

**CHINESE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' ENGAGEMENT WITH DEMOCRATIC
DISCOURSES AND PRACTICES IN CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES**

by

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Abstract

This dissertation situates current Chinese international students in the historical flow of internationally mobile Chinese people since the late 19th century. Informed by their predecessors' significant contributions to China's political transformation in the 20th century, the doctoral research conceives of these students as political subjects 'in the making', and examines them as potential influencers on China's democratization efforts in the upcoming decades.

This doctoral study examines how Chinese international students become and/or are made into political – and possibly democratic – subjects through their engagement with democracy while pursuing degrees at universities in Canada and the United States. Adopting a qualitative case study approach, the study recruits twelve students from two sites, one on the Canadian West Coast and the other on the U.S. East Coast. It collects data on participants' engagement with democratic discourses and practices in their two host countries with three methods (i.e., qualitative interviewing, observations, and document gathering).

Findings demonstrate that international mobility in higher education has significant bearings on participants' political subjectivity. Particularly noteworthy is that half of the twelve participants emerge with increased commitment to democracy and increased competence to effect democratization in China. Increased commitment and competence were closely related to students' engagement with three kinds of democratic practices: 1) those associated with learning and unlearning about democracy, 2) those associated with democratic elections at the regime level, and 3) those associated with organization design and management. Further, students' engagement with democratic practices occurred largely in

two spaces related to their education: 1) the conceptual space entailed in disciplinary studies, especially those in the social sciences, 2) the structural procedural space entailed in the electoral politics of the two host countries and politics in Chinese international student organizations. Finally, the dissertation research illustrates how democratic practices were related to different spaces, including conceptual and structural procedural spaces.

Lay Summary

Chinese citizens today make up the largest group of international students globally, and most of them are projected to return to their home country after graduation. Against such a backdrop, this study examines how Chinese international students engage with democracy in Canada and the United States, and how such engagement affects their thoughts and actions regarding China's democratization in the 21st century. The study demonstrates that students can engage with democracy at two levels during their stay abroad. At the regime level, they can observe, reflect upon, and even participate in the democratic practices associated with the electoral politics of their host countries. At the level of local associations, they can experiment with democratic practices in the processes of organization design and management. Through such engagement, some students may even become increasingly committed to democracy and increasingly competent to effect democratization in China.

Preface

This dissertation is an original intellectual product of the author, G. Li. The fieldwork reported in Chapters 5, 6, and 7 was approved by the University of British Columbia's Behavioral Research Ethics Board (Certificate Number: H13-02235).

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List of Abbreviations

CCDI	The Central Commission for Discipline Inspection
CPC	The Communist Party of China
FCO	The Foreign and Commonwealth Office
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
IIE	Institute of International Education
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	Non-government Organization
NPC	The National People's Congress
NSC	The National Supervisory Commission
OECD	The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PSC	The Politburo Standing Committee
UIS	The UNESCO Institute for Statistics

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Context and Rationale

Research has shown that higher education tends to have an important bearing on democratization. For instance, Benavot (1996) observed a strong positive impact of the expansion of higher education on the establishment and consolidation of democracy in Asian countries between 1965 and 1988, particularly in the 1980s. Informed by this finding from his longitudinal study, Benavot recommended that further research be conducted to explore the long-term effects of international students in North America or Western Europe on their home countries' democratization, a recommendation based on the assumption that these students "often receive firsthand exposure to democratic institutions and practices" (p. 403).

Benavot's ideas resonated with my experiences of participating as a recipient of Chevening Scholarships in the United Kingdom between 2007 and 2008. Here, it is worth providing some background information on Chevening Scholarships and myself.

The Chevening Scholarships were launched in 1983 as part of "the UK government's international awards aimed at developing global leaders" (The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2019, para. 1). Since the fund for the scholarships comes mainly from the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (the FCO), it is British embassies and High Commissions worldwide who select the recipients of the scholarships in more than 160 countries and territories annually. The scholarships are awarded to those applicants identified as having "the most potential to be future global leaders" (The FCO, 2018, p. 6). A successful applicant, often called a Chevening Scholar, is funded to pursue a one-year master's degree program at any UK university chosen by the Scholar. In addition to academic studies,

Chevening Scholars are offered opportunities to network with one another and with their UK professional counterparts through various events and programs organized by the FCO.

One feature of the Chevening Scholarships in the People's Republic of China¹ (excluding its two Special Administrative Regions, Hong Kong and Macau) is particularly noteworthy. Between 1983 and 2005 the scholarships were open primarily to mid-career professionals in China's central government, provincial governments, and state-owned enterprises. The majority of Chinese Chevening Scholars in this period were, therefore, referred directly by the Communist Party of China (the CPC). The scholarships became open to Chinese applicants of all backgrounds in 2006, the year in which I sent in my application. At that time, I was an adult English teacher in New Oriental Education and Technology Group, the number one private education service provider in China. According to the selection criteria, I was one of the few scholars from China's social development sectors.

While pursuing my master's degree in education at Cardiff University between September 2007 and August 2008, I networked extensively with other Chinese Chevening Scholars. In particular, I participated with some of them in a two-week-long internship program organized by the FCO, the aim of which was to build professional networks between Chevening Scholars studying in Wales and senior civil servants and political leaders at the Welsh Assembly Government.

At these networking events the topic of China's political reforms occurred again and again. One observation intrigued me in particular. That is, despite being taught in China that democracy is a key ideological weapon of the West, many of my Chevening colleagues,

¹ The People's Republic of China is referred to as China in the remainder of the dissertation.

including myself, while discussing China's political future with one another or with UK politicians, agreed that it is only a matter of time until forms of democracy emerge in China. We even agreed that the real challenge is how to develop democratic practices without transplanting a democratic model or system from another country or context.

This observation made me aware that Chinese students can become political subjects in and through their engagement with democratic discourses and practices in Western host countries, the awareness paralleling Benavot's (1996) recommendation for further research as mentioned above. I also realized that this issue could be related to China's democratization in the 21st century because international students from Mainland China² (excluding Hong Kong and Macau) can engage with liberal democratic institutions and practices in their Western host countries, and this engagement may, in turn, contribute to developing democratic practices for China.

Reading literature on Chinese international students in the fields of international higher education and political science, I observed that neither field had addressed the potential relations between these students and China's attempts at democratization in any depth.

Scholarship in international higher education has focused on Chinese students but primarily in their role as consumers of international education, learners across cultures, and human capital. Neoliberalism as policy, ideology, and, in the Foucauldian sense, governmentality has perpetuated this neglect of the political dimension of Chinese students' international mobility in higher education (Larner, 2000). The neoliberal notion of increasing

² International students from Mainland China are referred as Chinese international students or international students from China in the remainder of the dissertation. This is because none of the students and recent graduates who were interviewed for this research comes from Hong Kong or Macau.

competitiveness of both individuals and nation-states has remained one of the most dominant themes in the current policies and practices regarding international higher education in the West. For example, Hutcheson (2011) identified that the purpose of higher education in the United States has shifted from promoting democracy nationally and internationally to sustaining the country as “a powerful, if not the dominant, force in global economy” since the early 1970s (p. 56). As higher education is increasingly envisioned and formulated as an investment in human capital development (i.e., neoliberalization of higher education), students tend to be transformed “according to a specific image of the economic”, that of “an intensely constructed and governed bit of human capital tasked with improving and leveraging its competitive positioning and with enhancing its (monetary and nonmonetary) portfolio values across all of its endeavors and venues” (Brown, 2015, p.10). Drawing on Webb’s (2017) insight that “neoliberalism has economized life through market metrics in order to govern people more effectively” (p. 297), I concur with Brown (2011) that neoliberalization of higher education tends to influence universities, particularly public ones, to neglect their duty to educate students to become “a people oriented toward common concerns and governing itself” (p. 36), thus jeopardizing the very existence of democracy. To borrow Asgharzadeh’s (2008) words, my stance on the field of international higher education is that it “cannot remain indifferent to issues around democracy” (p. 336).

Scholarship in political science has examined public opinion about democracy of different demographics such as young people, adults, and political elites within China (Ding, 2001; Ogden, 2002; Shi, 2008; Thornton, 2008), but neglected Chinese citizens outside China. It should be borne in mind that Chinese citizens with experience of international mobility have played a leading role in China’s political transformation since the late 19th

century. This point can be illustrated by two prominent figures in China's politics in the 20th century: Sun Yat-sen and Deng Xiaoping. They both received parts of their formal or informal education in Western countries.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

Informed by my personal experiences of participating as a Chevening Scholar as well as by internationally mobile Chinese people's contributions to China's political transformation in modern history, my doctoral research aims to explore how Chinese international students are produced politically through their engagement with democracy while pursuing degrees at universities in Canada and the United States. Specifically, this study examines the following three questions:

1. How do Chinese international students engage with democratic discourses and practices in Canada and the United States?
2. How does this engagement affect the students' thoughts on and/or actions towards democracy?
3. How do the students become and/or how are they made into political – and possibly democratic – subjects?

1.3 Democracy and Democratization

This section discusses two key concepts of this inquiry: democracy and democratization. While democracy is a contested concept with its meanings shifting in history, I draw on Dahl's (1998) process-oriented conception of democracy. This conception,

in particular, distinguishes two scales (i.e., regimes and local associations) on which practices of democracy are enacted.

At the regime level, Dahl (2005) sets forth six institutions as the minimum requirements to qualify a regime as fully democratic:

- *Elected officials*: Control over government decisions about policy is constitutionally vested in officials elected by citizens. Thus modern, large-scale democratic governments are representative.
- *Free, fair and frequent elections*: Elected officials are chosen in frequent and fairly conducted elections in which coercion is comparatively uncommon.
- *Freedom of expression*: Citizens have a right to express themselves without danger of severe punishment on political matters broadly defined, including criticism of officials, the government, the regime, the socioeconomic order, and the prevailing ideology.
- *Access to alternative sources of information*: Citizens have a right to seek out alternative and independent sources of information from other citizens, experts, newspapers, magazines, books, telecommunications, and the like. Moreover, alternative sources of information actually exist that are not under the control of the government or any other single political group attempting to influence public political beliefs and attitudes, and these alternative sources are effectively protected by law.
- *Associational autonomy*: To achieve their various rights, including those required for the effective operation of democratic political institutions, citizens also have a right to form relatively independent associations or organizations, including independent political parties and interest groups.

