Community Services (CICS). Xing and Zhou (2018) discovered that hundreds of thousands of international students across the globe are "fending for themselves in a new country without adequate support from school boards, provincial governments and the federal government" (para. 5). In particular with the homestay industry, Wong et al. (2010) discusses how several private organizations often take agency in providing these services for students, which Wong-Tam further supports by stating that these circumstances can leave students at risk to potential "scams and poor treatment at the hands of the people responsible for the kids' wellbeing [...] It's concerning because we're seeing many gaps [...] The system is full of holes right now" (para. 6-7).

Wong-Tam explains that when minors arrive in Canada, they are required to have a family or homestay and a custodian or guardian who is appointed by parents or agencies to ensure the safety and well-being of these children. Wong et al. (2010) further their stance by stating that homestay families aim to not only provide a place for international students to live, but to nurture a positive learning environment that includes them in their regular routines so

students can participate and come to understand Canadian culture and values. Instead, research has revealed that many international students' experiences with host families were minimal, or even severe enough to be seen as negligence (Popadiuk, 2009; Xing, 2020; Xing & Zhou, 2018). It appears that for many homestay families, a major motivation is the financial opportunities that are prevalent within this growing market, rather than the welfare of their wards. As such, Wong-Tam informed Xing and Zhou (2018) that it is "unlikely homestay families and custodians can replace a student's parents, particularly when there's money to be made from the system" (para. 9). Through Xing and Zhou's (2018) investigation, they discovered that students' families pay approximately \$950 to \$1,300 a month to homestay families for accommodation and meals, and between approximately \$1000 and \$2,500 compensation a year to guardians depending on the range of services they provide in Wong-Tam's settlement agency. However, due to the lack of regulation, the settlement agency disclosed that these homestay families and guardians can easily exploit international youths and "charge a lot more and do a lot less than promised," as illustrated by the experiences of one of the Chinese international students Xing and Zhou (2018) interviewed.

This student revealed to Xing and Zhou (2018) that their parents had paid six times more than the approximate average for "the so-called 'super-custodian' package to guarantee [their] custodian would give [them] extra attention" (para. 11), which the guardians did not ultimately deliver. Instead, this student expressed their frustration and loneliness as they felt unsupported by their host family, stating that the times when they were not at school, they would just be alone in their room in despair, where they spent "so many nights, [crying] under my blanket" (para. 3). In times of emergency, the student could not contact their guardian and was only able to get in touch after nine missed phone calls and more than five hours later, as "he said he was at a party

and didn't hear the phone ring" (para. 4). This student discovered the following day when the guardian took them to the hospital that they were diagnosed with pneumonia.

Furthermore, the guardian charged hidden fees, as the student had to pay an extra \$300 dollars for the two hospital trips. The student was informed that "the rule is whenever he takes me to the hospital, I will be charged by trips and distance" (para. 12). Despite the frustration the student felt, they did not want to worry their mother and stated that, "I can't force my custodian to fulfill his responsibilities, so I knew I needed to become more independent" (para. 13). In another interview Xing (2020) conducted with seven international students from China, the students expressed how the host family "lied about the living conditions in their homes" (para. 2) and that they moved into "a situation that was not as advertised" (para. 3). These students described how they would see "their hosts eat steak after feeding the teens hot dogs and leftovers and discovering that what they had been told would be a short walk to and from school would actually take hours each day" (para. 3).

For many international students studying in Canada, their schoolboard may not provide homestay services, and instead "encourages families to do their own research and make their own arrangement" (Toronto District School Board, n.d.a, para. 3). These unaccompanied minors therefore face circumstances which render them vulnerable since school boards neither provide recommendations nor an extensive vetting process to ensure that homestay agencies have been adequately assessed and approved for high-quality living standards. As such, many of the students and their families are forced to find housing online. This is illustrated by one parent who shared that they found their child's homestay through WeChat, a Chinese social media platform. Xing (2020) cites that this platform was a popular application for Chinese families, homestay providers, and settlement agencies to help connect families and homestay programs.

However, the families that Xing (2020) interviewed conclusively iterated that advertised photos of living conditions did not match with reality. Many students vocalised sentiments of dissatisfaction and anger, as the reality of their living conditions amounted to a betrayal of trust. One parent shared that upon signing the contract with the host for their daughter, they had clear conditions that were agreed upon. These conditions consisted of not having their teenage daughter share a house with male students and that the household be pet-free as their child had allergies. The parent revealed that within a month, they received a call from their child stating that the host had a dog and that a male student had moved into the homestay. While the parent had contacted the provider about this issue, they ultimately did not listen and “even brought home a second dog a few months later” (para. 13). This put the safety of their child at risk, as their daughter’s asthma had flared up and they began to suffer with allergic dermatitis. While this parent attempted to get a refund of \$8,000 from the \$20,800 they paid for a year’s rent for their child due to these broken conditions, the homestay provider did not answer them or return their money.

Many Chinese international secondary students have shared with Xing (2020) how they felt deceived by the system and “regret it so much” (para. 5). Popadiuk (2009) further supports these sentiments, as they discussed how homestay and host family programs available for Chinese international students are often exploitative, as this system is highly unregulated and have left many international students to face potentially dangerous or abusive circumstances that are often underreported or disregarded. In Popadiuk’s (2009) study that examined Chinese international secondary school students’ homestay experiences, at least four students revealed the abusive conditions they faced, including sexual harassment and intense emotional abuse. One participant shared a negative interaction with their home-stay father and their friend. Both

engaged in inappropriate questioning regarding the student's personal relationships, with the friend suggesting they start a relationship with their home-stay father. The participant recalled how "They were both laughing at me and harassing me. The way they were talking made me think that they might attack me. I felt afraid and trapped and I didn't say anything to anybody," (Popadiuk, 2009, p. 235). Though Popadiuk (2009) stated that these issues were settled through school interventions, these circumstances remained overlooked for long periods before they were addressed.

While some of the parents expressed to Xing (2020) that they considered legal action, it was ultimately too difficult for them to do as they lived in China and were not familiar with Canada's legal system. As one parent emphasized, the homestay providers "took advantage of young students who are alone in the counter and don't have a support network or knowledge of how the legal system works" (para. 28). Thus, Wong et al. (2010) draw attention to the need for homestay programs to undergo immense change and regulation, as basic requirements like a criminal record check were clearly not sufficient enough to ensure that international students are receiving the highest quality of care based on student experiences with these services. There needs to be regulation and ample monitoring to "decrease 'moral hazard' and balance public welfare with private consumer choice" (Wong et al., 2010, p. 243).

5. Experiences During and Post COVID-19

While COVID-19 had a global impact, international students living independently in their host countries faced added layers of challenges. For example, Xu et al. (2021) discusses how the disconnect with their communities and the absence of meaningful social interactions had a significant impact on their mental health and acculturation to their new home. Furthermore, the interruption to their academic spaces and transition to online learning adversely impacted their

academic success and teacher relationships. For Chinese international students in particular, the challenges have “been tremendous and multifaceted” (Xu et al., 2021, p. 535) due to the unique socio-cultural and geo-political issues between China and Canada.

5.1. Geo-Political Tensions

First, the rising geo-political tensions between China and Canada may further negatively impact Chinese international students studying in Canada. Paris (2019) argues that contentions between Canada and China has been on the rise since 2018 following the arrest of financial executive Meng Wanzhou of Huawei, a major technology company in China, in Vancouver. These actions from Canada fueled anger from China, as Paris (2019) emphasized how Chinese officials threatened Canada with “‘grave consequences’ if Meng was not immediately released” (p. 154). These consequences were soon felt when China took immediate action following their warning, detaining two Canadian citizens in China, who were incarcerated on suspicion of compromising China’s national safety (Paris, 2019). These actions could not be seen as anything but a hostile retaliation and Canadians reacted with outrage and shock, not only at China's willingness to quickly escalate a precarious situation but also at the treatment of the imprisoned Canadians.

This increasing criminalisation of China was examined in Trilokekar et al.’s (2020) study of media coverage regarding the political conflict between Canada and China and its impact on universities. Trilokekar et al. (2020) identified how media reported raising suspicions that the Chinese government possessed immense influence on Chinese students which will impact Canadian campuses, with some suggesting that “the Chinese consulate [is] using students to infiltrate the academic field” (Xu & Friesen, 2019, para. 9 as cited in Trilokekar et al., 2020), which has implications to free speech and puts academic freedom at risk at Canadian

universities. This criminalisation was further amplified during COVID-19, as Chinese international students expressed feelings of discrimination by the media as the virus was being “politically framed as an existential danger coming from outside domestic borders” (Lee, 2020, p. iv) with China incurring the blame (Ma & Miller, 2021). This also resulted in increased incidents of racism, xenophobia, neo-racism, and discrimination all stemming from anti-Asian sentiments towards Chinese international students (Zhang et al., 2023).

5.2. The “Chinese” Virus

The experiences of discrimination, racism, and seclusion that Chinese secondary school students were already subject to during their studies abroad were only worsened by the immense stigma that emerged as a result of the global pandemic. Wang et al. (2018) explains that when the first outbreak of the virus occurred in December 2019, social and racial disparities were exposed and solidified. As the virus quickly began to spread across the globe, Zheng et al. (2020) reported that many media outlets began to use and popularize the term “Chinese virus” to describe COVID-19, innately binding the virus with race. This quickly prompted the general public to have immense negative perceptions regarding Asian populations, impacting Chinese communities across the world with the risk of ostracization, as it became implied that Chinese and individuals of Asian descent should be avoided during this time (Zhang et al., 2020).

5.3. Increased Experiences of Anti-Asian Racism

While some Chinese international students were forced to distance themselves from the general public, others faced aggressive behaviours, discrimination, and racism in both verbal and physical attacks (Wang et al., 2018). Xu et al. (2021) stated that at the beginning of the pandemic, many Chinese international students “received criticism for ‘bat eating’, stocking up facial masks to send back home, and the Wuhan lockdown” (p. 535). Nguyen and Balakrishnan

(2020) share how these experiences have been difficult for Chinese international students, who faced slurs to “go back home” (p. 1375) from strangers when out in public. By September 2020, the Chinese Canadian National Council (2020) reported over 600 incidents of anti-Asian racism since the start of the pandemic, with more cases per capita in Canada alone than in the US. In this report, verbal abuse and harassment are the most dominant forms of racism reported, transpiring in 65% of all incidents, while 30% involved assault, comprising of “targeted coughing, spitting, and physical attacks and violence” (Chinese Canadian National Council, 2020).

Moreover, the Chinese Canadian National Council (2020) reported that Toronto had the second highest quantity of instances involving anti-Asian hate crimes following Vancouver (Chinese Canadian National Council, 2020). Furthermore, Nicholson (2021) reported that there have been an additional 507 more incidents (with many incidents remaining unreported) that have occurred within the two-month span between January 1, 2021, and the end of February alone, with a total of 1,150 incidents of anti-Asian racism across Canada since the start of the pandemic in March 2020 to February 28, 2021. These numbers illustrate the growing Sinophobia in Canada, which is defined as the hatred or fear towards China and its citizens, that Nam et al. (2023) argues may “threaten to increase the number of racially-traumatic experiences for Chinese international students as well as other ethnic Asian students” (p. 690).

5.4. Mental Health and Well-being

Varughese and Schwartz (2022) conducted an online survey in Canada, requesting international post-secondary students to share their experiences during the pandemic. Approximately 55% of their 1000 international student respondents were at risk of depression and expressed their struggles grappling with loneliness, panic attacks, and social isolation as a

result of pandemic border restrictions. Ma and Miller (2021) also conducted a survey which examined the experiences of 182 Chinese overseas higher education students residing in the United States. Based on their circumstances and wellbeing during the pandemic, the study's results found that Chinese overseas students faced significant levels of anxiety and stress and were faced "with a double bind situation" (p. 1599), which refers to the contradictory messages they received from their host country and home country. This included conflicting messages regarding their safety and travel, such as being told that returning to China would be better and urged by parents, while simultaneously being reprimanded by Chinese government authorities to remain abroad to avoid infecting others, and other health and safety risks. Of the participants entangled in this double-bind situation, 14% reported that they were having difficulty navigating the conflicting messages of what they should do, and articulated feelings of anxiety, depression, and guilt. One participant "reported feeling 'depression and hopelessness'" (p. 1602). Anan et al.'s (2020) study investigated the mental health status of overseas Chinese students during COVID-19 by conducting a cross-sectional survey through various Chinese social media platforms like WeChat and QQ.

Among the 252 overseas students who responded, many respondents (63%) were between 18 and 25 years old with 42.9% of their respondents reporting from Asia, 30% from North America, 21.4% from Europe, and 4.8% from Oceania. Furthermore, there was a range of education levels, as 0.8% were high school students, 36.9% were undergraduate students, and 43.7% were postgraduate students. Despite the range of diverse educational levels, the rate of depression amongst overseas Chinese students was 60.3%, with students ranging from mildly depressed to severely depressed. The rate of anxiety was 53%, ranging from mild to severe anxiety, along with the rate of somatization symptoms being 83.3% amongst respondents ranging

from mild to severe as well. In collecting this data, Anan et al. (2020) mentioned that some of the researchers received inquiries from overseas Chinese students, highlighting that many students felt anxious, and the main purpose of these inquiries was to “find someone to talk” (p. 6) with, which was indicative to the fact that many Chinese international students may not have been taking the initiative or accessing support services for help. This aligned with Varughese and Schwartz’s (2022) investigation, as following their survey they interviewed 25 survey respondents and students reported that they found counselling centres at their educational institutions difficult to reach and there were extensive wait times to get appointments.

5.5. Financial and Travel Concerns

Compounding the stress, anxiety, and suffering that many Chinese international secondary students experienced as a result of COVID-19, financial issues posed another challenge many students faced. Canada demonstrated compassion by aiding Canadian citizens with emergency social and financial relief during COVID-19, like creating the Canada Emergency Respond Benefit (CERB) to provide economic security. However, many international students were exempt from these relief programs and assistance even though many students lacked the ability to return to their home countries, due to the cost or border restrictions (Firang, 2020; Varughese & Schwartz, 2022). Coulton (2022) discusses how many international students were left particularly vulnerable and in a state of uncertainty, with many facing financial hardships because of layoffs from their on-campus or part-time jobs during the pandemic.

Furthermore, with the implementation of travel restrictions, many international students in Canada were uncertain about their future, as Coulton (2022) forwarded, numerous international students were “already on tight budgets, operating in currencies weaker than the Canadian dollar, and are now stretched to their financial limit following nationwide layoffs”

(para. 4). Alongside these travel restrictions, Coulton (2022) revealed that an International Prospective Student Survey that was conducted by Academica revealed that more than half of international post-secondary students in Canada expected financial relief from their schools, with 67% reporting they would prefer this relief in the form of lowered tuition. Coulton (2022) stated that while both domestic and international students have requested financial relief through discounted tuition fees, several post-secondary institutions increased their tuition costs for the 2020-21 academic year. For example, Coulton (2022) discussed how Western University raised tuition costs for international students during this unprecedented time, with upper-year undergraduate programs seeing a four percent increase, while first-year undergraduate programs faced increases between eight to 12 percent.

Britta Baron, the associate vice-president, international at Western, responded to petitions and concerns by stating that tuition fees will remain the same despite the difficult circumstances students were facing, stating “We are fully sympathetic, but the president and senior leadership must make sure the university stays afloat and continues to operate to the standards that we are used to” (para. 5). This aligned with Varughese and Schwartz’s (2022) investigation, as 80% of their international students reported being “concerned” or “very concerned” regarding their ability to pay for their education. In their interviews, these students specifically reported having a prevalent feeling that the fees they were paying were not equivalent to the value they were receiving in their education. One student shared with Varughese and Schwartz (2022) that, “I feel like we’re getting kind of the short end of the stick with paying almost double [of] domestic students during the pandemic” (para. 20).

5.6. Shift to Online Learning

Furthermore, the shift to online learning has also been cited as a challenge for many international students due to the lack of interaction with peers, teachers, and immediate feedback (Lin & Nguyen, 2021; Varughese & Schwartz, 2022). Students highlighted their frustrations with their inability to experience and adapt to Canadian culture, anxiety and frustration by the overwhelming number of e-learning resources and technical issues, and lack of social networks during this transition to online spaces (Lin & Nguyen, 2021; Varughese & Schwartz, 2022). As one student shared with Varughese and Schwartz (2022), “it feels like I’m paying \$10,000 per semester to teach myself” (para. 21). International students have cited that online courses compromised their overall educational experience in Canada, due to the lack of interaction with fellow peers, with approximately 30% in Varughese and Schwartz’s (2022) survey reporting they did not adapt well to online instruction. One parent of an international student attending the University of Toronto expressed to Coulton (2022) that despite online classes, her son “so desperately wants to be on campus” (para. 5). These sentiments were shared by other international students that Coulton (2022) interviewed, as one student explained that “Spaces carry different energies” (para. 16), while another incoming international student from Vietnam who deferred their acceptance explained, “I can bear it for a semester if I have to, but a year of online learning is not what I want to experience” (para. 20). This student described that studying in person in Canada is a “totally different environment” that requires more communication and interactions with other students while providing an opportunity to grow and develop as an individual. Another student informed Coulton (2022) that the shift to online learning completely eradicates the cultural experience associated with obtaining an education in Canada, as they stated, “You don’t go to a foreign country just to study...It’s the cultural aspect that you’re

exposed to [...] it's the thing that international students will miss in this pandemic, period" (para. 17).

Along with the elimination of cultural exchange, international students also expressed that post-secondary institutions did not take geographical considerations for their students who were studying in their home countries during this shift to online spaces. As Coulton (2022) states, while "online instruction has become the sole option of Canadian international students all over the world, but their experiences are by no means equal" (para. 15). Not only are international students studying in their host countries experiencing major conflicts in time zones that were unmanageable or have unreliable internet connection, but many also endured other restrictions placed on them. For example, students from China were unable to access Google Suite technology, such as Google Drive due to China's internet censorship. One student from Delhi, India expressed to Coulton (2022) that "Humans are nocturnal beings [...] I hope they figure out how to do online classes in a way that people don't feel cheated" (para. 21) as they expressed concerns regarding the conflicting class and exam times they had to face during their online studies.

6. Gaps and Study Contribution to Literature

This literature review highlights four major gaps that the current study will shed insight upon. As stated prior, the experiences of Chinese international secondary students remain an under-researched field in comparison to post-secondary Chinese international populations (Calder et al., 2016; Cantwell, 2015; Guo & Guo, 2017; Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013; Scott et al., 2015; Tavares, 2021). First, the study will bring further understanding into the academic experiences of Chinese international secondary students, with discussions shared by both Chinese international student participants and secondary teacher participants within schools

across Toronto and the GTA. Their experiences will be coupled with comparisons from the international student brochures. While the academic experience within past research often exposes the differences in academic culture with emphasis on CHC, academic pressure, and negative teacher and staff interactions, the current study will have the opportunity to bring new student experiences and identify specific issues that Chinese international students face, such as the gap in ESL assessments and the narrative of the “visa dream” that many teacher participants identified. Furthermore, student participants revealed the contrasting differences in their educational experiences that differed greatly from the academic prestige Canada promotes within their international student brochures. There is very limited literature that currently outlines the recent and specific experiences and issues within Canadian public school boards and the issues and concerns of teacher and administration academic support towards these student populations.

Secondly, this study reinforces past research regarding the lack of interaction between international and domestic students, highlighting the difficulties that student and teacher participants share and note. However, this study brings first-hand accounts of the real social experiences’ students undergo in school, how these experiences contrast greatly with the advertised experiences promoted by Canadian schooling and the little support and opportunities schools deliver for international students to interact and foster friendships with their domestic peers. Alongside this, the study sheds light on other systemic gaps regarding standards of support within Ontario’s public schooling, such as guidance counselling and accommodations for international youth. The third major contribution the study will provide is insight into systemic gaps within the homestay industry and guardianship, as student and teacher participants emphasize how problematic these organizations can be, the scarcity of proper regulations within the international student services, and the exploitative measures recruitment agencies abide by.

While research reveal how deceitful recruitment agencies and homestay services can be from the perspectives of educators, parental and government administration (Tamtik, 2018; Tamtik & O'Brien-Klewchuk, 2020; Wong et al., 2010; Xing & Zhou, 2018), there is less research, especially within the last decade, that provides experiences shared from international public school youths themselves on the exploitative methods they were forced to endure, and the confusion and loneliness they felt from the lack of support within these services (Popadiuk, 2009; Xing & Zhou, 2018; Xing, 2020). The study will also provide insight from educators on what role public school boards play to identify overarching concerns and issues for international youths.

Finally, this study will provide another key role in examining the experiences of international students during COVID-19, bridging the limited literature on this topic as the majority of research that explored Chinese international students' experiences during the pandemic were accounts from post-secondary perspectives (Coulton, 2022; Lin & Nguyen, 2021; Long, 2022; Varughese & Schwartz, 2022; Zhang et al., 2023). Their accounts will be compared alongside their experiences with online learning and incidents of racism prior and following COVID-19 which call attention to the normalisation of racism and disregard towards Asian populations. Lastly, the study introduces issues of inconsistency amongst educators and the varying degrees of support they provide due to inequities and biased opinions founded on the dominant culture, contrasting greatly with the information advertised on international school board brochures that emphasize EDI.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The following chapter will provide an overview of the core constructs of my theoretical framework and describe and define other associated and relevant frames and constructs. I began the study with the intended use of my main theoretical framework Critical Race Theory (CRT), and associated theory Asian Critical Theory (AsianCrit). However, as I began to analyze the emerging themes from the data, there were other frameworks like International Student Security (ISS) and neoliberalism that seemed relevant and assisted in developing an understanding of the interactions and experiences Chinese international students had studying abroad. I also found multiple constructs such as model minority and yellow peril and newer frames such as racial capitalism and neoracism to expand my understanding and application of theories such as CRT and AsianCrit to my international student population.

1. Critical Race Theory (CRT)

CRT first emerged during the mid 1970s from Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman in response to the dissatisfying pace and lack of racial reform in the United States. Foundational to the CRT framework is the “premise that structured racial oppression is an educational reality, [and that] certainly race is a social construction, but its consequences are as real as gravity” (Leonardo, 2013, p. 14). Conceptions of colour-blindness and equality only lead to masking the genuine issues or unconcealed discrimination that many students face as it allows individuals to disregard racist policies that maintain a cycle of social inequality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Hiraldo, 2010). CRT aims to unsettle the dominant status of Whiteness by “revealing the invisible, naturalised ways it manifests [...]” (Pechenkina & Liu, 2018, p. 2), and enabling surface level goals, like achieving diversity through increased enrolment of students of colour rather than institutional change, or supporting principles that assert the notion of fair and uniform

standards across school boards and institutions, while only perpetuating a system of oppression and privilege (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Hiraldo, 2010).

2. Basic Tenets of CRT

Basic tenets have emerged from the work of CRT which consists of the normality of racism, Whiteness as property, interest convergence, counternarratives and counter-stories, intersectionality, and critique of liberalism (Ladson-Billings, 2020; Delago & Stefancic, 2023; Shah et al., 2022). Below will be an overview of the tenets and how they operate within education.

2.1. Normality of Racism

The first tenet highlights how racism is a normal and an inherent part of American society, seen as something that is “both normal and natural to people in this culture” (Ladson-Billings, 2020, p. 12). While CRT recognizes that race is socially constructed, it remains socially significant as racism is entwined within the political, social, and economic spheres of society (Ladson-Billings, 1988). This has real impact on individuals, as dismantling racism becomes difficult to address as the normality of racism being embedded into operations of society allow it to remain unacknowledged, with people continuing to be “colour-blind” to the ways that society perpetuates racial hierarchies (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023). This system ultimately sustains White supremacy, as White individuals can benefit from these rights and privileges (Hiraldo, 2010). White supremacy can be conceived as a “political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power” (Ansley, 1997, p. 592, as cited in Gillborn, 2006), are continually positioned as the dominant centre, and assumed as the ‘norm’ in society. White people are often privileged over people of colour in every aspect of life through structural or institutionalised racism, especially evident in education (Ladson-Billings, 1988). Pechenkina and

Liu (2018) discuss how the practices and knowledge structures within educational institutions are often from the perspective of Whiteness, where teaching practices and strategies are shaped by White supremacy, where pedagogy disregards “structural inequities and attribute[es] low performance exclusively to individual students” (p. 3). Shah (2018) highlights that educational institutions and school boards possess limited awareness of how Whiteness may function “in invisible ways [that] correlate with normalcy” (p. 28). Despite potential efforts to transform conditions and enact change for students who may experience ‘othering,’ many leaders in education may actually possess “an underdeveloped sense of how their White privilege informs understandings of their leadership” (28), and do not recognize how they benefit from a system that perpetuates White supremacy and privilege.

In Stewart-Hall et al.’s (2022) study that interviewed seven Headteachers, their knowledge gaps were often regarded as “incidental rather than an integral part of an ideological, systemic and dynamic, wilful white ignorance” (p. 145). This gap is sustained through socialisation where Whiteness is position as the dominant centre and norm within society, which validate the “White epistemic authority” (Mills, 1997, p. 19 as cited in Stewart-Hall et al., 2022, p. 145). One Headteacher recognized the impact of Whiteness and understood that they must “struggle against complicity” (Utt & Tochluk, 2020, p. 128 as cited in in Stewart-Hall et al., 2022, p. 146), as omission and complicity through race neutrality and their place of colour-blindness can result in educators prioritising or “embedding anti-racism into aspects of their organisations” (p. 146). Another Headteacher became aware that they did not fully understand that racism was a daily and permanent experience, and that they would employ “‘kindness’ as an ‘emotional tool of whiteness’” (Picower, 2009, p. 208, as cited in in Stewart-Hall et al., 2022, p.

148), in order to avoid confronting the realities of racism and as a method to “de-racialise situations” (p. 148) and conflicts to preserve a race-neutral stance.

2.2. *Whiteness as Property*

Since racism is entrenched within all aspects of society, this concept shapes the second tenet which is Whiteness as property, coined by Harris (1993) which discusses how Whiteness can be “considered a property interest” (Hirald, 2010, p. 55) and as an “asset that only White individuals can possess” (p. 55). Hirald (2010) discusses how the historic system of ownership during enslavement, where Black individuals “were objectified as property [...] further reinforce[s] and perpetuate[s] the system of White supremacy because only White individuals can benefit from it” (p. 55). Harris’s (1993) examination of Whiteness as property within US laws outlined four rights within Whiteness as property which include: (a) the right to disposition, (b) the right to use and enjoyment, (c) the right to status and property, and (d) the right to exclude. The right to disposition involves the ability to pass rights and privileges to descendants and allows White individuals to use their Whiteness to their own accord. For example, Bondi (2012) explains that White individuals can focus and prioritize their needs and perspectives, while disregarding racially marginalized individuals’ as they are not expected to know their needs. The third right to status and property protects the esteem and elite status of White individuals. Bondi (2012) highlights that White individuals are “assumed to be good intentioned” (p. 399; Harris, 1993), and this reputation is recognized by the courts with laws that protect them. Within educational spaces, much of the individuals in power and leadership, like faculty members or administration in both secondary and post-secondary educational institutions are White, which establishes “an understanding that being White has more status and power” (Bondi, 2012, p. 399; Patton et al., 2007; Shah, 2018). The fourth right comprises of the right to

exclusion, emphasising that laws in society have been developed in a way that allows lawmakers, who are commonly White individuals, are the ones who decide which individuals are protected under the law (Harris, 1993). An example of this exclusion for racially marginalized individuals that Bondi (2012) discusses is immigration laws that limit opportunities by race and “access to in-state tuition and financial aid” (p. 400). Within education, Whiteness as property allows for the sustained cycle of race-based inequities to become normalized as many patterns and practices demonstrate a protection towards the interests of White people (Wiley et al., 2024). Research has revealed the racial disparities for disciplinary action for Black and Latinx students in comparison to White students, as these students are more likely to be treated harshly, associated as the behavioural issue, and face greater rates of suspension than their White peers (Hinojosa, 2008; Lee et al., 2011; Gibson et al., 2014; Wiley et al., 2024). These discipline disparities have significant impact on students of colour, as it demonstrates “a form of racialized Whited interests [...] through the denial of educational opportunity” (Wiley et al., 2024, p. 225). Excluding marginalized students from their education allows “the education of Whites to proceed uninterrupted” (p. 225) and sustains a system that dispossess marginalized students while advantaging White students.

2.3. Interest Convergence

As such, the third tenet focuses on the theory of interest convergence, which suggests that racial progress and change for marginalized individuals can only occur when their interests align with the interest of those in power. This term was coined by critical race theorist Derrick Bell, who expressed that ultimately “because racism advances the interests of both white elites (materially) and working-class whites (physically), large segments of society have little incentive to eradicate it” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023, p. 9). As such, Milner (2008) discussed how many

scholars have view this concept pessimistically, arguing that the interests between White people and people of colour will never truly intersect. When the interests of marginalized communities directly oppose those in power, it will be extremely challenging to “expose racism and to pursue racial equality” (Milner, 2008, p. 333), as the dominant group will be forced to inherently give up and sacrifice benefits and privileges to achieve real change.

This is relevant within education, as educational leaders need to consider the interests of marginalized students within their school communities and engage in self-reflection on systemic racism. Educational leaders need to recognize the ways that policy sustains power hierarchies, and to recognize their own complicity in the dominant systems that maintain these power imbalances and their own positions of colour-blindness. Shah (2018) highlights that reflection is fundamental to understanding how issues of privilege and power can have profound negative consequences on marginalized communities, and that there are various ways of thinking and understanding to challenge these mindsets. Three of the four school administrators that were interviewed in Shah’s (2018) study highlighted how engaging in dialogue was vital to addressing and recognising sensitive or controversial topics, but Shah noted that these administrators did not “address the skills needed to dialogue across difference in where there are racial and other power imbalances” (p. 20).

White leaders or leaders who possess mindsets of the dominant culture may require further engagement in developing skills and frameworks that allow them to identify and actively respond to racial microaggressions, which are a “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative racial slights and insults that potentially have harmful or unpleasant psychological impact on the target person or group” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 72). Failure to enable

various dialogues associated with race “is indirectly linked to the ability to recognize racial microaggressions” (Shah, 2018, p. 20). Failure to address and understand issues of Whiteness and race in administration and schools allows for the prioritisation of “the dominant racial perspective; whiteness” (p. Starke et al., 2018, p. 469), ultimately sustaining a cycle of discriminatory administrative actions and structures that disadvantage minoritised groups.

2.4. Counternarratives and Counter-stories

Another tenet of critical race theory is the importance of counternarratives and counter-stories, which are the stories of people of colour (Magdaleno, 2021). From critical race theory perspectives, Milner (2008) discussed how knowledge can be formed through the experiences of marginalized groups as race and racism are positioned at center of these narratives and counternarratives. Counter-stories allow opportunities to reveal, critique, compare and contrast dominant narratives, which could perpetuate racial ideologies, beliefs and stereotypes, with the personal stories and perspectives of people of colour. With counter-stories, participants experiences with racism can be explored to counter deficit storytelling and contrast the dominant or perceived constructs that surround them (Milner, 2008; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) discussed that within education, counternarratives and counter-stories can allow researchers to question “‘Whose stories are privileged in educational contexts and whose stories are distorted and silenced?’” (p. 36). Exploring the voices of marginalized students can provide opportunities to understand their experiences, and how they are “epistemologically marginalized, silenced, and disempowered” (p. 36) through policies, practices, and strategies within the education system. This approach can identify the ways that marginalized students, like international students, are disregarded or excluded from EDI, and how educational discourse

centers Whiteness and the dominant culture. This will ultimately establish an understanding of strategies and changes that school boards can implement to respond to this deficit storytelling.

2.5. Intersectionality

The following tenet includes intersectionality, which is the notion that everyone has possible conflicting identities, whether it be race, gender, culture, or other social practices and associations, and examines how these categories intersect in different circumstances (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023). For example, Delgado and Stefancic (2023) explain that an Asian individual who has recently arrived from overseas with a rural background will have a different, potentially more disadvantaged experience than an Asian individual who is fourth-generation Chinese with parents from have middle to upper-working class careers. In the context of my study, a Chinese international student that has just recently moved to Canada will have a different educational experience than a Chinese Canadian-born student that is familiar to Canadian teaching practices and landscapes. As such, multiple inequalities can become interconnected, and intersectionality can allow researchers recognize the complexity of each individual, and how these identities can influence the specific way each person experiences bias and discrimination (Gillborn, 2015). Gillborn (2015) discusses how terms like “race” and “disability” have frequently been used to exclude and oppress students, where both “race” and “disability” are regarded as individual issues rather than the limitations of an education system entrenched with racism that perpetuates inequities.

2.6. Critique of Liberalism

Finally, the last tenet involves the critique of liberalism, that highlights how the social and liberal order benefits the interest of White people (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023). CRT scholars have criticised that the notion of a neutrality and colour-blindness within the law

actually plays a role in perpetuating an unjust system as it is ultimately inequitable and does not take into consideration the differences of each individual. While in theory colour blindness is intended to benefit all citizens, if racism is a natural and inherent part of society then “the ‘ordinary business’ of society— the routines, practices, and institutions that we rely on to do the world’s work— will keep minorities in subordinate positions” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023, p. 27). Equality and color-blindness within the legal system cannot eradicate deeply entrenched forms for racism and bias, and legal systems and processes need to actively place efforts on being colour-conscious to address and advance minority interests and implement radical reform (Litowitz, 1996). Within educational landscapes, concepts like equality and colour-blindness also continue to perpetuate racial disparities, as implicit biases are entrenched within each individual and can conceal the relations of power (Kahn, 2006). The ability to remain blind to skin colour and race is an exclusive privilege to White people, and only “contributes to a collective ignorance and relieves individuals from fighting against the impact of racism” (Ullucci & Battey, 2011, 1196). Working alongside this is individualism, which is the idea that each person is determinant of their own success or struggle and is often utilized to disregard group-based racial disparities (Ullucci & Battey, 2011). Through individualism, external factors outside of an individual’s personal characteristics do not influence their success, so aspects like race, gender, class, and religion fail are not acknowledged or play a role on this “playing field” (p. 1201). Thus, disregarding both race and accepting the concept of individualism allows educators to “dismiss their complicity in racial hierarchies” (Ullucci & Battey, 2011, 1196) and to ignore any changes needed within their teaching practices, strategies, accommodations, and modifications to better support their students.

3. CRT and International Students

Although CRT originally emerged in the mid 1970s in response to the lack of racial reform in the United States, this framework has been expanded outside these boundaries and their associated domestic racial populations. In the last decade, researchers have been actively applying CRT to analyze global interactions and transnationalism, as international student populations, particularly those that originate from non-Western countries and are non-English speaking, frequently face racism, discrimination, and prejudice (Buckner et al., 2021; Liu, 2023; Rodriguez et al., 2023). This theory has been applied to a study conducted by Yao et al., (2018) that analyzed literature focused on international student experiences in the United States. The study highlighted how CRT can be expanded outside the confines of US domestic racial groups and be applied to examine transnationalism and global interactions and exchanges. International student populations, especially those that originate from Non-White and Non-English-speaking countries, often experience more social isolation and ‘othering’, along with increased racism, prejudice, and discrimination.

While the cultural, political, and historical structures of race and racism are contextual to each different country, Yao et al. (2018) discusses how internationalization, racism, nativism, and migration have been intertwined throughout the history of the US, and that issues related to “power and oppression of people based on regional differences [is described as] othering” (p. 39; Said, 1978, as cited in Yao et al., 2018). Othering has been used to define how the Western world contrasts a difference, an ‘us versus them’ perspective, to separate a dominant culture from an inferior ‘other’ (Yao et al., 2018). Furthermore, due to the changing transnational spaces and the multiple identities and complexities that students possess, educational institutions “must adapt binary notions of race and racism to accommodate the complexities of local and global

dynamics, all of which affects the growing population of mobile students” (Yao et al., 2018, p. 39). International student populations often experience this ‘othering,’ more social isolation, and difficulty adjusting to their host countries than their Western counterparts (Yao et al., 2018), and CRT can be utilized as a lens to examine their experiences of racism and the racialization they face during their studies in their host-countries.

4. Neo-racism

The term neo-racism emerged to define racism that extends beyond an individual’s skin colour and hereditary characteristics but are grounded on other aspects like cultural and national differences (Balibar, 1991; Lee & Rice, 2007; Long, 2022; Yao, 2018). This concept is deep-rooted in White supremacy and is frequently exploited to support the belief that certain minorities pose a threat to national security and safety. As stated prior, this has been particularly evident in recent years where international students from China have increasingly become criminalized and monitored more attentively than their White-European centric peers (Lee, 2020). Research has also demonstrated that not all international students are equally welcomed, as there is an immeasurable difference between the level of discrimination White international students faced in comparison to students of color from non-Western countries (Lee & Rice, 2007). These experiences reflect the potential cultural hierarchy that is present, as international students from Europe, Canada, and New Zealand did not account any negative experiences associated to their race or culture due to many cultural similarities they possessed to the host country. Many institutions benefit financially and gain improved prestige from international student enrolment, but as Hiraldo (2010) emphasizes it is domestic students that are the sole individuals provided the opportunity to “become more cultured at the expense of the international students,” (p. 56), while elevating educational institutions rankings.

Yao et al.'s (2018) study revealed how many American post-secondary domestic students viewed certain international students as a potential threat towards their national values and culture, compromising their educational, economic, and social statuses. These sentiments were similarly held in Canada, as the increased enrolment of Asian students and immigration resulted in an article published in Maclean's Magazine in 2010 entitled "Too Asian" to draw attention to how Asians were dominating Canadian higher education, and the damaging impact this socio-cultural shift on school campuses will have towards "real" Canadians (Padgett et al., 2020). Furthermore, with the overwhelming influence and emphasis on Western culture in the world, many individuals from Western countries, and even those from non-Western countries, may develop an implicit or even explicit bias towards Western cultural superiority. This can lead to increased challenges for non-Western international students as they navigate their host countries, negatively impacting their sense of belonging or even resulting in potential mistreatment. Due to neo-racism, international students from non-Western cultures can be perceived as "inferior" and may be more at risk to facing challenges in the social and academic domains of their lives, negatively impacting their sense of belonging with their communities and the host-country.

5. Racial Capitalism

Another framework that examines racial hierarchies amongst marginalized individuals is racial capitalism. This concept was introduced by Robinson et al. (1983) to understand the complex relationship between racism and capitalism and how they inform one another (Shah & Chanika, 2003). Racial capitalism is thus "the process of deriving social or economic value from the racial identity of another person" (Leong, 2013, p. 2153, as cited in Daniel & Shah, 2024, p. 6), therefore "creating racial hierarchies that differentially assign value and worth" (Shah & Chanicka, 2023, p. 8). When describing these racial hierarchies, three categories are identified:

Whites, Honorary Whites, and the Collective Black. Those in the “Whites” and “Honorary Whites” will have nuanced experiences as they are racialized informally and formally in different ways, and the social and economic value of racialized individuals will change “in response to the needs of White society, the nation-state, and the labour market” (p. 8).

Within education, racial capitalism can help to understand how the production of value transpires. This value is drawn across “the commodification and capitalisation of education” (Gerrard et al., 2022, p. 435) seen through aspects like publishing statistics and data on student academic performance or graduation rates, cultivating educational competition between educational institutions, or implementing curriculum tools, resources, and products to become more desirable. However, the “prestige of ‘desirable’ curriculum products is often built from the erasures of non-European knowledge and, in some cases, direct histories of ‘civilising’ colonised people through education” (p. 435). Thus, what is considered valuable or defines educational success is often founded on the dominant culture and Whiteness, and in the context of international students, their intrinsic value will often be assessed through their ability to align successfully with the dominant culture.

Furthermore, an individual’s racial value also relies greatly on the ways they can contribute to a country. Specifically, this concept is important for the study as it examines how White individuals and institutions have been able to utilize non-White individuals and benefit from them through gaining social and economic power (Daniel & Shah, 2024). Much of the racial dynamic of Chinese international students often highlight the “entwined nature of racial oppression and economic exploitation within capitalism” (Lan et al., 2024, p. 1). These students are often seen as a symbol of global capitalism, which often makes them subjects to xenophobic or discriminatory criticism (Lan et al., 2024). This is apparent in contemporary times, where

many Asian individuals have been valued based on their contributions, historically for labour and now intellectual and economical (Au, 2022). In the context of international students, value will vary depending on whether their nation has a need for their contribution. Depending on this need, the model minority myth will play a role in offering a positive depiction of this minority group. On the other hand, yellow peril or the Oriental will be utilized when they are perceived as a safety hazard or threat to society (Au, 2022). These concepts will be further expanded on within the following section.

6. Asian Critical Theory (AsianCrit)

Grounded in CRT, AsianCrit was developed by Museus and Ifitkar (2014) to provide a deeper understanding of how race and racism impact Asian Americans in society. This framework is also founded on the notion that race and racism are “powerful and pervasive aspects of society [and that they] influence the nature of individual interactions and thought processes” (p. 95). Despite implementing racial reform and laws on a systemic level, race and racial disparities remain an issue that penetrates almost every aspect of society. While this theory encompasses the term “Asian,” it is important to note that AsianCrit may not adequately address the multiplicity of all identities. This approach often focuses on East-Asian perspectives and does not always acknowledge the difference in experience and racialization that South-Asian individuals may face in comparison to East-Asians (Harpalani, 2013). However, for the purpose of this study, this theory is relevant in examining the East-Asian identities of the student participants and their experiences with racism, recognizing the various perspectives, representation, and voices of East-Asian individuals comprehend how these prevailing systems of oppression have impacted their lives. AsianCrit, addresses seven interconnected principles that are used to understand how White supremacy shapes the experiences of Asian individuals,

and how narratives like the model minority and yellow peril function in propagating White supremacy (Iftikar & Museus, 2018)

6.1. AsianCrit: Seven Interconnected Principles. Within the AsianCrit framework, Museus & Iftikar (2014) identify seven interconnected principles that can be utilized to understand how White supremacy shapes the experiences of Asian Americans, and contribute to a greater discussion in understanding how racism functions in society. The first principle includes *Asianization*, which is the belief that individuals only become “Asian” as a result of White Supremacy and the process of racialization imposed on these minorities. Concepts and narratives like model minority and yellow peril all play a role in propagating White supremacy within “laws, policies, programs, and perspectives that dehumanize and exclude” Asian individuals (Iftikar & Museus, 2018, p. 940).

The second principle is *Transnational Contexts*, which highlights the essentiality of positioning Asian communities and the process of White supremacy within individual, political, and structural levels. It is fundamental to examine how former and current processes have, and continue, to impact the conditions of Asian individuals to understand how racism shapes their experiences. The third principle consists of *(Re)constructive History*, which is grounded in the belief that Asian communities have generally been disregarded and remained invisible within North American history. Thus, (re)constructive history emphasizes the necessity to include the voices, existing history, and contributions of Asian communities. The fourth principle is *Strategic (Anti)essentialism* that is shaped on the belief that race is a social concept that acknowledges how White supremacy racializes Asian communities as one homogenous group, but also recognizes that Asians are “actively interven[ing] in the racialization process as well

[and] engage in coalition building” (Iftikar & Museus, 2018, p. 940) in order to advocate against White supremacy.

The fifth principle consists of *Intersectionality*, which is the belief that White supremacy and other forms of systemic oppression (e.g. sexism, ableism, colonialism), are all interconnected and can influence the conditions of Asian communities experiences as well as the racial and social identities they exist within. The sixth principle *Story, Theory, and Praxis*, builds on the research of CRT scholars who highlight the significance of stories and stress the relationship between theory and story. This principle emphasizes how “racially marginalized people’s experiential knowledge can serve to challenge dominant, White, European epistemology and offer an alternative and empowering epistemological perspective that is grounded in the realities of people of color” (Iftikar & Museus, 2018, p. 941). Thus, an epistemology that is centered on Asian individual experiences, voices, and stories can enlighten theories, discourses, and systems in meaningful ways. Finally, the seventh principle is the commitment to *Social Justice*, which emphasizes how AsianCrit is committed towards the advocacy to end the various forms of systemic oppression.

6.2. Model Minority Myth. The model minority stereotype is a myth that seemingly offers a positive perception that bolsters Asians as the ideal example for other minorities due to their high economic, academic, and social status and achievements (Ho, 2015; Padgett et al., 2020). At first glance, the model minority myth may appear like a positive portrayal of Asian individuals and yellow peril is a blatantly negative stereotype, but in reality, both constructs are harmful to Asian communities as they both ultimately perpetuate White supremacy (Cui & Kelly, 2013). These model minorities also appeared to uphold the image that they are quiet, passive, and “good, law-abiding minorities who know their place within society and do not

challenge their place in it” (Ho, 2015, p. 119). The construction of this myth ultimately contributes to greater systemic issues of White supremacy, as it often labels individuals of Asian descent as the “good people of color,” (p. 119) and commonly utilized throughout history to compare and contrast with other groups of individuals and races (Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario & Toronto District School Board, 2020; Ho, 2015; Kim et al., 2021; Matriano et al., 2021; Wing 2007). It also impacts all Asian individuals as the lens is homogenous and disregards the disparities between different Asian groups (Ho, 2015). There are contrasting ways that Asian ethnic groups are racialized as the generalizations and perceptions of East-Asians are vastly different than South-Asians and masks the disparities between these two communities. For example, data conducted by Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada (APF) in 2017 demonstrated the public’s generalization and opinion of Asian communities. The results illustrated how in general Canadians tend to stereotype East-Asians, such as Chinese, South Koreans, and Japanese, as ““hard working and traditional”” (p. 22), while South-Asians, like Filipinos and Indians were characterized as being ““poor”” (p. 22).

Along with this, the model minority myth has also been cited as a potential cause for the invisibility among individuals of Asian descent. This stereotype suggests that Asian individuals are collectively successful and do not endure racial hardships and has been frequently utilized to compare Asian individuals to other minority groups (Iftikar & Museus, 2018). Ho (2015) cites how these positive attributes associated with the myth have been utilized strategically in the past by governments, education systems, and policies and programs to ratify the belief that racial prejudice and discrimination does not exist. Specifically, it has been used to justify anti-Black racism, opposing arguments regarding systemic disparities that oppress Black individuals and retain White supremacy on a systematic level (Padgett et al., 2020). It does not potentially inhibit

educational or occupational opportunities and can easily allow anti-Asian racism to be disregarded or unacknowledged (Museus & Kiang, 2009). This highlights how Asian individuals are often the invisible minorities or invisible citizens within the nation, as their struggles and issues continue to be marginalized or disregarded (Cui & Kelly, 2013). This can be demonstrated in *Building a Foundation for Change: Canada's 2019-2022 anti-Racism strategy* published by Canadian Heritage (2019), where anti-Asian racism was not mentioned within the strategy, despite the emphasis of other racialized groups like Indigenous Peoples, Black, Muslim, Jewish, and the LGBTQ+ communities (Liu, 2023).

6.3. Yellow Peril. The model minority myth presents Asians as the standard for which minority groups can transcend obstacles and prejudice through hard efforts and determination. On the other hand, Asian individuals have also been depicted as yellow peril where they are seen as a safety hazard and threat to society. This stereotype only perpetuates the dominant cultural norm, as Asian individuals are seen as potentially “Too Asian,” which reinforces the “us versus them” distinction and the “forever foreigner” identity applied to marginalized individuals (Cui & Kelly, 2013). This is a result of the longstanding anti-Asian racism that has existed in the country that many Canadians are not even aware of, often due to how the symbolism of multiculturalism dominates the narrative and identity of Canada. However, Asian communities have faced numerous experiences of anti-Asian sentiments and discrimination throughout Canadian history, often visualized as “Yellow Peril” as they were understood to be a threat and hazard to the White Canadian way of living. First, a Chinese Head Tax was implemented in 1885, charging individuals of Chinese descent an additional \$50 to enter Canada to decrease the influx of Chinese labourers that begun entering the country to assist in building the Canadian Pacific Railway.

These anti-Asian sentiments only continued to rise throughout the years until it ultimately led to anti-Asian riots in 1907. These riots occurred in both Canada and the United States, driven by the anti-immigration protests and beliefs. White working-class individuals in Canada saw Chinese workers as a threat as their labour was significantly cheaper, and these riots showcase how White individuals depend on the power of their own race during economic struggles, weaponizing White supremacy in order to secure their benefits and protect their own interests (Chen, 2019). These sentiments of distrust and contempt towards Asian people within Canada continued throughout the first half of the 20th century, also leading to the creation of Japanese internment camps during World War II (Padgett et al., 2020).