- *Inclusive citizenship*: No adult permanently residing in the country and subject to its laws can be denied the rights that are available to others and are necessary to the five political institutions just listed. These include the right to vote in the election of officials in free and fair elections; to run for elective office; to free expression; to form and participate in independent political organizations; to have access to independent sources of information; and rights to other liberties and opportunities that may be necessary to the effective operation of the political institutions of large-scale democracy. (pp. 188-189)

According to the above-mentioned requirements, neither of the two host countries selected for this research (i.e., Canada and the United States) qualifies as fully democratic regimes because permanent residents are not allowed to vote in the election of officials or run for elective office. Nonetheless, compared with China, these two countries meet Dahl's criteria for a fully democratic regime to a much greater extent.

At the level of local associations, Dahl (1998) sets forth five processes in continuous motion as the minimum requirements for qualifying a situation as democratic:

- *Effective participation*: Before a policy is adopted by the association, all the members must have equal and effective opportunities for making their views known to the other members as to what the policy should be.
- *Voting equality*: When the moment arrives at which the decision about the policy will finally be made, every member must have an equal and effective opportunity to vote, and all votes must be counted as equal.
- *Enlightened understanding*: Within reasonable time limits, each member must have equal and effective opportunities for learning about the relevant alternative policies and their likely consequences.

- *Control of the agenda:* The members must have the exclusive opportunity to decide how and, if they choose, what matters are to be placed on agenda. Thus, the democratic process required by the three preceding criteria is never closed. The policies of the association are always open to change by the members, if they so choose.
- *Inclusion of adults:* All, or at any rate most, adult permanent residents should have the full rights of citizens that are implied by the first four criteria. Before the twentieth century this criterion was unacceptable to most advocates of democracy. (pp. 37-38)

A major example of this type of local associations given by Dahl is that of a local government. However, Chinese students on student visas are temporary residents in Canada and the United States, thus having no legal right to participate in the affairs of local governments in the two host countries. Therefore, for this research I applied Dahl's notion of local associations mainly to the ones in which Chinese international students can have membership and participate in the decision-making processes that relate to their interests in their host countries. A good example of such local associations is that of student organizations affiliated with specific universities in Canada and the United States.

It is also worth noting that these five processes serve as "guides for shaping and reshaping concrete arrangements, constitutions, practices, and political institutions" (Dahl, 1998, p. 42). This means that local associations must keep working on these processes so as to practice democracy more fully.

Based on the process-oriented conception of democracy, I conceive of democratization as a process by which a regime and a local association come to behave in greater conformity to the expressed demands of its citizens and its members, respectively. There are some favorable conditions for democratization, such as public beliefs in democratic ideas and

practices, and the rule of law (Dahl, 1998). Furthermore, I conceive of democratization as a process pertinent to citizens of a country and members of a local association being made into and/or becoming political subjects. Therefore, a very important, if not central, dimension of democratization is that of how citizens and members become democratic subjects in and through their engagement with practices that are enacted at the level of regime and at the level of local associations.

1.4 Significance

The importance of my doctoral research lies mainly in its inquiry into current Chinese international students' formation as political subjects in relation to China's democratization effort in the 21st century. Therefore, this dissertation can contribute to two fields of study in particular, namely international higher education and China's democratization.

In this research Chinese international students are primarily conceived of as political subjects in the making. As such, their movement from China to host countries pertains not merely to their education, but more importantly, to their political subjectivity. From this perspective, I hope that the research can capture those practices associated with their education abroad that have important bearings on their thoughts on and actions toward democracy. On the other hand, democracy in this research is conceived of not as a monolithic entity, but as a multiplicity of differing practices. Therefore, by capturing various practices in democratic processes both at the regime level and at the local association level, this inquiry can locate Chinese international students' political subjectification and democratization within pluralities, differences, and multiplicities.

I hope that findings of this research can contribute to the identification of those practices in and through which Chinese international students become democratic subjects. More importantly, I hope that these practices can serve as a springboard for the development of democratic practices suitable for the Chinese context in the 21st century.

1.5 Structure of the Dissertation

The dissertation consists of eight chapters. After this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 reviews the literature related to my research questions, in three fields of study: international higher education, history, and political science. By situating current Chinese international students in the history of China's democratization since the late 19th century, the literature review highlights the knowledge gap regarding the significance of these students to China's political transformation in the 21st century. Informed by the contributions of internationally mobile Chinese people to China's democratization in the past, I argue that Chinese international students should be re-imagined as political subjects in the making. This idea presents a new image of political subjectivity in addition to the three existing ones that current literature has used and projected onto these students (i.e., consumers in international higher education markets, learners across borders, and human capital). I also propose two thematic areas as the basis of my doctoral research that inquires into the students' formation as political subjects in Canada and the United States. The first area is that of the students' meaning making of democracy as a concept, and the second their engagement with democratic practices in the two host countries.

Chapter 3 develops a theoretical framework for understanding Chinese international students' cross-border mobility in relation to China's democratization efforts in the 21st

century. Drawing on the critiques of liberal democracy offered by four theorists (i.e., Carl Schmitt, Chantal Mouffe, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Rancière), I construct the framework with four key concepts: the political, politics, democracy, and political subjectification. The key theoretical insight developed in this chapter is that Chinese students' international mobility in higher education can be conceived of as a nexus of political practices and subjectification practices. These practices, in turn, may contribute to students' becoming and being made into political subjects with increased awareness of the complex interplay between autonomy and authority as well as increased competence to promote liberty and equality in politics. The framework envisages this type of political subject as having important bearings on China's democratization efforts in the 21st century.

Chapter 4 presents the methodology of my doctoral research. In it, I provide descriptions and explanations of five methodological factors (i.e., research design, research sites, participant selection, data collection and generation, and data analysis). The research design adopts a qualitative case study approach. A total of twelve Chinese international students were recruited from two research sites, one on the Canadian West Coast and the other on the U.S. East Coast. Three methods (i.e., qualitative interviewing, observations, and document gathering) were used in the process of data collection and generation, a process that lasted for 21 months. Data analysis revolved around three main themes: the contexts of participants, participants' engagement with democratic discourses and practices, and participants' formation as political subjects.

Chapter 5, Chapter 6, and Chapter 7 report findings that emerged from the thematic analyses of the collected and generated data. Chapter 5 describes and analyzes how research participants engaged with the domestic politics of Canada and the United States. It shows

that most participants observed, reflected upon, and even participated in those practices associated with the processes of voting. This key finding counters the assumption that Chinese international students tend to engage with their host countries' formal electoral politics in a very limited way, based on the fact that their international student status legally prohibits them from voting in their host countries' democratic elections. This chapter also shows that participants' engagement with formal electoral politics in Canada and the United States was influenced by a host country's system of government (institutional factor), Chinese immigrants' past experiences in the host country (historical factor), and the host country's current immigration policies (policy factor).

Chapter 6 describes and analyzes how participants engaged with politics in three Chinese international student organizations at the U.S. research site. It demonstrates that most of the participants recruited in the United States experimented with various democratic practices associated with the processes of organization design and management. Noteworthy is that politics in the three organizations was imbued with issues of and conflicts over power, a characteristic that derived mainly from the competitions and sometimes even conflicts among various macro- and micro-political factors in specific organizations. Nonetheless, findings in this chapter clearly shows an unintended consequence of the competition between cultural norms of China and those of the United States to constitute research participants as political subject in the context of organizational politics. That is, they became not only increasingly aware of how their political subjectivity had been or could be subjected to certain undemocratic cultural norms of their home country and host country, but also increasingly competent to resist such subjection of their political subjectivity, and even constitute themselves as Chinese citizens.

Chapter 7 illustrates and analyzes how half of the twelve research participants developed a strong self-sense of becoming democratic subjects with increased commitment to democracy and prioritizing democratization over democratic elections. Noteworthy are the three features that marked participants' political subjectivity in relation to their international mobility in higher education (i.e., subjectivity in subjection, disidentifying subjectivity, and democratic subjectivity in the making). This chapter theorizes that international mobility in higher education has created two particular spaces that made it possible for participants to become democratic subjects. The first space is entailed in participants' disciplinary studies, particularly those in the social sciences. In this space, the participants went through a reciprocal process of learning and unlearning about democracy, which enabled them to become increasingly aware of the importance of democracy for the Chinese people in the 21st century. The second space is entailed in the structures and procedures of electoral politics in Canada and the United States and politics in Chinese international student organizations. In this space, the participants problematized democratic elections at the regime level and experimented with various ensembles of democratic discourses and practices at the organizational level, which enabled them to demand going beyond voting particularly by deliberating in the decision-making and/or problem-solving processes pertinent to their collective rights and/or interests.

Chapter 8 concludes this doctoral dissertation. In it, I highlight the key findings of this research and summarize its major contributions to the fields of international higher education and China's democratization. Informed by the key findings as well as the limitations of this study, I also suggest two directions for future research on Chinese international students' political subjectivity and one direction for future research on democratization.

Chapter 2: Literature Review³

2.1 Introduction

This chapter builds the connection between Chinese international students and China's democratization in the 21st century by reviewing existing literature in three fields of study, namely international higher education, history, and political science. In doing so, it argues not only for considering Chinese international students' potential impacts on China's democratization as an urgent and under-researched topic of inquiry in its own right, but also for re-imagining these students as political subjects in the making.

The main body of the chapter is divided into four parts. It begins by locating Chinese international students in the worldwide massive flow of students pursuing tertiary education abroad in the 21st century. It then summarizes two key features of these students' international mobility in tertiary education, one pertaining to their preferred destinations and the other their preferred type of education. What follows is a review of current research on Chinese students in the field of international higher education. The review pinpoints the lack of knowledge on these students' international mobility from a political perspective. With recourse to history, the fourth part details the significant contributions of internationally mobile Chinese people to China's democratization since the late 19th century.

³ Significant portions of this chapter have been published in 2020 as my single-authored chapter "Reimagining Chinese globally mobile students: Political subjects in the making" in the book *Rethinking education across borders: Issues and insights on globally mobile students* co-edited by Uttam Gaulee, Shyam Sharma, and Krishna Bista.

The chapter concludes by connecting current Chinese international students with China's democratization in the 21st century and outlining two thematic areas as the basis of this doctoral research on Chinese students' formation as political subjects in Canada and the United States.

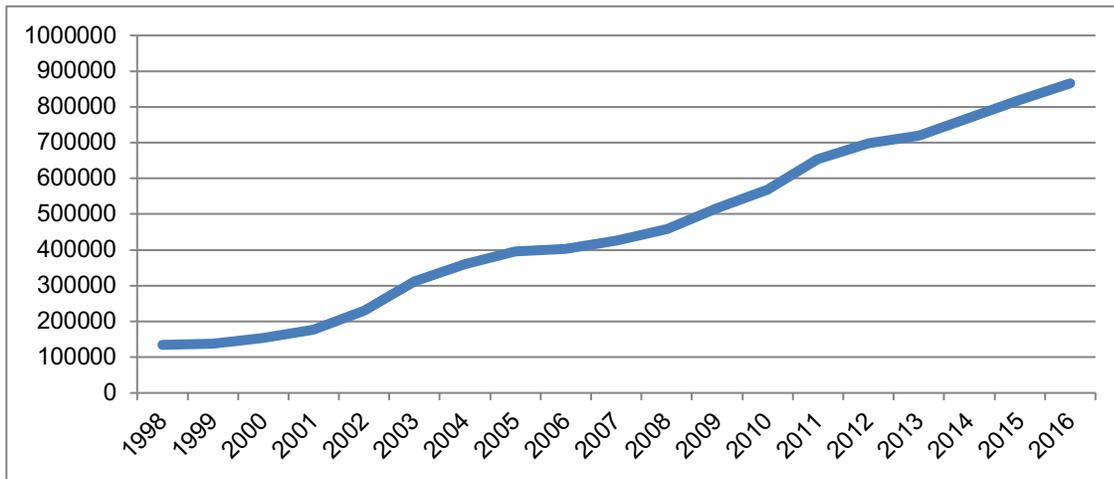
2.2 Worldwide Flow of Students Pursuing Tertiary Education Abroad in the 21st Century

The world has witnessed a vast expansion in international tertiary education since the late 20th century, which is related to the neoliberalization of international higher education as “a commodity to be freely traded” and “a private good” (Altbach & Knight, 2007, p. 291). This expansion is most evidenced by the worldwide and increasing flow of students pursuing tertiary education abroad. According to the latest available data released by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2018), the global number of tertiary-level students enrolled outside their country of citizenship has multiplied more than 2.5 times, from 1.9 million in 1998 to 5 million in 2016.

One of the major driving forces behind this increase is that of Chinese students. According to the data provided by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS, 2018), the total number of Chinese students seeking tertiary education abroad has multiplied 6.4 times from 134,407 in 1998 to 866,072 in 2016 (Figure 2.1), a rate that far outstrips the worldwide increase over the same period. Kajanus (2015) argued that the dramatic expansion in Chinese international student numbers is on the one hand pulled by “the internationalization of education” particularly in the developed countries, and on the other hand pushed by “the problems of the Chinese education system” (p. 47) such as disparity in access to China's elite

universities. Kajanus also noted that the expansion is underpinned by “the neoliberalist perspective on education as standardized and commodified training of highly mobile and flexible workforce for the needs of either global or national economies” (p. 72).

Figure 2.1
Number of Internationally Mobile Chinese Students at the Tertiary Level (1998 – 2016)



Data extracted from UIS

The latest data show that 869,387 Chinese students pursued their tertiary education abroad in 2017, accounting for 17.1% of the worldwide population of international students at the tertiary level (UIS, 2018). In this regard, China dwarfed all other top eight source countries of tertiary-level international students: India (6.0%), Germany (2.3%), the Republic of Korea (2.1%), France (1.8%), Saudi Arabia (1.7%), Nigeria (1.7%), and Vietnam (1.6%). Even when these seven countries are combined, the students they sent abroad for tertiary education accounted for 17.2% of the worldwide total, a proportion leading China by only 0.1%.

Before proceeding further, it is fitting to define two key terms here. The first is “international tertiary students”, which refers broadly to students “who left their country of origin and moved to another country for the purpose of study” at the tertiary level (OECD, 2018, p. 225). It should be clarified that in this research I define Chinese international students at the tertiary level more narrowly as Chinese students who pursue their tertiary education in countries where they hold student visas or permits.

The second key term is that of tertiary education, or higher education. Based on OECD’s (2014) categorization, tertiary education consists of three types of education:

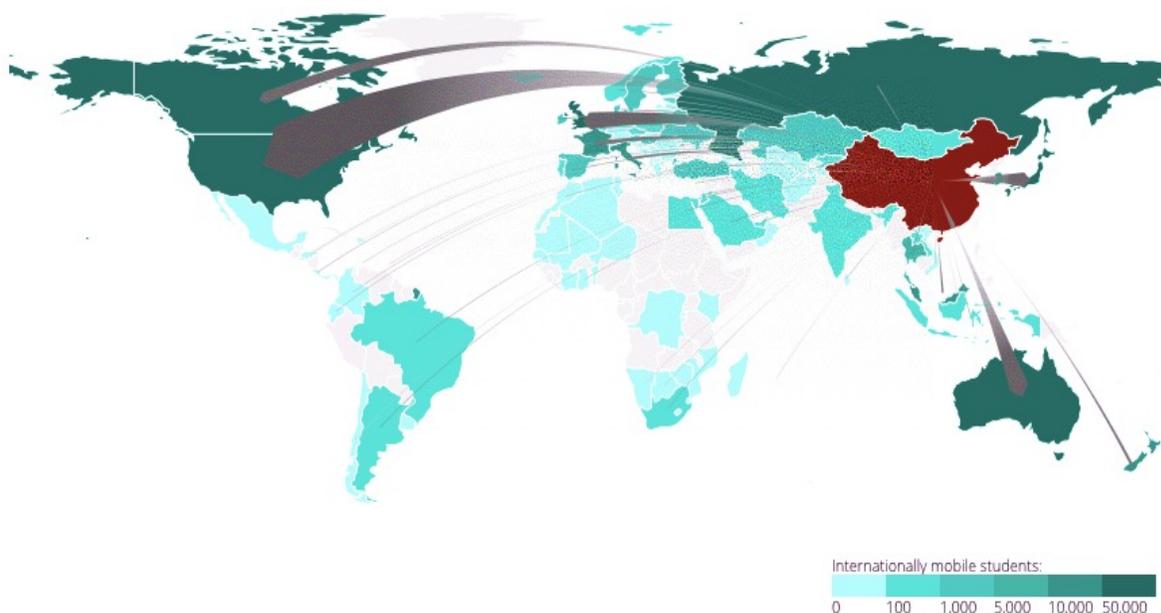
- tertiary-type A education, which offers “largely theory-based programs designed to provide sufficient qualifications for entry to advanced research programs and professions with high skill requirements, such as medicine, dentistry or architecture”;
- tertiary-type B education, which offers programs that “are typically shorter than those of tertiary-type A and focus on practical, technical or occupational skills for direct entry into the labor market, although some theoretical foundations may be covered in the respective programs”;
- advanced research programs, which are “devoted to advanced study and original research”, leading “directly to the award of an advanced research qualification, e.g. Ph.D.” (p. 23)

Here, it deserves mentioning that all the twelve students selected for this research pursued degree programs in tertiary-type A education and advanced research programs. As will be shown in Chapter 4, eight participants undertook doctoral degree programs, three master’s degree programs, and one a bachelor’s degree program.

2.3 Two Features of Chinese Students' International Mobility in Tertiary Education

In general, Chinese students' international mobility in tertiary education is marked by two features. The first one pertains to their preferred destinations. Their preference is visualized in Figure 2.2: the bigger an arrow points to a country, the larger the number of Chinese students who pursued their tertiary education in that country in 2017. It can be seen clearly that the vast majority of Chinese students were attracted by five developed English-speaking countries: two in North America (i.e., the United States and Canada), one in Western Europe (i.e., the United Kingdom), and two in Asia Pacific (i.e., Australia and New Zealand).

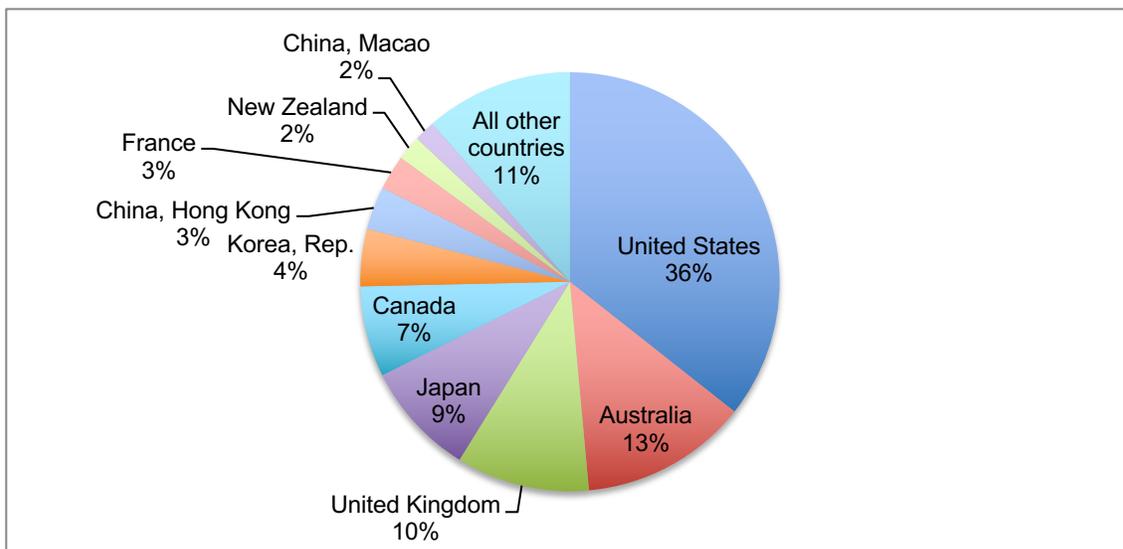
Figure 2.2
Destinations of Chinese Students Seeking Tertiary Education in 2017, by Country



Source: The UIS (2018)

It is no surprise that these five English-speaking countries were all among the top 10 destinations for Chinese international students at the tertiary level in 2017. In total, they hosted 67.7% of these students' worldwide population (Figure 2.3). English is, therefore, the dominant language in which Chinese students receive their tertiary education abroad. It also deserves mentioning that, among the top 10 destinations, all three non-English speaking countries (i.e., Japan, South Korea, and France) as well as Macao⁴ (i.e., a former Portuguese colony and now a special administrative region of China) offer some tertiary education programs in English, and Hong Kong⁵ (i.e., a former British colony and now a special administrative region of China) continues to use English as the medium of instruction for almost all tertiary programs.