It was not until the 1960s and 1970s that attitudes towards Asian Canadians began to transform as a result of immigration reform. Multiculturalism as a policy began to emerge alongside growing emphasis on representation, specifically with particular racialized minorities (Chen, 2019). Canada also modified its *Immigration Act* in 1967, implementing a point system that prioritized education and skills, allowing individuals of “high status” to enter Canada to study and work (Chen, 2019; Padgett et al., 2020). Though this new system allowed more opportunities for immigrants to enter based on their own merit, rather than race, Asian immigrants once again received backlash when an increase of Asian immigrants emerged, and the model minority myth was first presented on a news program in a 1979 story called “Campus Giveaway,” which aired on a Canadian news program on a major network (Padgett et al., 2020).

This news program conveyed how Asian international students, despite the fact that many in reality were Canadian citizens, created unfair competition for “true” Canadians entering into medical school. A few decades later, with the increased flow of Asian student enrolment, immigration, and Asian communities achieving academic and financial success in Canada, the

negative stereotypes associated with Asians have also increased in turn. Another controversy emerged, as mentioned before, where Maclean's Magazine published an article in 2010 entitled "Too Asian" to highlight how Asians were dominating Canadian universities, and ultimately negatively changing the socio-culture of school campuses that was detrimental towards "real" Canadians (Padgett et al., 2020). Thus, these stereotypes are interchangeable and can be applied to Asian populations depending on the circumstance. Furthermore, Cui and Kelly (2013) discuss how the "Too Asian" construct presents these students as "self-segregationists" (p. 157) and establishes the blame on the victim for the cause of their own exclusion that leaves the underlying cause unquestioned and disregarded (Kawai, 2005). These negative portrayals also deepened narratives of Asian individuals as economic competitors, further fueling sentiments of resentment, racism, and alienation that continue to be relevant representations today. Even now, many Chinese individuals continue to be perceived as threats to "the normalized sociocultural order and take away positions and resources from 'rightful' Canadians (Coloma, 2013, p. 588). In the Maclean's article, an Asian student shared that at their graduation, a "Canadian –i.e. 'white'– mother told me that I'm the reason her son didn't get a space in university and that all the immigrants in the country are taking up university spots (Coloma, 2013, p. 582).

Other Canadians continue to depict Chinese individuals through yellow peril narratives, as they are seen as "snatching up real estate, driving up prices, [and] refusing to assimilate" (Chen, 2019, para. 20), especially in areas with high Chinese populations like Vancouver. These narratives have developed over the years to reinforce White Supremacy in various aspects that is detrimental to Asian individuals. This can be illustrated by how the model minority myth and yellow peril stereotype can continually disregard the hardships Asian communities face and upholds misconceptions about Asian individuals. This can result in notions that Asian

individuals do not need or deserve support within institutional bodies, including government and educational structures, which ultimately justifies the omission of Asian individuals from racial reform and discourse (Ifitkar & Museus, 2018). These dual narratives demonstrate how the “model minority” narrative can be easily adopted for Asian individuals when relevant or needed, such as during efforts to increase enrolment and recruitment of international students, and quickly altered to the status of “‘unassimilable foreigner’ or ‘Yellow Peril,’” (Ho, 2015, p. 120) when circumstances change or during times of crisis (Liu, 2023).

6.4. *AsianCrit & International Students.* Despite the initial intention of AsianCrit to be utilized to understand the role of racism in the experiences of Asian Americans within the US education system, Yao and Mwangi (2022) discuss how tenets of AsianCrit are applicable in examining the experiences of student populations as these students are often “othered and racialized using U.S.-constructs of race” (Yao et al., 2019, p. 39, as cited in Yao & Mwangi, 2022). AsianCrit can be used to analyze the ways that Chinese international students are racialized in their academic, social, and domestic domains, and the forms of discriminatory policies or unclear boundaries they experience studying abroad (Museus & Ifitkar, 2014).

In Yao and Mwangi’s (2022) review of articles and news sources utilizing AsianCrit to examine the impact of COVID-19 on Asian international students in the US, they identified that Asians and Asian Americans faced anti-Asian and racist experiences. In particular, negative influences on Asian international students included “their scapegoats for general society’s anger at having to live within a global health crisis” (p. 1034), and that both Asians and Asian Americans faced racism due to being branded as “disease bearers” (p. 1034). This is further demonstrated during the beginning of the pandemic, when Chinese international students were first experiencing harassment and stigma for wearing medical masks (Ma & Zhan, 2020). This

quickly escalated into greater levels of anti-Asian sentiments and racism when Asian communities were being blamed for the pandemic and seen as a threat, as Yu (2021) described how the crisis “evolved into a politically-driven blame game, [when] President Trump publicly labeled the coronavirus as “Chinese Virus” and “Kung Flu” (p. 4-5). Since then, Chinese international students have experienced a “resurgence of ‘yellow peril’ racism [...]” (Yu, 2021, p. 5). These shifting narratives can also contribute to the maintenance of White supremacy, as Yao and Mwangi (2022) emphasize that “discrimination against international students is nothing new because international students are often (re)racialized within the U.S. context, especially for students who come from non-White and non-English-speaking countries” (p. 1034; Yao et al., 2019). Museus and Ifitkar (2014) further discussed how many international students who decide to study abroad in North America will similarly experience the systemic layers of Whiteness and White supremacy that continue to shape education systems within these host countries (Museus & Ifitkar, 2014). This is especially valuable in examining the additional barriers these students face, such as language difficulties, the struggles in adapting to Western learning styles, challenges in fostering meaningful friendships with domestic students, and the shortcomings of homestay families and guardianship (Cheng, 2019; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006; Wong et al., 2010).

7. International Student Security (ISS)

Marginson et al. (2010) introduced ISS in order to expose the hardships and unresolved issues that international students experience, which include concerns regarding personal safety, financial issues, housing challenges, language adversities, racism, segregation, and feelings of loneliness. In doing so, ISS’s fundamental purpose is to improve the human security of international students by moving beyond just viewing these student populations as consumers to

extend rights, values, and protections for them beyond national borders. Human security can be defined as protection from abrupt and threatening disturbances in the daily lives of individuals. These can entail disturbances from home, in the workplace, or within the greater community, in addition to security in relation to health, safety, hunger, disease, and economic and political stability. Within Marginson et al.'s (2010) ISS framework, there are three major implications. First, international students are viewed as self-determining individuals who all have their own unique identities, paths, and values and needs and should be able to access the "full range of acknowledged human rights, not just consumer rights" (p. 75). While Marginson et al. (2010) discuss that each international students' human security is not identical, simultaneously there is a common component in all security, which is defined by rights. As such, human security "appears to all of us as a combination of objective rights with variable subjective needs" (p. 75).

The second implication is that human security occurs beyond the public and standard domains regulated by policy and protections. Many experiences occur in the "informal and private domains," (p. 76), especially for international education, and these concerns regarding the lack of regulation and responsibility should be taken into consideration, as what issues occur in the informal and private domain impacts the overall human security of an individual. Third, by granting human security to both citizens and non-citizens, ISS "adopts the premise of universal humanism rather than national particularism" (p. 76) and emphasises that the status of these students should not justify the restrictions and boundaries placed on respect or concern for them as individuals. Fundamental to ISS is the belief that international students deserve equal respect and worth afforded to their domestic counterparts in all aspects of life.

ISS is foundational for the study, as literature has revealed how the need for greater protections and entitlements for Chinese international youth in Canada in order to support the

success of these vulnerable populations (Sawir et al., 2009). Furthermore, as Marginson et al. (2010) states, “international students need both protection and empowerment [and] policy should combine these human needs without undermining the other” (p. 451). To address these two aspects, it is necessary to improve support systems for both students who are isolated or at risk, and a higher level of empowerment for students to have the ability to achieve a sense of freedom and manage their own lives and pathways. Though Marginson et al. (2010) suggests that both international and domestic student bodies may have similar objectives, there are major areas that need to undergo policy change and support that will meet the distinct needs and experiences of international students.

Many of these Chinese international students are seen as outsiders, drifting in between uncertain or unclear bearings in their host country. Several national governments often engage with the act of going back and forth between utilizing international students for their benefits or quickly disregarding them as hazards during challenging times (Marginson, 2012). This was especially clear during the emergence of COVID-19, where many Chinese international students quickly became ostracized from the public, subjected to slurs and cruel remarks to “go back home” (Nguyen & Balakrishnan, 2020, p. 1375). ISS also has a particular interest in restricting the governance for international students, as the current system driven by neoliberal forces leaves too much ambiguity between institutions and international students (Marginson et al., 2010). As stated prior, Marginson et al. (2010) discussed how the notion of student-as-consumer confines the global relationship exclusively into an economic one, as organizations and institutions may have a set of formal obligations and duties that they are responsible in delivering, but beyond these boundaries, it is “largely uncoded and partly informal relations with the student [...]” (p. 72).

Marginson et al. (2010) explains that this “thickness in ambiguous relations between institutions and students is instrumental to the commercial industry” (p. 72), as international students are “imagined as aliens with no rights other than consumer rights donated by the host nation” (p. 38) and entrusted with the government that allocate much of the responsibility to educational institutions to deliver services to students with very little regulation, which leaves no contract between the student populations and the government. As such, the ability for international students to report and communicate any consumer issues is minimal and lacking.

In most cases, students often possess very little awareness of what their rights and limitations even are as consumers, and there are “no external ombudsperson and ‘many factors [that] prevent students from seeking advice and help in such areas, the most prevalent being fear of visa cancellation’” (Marginson et al., 2010, p. 73). Marginson (2012) discusses the need for basic rights and responsibilities to be outlined and provided for international students. The inclusion of the same rights and protections that apply for citizen students to be granted for international students can reduce feelings of the other, and many of the various vulnerabilities, such as lack of communication, information, and even identity, that are involved within the current international student experience. This will allow them to maintain stable capacity of their human agency, as the greater the freedoms and liberties international students possess, the greater the improvement of their security (Marginson, 2012).

Furthermore, with the increasing privatization of public education and over-reliance on international education as a form of funding for school boards, the neoliberal role within the governance of education systems is putting vulnerable international youth at a higher risk to be exploited. Much of the high tuition costs that international students pay in are often not reinvested back into these student population services and support systems, as Marginson et al.

(2010) described how language departments are generally understaffed and unequipped to handle the demand and issues cited by international students, and certain services or opportunities are not provided or covered for these students, like the ability to apply for postgraduate scholarships or enter work experience programs. Having ISS as a framework for the study will allow a thorough analysis of the unregulated layers comprising this industry and what aspects need to be rebalanced or otherwise addressed. In doing so, the study can reveal what role the government and associated organizations should retain in establishing a structure that will monitor and advise international students. It will also divulge possible professional development programs that are necessary to ensure that organizations, support resources, and staff in all domains are trained to “meet the human security needs of internationals [and] emphasise cross-cultural relations”. Furthermore, ISS connects to my other framework like neoliberalism and my constructs like neo-racism as it can shed light to how we place boundaries on human security and where it is applied, in addition to how Whiteness and the dominant culture operates within EDI policies and practices, and what that means for international students within secondary contexts.

8. Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism can be characterized by the belief that market principles should become the standard for regulation and be implemented in all aspects of society, including education (Bamberger et al., 2019). This market-driven ideology is seen to be “the most efficient mode for decision making and the optimal way to promote human welfare” (Harvey, 2005, as cited in Bamberger et al., 2019, p. 204), often associated with free-trade agreements, privatization, and the reduction of the role of the state with social affairs (Harvey, 2005, as cited in Hamilton & Tett, 2021). Western education is seen as one of the most desirable products in the education market, as it is recognized as universally valuable, while education from other countries or

traditions may garner limited or qualified worth (Cheng, 2019; Mok, 2015; Chiang-Hom, 2004; Wu, 2019). As a result, many Chinese international students aim to study in developed Western nations to achieve “high-status Western educational credentials and cross-cultural competencies” (Wu & Tarc, 2021, p. 4).

Neoliberal frameworks contribute to the multicultural discourse within Canada. Rather than embracing diversity and multicultural attitudes to foster “mutual understanding and tolerance [that is] connected to humanistic and cooperative aims” (Bamberger et al., 2019, p. 207), the market-style approach to education has only led to the concept of multiculturalism to be associated with “increased readiness for employment in global and national labour markets” (p. 207). Consumers now consist of parents and their children, with different information containing standardized test scores, school performance rankings, IB programs, and graduation rates. With the powerful influence of neoliberalism and privatization within public education, the opportunities for what could have been global education, which focused on developing knowledge on global systems and fostering an understanding of the interconnectedness of humans and other species, has now shifted and allowed for international education to thrive as a method to pursue revenue as many school districts were attempting to “top up public funding [...] and look] beyond Canada’s borders for revenue sources” (Winton, 2022, p. 46; Pike, 2012). Trilokekar and Tamtik (2020) highlight as government funding continues to be reduced, neoliberal practices within education “have become increasingly the norm” (p. 44) as educational institutions begin to actively pursue these revenue streams. The increasing attraction of Western education in developed countries, like China and India, as a desirable and universally valuable product (Stein & de Andreotti, 2016) allowed for the unregulated system of international education to profit off students who were willing to pay extortionate tuition and housing fees

(Bozheva, 2020; Pike, 2012; Winton, 2022). As such, international education and neoliberalism have become inevitably entwined, which is apparent in Ontario's 2015 Strategy for K-12 International Education where the economic impact and benefits of international students studying in Canada were emphasized (Ministry of Education, 2015).

This framework is essential to examine the increasing neoliberal agenda within public education, as school boards are pursuing revenue sources in the form of international education in response to funding cutoffs from governments. This neoliberal agenda within education has increasingly led to education viewing international students as consumers (Marginson et al., 2010). As such, neoliberalism works collaboratively with ISS as the lack of responsibility and regulation from school boards and governments have implications on international students human security. Furthermore, this framework also works with my main theories CRT and AsianCrit, along with my constructs like model minority myth, yellow peril, neo-racism, and racial capitalism as neoliberalism often highlights the idea of individualism, which is the notion that each person is responsible for their own success or struggle, and often used to discount racial disparities (Ullucci & Battey, 2011). These concepts play a role in perpetuating an unjust system as it is ultimately inequitable and does not take into consideration the differences of each individual.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the core constructs of the theoretical framework and relevant frameworks that guide this study. Critical Race Theory (CRT) and in extension Asian Critical Theory (AsianCrit) will be utilized to understand how Chinese international secondary students are being racialized within their schools and viewed through a deficit lens from teachers and administration. Understanding how CRT functions in context of international

students is important for the study as it will help examine Chinese international students' experiences being 'othered' and allow a thorough examination of the complexities of student experiences with racism and the racialization they face during their studies. Understanding Whiteness within CRT enabled the study to understand how Whiteness operates within Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) policies and practices, and what that means for international students in a secondary education context. This is essential in understanding how marginalized students like Chinese international students continue to be situated as the other in EDI, and how they are framed within the context of integration within the dominant community, rather than genuine modification that embraces and values all students (Tavares, 2021). In particular, using racial capitalism, neo-racism, model minority, and yellow peril allowed the study to examine how these concepts are intertwined and play a part in dehumanizing these students and perpetuating their invisibility, especially during COVID-19. The shifting narratives of the model minority and yellow peril builds an understanding of how they contribute to the maintenance of White supremacy within education. Understanding of these theories and constructs were crucial for the effective implementation of direct solutions of ISS which advocated for improved standards of protection and human security for international students to ensure they experience lasting developments (Marginson, 2012). These theories allowed the study to conduct an in-depth exploration of Chinese international students' experiences and examine ways in which the dominant culture functions as the norm within secondary institutions. This is essential to building an understanding of how neo-racism can manifest within public education, and how EDI initiatives disregard international students and continue to make education unequal for international students.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, an overview of the study design is discussed, where a qualitative approach was described and why it worked alongside the theoretical framework to explore the research questions. A description of the interview protocol and a rationale for the interview questions chosen for participants will also be examined. I also have an opportunity to discuss my researcher positionality, where I reflect upon my role within the study and acknowledge my thinking and engagement with the research. Following this, the participant selection and sampling procedure is considered, and how purposeful sampling was employed to select participants and research sites that will garner the most informative and insightful data to explore the research questions posed. The data collection procedure is also explored, with the three phases of data collection discussed in detail which consisted of a critical examination of international education brochures and EDI policies of three school boards, followed by student, and teacher interviews. A description of participant confidentiality and privacy is also provided, where I outline the steps I took to ensure the strongest level of internet privacy, security, and safety of participants. Data analysis is also examined, where a description of the relevance of employing qualitative content analysis is provided, along with a detailed discussion of the data analysis process that includes how data was transcribed, coded, explored for themes and the process of data triangulation. Finally, the limitations of the study will be examined that provides an overview of the challenges that emerged for the study.

The guiding research questions for the study consisted of:

- What are the discrepancies and gaps between how Canadian secondary schools are marketed to Chinese international students and their experiences once they are within the system?

- What are key concerns and gaps in policy and programmatic supports for IS academic, social, housing and guardianship experiences that influence their protection and security?
- What insights do the experiences of Chinese international student population in GTA secondary schools reveal about Ontario’s school policies on multiculturalism, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI), and international education? How did the pandemic and growing geo-political tensions between Canada and China impact these policies?

1. Study Design

1.1. Qualitative Research

As the study utilized CRT and AsianCrit which examine how race and racism have shaped society that focuses on the experiences of marginalized individuals, a qualitative research approach was essential to establish more comprehensive interpretations and accounts of the social phenomena under study (Creswell, 2014; Fischer & Guzel, 2022; Lim, 2024; Naeem et al., 2023). Qualitative research offers a distinct lens that allows researchers to interpret and explore the “depth and richness of context and voice in understanding social phenomena” (Lim, 2024, p. 2) that aims to reveal the nuances of human interaction and behaviour, “capturing the complexity (breadth and depth) that these phenomena entail” (p. 3). Qualitative research is an effective approach for this study due to its unique capability of developing a “human-centered understanding” (Lim, 2024, p. 3) of complex social contexts.

Qualitative research utilizes methods like in-depth interviews and participant observation to help develop or expand theoretical frameworks, inform policy and programmatic changes, and connect research to real world issues. This approach is grounded in lived experiences that is ultimately “responsive to the needs of the modern world” (p. 3). Specifically, the interview process which utilized narrative interviews and counter-story aligns with this approach. Narrative

interviews complement the qualitative approach as it allows space that is less rigid and controlled and open to change based on the experiences shared by the narrator. The narrator is positioned to be the center of the study and have their perspectives prioritized (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008), which aligns with the focus of marginalized voices that CRT and AsianCrit values. Narrative interviews also align with counter-story, which is a tenet of CRT and a technique that allows marginalized individuals to communicate their experiences, and center students of colour and their silenced or untold stories (Sólorzano & Yosso, 2001). These counter-stories within the narrative interviews can challenge the perceived notions or beliefs regarding Chinese international secondary school students and shed light on the reality of these vulnerable populations.

This research approach also aligns with the aim of the study which is to examine the lived experiences of Chinese international secondary school students studying in GTA public schools. The rationale for investigating Chinese international students within the GTA is due to the culturally diverse school districts. First, Toronto is the capital of Ontario and the largest city in Canada, attracting many students from across Canada and the globe (Toronto District School Board, 2019). Located within Toronto is Canada's largest school board, Toronto District School Board (TDSB), with more than 246,000 students enrolled in 583 schools across Toronto. Toronto and TDSB appeals greatly to international students, as they are highly attracted to the unique global opportunities, diversity, and multiculturalism that the schoolboard endorses (Toronto District School Board, 2019). Many school boards within GTA also have diverse school districts that appeal to international students, such as Peel District School Board (PDSB), which is the second largest school board in Ontario with over 50% of residents living in that area being immigrants (Peel District School Board, 2022), along with York Region District School Board

(YRDSB), the third largest school board in Ontario that serves an approximate total of 126,121 students across K-12, with 41,181 enrolled in secondary schools and 6,434 secondary students identified as ELL (York Region District School Board, 2021). The nuanced experiences of Chinese international secondary school students studying in public schools is especially interesting given its high level of diversity, immigration and multiculturalism both within and outside the schools (Toronto District School Board, 2019; Zheng, 2014).

As stated prior, the value of qualitative research lies in its power to produce rich insights of the lived human experience through methods like in-depth interviews and participant observation that “delves into the subjective experiences and perspectives of individuals, providing a valuable platform that truly recognizes their voice” (Lim, 2024, p. 3). This depth and intimate knowledge are essential to shape recommendations and solutions that not only effectively address the gaps identified but is also more culturally and socially relevant. This approach aligned with the study aim, as in-depth interviews with Chinese international student populations lived experiences and teacher participant perspectives, along with an analysis of international education brochures and EDI policies, allowed for a holistic perspective that provided understanding from all relevant aspects and angles. This allowed the study to provide a “more complete understanding critical to theory development, as well as targeted solutions resulting in good return on value” (Lim, 2024, p. 4). The insights of multiple data points and participant perspectives helped me understand the essence of the shared experiences of Chinese international secondary students and helped identify overarching concerns and gaps within policy and programmatic supports for international students’ academic, social, and housing and guardianship experiences. The study thus exposed what areas within international education need to undergo systemic policy changes, and ways to better regulate international education to

improve support systems and greater protections and entitlements for international students during their studies abroad. The study also brought forth insights on strengths and limitations on Ontario international education and diversity school policies. It highlighted their experiences during the pandemic and how current educational systems and processes impact the conditions of Asian individuals. It also revealed how racism may shape their experiences, and how these Chinese international youths, and in turn international students of colour, have been potentially disregarded, lacked voice, or remain invisible in educational policies and practices.

Despite interviews having to be conducted through online platforms like Zoom due to COVID-19, Hyde and Rouse (2023) argued that online interviews are a valuable research method for qualitative studies as they can “enhance human encounters” (p. 874) in many ways. For instance, the interview may be enhanced as the researcher may actually look and focus on the face in a “way that is more penetrating than a face-to-face interview, thereby alleviating other possible distractions that might detract from the interview encounter” (p. 880). Furthermore, aspects like participants being interviewed from their homes can increase a level of comfort for them, as they are able to control their own environment which is not often possible during in-person interviews. This can allow for a more natural and relaxed interview where participants can speak freely about their experiences and feelings, sharing or talking more openly compared to in-person encounters (Olliffe et al., 2021). In some cases, participants can be more vulnerable with sharing their concerns or issues, especially those who may have opted to not share their camera during the interview, as they may not feel as self-conscious or intimidated by the researcher. This can allow the study to potentially explore participants’ lived experiences in ways that in-person interviews may not allow or facilitate, examining the discrepancies and gaps with

how Canadian secondary schools are marketed to Chinese international students and their actual experiences within the system.

2. Research Site

The original intended participant site during the early development stages of this study was collaborations with a school board located in the GTA. However, there were several challenges that emerged due to the ongoing pandemic, greatly impacting research opportunities. Since data collection occurred during the first two years of the pandemic, there were several restrictions that prohibited external research due to health and safety risks, alongside the internal struggles school boards faced adapting their schooling to new pandemic environments. Thus, any research opportunities to collaborate and conduct interviews with a school board, and any administration like principals and vice-principals, or with representatives within recruitment agencies and homestay services, were prohibited since many school boards paused external research opportunities during this time. Due to these circumstances, I was forced to adjust expectations and reach out to other organisations and teacher colleagues that I could collaborate with that aligned with the study goals, as schools and any school associated organisation were not allowed to participate.

Thus, the decision to collaborate with the IYC as the site of participant data collection was decided. The Immigrant Youth Centre (IYC) is part of the Centre for Immigrant and Community Services (CICS) that is fully funded by Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada. IYC demonstrated a commitment and passion in supporting newcomer youths as their mission was to enhance a sense of community for immigrant and international youths in an inclusive, supportive, and diverse environment. Furthermore, IYC was chosen as the centre was located in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), specifically Markham. Given the nature of service

and location, IYC attracted a fairly large number of international students, especially Chinese international students. To begin, the most recent census population sample conducted in 2021 revealed Markham had a population of 338,503, with 146,145 individuals identifying ethnically as Chinese (Statistics Canada, 2023). Furthermore, Markham is located within the York Region District School Board (YRDSB), where approximately 6,434 students identified as being English language learners (York Region District School Board, 2021). Thus, not only is this centre extremely attractive to Chinese international students as it had a greater Chinese community, but this collaboration allowed access to opportunities for interviewing my student demographic as I was informed by the program manager that there were numerous Chinese international students who were enrolled in public secondary schools within YRDSB and TDSB attended and utilized the services available at IYC. Furthermore, given the regulations that were implemented during COVID-19, IYC had an even stronger impact for international students during this time as there were limited opportunities for social connection and very little to no support services available. This was extremely significant for international students who came to Canada independently to study and felt isolated or alone during this time. IYC was able to offer a variety of services, resources, and different programs that supported their growth, adjustment, and provided general support for them.

These supports include 4 major categories, with the first being group programming that provides English language and academic support for students, education pathway knowledge, leadership opportunities and life skills guidance, field trips and community connections, and camps during the summer and March break. Alongside this, one-on-one supportive services is the next category of support that provides students assistance with settlement document support post-secondary application information and resources, pre-employment and assistance with job

search, homework and study skills support, and counselling and community referrals for students. Another category is tutoring and mentorship that provides students opportunities to enhance their English communication skills, to provide support with individualized homework and study skills, develop social skills and grow students' networks, and learn about Canadian daily life. Finally, the last category is IYC community action network (CAN) that offers engagement opportunities and hands-on-leadership experience for IYC youth to have a voice and develop skills to grow their social networks (Centre for Immigrant and Community Services, n.d.). IYC is not only committed to supporting international students during their adjustment to Canada but is passionate about encouraging youth to stay connected with their cultural roots. Many international students, particularly Chinese international students, utilized these services and accessed supports from them as they provide opportunities for leadership, to foster students' self-esteem and social development, and to allow them to build strong, lasting friendships (Centre for Immigrant and Community Services, n.d.).

3. Three Phases of Data Collection

The study had three phases of research collection, the first consisted of a critical examination of international education brochures and EDI policies from the three largest school boards in Ontario, which are Toronto District School Board (TDSB), Peel District School Board (PDSB) and York Region District School Board (YRDSB). These brochures and EDI policies were located from the school board official websites and all three school boards only had one international student brochure available to review for incoming students. This brochure and EDI analysis builds an understanding of how Canadian schools are marketed towards Chinese and general international students and how multiculturalism, EDI, and international education are promoted in Ontario and Canadian schools, in order to identify potential discrepancies and gaps

between what is being advertised to international students, and what their true experiences are once enrolled in the schoolboards. The second and third phase of data research consisted of interviews with participants. A total of 11 participants were interviewed, consisting of five Chinese international secondary school students and six secondary teachers from public schools located in the GTA to understand how they perceive Chinese international students and interpret the experiences of these youth. The second phase of research consisted of interviewing Chinese international secondary students. This was fundamental in understanding the true experiences of Chinese international youth studying abroad in Canada, especially youth who came independently without their parents or extended family and used recruitment agencies and homestay services during their studies. The third phase of study consisted of teacher participant interviews. The rationale behind teacher participants is the fact that they have years engaging and interacting with this particular international student population, contributing potential insight on student success, challenges, and overarching issues these students may face and identify gaps within practices, policies, and services within their school boards.

3.1. International Education Brochures and EDI Statement Analysis

The first phase of research collection consisted of examinations of international student brochures from the three largest school boards in Ontario, which were Toronto District School Board (TDSB), Peel District School Board (PDSB) and York Region District School Board (YRDSB) along with the EDI policies identified on their websites. The rationale in analysing these brochures and policies is to establish an understanding of how the three largest school boards in the GTA endorsed international student programs and EDI (Financial Accountability Office of Ontario, 2024). While the international education brochures and EDI policies taken from their website might not be a comprehensive representation of each school board, these

brochures and policies were taken as a sample to understand how Canadian education is marketed towards these students, what school boards valued and prioritized in regard to EDI policies, and what information consumers are exposed to. I paid particular attention to key words and phrases guided by questions through a CRT and ISS lens, reflecting upon the way the quality and standards of secondary education in Canada are portrayed, what forms of support services and programs are offered, how the overall living experiences studying abroad for international students are advertised, and how EDI was recognized and valued in each board. This analysis builds a foundation in identifying the gaps and concerns with the policies and standards in Canadian IS programs. This analysis also allowed for comparisons drawn later based on the collected interview data to determine how the promoted ideals of the Canadian schooling experience influenced the lived experiences of Chinese international secondary students and teachers' perceptions of students' preparedness and expectations. Table 2 illustrates the forms of questions that guided this analysis.

Table 2

Brochure and EDI Analysis Guiding Questions

Critical Race Theory	International Student Security
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is Western education being marketed to international students? • Are there any ideas or suggestions about Western education being advertised to students to influence their decision? • How are international students inherently being portrayed through the brochures? Are these student populations being racialized in anyway? • What EDI policies or initiatives do school boards value and prioritize? • Who is recognized in EDI policies? Are there any voices being disregarded? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What forms of support, programs, and services are provided for international students? • Are these services dedicated to international students concerns and issues or general support services for all students? • How are international students supported in their integration into their new host country? • How are school boards ensuring the safety of international students?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is EDI being used as a tool to sell a certain experience for students? • Do brochures indicate inclusivity of international student culture or integration into the dominant culture? • What qualifies as “success”? • What is the purpose of schooling? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What policies, practices, and responsibilities do school boards engage with to guarantee student security?
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3.2. Participant Interview Protocol

To effectively explore and answer the research questions, interview questions were developed to gain specific insight that was relevant for each participant group. Thus, there were two interview protocols that were created for student participants (Appendix A) and teacher participants (Appendix B). Student and teacher participant profiles are addressed in Chapter 5 where Table 3 provides an overview of student participant demographic information, and Table 4 provides an overview of teacher participant demographic information.

3.2.1. Participant Selection and Sampling Procedure. Purposeful sampling was conducted during participant selection to garner the most informative and gainful data from participants to understand the problem and research questions posed (Creswell, 2014). This sampling procedure was selected as it allows the researcher to select participants and sites for the study because “they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 224). Participants in the sample “need to have stories to tell about their lived experiences,” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 223), and as such, researchers can use their judgement to search for participants who have experiences relating to the specific phenomenon and can provide insightful and rich data (Kruger, 1988, as cited in Groenewald, 2004).

The participants that were selected in the study consisted of approximately five Chinese international secondary school students and six teachers from public secondary schools within

the GTA. These participants were purposefully selected as student participants needed to provide insight on their lived experiences studying in Canada as international students. As such, I limited the Chinese secondary participant range to consist of international students that were enrolled in a public school board or have had previous experiences in a public school board, were aged 16 and over, and have come to study in Canada within the last six years in order to obtain perspectives and concerns that were relatively recent, and provide insight into how these students adapted to their environment in their host country over time. Teacher participants were selected based on the requirement that they taught Chinese international students within the GTA. This is essential so they were able to provide firsthand insight on their experiences with Chinese international students and identify gaps and challenges in supporting them.

3.2.2. Ethics Approach. The research study proposal was submitted to York University's Office of Research Ethics (ORE), undergoing a rigorous review process that included questions, feedback, and revisions before being granted approval. Since there was no external research collaboration with school boards, I was not required to gain ethics approval from any other educational institutions for this study. Following approval from York University, the researcher made initial contact with the intended participating site, IYC, by contacting the gatekeepers of this organisation. Gatekeepers are individuals or authoritative bodies who will "directly decide or strongly influence the decision to allow [researchers] to conduct [their] study in that setting" (Gay et al., 2011, p. 182). In this case, the program manager for IYC was the gatekeeper that will make an informed decision and determine whether I could collaborate with the organisation to conduct interviews with international students. Once approval was granted by the program manager, they connected me with the youth program coordinator who assisted me with the recruitment of voluntary student participants. The youth program coordinator created

social media posts that provided students information regarding the objectives of the study, requirements for student participation, what the interview process would entail, and any privacy and confidentiality concerns and issues. The information for the social media posts were all derived from the information provided within the informed consent forms (Appendix C) that the interested student participants would sign. Student participants that were interested reached out to the youth program coordinator that would provide them the informed consent form that they needed to sign and connected them with me to arrange interview times.

Once voluntary participants expressed interest in the study and signed the consent forms, interviews were arranged so implementation of the research process commenced. Once the last interview was conducted with student participants, and there were no more interested participants following two months of the last interview with social media promotion, recruitment for teacher participants began. Recruitment for teacher participants were conducted through snowball sampling, where I reached out to teacher colleagues that were teaching in the GTA that had experiences with Chinese international students in their classrooms. These teachers were colleagues I have worked with on YRDSB, and those who had relevant experience with teaching international students and were interested in the study participated. Those who did not have relevant experience connected me with other teacher colleagues they knew that had these experiences and worked in the GTA. All participation for the study was conducted on a voluntary basis and in-depth narrative interviews ranging from one to one and a half hours with both participant groups, students, and teachers.

3.2.3. Participant Confidentiality and Privacy. All interviews were conducted using Zoom, a video conferencing platform. Though there is no guarantee for internet privacy when information is being conveyed online, the researcher attempted to provide more security by

creating a unique password for each interview that was sent to participants the day before the scheduled interview meeting. Prior to commencing, all participants (both student and teachers) were provided an informed consent form that outlines the purpose of the research study, what will be involved in the study, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality, and a section for consent. During individual interviews online, participants were once again be informed of the study process, confidentiality, potential risks, and benefits, and they provided verbal assent for their participation before commencing the interviews.

The research study was also identified as minimal risk, but participants were cautioned that there is very low potential for participants to experience psychological or emotional risks, as they may feel emotional discomfort, anxiety, or stress as they will be asked personal questions either about their own experiences studying and living in Canada or personal perceptions of student experiences. Prior to the interview, participants were informed that if they feel any discomfort regarding any of the questions asked, they can choose to not answer or withdraw from the interview immediately with no consequence. When conducting the individual interviews, all participants were once again reminded of their confidentiality and be informed about the potential risk of emotional discomfort and risk before the interview questions commence. Following interviews, the researcher was available to address any concerns or questions they may have. Following interviews, the data were transcribed, coded, analyzed, and explored for themes or descriptions that work towards answering the proposed research questions. Participants were given pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

3.2.4. Narrative Interviews and Counter-Story. For the interview process, the study used narrative interviews as the data collection process. Narrative interviews complement the qualitative approach within the study and reflects the theoretical framework, as the aim of the

researcher is to reflect and determine significant themes and understand the nature of the lived experiences of participants to establish an understanding of the social phenomena. This approach is open to change based on the experiences shared by the narrator, i.e., the participant, and they are positioned to be the center of the study and have their perspectives prioritized (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008). Though all structured interviews are developed within a question-and-answer format where an agenda is established and imposed upon by the interviewer, narrative approaches allow space that is less rigid and controlled.

This approach has been used in various disciplines to learn more about the culture, identity, and lifestyle of the narrator, as the stories of their lived experiences become the raw data (Butina, 2015). During these interviews, it is essential that the researcher emphasize that they are interested in “the personal story of the narrator’s life [and their] personal experiences,” (Każmierska, 2004, p. 156). In turn, it is the responsibility of the researcher to listen, observe, and understand the narrators’ lives and experiences rather than impose an agenda and be a respondent (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016; Hollway & Jefferson, 2008). Woven into these narrative interviews was also the method of counter-story, which is a tenet of CRT and a technique that allows marginalized individuals to “communicate [their] lived realities [...] [and] particularly how race frames these experiences” (Hauber-Özer et al., 2021, p. 4).

Counter-storytelling is a method aimed to tell stories of individuals whose experiences may not often be told, as it centers these students of colour and can be valuable in bringing attention to the various perspectives of the silenced and untold stories. This approach can examine, expose, and challenge the stories of those in power and privilege, whose “majoritarian” stories may be positioned as the dominant discourse in society (Sólorzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 475). With the use of counter-stories, there will be opportunities to identify, criticise, compare,

and contrast dominant narratives with the personal stories and perspectives of marginalized individuals. Participants experiences with racism can be examined to counter deficit storytelling that often perpetuate dominant or racialized constructs that surround them (Milner, 2008; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001).

These counter-stories within the narrative interviews can challenge the perceived notions or beliefs regarding Chinese international secondary school students and shed light on the reality of these vulnerable populations. There are three forms of counter-stories, known as personal stories, other people's stories or narratives, and composite stories or narratives (Merriweather Hunn et al., 2006). The student participants will share their personal stories, which compose of accounts of people of colour's experiences with racial discrimination or disadvantages, and reflect and share stories connected to their experiences with racism and discrimination during the interviews. The teacher participants will engage with other people's stories, sharing the challenges and potential discrimination and racism that these student populations have faced (Merriweather Hunn et al., 2006). These counter-stories allowed for opportunities to critically analyze how participants experiences with racism may contrast the dominant or perceived constructs surrounding them (Sólorzano & Yosso, 2001).

Każmierska (2004) discusses how narrative interviews are a telling of the participant's own lived experiences. As a result, it may be difficult for the researcher to resist the instinct to implement traditional research methods such as asking questions during moments of silence where the participant is thinking or during emotional moments. It is important that the researcher remember their observatory role during the "main-story phase", which constitutes the key phase of the interview process where the narrator is sharing their experience. During this time, the researcher should ensure that non-verbal cues of encouragement and communication are

provided to show positive reaction and interest to the narrator's experiences. Once the narrator is finished with their narrative, then the researcher may ask questions for clarification that are "related to the main narrative and pose theoretical questions" (p. 156) during this stage. These questions are asked to elicit greater details regarding their experiences that might have interested the researcher, and possibly areas where there were inconsistencies or confusion. Once the interview process is completed, it is important for the researcher to devote "time and attention to the narrator treating [them] as an interaction partner and not only a 'story-telling machine'" (p. 157), as the narrator has trusted the researcher by sharing their story and experiences. This was achieved by the end of the interviews, where student participants engaged in casual conversation with the researcher, asking questions they had of their own, not just regarding the research process, but about the researcher's personal life, background, and experiences. This again emphasized how important the research relationship between the researcher and participant is, as the comfort of the participant can deepen quality of rapport (Mizock et al., 2011).

The student participants bring forth insight on their *lived experiences* of studying as an international youth in Canada, while the teacher participants forth insights into how they interpret and understand Chinese secondary school students' experiences. The teacher participants were able to offer a different perspective from the experiences of these student populations as they will contribute reflections on daily or over-arching concerns, issues, or positive experiences that they are aware of or that these student populations share with them in general. They will also be able to provide potential knowledge on the policies, practices, and priorities that occur within their schools that can be contrasted or further support the accounts of Chinese international student participants.

4. Participant Interviews

4.1. Student Participant Interviews

As mentioned prior, student participant recruitment was conducted through collaborations with IYC where social media posts were created by the youth program coordinator that provided students information regarding the study. Interested students reached out to the youth program coordinator, who would provide them the informed consent form they would sign and connect them with me to arrange an interview time. Despite voluntary participation, the study managed to have a level of diversity within the limited participant sample, as there were both male and female students (three male; two female) that participated in the study, with students ranging from 16 to 18, in addition to student participants who came independently and utilized recruitment and homestay services (two students), while others came with family members (three students). I also had variety of school boards from students, as three student participants shared their experiences with the Toronto school board (TDSB) while the other two shared their experiences in a GTA school board (YRDSB). This allowed for the study to have a range of differing and diverse experiences shared that enriched the study analysis and discussion. Student demographic information can be further illustrated in Table 3.

Following general background questions, students were asked specific questions regarding their decisions to study abroad in China and their impressions of Canada. These questions were asked to later identify potential discrepancies and gaps between how Canadian secondary schools are marketed to international students within the international education brochures and the reality of their experiences (e.g. Tell me about your decision about studying abroad? Can you tell me how and why you came to decide?; What impressions or ideas of

Canada did you have before arriving here? Did your impressions or ideas of Canada change once you arrived?). Student participants were also asked their experiences within the academic, social, and housing and guardianship domains (when relevant) of their lives, and any concerns they had, and challenges they faced as an international student studying abroad (e.g. Do you enjoy your school experience? Why or why not? Is there something that you like or dislike?). Student participants were asked their opinion on international student services like recruitment agencies and homestay companies (e.g. What do you think of international student services like recruitment agencies or homestay companies?). Students who used these services were asked deeper questions regarding their experiences than students who have not utilized these services (e.g. Can you describe your experience? What do you like or dislike?; If you are staying in a host family, what was the experience like finding one? Has your experience with your host family been similar or different to what is advertised?). Student participants were also asked questions regarding how COVID-19 had impacted their lives, and if there were any signs or experiences with anti-Asian hate, racism, or discrimination faced during this time (e.g. Have you ever felt any discrimination or racism before COVID-19? Can you describe your experiences if any?; Have these experiences changed after COVID-19?). Finally, interview questions regarding supports were asked to student participants in order to understand what forms of support are available for students, how easily accessible and effective they are, and if there are were any concerns or future changes that should be implemented (e.g. Do you think there is enough support available?; Can you share a positive example and a negative example when you had to seek support and what the process was like?). Interview data from students will bring forth insights on Chinese international students' experiences in GTA secondary schools, and highlight discrepancies and gaps between how Canadian secondary schools are marketed to Chinese

international students and their true experiences once they are within the system. Furthermore, data will identify concerns and gaps in policy and programmatic supports for international students' academic, social, housing and guardianship experiences.

4.2 Teacher Participant Interviews

Teacher participants were recruited through snowball sampling, where I reached out to teacher colleagues that were teaching in the GTA that had experiences with Chinese international students in their classrooms. These teacher colleagues were similarly provided information regarding the aim of study, how the interview process will be conducted and what it will entail, and issues of confidentiality and privacy. Those that were interested in participating in the study were provided informed consent forms to sign and return before commencing interview scheduling. The teacher participants recruited for the study were not affiliated with IYC in any way and were not provided any information on the student participants that were separately interviewed.

Six teacher participants were recruited for the interview, with the majority identifying as female and Asian. There was a diverse range of years of experience (two years to 20 years), with a range of subjects taught. Four teacher participants were also teaching with schools located on the YRDSB, while two teachers were located in TDSB. Further teacher demographic information can be seen in Table 4 in the following chapter. Teacher participants were also asked questions regarding Chinese international secondary school students' experiences within the academic, social, and housing and guardianship domains, and any concerns they had, and challenges they identified for international students studying abroad (e.g. Can you share any positive or negative experiences international Chinese secondary school students have shared with you about their studies in Canada?). Teachers were also asked why international recruitment was important to

their school board and schools in order to establish an understanding of what teachers view as a priority in their educational institutions in comparison to what is advertised on the brochures. Finally, teacher participants were asked questions on whether COVID-19 had an impact on Chinese international secondary students, and if there were any signs or experiences of anti-Asian hate, racism, or discrimination they say during this time (e.g. In what ways do you think COVID-19 has had any impact on Chinese secondary school students?). Finally, teacher participants were asked questions regarding the support systems that were available for student participants, and how helpful and accessible they were for students, and what aspects could be improved or changed to better support these students (e.g. Do you think there is enough support available for these students?; Should there should be more professional development for teachers to help support ELL international students?). Interview data from teachers will reveal insights on Ontario's school policies on multiculturalism, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI), and international education, and how the pandemic and growing geo-political tensions between Canada and China impacted these policies. Teacher data can also reveal gaps and concerns for these student populations and identify overarching similarities or differences between student and teacher experiences or perceived experiences of these student populations.

5. Researcher Positionality

There are a variety of characteristics that define qualitative research, and one significant characteristic is *reflexivity* within the research process. This is where the researcher reflects upon their role within the study and how “their personal background, culture, and experiences hold potential for sharpening their interpretations” (Creswell, 2014, p. 235). As a researcher that is working with a specific ethnic group for the study, I recognize the significance of my role within the meaning-making process in relation to interpreting the phenomenon explored by my

participants' lived experiences. Researchers in qualitative research are "key instruments" (Creswell, 2014, p. 235) within the data process itself as they develop data collection instruments and gather the information themselves. As a key instrument in the research process, I understand how my internal biases and knowledge may inherently impact this proposed study.

Since the participant population that I interviewed are a marginalized population, it is essential to outline my positionality as a researcher and reflect upon my own personal identity. It bears significant relevance to my relationship with the participants. I identify as an Asian-Canadian woman who was born and raised in Markham, Ontario. I am a child of immigrants from Shanghai and identify as Chinese. However, I acknowledge that my own thinking and engagement with this research may be dissimilar to the participants of my study. Being born in Canada, I am deeply engrained in Canadian culture, while this culturalization process may have been a significantly different or missing from my participants' experiences. I am aware that I may not be able to identify with all the experiences international Chinese students may face, such as difficulties establishing belonging in a host country, language barriers, and homestay issues. Despite this, my ethnic background and ability to communicate in Mandarin is a potentially important aspect to the study. Matching researcher and participant race may increase the comfort levels of the participants. Since the lead researcher and participants can communicate in their first language, this is beneficial in establishing any further clarification if necessary and fostering an environment where participants can feel more comfortable during the data collection process. This can also potentially deepen the quality of rapport and disclosure of data with participants, developing a stronger research relationship (Mizock et al., 2011).

All interviews were conducted in English due to potential issues in the translation process, such as certain words in Mandarin not having English words that express the exact or

equivalent meaning, and student participant preferences to do their interviews in English. However, there were still moments where participants faced some difficulty in expressing their experiences or finding the correct word to describe their feelings. During these times, students were able to communicate in their first language as I understood Mandarin and I would then clarify their experiences in English to confirm. These students expressed relief that I was able to interpret their emotions or experiences correctly, such as when a student had difficulty in explaining their feelings of loneliness as they could not recall the exact vocabulary, and I informed them that they could share it in Mandarin, and then clarified their sentiments in English. These circumstances helped foster an environment where students felt comfortable and enhanced the quality of our rapport and research relationship (Mizock et al., 2011).

6. Data Analysis

6.1. Qualitative Content Analysis

The study employed qualitative content analysis to analyze the brochure and EDI documents and participant data as this method not only examines the textual data in a source, but it also aims to expand on the content to draw upon “themes and core ideas found in texts” (Drisko & Maschi, 2016, p. 82) and to understand how various “narratives are formatted and delivered” (p. 85). Within this analysis method, researchers can generate codes from the data, produce codes that are theory based or influenced by previous research, and ultimately categorize these codes into patterns or themes. However, as the name suggests, qualitative content analysis does not employ a statistical analytical approach to analysis, but rather, “a systematic method for searching out and describing meanings within texts of many kinds” (Drisko & Maschi, 2016, p. 87).

Thus, the focus of qualitative content analysis is often on identifying the themes that emerge from the data and to summarize the content or to highlight significant or meaningful findings within the data (Drisko & Maschi, 2016). For the research study, qualitative data based on the questions of varying complexity from the semi-structured interview were analyzed. All responses to qualitative questions were entered in NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software program that helps to analyze, organize, and find insights in qualitative and unstructured data such as interviews and open-ended survey responses. First, the international education brochures and EDI statements from three of the largest school boards in Ontario were analyzed and coded for themes and descriptions, with teacher and student participant analysis following to answer the proposed research questions.

The themes identified from participant data were strengthened through triangulation, which was addressed through a range of control and checking procedures (Creswell, 2014). Triangulation is a process that encompasses a variety of practices and assessments to “establish the fact that the criterion of validity has been met” (Schwandt, 2001, p. 257). This process involves critical cross-examinations and comparisons to identify any implications through the course of the research study. The research study draws on various data sources, which include international student brochures, EDI policies, and student and teacher participant data. Having multiple sources of data can better justify the themes identified from the data and offer a more comprehensive understanding of the study’s conclusions for researchers. Additionally, member checking will be utilized to establish the trustworthiness of the transcribed narrative interviews.

All participants received a follow up email with their transcribed interview data returned to them to certify validity. Participants were asked to verify the transcribed data and ensure that the interview accurately portrays their opinions and thoughts and have any opportunities to

reconstruct, add, or delete from their narratives (Creswell, 2014). All students verified the interviews with no changes necessary for their transcripts. One aspect to note is that the research study is using CRT as a framework, where subjectivity is centered, and bias can be expected throughout the process. However, since the study has different data sources to draw from, the themes will be stronger as I will be identifying overarching themes prevalent across international student brochures and student and teacher participant data. The study offers more comprehensive information for researchers to share with greater forthrightness and confidence to independent third parties (Creswell, 2014), as the study will have evidence from multiple data sources and justify described common themes based on various perspectives.