Figure 2.3
Distribution of Chinese Students Pursuing Tertiary Education Abroad in 2017, by Destination



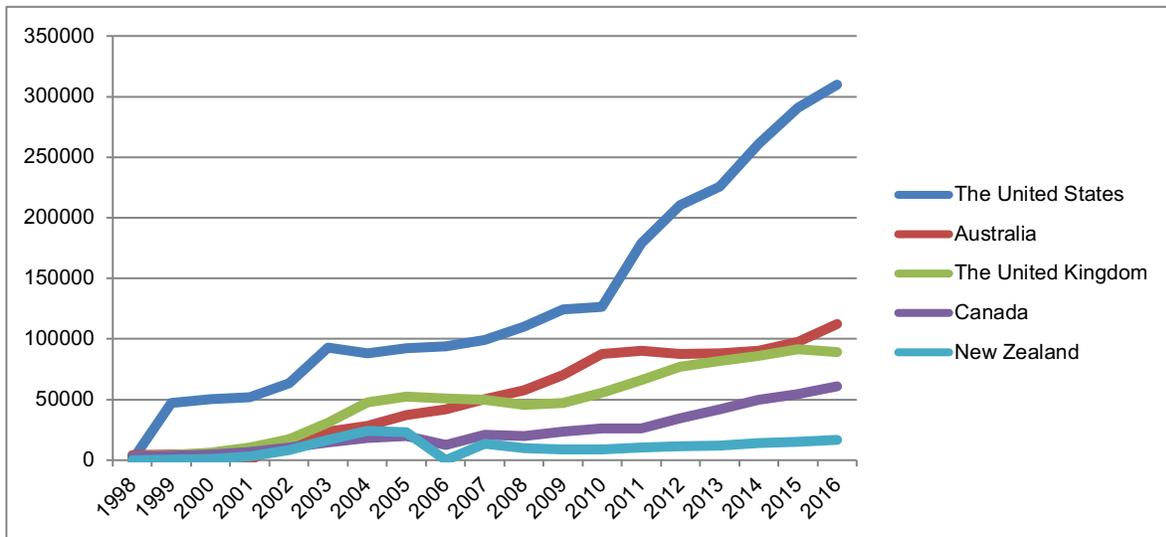
Data extracted from the UIS

⁴ Chinese students studying in Macao are categorized as internationally mobile students.

⁵ Chinese students studying in Hong Kong are categorized as internationally mobile students.

It should be noted that all the five English-speaking countries have experienced an explosion of the population of tertiary-level international students from China between 1998 and 2016. As illustrated in Figure 2.4, the number of these students increased almost 7 times in the United States (from 46,949⁶ to 309,837), slightly over 27 times in Australia (from 4,132 to 112,329), 31 times in the United Kingdom (from 2,877 to 89,318), nearly 22 times in Canada⁷ (from 2,820 to 60,936), and slightly over 67 times in New Zealand⁸ (from 247 to 16,625). It is no surprise that China has become the largest source of tertiary-level international students in all these five countries.

Figure 2.4
Number of Tertiary-level International Students from China in Five Major English-speaking Countries (1998 – 2016)



Data extracted from UIS

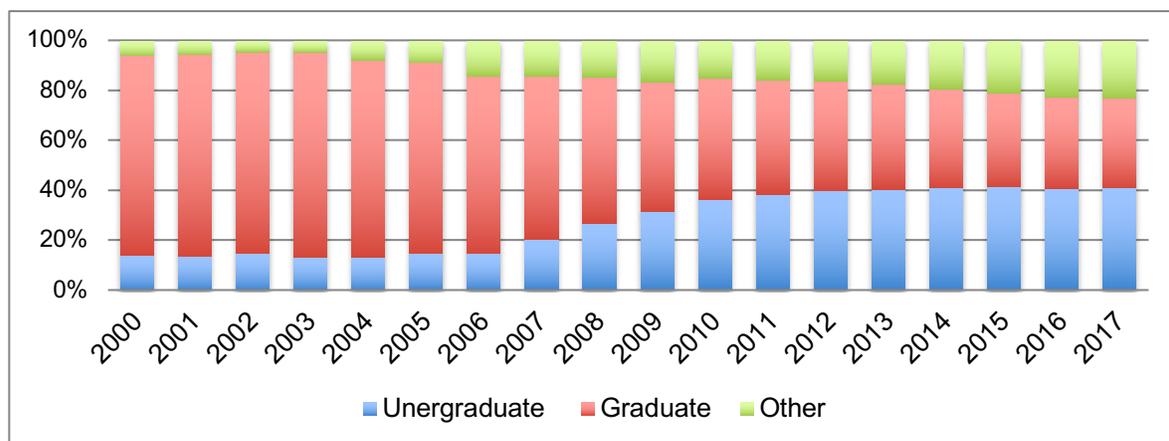
⁶ This number is from 1999 because data on Chinese international students pursuing tertiary education in the United States in 1998 are not available.

⁷ It should be noted that the Canadian data are based on national estimates.

⁸ It should be noted that no data are available on Chinese international students pursuing tertiary education in New Zealand in 2006. Therefore, the line of New Zealand drops to 0 that year in the figure.

The second feature of Chinese students' international mobility in tertiary education pertains to their preferred type of education. In general, the great majority of these students pursue degree programs. This tendency can be manifested in the above-mentioned levels of study of the twelve participants recruited for this research. More importantly, it is evidenced by the distribution of tertiary-level Chinese students in their top three destination countries⁹ (i.e., the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom), which together hosted 59% of the total population of Chinese students seeking tertiary education abroad in 2017. It can be seen from the three figures below (i.e., Figure 2.5, Figure 2.6, and Figure 2.7), since 2000 the proportion of Chinese students pursuing degree programs to the total number of tertiary-level Chinese students has always been above 77 % in the United States, 71.6% in Australia, and 82.6% in the United Kingdom.

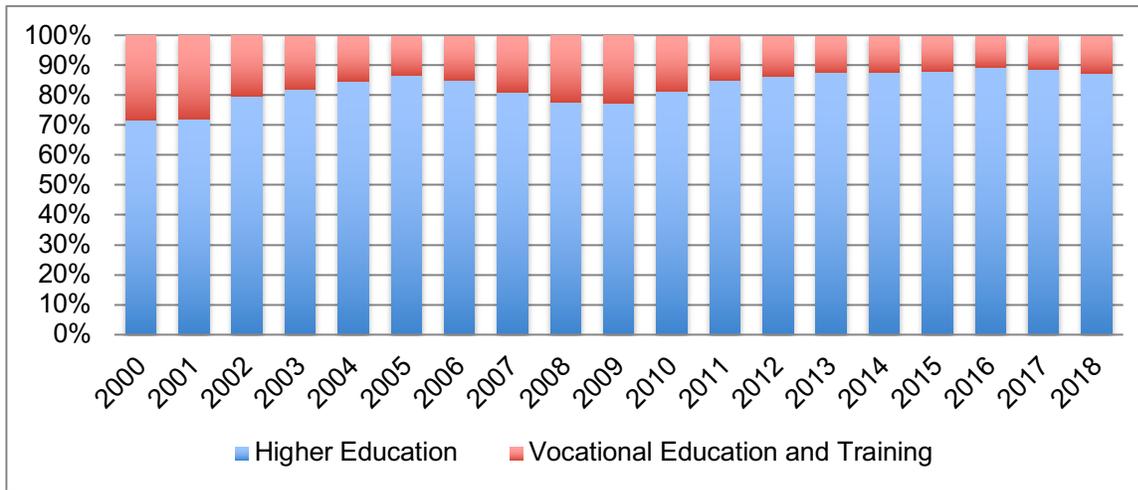
Figure 2.5
Distribution of Chinese Tertiary-level Students in the United States (2000 – 2017)



Data extracted from Institute of International Education (IIE)

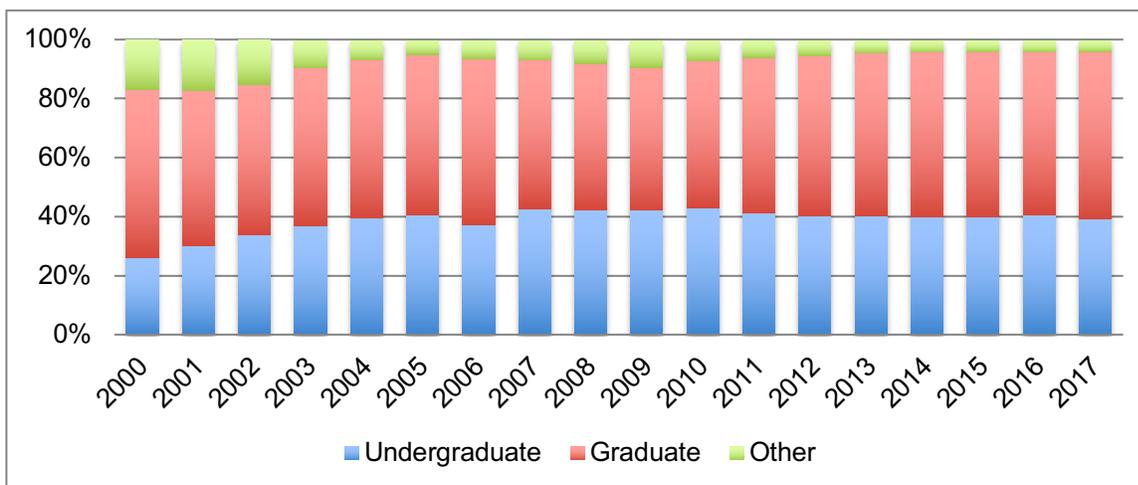
⁹ Although Canada is one of the two host countries selected for this research, no data are available about the nationwide distribution of Chinese students pursuing tertiary education in Canada as defined by level of study.