In terms of data saturation, Fusch and Ness (2015) discussed how there is no universal method to reach data saturation, but there are general guiding principles that determine whether saturation has been met, which is conclusion that there are no new major themes, data, and coding. Whether large or small, the size of the sample does not guarantee that data saturation will be achieved. Rather, it is what comprises the sample size and whether a researcher has reached the point of no new themes or data, which means that data saturation has achieved and there is enough information for the study to be replicated (Fusch & Ness, 2015). There were also methods conducted to enhance the ability to reach data saturation, like structuring interview questions that asked multiple participants the same questions. Thus, in terms of this research study, while the data sample was on a smaller scale, there were no longer any prominent reoccurring themes that emerged, indicating that no further coding was applicable for the study and data saturation was reached.

6.1.1. Brochure & EDI Analysis. As mentioned prior, the brochure and EDI analysis consisted of examining international student brochures and EDI policy statements from the three

largest school boards in Ontario, which are Toronto District School Board (TDSB), Peel District School Board (PDSB) and York Region District School Board (YRDSB). Alongside the guiding questions, the brochures and EDI policies were coded by key words that were repetitive across all brochures and EDI statements and were provided with a memo that highlighted the immediate context and how the word or phrases were. Some keywords for the brochures included: quality education, dedicated teachers, ESL programming, student support services, international student services, while some keywords for EDI statements included: diversity, belonging, inclusive education, safe. These keywords were later classified into themes based on sorting similar meaning and contexts into piles and connecting back to the guiding research questions and purpose of study that Stuckey (2015) refers to as the “storyline” (p. 8) of the study.

The first prevalent theme for the brochure analysis that emerged consisted of the “world class education” that school boards offered, which was defined by the quality and prestige of their education, a wide range of academic program choices, and the diversity and inclusivity that students experience within their school communities. The second theme identified was the high-quality support services that were readily available for students, as various categories of support were identified such as academic, social and cultural, teachers and staff members, as well as other additional specific services for international students. Finally, the last major theme that emerged was the associated services like home stay and guardianship programs. In particular, the lack of responsibility that school boards possess towards this particular process for international students was identified, as the information provided on the brochures were extremely limited and school boards emphasized that these external services were the responsibility of individuals and not the school board to arrange. Within the school boards EDI’s policies, the first major theme that emerged was the commitment for equitable and inclusive learning environments for

all students, staff members, families, and community members. The second theme that was prevalent was recognizing indigenous education and black excellence, followed by the third theme which drew attention to school board's promise in delivering accessibility and accommodations for all students, parents/guardians, and staff members. The final theme that emerged in the analysis was emphasis on diversity, as all school boards drew on a strong emphasis on ensuring that students, families, and staff members would be able to see themselves reflected within their schools, which paralleled much of the themes or ideas highlighted within the brochures.

6.1.2. Interview Analysis. Once interviews have been checked by all participants, all data was transcribed and also analyzed through the same method as the brochure analysis, by key words that appeared throughout interviews (e.g. accommodation) and immediate context for how the word or phrases were used (e.g. equality vs. equity; teacher preparedness) to establish themes, and identify gaps and vulnerabilities that Chinese international secondary students encounter that will shape beneficial policy changes or programmatic recommendations (e.g. professional development; standardized support systems). Student participant findings will be presented first, with dominant themes drawn from student participant data that consisted of Canada was my choice, ethics of recruitment, academic experience, social experiences, homestay experiences, teacher experiences and guidance support, impact of COVID-19 and experiences with racism, and finally looking back and looking forward. Teacher participant findings were presented afterward, with dominant themes drawn from teacher discussions that included the 'visa dream', academic struggles, social isolation, security, support and quality of care, teacher mindsets, and impact of COVID-19 and the fallouts.

7. Limitations of Study

As stated prior, numerous challenges emerged because of the pandemic that impacted timing and opportunities to collaborate with school boards. Many school boards were not allowing external research opportunities, and many schools shifted to online schooling environments due to health and safety regulations. Since external research approval was paused during this time, any representatives from homestay services, recruitment agencies, and even school administration that were associated with school boards were prohibited to collaborate with me. Since I was unable to collaborate with a specific school board, I had to change my research approach. I also had to adjust expectations regarding my participation selection, as I intended to include administration, guidance counsellors, recruitment agents, alongside student and teacher participants, but were unable to do so due to these restrictions. Furthermore, due to the health and safety regulations implemented due to the pandemic I had to adopt other interview avenues, such as interviews held over video conferencing platforms like Zoom.

Another limitation that is important to consider is since the interviews were conducted through Zoom, participants did not have to turn on their cameras if they did not feel comfortable to do so. While the majority of my participants did turn the cameras on during the interviews, two of the male student participants did not which could impact the communication between interviewer and participant, making it difficult to observe participant body language, detect nonverbal cues, and potentially foster a natural dialogue (Irani, 2019). Other possible limitations of the proposed research study could include issues with self-reporting and scope of the study. With self-reporting, the interviews will be dependent on the participants' willingness to provide experiences that were complete and accurate. In many circumstances, participants may provide inaccurate responses due to boredom, what they think the interviewer wants, what they believe

would be approved or disapproved of, faulty memory, or lack of knowledge or insight (Alshenqeti, 2014). Another limitation is the scope of the study as the research study will not necessarily be representative of the general population. The study is limited a smaller sample size and is not diverse as the study aims to understand Chinese international students specifically.

However, despite this, the limited sample size may also be a strength for the proposed study, as the sample size is able to support the intended depth of the narrative interviews. The rich experiences and untold stories that participants will have the opportunity to share will ultimately contribute to the limited existing literature on this population and their vulnerabilities within the education system. Furthermore, the study was able to recruit both student and teacher participants, alongside brochure analysis, which allowed for three sources of data to cross reference from. The study will also contribute to the even more limited research currently available with a focus on the current relevant global issues that may impact the experiences of these vulnerable student populations, such as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and increasing geo-political tensions.

Summary

Utilizing a qualitative approach, this study focused on exploring the experiences of Chinese international students in secondary schools within the GTA, paying particular attention to the vulnerabilities and risks among this population. Given COVID-19 restrictions with research, plans were revised from working with school boards to collaborating with the IYC as my research site for participant data collection. This study had three phases of research collection, which first consisted of a critical examination of international education brochures and EDI policies from the three largest school boards in Ontario, TDSB, PDSB, and YRDSB.

This analysis established a foundation of how Canadian international education and EDI policies were marketed towards international students. The second and third phase of data research consisted of interviews with participants. A total of 11 participants were interviewed, consisting of five Chinese international secondary school students and six secondary teachers from public schools located in the GTA to understand how they perceive Chinese international students and interpret the experiences of these youth. The second phase of research consisted of interviewing Chinese international secondary students. Interviews with students and teachers were essential in building an understanding of the true experiences of Chinese international youth studying abroad in Canada and identify concerns and gaps in policy and EDI initiatives, along with programmatic supports for international students' academic, social, housing and guardianship experiences.

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Three sets of research findings are discussed in this chapter. First, three dominant themes across the international student brochures and EDI statements from the three school boards (TDSB, PDSB, YRDSB) are analyzed. The brochure analysis included themes (1) world-class education, (2) supports and services to ensure success, and (3) associated international student services, like recruitment agencies, guardianship, and homestay programs. Following the brochure was the EDI analysis which included themes (1) commitment for equitable and inclusive learning environments, (2) recognizing indigenous education and black excellence, and (3) emphasis on diversity and accessibility. Following this will be a presentation of participant data findings. Student participant findings will be presented first, with ten dominant themes from student participant discussions including: (1) Canada was my choice, (2) ethics of recruitment, (3) academic experiences, (4) social experiences, (5) homestay experiences, (6) teacher experiences, (7) guidance support, (8) COVID-19 changed everything, (9) racism existed before COVID-19, and (10) looking back and looking forward. Teacher participant findings will be presented subsequently, with nine dominant themes from teacher discussions including: (1) 'visa dream', (2) academic struggles, (3) social isolation, (4) security, support, and quality of care, (5) teacher mindsets, (6) COVID-19 and fall outs, (7) value as revenue, (8) inconsistency in school support, and (9) standardising the system.

As a reminder, the guiding research questions for the study were:

- What are the discrepancies and gaps between how Canadian secondary schools are marketed to Chinese international students and their experiences once they are within the system?

- What are key concerns and gaps in policy and programmatic supports for IS academic, social, housing and guardianship experiences that influence their protection and security?
- What insights do the experiences of Chinese international student population in GTA secondary schools reveal about Ontario’s school policies on multiculturalism, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI), and international education? How did the pandemic and growing geo-political tensions between Canada and China impact these policies?

1. Brochure & EDI Analysis

1.1. Overview of School Boards

Toronto District School Board (n.d.) is the largest school board in Canada with approximately 246,000 students in 584 schools throughout Toronto. Located in the capital of Ontario and the largest city in Canada, TDSB highlights that they are the “most diverse public school district in Canada” (p. 6) attracting many students from across Canada and the globe. TDSB also advocates for the friendly community that is built in Toronto that is rife with opportunities as it claims to have “one of the most robust international education programs in Canada” (p. 3). The brochure presents students with opportunities for a successful future by highlighting how they can continue their studies in Canada by attending elite post-secondary institutions situated right in “the heart of the city,” (p. 25). The school board also promotes variety for international students as they are informed that they can select an “educational path” (p. 7) that most effectively aligns with their individualized passions, interests, and academic short-term and long-term goals. TDSB currently has 27 secondary schools that are allocated for international students, with each school having a particular speciality that international students can enroll for, such as Advanced Placement Programs (AP), International Baccalaureate program (IB), Arts Focus/Programs (ART), Math, Science and Technology Specialized Program (MST)

and more. In particular, TDSB highlights that international students will have opportunities to learn about diverse cultures and new perspectives while “getting a first-rate education” (p. 7), emphasising to students that they will be supported heavily throughout their whole educational journey by teachers, counsellors, and staff members that will support their academic and personal needs.

Peel District School Board (PDSB) (n.d.) is the second largest school board in Ontario, and emphasizes to international students how culturally diverse Peel region is, stating that Peel is located “in one of Canada’s most multicultural communities” (p. 3) and “with over 50% of residents living being immigrants” (p. 3). PDSB also advertises major attractions within the Peel region, such as sports, performing arts, and other extracurricular amenities, along with upcoming public transportation upgrades that have already started that will make transportation more accessible for the community. The school board notes that while it is located in a suburb within the GTA and is extremely near the downtown core, students can have the “opportunity to live in a smaller and safe community” (Peel District School Board, n.d., p. 3) that provides assurance to students and parents about their safety. The school board serves more than 155,000 students from K-12 in more than 255 schools, with 41,580 students enrolled in the 42 secondary schools across the board (Peel District School Board, 2022). PDSB identifies six particular secondary schools designated for international students that generally have a strong focus on ESL programming and various programs that align with the needs of their diverse learners.

York Region District School Board (YRDSB) is the third largest school board in Ontario, and boasts about the variety of culture, distinct character, interests, and attractions that every individual can experience within their nine municipalities that comprise of their school board (York Region District School Board, n.d.). With more than 200 schools, YRDSB highlights how

the board serves an approximate total of 126,121 students across K-12, with 41,181 enrolled in secondary schools and 6,434 secondary students identified as ELL (York Region District School Board, 2021). YRDSB advertises how students are “enriched by the opportunity to live and learn with students from around the world” (York Region District School Board, n.d., p. 4), with the school district dedicated to fostering inclusive and safe learning environments, collaborative relationships, and advocating for equity and ethical leadership. YRDSB’s secondary international student program allows students to select one of the many allocated secondary schools available for international students, with ESL courses available at five levels throughout the school year that will support students in their academics and building their language proficiency, in addition to AP courses that are available at select schools within the board (York Region District School Board, n.d.).

1.2 Dominant Themes Across International Student Brochures

1.2.1. World Class Education. All three school boards advocate for the prestigious education that students will receive during their studies in Canada, with two of the school boards even emphasising the “world-class education” that students will receive. This world-class education can be defined by (a) quality and prestige of Canadian schooling and (b) strength in diversity that builds an impression that students are fortunate to be given an opportunity to be educated at these school boards.

a. *Quality and Prestige.* Across all three school boards, there was a use of graduation rates, post-secondary success, standardised test scores, and the emphasis of academic program choices and partnerships as a tool to bolster the quality and prestige of school boards “world-class education” (Toronto District School Board, n.d.b., p. 3). While some school boards highlighted statistics, stating that 40% of students graduate as Ontario Scholars, with more than

80% of their students continuing their post-secondary education with a university or college (Toronto District School Board, n.d.b.), other school boards utilized former student testimonies to demonstrate concrete evidence of their prestigious education. As seen in Figure 1, Gary Zhang was a former student of PDSB from China who successfully graduated and went on to attend University of Toronto-Mississauga, stating “In Peel, the teachers are passionate and will help guide you through out high school and the transition as you prepare for graduation” (Peel District School Board, 2022, p. 2). Other school boards used Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) scores as a method to demonstrate their world-class education and that across province-wide assessment their students “continue to achieve among the highest results in the province” (York Region District School Board, n.d., p. 3).

This success is further illuminated by the emphasis of the diverse array of academic program choices that are offered for international students that allow them to “choose an educational path that best suits their personal interests and academic goals” (Toronto District School Board, n.d.b., p. 7). All three school boards emphasize the wide range of academic, language and elective courses, and advance placement (AP) courses that are available to further reaffirm the quality of education that is offered for students (Toronto District School Board, n.d.b.; York Region District School Board, n.d.). Some school boards also highlight distinct partnerships they have with their greater communities and post-secondary institutions to highlight their dedication to excellence and the vast future opportunities available for students. PDSB has partnerships with post-secondary institutions within the region, such as University of Toronto Mississauga and Sheridan College, highlighting the easily accessible resources international students can receive such as mentorship programs, workshops, or distinct campus tours that will prepare students for post-secondary education (Peel District School Board, n.d.).

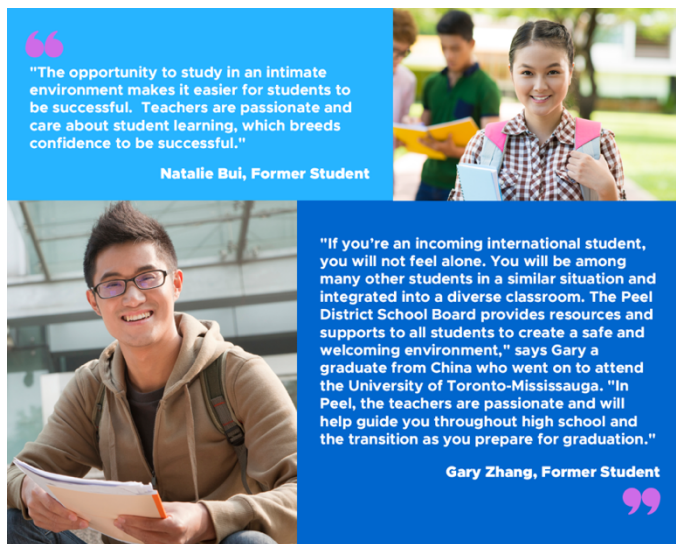
The emphasis of high rates of graduation, post-secondary success, standardised scores, and academic program choices and partnerships all function to build the impression that academic success is a guarantee for students who attend these school boards, and that students are fortunate to have the opportunity to be part of this success, as many make a point to mention how they pride themselves in being a “leader of public education” (Toronto District School Board, n.d.b., p. 6; York Region District School Board, n.d., p.3) in Ontario and across Canada. There is also strong emphasis on the prestige of the students that attend these school boards and their level of success and achievement, which establishes the notion that international students will be studying alongside peers who are “organised and motivated students” (York Region District School Board, n.d., p. 4) and “the highest performing in the world” (Toronto District School Board, n.d.b., p. 6).

These students are also “ranked among the highest in student achievement” (York Region District School Board, n.d., p. 4), and will ultimately “reach high levels of achievement and develop a love of life-long learning” (Peel District School Board, 2022, p. 3). This can all be attributed to the talented and high-quality community of “educators and support staff [that] are dedicated to enriching the lives of all students and helping them achieve success” (Toronto District School Board, n.d.b., p. 6), and an overall supportive community that all share a “common vision of excellence” (York Region District School Board, n.d., p. 3). Furthermore, students will also develop into well-balanced individuals and cultivate a broad range of interests and knowledge with various extra-curricular activities they can engage with (York Region District School Board, n.d.). There are even specific schools listed that are designated for international students in the brochures, where many of these schools share a common theme of their dedication towards academic excellence. Many secondary schools stress that they are,

“proud of its tradition of programming for academic success” (Toronto District School Board, n.d.b., p. 35) and have “high expectations of student achievement and engagement” (p. 35). Others promote how the “variety of courses offered serves the diverse needs of all learners” (Peel District School Board, 2022, p. 4) and that “[i]nternational students will be well prepared to pursue post-secondary education because of the positive learning environment” (p. 4).

Figure 1

Former Student Testimonies from PDSB



b. *Strength in Diversity.* Another defining feature of world-class education was this theme of strength in diversity that was prevalent throughout the international student brochures. Terms like “diverse” and “diversity” were repeatedly emphasized, with the idea that students would develop the knowledge, skills, and experiences to become responsible and “engaging global citizens” (Toronto District School Board, n.d.b., p. 3). These school boards advertised their diverse communities that care and support student growth. Students have the opportunity to reside and learn with other students that come from across the globe, and to attain high achievement and learning goals in school environments that foster inclusivity, safety, and

committed staff members that support and foster students' knowledge and skills (York Region District School Board, n.d.).

The strength in diversity within these school boards also gives the impression that international students will not only be given an opportunity to “learn about other diverse cultures, gain new perspectives and meet new friends while getting a first-rate education” (Toronto District School Board, n.d.b., p. 7), but that students were fortunate to have the opportunity to become part of a multicultural community that will ensure their success. This idea of inclusivity was often utilized as method to reassure students they will be heavily supported and undoubtedly foster strong connections with their peers, teachers, and staff members. The brochures informed international students that “diversity is celebrated, and international students become part of the cultural fabric of our schools” (Peel District School Board, 2022, p. 2). This is further supported by a student testimony, from Gary Zhang in Figure 1, who states, “If you're an incoming international student, you will not feel alone. You will be among many other students in a similar situation and integrated into a diverse classroom [...]” that demonstrates the safe, collaborative, and welcoming learning spaces students will be immersed in.

1.2.2. Supports and Services to Ensure Success. Another dominant theme across international student brochures was the exceptional support services provided for students at these school boards. Brochures assured that the robust schools, programs, teachers, guidance counsellors, and staff members will all meet the diverse needs and interests of their students and help adjust and integrate international students' lives in Canada (Peel District School Board, 2022; Toronto District School Board, n.d.b.; York Region District School Board, n.d.). These exceptional support services that students will receive can be seen through the (a) dedicated teachers and staff members, (b) ESL programming, and (c) social services offered.

a. *Dedicated Teachers, Guidance Counsellors, and Staff Members.* All the international student brochures endorsed their dedicated staff, where teachers, guidance counsellors, and staff members are all available for international students and can assist in supporting academic success and integration and adjustment to life in Canada (Peel District School Board, 2022; Toronto District School Board, n.d.b.; York Region District School Board, n.d.). This paints an image for international students that all their teachers, guidance counsellors and staff members are devoted to creating safe and supportive learning environments that will ensure students feel welcomed and cared for. Teachers are advertised in student testimonies as “passionate and care about student learning, which breeds confidence to be successful” (Peel District School Board, 2022, p. 2), and that students will be able to explore their interests without consequence, and to “reach their full potential” (York Region District School Board, n.d., p. 3). Many school boards further emphasize the diversity amongst their own employees as another tool to emphasize how their teachers and staff members will support international students, as TDSB highlights that they employ approximately 41,400 teachers and support staff that “speak a variety of languages” (Toronto District School Board, n.d.b., p. 7) and are dedicated to fostering a positive learning environment.

Guidance counsellors are also promoted as dedicated throughout the international student brochures as they can offer support towards any academic issues for international students as “each secondary school has a team of guidance counsellors that provide assistance [...]” (York Region District School Board, n.d., p. 5) readily available. Guidance counsellors are advertised as individuals “who understand international students” (Peel District School Board, 2022, p. 2) and that these “dedicated guidance counselors for international students [can] provide counselling and support” (Toronto District School Board, n.d.b., p. 10) in a variety of other

categories alongside academics, such as career, personal, and post-secondary assistance, or language integration. Again, the emphasis of dedication throughout these brochures establishes this notion that there will be unconditional support and care provided for international students who study in Canada. Manon Gardner, the former associate director of TDSB, further affirms these commitments by stating, “We give you our sincere promise that we, at the TDSB, will do everything we can to help you with your academic achievement and personal growth” (Toronto District School Board, n.d.b., p. 3).

b. *ESL Programming.* International students are also reassured throughout the brochures that ESL supports are readily available for them, and that school boards will provide “superior” (Peel District School Board, 2022, p. 2) ESL programs for international students that will support their academic achievement. All incoming international students are required to complete an English and math assessment before being registered in school to assist in placing students in the appropriate ESL and other academic courses. This mandatory assessment reassures students that they will be placed in the appropriate ESL or academic courses depending on their abilities, skill level, and learning goals, with school staff prepared to fully support each individual student (Peel District School Board, 2022; Toronto District School Board, n.d.b.; York Region District School Board, n.d.).

Other ESL supports mentioned that provide an impression that international students will be heavily supported throughout their transition to Canada are professional settlement workers available to support students within and outside school environments in adjusting to their new lives (Peel District School Board, 2022). There are also student liaison services that further emphasizes the level of commitment staff members have towards international students on their school board, as these members can act as a liaison between international students and their

schools. These liaisons will assist students in their adjustment to their school and community, making “regular visits to schools to meet with school officials to monitor students’ academic achievement and communicating with parents on students’ progress” (p. 5). All these ESL support services and assessments reassures international students that every need they may have will be met, and that students will reach their full potential through the supportive and caring environment they experience in their Canadian schooling (Toronto District School Board, n.d.b.).

c. Social Services Offered, including Orientation Program. The international student brochures also highlight an orientation program that is offered to international students, that creates this idea for students that there will be many opportunities for international students to interact and engage with domestic Canadian students and to foster friendships with other international students and be supported in their integration. These orientation programs range from highly specific to broad depending on the school board. Starting in 2019, TDSB (n.d.b) offers a free four-week Integrated Orientation and summer school program for students joining the school board in September. For the summer school program, students can select one course to begin in the summer, which include all five levels of ESL, along with courses titled Exploring Family Studies, Designing Your Future, and Drama. These programs are cited as extremely valuable and helpful experiences for international students and “intends to support the integration of new students” (p. 3).

These orientation programs are spoken highly of, as these activities are promoted as engagement that can improve students “conversational English, reading and writing skills in a fun and interactive way” (Peel District School Board, 2022, p. 5) while emphasising how students will be supported in their adjustment to their lives in a new school in Canada. Brochures advertise opportunities for international students to collaborate and be involved in in a variety of

team-building activities that will foster new friendships. Students will be able to explore new environments outdoors, learn from guest speakers, and engage in community centre visits or field trips that will “give students a head start in getting to know each other and discovering more about themselves all while learning about their new school and the English language” (Peel District School Board, 2022, p. 5; York Region District School Board, n.d). These advertised orientation programs create the impression that students will have “the best possible start to their learning career” (York Region District School Board, n.d., p. 5), and that they will be able to quickly achieve a sense of belonging and success within their school communities, and easily integrate within their new learning environments as they are assured that these programs will ultimately help in making “it quickly feel like a home away from home” (Peel District School Board, 2022, p. 2).

1.2.3. Associated International Student Services. These services, like recruitment agencies, guardianship, and homestay programs. One aspect that was notable across all international student brochures was the limited information school boards have with associated services like recruitment agencies, guardianship, and homestay services. Only homestay accommodations are mentioned across all school board brochures, and while school boards state they are committed in the personal safety and well-being of their international students, this is not truly apparent when all the school boards make it clear they do not take any responsibility in provide homestay accommodations. Instead, all school boards highlight that “arrangements for accommodation, meals, guardianship and airport transportation can be arranged with local homestay agencies” (Peel District School Board, 2022, p. 6). International students who need homestay services are forwarded to contact the trusted partner organizations that they collaborate with, such as TDSB’s partner Canada Homestay Network, which is a non-profit family-run

organisation that assists students in finding a home in Canada (Canada Homestay Network, n.d.), or PDSB's four local homestay organisations (Homadorma, Homestay Select Inc, MLI Homestay, and Nacel Homestay) that international students on their school board have used in the past (Peel District School Board, 2020).

While it is clear that school boards do not take a role in arranging these services for international students, they still try to reassure students that these partner homestay organizations are dedicated in “providing caring, reliable and trust-worthy homestay families for visiting students” (York Region District School Board, n.d., p. 7), and that “accommodations are arranged in safe and secure family homes [...] [where] international students and hosts are matched according to their interests, background, lifestyle, personal needs and preferences” (p. 7). Thus, students are given the impression that these organizations that are partnered with the school board are trust-worthy and reliable in supporting and protecting the safety of their students. To further reassure students, some school boards also promote that there is regular monitoring conducted with international students and their host families to ensure they are successfully adapting to their new homes, in addition to a 24-hour emergency service available (York Region District School Board, n.d.).

However, regarding other associated services, there is a clear lack of information regarding guardianship and recruitment agency services for international students. The only information provided regarding guardianship is that students who are under 18 years of age are required to have a guardian living in the GTA and must live with a family rather than independently. While some school boards suggest that international students can live with their parents, or extended relatives during their stay, if they ultimately require guardianship services, they can make these arrangements through the partnered homestay organizations, once again

placing responsibility in these organizations rather than the school board themselves (Peel District School Board, 2022; Toronto District School Board, n.d.b.; York Region District School Board, n.d.). However, there is no mention of recruitment agency services, both internal or external, that international students can access if needed, or even any mention of further information regarding recruitment agency services that can be provided upon request or accessed through their website. This limited information builds an impression that there is a lack of accountability and responsibility from school boards towards this process for international students, as they are either being forwarded to other organizations to attend to these matters or not provided any information regarding these services.

1.3. Dominant Themes Across EDI Policies

EDI policies were analyzed based on the information retrieved from TDSB, PDSB, and YRDSB websites. Three major themes emerged from the analysis, which included: (1) commitment for equitable and inclusive learning environments, (2) recognizing indigenous education and black excellence, and (3) emphasis on diversity and accessibility.

1.3.1. Commitment for Equitable and Inclusive Learning Environments. Across all three school boards EDI policy statements there was an emphasis on the commitment to ensuring equitable and inclusive learning environments for all students, staff members, families, and community members (Peel District School Board, 2025; Toronto District School Board, 2025; York Region District School Board, 2025). Much of the language utilized by the school boards highlights their aim to ensure that every individual feels safe and are given equitable access and opportunity to succeed in a positive and inclusive learning environment.

Some school boards even go as far to highlight how they have a responsibility under the *Ontario Human Rights Code* and *Education Act*, along with their school board policies and

procedures, “and a moral obligation” (Peel District School Board, 2025, para. 1) to ensure all students feel safe and included in the school community. Other school boards highlight guiding principles they uphold to ensure equitable and inclusive education which included meeting individual needs, identifying, and eliminating barriers, building on and enhancing former and existing initiatives, and collaboration with the broader community (York Region District School Board, 2025). The language used, along with direct emphasis on strategies, acts, and policies that are followed create the impression that school boards are holding themselves to a high level of responsibility and accountability to ensure an inclusive and safe learning environment where students feel supported. This language all comes together to demonstrate the unwavering commitment and priority school boards have towards ensuring equitable and inclusive spaces in their school communities. School boards are explicitly highlighting how they are actively challenging these systemic barriers and prejudices, and are engaging in ongoing policies, practices, and fostering a school culture where “diversity is honoured and all individuals are respected” (York Region District School Board, 2025, para. 10).

However, it is also important to note only one of the three school boards explicitly provide definitions of what they consider equity, diversity, and inclusivity as seen in Figure 2. This lack of a clear definition for equity, diversity and inclusivity allows room for vagueness and ambiguity. Many school boards were instead using other terms like “belonging”, “welcomed”, and “well-being” to address their objectives and aims more often than EDI rather than addressing or unsettling systemic disparities. This was also reflective in the international student brochures, as school boards would often use these terms more often than equity and inclusivity to address their support and international student services. This could be potentially problematic, as it draws focuses on the individual well-being and reinforces the notion of individualism, where the

responsibility becomes placed on marginalized students, reinforcing exclusionary practices instead of identifying or challenging systemic barriers and undermines genuine social change (Zargarian & Wilbur, 2025).

Figure 2

YRDSB's Definition of EDI

Definitions

(Ministry of Education Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation – 2009, Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools)

Diversity

Diversity is the presence of a wide range of human qualities and attributes within a group, organization, or society. The dimensions of diversity include, but are not limited to, ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, language, physical and intellectual ability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status.

Equity

Equity is a condition or state of fair, inclusive, and respectful treatment of all people. Equity does not mean treating people the same without regard for individual differences.

Inclusive Education

Inclusive Education is based on the principle of acceptance and inclusion of all students. Students see themselves reflected in their curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the broader environment, in which diversity is honoured and all individuals are respected.

1.3.2. Recognizing Indigenous Education and Black Excellence. Across all three school boards, there is a distinct recognition towards indigenous education and black excellence. While some school boards mention recognition towards other students of “diverse social identities including our English language learners and special education students [that] have been historically marginalized” (York Region District School Board, 2025, para. 2), there are clearly defined missions, collaborative efforts with organizations, and strategy plans and reports that all three school boards are guided by to meet the learning and cultural needs indigenous students and to dismantle anti-black racism (Peel District School Board, 2025; Toronto District School Board, 2025; York Region District School Board, 2025).

There is clear commitment from school boards to dismantle systemic barriers to create transformational change within school communities. School boards draw attention to their

awareness in challenging teaching approaches, practices, and policies to ensure they disrupt oppressive learning spaces and foster equitable schools and outcomes for all students. One aspect to note is that while all school boards acknowledge the importance of indigenous education and black excellence, only one school board drew attention to English Language Learners and their unique challenges and struggles within the classroom. However, all three school boards did not acknowledge or identify international students as marginalized students despite being the three largest school boards in the GTA with high international student enrolment numbers. The disregard to a whole student population highlights the continued invisibility international students experience, and the lack of recognition towards their unique struggles and challenges faced within the public education system.

1.3.3. Emphasis on Diversity and Accessibility. Alongside this, there is emphasis on diversity and accessibility across all three school boards. School boards highlight how students, families, and staff members will be able to see “their identities reflected, celebrates and respected in our schools” (York Region District School Board, 2025, para. 4). To achieve this, many school boards mention their commitment to equitable hiring practices that ensures there are qualified teachers and staff members that are reflective of the diverse school regions. There is ongoing support towards the professional development and growth of all staff members in order to become influential and transformative educational leaders that will support students and prepare them to become global citizens (Peel District School Board, 2025). There are also efforts delivered from all school boards to collaborate with their greater communities, organizations, and leaders in order to promote a sense of belonging and care for every individual. There is also distinct attention drawn on religious accommodation and how school boards value religious diversity. There is clear commitment from boards to provide a respectful environment where

every individual will be safe from discrimination and can practice their beliefs (Peel District School Board, 2025; Toronto District School Board, 2025; York Region District School Board, 2025).

These statements all create an impression that diversity is a major priority for these school boards, and that they are actively engaging in ways to continue their efforts to improve their schools through action and policy. Delivering accessibility and accommodations for all students, parents/guardians, and staff members is also highlighted across all the international student brochures. There is a clear promise from all school boards to provide an environment that is inclusive, with their commitment to the improvement of accessibility and ongoing removal of barriers to provide greater equity so every individual within the school community can “participate fully and successfully” (Toronto District School Board, 2025, para. 2). Many of the school boards also highlight how there are resources, support systems, and expertise that teachers and staff members can access to demonstrate that every individual can will be supported and achieve success and well-being. This emphasis was interesting when contrasted with the international student brochures, which often utilized the term diversity as a feature to attract international student recruitment where international students are privileged to have the opportunity to learn in a diverse space and gain new cultures and perspectives.

2. Interview Analysis

Following the brochure analysis, student and teacher participant data were coded and analyzed in order to identify major themes within these data sets. There was a total of 11 participants for the study consisting of five Chinese international secondary students and six secondary teachers on school boards located in the GTA. Through the process of coding, the collected data was evaluated, and codes were generated to uncover any notable trends, patterns

and themes (Gibbs, 2003). Major trends identified within the student and teacher findings were coded as key themes as listed above.

2.1. Student Participant Findings

As stated prior, all five student participants were recruited through IYC. Once approval was granted by the participating organisation, promotion for the research study on social media platforms were conducted and interested participants contacted IYC representatives that were connected to the researcher. Table 3 outlines the demographic information for all participating international secondary students who originated from China.

Table 3
Participant Demographic Information (Students)

Participant	Gender	Age	Grade	International Student in Canada	School Location	Agency & Host Family
Student 1	Female	18	12	One and a half years	GTA	Yes
Student 2	Male	16	11	One and a half years	GTA	No
Student 3	Female	16	11	6 months	Toronto	Yes
Student 4	Male	16	12	6 years	Toronto	No
Student 5	Male	17	11	3 years	Toronto	No

All participating students attended a public schools within GTA, except for Student 1 who only attended a public school for a semester and then switched to a private school located in Toronto. However, the student only shared their experiences during their time while in the public education system for this study, and the school was located in the GTA as listed in the table. The themes identified within student data are detailed below.

2.2. Interview Process

While I can speak the Mandarin language, which was the first language of all the student participants, I did not feel that it was as at the same level as my English language capabilities. As a result, I made the decision to conduct the interview in English but offered translation of

questions in Mandarin if students were experiencing any confusion or uncertainty. I also informed participants they could provide their responses in Mandarin if they prefer, as my understanding of the language was stronger than my verbal abilities. All participants chose to administer the interviews in English, which provided consistency across interview data and analysis.

For the most part, communicating in English for the interviews was not a substantial barrier for participants, as many displayed ease and comfort when speaking in English. When there were moments of confusion, I was able to provide clarification in two forms, first reiterating the question using different words in English, then providing another explanation in Mandarin that allowed participants to fully grasp an understanding of what was being asked. However, I did notice during the interviews that the same two male participants that demonstrated differences in the depth of their interviews, as these participants appeared to have less linguistic proficiency and ease with the English language. As such, they did not share their experiences as confidently and clearly as other participants. I observed more pauses and hesitation with their speech during the interviews, and when I reminded participants that they have the option to communicate in Mandarin for the interview if they feel more comfortable to do so, they rejected this and continued to conduct the interviews in English. When there were moments of hesitation or struggle with the vocabulary or questions asked, they did not ask for clarification and would not provide as much additional information during follow-up questions from the researcher. Instead, these participants often responded with “I don’t know” or “I don’t remember”, which could suggest they did not feel completely comfortable about being vulnerable with their language proficiency.

Other interesting trends noted within student participants interview data was the differences between the quality and depth of the shared lived experiences between female and male participants. Female student participants demonstrated a high level of comfort in regard to reflecting about their thoughts on Canadian culture and life and were extremely vocal in sharing the struggles they faced within the academic, social, and domestic aspects of their lives as international students. However, two of the three male participants often provided single word or short phrased responses, which ultimately led to the researcher having to become more involved in the process, which resulted in the researcher having to consistently ask follow-up questions to develop further insight on these participant experiences. Furthermore, the majority of male participants appeared to be more uncomfortable with reflective silence and navigated the open-endedness of the narrative interviews with more strain, often wanting to transition to the next question quickly, while the female participants embraced this communication style.

Another difference noted during the interview was when the interviews progressed to the topic of friendships with domestic students, both the same two male participants made it clear to the researcher that they did not struggle in fostering friendships with both international and domestic students. They emphasized that they had “lots of [friends]” and that it was not difficult to have relationships with domestic students, while the female participants explicitly highlighted the challenges they faced in their attempts to form friendships and bonds with domestic students. Furthermore, when both students were asked whether they experienced any racism during COVID-19, one of the male students vehemently stated they did not face any racism, and the other student initially stated they did not. However, as the interview progressed, this participant began to feel more comfortable and ultimately revealed some of the struggles they faced with racism as an international student. These differences could indicate the potential layer of cultural

expectations regarding gender roles that could explain the differences between female and male student participants willingness to share their vulnerable moments in life. A possible explanation for this could be what May (2021) describes as a push from government officials to combat China's "masculinity crisis" in recent years, with a government official's declaration to "prevent the feminization of male youths" (para. 3). Though this declaration has faced immense objection from citizens across social media, Lin and Mac an Ghail (2019) highlight how there has also been many positive responses in agreement with these beliefs. As this masculinity crisis is being portrayed as an issue of national security in China by the government, the expectations and pressure to conform to these traditional attributes and behaviors associated with masculinity could be a potential factor for the lack of willingness from male participants to share their vulnerabilities during the interview process. Despite these male participants studying abroad in Canada, Wang et al. (2018) mentions that many parents who possess these similar sentiments regarding masculinity will continue to ground the expectations and pressures onto their children.

Overall, the interviews were an enjoyable experience with no major issues faced. The majority of student and teacher participants continued to engage in conversation with me following the end of our interviews. Many students and teachers expressed an interest not only in my research study, but also asked many questions regarding my background and interests demonstrating their level of interest in the subject matter. The teacher participants demonstrated passion for my research and student participants were cooperative and respectful. The prominent theme that emerged from these observations was the discrepancy in the quality and content depth of answers collected from male and female participants, which, along with data results, will be further analyzed and discussed in the following chapter.

2.2.1. Canada Was My Choice. Chinese international secondary student participants were asked about their motivations to study in Canada and impressions of Canada following the interview questions listed on Appendix A. Some of these interview questions consisted of: Tell me about your decision about studying abroad? Can you tell me how and why you came to decide? What impressions or ideas of Canada did you have before arriving here? After your experiences in Canada, did your impressions or ideas of Canada change once you arrived? Based on the interview data, all student participants emphasized that their decision to come to Canada was made by their own violation, with two participants having some parental influence, but ultimately all students participants expressed how their decision to study abroad was their own decision.

a. Motivation for Canada. All student participants highlighted that their decision to study abroad was their own choice, with the majority of students motivated by the educational opportunities that Canada can provide and the differences in Canadian schooling in comparison to China. To specify, three student participants mentioned how the schooling system is extremely competitive in China, and that they regarded education in Canada as an easier, more relaxed system that will provide more opportunities for them in the future. Student 1 stated:

It was my own choice to come here. I mean I'm aware of high tuition costs and that I don't need to come here but it's really competitive in China with lots of schoolwork. I heard and learned that high school here would be way easier.

Student 4 shared similar sentiments, explicitly stating that "Things are easier here, right? I can get a better chance in Canada. It is very difficult in China and I have to work very hard, but here I can just relax and still get a good grade." Student 5 also highlighted the intense competitive nature of schooling in China, stating:

It was really stressful back in my original country. It's really competitive in my junior high school [...] I think it's around my grade eight that my parents said if we continue to do this it's basically going to damage myself like physically and mentally. We thought maybe we could come to Canada and study international because school is easier, and the pace is more chill here.

Student 2 and Student 3 were also driven by the educational opportunities to come study abroad in Canada in comparison to China but expressed more positive views regarding the quality and rigor of the Canadian education system compared to other student participants that voiced the ease of Canadian schooling. Student 2 explained that "My parents told me that the education in Canada is really good and I think the education in Canada can help me a lot in my future."

Student 3 discussed that she always wanted to study abroad in North America, but Canada was not their primary choice but only option. She shared that:

The reason why I came to Canada is that there's better education here. I think China is really dangerous place for children, especially students. It's like they're prisoners. In my city, the teachers punished the students by like kicking them or just pulling them. I think from my view, students and teachers are more like two different classes. No dignity. It's not equal and that's so bad I can't stand that.

b. Impressions of Canada. Student participants were also asked what their impressions of Canada were before they studied abroad in Canada and whether these impressions were accurate or changed for them after their arrival. All participants shared generally optimistic depictions of Canada and Canadian culture. Many of the student participants expressed positive feelings towards how much nature they were able to experience in Canada that differed drastically from China's physical landscape. Students also demonstrated favourable feelings

towards the social environment Canada embodied, such as the increased opportunities for after school activities, sports, and the general positive characteristics of Canadians they encountered. Students also declared that their impressions did not change after arriving in Canada for their studies. Student 1 stated “Canada is really famous for its nature and the landscape was really attractive to me and that there are a lot of after school activities,” while numerous student participants mentioned how they enjoyed the physical and social environment in Canada. Student 2 highlighted how “people here are nice and it’s easy going”, while Student 5 shared an experience with his English teacher who tutored him online that left a positive impression about Canadians. He stated:

He was Canadian and super nice to me and I think it kind of made me feel like ‘oh, Canadians are really nice, they’re good people.’ He also talked about the diversity [in Canada]. That’s how I learned about this concept of diversity. It’s not just Chinese people, but a bunch of difference races so that was a big impression for Canada, and it was true.

Student 4 was the only student who mentioned the “easy” nature of Canada’s education system as a prevailing impression he had. Student 4 said that “My impression of Canada is that things are easier. My mom told me like there's not much homework and I can get a good grade there. I can get into a good school and it's a lot easier.” Student 4 remarked that this impression he held about schooling did not change after his arrival into the country.

Overall, all student participants highlighted that studying in Canada was their choice, often motivated by the educational opportunities and less rigorous and relaxed lifestyle they can experience in comparison to China’s education system. All student participants shared generally positive depictions of Canada and Canadian culture, with emphasis on the nature they can

experience in Canada. They also demonstrated positive feelings regarding their education in the context that it would be easier and more relaxed than their experiences in their home country.

2.2.2 Ethics of Recruitment. Only two student participants, which were Student 1 and Student 3, came to Canada independently as an international student and had to utilize recruitment agencies, homestay, and guardianship services. While the other student participants all came to Canada with their families, often with support from extended families or friends to help them settle down, the experiences of these two participants were extremely unique and had a major impact on their overall experiences being an international student in Canada.

Furthermore, while the other student participants did not utilize these services, Student 5 did speak to the experiences they learned about from their Chinese international secondary friends who used these services. Based on the two student interviews and insight from Student 5, issues and gaps within recruitment agencies, guardianship duties, and homestay life were highlighted. The two students expressed that they felt these services were financially driven, and they were uninformed and experienced a lack of support, that there was an apparent lack of responsibility with guardianship duties and gaps within the homestay life.

a. Recruitment Agencies: Financially Driven. Both Student 1 and Student 3 expressed the inadequate services they experienced with their respective recruitment agencies as they both felt that the agencies were financially motivated, and the support and facilities advertised were not accurately delivered. Student 1 made it clear that “I personally really don’t like the agency and if I can figure out anything myself I won’t go through agencies again.” She proceeded to explain that:

They were so frustrating, they don’t really take care of you or care about what you actually want. Mostly, I feel like they're just money oriented. That was definitely not a

pleasant experience because it just feels like we are taken advantage as international students than native people because we don't have the resources and we don't know a lot about what works here. The agencies kind of know a little bit and whatever they say we are going to believe it 'cause we have no choice or no idea what is actually going on.

When asked about why Student 1 felt that these agencies were financially driven, she reflected that her experiences prior to signing a contract with her agency was extremely different in comparison to after. Following payment, there were many instances where the representatives did not take responsibility for their duties, resulting in irregular email checks, overdue visa applications, and important information like guardianship procedures. Student 1 stated:

[These agencies] find the guardian for me as well and they did not tell me how it works. I was just like legally, what are they supposed to do and how does it work? Like, you have to pay for the guardianship. It was definitely the worst thing when I found out that it was actually so important to have a responsible guardian to take care of me and to attend all my school meetings and also sign documents for me. I didn't know any of this, [the agency] didn't tell me anything.

Student 1 also explained that in her home country, she was essentially forced to use this agency since she lived in a city that was not particularly large so “there's limited agency that you can find to help with this kind of connection, so it was one of the few choices I have back in my city.” While Student 1 made it clear that the school experience in Canada was advertised correctly as she had enjoyed her experience in that aspect, every other component involved in her journey as an international student through the agency was not as advertised. Student 1 expressed how she felt taken advantage by these agencies as an international student, as she revealed that

there were hidden fees that she was not informed about, such as having to pay for guardian signatures. She stated:

What is even more ridiculous would be that if I want my guardian to attend my school meetings I have to pay the guardian to do it [...] I would have to pay like \$100 for it. The agency literally has a price list I don't even know if that is legal but that is how the agency works. Even if I wanted to ask my guardian to sign some sort of form, I could not do it too much. I think five signatures were free but after that I would have to pay my guardian to sign these forms so I am limited in my field trips or sport activities because I could only have up to five. I would literally have to pay them for everything.

Student 3 also shared similar sentiments regarding how financially motivated the recruitment agent that worked with her was, and how little support was provided for her throughout the process. She shared that:

We compared two or three agencies to figure it out, how to go to Canada [and] the agency itself is fine, but I think the specific people were not good. The one that's in charge of me was bad, she was just not responsible at all. She just wanted to figure it out and then drop us off then go to the next person so she can earn more money. I just feel they are really focused on trying to get your money and then leave and don't help us a lot after.

Student 3 also emphasized a significant decrease in support prior and following payment. She stated:

At the beginning the agencies provide a lot of information because at that time we haven't paid money. They give you information about how the city looks like, the weather there, or like the education there. But after we paid, they disappeared and there was no support.

b. Uninformed and Lack of Support. As mentioned prior, the lack of support was a major issue for both student participants. Students expressed that the recruitment agency representatives did not fully inform them all the information they needed to be aware of as an international student, and that there was a severe lack of support from their agencies. Student 1 was extremely vocal about the lack of information recruitment agencies provide international students about requirements and the importance of having a guardian. Student 1 shared:

I didn't get any information at all. Even my parents did not know because the agencies didn't tell us. I wish there was a bridge telling international students that you should be aware that if you send your kids as a minor here by themselves by law it is not okay in this country. They need to have someone responsible for them, they can't just do their own thing. In that case, I wish there was some kind of official process that can tell the Chinese parents because they don't really know a lot of information. All their information comes from the agencies who really just talk about the good things to make benefits for the agencies themselves, so I wish there was an official process that talks about what is actually needed and what it is actually like here.

Student 1 went on to further discuss how inadequate she felt that school board coordinator in her public school was in supporting her as an international student. She expressed that:

I just feel like the coordinator from the school in the public board for international students should be more responsible for me. The school was trying to be helpful, but the coordinator was bad at responding to emails and did not know what was happening with international students. There needs to be something more official because I feel like she did not do anything practical or beyond superficial for me. For example, she would just

send me some random links like the government mental health support links, videos, or platforms and this was not helpful for me when I was having a hard time.

Student 1 also mentioned how the school board and recruitment agency lacked communication, as her transition into her school in Canada was not organized. She recalled:

Like when I first arrived I had to quarantine and my school board did not even know that I was already here [...] The settlement worker did not even know that I was in the school because she was not informed. I just feel kind of this conflict because if I ask them stuff they would let me know, but it just feel like this is something that they should or are supposed to tell me. It feels like they did me a favour, but really it's just something they're supposed to do.

Student 3 also highlighted the little to no information that she received from the recruitment agency which had an impact on the options she could have in the future. She stated:

Of course, I really want to see some changes because although my agency that my dad picked is really cheap, really cheap among all others, it still cost a lot and the help it provides I think is just not good. There needs to be more basic parts added. They provide information, but the information is not really on time or that detailed just very general. I want information that is specific for what I want in life or my future.

The advertised level of support the recruitment agencies both student participants' utilized was also revealed to be inaccurate and insufficient. Student 1 stressed her frustration on the lack of responsibility that these agencies had towards their students, as she shared that recruitment agencies "just doesn't give any support and they don't care about you." When reflecting about these experiences, Student 1 stated she felt, as an international student, that she was taken advantage of from her recruitment agency.

She explained that when she informed her peers or community regarding the fees she would have to pay she was met with shock. She remarked that “I just have the feeling that the agency is taking advantage of us students, it was really not acceptable.” Student 3 cited that the level of support the agency advertised was not accurate, as what was marketed to international students were not delivered. She stated “When I haven't taken their service, their ads show that I can get a lot of support [...] But after going to Canada it's nothing. I think the ads just too aggressive. They're not right, they are not that ideal.”

c. Guardianship – Who is Responsible? Interestingly, the two student participants shared contrasting experiences with guardianship. Student 1 expressed a confusing and inadequate guardianship experience that was organized through their recruitment agency. On the other hand, Student 3 expressed the high standard and supportive experience they received from their guardian, who was not organized through their recruitment agency and was an external service that was recommended to her parents from her extended family. Student 1 revealed that she never even knew who her guardian was during her time in the public schooling system, stating:

My Guardian was definitely not helpful at all because I don't even know who it is. I'm not sure who even is my guardian and I have never met my guardian because it's through school. I didn't realise that you have a separate guardian that is not your host family.

There's a lot of third parties involved and makes it very complicated.

Student 1 went on to explain an incident she experienced as an international student trying to seek medical help, which ultimately became an extremely complicated and unsupportive process. She shared:

There was one time that I needed to get help because I wasn't feeling well and I wanted to see a doctor, but I had to talk to my guardian to try to get some help from them. I went to [my host] to ask what I should do, and she said that this is something that your guardian should do. It just feels like no one was taking responsibility and this is definitely not my responsibilities. I don't even know who to blame or who should be responsible it's just that the system doesn't work at all. I just didn't feel any support. I feel like every single party have done their best and every single person will feel frustrated but everyone is trying. But when you have to deal with five other parties involved there was a lot to communicate even just repeating one thing for five times it's frustrating.

She ultimately went on to express how her experiences with guardianship was “definitely one of the worst experiences” as an international student due to the lack of information and organisation she felt from both the agency and schools. She revealed:

They never mentioned how important a guardian is. It's just that guardians should be another form of support. For me, a guardian was just another pressure in the public school system. And it's not like you have a choice to not have a guardian. My parents were super frustrated about it but there is nothing they can do [...] They would just be like it is what it is and accept it but I just feel like it is not fair at all.

On the other hand, Student 3 shared positive experiences with her guardian, but revealed that her guardianship was arranged outside of the agency based on her extended family's past experiences. She explained that her guardian was recommended to her by a relative who also studied in Canada for a few years. As such, she expressed how supported she felt from her guardian as she believed “my guardian is very good. When I have things that you need to get

signed or anything like that, they're available [...] I didn't have to pay for any of that they were nice.”

2.2.3. Academic Experiences. All five participants shared were asked about their academic experiences while studying abroad in Canada. All students mentioned that they were aware of the mandatory ESL assessments and in general had no issues towards these forms of assessment or the ESL ranking they received after assessment. In general, student participants contrasted their academic experiences in Canada to their academic experiences in China in a favourable light and highlighted their preference towards the Canadian education system.

a. ESL Assessments – No Surprises. All student participants were asked about their experiences with the ESL assessment in Canada, and all students noted they were aware of the mandatory assessment they were required to do once arriving in Canada. Generally, all participants expressed no issues with this overall experience or the ESL ranking they received after their assessments. Student 1 said, “My agency told me that I would take an assessment test and then [the school] will tell me what level I'll be, but the test was really easy and not a problem, so I started with the normal courses.” Student 2 agreed that it was a simple process, and he faced no issue with the ESL ranking he received when he arrived in Canada. Student 2 shared that, “I just had a meeting and then they put me into ESL D. I think it's not very high, but I think it's necessary to study ESL if you don't have very good English.”

Student 3 also revealed that they were aware of the ESL assessment process, having been informed of this after arriving in Canada. She shared that:

I had to take the test to get into ESL stream which was ESL C after I arrived in Canada.

I'm fine with the test because it's not really a big test that costs a lot of time. But ESL C

was maybe easy for me, so I change in two years, and it was easy to switch to different ESL class too.

Student 4 also remarked that he had no issues with the ESL ranking he received after the test, stating, “When I first came I had to test my English skill and then they decided which ESL class level I would be put into and I believe I got like ESL B and I just accepted that, it was fine.”

Student 5 also explained his experience with the assessment and revealed some of his friends’ experiences with ESL classes during the discussion. He shared:

They tested me first and then they found out that I have no problem with English so they made the decision that I could go mainstream like normal English class, so they just let me in. But what I know is that most of the Chinese international students who came with me, like in the same group, uh, like I would say 70% of them went to ESL first. Most of them weren’t upset about going into ESL though.

b. Comparatively Speaking. Students also expressed positive experiences with their academic experiences with the Canadian schooling system, with the majority of students stating they prefer Canadian schooling. In particular, students highlighted that they enjoyed the variety of academic options available for them, and how relatively easy and relaxed Canadian schooling is in comparison to schooling in their home country, China.

All student participants expressed how they preferred the education system in Canada in comparison to China due to various reasons, like the class size and teaching styles. Student 2 shared that:

In China your lessons and classes are planned by your schools. You just have to learn that every day and every week and the teachers are the same. However, in Canada you can

choose your classes every year. You can meet a lot of different people, different classmates.

Student 5 further mentioned his preference for the Canadian education system as it values a variety of subjects and teaches you diverse skills that are different to his experiences in China.

He explained:

China is really exam based so everything we just do work towards answering questions. In my opinion, I think Canada's system is more reasonable by having different factors incorporated in. Like having different forms of demonstration of students' skills, like presentation. In China, we have art class or physical education but if your math or English teacher wants to teach more they can just take away art and just teach more 'cause they don't like value as much like those main subjects in the final exam but in Canada all the subjects are the same value.

Student 4 also noted how his schooling experiences in Canada had many differences in comparison to China and identified his preference towards the Canadian education system. He shared:

Yes I enjoy school. It's easy and relaxing [...] It's like completely different like in China and I like it. Like, teachers are pushing you all the time to learn and to study in China, to do your homework... It is non-stop, but in Canada you have to do everything by yourself. No one is pushing you too hard.

Student 5 also provided insight about China's schooling process, and just how detrimental it can be for the mental health of students, and how different his academic experiences were in comparison to Canada. In particular, Student 5 voiced how demoralising the schooling process is and how limited the opportunities are for students who are not able to succeed or meet these

standards. He revealed that the educational system in China is determined by one exam that will determine the trajectory of your life and explains that “You have no chances in this system because these people were so young, they don't even get to realise what they actually want to do.” Student 2 also highlighted how they considered schooling in China to be too difficult, in some cases inhumane as she explained her:

Middle school experience is really not humanitarian [...] I think. Like morning I need to go to school by 6:30 and I finish school at 5:30 at night. I think that is really a long time. You get breaks, but in China, it's a fake break. Canada is more relaxed.

2.2.4. Social Experiences. All student participants were asked about their experiences with friendship as an international student studying in Canada and revealed that while they had friendly experiences, many shared that meaningful friendships were often only formed between international students. Participants revealed that: they were unable to relate with domestic students which made it difficult for them to form meaningful friendships, that domestic students tended to “stick together”, and the importance of being out-going in order to better form friendships with domestic students. Overall students call attention to the need for schools to foster more opportunities for international students and domestic students to interact. One student expressed that, “Once [domestic students] know you're an international student you get the label and then you get kind of isolated [...] The school doesn't really try to let students get to know each other either” (Student 5).

a. We Are in the Same Boat: We Don't Relate with Domestic Students. Three student participants explicitly stated that becoming friends with other international students was easier than domestic students and that most of their close friendships consisted of fellow international students of all backgrounds. Student 1 explained that a potential reason for the

effortless friendships formed with international students is a result of the shared universal experiences they all possess. She said:

I would say for an international student it is easier to make friends with other international students because you guys are in the same boat. It's just like so many things we experience that domestic students would be like what are you talking about? They never knew what host families were because they had their own families, and many things they did not have to worry about like trying to figure out transportation back home after a school activity because their parents would pick them up. It doesn't matter what nationality or ethnicity the international student is because no matter what we are all on our own and life is kind of similar so there's so much to talk about and easy to find similar topics. With domestic students, I feel like I mostly interact with them is limited, only sometimes through sports or group projects so we will talk then during class. While I am friends with local students and they're really nice, we're not like the closest friends. There's just a lot of parts you don't relate with.

Student 3 shared similar sentiments about forming friendships with domestic students and expressed that it was also an easier experience trying to become friends with fellow international students. She shared that:

It is easier to talk to other international students and I would prefer to talk with international students. And I mean not Chinese international, but other international students because I want to train my English language skills. But I have friendships and talk more with other international students because the native students can't understand why life for international students is so difficult, so we don't have really much same topics to talk about. It's hard because there are some things I can't understand so not

really good to talk with them. It is a little embarrassing. I'm really distant with the native students.

Student 3 went on to discuss her observations and expressed how she often felt there was a divide between domestic and international students within her school. However, she also made it clear that she felt supported in other ways through her friendships with fellow international students. She revealed:

I think international students and native students are separated because you don't have the same topics. If you are grown in Canada you know about native things like policies, daily shows, stores, and they communicate easier because they're native. They just talk really, really, really quick. Many international students maybe still have challenge to understand them, so they don't really talk together to each other. And also maybe native students also can't understand why international students would have some weird actions because of their country, because their culture is like that. They can't understand so I think there's a culture gap. But I feel like I can relate better with international students because we experience same things. I have got help from many international students. Some of them are really, really helpful and I'm still thankful to them.

Student 5 also addressed the difficulties that emerged in his attempt to form friendships in his social experiences in Canada. While Student 5 is friends with both domestic and international students, he did express that it was ultimately harder to be friends with domestic students. He noted:

I originally went to a private school but then I switched to public because I don't like the environment. Like the school having lots of international students like it made me still feel like I'm still in China 'cause like people just talk Chinese. You're not really practicing

your English if you stay there. It's not going to help with maturing. So I came to public hopefully to make new friends with local students. My definition of friends are people who would listen to you and hang out with you, something like that, not just someone you meet at school say hi and sit with. So for me, it's definitely harder for me to make friends with local students, to be honest. They have a different growing background so the stuff that they learn and the things that they see during their growing it's really different from my experience.

Student participants expressed that domestic students also tended to stick together, making it increasingly difficult for international students to attempt to form friendships with them. Student 5 shared that "Sometimes there's like this barrier between me and them, and that barrier costs us to not be closer. Local students tend to stick together." When reflecting about these interactions, he voiced that for many students it is easy to fall into the pattern of remaining in your comfort zone, where one's environment and things are familiar. Thus, he believed it took immense courage to interact with different groups of individuals. Student 5 further stated:

I also think talking to someone with a different culture than you... People just scared, they don't know how to talk to them [...] People just scared to start a conversation.

People just come back to their comfort zones. I think it takes a lot of courage to actually start a conversation with international students and is the same for internationals to start a conversation with local students.

b. Importance of Being Out-going. Two student participants stated they had an equal number of friends with both domestic and international students and expressed the importance of possessing an out-going personality. Student 4 explained that while in his first three years in Canada was difficult to make "non-Chinese friends because of the language

barrier,” now he is “friends with students from different countries like Filipino or Korean and Asian students that are born in Canada while others are international students. Since Student 4 has been an international student for the longest in Canada (six years), he expressed that it is easier for him to interact with domestic students since he was outgoing and he was comfortable with Canada. Student 2 on the other hand made it explicitly clear to the researcher that they were friends with both domestic and international students. It was apparent that Student 2 also had a high level of comfort with his surrounding, but he highlighted that he had always been outgoing even in his home country. When asked about his friendships he stated:

Maybe half and half. You just need to be out-going, you just talk with them. I think some students from China, they don't really like to talk with students from here because they just get into school and have lessons and just go home. So you just need to try to talk with them truly. For other international students, I think maybe one reason is that they say their English is not very good so they can't talk easily to the national students. And maybe the character of some are not very outgoing. I have always been outgoing even back home [China] so it's really easy to make friends.

Student 5 mentioned his experiences with interacting with domestic students, mentioning how:

As an international student, you just hope the person you talk to is also open to this stuff, like open to culture, so then you guys can match and be friends like if one of those conditions not satisfied. But it's funny, sometimes when I try to talk to local students they will say that they are surprised I am so talkative with them. I guess they expected me to be quiet because a lot of Chinese international kids are, or they don't try to talk to them.

c. More Opportunities for International and Domestic Student Interaction.

Student 3 also mentioned that since schools are now operating back in person, implementing more opportunities for international students and domestic students to interact would be beneficial and teachers would be able to foster stronger relationships with their students. She reflected:

We are back in school and it is operating better now, I really hope to see next year or next few years some changes. I hope we get more teachers back to school and we will get more outdoor like activity that is really important to mental health, both international students and native students can get to know each other more. And I hope teachers will get closer with their students. I think because of COVID-19, I think everybody was distant with each other. There seems to be an invisible line between people and people just take care of their own things but not others. So that is too distant. I hope society will run better and everyone will get closer to each other.

Student 5 also mentioned having more activities implemented in schools to provide international students more opportunities to interact with other students. However, he expressed that while he felt that there is often a separation, he was unsure what can truly be implemented to foster a better environment and opportunities for friendship. He stated:

I definitely think not everything good. Like, international students are really kind of separated. I feel like once they know you're an international student you get the label and then you get kind of isolated. It's not an obvious thing, but it's a label and they know it. Maybe having more activities, more bonding time, things like that to try to encourage more interactions? The school doesn't really try to let students get to know each other either. There's like, no such, events or activities or anything like that. But in Canada, it's

like nobody is actually going to force you to do anything and then based on that, I don't know what to do. What can people do? Like I'm still even myself am thinking about it how can we solve it? But for now, I don't think I got an answer.

2.2.5. Homestay Experiences. While only two student participants utilized homestay services while studying in Canada as international students, their insights on their experiences were eye-opening regarding the level of support provided and the gaps within these services. Student 1 and Student 3 expressed that while they would not consider their homestay lives to be an extremely low quality or standard of living and support provided, both participants identified numerous issues with their experience with their host families which were the inconsistent quality and level of care, confusion regarding the homestay service protocols, and the reality that you are on your own as an international student and it is better to accept the conditions you have.

a. Inconsistent Quality and Level of Care. Student 1 shared how she was aware of how there was no guarantee for the quality of the host family that you are assigned with, as she has heard about numerous host family experiences from international students. However, Student 1 explained that she did not want to live on her own, and “wanted a host family because it’s supposed to feel like a family and then there’s someone who will take care of me. But it’s not always like that, you can’t expect a lot.” Student 1 went on to explain that the agency she worked with actually warned her prior about the potential quality of host families she may encounter.

She said:

The agency would tell you it depends what kind of host family you match with because someone can be really nice and they would take good care of me and were just like my parents, super encouraging and positive, and then there were some that would scold you

all the time and if you didn't do a little thing right they would be repeating it all the time and being super mean about everything. So I just didn't know like how mean [my host family] were going to be or how nice they would be, just the agents were just being nice to tell us what the experience might feel like. They were really clear about it, they said there might be really bad host families. They were super straight forward that it's just your fortune and depends which family you will be assigned to.

Student 1 also explained how different the lifestyle is for international students living with a host family, especially one where the family is dependent on the income the agency provides them. She explained that as a daughter from a small family in her home country, living with a big family with financial strain or limitations was an experience she had to adjust to. Furthermore, she continued to question the role of host families and what standard and quality of care they are supposed to meet. She shared that:

It's a big jump from what international students get back home compared to when they are here. There was a lot of problems at the start, it's just things you don't care about like how much paper towel I use, but the host family will be limited and just budget on everything so that was something I didn't get used to. Also, how much attention and care you got.. Yeah, they would be helpful but definitely not like my parents. I think it's just a job for them...Even now I am confused, are they supposed to take care of me? What is the standard to take care of me? Or am I just an international student who lived with them? I just don't know what their responsibilities are. I just feel like – I had a room, I got 3 meals, but sometimes it's really different.

Student 3 also discussed their experiences living with a host family, which was arranged by her guardian and not the recruitment agency. While the standard of living was not the worst, she

shared how her environment was not stable and she did not have an overall positive experience. She shared:

I live here with the host and another international student who is in the same year, same grade. When I first come here my host, she showed me kindness a lot because I am really unfamiliar with the place... But I have to say it is not actually really that good because after some time she show her real face. She is not that kind, not that supportive. For example, in the car she will make bad comparisons between me and her own kids or other host family students that is hateful. Not, not really good, not respect to others.

While Student 5 did not stay with a host family and came to Canada with his parents as an international student, he did share stories of his friends who were staying at homestays and expressed concern regarding their experiences. He explained that majority of his international friends were not fortunate to have a good host family and those who did receive one were rare. He highlighted that, "If I saw people who post like online about how good their home stays are I'm like 'oh holy you're really lucky, huh?'".

b. What are the Protocols?. Student 1 also shared some of the confusion she faced during her transition with her host family, highlighting the lack of information their recruitment agency and school boards provided her. She stated:

The thing is I'm not really aware of what host family should do, like the broader idea. No one would talk to me about it which is not acceptable. Like what is the boundary or what are her responsibilities for me? My host was also a teacher in the school and when I was telling my friends about my host family, my principal told me you cannot tell people where you are living, or who you live with. I was very confused because I didn't know this and I was just telling others like what is going on with my life, just daily

conversations, but then the principle came to me and told me ‘you cannot do that this is dangerous to your host family.’ I am just confused about everything that is going on behind the scenes.

c. You are on Your Own: Better to Accept What You Have. Both student participants expressed that even with a host family, you can often feel lonely and will ultimately have to be responsible for yourself as you are on your own. Student 1 stated:

It was a very different change for me because you don’t have anyone to talk to about what is going on or to see how you feel. Like back home, my whole family will try to coordinate with my schedule but here they don’t really consider you at all. They just let you know this is a time if you are not back just let them know but you are responsible for yourself then. No one is going to drive you to school and pick you up like what I got back home, so you have to do everything yourself. You are on your own here.

When Student 3 was asked if she would considered the potential to change host families as her current living environment made her uncomfortable and visibly upset when she recalled her experiences, she explained that:

At this point, it’s fine. I’ve accepted my living situation because maybe I don’t have a very good chance to go to another family that is better. My parents know and they say just deal with the relationships because the price is cheaper than a lot of other hosts. If I want to change the family, it’s really difficult to find another better host. I can’t really afford the risk because I can’t check if they are actually really good before I go there. If I change and they are worse, I can’t afford to keep changing.

2.2.6. Teacher Experiences. All student participants were asked about their experiences with their teachers during their schooling, and three participants expressed exceptional

experiences regarding the teacher support and quality of teaching they received, while two participants shared they did not have consistent quality experiences, highlighting three categories that emerged from the data which consisted of: the impact of having teachers being accessible and empathetic to their students, the inconsistent level of support from teachers, and the impact of teacher diversity.

a. Accessible and Empathetic: Going the Extra Mile. Student 1 noted that one of the major differences regarding the classrooms in Canada in contrast to China is that class sizes are much smaller, so as a result:

The teacher would give us really good attention and the teachers are really, really nice. Some people [are] really struggling with some course, but the teacher will spend time with them or we just do more groups like discussion to make sure that everyone can catch up. I got really good attention and I can have really good relationship, and communicate with my teacher whenever I have something I don't understand. They gave me really, really good care and especially at first when language might be a barrier for us. They would take care and consider us.

Student 1 went on to further emphasize that one of the major reasons why she does not regret her decision to come study abroad in Canada is vastly due to the support she felt from her teachers and guidance counsellors. She explained:

Like, it was a nice connection to have good teachers, because for me I don't have any other connections other than my host family and school so having a nice teacher is just such a blessing to be in that school from my experience. This was the reason for making me not regret what I've chosen. The teachers are so considerate and that was definitely my best experience in Canada about school.

Student 4 shared similar sentiments, stating that the “teachers are very nice, and they don’t push you too hard or anything. If I need help they are usually there to help me.” Student 2 also reflected on his experiences with the teacher support he received during his studies, highlighting various accommodations that the teachers provide stating:

Yeah, I think the teachers are supportive. I think if you have not very intense questions or the things the teacher told before you can ask them, and they are really likely to help you to help you to understand more about the insight. A lot in class and maybe after school you can e-mail them to solve the question and understand better. This year [my math teacher] gave the Chinese students a translation dictionary. She brought maybe two to three dictionaries to help the Chinese students. And for my science teacher. He let some of the student in ESL, they can write a piece of papers that have both Chinese and English to help them to understand the question and answers.

b. There is Variation in Experience: Not all Teachers are Supportive. However, while some students shared their exceptional teacher experiences, not all student participants had the same experience. Two student participants identified they did not always experience a high standard or quality of support from their teachers, as it was inconsistent based on the particular teacher they had in class. One student participant who did have an enjoyable teacher experience also revealed the opposing, unsupportive experiences their friends faced in their classes. Student 3 discussed that:

I have 6 teachers now, but I think three of them are not really good. Like they just live their own life and want to avoid the responsibility to students. And when I ask them questions about the course or maybe the culminating works, they are really impatient, really impatient and make me feel embarrassed in front of the whole class. I had one

teacher... They don't really want to explain things to me or use their own time. I have PE class last semester and my PE teacher is impatient because I have a lot of sports problems because in China we just have running and basketball. Nothing else. So here there are a lot of sports that I don't know and never played before.

At this point, Student 3 began to get emotional and visibly upset as she emphasized in the interview that she felt “really trouble by this experience that my teacher, he's not willing to help me learn. I was surprised how unsupportive the teachers are in Canada.” However, Student 3 did note that while she had extremely negative experiences, she also has received positive experiences. For example, Student 3 highlighted:

But a good experience was my ESL D teacher. She's an old woman and she's really kind and funny and like really creative to make some really interesting games before our class. Although she's not good at explaining how to use the grammar really good, she has the heart and she get along with us really well. In another PE class, the new teacher is so good to me. I can't play volleyball you know, and it's so difficult to me and she just teach me individually. She just give me hope and like she's kind of like my mother. I was thinking that's great.

Student 5 also shared how his schooling experience was not consistent, as he faced some teachers who were not supportive or did not provide a high standard of teaching. He stated:

I definitely do not have all positive experiences with teachers. There's this teacher I met in grade 10, she's a science teacher. So, this is 2021 and we're still having online school and students who are online got really bad marks and most of the online students was us international students. Even though we worked hard like so, their average for online students are around like 80. But people who go to her class like physically, she gave them

90s and we're doing the same thing. And look, I mean we were assigned to the same projects. We're doing the same thing, but like they have like labs and materials provided from the school while people who were online we had nothing to do like we have no materials provided and she didn't really do anything more for us online students. So that I think was an unfair thing. I don't know if it had to do with us mostly being Chinese international students online but the way she talked with us... it felt different too.

c. Impact of Diversity: Teachers who Understand International Students. One student participant's experiences also shed light to the impact of having teachers who understand the experiences of international students. Diversity amongst teachers who are a similar race and are able to communicate with international students in the same language can have an astounding impact, as demonstrated by Student 5's experience that resonated with him. He shared that:

I also had a really good experience with a teacher. In my calculus class I met a super nice Malaysian teacher who speaks like almost all the Chinese languages. But most importantly is that when he met an international student in our class, he would like voluntarily speak Mandarin or Cantonese. So, it's going to be like easier for students to understand what he's trying to do. During normal class, he would use English to explain, but if you ask him personally, he will explain in Mandarin. And that's why we know so many different languages, so it can help so many different kind of students, right? That's the guy that I looked up to.

The impact of having a teacher who can communicate or understand international students was further illustrated when Student 4 shared revealed a poor experience his friend faced due to language barriers. He explained that:

I have [a] friend and she said that they don't know how to talk with teachers because the teachers don't understand them, and they don't understand the teacher. So, it's really a lot of trouble for them. They didn't feel [that] they got any support as the teacher didn't try and they just gave up.

Student 2 also emphasized that having more diverse teachers could be beneficial for other international students, as he explained:

Maybe for some students that are not really good at English. They can't understand lots. We can have some teachers that can speak both Mandarin and English to help and that will make students more comfortable or have a better connection with their teachers.

Student 3 also mentioned that having more teachers that specialized with international students would potentially ensure better support for international students. She explained:

There's a lot of international students in Canada, I think there can be certain teachers for international students. They should have teachers who can deal with these things and problems that come and should be able to help. If we have like international students and more teachers that are for these students, they maybe have less problems and they can keep a good mental health and get better grades and become better immigrants and citizens after graduates. So that is really important I think.

2.2.7. Guidance Support. Student participants were also asked about what forms of support were available for international students, and whether the standards of these support services were of high quality and fully supported their transition and lives as international students in Canada. Based on the interview data, guidance counsellors and school orientation were identified as the forms of support that were provided for students, but there were mixed results regarding the standard of these supports offered, the lack of understanding guidance

counsellors had towards international student populations, and the limited impact school orientations had for supporting international students in their transition to public school.

a. Great Variation in Quality and Supports. First, there were varying levels of quality and support reported from student participants' regarding their experience with guidance counsellors at their respective schools. Student 1 expressed the exceptional services her guidance counsellor provided during her time in public school as she felt they were responsible and provided great support for her. She explained:

I was lucky like I had a really good guidance teacher in my public school 'cause like in comparison to others who have gone to different schools I learned she was super responsible. She would provide me like all the information so that was a really good thing. I feel like the person who should be responsible for helping me, the coordinator for international students at my school, didn't really take their full responsibility.

Student 2 also expressed that he enjoyed his experiences with guidance at his school, stating that:

I think it's enough. I have any question I can ask my guidance so she can answer most of your questions. I have asked guidance questions before it is really quick to talk to the guidance counselor and they help you very quickly.

Student 4 shared similar sentiments as Student 2, reflecting on the enjoyable experiences he had interacting with guidance services. He shared that:

I can just go to the guidance office and I just book a time to meet with my guidance and we can just like chat in their offices. I think it is easy to book an appointment and sometimes even though I didn't put a time for my appointment, they will come find me and ask me questions about my grades, marks, and ask me if I need something for support.

On the other hand, support was seen as variable as Student 5 expressed that he felt the standard of support from guidance was minimal and often limited to issues regarding course selection, rather than any personal issues and concerns. He shared that:

Guidance is a minimum level of support. Basically, like my course selections and stuff.

[...] When you talk with them it is very in and out. And for support for international student problems, I think you already know that they wouldn't be able to help you aside from course selection. I asked them questions about being an international student to get some help with my transition and they have no answers. They don't really know what to say... They just say tell me to talk with my parents, but my parents don't know either?

And what if you are here by yourself like my other friends? They just don't understand us and you know they can't really help you with anything else.

After some more consideration and reflection about the standard of support Student 5 has experienced with guidance, he ultimately decided that:

In my mind, you're kind of just better off doing everything by yourself. I think the guidance have little help for international students, but now I think they also don't help for local students.

Student 3 also shared similar sentiments regarding the standard of support received from guidance, and general support from their school. When discussing her experiences, she was visibly upset about the lack of support she received as an international student. The participants revealed how upset she was about how little she felt her school cared or supported students, especially international students. She faced numerous mental health issues, and confusion during her transition, and the school provided little to no support. She stated, "I don't think they care about international students or know how to help us. Every time I talk about China and how

different and hard it is here they don't listen. I'm really sad." She continued to share her disappointment and sadness regarding the lack of support she experienced stating:

The thing I'm not impressed with is the guidance counselor. Actually a few years ago I think they have three guidance counselors and now one is gone so we only have two and every time it's really difficult to make appointments. It is difficult to communicate with them. I have some language problems, like my proficiency. It's not good... Really not good.

b. They Don't Really Know Us. Student participants also highlighted the importance of having consistency within guidance services and noted the impact school boards could have for international students if they employed guidance counsellors that could provide specific support for international student concerns or issues. He considered:

I think some changes in guidance that would be good [...] schools don't have consistent a group of employees who are really skillful of dealing with schooling and students' problems. Having guidance that can also help international students and the problems they deal with would be good too.

Student 3 expressed similar sentiments by highlighting the lack of genuine care and support guidance counsellors provided students as:

Because they are there for too many students, they are not really put their heart into students like studying about them or understand their background. They don't really know us and we only have 15 minutes each time. For my appointments, I just ready and prepare for a lot of questions, but they don't really like explaining it to me deeply. I should find it myself. And I also have some mental problem at first, but I have no one to communicate

with and that's really bad. I think they do care but they do not have enough time. They have to move to other students.

c. No Orientation. Student participants were also asked about their experiences with their school orientation when arriving in their schools as international students, and the data revealed that all student participants either did not receive a school orientation or received an orientation that they would not consider valuable or extremely helpful. Student 1 shared that there were issues with communication within her school board and that she did not receive an orientation which was confusing. She explained:

I think I was supposed to have the orientation, but I didn't get it from my school board. I think that there should be a settlement worker in public schools that give you orientation because it would help a lot with the transition. Even though I believe I did have a settlement worker, I never saw her and was only connected after a month when it was too late. My guidance counselor was also just trying to be helpful, but she didn't have any of the information, so there was miscommunication issues.

Student 2 and Student 4 also revealed they did not receive any form of orientation. Student 4 revealed that following his ESL test he only received a basic school tour and talked with different teachers, but that was the only form of orientation he received. Student 5 also stated that he received no orientation, and that in general there was no orientation for international students. He explained:

In my school, orientation is for newcomers like Grade 9 newcomers. In my case, I did the ESL test before I started high school and then when I entered the school in 2020 in my Grade 10 school year and I just walked in and just tried to find my class and that was it. They didn't give any information.

Student 3 stated that while she did receive some form of an orientation, she emphasized that it was very limited and there needs to be more efforts put forth in better supporting Chinese international students in their transition to Canadian public schooling. She highlighted that :

[Orientation] was not much. There is a lot of difference between Chinese education and English education here. I wish they gave me more information about school and I could get more help because it was hard. I'm just really sad about this whole thing.

2.2.8. COVID-19 Changed Everything. All student participants were asked questions regarding their experiences studying in Canada during this unprecedented time, and as they shared their experiences it became apparent that COVID-19 had an immense impact on various aspects of students' lives for the worse. Student shared how the pandemic resulted in academic challenges as they felt a decrease in the standard of learning, feelings of isolation and depression due to limited interaction with peers and teachers, with some students even expressing how COVID-19 had impacted the trajectory of their lives.

a. Academic Challenges: I Was Not Really Learning. While some students, like Student 2, expressed that it was “difficult to learn online. You can only open your desktop and join the meeting,” other student participants considered online education to be ‘easier.’ However, the many student participants expressed disdain towards online platforms despite it being less difficult than in person. This was mainly due to the decrease in the quality and standard of knowledge and skills students were learning online. Student 4 explained that during the pandemic restrictions:

I had to do all the classes online and even though it was a lot easier having everything online, I think the main problem is that we weren't really learning. Even though I would be getting good grades, I feel like I didn't actually learn stuff or have the knowledge. So

COVID really impacted my grade 9 and 10 as we were basically online for those whole years and because I didn't learn a lot of knowledge, I feel like it made my grade 11 courses difficult.

Student 5 agreed, stating:

Yeah, school should be more, but schools just adjusted the study plan, like to make it easier for a student to pass, and then just like everybody was just trying to finish it off and just go. That's what I think because it was too hard for them to maintain the same pace and same learning environment online

b. Isolation and Depression: Not Being in Touch with Peers and Teachers.

Student participants also expressed their struggles with the limitations that came with the pandemic, and how it greatly impacted their school experience as they were unable to connect with their peers and teachers which led to increased isolation and feelings of depression.

Student 2 shared that prior to COVID-19 he was enjoying his school experience, but the pandemic restrictions drastically changed his life. He shared that:

My school life is good I made a lot of friends. But during the COVID it was hard because I can only study on online, so I can't meet my classmates. And I have less time to talk with them. I think during this time it's really hard to make friends.

Student 4 expressed the increased difficulties he faced in trying to connect with his teachers, as "When I had questions or problems I had to write an email to them, and then they would take two or three days to respond back to your email." Student 5 expressed similar sentiments of how he did not enjoy his schooling experience as the pandemic restrictions resulted in limited opportunities for communication, which negatively impacted the ability to form new friendships with his peers. He explained:

I did not enjoy school during this time. Because of COVID there's no interaction between my school, it completely changes everything. You're online and it's hard to talk to people online. It's hard to talk to your teachers. And now we're going back to school in person, we still don't talk to each other [...] It is pretty depressing.

Student 5 also noted that not only were peer interactions negatively impacted, but interactions between teachers and students also became limited and his experiences online did not meet his expectations for schooling. He revealed:

The interaction between teachers and students had really reduced a lot too. It just wasn't good. Teachers didn't really try to talk to us too much [...] During COVID, it makes people not connected and not familiar with each other at all. This made connecting with other students and making friends was basically impossible.

c. Impacted Life Course. Some student participants actually revealed that COVID-19 had such an immense impact on their lives that it completely changed the trajectory of their lives and the experiences they were expected to possess. Student 1 shared how the pandemic changed her whole experience when she first arrived in Canada, as she expressed how her school experience was not only impacted, but many activities and opportunities that she was looking forward to participating were no longer available for her. She stated:

The whole COVID thing was something that changed really a lot. First, we didn't really learn a lot online, but school is a big connection for me. I don't have a lot of other connections aside from the school. Sports was [also] stopped and the clubs and activities. That was definitely, really, really tough time and just like a different lifestyle, but the whole festival culture from schools and government was all cancelled so I have less experience definitely.

Student 3 was the only student that did not experience any form of online schooling, but still expressed that COVID-19 had an extremely negative impact on her life that limited her opportunities to study abroad. She stated:

I didn't have any online school experience because when I came here it was back in person already. But if there is no COVID, I may have already gone to America. But now I have changed my life journey and I came to Canada.

2.2.9. Racism Existed Before COVID-19. Student participants were asked whether they experienced any signs of anti-Asian hate, racism, or forms of discrimination because of COVID-19. Three student participants revealed they have faced forms of discrimination and racism as international students in Canada, but not all experiences were as a result of COVID-19. Other student participants emphasized the heightened racism they experienced following the pandemic, with one student even rationalising how these racist experiences might impact differently depending on context, like whether the perpetrator is a Chinese peer compared to one who is White.

a. Same Before and After. For some student participants, they emphasized that they experienced racism prior to the pandemic, and it remained consistent following COVID-19. Student 1 explained:

I feel it, but I think it was the same before and after COVID... It was just something really normal and in life you can't control what others saying. Like some people just think you're Asian and they have stereotypes about you, especially local students. Not to say that this is a big form of discrimination or anything, but it's clear they are just not aware of the micro aggressions they have, but it's literally everywhere and I experience it

so often. There are definitely moments like that and it's definitely uncomfortable. Like, yeah I'm different, but like they took it really literally.

When Student 4 was first asked about his experiences, he quickly replied he had no experiences with racism, but as the interview continued and he began to reveal some incidents of racism he has faced both prior and following the pandemic. He recalled an incident that occurred prior to COVID-19 that still resonated with him as he faced prejudice attitudes from a teacher in his middle school:

When I first came to Canada as an international student there was a gym teacher and I feel that he was racist towards Chinese international students. He didn't exactly say racist things to us, but he only ever yelled at us Chinese students and was really mean to us and would not act that way to the other students in the class. I don't know if I'm being too sensitive or something, but I still remember that time.

While Student 2 shared that he did not experience any racism whatsoever in his schooling abroad in Canada, he revealed experiences his Chinese international friends had to endure during school. He shared that:

For me, I have not. But I have heard from my friend that a teacher in his ESL classes, she said some bad words about China and give less help to the Chinese international students. She says she doesn't need to help Chinese students as much. Maybe she don't like China and she said some bad words about China.

b. They Don't Show Their Kindness. One student shared her experiences with forms of discrimination and certain attitudes that were directed at her as a Chinese international student, highlighting that there was very little kindness shown to her. Student 3 stated:

I do think there is racism, especially for us kids that are newcomers, people are not really friendly. They don't need to be supportive, but they don't really show their kindness. For example, some native students in one competition of basketball, when I play they're trying to make me uncomfortable and kind of put their anger on me. I'm not really familiar with here, and I think COVID made my experiences worse too and I can't really communicate with them. So I got really distant with the native students. They just treated me differently than the other students.

c. Thanks for Giving Us the Virus. Some student participants also revealed that there were incidents of heightened racism following COVID-19, as Student 4 shared that he would frequently experience racism in online environments when he played video games, stating:

I have teammates and I don't know who these players are, but once we start talking and they find out that I am a Chinese international student they would start to say things like 'Oh thank you, Chinese virus,' or 'Thanks for giving us the virus' things like that and it was not really a fun experience. I have also been stereotyped by classmates or friends.

They often think that Chinese people are good at math, but bad at sports.

While Student 5 and Student 2 stated they did not experience any racism themselves, they did reveal the racist and discriminatory experiences their friends faced. Student 5 explained that the secondary school he attends has a high Chinese student population, and as a result, he feels that this influenced the lack of racism and discrimination he personally experienced following the emergence of COVID-19. He voiced that:

Because we had so many Chinese students I think that helped with the school environment, like less prejudice and less discrimination. Basically, like, it's just full of

Chinese people. But I can say that I also have friends from my previous school, that school had a lot of, like, White people. They told me that they would meet lots of discrimination from White dudes being a Chinese international student. It's pretty common for them to joking about like Chinese students about this Coronavirus thing. They like saying something like, 'it's all Chinese people fault.' My friends even said that some of their teachers make jokes about China and the coronavirus which I was surprised about because it's a teacher you know? They are supposed to be nice and care. Then there were some people who are more aggressive and was more severe, but eventually they got punished.

d. Attitude and Tone is Different from a Chinese Individual. The impact of schools having Chinese students, both domestic and international, was further discussed by Student 5 as he went on to explain that while some students at their school did engage in jokes regarding COVID-19, he felt the experience was different than his friends experiences due to the differing context and attitudes. He stated:

But my school did have some people make jokes like 'oh, China, they did this or they did something bad, they spread the coronavirus to us,' stuff like that. And if I'm going to say I'm not affected by these uh, these talks I'm definitely lying. I definitely feel frustrated sometimes, but I also know it's just joking because we also joked about conditions in America or Europe so it remains relatively wholesome. I think the reason is because the people joking are also Chinese and their parents are from China. So there's no way for them to like be aggressive about the Corona thing or China. The attitude and tone is different when it's a Chinese person whose parents are also immigrants joking about this compared to maybe like a White person?

2.2.10. Looking Back and Looking Forward. Finally, participants were asked to reflect on their overall experience studying in Canada as an international student and whether they felt safe during their stay in Canada, the different shifts they experienced living in Canada, whether they are planning to stay in Canada in the near future and if they would do anything differently, and what future changes they would like to see implemented to better support future Chinese international students. As participants shared their observations and experiences, categories emerged from the data which consisted of my safety – trusting the system, growing up fast: you are on your own, different cultural knowledge, staying or leaving Canada, and how public-school boards need to take on more responsibility.

a. Safety – Trusting the System. While four student participants stated they felt safe during their stay in Canada, and did not have any major concerns regarding their safety, one student disagreed. Student 1 made it clear that she did not feel safe and instead had an extremely traumatising experience as an international student in Canada. Student 1 revealed that:

From my experience, I definitely do not feel safe in Toronto. I got robbed here, the robber just came to me with a knife so that was really scary for me here especially by myself. And even though nothing happened to me, if something serious was to happen to me I'm not sure if I would actually be okay. Like before when I had an emergency it took so long to coordinate [...] I don't feel like I can trust the system.

b. Growing Up Fast: You Are on Your Own. When asked about the different changes they experienced as international students in Canada, two student participants shared the difficult shifts of experience they faced adapting to their Canadian lives as they had to “grow up fast” when you come to Canada independently. Student 1 explained how it was a drastic change

for her in comparison to her life back in her home country as she had to take care of herself. She shared that:

The whole experience was just a big change for me. Living on your own you have to take care of everything. Yeah, I had to grow up so much. Like transportation, every time you hang out with your friends, yeah it was a lot of fun, but afterwards all my friends will get picked up by their parents and then it was time for me to figure out how to get home. You have so much fun, but then it is just a frustrating time when you realise you're on your own and have to figure everything out by yourself.

Student 3 discussed similar sentiments, stating how she had to become more independent because of the lack of support she felt she received as an international student. She stated:

I think I've had to focus on myself more. I'm the most important in my whole life, not everybody nearby. I have to be very independent too. I do a lot of stuff by myself because I have to here because the schools and agency don't give a lot of support or help. I waste a lot of time trying to figure stuff out myself. I'm really sad about my experience here.

c. Different Cultural Knowledge. Student 4 explained that having to uproot your life was a difficult shift for him, as he had to “make completely new friends and start a new life here. That was the main difficult thing. I also have to quickly learn about Canadian things that kids here know. My parents had to find a new job too and that was hard.” Student 5 also further explained the difficulty in grasping the cultural knowledge in Canada that domestic students possessed. He explained:

I think it's hard to understand these cultural things, like tv shows and entertainments. I feel like and sometimes I just couldn't understand what teachers [are] laughing about or like what their interests are or the local students sometimes. And I understand 'cause like,

there's no way they're gonna know what I watched back in China when I was a kid... But sometimes it's hard to relate and it doesn't make me feel good.

d. Staying or Leaving Canada. Finally, student participants were asked if they are planning on staying in Canada following their secondary education, and if they would do anything differently when looking back on their experiences. Only Student 1 expressed they would not like to stay in Canada following their secondary education, while all the other student participants expressed an interest in staying. Student 1 shared that they felt this way primarily due to what she perceives as a lacking work culture and environment Canada possesses. She explained:

I applied to university in the UK, that's my plan to go there in September because here international students pay really a lot for tuition, and I feel like that was really unfair. I just feel like I mean I don't mind paying that but like I want to feel that it was worth it and I don't think it is here. Everything here is too slack.

Looking back on her experiences, Student 1 also reflected that they would do things differently if they could. She stated, "If not because COVID, maybe I could go to another country. I also think I should come to Canada first before I choose which city I actually want to stay, because different city has really different vibes." While Student 3 stated they would want to stay in Canada to do their post-secondary education here, they did mention they ultimately would prefer leaving to another country. Student 3 shared:

I think I'm not going to back to China. I don't want to go back, just stay in Canada. But maybe if I have the chance, go to America. I would prefer America because it has a huge population and I get more opportunities to do what I really want to do there.

However, Student 3 made it clear that she did enjoy her journey to Canada despite not having other options, but she regrets not being able to explore other options within Canada. Student 4 also stated that while he plans to remain in Canada following his secondary education, he ultimately would prefer to return to China due to the culture and lifestyle. He shared:

I want to stay in Canada to do my university here, but I think once I am done that I will go back to China to find a job and stay there. I prefer the Chinese culture for me. I would rather go back to China even though I enjoyed my schooling experience here, I feel more comfortable with other Chinese people around me and have the same lifestyle and culture.

Student 4 also reflected that they would not do anything differently as he has enjoyed his experience in Canada and does not have knowledge regarding other countries stating, “I think I prefer to not change anything. Um, I don't know anything about like other countries and plus I liked the experience it's good here, so I'll just prefer to not change anything.” On the other hand, Student 2 strongly stated that he plans to remain in Canada following his secondary education, stating, “I think the Canada is good for my future. The economic situation in China is not very well now. I think I just get to university and have a job and will live here for a future time.”

Student 2 also expressed he would not do anything differently, as he has enjoyed his journey thus far. Student 5 also shared similar sentiments regarding his feelings about China and his positive experiences in Canada. He revealed that the lifestyle and pace that is “chill and slow” aligns with his lifestyle, as this allows him opportunities to explore his interests and hobbies outside of the classroom. Student 5 also emphasized he would not do anything differently, as he has enjoyed his life as an international student with his family in Canada.

e. School Boards Need to Take on More Responsibility. Finally, Student 1

highlighted how she feels that the public school system needs to take on a more active role in supporting their international student populations, especially for individuals who take on important roles like the international student coordinator at public schools. She vocalised that:

Taking a government role like an international student coordinator, I feel like you should be more supportive and provide more for students. After changing to the private system, I know how much support I can get. They respond to my email so fast and set me up with all the support and give me all the resources I wish I received when I first arrived in Canada on the public-school board. This role isn't just a job that gives you an income, you need to think about these students they are so young, and they have a dream to study here [...] you need to help them feel less stressed or scared. I feel like the public board needs to improve on this. If they take this kind of job to take care of international students they need to just be aware of how much help some small things can do for us.

f. It Is What It Is. Through student data, it is clear that there were various aspects of the Chinese international student experience that were enjoyable and preferred by student participants in comparison to their schooling system and experiences in their home country, China. These included the enjoyable academic experience that was more relaxed and had increased choices and opportunities. However, there were also numerous gaps and concerns that were identified from students, such as ethics of recruitment, homestay and guardianship issues, and lacking support systems for international students. In particular, Student 1 stressed that she shared her story in hopes of spreading awareness of the vulnerabilities and gaps that international students are exposed to within the educational system and advocate for change. She disclosed that:

I just feel like there's so many stories out there because when I get to know so many other international students everyone has a similar sort of story, but I feel like all international students choose to be quiet or have the attitude "it is what it is" and they just accept it. I really hope you can call for some attention about this and the situation can change so there will be more people willing to help us. I really wish it can change. We are really a minority. We don't have any support and the laws are very different for us, so we are not certain if what is right or what is wrong. This is not our home country and a lot of people who come here don't want to be kicked out of the country or be sent back home so we could not really speak up about stuff. The things we experience really makes us upset or angry, we don't have anyone to reach out for, especially at this age you don't have any power or influence in this society.

Student 1 also became emotional when she explained that she felt she could not share her voice and concerns because of her status as an international student, and the attitudes that many individuals possess towards international students. She remarked that:

Even if you want to talk about it, there is not even a place your voice can be heard especially since we are not a protected person or a citizen here. There is not a lot of organisations or government funds just for international students because it's our choice to be here so we feel like there is just that "you can go back home if you don't like it here" attitude towards us. I'm not even asking for an organisation, but even just a website where international students can post about their experiences and issues so at least new students can at least be aware of things because you never truly *know* until you get here. Even giving a list of navigation for students like banking, the visa process, guardianship information. I feel that agencies or schools should give us a package with all this

information so we can get this information easily. I have been here for over a year now and I am still confused about things, like whether I can do that or do I have the right to like advocate for that or I should just leave it and let things stay as it is.

Summary of Student Participant Data

Based on student participant data, Chinese international secondary school students revealed that while there were various favourable aspects of Canada, such as the educational opportunities that Canada provided and the differences in intensity in academics compared to their schooling experiences in China. However, there were also numerous gaps that were identified. First, for international students who utilized recruitment agencies, homestay services, and guardianship, there was a severe lack of support and responsibility. Services were inadequate, falsely advertised, and financially driven, leaving many students vulnerable as they navigated their new environments on their own. Student participants also expressed a need for more opportunities to allow domestic and international students to interact, as many expressed the difficulty in fostering meaningful friendships with domestic students. Teacher experiences also differed greatly, as while some students expressed favourable and supportive teachers, many also revealed how little support they received from their teachers, as some teachers showed little effort or care in understanding the circumstances or changes they faced as international students. Students also expressed how detrimental COVID-19 impacted their schooling experience, as they felt a decrease in the standard of their learning and feelings of isolation and depression because of limited interaction with peers and teachers. Furthermore, some student participants reported having increased experiences with racism and discrimination following the pandemic, with even one student rationalising the ‘jokes’ they experienced being not as impactful due to individual context, like perpetrators being Chinese peers. However, many student participants

revealed that they have faced forms of racism and discrimination as international students prior to COVID-19. Student participants experienced ‘jokes’, stereotypes, and prejudice attitudes directed towards them from peers and even their teachers, with some students emphasising that there was very little difference before and following the pandemic which highlights the normalization of anti-Asian racism and how constructs of the model minority myth may underpin many students’ identities. Students’ experiences highlighted how they are often forced to accept their vulnerable status, as there is limited support and opportunity for international students to express their concerns and issues within the Canadian system.

2.3. Teacher Participant Findings

As stated prior, all six teacher participants were recruited through snowball sampling where the researcher contacted colleagues who were teachers on public secondary school boards (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All six teacher participants (five female; one male) are currently employed in a public secondary school located within the GTA. The years that these participants have been teachers on their school boards range from three years to twenty years of experience during time of data collection. The themes identified within the teacher data are discussed below. Table 4 outlines the demographic information for all participating secondary teachers.