Figure 2.6
Distribution of Chinese Tertiary-level Students in Australia (2000 – 2018)



Data extracted from Department of Education and Training of Australian Government

Figure 2.7
Distribution of Chinese Tertiary-level Students in the United Kingdom (2000 – 2017)

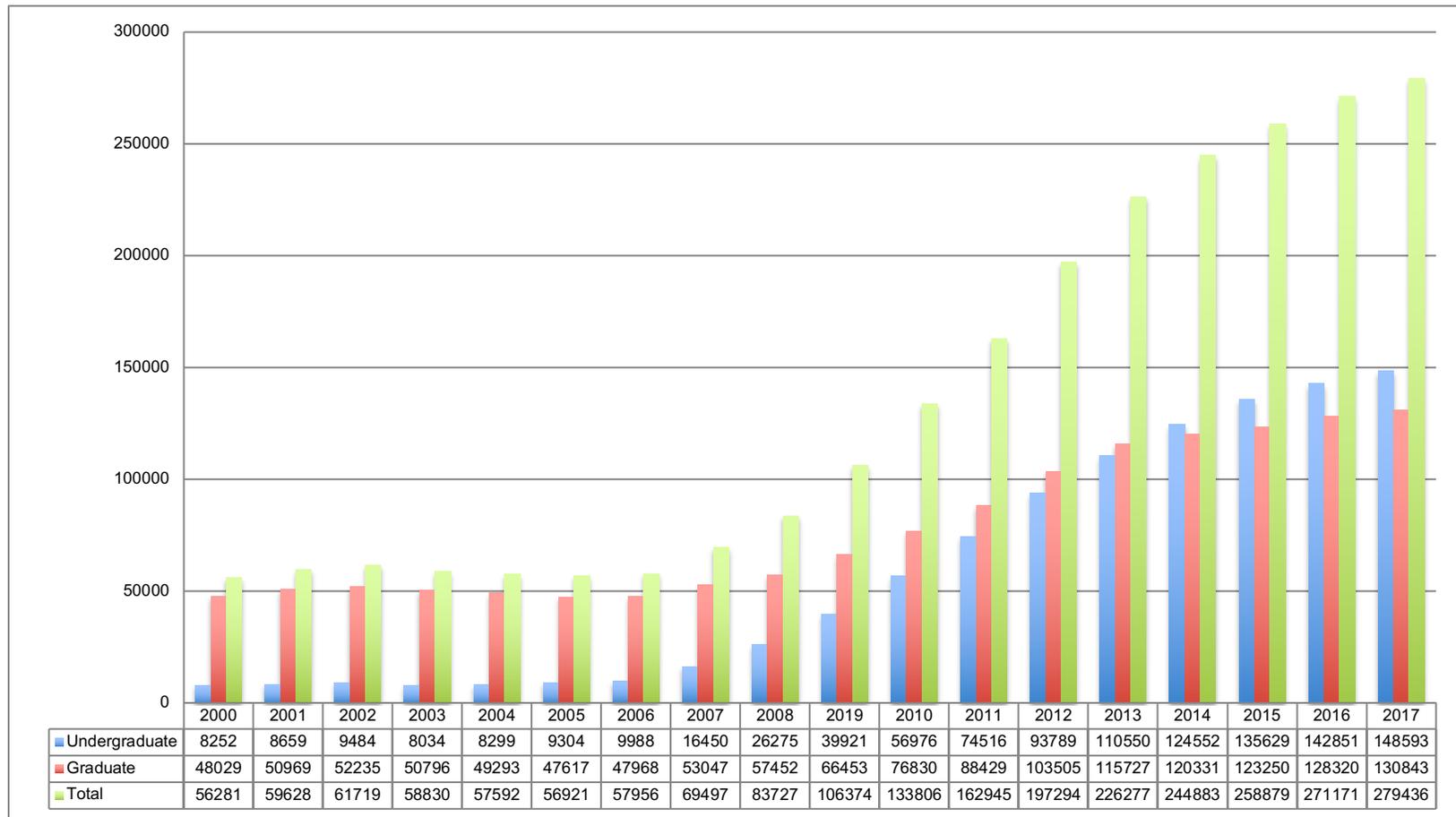


Data extracted from Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

A trend pertinent to this research stands out in Figure 2.5 when the three figures above are viewed through a comparative lens. That is, the proportion of those students enrolled in undergraduate programs in the United States, one of the two host countries selected for this research, increased almost threefold from 2000 to 2017 whereas that of those in graduate programs decreased slightly more than twofold in the same time period. As quantified in Figure 2.8, the total number of Chinese students pursuing undergraduate degree programs in the United States multiplied 18 times from 8,252 to 148,593 while that of Chinese students pursuing graduate degree programs multiplied 2.7 times from 48,029 to 130,843. Although no data on students' age are provided, this trend suggests that the population of Chinese students pursuing higher education in the United States, their top destination country, is getting younger.

Figure 2.8

Number of Chinese Students Pursuing Degree Programs in Higher Education in the United States (2000 – 2017)



Data extracted from IIE

This section shows that Chinese students have become the largest source of international tertiary education migration, and the great majority of them pursue degree programs in five major English-speaking countries. It is no surprise, then, that scholars in the field of international higher education have drawn increasing attention to these students.

2.4 Three Main Images of Chinese Students Seeking Higher Education Abroad

The existing literature in the field of international higher education has mainly projected three images onto Chinese students pursuing higher education abroad. The first is that of ‘consumers’ in the international higher education markets (Fang & Wang, 2014; Simpson & Tan, 2008). This image is mainly based on the recognition that Chinese international students constitute a significant revenue source for higher education institutions, local communities and destination countries. Their vast economic contributions bring not only opportunities for but also fierce competition among host countries. Therefore, research has been conducted to study motivation factors in Chinese students’ choice of study destinations (Wu, 2014), as well as recruitment strategies of host higher education institutions (Bodycott & Lai, 2012).

Chinese students are also portrayed as ‘learners’ across borders (Barker, 1997; Cheng & Erben, 2012; Cortazzi & Jin, 1997; Forland & Kingston, 2008; Zhang, 2010). This second image mainly derives from research that examines the students’ experience of pedagogical challenges, particularly those associated with language difficulties and cultural differences. Major topics covered by research in this regard include classroom participation (Elliott & Reynolds, 2014; Wu, 2015; Zhou, Knoke, & Sakamoto, 2005), critical thinking (Durkin, 2008; Heng, 2018; Song & McCarthy, 2018), and cultural heritage from Confucianism (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Tran, 2013; Triandis, 1995).

The third main image of these students is that of ‘human capital’ (Bail & Shen, 2008; Biao, 2006; Guo & Guo, 2017; OECD, 2008; Zweig, 2006). This image is largely constructed in and through policies pertaining to the notion of the knowledge economy that is becoming increasingly driven by innovation in the 21st century. It is widely believed that students in higher education are a desirable skilled labor force, particularly important for raising a country’s competitiveness. Therefore, research has particularly examined the two directions of Chinese students’ migration after their study abroad: returning to China and staying abroad (Cheung & Xu, 2014; Hao, Yan, Guo & Wang, 2017; Jonkers & Tijssen, 2008; Lu, Zong, & Schissel, 2009).

It should be noted that a small number of studies have touched on the political aspect of Chinese students’ international mobility in higher education. For instance, a research by Fong (2011) examined how overseas experience transformed the ways in which Chinese students understood themselves, their home country, and their host countries. One interesting finding is that Chinese students’ motivation to study abroad involves political considerations, which pertain mainly to their desire to avoid political corruption in their daily life in China. Another study by Hail (2015) investigated Chinese students’ encounters with their American peers’ criticism of China on a U.S. university campus. Especially noteworthy is the finding pertinent to the political influence of overseas experience on Chinese students: “observing the exercise of political freedom in the United States helped them better understand American society and made them want China to become more politically open” (p. 10).

As shown above, prior research in the field of international higher education has done relatively little to examine Chinese students’ international mobility in higher education from a political perspective. Three factors seem to have contributed to this lacuna. The first is that

of research lag. Chinese students' increasing presence is relatively new in international higher education, starting only from the late 1990s. It is understandable that current research on Chinese international students has primarily focused on their pedagogical problems since academic achievement tends to be the top priority for these students and the higher education institutions where they study. Hence, there is a research lag regarding the political aspect of Chinese students' international mobility in higher education.

The second contributing factor is that of the dominance of neoliberalism in international higher education. Under the influence of neoliberalism, the expectation has grown that “educational systems, through creating appropriately skilled and entrepreneurial citizens and workers able to generate new and added economic values, will enable nations to be responsive to changing conditions within the international marketplace” (Robertson, 2000, p. 187). Driven by this expectation, international higher education has paid much attention to producing students as human capital required for global competition (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). The focus on the economic value of Chinese international students, in turn, has arguably contributed to the neglect of their political significance.

The third factor may be that scholars and other stakeholders (e.g., policy makers and practitioners) of international higher education lack the awareness of the connections between Chinese international students and China's democratization. Raising such awareness, in my view, requires an appreciation of how internationally mobile Chinese people have contributed to China's democratic developments since the late 19th century. Thus, the next section is dedicated to the history of China's democratization.

2.5 The History of China's Democratization

Scholarship pertaining to China's democratization tends to treat its history in a fragmentary way. For one thing, this history is conventionally divided into three periods: the Late Qing Period (1840 AD – 1911 AD), the Republican Period (1912 AD – 1949 AD), and the Socialist Period (1949 AD – present). For another, the knowledge generated under this periodization tends to focus on the distinct features of each period, thus neglecting the issues common across these three periods. Still using this conventional division, I attempt to review China's democratization history with a special focus on the contributions of internationally mobile Chinese people in this regard.