Table 4
Participant Demographic Information (Teachers)

Participant	Years of Experience	Subjects Taught	School Location	Race	Gender
Teacher 1	20	Literacy, English, & ESL	GTA	East-Asian	Female
Teacher 2	4	Mathematics & Physical Education	GTA	White	Female
Teacher 3	8	English & Social Sciences	GTA	White	Female
Teacher 4	6	French & History	GTA	East-Asian	Female
Teacher 5	2	History & English	Toronto	East-Asian	Male
Teacher 6	5	English, Mathematics, ESL, Science, Guidance & Careers, & Special Education	Toronto	East-Asian	Female

2.3.1. The ‘Visa Dream’ During the first teacher interview, Teacher 1 introduced the concept of the “visa dream” in their discussion, which was also frequently referenced by other teachers to describe similar student experiences and goals. This term refers to this notion that these students will easily graduate from a Canadian high school, and get into a prestigious university, often in Canada or sometimes the United States, and then ideally get a job here and stay in Canada or the States. Many teachers expressed that the majority of Chinese international students in their classes all possess the same ‘visa dream,’ hoping to establish themselves permanently in Canada or America and striving to make their parents proud of the investment they put forth for their children. Teacher 1 further discussed that many Chinese international secondary students are often very academically driven and hardworking, and many can be successful in achieving these dreams as long as they were supported in the form of accommodations. However, despite many students coming to Canada grasping this visa student dream, Teacher 1 stated that, “For many of these students, this is often not the case. Instead, many end up struggling in their classes.”

a. Unethical Recruitment: Problem with Expectations. This brought Teacher 1 to

question what the process of recruitment was back in the home country for these students, as she stressed that an overwhelming number of students hold onto this ‘visa dream’ expectation. Many students were even unaware that they had to complete assessments for their English proficiency and mathematics knowledge when they arrived in Canada, which determined what ESL level class they’d have to enroll in. This fostered a discussion regarding issues with the recruitment process, as teachers perceived that students were often unaware or upset about the assessment process, indicating to them that there was a disconnect between the information that recruitment agencies may be relaying to students overseas in China. Furthermore, Teacher 1 highlighted the significant learning gaps for many Chinese international students, such as extremely limited English or math skills. Teachers questioned whether recruitment agencies were doing any screening measures to ensure that students who are good candidates – those who are able to adapt efficiently and already possess a solid foundation of knowledge and skill – were being selected to study abroad in Canada. Teacher 1 stated:

We often get students who have some sort of learning need or disability that have never been tested prior, or we get students that were not excelling academically in their schools back home, or in some cases even expelled, so how did they get easily accepted into our schools in Canada? What kind of checks are they doing? I don’t know if it’s just the profitability aspect of it all, but there are just so many issues these students face that I think are quite inequitable. For the significant sacrifices and tuition that they’re paying, I just don’t really know what we are offering the students other than a timetable.

2.3.2. Academic Struggles. All six teachers agreed that similar to their domestic students, Chinese international secondary students were a diverse group of learners that ranged at opposite ends of the spectrum. While there were some students that were “the perfect example of what a

visa student should aspire to be. He was outgoing, hardworking, excelled in his academics, and was willing to take risks. Eventually he went on to a prestigious University like U of T or Waterloo” (Teacher 1), many were not able to achieve this success. Instead, most teacher participants shared that there were more Chinese international secondary students who struggled than thrived in their new school environments.

a. Language Development. All six teacher participants shared observations or experiences of Chinese international secondary students struggling academically in their classrooms, often because of their language difficulties. Teacher 6 discussed how students often face difficulty in understanding the content in her mathematics classes and that, “I think these students are put in math because [administration²] assume there’s less language and there won’t be issues, but that’s not the case. There’s many specific terms or word problems and it can be very hard for them.” Teacher 2 shared similar adversities for her students in mathematics highlighting that, “most of the time their struggles come from not understanding the question. Even things like ‘Make sure you show all your work,’ students may not understand this, and I would have to rephrase it differently like ‘Show all your steps.’” The teacher also mentioned that another major challenge for her students in their academic performance is verbal and communication aspects of their assessments.

Teacher 2 mentioned that with the immense technological advancements in this current age, many Chinese international students can access support online to help them understand content, such as translators and watching educational videos. However, a major challenge that persists is the oral component for many of these students. Teacher 2 revealed that, “many students feel embarrassed if they think their English is not strong, and they don’t want to expose

² Administration refers to principals and vice-principals of K-12 schools

their lack of knowledge and this vulnerability, so many are shy to participate or even voice their questions or concerns.” This was a concern for Teacher 2, as she emphasized that these observations and experiences lead them to constantly worry whether they are providing enough support and help for their international students, especially those who are not as vocal as the domestic students tend to be in their classes.

b. Improper Assessment. This issue of ineffective ESL levels placed for students was also identified by four of the six teacher participants. Teacher participants felt that many students were not ranked or placed with an ESL level that was truly accurate or reflective of their knowledge and skill level, and in many cases, it appears these students were simply being pushed through their classes to enter mainstream classes and graduate. Teacher 3 stated that:

The ESL ranking system is not effective at all. They just try to pass every single student, especially when we were online during the pandemic. I would have ESL D students who were fully functioning English speakers. Then, at the same time, I would have ESL D students who couldn't speak or understand any English. How is this possible? Just who decides the levels for these students? I talked to other teachers about this issue, and they had similar experiences in their classes. It's clear that the school is just trying to push these students through ESL A, B, C, and D so they can move to mainstream classes because there's no space for us to continue having them repeating the same courses.

Teacher 5 expressed similar feelings regarding many of his students that appeared to be, “pushed through the system, especially during COVID,” and was confused about how the testing process and ESL rankings were completed and decided for students. This teacher further shared an incident where:

I talked to one of my students who was struggling in my class, and they told me that they managed to scrape by their ESL class with a 50%. Then, because of COVID, they paused their marks during so they couldn't drop any further. So on paper, this student was done with ESL classes and was able to transition into mainstream based on the grading process as they completed their courses. In reality, I don't think they were actually ready or had enough skill to succeed in mainstream.

Teacher 4 also had issues with ESL student rankings in their classes, as she explained that students who are labelled as ESL A or B are often accurate levels that are reflective of their students' English knowledge and skill. As such, they are aware of what to expect with their capabilities in class and can provide the necessary support that aligns with their levels. However, the problem often stems from their students who are ranked as ESL D or higher. Teacher 4 stated, "My students labelled ESL D or E are supposed to be proficient in English, but in reality, they are struggling, and I end up giving them the same or more help than I do my actual A and B students."

Furthermore, some teachers have mentioned that some of their students are often confused or upset about the results of their ESL assessment. Teacher 1 discussed how students are often frustrated because they have been ranked lower than they expected in their ESL levels, and this is when bigger issues will begin to emerge. Teacher 1 explained:

Many of these students, they come to Canada excited and assume because they're in grade 10 and they will just automatically go into mainstream grade 10. But then they get here, get assessed, and suddenly they're assessed as ESL B, or they're grade 10, but they need to take grade nine math, and feelings of frustration begin. Many students get very upset at their initial assessment and start thinking 'How long is this going to take me to

finish high school? How do I make this go faster or they must have done the assessment wrong.’ So we’ve actually had many students aggressively demand reassessment, or demand to skip an ESL grade when the reality sets in.

Teacher 3 shared that many of her students were also confused about their ranking, as students have expressed that there does not seem to be a correlation between their ESL level and their grades and ability. For example, the teacher taught French and explained that she had a Chinese international student who was labelled as ESL D. This ranking indicates that a student possesses a level of proficiency with the English language, but in reality, this student struggled to speak and understand basic English. As such, Teacher 3 expressed confusion as to why this student was placed in her French class and was now forced to attempt to succeed another foreign language despite barely grasping English first. When Teacher 3 privately talked to the student about this issue, the student admitted that “[They] didn’t know why they were ESL D because they weren’t fluent and basically cheated their way through the system. This just really put me in a difficult situation because this student didn’t demonstrate any real learning.”

c. Not Seeking Support or Fear of Expression. Some teacher participants also shared incidents that demonstrated a lack of effort or fear from students in trying to seek support. Teacher 2 revealed a particular incident that happened to one of her Chinese international students. This student reached out to Teacher 2 as they were not doing well in another class and was experiencing an extremely difficult time as they were unable to connect well with their teacher for this course. Teacher 2 shared that:

[The student] tried talking to their teacher, but they didn’t understand what their teacher was saying. They handed something in, and the teacher just handed it back telling them that it was all wrong. I asked them if they wanted me to talk to their teacher, but they

didn't want me to get involved. I do remember them saying was that 'If I don't pass this, they're going to send me back to China because I will fail too many courses, and I don't want to go back to China.' I felt awful for this student. I'm not sure what ended up happening, but it was just such a weird experience because this student was perfectly fine in my class, so I wonder what the disconnect was there

The lack of support the student received from this particular teacher not only had a detrimental impact on their academic ability but appears to have also become a barrier for students as it fostered fear and a reluctance for the student to ask for assistance despite needing the support. Teacher 4 stated that it is not uncommon to see Chinese international students in her English class struggle with their assignments, and when she offers to provide support many appear to be reluctant or will just tell her "they're fine and understand everything" when they do not. They are also often not consistent with handing their work in. Teacher 5 went on to share some of his observations of their students in their classes and the lack of effort they have with accessing support, stating:

Often times, instead of asking for help these students would just have headphones on, and just gave the impression they don't care. Or at least, I don't think it's their intention to give that impression, but rather, they just didn't understand anything so for them it was like what was the point in listening? Might as well listen to something familiar or stimulating.

d. Seeking Online Supports. The use and overreliance of translator applications was another issue that teachers also identified, as due to their lack of English proficiency, many relied on these online supports. Teacher 5 revealed that in his English class, approximately half his Chinese international students were not excelling academically in his history classes and used

translator applications. Similarly, Teacher 3 emphasized that for one of her Chinese international students, “The main skill they picked up was Google Translate.” The teacher went on to further state that it is very apparent when students use translators as many of these applications do not pick up on specific aspects of writing like grammar, or they are not using certain words properly or correctly in their sentences as they do not fully understand them.

e. Private School – The Easy Way Out? Teacher 1 highlighted that in the face of these various academic struggles, this is when the private school issue emerges. Many students who may be struggling in their classes or were assessed in an ESL level lower than they would prefer, would start to look for other options to complete their school as quickly as possible.

Teacher 1 stated that:

This is when students think ‘This is taking too long’ or ‘This is too hard,’ and decide that they will just go to a private school to get the credits instead. And these private schools, I’m not sure how they’re able to have quad semesters and offer students a credit every eight weeks, but I don’t think these students are getting the right support when they go. But to be honest, I’m not sure what happens to most of these students because we lose track of them when they leave [...] the kids that need the most support go to private school.

2.3.3. Social Isolation. All six teacher participants identified another concern for their Chinese international secondary students’ which were the social relationships they form when studying abroad in Canada. Specifically, the teacher participants mentioned that these students often do make strong friendships when they study in Canada and can be very social in their own groups that consist of other Chinese international students, but they have very limited interaction with domestic students or other international students who speak different languages.

This was a concern for some of the teacher participants, as they expressed they were not sure whether it was a choice for these students to only become friends with other Chinese international students due to similar culture and comfort, or because that was the only option for these students as they did not feel like they were accepted or belonged within the school culture and other domestic students.

a. Chinese not Domestic Friends. Teacher 2 shared that based on her experiences and observations with Chinese international students, she has noticed that:

In many instances, especially when you walk around the school during lunch where students are sitting together... The Chinese international students just look isolated. I'm not sure if they really feel a sense of belonging here. I can't say that all of them have a really good social life. Some integrate well with each other, and in most cases it is another international student that they connect with, but they have a hard time connecting with the greater community.

Teachers expressed similar perspectives where Chinese international secondary students often "form a stronger bond" (Teacher 3) with each other, as friendships between these student populations are especially strong when they come independently to study or with extended family, as they rely heavily on each other for comfort and develop a sense of belonging with each other. However, teachers highlighted concerns regarding how "outcasted" these student populations were from their school as they often got pigeonholed into a 'international student' category, which leads to them only hanging out with other Asian international students.

b. Language or Culture?. Some teacher participants also brought forward the question of language versus culture for the friendships Chinese international students formed. For Teacher 1, she highlighted that even in a school that may have a higher Asian domestic

student population, while Chinese international students and domestic Asian students may have commonality with a shared language, these domestic students still have contrasting upbringings and cultural differences that may make it difficult for Chinese international students to connect with. Teacher 3 mentioned that some Chinese international students will try to interact with domestic students who are able to speak the same language, so language was considered to be a major factor in what she believed was important for students to connect with one another. She shared that:

Many connect better with their mother tongue, and I think it stems from both fear mixed with laziness. They feel uncomfortable mingling with domestic students, whereas somebody who speaks the same language as them feels kind of like home. So, they don't have to try as hard to make these kinds of friendships and are comfortable, but this limits themselves opportunities to improve their language skill and have diverse interactions.

Teacher 5 also shared that while experiences may differ based on each student, as some Chinese international students have attempted to interact with both international and domestic students in his classes in order to “push their English skills and integrate better,” he has also seen many circumstances where these student populations “find it very difficult to integrate and experience a culture shock or culture clash.” Teacher 5 explained:

I think a lot of these interactions and friends come down to language. A lot of students just feel comfortable talking with other students that speak the same language. But at the same time, I also have a few Chinese international students who are not very responsive with anyone. I think they are just too used to being pushed around or having all these changes that it is easier for them to skip class or just be quiet.

Teacher 1 also mentioned that this social isolation Chinese international secondary students experienced was not just noticeable to teachers, but also students and administration. She mentioned how difficult it can be to foster more opportunities for international students to interact with domestic students, even with school efforts employed because “We can’t force kids to be friends [...] I don’t really know what else we can do.”

2.3.4. Security, Support, and Quality of Care. All six teacher participants expressed concerns regarding the experiences with homestays, guardianships, and general life at home for Chinese international secondary school students in Canada. All six teachers shared their observations, perceptions, and personal student experiences, with many expressing how problematic these services and supports can be for students. Many teachers also questioned the legitimacy of recruitment agencies, and the gaps and issues that are prevalent within these services. Teacher 1 revealed that while there are acceptable services, there are also many that are highly problematic. She shared:

I clearly remember an incident where our principal had to physically go to a house to find a student that hasn’t come to school for God knows how long and when [they] got there it was really just like a group home. Like, some kind of company came in and perhaps stocked the fridge, maybe came and did cleaning, and then left these teens to themselves to take care of each other. The principal found the student we were looking for locked in [their] room unable to get out of bed because [they] were so depressed and homesick.

The host family quality of care was also a concern as Teacher 6 stated based on her own perceptions that:

Parents are generally more concerned about their own children, right? If it’s a host family [and] the student needs more academic or emotional support, I’m not sure if they will

truly be able to get it from their host families. Especially if they're new to Canada and don't have a lot of friends either, that means they aren't getting peer support. And if they have a language barrier they struggle with at school, they might not be getting adult support. Then, if they don't have support at home either, then where are they getting support from? What do you do?

Other teachers revealed that often times, many of their students do not get along with their homestay families, or there is a lack of care and interest in the students' well-being which is detrimental for students' educational outcomes and mental wellbeing. Other teachers revealed guardianship issues with their Chinese international students, such as Teacher 2 where one of her students who was wonderful was using a homestay service and it was apparent the guardian "wanted nothing to do with [them]" once the student turned 18. Based on this experience, Teacher 2 expressed concerns about the lack of support these guardianships and services are providing for these students, questioning what potential struggles and experiences they may have experienced at home if this guardian was so blatantly hostile towards this student with teachers and administration at school.

Teacher 3 also noted how hesitant or reluctant students might be to share their potential struggles at home with other teachers due to these varying circumstances involving homestays and guardianships. Teacher 3 stated that based on her understanding, many Chinese international students are not living with their parents. Rather, the Chinese international students at their school are often living with extended family, such as an aunt or uncle, or in some circumstances even just a family friend. As a result, Teacher 3 recalled that when she attempted to talk to these students about their home situation they will, "often not say much about it. I think they feel a

little embarrassed or don't know what to say. When I request to speak to their parents, they just say 'No, it's just my uncle at home,' and that's it."

a. Who is Responsible?. Two participants highlighted the lack of support and accountability that these services provide and questioned the issue of responsibility. Teacher 1 revealed when they attempted to contact a guardian for a student that:

While you're looking up different kids you realise that this one guardian is responsible for like a million kids. And they don't live with them obviously. Even today, I called a guardian and had to tell them the name of the student I was calling about so many times for them to try to recall this student. It was clear that this was just a job that they do during the workday. I don't know who is responsible for these kids, and I just don't get how they set these kids up with these kinds of services where they clearly don't get the right or enough support from.

Teacher 4 also revealed an emergency incident that occurred at her school, and how they were forced to adapt to the circumstances and questioned what felt like gaps in responsibility. One of her Chinese international students was extremely ill and had to go to a hospital, but they were unable to get a hold of their parents due to the time difference. The parents finally contacted them the following day "but at that point medical decisions were already made." However, the main concern Teacher 4 expressed was that:

The guardian [who] was responsible ... or the host family? I'm not sure how it works, but regardless these people didn't seem reliable and that stressed us out. I guess I just feel like no one is truly responsible for these kids. I guess legally their safety is guaranteed through these homestays and guardians, but I don't really get the sense that these students

really feel safe or that there is someone they can really turn to. This becomes a burden for the student, just an extra layer of responsibility on top of so many other things

Overall, all six teacher participants identified that their biggest concerns for Chinese international secondary students involved the academic, social, and housing/guardianship experiences faced by these student populations when studying abroad in Canada. Though there are some diverse experiences shared from teacher participants perceptions, observations, and personal student experiences, it is apparent that there is an overwhelmingly amount of problematic experiences from these student populations.

2.3.5. Teacher Mindsets. Teacher mindsets emerged as a theme when teacher participants were asked to share their perspectives and experiences on whether teachers at their schools were providing enough accommodations. This included within the classroom, guidance counsellors, and administration, for Chinese international secondary students, and whether there should be more professional development and resources available for teachers to help better support international ELL students. Half of the participants mentioned the issue of teacher mindsets, and how they believed these mindsets can be a major contributor to the lack of effort towards supporting international students. Four major categories emerged from the interview data, which were inconsistency with teacher support, inequities, teacher stereotypes and attitudes, and lacking teacher professional development.

a. Inconsistency with Teacher Support. All six teacher participants revealed that while some teachers put forth great effort to accommodate to Chinese international secondary school students, there is also an overwhelming number of teachers who do not attempt to accommodate the needs of these students, whether the lack of accommodation is intentional or not. Teacher 1 shared:

I feel that among our own staff, we just had a student success meeting this week and our Vice principal told us ‘Oh, you know a lot of ELL’s are really struggling in science. Maybe we can have the teacher who’s the ESL head have a conversation with the science teachers about accommodations. And myself and another teacher were just laughing about it because we have this same conversation every semester, every year. The question continues: why are our own teachers not supporting our ELLs? Our own teachers can get the support *they* need, but our own students aren’t. If you look at interim and midterm marks, so many kids with failure or multiple failures are our ELLs.

Teacher 2 shared similar sentiments of her school culture and levels of teacher accommodations they have observed. Teacher 2 shared that the ELL department at her school put in great effort to send tips and resources every year to teachers to help them understand the varying ESL levels, and ways to better accommodate these students at every level. However, despite these resources, teacher accommodations continue to lack consistency across classrooms because of teacher’s personal efforts and mindsets in providing accommodations. Teacher 2 stated:

Some teachers are passionate about providing accommodations, such as allowing students to have different versions of the test. Personally, I’ll make a different version that accommodates the needs of my ELL students so they can pass, and I do that because I want to make it equitable. They’re answering the same question, it’s just in a way that they can understand it better. One day they’ll be able to understand it the way other students have, but until then, I do this for them. But I know that this is something that not every teacher does, and I can say that I personally a lot of teachers who don’t do it.

This issue of inconsistency in support was also addressed by teachers, as participants highlighted how the lack of a standard implemented across schools and school boards results in an

inconsistency in teaching and accommodations. Especially for teachers who may not be familiar with international students or have a sense of understanding towards their circumstances, then inequities will form within the classroom.

b. Teacher Stereotypes and Attitudes. Many teacher participants also revealed the attitudes and stereotypes teachers possess towards Chinese international secondary students that have greatly impacted the accommodations and level of support received in the classroom. Teachers revealed that Chinese international students excelling in mathematics is a very common stereotype amongst her math department, which hinders many opportunities to support these students properly, especially those who may actually struggle in the subject. This may also result in students feeling embarrassed to seek support due to the stereotypes and attitudes placed upon them. Teacher 2 shared that:

Some Chinese international students struggle in math, and I think a lot of teachers have this attitude and think, ‘Oh, they’re from China, they probably have a strong foundation in this content,’ when they don’t. So, in circumstances where the student isn’t doing well, it’s kind of an immediate negative reaction where the teacher will question, ‘Well, why don’t you have a strong foundation here from China like you should? What’s going on?’. It’s just a very bad stereotype, and we can’t go around having these assumptions. I think it leads to this mindset where you just expect students to produce something, and as a consequence, you’re not giving them the accommodations they may actually need. And once teachers find out these students aren’t doing well, then they get concerned because they haven’t been providing any accommodations or considerations.

Teacher 4 also mentioned her concerns about other assumptions teachers have about Chinese international students that would hinder the opportunities students could reach out for support

and help, especially regarding their mental health. Teacher 4 stated, “I think there’s this assumption that these students are doing well, because a lot of times they’re very quiet and don’t really speak out about their issues. Because of that, I worry they might fall in between the cracks.” This concern was also mentioned by Teacher 5, who discussed that these student populations are often “too shy to speak up, and I worry they just end up being complacent and happy with the status quo.” He went on to share that in China, many of these students are “taught to not fight authority, they’re told to be obedient and listen to their teachers. So, I’ve seen cases where teachers would just dismiss these students, and they would just be quiet and accept this type of behaviour towards them.” The teacher also revealed concerns about issues of complacency directed towards their understanding in class, that would ultimately hinder their ability to receive support from their teachers. Teacher 5 stated that:

There are many times where teachers would ask these students if they understand something, and they just shake their head and say yes. But in reality, I talked to some of these students and they said they only roughly understand 50 percent of what their teachers say.

Furthermore, Teacher 5 emphasized the importance of having professional development for teachers as a method to bring awareness and combat these preconceived stereotypes and assumptions towards these student populations. Teacher 5 stated that:

One major issue is that teachers often label Chinese international students by just their country of origin. They don't see that there's a distinct difference between [them] or even students who grew up in a big city versus the countryside or assumptions about their social economic status. When I talk to teachers, I found many stereotype or generalise these students as a homogeneous group. They also say things like, ‘Oh, they're just very

quiet or very polite. They're good kids, they don't cause trouble, but they don't really do anything.' So I think professional development is so important and necessary to bring awareness and encourage teachers to get to know these students individually. As teachers, we always talk about pedagogies being culturally relevant, and differentiation, so it's not fair that we're not doing that with these students.

c. Inequities: Lacking Teacher Professional Development. Many participants also revealed that despite the numerous professional development opportunities and resources that would be helpful and beneficial, there still remains a lack of professional development that have an impact and genuinely influence teacher mindsets. For example, Teacher 1 mentioned that many teachers in her school hold the belief that because studying abroad in Canada was a *choice* for these students, these students inherently need to work hard, in some cases, “work 100 times harder than everybody else” (Teacher 1) and should be held to the same academic expectations and standards as any other domestic student in their courses. Teacher 1 shared that:

There is the same argument and attitude that a lot of teachers have when we ask them to accommodate these students, which is that it's too bad, they made the choice to be here, this is an amazing opportunity for them [...] Every time we look at the failure list, it's always special education students, students that are struggling with mental health issues, and our ELL students. So, what is the problem here? To me, it's often a lack of willingness to accommodate and allow students to learn in the way they need to learn and demonstrate their learning in the way they need to demonstrate it.

Teacher 1 further emphasized that while there needs to be professional development (PD), she feels that they have done PDs year after year with little change being implemented. As such:

It really is about the mindsets of teachers, and mindsets are really hard to change. What teachers think is fair and unfair, what is equitable and not equitable for their students, those are all about mindsets. I feel like for the most part, teachers understand the idea of accommodations and what they need to do, whether they choose to do it is a different issue.

When asked to further expand on these notions of “fair” and “equitable,” the teacher further explained the issue of equality and equity that many teachers seem to use as their primary reason for not providing accommodations for their Chinese international secondary school students. Teacher 1 revealed that many teachers have an attitude regarding what they consider as equal and equitable. Many teachers are:

Still stuck on this idea that everybody has to do the same thing and hand in the same product, or else it is unfair. Honestly, it's been 20 years we've been talking about this and I just don't understand. Science is a conversation I have [...] trying to explain why can [these students] not have access to a word wall or a list of glossary terms that are in their own language? And then it just becomes the same arguments of, 'well, how is that fair?' or 'the other students aren't doing it that way.' Teachers are very protective of the integrity of their course and their credits, but at the same time I feel like often what they do is punitive. You're punishing students for something that they have no control over, which is their language development.

Teacher 2 also agreed that there needs to be changes implemented within their school and across the system. She shared that “Our school has a lot of older teachers, and as a result I think it has a lot of old school thinking and the growth mindset of potential is usually hindered by a very fixed mindset.” As a result, Teacher 2 expressed how these attitudes and mindsets can be extremely

debilitating towards their own efforts to accommodate for their classes due to the fact that as a young teacher:

You can't do new things without it being questioned. A lot of these older teachers, they just don't want to change. And I sign up for professional development, I review all these resources, and put so much effort in creating accommodations for my students. But in the end, no matter how much I do for my class, if the next teacher doesn't do it in their class, then it makes no difference as it's not consistent across the system. I just think we have such a wrong way of thinking and there needs to be more empathy. You just have to make it so that they're able to be successful, because most of them have the skills they need, they just need that crutch until they can get there.

Teacher 4 experienced a similar stance based on her experiences in their school, where attempting to provide accommodations sometimes resulted in what felt like criticism from other teachers. Teacher 4 stated:

Teachers would ask me 'why are you doing this or that,' or 'why are you putting so much effort into this, no one else is really doing this so why are you?' which made me feel like trying to accommodate for students was a bad thing or something. I even had one teacher when I provided my Chinese international students a word bank for their Shakespeare test that it 'wasn't fair for the other students the class, you're making it too easy for them, what's the point of them being in academic English then?'. To be honest, it was really upsetting to hear.

2.3.6. COVID-19 and the Fallouts. Finally, teacher participants revealed how the impact COVID-19 had on their Chinese international students and emphasized the issues

that emerged during the shift to online learning, what happens behind the scenes like racism and discrimination, lack of safety, and rising feels of discomfort within the school.

a. Shift to Online Learning. All six teacher participants shared how detrimental the transition to online learning was for these student populations, that led to many of these students becoming disconnected with their teachers and peers, and ultimately suffering in their studies. Teachers mentioned issues with online learning at the beginning of the lockdown, as Teacher 1 revealed that:

The students really suffered when COVID-19 happened. Last year when we were all in lockdown and doing school online, it was just ridiculous because we had all these students that were stuck overseas, and they were trying to learn on Canadian time. So these students in China were not seeing their own families because they were sleeping during the day and up at night trying to connect with the [school's] schedule. Eventually, accommodations were allowed for students to do stuff asynchronously. Obviously, a lot of students did not do well. Lots of students disappeared, some students we couldn't find for weeks. There were also disconnects from teachers during this time. There was a student who was failing an art class and they had an assignment where they had to take a whole bunch of photos. The student was trying to explain that they can't take photos because their learning is at night and the teacher kept pushing to say, 'you needed to go out during the day and take pictures of nature and patterns and textures.' The student just didn't hand in this assignment and the teacher kept harassing them for it. But I think to my understanding there were students who wanted to withdraw, but the board would not refund their tuition.

Other teachers expressed concerns about the shift to online education, as teachers were expected to adapt their lessons for this new setting and deliver the same quality of teaching online as they would in person. This transition was detrimental for Chinese international students, especially those who were coming to the school as new students. Teacher 4 revealed that, “these students definitely suffered because they would be present in the sense that their name’s on Google meet, but they were always muted, no camera, and never spoke. Even in breakout rooms, they don’t talk with the other students.” The teacher went on to also say that opportunities for these students to create friendships like they would in the classroom no longer existed. She stated that in the classroom:

These students would sit next to one another usually, and they would be able to talk to each other in Chinese and become friends. This does not happen online; I don’t think I’ve even heard some of them speak once. I just think it would be even harder for the international students if they are already kind of here by themselves with no friends or anything, right? I can't even imagine the kind of dark times that could have propelled students into.

Teacher 6 shared similar sentiments, emphasising how “for any student, it was really, really hard for them to make friends during COVID, let alone if you are an international student with a language barrier or coming here completely alone.” Teacher 6 also expressed concerns about the level of support students would be able to access during this transition to online learning, as they felt that communicating with teachers, or accessing guidance counsel services would be difficult or greatly hindered. For example, communication was often conducted through emails, but emails were all in English which could be a barrier for international students. Thus, while on the

surface level it may appear that there is very little issues, these students “might have needed help or support in other ways but we wouldn’t know that.”

b. What Happens Behind the Scenes: Racism and Discrimination. Teacher participants were asked whether they have noticed any signs of anti-Asian hate, racism, or forms of discrimination towards Chinese international secondary students as a result of COVID-19. Three of the six teacher participants stated they did not personally see any forms of racism or discrimination directed towards these student populations, but all three of these teachers did not discount the possibility of these students’ facing forms of anti-Asian hate. Teacher 3 explained that though she did not see any racism or discrimination, they “truly don’t know what actually goes on behind scenes.” Teacher 2 also stated that during the first two years of the pandemic, schools were in lockdown and student experiences shifted to online spaces, which made it more difficult for teachers and administrators to monitor students’ interactions.

Though Teacher 2 stated that:

Many of the students are forward thinking, and they’re all very understanding of what is going on and know that people need to feel accepted. But I did get notified today that there’s been a lot of issues with cyber bullying recently. I don’t know if it’s related to international students or not, but what I see at school might be completely different than what’s going on behind the scenes. I think because of COVID, everything just became even more virtual, and I might not be seeing everything that meets the eye.

However, three teachers did share the student experiences regarding issues of racism, discrimination, and certain attitudes and feelings that Chinese international secondary school students faced as a result of COVID-19. Teacher 1 stated that though she did not experience or hear about any blatant racism or discrimination towards these student populations, there were

some issues that emerged as a result of Chinese international students wearing masks. Teacher 1 revealed that:

There were concerns initially before everybody else started wearing masks. We had a lot of Chinese international students already start wearing masks, and we were coming into second semester so initially people were a little put off by that I do remember. The board had actually said initially that nobody was allowed to wear a mask because it was scaring people. We had administrators asking our international students to remove their masks at the beginning of the pandemic before it was mandated. To them, I mean it was a cultural aspect that they just did commonly at home whenever they were feeling unwell, but I think being told to remove them was also problematic.

Teacher 4 discussed an incident that occurred at her school. Though the incident did not occur in her personal class, she shared the details regarding this incident as the school had to quickly take action in spreading awareness and establishing a plan of action to combat forms of anti-Asian hate, racism, and discrimination that had stemmed as a result of the pandemic. Teacher 4 revealed that:

When we were back in person, especially at the beginning when there was a lot of political propaganda and you know, the news was saying that this came from China, then Donald Trump was calling it the Chinese virus, I think that impacted the way that some students viewed things. We had an incident, and this was not in my class, so I heard details from other teachers and then it became a school issue after, that one student was angry about what was happening. About not being able to go to prom or have a graduation, and was talking angrily with his friends and made snarky comments to an international student from China that was in class with them. The teacher had to deal with

that and bring in admin. I think that made it uncomfortable for some of the international students as they felt there was a stigma. Like people were always judging them or blaming them.

c. Lack of Safety. Teacher 5 shared the negative experience of their Chinese international secondary students' when they were able to transition back to the classrooms for in person learning. Based on their observations, it appeared that many of these students did not feel safe learning in the classroom due to the lack of precaution exhibited from domestic students and teachers in their commitment to following health and safety regulations. Teacher 5 stated:

These students tended to wear their masks very securely and took extra precaution, and some of the domestic students took a little bit more time to hop on that and really understand. These students took it much more seriously, and even more serious than many of the teachers. And some students, especially Chinese international students, felt very unsafe in those environments, because they still feel like there [was] a certain harm, especially when some of their family members [were] quarantined. The situation back home with some relatives abroad is that their whole city is under lockdown, and they're being told to be careful, be safe. They're hearing news about people getting really sick. It just feels like there's a gap in terms of bridging that connection of safety during COVID.

d. Rising Feelings of Discomfort Within the School. Teacher 5 also expressed how his Chinese international students were feeling in their classroom. Though the teacher did not see any of these students face any direct forms of racism or discrimination, it was apparent that these student populations were extremely concerned about their safety as they were

aware of the heightened rates of violence and anti-Asian Hate crimes occurring across the globe.

Teacher 5 shared that:

During the time where lots of hate crime was going on, especially in America where an old Chinese person was assaulted, incidents like that, there was definitely a rising feeling of discomfort within the school. There was a lot of chatter where [the students] would talk about these hate crimes, and they would ask me ‘how do you feel about it?’ or they would go ‘how could people are so quick to react like this? How could they do this to someone? Don’t they have any respect for elders?’ So, there’s definitely a lot of talk and because of this talk, I interpreted as a kind of discomfort and awareness of the discrimination going on. Because of this, our school was trying to do their best to combat it, and really focus on making sure these students felt safe, and make sure there is a clear distinction between one’s country and disease.

2.3.7. Value as Revenue. Teacher participants were asked to share their perspectives on why recruitment of international students was considered important to their school and school board. Despite teachers mentioning various ethical and positive reasons for the recruitment of these students, such as increasing diversity, adding culture to the school, and opportunities for students to be exposed and embrace different cultures across the globe, all six teachers were aware of the underlining profitability motives for the recruitment of international students and how invested their schools were towards international student enrolment. Teacher 1 disclosed that even though she would like to think it’s for “diversity reasons and exposing students to different cultures, international students pay a significant sum to be here and through recruitment agencies and with so many budget cuts right now this is definitely a way to bring more income into the board.”

Teacher 3 even learned tactics her school engaged with to increase profits. She revealed her school was labelling Chinese students as ESL even though they were born in Canada and did not have any English proficiency issues. She discovered that one or two of these students' parents or guardian did not speak English, so they would label the students as ESL because the school would receive more funding based on enrolment numbers. This made her question the ethics of these exploitative methods and what other avenues schools and school boards could be doing with international students to increase profits. Teacher 4 highlighted how the pressure for international student recruitment was immense, as there were numerous discussions and pressures to recruit international students and “talks about the money” and how “it is a learning experiences and benefits the international students, so it’s a win-win in the school’s eyes.” However, despite what it appears to be immense amounts of money generated for these schools from international student tuition fees, many of these teachers articulated that they often do not see this money invested or returned to the international students. Teacher 4 emphasized this by stating, “it’s not a secret that international students pay large tuition fees to come learn here, so it would be great if some of this money could be reinvested into them and not just our domestic students because I don’t think there’s enough support for them.”

2.3.8. Inconsistency in School Support. Teachers also shared what forms of support were available for Chinese international secondary students, and international students in general, and highlighted the need for better support services to better the lives of these student populations. Teachers revealed that there was very little consistency or a standardised system in the types of support offered for these students, as the level of support available for students was determined independently by each school and their administrators. For Teacher 1’s school, she had a large international student population, a dedicated ESL department, and a principal who “is more

familiar with the culture and the students, and [they were] willing to invest the time and the money and the resources.” As a result, the teacher shared that the school offered numerous forms of support, such as having a student success team that connected with international schools and communities, often working closely with a coordinator that is contacted if there are any major issues with any of the visa international students. This coordinator often took on the role of translating and conducted the communication between parents of students who were overseas. The school also offers an assessment and orientation for new international students, in addition to having a regular check-in with guidance counsellors.

However, for the majority of teachers, many expressed that the only forms of support offered were general and did not cater to international student needs. Teachers explained that while there were services available for all students, like general academic guidance counselling, there were no specialized services or departments solely dedicated for international students. Other activities like orientation or mentorship programs were only for grade nines to help familiarize themselves with the school, but there were nothing to limited resources for new international students. Concerns were expressed whether international students were receiving enough support as Teacher 5 shared:

After getting them situated in the school and getting placed, for example in an ESL course based on their language level, there is no additional support for them [...] I’m not sure if our school does anything for our international students to be honest. My understanding is we definitely draw a lot of money because of the amount of international students we have. Where the money goes to, I am not sure.

2.3.9. Standardising the System. It became apparent through these conversations with teacher participants that there was a need for greater support services to be implemented within

schools and across the board to better support both Chinese international students, but also international students in general. All six teachers mentioned that there was no standardised system implemented across their school boards regarding the level of support offered to these student populations, such as guidance counsellors that support international students, translators, assessments and courses offered, and finally teacher professional development.

a. Guidance Counsellors that Support International Students. Teachers agreed that implementing a standard for services such as guidance counsellors would be beneficial for supporting students. Teacher participants explained that while it may be difficult to standardise forms of support as it is dependent on each school and how many international students are enrolled, it is still essential to have:

An official standard department or something where they have these translators and guidance counsellors that you can easily access would be really helpful. Maybe they can come to your school and help, or if you need them to quickly translate something, you can call them on the phone, set up a quick google meeting, something like that. (Teacher 4)

Teachers expressed how important it is for international students to have guidance counsellors who were able to speak various languages and could support international students with their mental health and well-being, but also connect them to the greater community. Teacher participants shared that have had instances where they have struggled to support some of their international students, and when they reach out to guidance counsellors for assistance, they also do not know what to do as they are not educated or have the resources for them. Thus, it is essential to have a dedicated guidance counsellors who are trained and educated to understand

the particular needs of these students as currently “they’re treated like any other student when they’re not” (Teacher 3).

b. Translators. Two teachers mentioned the significant impact of having a translator on site at the schools, or having the translator be extremely accessible for teachers if they want to connect with international student’s family to create a better support system. Teacher 6 agreed with the benefits of having a translator, especially for “schools in the GTA that have high Chinese student populations because at the schools I’ve worked in I was asked to translate many times.” Teachers expressed that rather than having to find a teacher that potentially spoke a similar language within the school, it would be more efficient to have translators readily accessible to support these students. Teacher 6 shared a particular incident with one student that they were requested to help translate for numerous times, however, because Teacher 6’s Mandarin was not proficient she expressed that “I do not think this way of doing things is efficient [...] Teachers aren’t supposed to translate for students that come. They’re supposed to get a translator.”

c. Assessments and Courses Offered. Teachers also mentioned other general forms of school support that would be beneficial future change for Chinese international students, such as better forms of ESL assessments and courses offered for international students. Teachers discussed issues with assessments for these student populations, specifically implementing a better assessment standard to determine whether these students are truly ready and capable of successfully studying abroad in Canada. Teacher 1 stated:

There needs to be a much more comprehensive assessment of their readiness. There are so many students that are not successful, and I think it just stems from sort of why they’re here in the first place.

Teacher 3 also discussed issues with the overall lack of ESL courses available for international students. She questioned why this course was not being offered at her school, especially considering the fact that her school has a high international student population so there is a need for them. Teacher 3 went on to further say:

I think the feeling I get even from guidance counsellors and other teachers is very dismissive too. They just say ‘pair them up, hope that they pass, get a 50, they just have to put in the work for it.’ But they’re spending most of their time struggling. Generally, the mentality is that they’re ESL D, so they should be fully functioning, but even with that, I’m seeing that that’s not the case so ESL rankings don’t really mean anything at this point.

Teachers also mentioned that to help fully support their students, there also needs to be more information provided for staff regarding the international students “before they are placed in your class” through some form of assessment. Though it is important and essential that teachers put in the effort to get to know their own students, even information regarding their assessment, or previous level of education from their home country would be helpful and “quicken the process instead of just throwing these students in our classes.” Teacher 6 explained:

Especially for some of the international students, I don’t want to ask them about their previous school experiences or personal lives in front of all the other students as many may be shy or feel awkward and uncomfortable, and doing a written sheet may be difficult if they’re not that strong in English.

d. Teacher Professional Development. Four teachers also highlighted the need for future change in the kind teacher development provided for staff. Teacher 4 stressed that “education as a whole needs to take an interest to prepare teachers for the very real possibility

that you will be faced with teaching international students in your class.” As such, Teacher 2 agreed there is a need for teachers to foster a “growth mindset about acceptance and knowing. More empathy and provide these international students with someone to lean on to guide them in their first days of school and throughout the semester.” Teacher 5 also discussed the importance of having a staff that reflects the diverse student population in schools. He shared that:

I think what really makes a big difference is having someone that understands them culturally. More diversity or reflection in the staff, admin, and guidance. I think in terms of support, there definitely could be more support, but instead of throwing resources, maybe just changing or re-interpreting the support instead of thinking that it’s one solution that fits all. They need to feel supported by teachers and staff, and make mistakes and not feel judged, and be in an environment where everyone else is actually trying to welcome them in and accept them.

Summary of Teacher Participant Data

Based on teacher participant data, it is apparent there were numerous gaps, concerns, and inconsistencies identified across the educational system. First, teachers introduced this concept of the ‘visa dream’ that most Chinese international students’ expected to achieve when coming to study in Canada. However, many are often unable to attain this, which led to many students feeling frustrated and upset, bringing the question of what the process of recruitment is like back in China, the low English proficiency identified by all teacher participants, and how many students often struggled academically in their classes due to the language barriers they face. Teacher participants also highlighted numerous issues regarding improper assessments for Chinese international students, and how the ESL levels students are placed in are not truly accurate or reflective of their knowledge and skill level, with many students relying heavily on

online supports like translator applications. Often, it seems that these students are merely being pushed through the system to enter mainstream classes and graduate. Many students also appear to face difficulty in seeking support from their teachers, primarily due to a lack of connection with their teacher or a fear of expression.

Teacher participants also revealed the social isolation these student populations face, as friendships were often limited to other Chinese international students. This was a concern for some of the teacher participants, as they expressed they were unsure whether this was choice for students or because they were forced to as they did not feel accepted or belonged with the greater school culture and other domestic students. Security and quality of care was also addressed, as teacher participants shared incidents of student experiences with homestays, guardianships, and general life at home that raised numerous red flags to the legitimacy of these recruitment agencies, and the gaps and issues that are prevalent within these services. Teacher mindsets was also a major issue that participants identified, as many revealed that there were inconsistencies with teacher support across their school which led to inequities for Chinese international students, which were also worsened with the teacher stereotypes and attitudes many held towards these students that impacted the level of support and accommodations that were provided for them.

COVID-19 and the fallouts were also addressed, with issues emerging during the shift to online learning, and discussions regarding the potential racism and discrimination that could happen behind the scenes and lack of safety that students faced. All teacher participants also revealed the profitability motives behind international student recruitment, and how these students are valued, as they exposed the strategies and initiatives that their schools encourage or engage in to increase international student numbers. Inconsistencies in school support were also

addressed, with participants highlighting the need for these services to be standardised and professional teacher development to be implemented within the educational system to better support these vulnerable youth. With international student brochures, student participant data, and teacher participant data analyzed, the following chapter will provide a discussion of the overarching themes across all three data sources that help define and shape the experiences of international students and heighten their vulnerabilities during and post COVID-19, addressing my research questions.

Summary

Overall, this chapter provided an overview of the three sets of research findings. First, dominant themes across international student brochures from three school boards in the GTA were analyzed, which included (i) world-class education, (ii) supports and services to ensure success, (iii) and associated international student services. Following the brochure analysis, participant data findings were identified. Student participant findings were discussed first, with dominant themes including: (i) Canada was my choice, (ii) ethics of recruitment, (iii) academic experiences, (iv) social experiences, (v) homestay experiences, (vi) teacher experiences, (vii) guidance support, (viii) impact of COVID-19, (ix) experiences with racism, and (x) looking back and looking forward. Teacher participant findings were reviewed afterward, with dominant themes including: (i) 'visa dream', (ii) academic struggles, (iii) social isolation, (iv) security, support, and quality of care, (v) teacher mindsets, (vi) COVID-19 and fall outs, (vii) value as revenue, (viii) inconsistency in school support, and (ix) standardising the system. The following chapter will discuss overarching themes across all three data sources that help define and shape the experiences of international students and heighten their vulnerabilities during and post COVID-19.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of Chinese international students in secondary schools in Canada paying particular attention to the vulnerabilities and risks among this population, especially as they were further exacerbated by the recent global pandemic, COVID-19. Chinese international secondary students have been placed in an even precarious position in recent times due to the rising anti-Asian racism and discrimination that has manifested, alongside the rising geo-political tensions between China and Canada. These contexts ultimately impact their experiences and ability to integrate within a new education system and culture in Canada. The study also sheds light on required policy and programs to protect the vulnerability of these international youth, bringing forth insight on the internationalization of secondary schools in Canada (Lee, 2015; Marginson et al., 2010; Sawir et al., 2009; Sherry et al., 2010). The guiding research questions for the study were:

- What are the discrepancies and gaps between how Canadian secondary schools are marketed to Chinese international students and their experiences once they are within the system?
- What are key concerns and gaps in policy and programmatic supports for IS academic, social, housing and guardianship experiences that influence their protection and security?
- What insights do the experiences of Chinese international student population in GTA secondary schools reveal about Ontario's school policies on multiculturalism, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI), and international education? How did the pandemic and growing geo-political tensions between Canada and China impact these policies?

The previous chapter presented detailed findings in three sections, which consisted of international student brochures, EDI statements, student participant data, and teacher participant

data, which were organized by themes. In this chapter, I will discuss overarching themes across all three data sources that help define and shape the experiences of international students and heighten their vulnerabilities during and post COVID-19. I have organized the section in six major overarching themes: (1) selling the visa dream, (2) neoliberalism and IE, (3) two worlds colliding?: discrepancy in perspectives (4) the act of silencing-silencing themselves or silenced by system?, (5) the irony of equality and equity, (6) impact of COVID-19, and (7) geo-political tensions. Through this discussion, I will address my three research questions.

1. Selling the ‘Visa’ Dream

In examining how Western education is being marketed to international students, selling the ‘visa’ dream was a theme identified as the brochures and participant data both highlighted how education in Western countries, Canada being a prime example, is “sold” to Chinese international students. On one hand, the “visa dream” of studying in the West increasingly pressurizes Chinese international students to seek Canadian education and come in with high expectations for “success” and on the other hand, the idea of achieving the visa dream ironically increases their vulnerabilities as international students.

1.1. The Advantages of the “West”

One of the major motivations for choosing to come to Canada was this notion that a Western education can ensure future success. The “visa dream” is simultaneously sold and endorsed by recruiters in China and in Canada and influenced many students and their families decisions. Recruitment agents are clearly marketing international education in Canada in a particular manner, as participants explicitly stated that they learned these notions of the “visa dream” from recruitment agents in Canada and China. One student stated that his mom had discussed with “school agents in China and learned that there's not much homework and I can get

a good grade there. I can get into a good school [...]” (Student 4). These sentiments align with Wu and Tarc (2021) study, where their student participant expressed similar notions that they “could not resist the temptation when Chinese educational service agencies showed the pictures in which many students who did not study so hard were still admitted by high-ranking universities in Canada” (p. 7). Again, these instances demonstrate that despite the vast amount of recruitment agencies available for international education, many of these agents are marketing in similar methods where they attempt to sell the “visa dream” to students and highlight the ease of Canadian schooling and guaranteed success.

It is no surprise that the international education brochures of Canadian school boards also build upon this narrative of this Western advantage, advocating for their world class education in order to appeal to students and their ambitions to achieve the “visa dream.” Across all three school board brochures, the emphasis of graduation rates, post-secondary success, and partnerships and collaborations with greater community and post-secondary institutions all draw upon an illusion that assures students that education in Canada is a worthwhile investment that guarantees success. School boards advertised that international students will have opportunities to be connected, be prepared, access resources, engage in mentorship programs, and even receive distinct post-secondary campus tours during their studies that were exclusive and only offered from their school board (Peel District School Board, 2022; Toronto District School Board, n.d.b; York Region District School Board, n.d.).

Several past studies have also suggested how the advantages of the West have been heavily endorsed. Many Chinese international students revealed similar decisions they or their parents made to study abroad, with the intention to advance their careers and to secure a better, more successful future (Tamtik, 2018). Testimonies from Chinese international secondary students in

Wu and Tarc's (2021) study, for example, "My parents thought that it is 'worthwhile' to invest in international education for my 'brighter future' and life in cities" (p. 8), paralleled the sentiments of one of my student participant's as one of them similarly explained, "My parents told me that the education in Canada is really good and I think the education in Canada can help me a lot in my future." Chinese international students emphasize that the appeal of Canada, for students is that they can more easily achieve high academic results, attend a prestigious post-secondary institute in North America, and ensure success for their future.

These attitudes illustrate how Whiteness perpetuates across the globe, as despite many international students being people of colour from non-Western countries, "social and institutional power structures continue the aims of Whiteness" (Shahjahan & Edwards, 2022, p. 748).

Whiteness is applied and enforced through curriculum, practices, school design, and policies that require an understanding of Western languages, knowledge, and beliefs (Knaus, 2018). Shahjahan and Edwards (2022) introduced the concept of Whiteness as futurity, highlighting how global education continues to prioritize White interests and aspirations that ultimately only benefit Western nations and reproduce racialized inequities. This superiority has positioned Western nations and their education as "the future for which the rest of the world must aspire" (Shahjahan & Edwards, 2022, p. 751). As such, the dominance of Western education is sustained, as non-White nations have reformed many of their educational objectives and strategies to align with White aspirations, participating and engaging in the spread of Whiteness. Shahjahan and Edwards (2022) argued that this system ensures that Whiteness becomes an investment that guarantees that Whiteness remains "a protected asset value [...]" (p.751). In turn, this secures White Western nations position as the center, as "non-White subjects must also feel compelled to invest" (p. 751) to have a chance to prosper in the global economy as their value is compared to the standards

established by the dominant system. These sentiments align with participants' and their parents' motivations to study in Canada, as many have expressed how investing in Western education will benefit and allow them to achieve success in their futures.

1.2. Intensifying Vulnerabilities

Ironically, this notion of the visa dream adds vulnerabilities for students and their families as the over-emphasis of the advantage and ease of Western education, especially in comparison to the immense educational and professional competition in China, builds overwhelming pressure for Chinese international students to succeed and achieve these dreams. Chinese international participants shared how they often had to suffer silently, with parents informing them to “just deal with the relationships” (Student 3). Teacher participants also disclosed how students expressed a fear of being sent back to China if they failed academically in their courses, with many students feeling concerned and stressed about their ability to achieve the visa dream. In this manner, ironically, the visa dream increases student vulnerabilities and silences them into accepting injustices.

This visa dream plays a part in contributing to the superiority of Western education, where many international students are forced to invest in to achieve success. This not only maintains the dominance of Whiteness, but also results in many unregulated international education organizations like recruitment agencies to profit off students who are willing to pay inflated tuition fees (Bozheva, 2020; Pike, 2012; Stein & de Andreotti, 2016; Winton, 2022). As research has demonstrated, students feel immense pressure from their families as they have sacrificed and invested all their money and energy into their international education, so many “expect high returns” (Wu & Zheng, 2019, p. 12). As a result, many Chinese international students may suffer silently and attempt to avoid raising concerns or trouble. Literature has

shown that many issues and concerns often go unaddressed for these student populations since they often do not report or are reluctant to share their challenges out of fear of being sent home (Popadiuk, 2009; Lee, 2015; Wu, 2019).

1.3. Reveals Discrepancies in Perspectives: Is Academics of a Higher Standard in Canada or in China?

As explained above, Western education has become one of the most sought out products in the education market, as studying in the West is universally valuable and a worthwhile investment to ensure success (Stein & de Andreotti, 2016). While this might be our perspective in the West, it is interesting that participants highlighted how schooling in China is extremely competitive with an immense amount of schoolwork, which pales in comparison to Canada's significantly easier education system. Similarly, participants in Wu and Tarc's (2021) study have also highlighted the less competitive and relaxed nature of the Canadian schooling system which will result in better chances for their future with less work and effort required from them. These student populations often come to Canada with these sentiments in mind where they will easily graduate from their secondary schools, enroll in a prestigious Western university, and secure a career working in North America and achieve the "visa student dream." Thus, there is a discrepancy in perspective in how we in the West perceive Western education in terms of high educational standards. In comparison to student participants' experiences, the data indicated that schooling was significantly more competitive in Asia, and students view us in the West as having easier or lower standards.

However, despite the ease of Canadian schooling in comparison to their experiences in China, Western education is ultimately deemed as superior and necessary. The dominance of this White system unfortunately discredits non-White educational systems and forms racial hierarchies

that silence people of colour (Gerrard et al., 2022; Knaus, 2018; Shahjahan & Edwards, 2022). Shahjahan and Edwards (2022) discussed that as Whiteness becomes engrained across the globe, racialized hierarchies are produced across various levels to secure White futures. This is demonstrated through the micro-level (students' English language development) and the meso-level (engaging with White liberal education), and the macro-level (globalization of White education e.g. global university rankings). Thus, international students will continue to invest in Western education despite the lower standards and quality of education, as this dominance has created circumstances where colonised individuals are forced to assess their intellectual worth by the standards of colonial education to achieve educational success. Whiteness will continue to control and shape the future, and international students will have no choice but to participate and reinforce this system (Knaus, 2018; Shahjahan & Edwards, 2022).

2. Neoliberalism and International Education

As mentioned prior, the increasing neoliberal agenda within public education has allowed for the marketization of international education to occur in K-12. The shift towards privatization within the public sector has pushed school boards to prioritize alternative methods of revenue, such as international education recruitment. The development of the international education movement has become increasingly shaped by the influence of neoliberalism, as the market-driven ideals and tenets within neoliberalism have increasingly infiltrated practices, policies, and objectives (Harvey, 2005; Pike, 2012). This is also cemented in policies implemented within public education across provinces in Canada, like *The School Amendment Act* of 2002, that declared an aspect of responsibility for public education funding was the “entrepreneurial activities of school districts” (Fallon & Poole, 2014, p. 303). The integration of policies like this

has only enabled school boards to act like “business entities” (p. 303) given less reliance on governments to provide funding for school boards. Less reliance also results in very little contact or pressures from the government to regulate or monitor their recruitment processes, which ultimately lead to gaps and concerns in policy and programmatic supports, increasing vulnerabilities for these youths.

Winton (2022) highlighted that international education was evidently valued by governments for far greater than their benefits, as despite claims of international education fostering diversity, inclusiveness, and cross-cultural learning, there is still no “government scholarship generous enough to enable young people from a wide range of countries and social classes to attend Canadian elementary or secondary schools” (p. 70). Instead, international education is utilized as a method to promote economic growth and job opportunities. With the tremendous economic impact international education has for school boards, many are now actively competing to recruit international students through marketing strategies and recruitment trips. This can ultimately impact staff members on associated boards, as they now “have to change how they work and think more like their counterparts in the private sector” (Winton, 2022, p. 72).

Education is no longer valued for developing students into democratic engaged citizens, but instead, focused on producing knowledge and skills that contribute to the economic productivity of the nation. As a result, this dominant neoliberal system leads to assessing students through standardization and productivity, where their value is weighed on measurable outcomes and performative criteria, rather than civic engagement (Hursh, 2000). This is apparent through the emphasis of graduation rates, standardized test scores, school performance rankings, IB and specialized programs that are promoted across school boards. Alongside this, CRT is

further reinforced through neoliberalism, as Knaus (2018) discussed how the standards of success students are measured and valued against are rooted in Whiteness that validates Western knowledge. This metric-based framework perpetuates White privilege, as it “limit[s] access to only a small few elite educated individuals, thereby structurally excluding multiple language and knowledge systems” (p. 752). International students of colour from non-White countries are being compared to educational systems rooted in Whiteness where inequities are sustained through this implementation. In this sense, policies and laws continue to protect whiteness and the dominant culture, sustaining racial hierarchies that oppress marginalized individuals. Whiteness becomes a form of capital that non-White individuals must strive for.

Furthermore, when failing to meet these standards of success, this is seen as an individual issue with little to no consideration of any other context (Ullucci & Battey, 2011). Neoliberalism has altered the conception of social risk which shifts the “emphasis from collective indemnification to individuals taking responsibility for moderating their burden of risk” (Beck, 1992, p. 164, as cited in Estellés et al., 2024, p. 1098). Through this perspective of individualism, aspects outside an individual’s personal characteristics are not factored into their struggles. Each individual is the sole determinant of their success or failure, and if one is hard working, they will achieve success. Those who face hardships are considered unmotivated and lack initiative, inherently suffering the consequences of their own choices in life (Ullucci & Battey, 2011). In Marginson et al.’s (2010) discussion, this focus on choice as “either self-determination and individual decision” (p. 75) undermines international student security as students’ are unable to have human security and economic freedom together. The current neoliberal education system promotes education as a “market game in which risk is inevitable and there are losers as well as winners” (p. 266). Educational standards and security should be guaranteed by the provider or

nation, as a level of guaranteed standards ensures that individual protections are provided, inherently enhancing choice and freedom for international students.

2.1. International Students as Monetary Value

This theme was also evident across all three of my data sets. With the pressure to seek alternative venues for funding, it comes as no surprise that international education has become a lucrative market for school boards to target with increased efforts to sell the “visa dream.” This association of international students as monetary value demonstrates an aspect of racial capitalism where White individual and institutions are able to use non-White individuals to benefit through social or economic value gain (Daniel & Shah, 2024). Previous research has highlighted the profitability of recruiting international students, as international students are often viewed and valued as “cash cows” from education systems across all levels. These students have frequently been depicted as a product or resource that provides financial gain and stability for many Western countries (Song, 2020; Stein & de Andreotti, 2016; Stein, 2017; Yao & Mwangi, 2022).

In particular, Chinese international students have long been exploited within capitalist systems. These students are torn between dual narratives of the “model minority” when seen as desirable, like when educational institutions aim to increase enrolment to meet diversity quotas, increase school rankings, or profit revenue (Gendle, 2023). However, they are also easily disposable as “yellow peril” when identified as a threat to national security or competition in the labour market (Lan et al., 2024). Furthermore, Lan et al. (2024) examined how compared to their Western peers who are often depicted as “victims” of commercialised education, Chinese international students are understood as “complicit in academic capitalism” (p. 7). Educational institutions, educators, and media often craft this narrative about Chinese international students

“inauthenticity, in contrast to the ‘genuine’ native-born students” (p. 7) which further sustains the economisation of these students. Many educators and media reports have expressed how unqualified these student populations are for Western education systems (Lan et al., 2024). These attitudes were also expressed by teacher participants in the study who questioned the recruitment and screening procedures for student recruitment, expressing that many Chinese international students were often not “good candidates” or able to meet the standards of success. Those who are able to succeed are seen as “worthy” and privileged, while those who are unsuccessful are depicted as “unworthy” and ultimately stigmatized (Melamed & Reddy, para. 9). The racialization of Chinese international students is directly linked to racial capitalism, as these dual narratives create a form of dehumanisation where individuals are being treated as a commodity (Au, 2022). The value of these students is now reduced solely to their economic and productive functionality, where the “‘yellow peril’ and ‘the model minority’ stereotype function as complementary aspects of the same form of racialization, in which economic efficiency is the basis for exclusion or assimilation” (Day, 2016, p. 7, as cited in Au, 2022, p. 199).

2.2. Disregard to Unethical Practices: Lack of Government Regulation

The increasing underpinnings of neoliberalism have also led to the lack of government regulation and support in protecting these students from exploitative international education services, seen across three major areas of concern: recruitment agencies, guardianship, and home-stay services.

2.2.1. Recruitment Agencies. Previous literature on post-secondary Chinese international students have revealed how predatory recruitment agencies can be, as students who used recruitment agencies to facilitate their applications did not often have their interests as a priority. Some even deliberately concealed critical information from their clients that resulted in

students experiencing a disconnect between their experience and what the agency communicated to them regarding the host country's expectations (Su & Harrison, 2016). This aligns with the experiences of student participants' who utilized recruitment agencies and other services, as they expressed the disconnect between the advertised support they were expected to receive from both their schools and their respective recruitment agencies, and what they actually experienced.

Research also indicates that students and parents who possess little knowledge regarding the education in the intended host country are left with very little option but to utilize international recruitment agencies to bridge this gap. Recruitment agencies can possess a major impact on their decisions to study abroad, and as seen in the study, international students will often take their advice and information as the truth (Pimpa, 2003; Su & Harrison, 2016). However, often times the advice and information provided from agencies are cited as unreliable, due to conflict of interests. Chinese international students are a "lucrative market" (Su & Harrison, 2016, p. 914) that predatory recruiters can easily influence and direct toward paths that are profit-oriented and merely benefit agents and agencies, rather than the best interests of students' (Nikula & Kivistö, 2018). There are also often inefficient monitoring processes from educational institutions on the quality and operations of these recruitment agencies. Many higher education institutions admitted that there are very few if any established monitoring procedures or guidelines for the recruitment of international students. Many have little understanding whether recruitment agencies are accurately representing their institutions, or what agencies are communicating to their international students as language and cultural differences can be a major factor for this lack of monitoring and ability to efficiently assess standards (Brabner & Galbraith, 2013; Nikula & Kivistö, 2020). These concerns and lack of understanding regarding recruitment agencies and practices are also potentially reflective on a secondary level, as only one school

board mentioned any form of monitoring on their international student brochures (York Region District School Board, n.d.).

Student participants emphasized how financially motivated recruitment agencies were, as expectations regarding the level of support and facilities advertised to them were not honoured following their payment. Participants expressed that these agencies were able to take their lack of knowledge and understanding of their rights and the Canadian education system to their full advantage and easily exploit them and their families. Support was seen as fragmented, coming with additional costs and hidden fees once students arrived in Canada, with advertised support and services not being truly delivered and an emphasis on financial profitability of international education. Previous literature on international secondary students also highlighted how many students emphasized a lack of choice in their decisions to study abroad because of the limitations and conditions they were forced to comply with from the recruitment agencies and organisations they hired (Tamtik, 2018). This was reflective in Student 1's experiences, as she also expressed that in her home country she was essentially forced to use this agency as there was limited agencies available in the city she lived at, so it was "one of the few choices I have," and as such, she felt taken advantage of due to these limitations. This lack of safety and regulation is connected to the apolitical underpinnings of neoliberalism that does not focus on social justice or rights. As stated prior, this focus on individualism has now framed children's safety and protection as an individual responsibility or behavioural issue, rather than a broader social concern. The conversation is no longer focused on the lack of government regulation in protecting these vulnerable students, but rather, how individuals are at fault for selecting recruitment agencies that were exploitative. The blame remains on the individual, rather than the system as a whole failing to protect international student populations.

2.2.2. Guardianship. Guardianship was another concern expressed by both student and teacher participants. This service was poorly regulated with contrasting experiences from the two student participants who utilized it. While one student identified numerous issues with her guardianship, another student shared more of a positive experience. This illustrates that the lack of consistency for the standard of care amongst services, as one participant utilized a recruitment agency for their guardian while the other was an independent agent. Poor guardianship experiences, especially as an international student coming to Canada during the midst of COVID-19, highlights how the drive for revenue may lead school boards to disregard ethical duties and responsibilities to quickly bridge tuition losses and retain their economic revenue (Gyamerah et al., 2022). Many teacher participants discussed how profit driven school boards are, and how taken advantage many students feel as a result. The data from the study revealed that school principals often take on the guardianship role for many of their independent international students. This calls into question the motivation and sincerity driving both parties when there is such potential for mutual financial and professional gain from this collaboration. This also raises questions regarding the role of public education and school boards, when their priority is founded on profit which can conflict with other policies, and the lack of responsibility for students' safety and support.

The student experiences in this study reveal the lack of monitoring processes and guidelines school boards possess. It is unclear what steps Student 3 had to take to have an independent agent as a guardian, and whether there were certain standards and qualifications the guardian was required to meet, or an assessment from the school to approve of her guardian. These poor guardianship experiences shared by the participant mirrored many teacher participants experiences with their students, which brings into question the legitimacy of this

service. The lack of genuine care and responsibility that these guardians possess towards their students is extremely despairing as many of these youth who come independently as minors often have little to no other adult figures to rely on, and their guardians should be another form of support for them, but instead, are often unreliable or even strangers in these youths' lives. Teacher participants highlighted that students do not feel truly safe with their guardians, aligning with literature that have explores other international student experiences where they have felt unsafe, and left to fend for themselves as minors in their host countries (Popadiuk, 2009; Xing, 2020; Xing & Zhou, 2018).

Again, the neoliberal approach in policy and practice has led to the reimagining of the student as a consumer and has immense implications for their human security. Bamberger et al. (2019) discussed how the increased monetary value of international education has fostered an environment that engages in recruitment behaviour and marketing strategies that can be seen as predatory towards international students. These students need to be viewed as more than just consumers to extend rights and protections for them beyond national borders (Marginson et al., 2010). Furthermore, the student who expressed positive experiences with her guardian that was arranged outside of recruitment agency services drew similar connection with the findings in Su and Harrison's (2016) research that demonstrates that post-secondary international students who did their own research demonstrated a higher degree of satisfaction. It is apparent that pre-arrival information is extremely relevant and significant, but again, it should not be the responsibility of the individual to conduct thorough research prior to their arrival that will determine the quality of their experiences. There needs to be consistent standards of protection implemented within international education so students experience reliable and trustworthy recruitment agencies and organisations that will provide helpful information for them.

Moreover, if there are inconsistencies within the processing of unaccompanied minors as the internal evaluation of CIS highlighted, then this means that unaccompanied minors can fall even further through the cracks as there is no adequate system to potentially process them and monitor or record their well-being. This calls attention for the government, especially CIS, to be more involved in regulating these services by outlining and receiving the necessary requirements, qualifications, and standards for individuals who want to take on the role of a guardian, and to process which unaccompanied minors are staying with which guardian to ensure they stay informed on the safety of unaccompanied minors currently studying in Canada.

2.2.3. Homestay Services. Student participants expressed dissatisfaction regarding their experiences with their host families, identifying various issues and a lack of support with their host families. Students revealed that there was no guarantee for the quality of the host family that international students are assigned with and was explicitly warned by recruitment agencies prior about the potential inconsistencies of quality with host families. This indicates that many recruitment agencies were extremely aware of the inconsistent standard of quality between host families, but clearly there was no real initiative or action involved to bridge these gaps. Based on the tone of the conversation students had with the recruitment agency, it appeared that representatives accepted the inconsistent system they had and did not indicate any steps towards improving the monitoring and regulation of this process for international students, continuing to put them at risk.

Despite these warnings from recruitment agents, students expressed that they wanted to live with host families in order to experience a sort of family while studying abroad. However, there was confusion and a lack of clarity on what the exact role host families were to serve for international students, what standard of quality and care were required from them, and what the

boundaries were. As Student 1's host was also a teacher at her school, she was informed by her principal she was not allowed to discuss any of her home experiences with others as this was dangerous to her host family, which greatly confused her. This is extremely problematic as it is a potential conflict of interest, as international students may be restricted in sharing the true nature of their home life and experiences to their peers and friends. This could be a deterrent for international students to not share their real concerns, issues, and potential circumstances of mistreatment or abuse due to fears of breaking the "rules" that were placed upon them, reinforcing what other Chinese international youth have expressed in research regarding the lack of understanding in their status as minors and fears of being sent home (Popadiuk, 2009; Lee, 2015; Wu, 2019). Both student participants expressed confusion regarding the quality of support and care that host families were deemed to provide, as neither experienced feelings of being part of a family. Student 3 was visibly upset and uncomfortable about her disappointing host family experience, and when asked if she could possibly consider changing host families she expressed how she and her parents have ultimately accepted her living situation as it is very difficult and there were no guarantees to find a better host family. She emphasized that she could not afford the risk of changing her host family as there is no option for her to check if her new host family was any better than her current circumstances.

It is apparent that international students are aware of the lack of consistency and quality standards amongst host families and have come to just accept below average support and services out of fear of the chances of receiving 'worse' treatment elsewhere. These standards are often the norm for many international students who use these services, as Student 5 expressed how surprised he was when he discovers that a student had an enjoyable host family experience. These student experiences aligned with teacher participant experiences, as they expressed how

inconsistent the quality and standards were for host family services and how concerning this was, as many international students that come independently often do not have the same form of support domestic students may typically have, like peer support or language efficiency, which makes host family support even more important for them.

These experiences illustrate how students are viewed as “subjective consumers of a service, not right-bearing education or welfare subjects” (Marginson et al., 2010, p. 83), as there is an assumption that these students as consumers will regulate the quality of international services themselves by their informed decision in selecting between the numerous providers available. However, international students often are unable to truly evaluate the service when they are overseas, and there is very little option for them to pressure providers to improve their quality of service and standards. These concerns align with the limited literature available regarding the recruitment and homestay agencies that highlight how homestay and host family programs continue to be an exploitative and unregulated system. Chinese international secondary students have expressed how they have felt deceived in the Canadian homestay system, with many students facing potentially dangerous or abusive circumstances that are often underreported or disregarded (Popadiuk, 2009; Xing, 2020).

Many of the students and their families who find housing through social media platforms, like WeChat, have shared how they have been deceived as advertised photos and living conditions often do not match the reality, leaving these students and families feeling betrayed (Xing, 2020). Many families revealed how clear conditions that were agreed upon and signed prior were not upheld once their children moved in, with children’s safety being put at risk and very little option for these students or families to take any legal action as it was too difficult for them as they lived in China and were not familiar with Canada’s legal system. Circumstances

like these draw attention to the need for homestay programs to undergo immense change and regulation, as there needs to be more requirements than just a basic criminal record check to ensure the safety of international students (Wong et al., 2010).

2.2.4. Neoliberalism Influences Unethical and Unsafe Practices. With the increased pressure for funding and lack of government regulation, it is extremely easy for international education services like recruitment agencies, guardianship, and homestay programs to engage in unethical practices and exploit vulnerable international youth. All teacher participants in this study were acutely aware that much of international student recruitment is an avenue many school boards are taking to bridge budget cuts and bring in profit for their schools. Some teachers even shared how there have been explicit pressure and direction from school meetings to recruit international students and “talks about the money” (Teacher 4). Alongside observations of the high tuition fees that these students are exposed to, teacher participants also noted that the immense money generated for their schools from international student tuition fees are not being reinvested in these students by way of much needed forms of support (Teacher 4). Clearly the monetization of international students’ recruitment results in a disconnect between the international education objectives of increasing diversity and encouraging that school boards advertise across their international student brochures and mission statements, and how school boards are actually valuing and viewing their international students, which is the monetary benefits they can bring.

Furthermore, an internal evaluation of the International Student Program was conducted in 2013 and published April 2015 by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) that outlined recommendations for CIC to “review its policies and operational guidance regarding minor students and custodianship” (p. 38). This evaluation identified “several gaps” where “evidence

suggests that there is some inconsistency in the ways in which unaccompanied minors are processed...” (p. 38) and “requirements for custodians of unaccompanied minors [...]” concerning the review of requirements of custodians to “ensure they are strong enough to protect minor students, who present a vulnerable population...” (p. 38). Despite this internal evaluation that already highlighted concerns regarding the standard of care, quality, and requirements for guardianship and processing of unaccompanied minors, it is apparent these gaps have not been addressed and concerns have been disregarded as inconsistencies continue to be rampant amongst these services ten years later.

2.2.5. Who is Responsible? Falling Through the Cracks in the System. The experiences students face brings into question who is responsible for the safety and care of these vulnerable youth. Despite intense prioritisation of international student recruitment for financial gain, school boards are demonstrating a lack of responsibility towards protecting these same student populations. In regard to homestay services, all three school boards do offer and endorse homestay organisations and partners that they collaborate with and offer further information on their websites or brochures for international students who require these services. However, the information provided is extremely limited as the majority of school boards emphasize that they do not take responsibility in arranging homestay services for international students. These school boards make it explicitly clear that homestay accommodation, arrangement, meals, and transportation are not the responsibility of the school board, and that these services need to be arranged with external organisations.

As stated prior, many experiences transpire in the “informal and private domains,” (Marginson et al., 2010, p. 76), and the lack of responsibility from school boards, alongside the little involvement governments demonstrate towards school board funding and regulation on

international student services, has implications on the human security of these students. Despite school boards providing potential external organisations that students can contact to utilize these services, the direct lack of accountability from these school boards can lead to many international Chinese students easily being deceived by third party agents or face difficulty in navigating this process with limited knowledge and insight. The homestay industry continues to be an extremely unregulated system, with several private organisations often taking the role in providing these forms of services for students (Wong et al., 2010). These issues raise questions regarding whose responsibility it is to protect these students and to ensure secure standards of service are delivered. Is it the school, the school boards, or the provincial or federal government that sets overall policy for recruitment and retainment of international students? As school boards are not taking any form of responsibility with these services, international students are exposed to vulnerabilities as there may not be an extensive process or standards and regulations placed within this service. There is also very little interest towards investing in forms of support for international students as these students are seen as monetary profit for school boards, as international education is being increasingly served as a commodity with international students viewed as consumers (Marginson et al., 2010). This is especially apparent following COVID-19 as pandemic travel restrictions lifted and schools shifting back to in-person, there were urgent pleas and appeals across Canada to recruit more host families for international students, as international student enrolment numbers have surged beginning in 2022 (Crawford, 2022; Ronson, 2022a; Ronson, 2022b; Seyd, 2022; Sturgeon, 2022; Thunder Bay News Watch, 2022).

As many international education programs “are struggling to find accommodations for incoming students” (Ronson, 2022a, para. 10), many homestay organisations are utilizing methods to appeal to individuals and garner interest in applying as a host by raising

compensation for hosts. Even Canada Homestay Network, which is TDSB's partner that is endorsed on their international student brochure for students, is cited to have lost approximately half its hosts due to the consequences of inflation and fears of COVID-19. Homestay programs and services are urgently trying to fill the gap in host families in order to meet the demand of students. The intensification of neoliberalism within the public education system ironically exacerbates the vulnerability and insecurities for international students. This could lead to more cracks in the system, as international education programs' desire to recruit more host families to increase profit and revenue could result in less formal assessment procedures and practices or oversights when evaluating host family qualifications and standards.

Thus, the current education system reinforces the marketization of education, which results in the same concerns and conditions that were identified ten years ago from CIS's internal review to continue to run rampant. School boards and other international education services continue to prioritize profit, and with increased pressure to bridge tuition losses due to the pandemic the priorities can greatly outweigh the care and safety of students. Furthermore, school boards continue to systematically distance themselves from liability by maintaining clear separation from caretaking responsibilities for international students outside of academic settings. This leaves the responsibility to care for these international youths in the hands of non-school board external organisations, such as recruitment agencies, and guardianship and homestay programs. However, research has clearly indicated that these external organisations are not truly taking responsibility and protecting these youth, and instead are exploiting them for monetary benefits (Xing, 2018; Xing, 2020). Students utilizing external services can make it even more difficult for schools and school boards to monitor their international youth and ensure their safety and well-being. As a result, many international youths are ultimately left to fend for

themselves in their new host countries, as numerous parties continue to fail them despite the fact that these school boards and services were meant to be the pillars of support in their everyday lives. These issues raise further questions regarding the responsibility of school boards and the broader short and long-term implications of neglect of this responsibility within and across their communities.

3. Two Worlds Colliding? Discrepancy in Perspectives

While some overlaps have been described above, another major theme that emerged from the data was the discrepancy in perspectives between the students and teacher participants. This suggests divergence in perspective with their two worlds almost colliding versus being in sync. These discrepancies in perspectives highlight the tensions that exist in OUR understanding of the Chinese international student experience within our school systems. Below I highlight eight different examples from my data to illustrate these divergencies in perspectives and therefore an understanding of the student experience.

3.1. Educational Quality: Is China or Canada Easy/Difficult?

Interestingly while both the school international education brochures and the teachers tout their “world-class” education standards and the overall high quality of instruction and learning, Chinese international students repeatedly mention that an overwhelming reason for their choice to study in Canada is because the school system is “easy” and more “chill” when compared to that in China. As mentioned prior, all student participants expressed how much easier the education in Canada was, where they were able to achieve high scores with very little work and how expectations in their courses were much easier than in China. This allowed students to easily meet the standard of academic success in Canada, especially in comparison to the standards from their home country.

In contrast to this perception of student participants, teacher participants had expressed the opposite. Teacher participants stated that their Chinese international secondary students struggle to meet the standards of success in their classrooms. The teachers identified language barriers as a major issue for many of their Chinese international students, which supports the limited literature that revealed English language learning is a major challenge for Chinese international secondary students in Western countries (Gan, 2009; Wu, 2019; Zheng & Beck, 2014). Teachers explained that many students struggled due to their limited English proficiency, often becoming over-reliant on translators, and resulting in just getting pushed through the system as their schools were unable to maintain space for students to repeat the same courses.

When considering the difference between student and teacher participant data, it is important to factor in the broader scope of each participant's experiences. It is also essential to acknowledge the limitations with self-reporting, as participants could potentially be providing experiences that are not complete or accurate (Alshenqeeti, 2014). For example, in this circumstance, participants may intentionally provide inaccurate responses due to what they believe the interviewer wants, the desire to project themselves in a positive light, the fear of repercussion, or lack of knowledge or insight on the subject. Additionally, while all shared experiences from participants is subjective, the student participants are providing insight on their own academic experience, while teacher participants may have many Chinese international students in their classes and can identify trends in the struggles or concerns of these student populations. Furthermore, regarding student participants it is important to take into consideration the type of students that were involved in this research study that could potentially explain the differences in academic experiences that were shared from teacher participants. For example, the students who were more comfortable in reaching out to participate in this study might embody certain

characteristics, like higher sociability levels and a willingness to talk and engage with others. All student participants did not appear to have low English proficiency, as two student participants were able to transition into mainstream classrooms following their ESL assessments, while the other three participants were enrolled in higher level ESL courses indicative of their English Proficiency capabilities. This can explain why these participants thought their classes were “easy” in comparison to an international student with less comfort in their English proficiency.

However, this differential is important to note. The contrasting difference between student and teacher participants perspectives, could suggest that teachers do not truly understand their international students, the educational systems they come from and how they perceive and experience the Canadian system. They are simply relying on the narrative of the visa dream and their assumption of the superiority of the Canadian system and in turn the inferiority of the Chinese system. Many teachers may not have the empathy or insight on the true experiences of international students, which could result in this disconnect (Bodycott et al., 2014). If there are such drastic differences between the academic perspectives, it could suggest that there could be other differences in other domains of students’ lives that teachers are not fully grasping and understanding.

3.2. Inaccurate ESL Assessments vs. No Surprises with ESL Assessments

Another discrepancy in perspective was the discussion on ESL assessments, as issue that was mentioned amongst most teacher participants was the ineffective ESL assessments. Many felt that students were not properly ranked or placed with an ESL level that was truly accurate of their knowledge and skills level. This data is not consistent with information outlined on the international education brochures, as all three school boards stated they provided effective ESL assessments that will place students in the appropriate ranking and courses depending on their

abilities, skill level, and learning goals. PDSB even highlighted their “superior” school board that possess “experts in ESL programming” (Peel District School Board, n.d., p. 3) to support students’ academic achievement. Furthermore, there is no information regarding the different ESL levels available for international students and what the school board standards and expectations students need to meet to progress successfully through them. This lack of information and clear outline of standards align with the discussions shared by teacher participants where they stated that there was no consistency with their Chinese international secondary students and their ESL levels.

However, when discussing ESL assessments, student participants had conflicting perspectives with teacher participants, as they expressed that they were aware of the mandatory ESL assessment they were required to conduct when arrive in Canada. Furthermore, all participants generally had no issues with the overall experience or ESL ranking they received on their assessments and were cooperative with the system. The difference in perspectives demonstrates a potential gap in the kind of information recruitment agents provide for international students, as it indicates inconsistency. Most of the participants in the study were aware of the ESL assessments, which could mean that these students had utilized recruitment agencies that provided accurate information for participants regarding the academic process for students. While these students were properly informed about this system, other international students may not be as fortunate, like the students that teacher participants could be interacting who did not receive proper information and were confused or unaware of the ESL assessments. These students may have been potentially exploited by agents and agencies in order to quickly generate profit through their services. With a lack of clear guidelines on what information needs to be provided for students, and very little regulation in the industry, international students are at

risk of not being informed of all the expectations required from them which could deter their interest in studying in Canada (Nikula & Kivistö, 2018).

Furthermore, the discrepancy between observations raises questions on how teachers view these student populations and how students view themselves. The perspectives of teachers regarding the lack of preparedness and low English proficiency for assessments could indicate potential generalisation or stereotyping towards these student populations. Research on a post-secondary level has revealed that Chinese international students often faced criticism from faculty members about their inability to read articles, poor oral skills, and lack of motivation (Jenkins 2000, as cited in Heng, 2018). Faculty members often had the same generalisations and opinions of these student populations, which was associating Chinese international students poor English proficiency to their culture and have little interest in acculturating with their host countries (Heng, 2018). Despite students struggle in adapting to new learning environments and Western ways of teaching and learning, many faculty members “are not always cognizant that learning environments are heavily cultured” and rather than recognize these differences, many just retreat to stereotyping these students in harmful narratives (Heng, 2017). The same attitudes in faculty members seem to be potentially reflective on a secondary level, where teachers could also be falling back to generalising the abilities of these student populations, which differs greatly with what students themselves see their capabilities and skills as.

3.3. Unengaged vs. There are Lots of Choices! Lots to Like!

Another discrepancy identified was the perceived engagement from Chinese international students. Student participants emphasized how much they enjoyed the Canadian education system compared to China due to various reasons. These reasons included increased student choice in aspects of their education like course selection, along with other factors like class sizes

and teaching styles. Students also expressed how much they enjoyed the extracurriculars and school events that were available in Canada. In contrast, teacher participants mentioned the disengagement they perceived from Chinese international students, especially in their academic classes where students were seen to be inconsistent, not engaged, and just “gave the impression they don’t care” (Teacher 5).

These discrepancies between student and teacher participants again highlight the potential lack of understanding that teachers may have towards these students’ populations. A study conducted in higher education revealed that professors regularly questioned international students’ capabilities in successfully completing course assessments and on occasion would possess a negative impression towards students with low English proficiency as they were perceived to not be well-prepared for class (Wu et al., 2015). This could be applicable in the secondary level as well, where students may not feel comfortable with their teachers to be able to share their experiences or feel like they can express themselves without judgement. Chinese international students are often characterized as opposite of their Western peers, with depictions of students being passive, obedient, and quiet despite distinct learning students emerging from the shared cultural heritage rooted in Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) (Henze & Zhu, 2012). Teachers may fall back to generalising or stereotyping these student populations in an invalidating manner, assuming they are disengaged in class, and not interested in socialising or acculturating in the school, leading to tensions between teacher and student perspectives.

These depictions are a clear example of present-day manifestation of Orientalism, which is a theory developed by Edward Said. This theory portrays Asian societies as exotic with fantasized or dehumanizing perceptions of the Orient that counterpoint to the West, which is depicted as the superior and colonial power (Leong, 2005). In this context, international students

are forced to engage in Western forms of pedagogy, reproducing skills, knowledge, and products that ultimately position the international student as the “Other” (Doherty & Singh, 2005).

Doherty and Singh (2005) discussed how the otherness of international students are “socially constructed in relation to the category of Western student” (p. 53), and often done so where they are seen through a negative and deficit lens, or a potential hazard to Western education and traditions. Alongside this, when students are unable to reach Western standards and perceived as unsuccessful in adopting Western learning styles and practices, neoliberal discourse deflects from the systemic issues that maintain social inequities. Instead, attributes the blame to the individual for their “lack of ‘investment’ in human capital” (Klees, 2020, p. 16), or other factors that are focused on individual responsibility, like a lack of commitment to school, or not studying the “correct” fields for success. This neoliberal focus on the individual does not acknowledge the significance of race and White privilege, denying how the dominant culture shapes institutional and legal systems, and how it can further contribute to colour-blindness that sustains racism and Whiteness within society and education.

3.4. International Students Stick Together vs. Domestic Students Stick Together

Both teacher and student participants discussed the difficulty in forming friendships with domestic students, however, there were discrepancies in the way these conversations were framed. While student participants discussed how forming connections with other international students was much easier in comparison with domestic students, they often described how domestic students would only stick together and connect with each another. Students have revealed the exclusion they felt and how uninterested their domestic peers were in them. Previous research about the lack of interest from domestic students about their interest in forming friendships with international students is thus reflected in this research study as well.

Many students shared how domestic students “tend to stick together” (Student 5), with common words such as “separated” often used to describe their relationship with domestic students and feeling a lack of belonging or loneliness (Wu & Zheng, 2019). Similar to previous literature, this can potentially lead to many international students feeling uncomfortable in their attempts to express or form bonds with domestic students, which often leads to Chinese international students turning to develop friendships with other international students (Cheng, 2019). In some instances, this lack of interest from domestic students can be felt as forms of discrimination, which can ultimately influence overall experience and acculturation with the host country (Wadsworth et al., 2008).

This contrasted with how teacher participants would depict international students as being the group that would only interact with one another and have no interest in interacting with domestic students. Teachers did not often frame the narrative as domestic students being closed and uninterested in forming friendships with international students, despite international student participants expressing their interest and making active attempts to engage in conversation with their domestic peers. While teacher participants also highlighted that friendships between international students and domestic students were limited with very little interaction, there was a difference with the concerns teachers had regarding Chinese international students and their lack of belonging and connection to the school and greater community. Teacher participant data often framed the dialogue on forming friendships with the idea that international secondary students tend to form friendships and interact solely with other Chinese international students. Teacher participants observed that Chinese international students often “only stick to other Chinese international students” (Teacher 1) potentially due to similar language and culture that they are comfortable and familiar with. Other teachers have also noted that Chinese international students

tend to “form a stronger bond” (Teacher 3) with each other and become a “tight knit group” that socialize with each other within and outside of school environments.

While these teacher observations align with previous literature that discuss how many Chinese international secondary students “rarely step out of the comfort zone of their Chinese friends’ circle” (Cheng, 2019, p. 10), these observations differed from the student participant experiences. The teacher understanding of Chinese international students appears to put the onus on the international student to take responsibility in actively taking leadership in interacting with domestic students and forming friendships. Very little is mentioned on how potentially hostile or uninterested domestic students may be despite international students’ efforts to interact with them, which student participants revealed was often the reason why they can only form deep bonds with other international students. These perceptions indicate the pressure for international students to integrate into the mainstream culture and how this integration is viewed as success, rather than accepting inclusivity amongst these students. Many teachers have also expressed how limited their role can be in fostering friendships between international students and domestic students, despite efforts from schools and classrooms teachers expressed that ultimately they “can’t force kids to be friends” (Teacher 1).

This is a clear gap in expectations for international students as much of the international student brochures heavily emphasize how international students will have many opportunities to be integrated and become part of the school community with Canadian students, making it feel “like a home away from home” (Peel District School Board, n.d., p. 2). Similar to the false advertisements from brochures, many student participants expressed how they were informed and held impressions that Canada was diverse and Canadians were kind, but this was not the reality. Instead, students expressed feeling like outsiders, and with teacher participants revealing

that many teachers held attitudes where students can “go back home if [they] don’t like it here.” These attitudes and biases that teachers held could easily be reflected in their interactions with Chinese international students in the classroom and the level of support, care, and understanding they foster towards their students. This could explain the discrepancies that students experienced with some teachers exhibiting empathy and kindness towards them, while other teachers did not know them or understand the challenges they potentially faced in adapting to Western thinking and learning, and sociocultural contexts.

4. The Act of Silencing – Silencing Themselves or Silenced by The System?

Throughout the discussions with student and teacher participants, it became apparent that many Chinese international secondary students were being silenced, whether it be through teacher stereotyping these student populations or students themselves rationalising stereotypes or narratives on themselves demonstrating how the model minority myth, neo-racism, and Whiteness as the dominant culture function as silencing mechanisms. In this section I will explore how silencing occurs through a reflection on teacher stereotypes and attitudes on the image of a Chinese international student and these student populations themselves come to accept their fate in silence. In turn, this reflects on how the broader system acts to silence their voices and experiences.

4.1. Teacher Attitudes Towards Chinese International Students

Data revealed that many teachers possess stereotypes and attitudes towards Chinese international secondary students, painting a particular homogenous image of these students. One image that was portrayed for Chinese international students is the stereotype that these student populations will excel in subjects like mathematics. Teacher participants have shared that many of their teacher colleagues think that because these students are from China they will have no

issue with the mathematic content, or that there is this assumption that very little English is required in this subject so there is little concern about their success in these courses as they will not struggle as much. As a result, this hinders opportunities for these students to gain the support they need, as it can lead to teachers possessing a mindset that assumes students will not need any support and can complete their schoolwork without issue. Teacher participants highlighted that in these circumstances, when teachers start to recognize that their students are not doing well in their classes, then they begin to feel concern as they realize that they have not provided any considerations or accommodations for them.

These stereotypes and image of what a Chinese international student is demonstrates how the model minority myth underpins many teachers' attitudes and works in silencing these students. Misconceptions about Chinese international students can become barriers for these students and are ultimately harmful to their success. The model minority myth suggests that Asian individuals are successful and do not endure racial hardships, associating positive attributes with the myth that have been utilized to compare minority groups and sustain White supremacy on a systematic level (Ho, 2015; Iftikar & Museus, 2018; Padgett et al., 2020). This myth has been cited as a factor for the invisibility of Asian communities, and their struggles and issues continuing to be disregarded or marginalized (Cui & Kelly, 2013).

The teacher participant experiences and perceptions demonstrate just how these model minority stereotypes placed upon Chinese international students lead to their invisibility. Data revealed that students have expressed they felt they could not reach out for help as many of their teachers has assumed they were capable and did not need any help and asking for assistance would highlight their failure or inabilities. These stereotypes also demonstrate another image that is placed upon these student populations which aligns with the model minority myth that Asian

individuals are quiet, passive and “good, law-abiding minorities who know their place within society and do not challenge their place in it” (Ho, 2015, p. 119). Teacher 5 revealed how he has experienced teachers dismissing these students, with many colleagues generalising these students as one homogenous group and expressing opinions like “They're just very quiet or very polite. They're good kids, they don't cause trouble, but they don't really do anything,” indicating a clear connection with how the model minority myth functions within teacher mindsets and perceptions. Previous research has also revealed how the model minority myth often silences these student populations, as it limits opportunities for them to access support. Many feel embarrassed or ashamed to ask for assistance, or only place pressure on themselves criticising their abilities and skill for their poor academic performance, rather than consider other factors like having equitable accommodations to support their understanding or demonstrate their learning (Museus & Kiang; Wing, 2007). This perpetuates a cycle of disregard for the struggles and hardships these students face, alongside increased risk of their safety, mental health, and overall well-being just being dismissed by teachers. This can also leave their voices unheard and invisible for potential supports from institutional bodies, including both government and educational structures (Iftikar & Museus, 2018; Liu, 2023; Wu & Nguyen, 2022).

4.2. International Students Silencing Themselves

Many international students may already struggle to communicate with their educators, and these conditions will only maintain the already reported lack of comfort and support secondary international students feel in sharing or discussing their issues or concerns with their teachers (Zheng, 2014). Furthermore, the impact an educator's attitudes and genuine care towards students is immense, as both Student 3 and Student 5 mentioned how grateful they were towards their teachers who demonstrated effort to support their needs, as they viewed these

teachers as an individual they could “look up to” and that gave “hope.” Again, this draws attention to how little teachers know their international students and how they do not often demonstrate care and support towards these student populations. As teachers expressed, engaging with professional development is necessary for teachers to develop awareness and combat these preconceived stereotypes and assumptions towards these student populations. There needs to be effort put forth to learn about these students on an individual level and make genuine connections with them as “[teachers] always talk about pedagogies being culturally relevant, and differentiation, so it’s not fair that we’re not doing that with these students” (Teacher 5).

4.3. The System Performing the Act of Silencing through Whiteness and the Dominant Culture as Norm

Through their discussions, teacher participants revealed a notion of the “right” or “good” international student that would succeed in the Canadian education system in contrast to the “unsuccessful” students. For teachers, those who were able to integrate socially with domestic students were portrayed as “successful”, while students who would only interact with the same social group or other international students were seen as a concern and unable to adapt. Students who are deemed as “successful” in social integration as teacher participants described might be students who have higher levels of English proficiency than domestic peers, especially White peers, have considered acceptable and align with Western culture and values. This could potentially suggest how many teachers hold the belief that international students need to conform to the Western standards and culture, rather than having teachers accommodate to their learning needs. These experiences highlight how the definition of success and knowledge have become engrained with a framework that sustains bias towards White ways of learning and thinking

(Knaus, 2018). This is very contrary to what is voiced within EDI initiatives, and there is clear tension between teachers and students. Teachers may not truly be understanding their international students and instead, are framing international student experiences within their own implicit biases and standards of success.

Tavares (2021) mentions that despite educational institutions values, aims, and missions emphasising the goal of inclusivity and valuing diversity, minority groups continue to be commonly situated as the other and with the aim to “integrate them into the ‘dominant’ community, rather than expressing a commitment to the ‘transformation of us all’” (McNeal, 2012, p. 138 as cited in Tavares, 2021, p. 3). Language that is often used in these EDI statements also portray marginalized groups as being “welcomed” into the school communities, which can be problematic as they are immediately being categorised as the other. Again, the emphasis on success seems to correlate with their English proficiency and how they have adapted to Western standards. It has been cited that international students from non-European and Western countries with lower fluency in English are seen to struggle more and receive less social support (Cheng, 2019; Jackson et al., 2013; Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

All three school boards advocate for the diverse experiences they can offer for students on their international education brochures and EDI policies. Many of these school boards emphasize terms like *diversity* and *inclusivity* making claims like “diversity is celebrated and international students become part of the cultural fabric of our schools” (Peel District School Board, n.d., p. 2), which affirms and further demonstrates how these student populations are portrayed within a pre-determined category of the other and are welcomed and integrated into the dominant community. Participant findings also reveal how surface level EDI statements from school boards truly are, as they often associate diversity with the number of students of colour or

international students enrolled, rather than genuine institutional change that considers international students' circumstances across school boards.

Tavares (2021) discussed the limitation of internationalization within Canadian post-secondary curriculum, as post-secondary international student participants in the study ultimately identified how instructors possessed certain assumptions of their classes despite the high enrolment of international students. Rather, educators frame and teach the curriculum with the “native-speaker-of-English student in mind” (p. 11), making these students the “ideal” students’ content and instruction are designed for, resulting in non-English native speakers being disadvantaged in classroom activities and engagement.

In addition, many educators and those in leadership positions do not recognize how content and teaching practices are inherently Western and prioritize the native speaker, and that Chinese international students do struggle immensely in courses, mathematics included. Many of the forms of assessment privileges domestic students who have acquired Western knowledge structures and English as a first language that allow them to understand specific terminology that will help them succeed. This is especially apparent for students enrolled in grade 9 mathematics which has become a destreamed course implemented along with other subjects like English, Science, Geography. Destreaming was officially mandated across all public secondary schools in Ontario in 2023, meaning students are no longer separated into academic and applied streams (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2020).

With these destreamed courses, there are new expectations, instructions, and forms of assessment being implemented where academic success aligns with the Western view of student success. For example, in mathematics students will now be increasingly assessed based on activities such as surveys, student reflections, and observations and conferencing (Ontario

Ministry of Education, 2020). These forms of assessment all involve greater English capabilities and Western knowledge that many international students may not be familiar with. Again, with the underpinnings of neoliberalism and the focus of individualism, students who may not be familiar with these forms of knowledge may struggle in their classes despite destreaming being viewed as a more equitable and ethical solution. This lack of consideration to other contexts, like bias in Western knowledge and Whiteness, can lead to educators viewing these students as “disengaged or unintelligent” (Tavares, 2021, p. 12). As teacher participants stated, international students may give the impression that they do not care, when in reality they are just unfamiliar with or do not understand the content.