2.5.1 The Late Qing Period (1840 AD – 1911 AD)

China's democratization was incubated in the milieu of education reforms triggered by the country's humiliating interactions with foreign powers in the late Qing period. Until the mid 19th century the Qing court and its elites had believed that China was supreme in the civilized world (Reynolds, 2001). However, this strong sense of supremacy gradually turned into deepening humiliation by China's consecutive military defeats, starting from China's first unequal treaty signed with the United Kingdom after its defeat in the Sino-British Opium War in 1842, and culminating in its crushing defeat by Japan – a country which had been traditionally dependent on China – in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95.

These defeats aroused a profound sense of national crisis among many government officials and elites. Their prescriptions for the survival of China mainly pertained to education reforms instead of political ones. Assuming that “western learning could bring China wealth and power in a modern world where China's Confucian heritage was of little

value” (Pepper, 1996, p. 519), the Qing government abruptly abolished the 1,200-year-old civil service examination in 1905. In the belief that “Japan has taken the West’s excellence in education as its model in fostering talent, and the country’s power has indeed risen greatly” (Borthwick, 1983, p. 42), Chinese reformers replaced civil service exam with a three-tier modern school system of primary schools, secondary schools and colleges, a system modeled on the Westernized Japanese Meiji one.

Late Qing education reforms proved to be a catalyst for the end of China’s last imperial dynasty. This is mainly because the abolition of the civil service examination broke the long-lived “partnership” (Elman, 2000, p. xix.) between the Chinese imperial bureaucratic state and its local elites. The civil service examination was initially instituted as an empire-wide measure by China’s imperial rulers in the Sui dynasty (581–618 AD). Its original purpose was to limit alternative centers of power, mainly the landed aristocracy, and consolidate the newly established imperial state (Elman, 1991). In the Song dynasty (960–1279 AD), the landed aristocracy was permanently replaced by a new class of “scholar-officials” who were exclusively selected through the civil service examination that tested examinees’ mastery of the Confucian classics. Most elites remained loyal servants of the imperial state by subjecting themselves to the state’s moral and political orthodoxy of Confucianism embedded in the content of the examination. The state, in turn, affirmed these elites’ belief system, and gave them social status, political influence, and the material means of securing landed and commercial wealth. Moreover, certain “nonhereditary values” (Pepper, 1996, p. 46) in Confucianism and the legitimacy of the examination as fair and impartial bureaucratic channel for official selection were also inculcated in commoners, particularly by the rare examination successes of a few sons of commoner families. Therefore, it is not surprising

that the Qing Dynasty collapsed only six years after the abolition of the civil service examination, a system that had interwoven the interests and aspirations of Chinese elites and commoners with those of the imperial state for 1,200 years.

One unintended result of the education reforms in the late Qing period is that the declining confidence in Confucianism motivated many Chinese elites to learn from the West about democracy as a means of building China into a powerful modern state. Liang Qichao, an elite reformer, popularized almost single-handedly the very concept of democracy in China during his exile in Japan after the Qing court's crackdown of the Hundred Days of Reform in 1898 (Nathan, 1985). He borrowed the Japanese term 民主 in his writing to signify democracy, a term that denotes "a democratic political system" (Xiong, 2001, p. 74). Interestingly, this term was invented through recombining existing characters of the Japanese literary language – a language very close to the classical Chinese – in new ways when western political texts were translated into Japanese in the late 19th century (Liu, 1995).

While exploring Western political thoughts in Japan, Liang was optimistic about democracy, which he viewed as a source of the power of Western countries. Liang's conception of democracy was mainly that of "a means of communication between government and people" (Nathan, 1985, p. 49), which can effectively unleash the power of popular participation to unify the wills and efforts of individuals and to promote collective welfare. In Liang's opinion, this solidarity of the group would ultimately secure the survival of China in its fierce competition against other countries.

However, Liang became pessimistic about democracy after his tour of the United States in 1903. This attitude shift was largely influenced by his interactions with American

politicians and observations of some Chinese communities in the United States. Unimpressed by the talent of American politicians and deploring the inefficiency of constant elections, Liang was very disappointed with the U.S. democracy, particularly the republican form of democratic government. He also observed that, despite the freedom and privileges that the Chinese people enjoyed in the United States, their participation in elections and organizations tended to lead to chaos and disorder. Reasoning that even those Chinese people in the United States appeared incompetent of achieving unity through democracy, Liang concluded:

Freedom, constitutionalism, republicanism: these are but the general terms which describe majority rule. But China's majority, the great, the vast majority of Chinese, are as I have described them here. Were we now to resort to rule by this majority, it would be the same as committing national suicide. Freedom, constitutionalism, republicanism – this would be like wearing summer garb in winter, or furs in summer: beautiful, to be sure, but unsuitable. No more am I dizzy with vain imaginings; no longer will I tell a tale of pretty dreams. In a word, the Chinese people must for now accept authoritarian rule; they cannot enjoy freedom. ... Those born in the thundering tempests of today, forged and molded by iron and fire – they will be my citizens, twenty or thirty, nay, fifty years hence. Then we will give them Rousseau to read, and speak to them of Washington. (Liang, 1904, as cited in Grieder, 1981, p. 167)

Based on the assumption that the survival of a state was identified with that of individuals within that state, Liang turned to constitutional monarchy as a more suitable form of government for China and took authoritarianism as a necessary means to build China into a modern state. In his post-American-tour essay "On Enlightened Despotism", Liang (1906)

further argued, “even if a governmental system deprives the people of much or all of their freedom, it is a good system so long as it is founded on a spirit of meeting the requirements of national defense” (as cited in Nathan, 1985, p. 62).

In summary, China’s democratization was incubated in the late Qing period in the greater context of China’s humiliating interactions with foreign powers. Noteworthy is that Liang Qichao, while being internationally mobile, popularized the concept of democracy in China. His international mobility also influenced his attitudes towards democracy. During his exile in Japan, he was enthusiastic and optimistic about democracy when interpreting it in light of ideas and values of Confucianism. Nonetheless, his direct exposure to democracy and observations of some Chinese people in the United States made him more pessimistic about democracy. As one of the key figures who brought the concept of democracy to China, Liang paradoxically provided a rationale for adopting authoritarianism in China.

2.5.2 The Republican Period (1912 AD – 1949 AD)

In the Republican period, China’s democratization took shape mainly on the theoretical foundations laid out by Sun Yat-sen. Noteworthy is that Sun’s theoretical thinking with regard to democracy was influenced by his experience in North America and Western Europe where he inquired into the political, social and economic developments of major Western countries between 18th century and early 20th century.

Informed by these inquiries, Sun (1919/1994) conceived of democracy as “sovereignty of the masses” (p. 225). On the one hand, he regarded democracy as “the tide of political progress throughout the world” (p. 228) that could not be resisted by any person or government. On the other hand, he advocated for democracy in China with three arguments.

First, he argued that a supreme ruler had no place in China because the people were the country's foundation and they were equal with one another. Second, he argued that constitutional monarchy¹⁰, the form of government preferred by Liang Qichao, was ruled out in China since the Han Chinese, the vast majority of the Chinese population, were extremely hostile to monarchy after having been ruled heavy-handedly by the Manchus for 260 years in the Qing dynasty. Third, he argued that democracy could solve the political evil of prolonged chaos and corruption that had accompanied revolutions in Chinese history. Sun further reasoned that, without a democratic system, revolutionists would covet the power of an emperor, a threat that had already caused endless wars in China's past.

It should be noted that Sun's conception of democracy was closely related to nationalism and socialism. This is mainly due to his famous Three Principles of the People (*sanmin zhuyi*) that underpinned his revolutionary endeavors. These principles are the Principle of Nationalism (*minzu zhuyi*), the Principle of Democracy (*minquan zhuyi*), and the Principle of People's Livelihood (*minsheng zhuyi*). The Principle of Nationalism served as the foundation of the nationalist revolution for a twofold purpose: to end the rule of Manchus over Han Chinese, and to restore the lost Han Chinese nation and establish it as equal with other nations in the world.

The Principle of Democracy was the foundation of the political revolution against monarchy, a revolution that, in Sun's opinion, must be concurrent with the nationalist revolution against Manchus. Sun envisaged this political revolution to create a constitutional,

¹⁰ It deserves clarifying, here, that constitutional monarchy is not, in and of itself, incompatible with democracy, as demonstrated by a number of European countries today (e.g., the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Sweden). The regime that Liang Qichao preferred was a more authoritarian kind of monarchy that continued the rule of the Manchu minority over the Han Chinese majority.

democratic system, which combined direct democracy at the county level and representative democracy at the national level.

The Principle of the People's Livelihood was the foundation of the social revolution. Sun defined this principle as socialism, believing it could help the newly founded Republic of China as a latecomer in industrial and economic development to avoid the unequal distribution of capitals and political powers among different demographics (particularly between the rich and poor), a social problem that he perceived as being bitterly experienced by the Western capitalist countries in his time.

Sun (1923/1994) also laid out a three-phase road map to China's democratization: military administration, political tutelage, and a constitutional period. In the first phase, martial law would be in effect and the revolutionary army would not only destroy the Manchu dictatorship and official corruption, but also reform those practices of the imperial era that opposed the people's self-government. This was to be followed by the second phase of three years of political tutelage. The aim of this transitional period was threefold: a provisional constitution would be in effect; local autonomy would be introduced and practiced; former subjects of the Qing dynasty would be instructed both on the powers of the revolution government and on their rights and obligations as citizens so that they would be ready to participate in direct democracy at the county level and indirect democracy at the national level. In the third phase of constitutional period, each county having achieved complete local self-government would elect one delegate. A national congress consisting of the total number of the elected delegates would then draft the constitution, after which the people would elect a president and parliamentary delegates to form the central government. In the constitutional period, Chinese citizens would exercise their rights of suffrage,

initiative, referendum and recall directly at the county level, and their delegates in the parliament would exercise all the aforementioned rights except suffrage at the national level.