This calls attention to the potential limited awareness of how the dominant culture can inform our understanding and attitudes toward international students, as we often associate Western culture and values as the norm. Genuine institutional change cannot take place if EDI fails “to recognise issues of power and privilege beyond rhetoric” (Tavares, 2021, p. 3). As stated prior, Whiteness has become entrenched across the globe, with racialized hierarchies produced across various levels to ensure the success of White futures. Colonialism has sustained hierarchies and systems of power that continually reinforces the colonizers’ authority and control, and that education “has perpetuated the continuation of the hierarchy between Western superiority and dependency of the colonized in relation to epistemology, subjectivity, culture, and economy” (Lin, 2023, p. 42, as cited in Rhee, 2009, p. 57). International students also have racialized histories and are impacted by colonialism as international education services often maintain western hegemony by privileging western education and English as the global language, and subjecting non-Western students as inferior and reinforces White superiority.

Though international students can be impacted by issues that other domestic marginalized students experience, EDI also needs to recognize the unique issues of discrimination that are founded on their “othered institutional status” (Tavares, 2021, p. 3). Very little of the international student experience and concerns are recognized within EDI policies, practices, and values on school boards or teacher professional development programming. While all school boards recognized the importance of indigenous education and black excellence, only one school board drew attention to English Language Learners and their unique challenges and struggles within the classroom. However, all three school boards did not acknowledge or identify international students as marginalized students or even drew attention to the struggles and issues they potentially faced within the education system despite being the three largest school boards in the GTA with high international student enrolment numbers. This disregard in international student considerations continues the cycle of oppression and continues to silence the students through teachers, teaching practices, and educational policies. This possesses immeasurable impact on international students and their ability to achieve a sense of belonging, feel comfortable to communicate to educators, administration, and staff members for support, and can lead to isolation and loneliness during their studies abroad (Hiraldo, 2010; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Yao et al., 2018).

4.4. Acceptance in Silence: Voiceless and Invisible

As a result, students begin to accept their circumstances in silence due to feeling voiceless and invisible within the education system. The collective impact of the model minority myth, the dominant culture, and the lack of understanding towards international students concerns and circumstances can ultimately silence these students and further amplify their “sense of being powerless” (Lee, 2007, p. 267). This impacts students in a detrimental way, as students

can perceive their environment as unwelcoming and this impact their security and shape the ability to act within private domain (Marginson et al., 2010). Furthermore, when attempting to speak out against these behaviours, students stated that their experiences were not only invalidated, but they were also emotionally manipulated to question their own experiences. People within their social circle would inform them to “lighten up, laugh and stop being sensitive,” (Ryu, 2020, para. 18) with these incidents being mocked and being told that these behaviours were “less serious, and therefore more acceptable” (para. 13). This could potentially explain why Student 4 was hesitant to share his experience with racism from his teacher during middle school. When the student did share, he followed up by stating he did not know if he was “being too sensitive” despite this experience clearly resonating with him. The student was minimizing his own experiences, inherently reinforcing the model minority myth and his own internalization of bias.

The term gaslighting can be defined as the act of manipulating an individual to question their own sanity and is often utilized against victims of microaggressions “so that perpetrators can gain power and control” (Martin, 2018, p. 104). Experiencing microaggressions and the gaslighting, denial, and invalidation of these experiences that often follow can lead to racial battle fatigue (RBF), which is the cumulative psychological and emotional impact of coping and fighting daily microaggressions and racist abuse (Martin, 2018). This not only leads to negative consequences on the health and well-being of racially marginalized populations, but also sustains inequities within school environments, communities, and curriculum. Dominant discourses and White supremacy can be perpetuated in these conditions, and “students possessing counternarratives may be marginalized” (Martin, 2018, p. 104), hindering academic

performance, sense of belonging, and leading to higher rates of dropping out for these student populations.

Furthermore, many encounters of racial microaggressions from an individual's friends or peers from their personal social circles, or acquaintances in their greater community can lead to victims making excuses for them by "rationalizing away their biases and by denying their own racial reality" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 78). This was apparent in Student 5's shared experience, as he initially claimed that he did not experience any direct racism, but later revealed that peers at his school did engage in 'jokes' that negatively associated China with the virus. As Student 5 continued to share these experiences, he ultimately disclosed that he was not completely unaffected by these comments and would experience feelings of frustration. However, he rationalised these circumstances by explaining that these 'jokes' were from other domestic students who were Chinese and had parents that immigrated from China, so it remained relatively wholesome and that they also engage in similar jokes about America and Europe.

By referring to these as 'jokes,' Student 5 is minimizing the severity of these statements, especially in circumstances where the perpetrator is a friend or peer, the victims of microaggressions do not want to be judged as unable to handle jokes (França et al., 2022). Though he and his domestic peers share similar cultural identities that can potentially change the tone and attitude of this discourse, it is still important to note that these students are drawing a distinct line of difference between their national identities. As a result, this interaction can actually be a portrayal of neo-racism, as these students are making it clear they are not associating with China and drawing a 'us versus them' narrative in their jokes regarding the pandemic.

These interactions also highlight a racial hierarchy, as despite Chinese domestic students and Chinese international students sharing similar cultural identities, the domestic students ultimately identify their nationality with Canada. As a result, there is a difference of value and worth assigned to their identity and making jokes or negative statements about China can have more impact for a Chinese international student with strong roots to their home country than a Chinese domestic student who identifies as Canadian. As the domestic students are drawing a distinction between their culture and their nationality, they are unconsciously or consciously presenting a hierarchy where they think that their country or the dominant Western culture is superior or greater (Long, 2022). In addition, Student 5 further minimized his experiences with microaggressions by comparing them to his friends' experiences with racism and discrimination at his previous school, which made him consider his experiences not as severe as the bullying and racism they faced. These sentiments highlight how invisibility of Asian individuals' experiences with racism are maintained, as many Asian populations may feel displaced or invalidated in race dialogues and histories (Sue et al., 2007).

Hsieh (2007) discussed how invisibility is “often caused by social structures that make individuals voiceless and invisible” (as cited in Garth, 1994, p. 379). Similar to the experiences of Chinese international students on a secondary level, identities are formed through interactions and experiences, and in Western societies, marginalized students are often assessed and compared to the dominant standards and norms. Sue et al. (2007) discussed how racial issues are often presented as a dichotomy, and as a result, these subtle forms of racism can be overshadowed by other minority groups racial experiences that are more blatant and overt. Individuals can also unconsciously perpetuate Western attitudes of White supremacy towards minority groups, inflicting long-term consequences on the physical and psychological well-

being, identity, and overall quality of life (DeCoster & Thompson, 2017; França et al., 2022; Houshmand et al., 2014; Nadal et al., 2015; Sue et al., 2007). These students are only seen as successful if they can integrate with the dominant White-system, and when they fail to do so, they may be associated with negative constructed identities (Yeh & Drost, 2002, as cited in Hsieh, 2007). This can also explain why some teachers possess attitudes and biases that these student populations are disengaged or do not care, without considering the fact that international students are being held to Western dominant standards and being actively disempowered in their educational spaces.

5. The Irony of Equality and Equity

The issue of equality and equity was another theme that emerged within the data, as teacher participants revealed that many teachers are “still stuck on this idea that everybody has to do the same thing and hand in the same product, or else it is unfair” (Teacher 1). As such, this is often cited as a primary reason for teachers and their lack of willingness to provide accommodations for their Chinese international secondary school students. Many teachers had the mindset that a teacher should have standardized expectations from every student or else this would result in being unfair to other students. This issue of equality has been an ongoing prevalent issue for teachers, resulting in some teachers feeling, that trying to support and accommodate Chinese international students felt as though it “was a bad thing or something” (Teacher 4). Teachers who were willing to make change and accommodate the specific needs of international students often met with argumentative opposition or refusal. They expressed that their school is hindered by a “fixed mindset” that results in many teachers lacking understanding and empathy towards international student populations. Teachers expressed how difficult it was to try to implement positive change and support for their students, as they often faced hostile

questioning when they try to implement new forms of support for their students, indicating how many teachers refuse and are not interested in change. This is indeed problematic and reveals many concerning issues.

5.1. Diversity and Multiculturalism Only a Trump Card?

Teacher participants revealed that many teachers often compare their Chinese international students to the standards they evaluate their domestic students, ultimately comparing non-Western international students to their domestic students who are already often equipped with the basic skills to succeed in their classes as they have developed contextual knowledge and are experienced with the dominant Western standard and culture of teaching and learning. Teacher participants shared that teachers in their school hold the belief that studying abroad in Canada was a *choice* for these students. As such, these student populations should be held to the same academic standards and expectations as any other domestic student and work hard to meet them, and “if you don’t know the language well, then I guess you will have to work 100 times harder than everybody else” (Teacher 1).

These sentiments illustrate a clear superiority towards Western norms and standards, where many teachers possess attitudes that international students need to adapt and change to the dominant culture. Like Tavares (2021) suggests, rather than having teachers accommodate to their academic needs and understand the learning adjustment students will face, these student populations remain situated as “the other” and compared with the standards their domestic peers receive. This brings into question the effectiveness of EDI policy as it is not being applied for international students. These policies are associating internationalization with the increased enrolment of students, but higher number of international students is not equivalent to increased understanding of diversity and inclusivity, or a better experience for international (Tavares,

2021). EDI policies and curriculum continue to disregard international student populations and disadvantage them as they are not being recognized as a marginalized group in comparison to their domestic peers. Despite the emphasis and commitment towards EDI, international students continue to be excluded and othered within their school communities, and conversations need to occur as curriculum and teaching practices, strategies, and policies perpetuate a cycle that disadvantages these students by benefitting Western knowledge and experiences (Tavares, 2021).

Thus, terms like diversity and multiculturalism appear to be merely used as a method to market the Canadian experience internationally, with the Government of Canada actively provides resources for international students to review. EDI is used as a for-profit strategy as these resources advertise multiculturalism and acceptance in Canada, with a list of the “top reasons to study in Canada” created by EduCanada, with one of the principal reasons promoted is that Canada will “Welcome you with open arms,” and that “We’re proud to say that the ‘warm and friendly’ stereotype about Canadians is true [...] You’ll find a welcoming country with a unique Canadian culture that embraces diversity” (EduCanada, 2019). The Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) has similarly embraced this multicultural and welcoming imagery as CBIE, advertising aspects like their “global mindedness” to demonstrate to international audiences that they connect with diverse cultures and that they value equity, diversity, and inclusion within their programs and policies (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2020). All three school boards use these terms to enhance the international student experience, with educators are portrayed as dedicated, devoted, and passionate in creating safe, supportive, and positive learning environments for all their students, whether it be domestic or international. Brochures advertise that there are school services dedicated for international students, catering to their academic and social needs, equipped with guidance counsellors,

translators, and excellent ESL programming that will support their academic success and integration and adjustment to life in Canada (Peel District School Board, n.d.; Toronto District School Board, n.d.b; York Region District School, n.d.).

However, despite claims of multicultural education being applied within school systems in Canada, James (2001) examined opposing arguments of this educational approach, and how it manages to essentially deliver the opposite of the objectives and interests it aims to accomplish. Instead, the full effects of multicultural education have not been experienced, as James (2001) highlights how other influences, like low academic expectations from educators, ultimately leads to international or minority student populations being academically streamed into respective low-level programs, leading to isolation and higher drop-out rates. With this reality, multicultural and diverse education does not equate to any guarantee of achieving equality within the Canadian education system or academic opportunities. Rather, there is often an absence of interaction between cultural and ethnic groups, that produces “ignorance that in turn reinforces prejudice, ethnocentrism, racism and xenophobia among members of society” (James, 2001, p. 175). Diversity and multiculturalism has become appropriated within public education’s EDI policies and dialogue and continues to disregard international students. This results in these students becoming “isolated as well as isolating individuals who must compete, rather than collaborate, with local students (and other international students)” (Tavares, 2021, p. 14). While researchers like James (2001) have critiqued issues of multiculturalism when it comes to local student populations, there is room to understand how this critique impacts international students.

Despite the provincial government of Canada’s focus on advertising multiculturalism and implementing EDI in recent years that aim to develop equity in classrooms in order to increase student achievement, reduce the academic gap between groups of students, improve the

confidence and trust in public funded education, and take action against racism and discrimination (Campbell, 2021; Government of British Columbia, 2023; Government of Ontario, 2017), the realities suggest unequal experiences for Chinese international secondary students within our the classrooms. Many teachers are strongly opposed to the notion of providing any accommodations for their international students on the basis that it was not “fair”, especially in comparison to the domestic students who were not provided these similar privileges or accommodations. This brings into the question whether public education truly values difference, or ultimately prefers standardization as data revealed that many teachers often possess the belief that every student is required to engage in the same tasks and activities, and to hand in the same assignments and assessments or else it would be considered “unfair.” Some teachers even stated that these student populations “chose to come here,” (Teacher 1) using these sentiments as a rationale to push the agenda that international students need to adapt and conform to the Western standards in order to succeed.

5.2. Teachers Fixed Mindsets

CRT calls attention to the difference between equality and equity, as equal opportunity and effort is not truly equal unless it takes into consideration the varying systemic and social inequities of all stakeholders. Teacher mindsets and attitudes highlight the ways that Whiteness and the dominant culture can function “in invisible ways [that] correlate with normalcy” (Shah, 2018, p. 28), as despite potential efforts schools might put forth in concepts like achieving equality or celebrating diversity, many of these teachers and administration may not recognize or are aware of how their White privilege or preference for the dominant culture can inform their leadership (Shah, 2018). Concepts like achieving equality only result in the masking of genuine issues or unconcealed forms of discrimination that many students face, as it allows individuals to

disregard policies and standards that sustain a cycle of social inequality (Hiraldo, 2010; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Thus, what many of these teachers are engaging in is not equal opportunity for their students but are instead setting many of their international students up for failure. These teachers are unconsciously punishing international students for issues that are out of their control, like their language development, as they are not considering their unique circumstances or putting an effort to understand their diverse backgrounds. As Teacher 1 shared that every time they review the “failure list” it was always the same three category of students, which consist of students in special education, students that are struggling with mental health issues, and the international ELL students. A main factor for this success gap is the fact that many of these teachers just have a lack of willingness to accommodate and allow students to learn in the way they need to learn and demonstrate their learning in the way they need to demonstrate it.

Both student and teacher data from the study demonstrate the inconsistent levels of support that are provided from teachers for Chinese international secondary school students. While some student and teacher participants highlighted the great efforts some teachers displayed towards supporting these student populations, other participants recalled a lack of consistent support and issues that stemmed from teacher mindsets and attitudes that led to inequitable outcomes for students. Despite numerous professional development opportunities and helpful and beneficial resources available, if teacher mindsets do not change there is ultimately very little that can be implemented to achieve true accommodation and support for these students. The stereotypes and attitudes teachers may possess towards Chinese international secondary students also shape the level of accommodations and support they receive in their classes. It is important to also note, that while most teacher participants in my study identified as East-Asian, many of these teacher participants actually possessed problematic attitudes towards these student populations, such as

teachers expressing their standards of what a “perfect example of what a visa student should aspire to be” (Teacher 1), highlighting how these students were outgoing and integrated well with domestic students, showcasing the bias they unconsciously possess associating their idea of success with the dominant standards and culture, and how that could ultimately shape their interactions with these student populations.

These issues discussed highlight how essential it is that teachers and administration recognize their implicit biases and to actively engage in critical conversations that require educators to identify the specific biases and stereotypical mindsets they possess for genuine change (Chiu et al., 2022; Gorski, 2017). A potential obstacle for teacher and administration to engage in genuine and critical reflective conversations about race is “the misunderstanding of terms [as] [f]ew people would overtly describe themselves as racist” (Chiu et al., 2022, p. 7-8; DiAngelo, 2018). As a result, many individuals may not even be aware of the implicit biases and associations they possess and unconsciously engage with on a daily basis that can greatly impact teacher decision-making and contribute to a cycle of academic and social disparities between student populations (Chiu et al., 2022). However, much of the discourse surrounding implicit bias in educational contexts is often framed within White and Black student biases (Chin et al., 2020; Chiu et al., 2022; Marcucci, 2020; Quinn & Desruisseaux., 2022; Scott, 2021; Starck et al., 2020; Whitford & Emerson, 2018), with very little discussion focused on Asian domestic student populations (Chang & Demyan, 2007; Godsil et al., 2014; Hartlep, 2015) and even less to none on the topic of international student populations. With many race dialogues and histories often neglecting Asian populations within this discussion, this could be a potential factor for the drastic inconsistency demonstrated by teachers in their lack of support for their Chinese international students.

Vaught and Castagno (2008) revealed that many White teachers did not recognize their power and privilege and put them on the defensive when discussing issues of racism and racial bias. However, there is very little research focused on unpacking how teachers of color could also be perpetuating stereotypes towards students of colour and their racial biases. As mentioned prior, several teacher participants in my study were East-Asian, but still held stereotypical views or unconscious biases of Chinese international students. Much of the literature on teachers of colour concentrate on experiences with racism focuses on their struggle for racial justice, internalized racism, or experiences with structural racism (Kohli, 2014; Kohli & Pizzaro, 2016; Vaught & Castagno, 2008). It is important to ensure that teachers of colour are also encouraged to reflect on their own unconscious attitudes towards racialized students and engage in professional development that dismantles their own implicit biases that are founded on the dominant culture.

5.3. Importance of Teacher Representation

Data also demonstrated how significant it was to have teachers that reflect the diverse cultures and backgrounds of the students within school communities, as racial representation has a major impact on the success of students and their sense of belonging, especially for students who identify racially or culturally with these teachers (Dee, 2004; Keane et al., 2022; Gershenson et al., 2021; Lindsay, 2019; Sleeter et al., 2014; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). In Redding's (2019) review of the impact of student-teacher racial and ethnic matching on marginalized student outcomes, data does suggest improved academic outcomes for students. In particular, Black students experienced improved achievement when assigned to a Black teacher, revealing that a shared cultural understanding between teachers and students, or the level of student responsiveness towards having a teacher of the same race does improve student outcomes.

Redding (2019) also discussed how Black teachers can play an essential part in fostering a culturally relevant space for Black students to flourish.

While there is little literature that examined the impact of matching student-teacher racial and ethnic background for international students, the data in the study aligned with the impact Redding (2019) identified in their review of student-teacher racial and ethnic matching. Student participants shared how supported and excited they felt when they experienced teachers who showcased genuine understanding towards them. They also had teachers who could speak numerous languages and would utilize these skills to communicate with their Chinese international students. Finn et al. (2020) highlights how language competence can be one of the biggest challenges for a culturally diverse classroom, with many non-English speaking international students often underperforming academically. Data has shown increased academic scores for students that have teachers who reflect the racial and ethnic backgrounds of their students, and also have experiences teaching or studying abroad to better understand the circumstances of these students. Furthermore, teachers who possess the language competency to better communicate with them have also improved student outcomes (Finn et al., 2020). Chinese international students were able to better understand the content and feel comfortable and safe with their teacher to express their feelings and concerns.

Teacher diversity can also play an important role for EDI, as Tavares (2021) discussed how intercultural experiences are often acknowledged and celebrated, but one is never rewarded for it. Instead, international students continue to be punished for failing to integrate successfully in the dominant community. It is significant to have teachers who do not push a bias and attitude aimed to integrate international students “into the ‘dominant community’” (Tavares, 2021, p. 3), but to modify and accommodate to their students’ academic needs. This is particularly important

for teachers of colour to consider, as mentioned prior, as they also need to engage in reflection on dismantling any implicit biases they have founded on the dominant Western culture. As one student shared how impactful his experience with his teacher was, who not only taught the lesson in English, but provided individualized support for his international students, reviewing the lesson and content to them in their native language to better support their understanding. The teacher took into consideration the differences they may experience during their adjustment to their host country and disrupted the hierarchy of Western culture and language that is prevalent within the public education system.

6. Impact of COVID-19

All student participants agreed that COVID-19 had a detrimental impact on their overall experiences as international students in Canada, as not only were their academic experiences impacted, but many social aspects were drastically impacted. As classes shifted to online platforms, this impacted opportunities for international students to connect with teachers and other students, making it difficult to form friendships with their peers. While this was true of all students, this was especially difficult for international students for whom school was often the only social connection, and for whom the only space to form friendship. Removing this social connection only amplified their loneliness and made them feel isolated. COVID-19 resulted in exposing additional cracks in the system, namely creating further divergence between the experiences of international students from their domestic counterparts, raising questions about any recognition and/or empathy towards their unique circumstances. COVID-19 increased the invisibility of international students on one hand while at the same time exposing them to blatant experiences with racism and discrimination.

6.1. Difficulties Navigating Online

Student participants all expressed how difficult it was to navigate schooling during these unprecedented times. The shift to virtual learning was extremely difficult for international students as school was a major social connection and the pandemic limitations drastically changed their lives. It became increasingly difficult to have opportunities to form new and lasting friendships with peers or even connect with teachers or other staff members. It also had implications on their social and language development, as the lack of communication in these spaces resulted in less practice with the English language which led to an increase in their fear and anxiety of speaking in English.

The shift to online spaces had implications for Chinese international students' social development and connections, as online learning for students during the pandemic did not replace "the complex, relationship-oriented learning and social environment in schools" (Parker, 2021, para. 5). School is an opportunity for students to emotionally connect with peers, and peer influence can play a major factor in student engagement and academic achievement. Research revealed that emotional support from peer relationships and interactions can greatly impact young people and motivate them to attend school and support their overall well-being (Bradley et al., 2021; Darensbourg & Blake, 2014; Gristy, 2011). Disengaged youth may also face barriers in forming meaningful connections within school and are more at risk for developing behavioural issues that will impede with their success (Wang et al., 2018; Wang & Fredricks, 2014).

While there are some students who excel in online settings, literature indicated that for the majority of students, the transition to virtual schooling has negatively impacted their engagement, and that virtual environments did not sustain the same quality of motivation and commitment in comparison to their in-person learning spaces (Dangerfield, 2021; Hall & Batty,

2020; Parker, 2021; Perets et al., 2020; Richards, 2020; Wong, 2021). Research indicated that online schooling environments can possess potential consequences on students' mental health, with greater feelings of social isolation experienced from students in comparison to in-person (Asanov et al., 2021; Parker, 2021). As Student 1 explained, for many students who may not have a lot of connections outside of school settings, like international student populations, or even other youth who may be facing domestic issues or experience loneliness at home, virtual schooling was a barrier to their well-being and success (Leong, 2022). Additionally, students were cited to not only have little to no engagement with their peers, but individual conversations with teacher have also drastically decreased during this time. There is evidence that demonstrates the significance of student-teacher relationships, and how it can shape students' social-behavioural development, in addition to students' educational beliefs and aspirations (Ansari et al., 2020; Clem et al., 2020; Heatly & Votruba-Drzal, 2017; McFarland et al., 2016). During the pandemic in particular, having positive student-teacher relationships can result in students being more likely to be engaged in their online classes and have fewer mental health difficulties (Ye et al., 2021).

However, the limited opportunity to form teacher and student connections in these virtual spaces could lead to a lack of comfort or trust developed from students to share their concerns with their teachers, and in turn, teachers may not be actively checking in on their learning as they navigate through their own stresses and obstacles with adapting to virtual teaching (Leong, 2022). This aligned with the data presented, as many students mentioned how difficult it was to communicate with their teachers during the shift to virtual, with Student 5 highlighting that, "teachers didn't really try to talk to us too much." Teacher participants also mentioned this lack of student-teacher connection, as they highlighted the ways some teachers were putting forth

very little effort to get to know their students and their circumstances. Again, school boards did not consider or completely disregarded the potential barriers that their Chinese international students were facing, especially those who were forced to conduct their schooling across the globe in China, ultimately impacting their students' achievement outcomes and the support they received. This reflects the invisibility of not only Chinese international students, but all international students, and their absence in policy considerations. It was apparent that during this time, most decisions were conducted with the aim to ensure that *domestic* students would be well supported and able to transition from in person to online learning, with little to no consideration of the barriers and challenges international students would face in these learning spaces.

Furthermore, students and teacher expressed that during COVID-19, many students were just being passed through the system. Students explicitly stated that even if they were achieving high marks during this time, they did not feel they genuinely learned the content and were concerned of their success in later grades as they felt they had not developed the necessary content to succeed. This contrasts greatly with Canada's world class education system that school boards advertise, where high-quality educators and rigorous academic courses are being utilized as a way to attract international students. In reality, students were not receiving what they considered a quality education, rather, it was much easier to pass courses and graduate as the standard for success was so much lower.

6.2. The Difference Between the Experiences of International and Domestic Students

A gap that emerged within teacher data was the lack of consideration towards international student circumstances during the pandemic, as their experiences were not consistent with domestic student experiences. Teacher participants revealed that many of these students were "stuck overseas" and were forced to adapt to Canadian schooling time when the shift to

virtual was just starting. Teacher 1 expressed concern for their mental health and development during this time, as students that were studying in China were not able to see their own families as they were forced to adapt to the school's schedule which was opposite of the time zone in China. While school systems did eventually shift to allow asynchronous, during this period where Chinese international secondary school students were following this schedule many students were not doing well. During this time, Teacher 1 expressed how many students "disappeared" and some they were unable to find or track for weeks. Furthermore, to Teacher 1's understanding, some students wanted to withdraw from their schooling "but the board would not refund their tuition [...] they were expected to continue remote learning wherever they were from" highlighting what school boards prioritized during this time, and the lack of organisation school boards possessed in formulating a lasting and effective plan for these students during these challenging times.

Overall, there was a lack of consideration from teachers towards these student populations, as mentioned prior where teachers did not understand the circumstances that these students were facing. These student experiences align with recent literature that highlight how the pandemic have put international students in a more isolated position, as the specific needs of international students are further neglected within their host countries during this time with the increased inaccessibility of public resources and support from governments and educational institutions, an option for safe return home, struggles with the medical system, and continued language or cultural barriers (Chen et al., 2020; Crawford et al., 2020; Nguyen & Balakrishnan, 2020). As Tavares (2021) explained, the increased enrolment of international students does not equate to increased inclusivity, understanding of diversity or consideration towards these student populations as they "remain systematically excluded from their academic communities" (p. 12)

and their circumstances and experiences are not considered within EDI initiatives. There needed to be more opportunities for students to interact in their virtual learning spaces, but there was very little consideration and care put towards international students' mental health and development during this transition (Lorenzo, 2008; Paudel, 2021) raising questions about any recognition and/or empathy towards their unique circumstances.

It was apparent that the shift of online spaces was made with very little consideration taken towards the needs and concerns of international students. These student populations, who may be newer to the country, faced a particularly straining experience for their cross-cultural adjustment. Many social opportunities like orientations and school clubs which were essential in allowing new international students to meet each other, have interactions with domestic students, and access resources and support systems, were no longer available for them. This made it extremely difficult for students to establish socio-emotional networks that were essential in helping them feel more connected culturally with their host country (Mobous et al., 2022; Shu et al., 2020). While in-person activities were limited, there could have been opportunities to create extra-curricular activities online for students, but research indicated that there was very little effort put towards this. People for Education's 2020/21 Annual Ontario School Survey revealed that "the vast majority of schools offered no clubs or extracurriculars at all – compared to more than 90% of schools last year. The fundraising that makes these broader opportunities possible also dropped by more than half" (People for Education, 2021, para. 2).

Many international students were also wrestling with other challenges alongside this, such as an increased feeling of homesickness and anxiety due to travel restrictions that prohibited them from returning home to their families, which could be reinforced by students' isolated environments (Mobous et al., 2022; Shu et al., 2020). None of these concerns were considered by

school boards during the shift to online learning, as guidance counsellors or any resources schools provided only focused on academic concerns, like course selection rather than mental health concerns.

6.3. Increased Invisibility

COVID-19 led to the increased invisibility of Chinese international students, as many felt overwhelmed by the transition to virtual and lagged further behind. It was also difficult to put a face to a student's name as there was no method to enforce camera use due to privacy issues, resulting in the majority of students not turning their cameras on in class. As such, many students 'disappeared' during this time, which are those who are logged in but are unresponsive or missing from class altogether with teachers having a difficult time tracking since there was barely any opportunity to form genuine relationships with students during this time (Richards, 2020; Wong, 2021). A student noted that it is "a lot harder for your ideas to be heard" (Wong, 2021, para. 3) despite actively attempting to participate or engage in their online classes, and that resources and support structures are not sustained in these virtual learning environments. There are many differences that can accumulate and make it more difficult for them to gain the support they need. For example, one student noted that during in-person class they can simply ask questions to their teachers, and "don't have to wait for him to see that my hand is raised virtually [...] If I have questions about the assignment, I don't have to email him. I can just ask him in person" (Wong, 2021, para. 4). Students also spoke about the lack of support from teachers, as their communication and interactions with teachers or guidance counsel services were often conducted by emails, and written in the English language, which could make it more difficult to fully express their needs or issues and hinder their access to help. Teachers have already expressed concern regarding how this shift online will impede their ability to "tailor learning and

to support their students with the full range of strategies” (Parker, 2021, para. 11) that would be available and delivered in physical classrooms, alongside consistent observation and monitoring to maintain student focus and attention (Sokal et al., 2020).

6.4. Blatant Anti-Asian Racism

Many student participants mentioned that COVID-19 potentially increased some aspects of racism in their lives, such as frequent racist online experiences when one student played video games, where he would receive comments like “Thank you Chinese virus” or “Thanks for giving us the virus” (Student 4) when players would discover he was a Chinese international student. Other students would experience comments or ‘jokes’ about COVID-19 where they stated “it’s all Chinese people fault” (Student 5) or increased geo-political tensions where students would feel hostility from teachers where they said “bad words about China” (Student 2) or received less support. However, more importantly they also stated that there were ultimately not many drastic changes with their daily interactions with racism, as discriminatory attitudes and microaggressions remain consistent prior and following the pandemic.

This highlights the long-standing vulnerabilities that Chinese international student populations experience, as racist experiences, issues, and concerns of these students were often overlooked or invisible prior to the COVID-19. The emergence of the pandemic only finally brought some attention to the circumstances these populations face because of the increase of blatant anti-Asian hate and violence. The study revealed how efforts, initiatives, and changes need to be implemented within educational institutions to ensure that support is provided for students from all minority groups, and that international students are not disregarded within EDI initiatives. As Student 2 revealed, some teachers potentially possess neo-racist sentiments that highlight the geo-political tensions between China and Canada which has a tremendous impact

on shaping the attitudes and behaviours of other students, staff members, and the overall climate of the school community. This is especially important in schools where students of colour may not feel reflected in their student bodies and faculty, where greater efforts need to be implemented to spread awareness and combat any forms of hate, racism, and discrimination for all students.

7. Geo-Political Tensions

Geo-political tensions could also further impact the way that teachers also interact with these students, as the increasing criminalisation and hostility towards these student populations can affect the level of support provided. With the criminalisation of China further amplified during COVID-19, Chinese international students expressed feelings of discrimination by the media as the virus was being “politically framed as an existential danger coming from outside domestic borders” (Lee, 2020, p. iv) with China incurring the blame (Ma & Miller, 2021). This has also resulted in increased incidents of racism, xenophobia, neo-racism, and discrimination all stemming from anti-Asian sentiments towards Chinese international students (Zhang et al., 2023). This was reflective in the current study, as the impact of geo-politics and the pandemic demonstrated how broader issues can influence at the micro level with student school experiences. Student participants revealed that during this time, they experienced hostility from teachers, and how some of their friends in their classes experienced “bad words about China” (Student 2) and received less support from their teachers as a Chinese international student. Teacher’s own biases and attitudes were bleeding into their interactions and level of support with students in the classroom. The pandemic should be used as an opportunity to address anti-Asian racism and dismantle any biases, stereotypes and prejudice in their educational spaces. Not only is it important to ensure students feel supported and that they belong within the greater school

community, but educators and administration also need to ensure they are not perpetuating their own biases through their interactions with students.

These tensions also reveal how neo-racism can manifest within school communities, as a teacher participant revealed how discriminatory practices can perpetuate through policy and administration. During the beginning of the pandemic, school boards put forth a statement at the beginning of the pandemic informing students, often times Asian international students, that they were prohibited to wear a mask as “people were put off by that” and “it was scaring people.” This led to administrators directly asking Asian international students to remove their masks without consideration of the cultural aspects involved with mask-wearing, as it was a common practice in Asia (França et al., 2022). Ma and Zhan (2022) discuss how the stigmatisation and structural discrimination associated with Chinese international students who wore face masks was indicative of how “power constructs stigma” (p. 7). While Chinese international students were following Chinese government health measures that mandated mask wearing, the governments in North America stigmatised this act and Chinese international students were placed in a conflicting dilemma that ultimately made their voices invisible.

Summary

The study explored the particular experiences of Chinese international secondary students in the GTA, identifying major discrepancies and risks among this population. The guiding research questions for the study consisted of:

- What are the discrepancies and gaps between how Canadian secondary schools are marketed to Chinese international students and their experiences once they are within the system?

- What are key concerns and gaps in policy and programmatic supports for IS academic, social, housing and guardianship experiences that influence their protection and security?
- What insights do the experiences of Chinese international student population in GTA secondary schools reveal about Ontario’s school policies on multiculturalism, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI), and international education? How did the pandemic and growing geo-political tensions between Canada and China impact these policies?

Through the discussion, a dominant theme across all findings was that neoliberalism has ultimately created unethical and unsafe policies and practices that negate EDI initiatives. The increasing neoliberal agenda within public education has allowed for this marketization of international education to occur in K-12, with the ‘visa dream’ narrative often sold to students to influence their decision. This exploration demonstrated how Whiteness are entwined with neoliberal frameworks, as this push towards standardization and individualism actually perpetuates racial inequities. Standards of success are rooted in Whiteness that validates Western knowledge, forcing international students to inevitably invest in Western education despite the lower quality. Whiteness has now become a form of capital that non-White individuals must attain (Gerrard et al., 2022; Knaus, 2018; Shahjahan & Edwards, 2022). Furthermore, the study demonstrated how concepts like racial capitalism play a role in exploiting Chinese international students, as these students are often torn between dual narratives of the “model minority” when needed, like for monetary revenue, and easily disposable as “yellow peril” when identified as a threat or hazard (Gendle, 2023; Lan et al., 2024). Policies and laws continue to protect Whiteness and the dominant culture, sustaining racial hierarchies that oppress people of colour and position Chinese international students as the “Other” (Doherty & Singh, 2005).

Despite the concerns voiced by students and teachers, school boards and governments continue to take little responsibility and disregard major gaps and issues with the system as they continue to profit off the expense of international students. The study demonstrated how predatory recruitment agencies can be, as the unregulated system allowed for such discrepancies experienced by students as many faced a disconnect between the services and support that was advertised by their recruitment agency in comparison to what they actually experienced in Canada. As Chinese international students are valued mainly for their economic worth, there is often a conflict of interest as predatory recruiters can manipulate information in order to influence student decision-making that aligns best with their interests and profits (Nikula & Kivistö, 2018; Su & Harrison, 2016). With little to no regulation, and recruitment agencies and school boards taking little responsibility, it is apparent that every player in international education is solely invested in the economic gain from these students.

Key concerns and gaps in policy and programmatic supports were also identified for international students, as the study highlighted reveals how these unethical and unregulated practices put Chinese international students at risk for their safety and protection. Standards of care for services like guardianship and homestay families were revealed to be inconsistent from students and teachers, with various issues and lack of support identified that indicated there was very little steps made towards improving the monitoring and regulation of this process for international students, continuing to perpetuate a cycle of risk for them. Furthermore, another dominant theme across findings was how Whiteness and the dominant culture continue to function as the norm within classrooms and school boards, as educators and administration continue to perpetuate and compare international students to the Western standards of success and see them through deficit lens. In particular, participant discussions illuminate the ways that

neo-racism can manifest within educational institutions, and how EDI initiatives are not taking into consideration the insights and experiences from international students, as they continue to reinforce Whiteness on marginalized student populations and make education unequal for international students. EDI initiatives and curriculum are framed with a domestic student in mind that familiar and aligns with the dominant culture.

Very little consideration is given for how Western power and privilege plays a role in EDI values and educational institutions need to recognize the distinct forms of discrimination that are founded on the “othered institutional status” (Tavares, 2021, p. 3) Chinese international students face. As such, Chinese international secondary students were being silenced, whether it be through the education system and the dominant norm, teachers, or even with themselves. Students accepted their circumstances in silence, often by accepting and rationalizing stereotypes on themselves demonstrating how the model minority myth, neo-racism, and Whiteness as the dominant culture function as silencing mechanisms. Finally, experiences on the impact of COVID-19 are extremely insightful in understanding the cracks that exist in the system that led to increased invisibility for international students, greater discrepancy between their experiences and that of their domestic counterparts and more blatant experiences of racism and discrimination. Research data highlighted how administration and educators are actively showcasing their stereotypes and implicit biases when interacting with Chinese international secondary students, especially during the pandemic when very little support was given towards these student populations. Instead, Chinese international students were disregarded within educational policies and practices during this time, with very little consideration on how changes like online learning would impact their success and development. Methods to bridge these gaps and concerns will be outlined in the following recommendations chapter.

CHAPTER 7:

CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This research study explored the experiences of Chinese international students in secondary schools in Ontario, the largest and fastest growing international student population paying particular attention to the vulnerabilities and risks amongst this population. It identified systemic issues within the academic, social, and homestay and guardianship domains of international students' lives, and how COVID-19 further impacted these concerns and their overall experiences. The study ultimately aimed to contribute to the limited existing literature on this population and contribute to theory in terms of assessing the significance of nationality and international status as a determinant of inequity that continue to permeate various layers within the education system. It also shed light on the gaps and discrepancies that may be present within relevant policies, support structures, institutions, and organisations in order to ensure that this populations receives the protection and support they deserve during their studies in Ontario.

The research study faced numerous challenges as data collection occurred during the first two years of the pandemic, which resulted in several limitations on external research due to health and safety risks. Research opportunities with school boards and their respective organisations and individuals, such as administration or internal recruitment agents and representatives were prohibited. Due to these circumstances, I was forced to adjust expectations and reach out to other organisations and teacher colleagues that I could collaborate with that aligned with the study goals. Despite these challenges, I was able to collaborate with Immigration Youth Centre (IYC) to outreach student participants, interview teacher participants through a snowball sampling method and thus achieve the research study's broader objectives.

The earlier chapter discussed and summarized the key findings. Of note is the discrepancies

between how Ontario and Canada are advertised as study destinations and the promises made to students and the lived reality of international students upon arrival in Canada as well as the differences between student and teacher perspectives when it comes to several aspects of student's academic and social experiences. Within the realm of safety and security, data revealed the exploitative nature of recruitment agencies and issues and discrepancies that many students faced with their homestay services and guardianships. These concerns illustrate the increasing neoliberal agenda and shift to privatization within public education leading to an exclusive focus on earning economic revenues from different sources. This leads to an increasing disregard towards the ethical duties and responsibilities of school boards in protecting and supporting international students (Gyamerah et al., 2022).

The study also identified major concerns regarding how Whiteness and the dominant culture shape teacher and administration interactions with international youth. The experiences of Chinese international student populations in GTA secondary schools also reveal that Ontario's policies on EDI do not take into consideration the experiences and concerns of international students, as they are not recognized as a marginalized group within EDI on school boards. Rather, EDI within public education fails to recognize the dominant power and privilege within their narrative, as international students continue to be disregarded and 'othered' (Tavares, 2021). Very little of the international student experience and concerns are recognized within EDI policies, practices, and values on school boards or teacher professional development programming. While all school boards recognized the importance of other marginalized student populations, all three failed to acknowledge or identify international students as vulnerable students or even drew attention to the struggles and issues they potentially faced within the education system. The study also examined how the rising geo-political tensions between China and Canada further impacted

Chinese international students, as participants have highlighted the attitudes surrounding the criminalization of China that has led students to experience instances of racism, neo-racism, discrimination, and anti-Asian sentiments towards them (Zhang et al., 2023).

Data revealed concerns with how teachers engage with constructs of equality and equity influence their ability and willingness to fully understand and support the experiences of their Chinese international secondary students. This works against a major shift in recent years from K-12 school boards and their focus on implementing initiatives and policies that aim to develop equity in classrooms to increase student achievement and take action against racism and discrimination (Campbell, 2021; Government of British Columbia, 2023; Government of Ontario, 2017). Despite this emphasis on equity, diversity, and inclusion (DEI) within education, many teachers continue to reinforce dominant Western culture and the lack of interest in accommodating to many of these non-Western international students. Research has indicated that educators may not always be aware of how learning is influenced heavily by culture, with many associating learning and teaching styles from Western countries as the norm (Adrian-Taylor et al., 2007; Heng, 2017). On the contrary, international students face neo-racism, as the reinforcement of the dominant Western culture and the lack of recognition and acceptance of non-Western educational/social ways negatively impacts the experiences of international students. Many teachers and administrators also displayed stereotypes and attitudes, such as the model minority myth that add further barriers towards these students' success.

Finally, the research study provided unique insights on the challenges and circumstances imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic that revealed the lack of support and considerations provided to international youth during this shift to online learning, and issues of anti-Asian racism and discrimination that Chinese international student populations face. Student and teacher

participants highlighted the negative impact COVID-19 had on the overall experiences of international students in Canada, as not only were the academic aspects in their lives impacted, but many social aspects were also affected as group activities and opportunities were no longer available for them to participate in. While some incidents of racism and discrimination changed or were worsened by the pandemic, many student participants revealed that their experiences have been consistent prior to the start of COVID-19 and following. The student and teacher data revealed how racism toward Asian populations has frequently been normalized, as student experiences with microaggressions, stereotypes, and prejudice were often described as a standard experience for them.

The lived experiences of Chinese international students call attention to the numerous gaps within Canada's education system in context of how racism is transpiring and how these issues are exacerbated by neoliberalism. The study revealed the problematic policies and practices surrounding the unregulated recruitment agencies and homestay services and the lack of accountability from school boards to ensure international students' safety and care. The study highlighted how financially motivated the Canadian education system is towards international student recruitment, without sufficient investments in effective policies, support programs and services. With the wide diversity of players invested and engaged in international education, the lack of regulations creates further inconsistency, conflict of interests and lack of coordination in this sector. Based on these key findings, outlined below are some key recommendations regarding the role and responsibilities of the different actors, the overall policy approaches of the educational system and the need for teacher preparedness and training to substantially enhance the international students experience in our K-12 system.

1. Recommendations

Based on participant findings, and the varied diversity of actors engaged and benefit from international students, there is great need to address both the responsibility of each of the actors and the need for a more collaborated and coordinated approach to better support and protect international students and regulate international education.

1.1. Need for Federal and Provincial Regulations

At both the federal and provincial levels, there are major oversights and gaps within the system in protecting international high school students. It is clear that international student services are highly unregulated and therefore open to exploitation of international students.

1.1.1. Regulation of Recruitment Agencies. First, there needs to be transparency measures enforced before agencies and services can recruit international students. The research documents that recruitment agencies/agents are not forthright with information, in fact they are extremely guarded, and in many cases only provide information once individuals commit to the provided service. For example, in my own efforts to attempt to investigate the processes that recruitment agencies undergo within school boards, there was little documentation available online. In another circumstance, for a homestay service that was advertised on the international education brochures, I was also unable to obtain information from the organisation regarding the homestay regulations and procedures unless I was able to pass the interviews to become a host for international students. The unwillingness and protective nature of responses to my attempts to access information, alongside the lack of available information online, brings into question potential conflicts of interests between school boards and these agencies. It also draws attention to how easily international students can be exploited as they potentially do not have a method to proactively validate these services. Therefore, at the federal level there needs to be full information

and transparency regarding the policies, processes, procedures, and fees that apply to both recruitment agencies, school board relations with these agencies and roles of other affiliate organizations.

For example, in Student 1's circumstances where she was not informed prior to her commitment of her agency that she was required to pay for every guardian signature following five free signatures is an extremely exploitative practice that needs to be regulated. Furthermore, information regarding the difference between the role of guardianship in comparison to host family needs to be provided clearly, alongside concrete steps outlined for special circumstances, such as medical emergencies, in order to avoid similar issues and barriers that Student 1 faced. If recruitment agencies and homestay services are forced to provide in-depth information and outline their exact practices, there could be a potential for less misrepresentation or deliberately misleading information advertised to students, as there is information and clear expectations and standards of practices and responsibilities that students can track and refer to. Alongside this, these international student services should be required to outline on their websites the rights and protections that international students are entitled to. As both literature and the study revealed, many international students are unaware of the rights they possess as international students within their host country, and many are left in vulnerable and powerless as many issues go unaddressed due to underreporting as a result of the fear of being sent home (Popadiuk, 2009; Lee, 2015; Marginson et al., 2010; Wu, 2019).

Therefore, provincial governments need to invest in ombudsperson services to protect international students' rights. Ombudsman Ontario (2024) is an independent unaffiliated Office of the Ontario Legislature with the role to ensure that the provincial government and public sector operates fairly and is being held accountable. The Ombudsman superintends all aspects of K-12

public education in Ontario, and intervenes or resolves any conflicts, issues, or concerns doing so based on complaints submitted or on their own initiative, with school boards accounting for the principal number of complaints in this area. However, while Ombudsman Ontario (2024) identifies that they can help with investigating child protection services, the language insinuates that these services may be limited to helping domestic youth. International students are not even mentioned within any of their support services, with Ombudsman Ontario (2024) specifically stating that they cannot investigate individuals and private businesses. Thus, there should be a representative or sector within Ombudsman Ontario that is dedicated to helping international students, even if it is just providing information regarding what their rights are, what recruitment agencies and homestay services are legally required to provide to minors and referring students to other legal services that can investigate or provide assistance if they feel they are at risk of exploitation or harm through their complaint referral system.

1.1.2. Regulation of Guardianship. As CIC already identified in their internal report on April 2015, guardians are not being “documented in a consistent manner” (p. 21) in the Global Case Management Notes (GCMS), which is Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada’s global internal system for managing and evaluating visa applications. The report stated that, “In fact, some offices do not record custodians at all, as a common practice” (p. 21), while other interviewees from CIC expressed concerns regarding “officers [who] are not in a position to properly vet custodians” (p. 21). These issues highlight the vulnerability of unaccompanied minors, as the report even suggests that CIC “consider tightening controls regarding the number of minors one custodian can oversee as well as regarding the nature of the relationship between a custodian and a minor” (p. 21). Based on the data, there appears to be very little action that has addressed the concerns reported in 2015, as Chinese international minors continue to be exploited and left

vulnerable in these circumstances. CIC needs to implement major changes and ensure that they are hiring suitable officers that have the knowledge and skill to assess suitable guardianship and conduct background research for each guardian. There also needs to be standard protocols implemented for reporting all guardians, establishing a number for how many students a guardian can host to ensure there is enough support provided for every child and what the relationship between the guardian and minor is.

a. Reporting System. The current systems places students as consumers, resulting in very little interaction between the government and students. Instead, “[r]esponsibility is devolved from government to educational provider” (Marginson et al., 2010, p. 66), where the responsibility of happiness and security of the student is founded with the provider through this consumption relationship, which leaves implications for the human security of these student populations. Though recruitment agencies and guardianships have the responsibility to ensure that they are providing adequate services for international students, the provincial governments also need to have a level of accountability in regulating these services to mitigate systemic gaps in services and noncompliance of policies/requirements. Provincial governments need to expand the scope of international student security by implementing a reporting system that provides vulnerable international students a voice to make formal reports to provincial governments regarding any mistreatment, misconduct, or neglect of duties and agreed upon services. Thus, alongside ombudspersons, there needs to be a formal system that can allow international students to voice their concerns and issues, and ombudspersons can decide what measure of investigation and corrective action they want to conduct, if any, on an individual case by case. However, this reporting system will allow them to have the necessary data that can assist in identifying any notable trends or patterns of concern or issue from international students. This will also enable

international students to have a direct method of connecting with the provincial governments to raise concerns, spread awareness, and report issues.

Feedback and self-reported issues from international students can help identify problems with recruitment agencies and agents, the quality of service provided, transparency, and financial exchanges and charges conducted (Nikula & Kivistö, 2020). One aspect of this reporting system that does need to be considered is potential liability with language barriers, as there may be a potential for international students who possess limited English proficiency to struggle to fully understand the questions on the reporting form or are unable to communicate their issues or experiences across effectively. As such, there could be options available where reporting forms are translated in various languages that will allow international students to provide the most accurate information as possible and reviewed by representatives that are proficient in the written language. This resource is especially important for international students who feel that they have experiences that are difficult to disclose to proximate individuals, if they are unsure if there are conflicts of interest between their schools and agencies, or for students who feel they do not have forms of support elsewhere.

1.1.3. Monitoring of Recruitment Agencies, Homestay and Guardianship Services. The data from both student and teacher participants highlight how the experiences for Chinese international secondary school students who come through recruitment agencies and homestay services is consistently negative/problematic. The Government of Canada amended the Immigration and Refugee Act in 2011 that declared it was illegal for any individuals but authorized representatives who possess the required skills and credentials to charge their services to help with immigration and refugee applications for individuals, including educational agents (Government of Canada, 2011). However, it is apparent there remains numerous exploitative agencies and

homestay services that still manage to slip between the cracks, which bring into the question the vague standards used to determine what qualifies as an “authorized representative” (para. 3) and what exact skills and training are required from them to be able to be educational recruitment agents. The study’s data has revealed numerous circumstances where recruitment agencies or homestay services have provided misleading or false information and services offered that breach the interest of students. As Marginson (2012) discussed, if there is no minimum measure outlined in relation to the quality of services for international students to use as a gauge, the vague or ambiguous wording of this Act can leave international students vulnerable, as they are less familiar with the standards and conventions of the host country’s service and more at risk of receiving less than they are entitled to. Furthermore, in this context international students are treated as consumers who “will regulate standards by making market choices,” (Marginson, 2012, p. 503), however, international students who are overseas, and who have very little connection to the host country and rely solely on the recruitment agencies and the information they provide, often do not have the opportunity to evaluate the quality of these services prior to purchase.

There is also very little students are able to do to “pressure providers” (p. 503) to improve the standards of their services, as often times many students’ families have already been charged immense amounts of money for these services, and as students expressed, there is no guarantee one can find a better service if you try to change. As such, there needs to be modifications implemented within school boards and on a federal/provincial level in order to provide more concrete protections for international students, rather than just providing unenforced guidelines that are “silent in many crucial areas, such as student safety, and freedom from discrimination” (Marginson, 2012, p. 504). There needs to be a level of accountability held for school boards to annually report back their investments, outline their safety procedures, and to demonstrate a level

of monitoring and awareness of ways they are ensuring the security of their international students.

While there can be a basic guideline for these reports, school boards who have high levels of international student enrolment will have more thorough reporting procedures that outline forms of support they are providing and investing in their international students.

1.2. Responsibilities of School Boards and Schools

Though all three school boards mention specific homestay services students can contact on their brochures, they ultimately declare that they do not take responsibility in arranging homestay services or guardianships for international students. While school boards have quickly adjusted to the “shift in government’s role from funder to education-market enabler [...]” (Winton, 2022, p. 67) by increasing marketing strategies, recruitment trips, and economic pressure within schools to drastically benefit from international student enrolment to bridge funding gaps, it appears that aspects that involve actual care and support for students, like homestay services and guardianships, are domains that school boards do not want to have any association or responsibility for, which underlines the profit driven priorities and values within public school boards. There still needs to be a level of accountability that school boards put forth in protecting these vulnerable youth, as school boards should not be allowed to encourage international student enrolment without some form of protection and security provided for students. A standard level of monitoring and regulations should be implemented within each school to support and protect their international student populations, especially those who come independently as minors to Canada.

1.2.1. Responsibility of Teachers and Administrators Teachers revealed how there have been cases where they have discovered that one guardian was responsible for numerous international students, which is indicative of potential neglect or lack of accountability these guardians may have in supporting these students properly. Other circumstances have highlighted

how teachers have noted international students with host families are not being provided a level of high-quality care. As educators, there is a duty to report where each educator has a “responsibility to protect children and youth from harm” (Ontario College of Teachers, 2018, p. 1). Under Ontario’s *Children, Youth and Family Services Act*, it is required for those who “perform professional or official duties with respect to children to report suspected child abuse where there are reasonable grounds” (p. 1). Though this is required for children aged 16 and under, educators can still conduct a report if they suspect a child who is 16 or 17 in need of protection under reasonable grounds. In this act, neglect, caregiver absence and separation, and caregiver incapacity all fall under grounds of protection alongside various forms of physical and emotional abuse. Based on the study’s data that despite having duty to report from educators, it appears that there is a potential for international students’ conditions to be overlooked, under-reported, or conditions minimized (Chen et al., 2020; Zhang, 2016).

In these situations, administration need to take responsibility in bringing awareness for teachers that international student populations need to be considered under their duty to report, and what potential unique circumstances of neglect and abuse are common for international students who are under the care of recruitment agencies, guardianships, and homestay services. As international student security highlights, many concerns regarding the lack of regulation and responsibility often occur in the “informal and private domains” (Marginson et al., 2010, p. 76) and these students deserve equal respect, worth, and protection that is afforded to their domestic counterparts in all aspects of life. Administration need to take more initiative in investigating these international student services, as they would for domestic students issues if teachers bring forth any concerns, and to contact children’s aid services for follow-up investigation to fully ensure that these students are living in safe conditions.

Furthermore, if issues arise with particular recruitment agencies and homestay services, there needs to be a process where administration flag these services and they are met with proportional consequences for their degree of non-compliance. There should also be documentation system that is accessible for all schools within school boards that not only retains, but can also be updated by administration, on which recruitment agencies and services are harmful or unacceptable so all schools can be aware of problematic services that international students may be exposed to. It is important that schools commit to regular monitoring and assessment of recruitment agencies that their international students are utilizing, especially those who come independently as minors, in order to maintain up to date knowledge about their schools, identify areas where there are issues or need amendments, and to recognize where inappropriate or exploitative practices are being used (Nikula, 2022; Nikula & Kivistö, 2020; Nikula & Kivistö, 2018).

1.2.2. Need for Teacher Diversity and International Education Professional Development.

Schools need to have teachers who also reflect the diverse cultures and backgrounds within our society, as racial representation possesses significant impact on the success of students, especially for students who identify racially or culturally with these teachers (Dee, 2004; Keane et al., 2022; Gershenson et al., 2021; Lindsay, 2019; Sleeter et al., 2014; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). In particular, administration need to embody transformative leadership, which is a social justice orientated approach that is founded by notions of democracy and aims to “advance cultural competence and teacher diversity among the teaching force” (Nevarez et al., 2019, p. 25). As many of the student participants suggested, having more diverse teachers that share similar cultural backgrounds and possess the ability to better communicate with international students was a recommendation they would like to see in their schools. This is also extremely beneficial for translating purposes, as despite some school boards stating that there are

interpretation and translation services available with a roster of approved interpreters and translators (Toronto District School Board, n.d.c), there is an apparent need expressed from student and teacher participants to have more educators and permanent translators on site to be able to communicate and assist in daily translations such as translating documents, policies, or clarifying any confusing information for international students who have just integrated into the Canadian education system. Students emphasized their best teacher experiences was with teachers who were extremely supportive towards international students and were able to speak many Chinese languages and utilized this skill as a tool to help international students learn the concepts in class better and make them feel supported and welcomed. Therefore, these teachers have experiences that help shape their understanding and empathy for international students, as they are not pushing an agenda that aims to solely integrate international students into the ‘dominant community’ (Tavares, 2021, p. 3), but instead, modifies their teaching practices to accommodate their international students’ academic needs.

Administration needs to take an active role in challenging constructs of the model minority myth with their school staff and to consider strategies that can better support their students in their schools and bridge cultural divides within and outside the classroom (Gay, 2010). These conversations need to occur within the classroom, alongside whole school initiatives like hosting assemblies, events, or workshops for students that engage students in a range of activities that explore topics of equality, fairness, and prejudice for *all* minority groups to equip students with the knowledge and skills to challenge racism, and to stand up for themselves and their peers. This is particularly important for international students, as data has revealed that many issues or concerns go unaddressed due to underreporting out of fear of being sent home or a lack of awareness of the rights they possess (Popadiuk, 2009; Lee, 2015; Marginson et al., 2010; Wu,

2019). Administration needs to make it explicitly clear that international students can voice their issues without any consequence equal to domestic students, and that action will be taken in to ensure they feel safe and protected within school communities.

1.2.3. Culturally Responsive Teaching: Practices and Knowledge Structures Need to Shift Away from Whiteness. Practices and knowledge structures continue to stem from a perspective of Whiteness, where policies, EDI initiatives, teaching practices and strategies are shaped by White supremacy (Pechenkina & Liu, 2018). The study's findings demonstrate how systemic layers of Whiteness continue to shape public education systems within Canada (Museus & Ifitkar, 2014). Educators and administration need to be aware of the overwhelming influence and emphasis on Western culture in the public education system. Many educators, even those of colour, may develop an implicit or even explicit bias towards Western cultural superiority and demonstrate neo-racism towards international students from non-Western cultures. This can put them at risk for barriers and challenges in the social and academic domains of their lives, negatively impacting their sense of belonging with their communities and the host-country.

Administration have to consider the long-term forms of practices and forms of support that are culturally relevant and can be implemented to foster equitable learning spaces for their students. This includes having teachers with international teaching experiences or who have studied abroad who can better understand international students, alongside strategies that can increase teacher diversity or access to existing teachers or role models of colour (Gershenson et al., 2021). There can also be cultural celebration events hosted from the school that can allow domestic and international students to engage in intercultural interactions. Intercultural interactions have been cited as beneficial for domestic students in developing empathy and new perspectives, insights, and knowledge about international students (Bodycott et al., 2014).

However, it is important to recognize that even if there are teachers of colour within staff, this does not guarantee that dominant discourse will not be sustained within teaching practices and policies. Several of the teacher participants in my study were East-Asian, but unconsciously expressed stereotypes or attitudes towards Chinese international students. This indicates that teachers of colour need to also be actively encouraged to reflect on their own biases towards racialized students and understand how their own identities, schooling culture, and experiences could be founded on the dominant culture when interacting with international students. As mentioned prior, much of the discourse on implicit biases and attitudes are often framed within domestic student populations with emphasis on White and Black secondary student perspectives (Chin et al., 2020; Chiu et al., 2022; Marcucci, 2020; Quinn & Desruisseaux., 2022; Scott, 2021; Starck et al., 2020; Whitford & Emerson, 2018), with very little to none on the topic of international Asian secondary student populations.

Thus, culturally responsive teaching is defined by Gay (2010) as “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (p. 31). Research has demonstrated the significance and need for culturally responsive teaching, and the lasting impact teachers can have in developing their own cultural knowledge base and “translate that knowledge into culturally relevant, equitable curriculum and practices” (Chiu et al., 2022, p. 8). This needs to be further supported by administration, as those in leadership roles should actively ensure that there are consistent standards of accommodations implemented throughout their schools for their international students. Instead of forcing literacy and ESL teachers to try to initiate conversation with their teacher colleagues regarding accommodations for international students that may result in hostility, resistance, or feelings of shame, administration need to take

action in supporting their teachers who voice concerns and initiating these conversations with all staff members. It would also be beneficial for administration to establish an understanding for every educator regarding the circumstances international student populations face studying abroad in Canada and to help them reflect and consider the potential inequities that might be sustained through their actions and attitudes.

A more consistent approach in providing accommodations for international youth is necessary, and administration can create a guideline that outlines standards their school can follow to ensure accountability from all teachers and staff members, as every staff member will have clear understanding of what is expected of them in supporting these students. This could potentially help in avoiding conflicts where hostile teachers cannot just disregard accommodating and supporting international students, as there will be a standard implemented to ensure equitable conditions that teachers are required to meet within schools. This is especially important given the growth in Chinese international student populations, and the likely continued high enrolment to come in the next few years. Having these forms of considerations and resources can have profound impact and might have even made the transition to online learning easier for international students, as teacher participants in the study revealed how little contemplation teachers and school boards held towards the circumstances many of these student populations faced during this transition. Many were forced to adapt to the Canadian schooling time while they were overseas and continued to face a disconnect or lack of consideration from their teachers regarding assignments, teaching styles, and accommodations which led to a detrimental decline in student engagement and academic assessment with many students disappearing.

Culturally responsive teaching has been cited as an effective and impactful factor in not only decreasing achievement gaps in schools, but also fostering more successful post-secondary

outcomes for students of colour (Chiu et al., 2022; Barrett et al., 2017; Morgan, 2020). Through culturally responsive approaches, educators are more equipped to better respond to the needs of the growing diverse population and backgrounds of students in schools and are actively engaging in more reflection and develop better self-awareness of their own biases.

Culturally responsive educators understand how their own personal experiences and upbringing can shape the stereotypes, unconscious attitudes, and mindsets they may possess that can shape how the curriculum, teaching style, lesson plans, and accommodations and support they provide to students (Chiu et al., 2022). Culturally responsive teaching must also “exist throughout a school; all teachers and staff must promote it and appropriately implement it not only in classrooms, but also in school policies and procedures” (Iwai, 2019, p. 15). For example, the study highlighted the implication of a student’s nationality or international status as a factor of inequity, seen when teachers demonstrated very little interest in accommodating to the academic needs of their international students. Teachers strongly opposed accommodations on the basis that it was not “equal” or “fair” in comparison to their domestic students and pushed the rationale that international students chose to study in Canada and should be required to adapt and conform to Western standards if they want to succeed. These sentiments highlight the ways in which Whiteness and the dominant culture continue to be reinforced within public education. In the case where administration was directly asking Asian international students to remove their masks without consideration of the cultural aspects involved in mask-wearing in Asia (França et al., 2022), culturally responsive educators could potentially avoid creating social implications that would then fuel discriminatory behaviours and attitudes within the school. Instead, culturally responsive educators would potentially be able to reflect and recognize how problematic and

heavily rooted with Western culture their behaviours and actions could potentially be (França et al., 2022; Ma & Zhan, 2020).

1.2.4. Bringing Awareness to Anti-Asian Racism and Relevant Theories (CRT; AsianCrit) Furthermore, one issue that was revealed from student participants regarding their experiences with racism and discrimination during the pandemic was the fact that many of these experiences were consistent prior to the start of COVID-19 and following. This brings attention to necessity of administration, teachers, and staff members to take action and ensure that Anti-Asian racism and hate is being regularly addressed during diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives within schools. While there have been some action and changes from the Ontario government, like creating educational resources to combat and address anti-Asian racism and discrimination within schools following the rise of hate crimes (Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario & Toronto District School Board, 2020; Reid & Eizadirad, 2023), this highlights how very little consideration was given to Asian populations prior to COVID-19 (Ontario Newsroom, 2021).

It is important that education policies continue to highlight Asian communities following COVID-19, as these communities have received very little attention prior to the pandemic within the discourse of education policy and strategy, primarily due to stereotypes rooted in the “model minority myth” (Cui & Kelly, 2013; Liu, 2023; Jang, 2022; Teranishi & Nguyen, 2012; Wing, 2007; Yu, 2006). With many Asian students being depicted as a “uniformly successful and fully self-sufficient group, the challenges and failures they face in and out of the school system become invisible to education policymakers and practitioners” (Jang, 2022, p. 3). The research data from teacher participants further supports to this literature and brings this issue to light, as teachers shared how many teachers and administration actively demonstrate how their

stereotypes and implicit biases shaped their perceptions and the kind of action they took towards their Chinese international secondary school students, resulting in a lack of support and consideration provided when teaching for these student populations. Furthermore, by emphasising the constructed success of Asian populations, this leads to the suffering of these student populations to become overlooked from much of education policy and reform despite these student populations experiencing institutional discrimination, and their safety often disregarded by educators even though studies have revealed they experience immense racial harassment in schools (Cui, 2019; Wu & Nguyen, 2022).

Education policy researchers need to pay greater attention to the invisibility of these student populations by considering where areas of collective action can take place in supporting these student populations in practice and EDI policy changes. Administration need to take an active role in challenging constructs of the model minority myth with their school staff and to consider strategies that can better support their students in their schools and bridge cultural divides within and outside the classroom (Gay, 2010). Professional development also needs to focus and introduce concepts like Asian Critical Theory (AsianCrit) and neo-racism so educators can learn how these constructs play a role in shaping their interactions with international students, and what Western biases or attitudes they may be applying to this population. There needs to be opportunities for educators to reflect on how their schooling culture and identity impact the ways they perceive international students in a deficit lens in comparison to domestic students, and how they are maintaining dominant discourse upon these student populations.

1.3. Enhanced Programs and Services

Both teachers and students expressed a need for enhanced programming and services dedicated to international students. If international students are going to be forced to continue to

pay high tuition fees, then these fees should be reinvested back to them in the form of better resources and support services.

1.3.1. Guidance Counsellors for International Students Both teacher and student participants expressed the need for schools to provide adequate counselling support, not only for Asian international students, but have the knowledge and skills to communicate and support the unique concerns and issues of all international students (Popadiuk & Marshall, 2011). Though the school board brochures all emphasized their “dedicated guidance counselors for international students to provide counselling and support” (Toronto District School Board, n.d.b., p. 10), and “who understand international students” (Peel District School Board, n.d., p. 2), teacher participants highlighted how contrasting the reality of Chinese international secondary school students’ experiences are. From their observations, many of the guidance counsellors at their schools “just didn’t know what to do” to support their international youths and despite efforts, it was “just not good enough when it’s not something you’re educated in” (Teacher 4) or were extremely “dismissive” of their concerns or issues (Teacher 3). Though some schools may have larger international student populations than others, guidance counsellors still need to actively develop their cultural competence to translate their expertise in effective ways that address students’ diverse contexts and possess the tools to connect international students to their communities or resources and services that can support them (Burnham et al., 2009).

While all guidance counsellors should develop their knowledge to better support international student populations, it would be extremely beneficial to have guidance counsellors that are specifically catered for these students as they can play a significant role in supporting them on an institutional and individual level (Popadiuk & Marshall, 2011). Literature has shown that having a school counsellor who demonstrates care and compassion about international

student experiences and truly understands their circumstances allows them to foster stronger bonds with students, with students demonstrating greater willingness to utilize support services (Popadiuk, 2010; Popadiuk, 2009). Guidance counsellors who are engaging in furthering their cultural knowledge bases can better empathise with their students, develop a multilayered perspective that will help them develop more achievable strategies to implement, and apply these knowledges to their practice to better support these student populations (Popadiuk, 2010). Student participants also demonstrate how international students are actively seeking opportunities to foster connection and relationships and need trusted adult figures in the form of teachers and guidance counsellors to support their ongoing needs (Popadiuk, 2010). Students themselves highlighted the difference of a guidance counsellor who was able to support them and provide all the necessary information to make their integration smoother. This is particularly important for students who come to Canada to study independently, as they often do not have other connections outside of school.

However, the majority of guidance counselling services were often only limited to minimal support regarding course selection and post-secondary information. As a result, international students are aware there is very little option for them to receive support from their guidance counsellors, often being forced to face their struggles on their own. There needs to be a standard of care within support services implemented within schools for their international students that allows training opportunities for guidance counsellors to develop their cultural knowledge bases and understand the forms of action they need to take to protect these students from cognitive, emotional, or physical risks. To implement practical support on a system level there could be mentorship programs, workshops, professional development, or informative resources that are effective for cross-cultural counselling. For example, there could be manuals or counseling

books focused on topics like cultural adjustment or other international student concerns that can help develop sensitivity and shape the knowledge, understanding, and training that will inform the skills and principles of counsellors (Khoo et al., 1994; Lee et al., 2022). These resources will also be available for teachers and administration, but guidance counsellors who are dedicated for international students will be required to ensure they are fully informed and up to date on these topics, and as a result, can also be a resource within the school for staff members in supporting international student concerns or issues.

1.3.2. Orientation Programs. Participants noted the lack of interaction between domestic and international student populations. Though all three school boards mention that they have Orientation programs available that aim to better support the integration of their new international students in adjusting to their new environments and communities, and provide opportunities for students to engage with Canadian students, the reality of Chinese international student experiences are not reflective of these advertised experiences (Peel District School Board, n.d.; Toronto District School Board, n.d.b.; York Region District School Board, n.d.). Instead, it appears based on student and teacher participants that there were inconsistencies in experiences, as some student participants received an orientation while others did not receive any orientation or information provided for them.

There needs to be a standard outlined within school boards that ensure some form of orientation is available for international students. It is understandable that some schools may have a higher international student population, which would make it more beneficial for some schools to hold an in-depth orientation session for these students. However, there should be a basic standard implemented within every school that regardless of international student numbers there remain some format of a school tour to help students familiarize themselves with their new

environment and an information session provided for incoming international students regardless of their grade. Orientation and information sessions can be extremely helpful for international students, and it would be beneficial as well for schools to establish a web-based online orientation and provide information and content for international students that they can always access regularly. Information could include statements of academic policies, guidelines for academic requirements, access to sources such as online dictionaries, resources to connect students to their communities, and opportunities for employment or volunteering, transportation information. There could also be general resources that students can access for ongoing support like counseling programs, or helpful guides and next steps for students who may be facing any risks or issues with their homestays, host families, or recruitment agencies (Murphy et al., 2022).

1.3.3. Targeted Programs to Encourage International and Domestic Student Interactions.

Alongside this, the lack of interaction between domestic and international students were noted as a concern. There should be greater efforts put forth to improve opportunities for all student populations to interact and engage. It is quite common for international students to establish friendships with students from similar cultural backgrounds who often speak the same language in their transition into their new host country, but these students have also recounted “feelings of guilt because they believe these friendships detracted from their adjustment to local culture and English language development” (Lindner & Margetts, 2021, p. 4; Kim & Okazaki, 2014). Research on intercultural friendships have revealed various benefits, where friendships between international and domestic students have been associated with decreasing international students’ stress during their adjustment, stronger English language proficiency, improved academic performance, and overall increased satisfaction of their study abroad (Cheng, 2019; Gareis et al., 2019; Smith and Khawaja, 2011).

International students have also disclosed their desire to form friendships with domestic students but have ultimately avoided interactions with these student populations due to their own concerns of their limited English or limited acceptance from the receiving student body (Gareis et al., 2019; Ward et al., 2009). While there are many factors that make up social cohesion, such as an individual's motivation and skills, it is also important to have opportunities for international students to have these intercultural interactions (Ward et al., 2009). As such, teachers and educational institutions are encouraged to promote and facilitate social integration by fostering a culturally inclusive educational environment, which is defined as a setting that "recognises, values and promotes diversity, and enables the worldviews of all students to be expressed through teaching and learning" (Tawagi & Mak, 2015, p. 342). Teachers and administration need to shift their mindsets towards Chinese international students as not individuals with deficits, but as contributors to educational environments that can foster genuine global citizenship.

Furthermore, a culturally inclusive learning environment can impact students' intercultural competence, which is defined as a "set of values, attitudes, skills, knowledge, and understanding that [is] required for understanding and respecting those who are perceived to be culturally different from oneself" (Barrett, 2018, p. 94) and is essential in supporting appropriate and effective forms of communications and creating positive relationships. Implementing programs like peer-pairing where new incoming international students can be paired with a domestic student to help students familiarize themselves with their environments and take on a role as "cultural informants and information-givers" (Ward et al., 2009, p. 80) can foster intercultural interactions between student populations and increase academic performance. Teachers can also engage students in various activities and tasks that allow students to have opportunities to

collaborate with domestic students of different cultural backgrounds, with all students sharing and aiming to achieve a common goal. This can encourage cooperative learning where students will have to see each other as equal, make decisions together, and support each other to succeed (Barrett, 2018). Pairing international and domestic students for long-term projects have also been cited as a potential opportunity for increased positive interactions as it encourages students to move past “their comfort zone and put them in a situation with the potential for intercultural friendship formation” (Gareis et al., 2019, p. 13). As one student mentioned, it is easy to connect with individual’s who possess similar environments and things that are familiar so having these opportunities within the classroom will allow students to work with other students who they often do not interact with on a daily basis and collaborate in a setting that is reflective of our diverse society.

1.3.4. Better ESL Support. Finally, an issue that was noted by teacher participants was the ineffective ESL assessments and ranking system for their Chinese international students, as many teacher participants cited inconsistencies in student ability and their associated ESL rank. Many teacher participants expressed the same sentiments regarding the fact that often times they notice many teachers attempt to push along students, which results in an ineffective ESL ranking system as there are inconsistencies between students’ ability and skill level and their rank. Teacher participants also highlighted that these students are forced to be pushed along because there is no space for them to continue repeating courses. A lack of specialized courses for international students was also noted, as Teacher 3 discussed that despite the high international student population at their school, there was no ESL courses like ESL History that as being offered despite the need and demand. She stated that she often feels that many guidance counsellors and teachers are dismissive to the needs of international students. These issues call

attention to how many schools are viewing the recruitment of international students as a source of cash flow to fund their operations, with international students not receiving any of these high tuition fees reinvested back to them in the form of resources or support services (Choudaha, 2017). Other teacher participants have stated that they are aware of the inequitable conditions that many of these international students face, and other teachers have also mentioned the tactics they discovered that their schools would engage in to be able to generate more funding by labelling students who are not ESL as such, further demonstrating how these educational institutions are viewing these students as ‘cash cows’, and possess more interest in profiting from these students rather than promoting internationalism or putting efforts towards supporting these students and their wellbeing (Tannock, 2018).

The exploitation of international students perpetuated throughout the public education system draws attention to the issue of educational equality and equity. Many international students are also aware of the financial sacrifices their families are making in order to afford their international student tuition fees to study abroad and could potentially feel the pressure to complete their studies as quickly as possible (Cheng, 2019). Many students public school tuition fees can range from \$9,500 to \$17,000 annually depending on the school board (EduCanada, 2022), and these conditions that international students are forced to face ultimately compromises the integrity and quality of education they receive. As such, if a school has a high enrolment of international students and is receiving funding for these student populations, then there should be a requirement that specialized courses like ESL History are being offered to meet the need and demand of the enrolment numbers. Schools should not be allowed to merely utilize international students as a source of cash flow to fund their operations, with little to no reinvestment back to support their education (Choudaha, 2017). Furthermore, changes can be implemented in teacher

education, where a mandatory course for teacher candidates should focus on ELL and international students in order to prepare future teachers and establish opportunities for them to reflect on their implicit biases that go beyond borders and to explore Whiteness and the dominant culture within K-12 educational contexts.

2. The Broader Context of Neoliberalism in Education

Neoliberal frameworks and policies directly challenge the aims of public education with the prioritisation of individualism and the shift to privatisation (Melanson, 2023). Melanson (2023) discussed how educational discourse is moving away from a collective public good and towards a more economic capitalist framework, with education being reduced to a commodity. This is apparent when teacher participants revealed how private schools are often an easy route for students to pursue if they are struggling in the public education, with many students able to pay their way in gaining the mandatory credentials to graduate. This brings into the question what is being valued in terms of education, whether it is the genuine learning taking place or the “goods” that are being marketed to consumers. The concept of resistance in this form is focused on reimagining the future, as Fraser (2024) discussed that much of critical resistance involves “speaking truth to power” (p. 130). It is the ethical responsibility of educators to critique problematic policies and practices to foster critical consciousness and work towards a “public education system that is equitable, inclusive, justice-oriented, and accessible to all” (p. 130).

In terms of international education on the K-12 level, the Ministry of Education needs to actively engage in the reassessment of their policies and to implement initiatives that widen financial aid or participation programs that can make tuition costs more affordable for international students. Within post-secondary institutions, governments in Canada have already implemented tuition limit policies to regulate mandatory program fees to ensure programs are

affordable and accessible for students (Government of British Columbia, n.d.; Government of Ontario, 2019). Similar to these policies, there should also be a tuition limit implemented on the fees in secondary schools across Canada, placing an affordable and narrower range set that secondary schools are legally bound to follow to ensure that there is some measure of consistency across every school charging international student populations. Furthermore, there needs to be more regulations imposed by school boards to ensure that international student populations are receiving the necessary supports and their tuition is being reinvested into them. Many teacher participants mentioned that schools who have higher international student populations often receive more funding to accommodate and support these numbers, thus, there needs to be mandates on reinvesting these tuition fees back to these student populations.

The Canadian public education system needs to shift away from the neoliberal “student-as-consumer” (Marginson et al., 2010, p. 66) narrative placed upon international students where “the student is imagined and regulated as a consumer in a contractual relationship with the provider of educational services” (p. 66). This narrative has a profound impact in notions of responsibility, as students-as-consumers often leads to little contract between the government and students, and instead, places responsibility in the hands of educational providers. However, in most instances the educational developer “devolves much of the responsibility for the success and happiness of students to the students themselves,” Marginson et al., 2010, p. 67) which leads to “the ethos of self-responsibility [being] built into the academic process” (p. 67) and having very little rights “other than consumer rights donated by the host nation” (p. 67).

For example, the schools who have higher international student populations and receive such funding should provide a report that outlines where the received funds and their international tuition fees have been allocated to, and what additional supports and resources they

have provided for these student populations, such as having specialized courses like ESL History. Despite claims from Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan of the commitment to identifying and eliminating inequities within education and that the system will be "fairer and more inclusive for all students [...]" (Government of Ontario, 2017, p. 3), international students continue to be left out of these dialogues. The Ontario education system needs to reflect upon their strategies and practices aimed to reduce barriers for academic achievement and student well-being and ensure that international students are "worthy of equal respect with local students" (Marginson et al., 2010, p. 77) and exercise the same rights to the educational opportunities, supports, and human securities that are advocated within their policies and programs. Equity, diversity, and inclusion conversations and efforts need to be extended to include international student perspectives and experiences to ensure genuine and meaningful transformation takes place in schools.

Canada has also implemented new legislation for international students, which includes a temporary federal cap on international student enrolment (Arrive, 2024). The number of study permit approvals is expected to decrease by 35 percent in 2024 and was created to bridge the lack of support and infrastructure that is not keeping pace with the significant increase in international student enrolment in Canada. Furthermore, this cap aims to better regulate private institutions who have "been accepting more international students to increase their revenues without improving admission and curriculum standards" (Arrive, 2024, para. 6). However, this new legislation is only applicable for the post-secondary undergraduate level and does not apply for K-12 which is problematic. Legislation needs to recognize the vulnerabilities and issues within the K-12 level, especially with these students' status as minors. This cap could result in increased risk for these student populations. The current study has already highlighted the major

discrepancies and gaps between how Canadian secondary schools are marketed to Chinese international students, and how different their experiences were once they were within the system. Private institutions may start heavily aiming and relying on students in the K-12 to bridge financial revenue losses due to the post-secondary cap. This will only increase the conflict of interest between international students and private institutions, as predatory recruiters may start to increase false advertisement of the experiences and level of support provided to influence and direct students towards a path that will profit them (Nikula & Kivistö, 2018).

3. Future Research Considerations

As stated prior, challenges emerged for the study as a result of the ongoing pandemic that impacted research opportunities with school boards. Many school boards were no longer allowing or deprioritized external research due to health and safety risks, and the internal struggles they were facing as a result of adapting to the pandemic environment. Findings may be expanded in future research by collaborating with school boards, as many are now allowing for research opportunities again that will allow researchers to interact with recruitment agencies. As mentioned earlier, my own efforts to investigate the recruitment agencies processes within school boards were hindered and I was unable to obtain information from recruitment agency representatives unless approved for external research with the associated school board. Future research that collaborates with school boards will be able to gain more insight on what recruitment processes entail, how school board services and supports are advertised to students overseas, and ultimately how these services may contrast with the reality of the lived experiences of Chinese international youth.

Furthermore, by collaborating with school boards, this could also open opportunities to conduct research with administration and guidance counsellors at the researching schools, along

with interactions with homestay services that are in partnership within the school board. This will allow for more diversified perspectives and insight on what services and support systems are truly available for students in schools, more insight on the concerns and observed experiences of international youth, which will allow for more data to compare these promoted supports to the lived experiences of students themselves. Research can also be further extended by having more opportunities to interview participants from a variety of schools with equal representation from both males and females. By collaborating with a school board, there can potentially be more opportunities to work with schools that have higher international populations. This can allow for more diverse research populations and experiences, such as recruiting more participants who have come to Canada to study independently, as these experiences differed greatly in comparison to students who came with their families and had other forms of support systems.

There are research possibilities that can extend the focus of my study, which is the life and experience of Chinese international secondary students studying in Canada. First, there is opportunities to examine the relationship between Chinese international students and Chinese Canadian domestic students as there is little to no research conducted examining these student populations together. It would be beneficial to further explore the discrepancies amongst these two student populations and how they interact and understand each other. Alongside this, teacher participants in the study highlighted how many international students who struggled in public education often turned to private schools to gain their credits and graduate. Further research that examines Chinese international student experiences within public versus private education would be valuable in shaping policy recommendations, as similarities, differences, and overarching concerns from teachers and students within both educational spheres can be identified. Finally, the study examined how international students from China have increasingly become

criminalized and discriminated against, with student experiences reflecting cultural hierarchy in the form of neo-racism and yellow peril. In particular, the increased enrolment of Asian students in Canadian higher education were perceived as “too Asian” (p. 225) and detrimental to Canadian culture (Padgett et al., 2020). With the new legislation that included a federal cap on international student enrolment for higher education, it would be beneficial to explore the reciprocal effect that Chinese international students might bring to secondary schools. There could be a potential increase in the secondary sector for international student recruitment, and future research should examine whether similar sentiments and attitudes are demonstrated on a secondary level.

Specific questions left unanswered that can shape future exploration and help bridge gaps and limitations in international education on a secondary level could consist of:

1. How can school boards ensure greater standards of care for international students?
2. How to reinforce standards of care through government mandate?
3. What mandates should be put in place to ensure that tuition fees are reinvested back to international student support and public knowledge of investments?
4. Government legislation that ensures recruitment agencies and host family transparency online for international students?
5. Mandate for better regulation within school board internal recruitment services?
6. How does Whiteness and the dominant culture inform EDI policies? How can we change these initiatives and practices to better support international students?
7. How to implement teacher professional development in the context of international education?

8. What are the sentiments and attitudes towards Chinese international students studying in Canada on a secondary level?

4. Final: Contributions to Research

Ultimately, this study has contributed to highlighting the vulnerability of Chinese international secondary students by exploring the experiences of these students in GTA schools. There is a growing number of Chinese international secondary students in the K-12 level in public education, yet very limited research studies have been conducted to examine these students' experiences and implications (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2023). There are vast opportunities to expand on the understandings and perspectives of these students, especially in exploring the nuanced experiences students faced during the pandemic which exacerbated pre-existing systemic issues. The study makes a major contribution to this limited research by identifying unique issues and concerns within the academic, social and cultural, and domestic domains of Chinese international students' lives, especially for those who come independently as minors and the added layer of vulnerability they experience with the lack of regulation on international education services (Cheng, 2019; Mok, 2015; Kuo & Roysircar, 2004; Lee, 2015; Popadiuk, 2009; Popadiuk & Marshall, 2011; Tsong et al. 2021; Wu, 2019; Zheng, 2014).

On a theoretical level, the study contributed to the exploration of CRT within international contexts. There are new contexts and dynamics of how Whiteness functions in society, and how it impacts a variety of marginalized communities. Understanding geo-politics and neo-racism is essential and needs to be included in the study of CRT as there are layers to how racism functions in society. In particular, contributions were made to the limited research focused on CRT and AsianCrit in K-12, exploring Whiteness and the dominant culture in

secondary educational contexts for international students, especially in examining EDI and racial dialogues on these marginalized students. EDI within public education in Ontario is shaped by Whiteness and the dominant culture and continues to ‘other’ and disregard vulnerable populations like international students. The study’s use of narrative and counter-storytelling allowed for a nuanced approach in exploring CRT and challenging the perceived notions or beliefs regarding Chinese international secondary school students and shed light on the reality of these vulnerable populations. Counter-stories were a strength within the study in exploring Chinese international secondary students’ experiences with racial discrimination or disadvantages and allowed for the critical analysis of how participants experiences may contrast the dominant or perceived constructs surrounding them ((Merriweather Hunn et al., 2006; Sólorzano & Yosso, 2001).

The study also contributed to theory in numerous ways. First, CRT and neoliberalism are not often positioned in relation to one another, and this exploration brought forth unique and significant contributions. The dominant push towards neoliberalism in public education has led to a focus on standardization where value is weighed on measurable outcomes and performative criteria (Hursh, 2000). However, the underpinnings of neoliberalism further reinforce CRT and Whiteness, as standards of success are rooted in Whiteness that only authenticates and prioritizes Western knowledge. The study shed light to how international students of colour are being inequitably compared to their domestic peers, as EDI policies and initiatives continue to perpetuate the dominant culture and sustain racial hierarchies.

Furthermore, the study highlighted how through the perspective of individualism, success or failure is now determinant on an individual’s personal characteristics and disregards other contexts that could factor into their struggles or issues. This can inform the attitudes and biases

educators have towards international students, as the conversation is now focused on individual responsibility rather than broader social concerns like a lack of government support, regulation, and inequitable policies to protect these student populations. The study demonstrated how these theories are entwined and build upon each other to ultimately make education inequitable and fail to protect international students populations. The study also revealed the implications of an individual's nationality and how international status can be a factor of inequity that may filter various layers within the education system (Hiraldo, 2010). Exploring international student security (ISS) at the K-12 level allowed the study to identify gaps and determine long-lasting solutions to improve standards of protection and human security for international students (Marginson, 2012). The study contributes greatly to understanding how concepts like neo-racism, racial capitalism, model minority, and yellow peril can influence teaching biases, practices, and levels of support that impact international students. In particular, the study revealed the significance in teacher professional development to focus on concepts like AsianCrit and neo-racism, examining how EDI dialogue and efforts need to be broadened to include international student concerns and perspectives.

The study examined issues within policy and programs that aim to protect the vulnerability of these international youth, bringing forth insight on the internationalization of secondary school students in Canada (Lee, 2015; Marginson et al., 2010; Sawir et al., 2009; Sherry et al., 2010). Despite perceptions of international students as privileged due to the inflated tuition fees they are forced to pay, the study has revealed a shift in this discourse and that public education need to recognize international students as a marginalized community as the continued failure to do so only sustains a cycle of oppression and discrimination (Tavares, 2021). The theories used in the study were able to build off one another to identify the vulnerabilities and

risks among Chinese international secondary youth, how these student populations can potentially be racialized in every aspect of their academic, social, and domestic domains, and expose the exploitative nature of recruitment agencies and homestay programs in order to determine what areas of new or reformed policies need to be implemented to better regulate international education and protect these vulnerable youths.

The data revealed the discrepancies and gaps with how Canadian secondary schools are marketed to Chinese international students and the realities of their experience once in the system (Creswell, 2014). The insights of individual Chinese international student populations lived experiences, alongside teachers' insights and observations, helped identify overarching concerns and gaps within policy and programmatic supports for international students. Research revealed how the increasing neoliberal agenda within education has led to implications for international secondary students, as the desire for profit from schools and a lack of regulation and involvement from governments has revealed gaps in quality of care, human agency, a lack of responsibility from all parties, and increased risk of exploitation for international youth. Current practices shaped by neoliberalism negate all progressive policies implemented by EDI initiatives, as international students are only increasingly becoming more vulnerable and at risk for their safety and security. The study brings into question why public education does not explicitly define quality differently in terms of care and support for international students and continues to disregard their nuanced experiences in terms of equity, student security and safety.

Chinese international secondary students' experiences during the pandemic revealed how racism shapes their experiences, and how these marginalized students remain invisible in educational policies and practices. The study examined the implications of COVID-19 in order to understand the long-standing vulnerabilities that Chinese international student populations

experience and exposed the additional cracks within the system that increased the invisibility of these student populations. The study also revealed how geo-political tensions could also further impact the way that teachers also interact with these students, as the increasing criminalisation and hostility towards these student populations can affect the level of support provided. The impact of geo-politics and the pandemic demonstrated how broader issues can influence at the micro level with student school experiences. As such, this research has impacted my own growth and role as an educator in the public education system, as the study brought forth understanding of what aspects of international education on a K-12 level need policy and systemic restructuring, and how to better regulate international education to better support and protect international youth. K-12 strategies needs to expand their focus and concerns beyond Canadian domestic students and include international students' voice and presence in EDI dialogue and policies. Major discrepancies were revealed between what school boards are advertising EDI values and practices are being promoted versus what is truly being implemented within the classroom from teachers, administration, and staff members. It raises questions on what policies and practices need to be established to ensure what is prioritized publicly is actually being regulated in the private (e.g. classrooms, schools).

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**Appendix A:
Interview Protocol
(Students)**

- Can you share some background information about yourself? (e.g., name, age, grade, school, country of origin)
- How long have you been an international student in Canada?
- Why did you choose to study in Canada?
 - Tell me about your decision about studying abroad? Can you tell me how and why you came to decide? Where did you decide to study?
 - What impressions or ideas of Canada did you have before arriving here?
 - After your experiences in Canada, did your impressions or ideas of Canada change once you arrived?
- Do you enjoy your school experience? Why or why not? Is there something that you like or dislike?
 - Is the way you are taught and learn in Canada different or similar to how you are taught and learn in your home country? Can you explain your experiences?
 - Are you making friends with other students in Canada? Are they international or domestic students?
 - Can you speak about your experiences with friendships?
 - Do you find it easier or harder to make friends with international or domestic students? Can you describe your experience?
 - Are you living with a host family or extended family? If so, can you describe your experience? What do you like or dislike?
 - What do you think of international student services like recruitment agencies or homestay companies? Have you used any? If so, can you describe your experience? What do you like or dislike?
 - If you are staying in a host family, what was the experience like finding one? Has your experience with your host family been similar or different to what is advertised?
 - What have been the most difficult shifts or changes you've experienced in your life in Canada?

- How has your life in Canada changed after COVID-19? Host family, school, friends, family? Can you describe your experiences since COVID- 19?
- Have you ever felt any discrimination or racism before COVID-19? Can you describe your experiences if any?
- Have these experiences changed after COVID-19? Can you describe your experiences if any?
- Do you feel safe during your stay in Canada? Do you think there is enough support available for you? If so, where do you find this support?
- Can you share a positive example and a negative example when you had to seek support and what the process was like?
- What changes would you like to see for future international students choosing to study in Canada?
- Looking back, would you have done anything differently coming to Canada to study? Do you think you will continue to study here? Why or why not?
- If you wouldn't change anything, what in particular was effective or good for you?

**Appendix B:
Interview Protocol
(Teachers)**

- Can you share some background about yourself? (e.g., name, job title, how many years you worked at the school board)
- Why is recruitment of international students important to your school board/School?
- What are the biggest concerns of Chinese international secondary school students once they have arrived in Canada?
- How do these concerns persist or change over time?
- Can you share any positive or negative experiences international Chinese secondary school students have shared with you about their studies in Canada?
- What supports are available for Chinese secondary school students?
- Do you think there is enough support available for these students?
- Do you think teachers are providing enough accommodations for these students?
- Should there should be more professional development for teachers to help support ELL international students?
- In what ways do you think COVID-19 has had any impact on Chinese secondary school students?
- Did you notice any signs of anti-Asian hate, racism, or discrimination towards these student populations following COVID-19?
 - Are there any changes you would like to see for future Chinese international students choosing to study in Canada?

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

Date:

Study Name: The Dramatic Rise of International Secondary School Students in Canada:
Exposing Vulnerabilities and Recognizing Responsibilities

Researcher name:

Helen Liu
Principal Investigator
Doctor of Philosophy (Language, Culture & Teaching)
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Purpose of the Research:

The purpose of the study is to explore the particular experiences of Chinese international students in secondary schools in Canada paying particular attention to the vulnerabilities and risks among this population. The pre-existing systemic issues within the academic, social, and homestay/ guardianship domains of international students lives could be further exacerbated by the recent global pandemic, COVID-19, as it has placed these students in an even more vulnerable position due to the anti-Asian racism and discrimination that has manifested as a result. This can ultimately impact their experiences and ability to integrate within a new education system and culture in Canada. The study ultimately aims to highlight the gaps and discrepancies that may be present within support structures, institutions, and organisations in order to ensure that these vulnerable populations receive the protection and support they deserve during their studies in Canada.

The primary research questions guiding the study are:

- *What are the discrepancies and gaps between how Canadian secondary schools are marketed to Chinese international students?*
- *What are the key concerns and gaps within the academic, social, housing and guardianship experiences following the arrival of Chinese students to Canada?*
- *What do the experiences of Chinese international student population in GTA secondary schools reveal about Ontario and Canada's schools and policies on multiculturalism, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI), and international education?*
- *Whether the pandemic and growing geo-political tensions between Canada and China further exposed limitations in the approaches to multiculturalism, EDI and international education, and the need to confront the protection and security of international students?*

- *What are the potential gaps in policy and program supports, and how do they reduce the protection and security of international students, both Chinese and non-Chinese populations?*

The research will adopt a qualitative research approach, aiming to conduct semi-structured interviews with ten to fifteen Chinese international secondary school students who are 16 and over from secondary schools within the greater Toronto area. Participation for the study will be based on a voluntary basis with no incentives. Data may be used potentially for published articles and conference presentations. Participants will be provided with pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research:

Participants for this qualitative study will be engage in in-depth online interviews with the researchers. Semi-structured interviews will be carried out within one-hour to maximum one and half hour sessions on the platform Zoom for each participant. There will be no inducements for this study. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time. An interview guide will be used with the participants to explore Chinese secondary school students lived experiences, challenges, and concerns during their studies in Canada. All interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed for subsequence analysis.

Risks and Discomforts:

There is a potential for low psychological or emotional risks for participants as you may feel emotional discomfort, anxiety, or stress as they will be asked personal questions about your own lived experiences, or your own perceptions of Chinese secondary school students experiences studying and living in Canada. However, prior to the interview you will be informed that if you feel any discomfort regarding any of the questions asked you can choose to not answer or withdraw from the interview immediately with no consequence. Following the interviews, the researcher will be available to address any concerns or questions you may have regarding the study. However, if you express feelings of distress in any form, you will be reminded that they can withdraw at any time and the research team will direct you to individuals qualified to discuss content and feelings in relation to their stress about their experiences. These qualified individuals include teachers and access to the school counselors or other counselling centres to provide the necessary resources and support regarding their concerns or feelings.

We do not foresee any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You:

By participating in this study, participants are offering important insights to schoolboards and international student programs within Toronto to understand what type of supports and protection are necessary in order to properly respond to the special circumstances of Chinese international students. This research is among the first of its nature to contribute insights into the experiences, impact, and needed supports for international Chinese secondary students during the global pandemic, COVID-19.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer, to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions will not influence the nature of the ongoing relationship you may have with the researchers or study staff, or the nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future.

If you decide to stop participating, you may withdraw without penalty, financial or otherwise, and you will still receive the promised inducement.

In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible. Should you wish to withdraw after the study, you will have the option to also withdraw your data up until the analysis is complete.

Confidentiality:

All information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. The data for this study will be collected through handwritten field notes and audio recordings of the online interviews. Your data collected through interviews will be held in strict confidence using password protected hard drive and stored in a secure location. Only the principal researcher will have access to the data. All information will be reported in such a way that individual persons cannot be identified, and all raw data (digital audio recordings and notes) will be destroyed upon completion of the study. Participants will be provided with pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

This study will use the Zoom to collect data, which is an externally hosted cloud-based service. When information is transmitted over the internet privacy cannot be guaranteed. To avoid this, we will use a unique password for each interview and fully lock the meeting upon the interviewee's arrival. This will provide security for each of our interviewees. However, there is always a risk your responses may be intercepted by a third party (e.g., government agencies, hackers). Further, while York University researchers will not collect or use IP address or other information which could link your participant to your computer or electronic devices without informing you, there is a small risk with any platform such as this of data that is collected on external servers falling outside the control of the research team. If you are concerned about this, we would be happy to make alternative arrangements (where possible) for you to participate, perhaps via telephone. Please contact Helen Liu for further information.

All recordings (audio) will be saved in a password protected file to research team members' local computer, not the cloud based service.

Please note that it is the expectation that participants agree not to make any unauthorized recordings of the content of a meeting / data collection session.

Questions About the Research?

If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact me at hliu566@yorku.ca or my supervisor, Dr. Roopa Trilokekar by e-mail at RDesaiTrilokekar@edu.yorku.ca. You may also contact the Graduate Program in Faculty of Education at gradprogram@edu.yorku.ca.

This research has received ethics review and approval by the Delegated Ethics Review Committee, which is delegated authority to review research ethics protocols by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board, and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, Kaneff Tower, York University (telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail ore@yorku.ca).

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I _____ consent to participate in the research study titled *The Dramatic Rise of International Secondary School Students in Canada: Exposing Vulnerabilities and Recognizing Responsibilities* conducted by Helen Liu. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature _____
Participant

Date _____

Signature _____
Principal Investigator

Date _____

Additional consent (where applicable)

1. Audio and video recording

I consent to the audio and video-recording of my interview(s).

Signature:

Date:

Participant Name: _____