Sun envisaged China's democratization as a top-down process revolving around two axes, namely the political party and the people. To Sun (1918/1994), the starting point of China's democratization was the establishment of a party whose members rallied around his Three Principles of the People. Then the party should educate the Chinese people about these principles so that they would become capable of participating in China's democracy.

Sun (1918/1994) regarded the relationship between the party and the people as that of mother and child:

The people as masters of the Republic are like a newborn babe. Our Revolutionary party members are the mother who gave birth to this infant, and it is our duty to nurture and educate it, if we are to fulfill our revolutionary responsibility. The revolutionary program requires a period of political tutelage so that the master can be nurtured until adulthood, when power will be transferred back to him. (pp. 209-210)

This quote indicates that education was crucial for realizing the democratic China as envisioned by Sun. He further devised a doctrine to guide his top-down approach to China's democratization: "to act is easy, to know is difficult" (p. 199), the doctrine that prioritized acquiring the knowledge of democracy over taking actions to achieve democracy.

In practice, Sun successfully ended the rule of the Manchu minority over the Han Chinese majority by overthrowing the Qing dynasty through the Revolution of 1911. He also

became the provisional president of the Republic of China that was founded in 1912.¹¹ However, the newly founded Republic soon disintegrated into a state of regional and local warlordism in 1915, which lasted until 1928 when the National Government of the Republic of China reunified the country.

The failure of importing democratic institutions from the West triggered a quick cultural turn in China's democratization process. Many influential intellectuals concluded that China's real problem lay in its culture: "everything in old China was backward, dark, and weak" (Hayford, 1990, p. ix). Deriving from such a conclusion was the New Culture Movement from the mid-1910s to the 1920s, a movement oriented towards creating a new culture, or an entire new way of life.

It can be argued that the New Culture Movement has been a creative force of China's democratization ever since. This is mainly because the Movement made possible the heterogeneity in conceptions of democracy, and brought democracy-related concepts such as liberalism, Marxism, and neo-Confucianism into competition until the end of the Republican period.

Noteworthy is that some returnee students, particularly those returned from North America and Western Europe (e.g., Hu Shi, Tao Xingzhi, Jiang Menglin and Guo Bingwen), were liberal intellectuals who conceptualized democracy as one resembling liberal democracy in the West. In particular, they advocated for a free civil society in China, arguing that China's democratization was to be determined by the enlightened, well-educated elites

¹¹ It is worth mentioning that the 1912 elections are the only open, national elections in China in the 20th and 21st centuries.

capable of applying scientific inquiry methods and influencing China's established centers of power (Schwartz, 1983). Furthermore, they conceived of the Chinese people as "new citizens", who were "independent and active... in a social system in which the state was losing its traditional priority" (Borevskaya, 2001, p. 35), and whose struggle for individual freedom contributed to China's struggle for national freedom and independence as well as its search for national wealth and power. It deserves mentioning that, under the influence of these liberal intellectuals, the 1919 Fifth Annual Conference of the National Education Association passed an unprecedented resolution proclaiming that government should not impose its ideology on education (Zheng, 2001). One intention behind this policy was to create a favorable environment for the development of a free civil society in China.

Returnee students also played an important role in China's politics under the umbrella of "the third force" in the 1940s. They strived to bring reconciliation between the two major political opponents then (i.e., the Nationalist Party of China and the Communist Party of China) through negotiation and compromise for the sake of the nation's unity in its fight against Japan and for the sake of avoiding a civil war in China. Besides, they advocated constitutional and democratic reforms as a way for China to go forward, which competed against authoritarianism offered by both political parties (Fung, 2000). Although their cause failed in history, "the third force" has created what Nathan (1992) calls "a liberal tradition within, not external to, the Chinese past" (p. 325).

It can be even argued that those returnee students in the Republican Period are not only the predecessors of China's present democrats, but also the giants on whose shoulders present democrats stand, in the sense that many issues raised by the liberal intellectuals pertaining to China's democratization in the 1940s still remain largely unsolved and continue

to pose great intellectual and practical challenges in China's present and prospective democratization.

To sum up, China's democratization took shape in the Republican period. Noteworthy is that some Chinese people who were internationally mobile in this period played a leading role in laying theoretical foundations of democracy in the Chinese context, creating a multiplicity of discourses available for meaning-making of democracy as a concept, and developing practices and policies to foster a free civil society in China. Nonetheless, priority in the Chinese politics was not given to democratization, but to the nation's independence from foreign aggressions in the Sino-Japanese War from 1937 to 1945 and then to its domestic unification in the Chinese Civil War from 1945 to 1949.

2.5.3 The Socialist Period (1949 AD – Present)

The founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 commenced the socialist period, a period that has witnessed both democratizing and de-democratizing developments in China. This period can be divided into two broad phases: one under the leadership of Mao Zedong (1949 – 1976), and the other under post-Mao communist leaders (1976 – present).

The CPC put forward a different meaning of democracy: socialist democracy. Drawing on Marxism and Leninism, socialist democracy is claimed not only as a historical advancement of the democracy of Western capitalist countries but also as a genuine form of democracy on the ground that the rule by the people is realized through the dictatorship of the proletariat (Hu, 2000).

The CPC's conception of socialist democracy also draws on Mao's ideas of "democratic centralism" and "mass line" (Hu, 2000). Firstly, democratic centralism means

the ways in which the ruling classes (i.e., working class, peasantry, petty bourgeoisie and national bourgeoisie) organize political power in the democratic stage of the Chinese revolution, a stage to be followed by the socialist stage. Democracy in this framework refers to the bottom-up approach to policy making in general and allowing the people to speak out during the policy-making process in particular. Centralism denotes the top-down approach to policy making particularly within the CPC: “the minority is subordinate to the majority, the lower level to the higher level, the part to the whole, and the entire membership to the Central Committee” (Mao, 1942, para. 33).

Secondly, “mass line” means not only that the origins of the CPC’s policies should be the ideas of the people, but also that these policies should gain the people’s support through their feedback. Mao seemed to treat mass line as a defining feature of socialist democracy and took leadership of the CPC for granted. History has shown that this conception of socialist democracy has led to the unbridled authority of the CPC.

Based on the Marxist assumption that the economic base determines the superstructure, the Maoists believed that economic inequality was the root of “China’s traditional hierarchical social structure and authoritarian attitudes” (Ogden, 2002, p. 70). Therefore, democratization in the Mao era was carried out by eliminating economic exploitation and redistributing governing power from the classes who had the means of production to those who did not. The CPC introduced and practiced a planned economy, which was underpinned by the establishment of public ownership through allotting the land of landlords to the peasants in rural areas, and the properties of the capitalists to the proletariat in urban areas. Private ownership in Chinese agriculture, handicraft, and capitalist industry and commerce was completely transformed into state and public ownership in 1956. Although the CPC

claimed that the socialist democracy was that of the democratic dictatorship of the Chinese proletariat, it proved to be more dictatorial than democratic in the sense that the Chinese socialist democracy sought equality not in freedom but in restraint. This led to the totalitarian rule in the Cultural Revolution between 1966 and 1976.

The Post-Mao era (1976 – present) has once again witnessed internationally mobile Chinese people's increasing impacts on China's political transformation. One good example is Deng Xiaoping, a returnee student from France after receiving some of his education through a work-study program there in his early years in the 1920s. Deng played a leading role in ending the Cultural Revolution and initiating China's economic reforms and open-door policies between the late 1970s and the early 1980s, which coincided with the rise of neo-liberalism in the West.

An important legacy of Deng's reform is that of a new approach to China's democratization in the post-Mao era. Based on the assumption that "the unconditional promotion of democracy will bring disastrous consequences to the nation and the people" (Yu, 2009, p. 4), China's democratization after Mao is envisaged to start with the calculation of the price of democracy (*minzhu de daijia*) which mainly referred to political and social instability, and proceed with incremental democracy (*jianjin minzhu*), that is, incremental development of grassroots democracy under the umbrella of the development of intra-party democracy (Yu, 2009). The main purpose of democratization in the post-Mao era is to achieve dynamic stability (*dongtai wending*), meaning the maintenance of political and social order by the authoritarian rule of the CPC. Such goal is to be achieved by two means: continued economic growth, and improved governance mainly in the form of negotiation

rather than repression as a means to deal with sociopolitical tensions on the part of the Chinese government under the leadership of the CPC.

It deserves mentioning that the CPC attempts to accommodate democracy within the party's authoritarian regime, which in turn has led to two major theoretical developments regarding socialist democracy. The first pertains to "authoritarian deliberation" (Dryzek, 2009; He & Warren, 2008). In short, the CPC has recognized the importance of deliberation – an integral part of deliberative democracy – in its governance and opened a space for the people to exert deliberative influence on policy-making process under the authoritarian regime. The second development relates to "intra-Party democracy" (*dangnei minzhu*), which is envisioned by the CPC as a means to institutionalize checks and balances within the party mainly through multi-candidate intra-party elections and decision-making by votes (Li, 2009).

Noteworthy in the theoretical developments of socialist democracy are the contributions of some CPC establishment scholar-officials with overseas experience. A good example is Yu Keping, the above-quoted theoretician of the new approach to China's democratization in the post-Mao era. He has spent much time abroad since the mid-1990s, particularly in the United States and Germany. Well-versed in Western social science writings, Yu advocated greater democracy in 21st-century China. In recent years, he has become an eminent public opinion leader promoting greater political transparency, deliberative democracy and the rule of law. As an official, Yu has been deputy director of the Central Compilation and Translation Bureau under the Central Committee of the CPC, a major think tank for the Chinese leadership, particularly in the area of theoretical research. Yu also serves as director of two think tanks based at Peking University (i.e., the China Center for Comparative Politics

and Economics, and the Center for Chinese Government Innovations), both of which are known for their cutting-edge research in the global trends in social science research and China's domestic political changes.

In the post-Mao era, there are also three empirical developments that bear importance for China's democratization. Firstly, the CPC has experimented with local self-government mainly in two forms: villagers' committee elections (O'Brien & Li, 2000), and deliberative polling at the township level (Fishkin, He, Luskin, & Siu, 2010; He & Thøgersen, 2010). Secondly, China's democratization has entered an era of what He (1997) calls "exile politics", meaning political activity by Chinese overseas students and others living outside China. Chinese exile politics began with the establishment of the Chinese Alliance for Democracy by a group of Chinese international students in the United States in 1983, and was greatly strengthened in 1989, the year in which many influential intellectuals and university students escaped from China and sought refuge in Western countries after the military crackdown on their pro-democracy demonstrations on Tiananmen Square in Beijing. This has led to the formation of an overseas opposition movement that aims mainly at promoting democratization in China.

Thirdly, the number of adherents of major religions has increased substantially in the post-Mao era although China officially remains an atheist state. This increase is particularly the case for Protestantism. The Chinese government data indicates a dramatic growth in the number of Protestants in registered churches from 10 million in 1997 to 16 million in 2006 (Grim, 2008). Considering the fact that the majority of Chinese Protestants practice their belief in house churches, the Pew Research Center (2015) estimates that the total number of

Chinese Protestants was about 59 million in 2010. According to Yang's¹² (2015) estimation, it is even possible for this number to reach 418 million by 2030, accounting for 30% of China's population and making the Chinese Protestant population the largest in the world. This demographic change may well affect China's democratization in the 21st century since some cross-national statistical research indicates a strong correlation between a larger Protestant population and higher level of political democracy in a country (Woodberry & Shah, 2004).

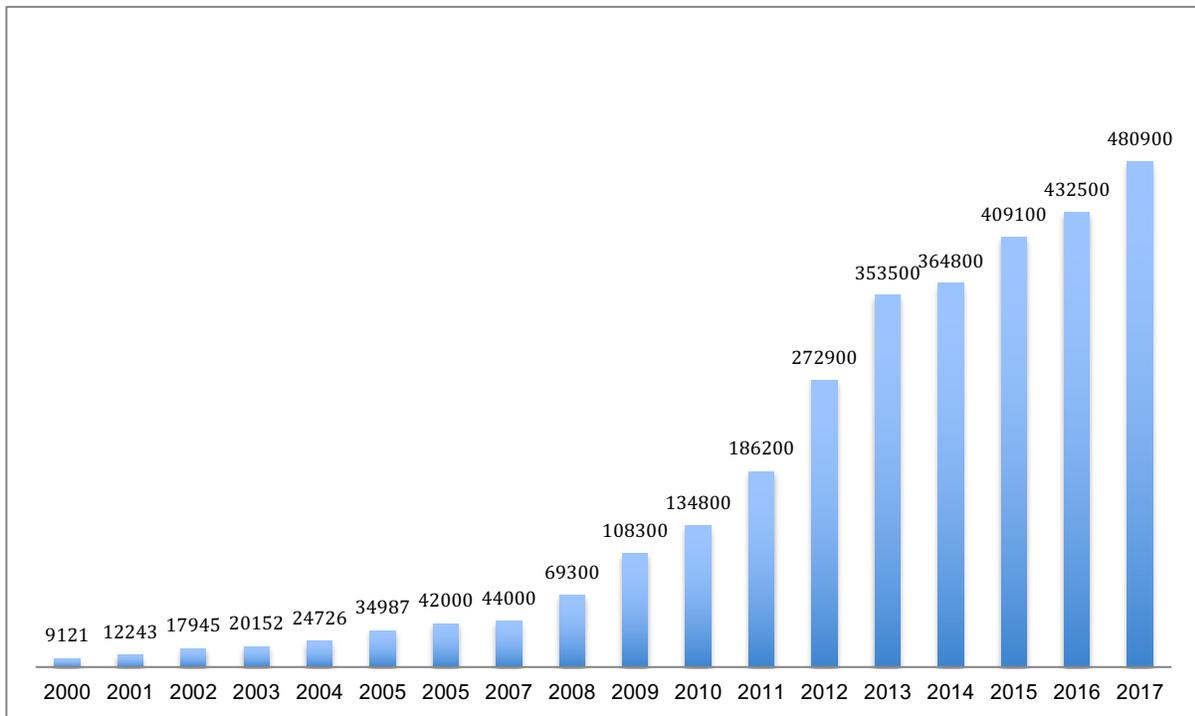
Concurrent with the aforementioned political developments in the post-Mao era, the influence of returned foreign-educated students on China's political landscape has emerged clearly in recent years. For example, many returnee students are playing a dominant role in think tanks that affiliate with China's top universities. As Li (2005) observes, when China faces grave domestic and international challenges, its top leadership usually turns to those think tanks for advice with global perspectives. A few returnees have even obtained higher ranks in the CPC. A noteworthy trend is that the percentage of returnees in the Central Committee of the CPC (i.e., the highest authority of the party) increased from 6.2% in 2002 to at least 20% in 2017 (Li, 2011; *The Economist*, 2018). It deserves mentioning that the majority of these returnees are from Western countries.

Although the presence of returnees in China's top political leadership is still small, they have great potential for influencing China's political development. On the one hand, they can create a ripple effect through their impacts on the center of China's political power with their

¹² Fenggang Yang is one of world's leading experts on religions in China. He is a Professor of Sociology and the director of the Center on Religion and Chinese Society at Purdue University in the United States.

knowledge and experience accumulated from their education abroad. On the other hand, they can produce cumulative effects on China’s political landscape since more students tend to flow back home after completing their education overseas in the near future. As illustrated in Figure 2.9, the number of returned Chinese students has multiplied 52.7 times from 9,121 in 2000 to 480,900 in 2017 (the National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2018). Furthermore, if we divide the number of returned Chinese students by that of those studying abroad in the same year from 2000 to 2017, a more striking trend becomes visible: the percentage of returned students has increased from around 20% in the early 2000s to around 80% from 2013 onward (Table 2.1).

Figure 2.9
Number of Returned Chinese Students (2000 – 2017)



Data extracted from National Bureau of Statistics of China

Table 2.1
Percentage of Returned Chinese Students (2000 – 2017)

'00	'01	'02	'03	'04	'05	'06	'07	'08	'09	'10	'11	'12	'13	'14	'15	'16	'17
23%	15%	14%	17%	22%	30%	31%	31%	39%	47%	47%	55%	68%	85%	79%	78%	79%	79%

Data extracted from National Bureau of Statistics of China

2.6 Conclusion

The review of the history of China’s democratization, as conducted in this chapter, highlights that internationally mobile Chinese people (especially those who lived and/or studied in North America and Western Europe) have played a very important, if not the central, role in developing theories, policies and practices related to democracy in China since the late 19th century. Even though firsthand exposure to democracy abroad may not lead to positive attitudes towards democracy or actions to seek greater democracy in China such as in the case of Liang Qichao, it is evident that Chinese international students’ potential impacts on China’s democratization should be taken as an urgent and under-researched topic of inquiry in its own right, particularly against the backdrop of the massive flow of Chinese students pursuing higher education abroad and the unprecedented number of returnees in the 21st century.

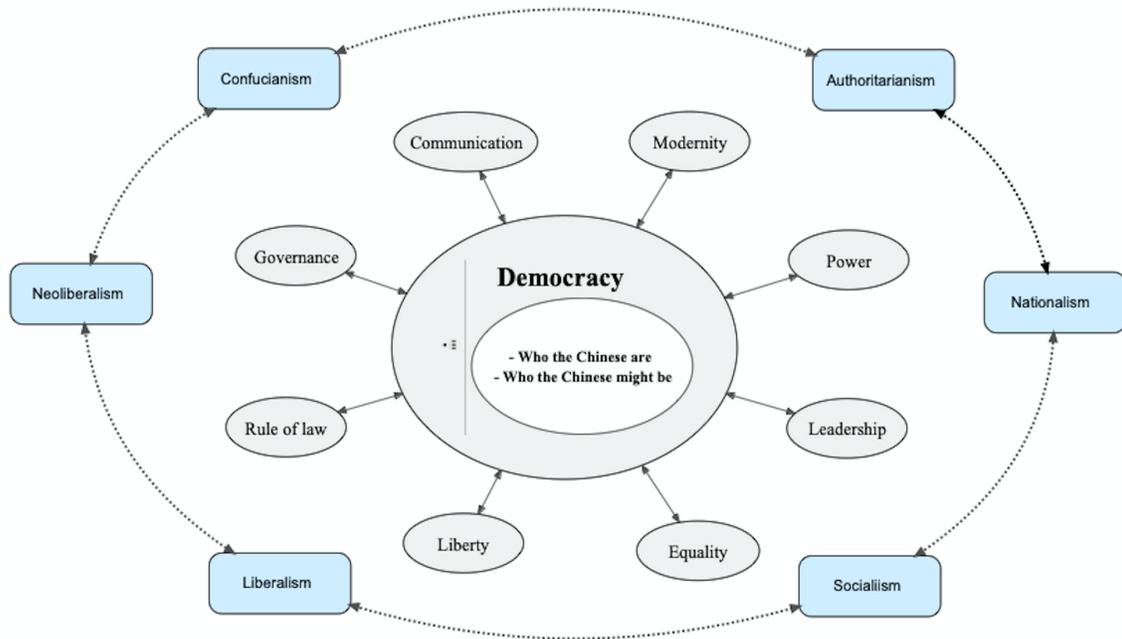
Conceiving of internationally mobile Chinese people’s historical contributions to China’s democratization as a manifestation of their political subjectivity developed abroad, I argue that Chinese international students should be re-imagined as political subjects in the making. This image is different from the three conventional images that current literature in

the field of international higher education has projected onto these students (i.e., consumers in international higher education markets, learners across borders, and human capital).

Informed by the literature review, I developed two thematic areas to serve as the basis of my doctoral research on Chinese international students' formation as political subjects during their stay in Canada and the United States. The first area pertains to these students' meaning making of democracy as a concept. Moving from an authoritarian society to a democratic society may lead the students to undertake an ongoing conceptualization of democracy with constant checking of the limits of democracy in the two host countries. This critical work of thought on democracy fulfills what Foucault (1982) calls the two roles of philosophy: to "prevent reason from going beyond the limits of what is given in experience", and to "keep watch over the excessive powers of political rationality" (p. 210).

The review of China's democratization history indicates that meaning making of democracy for the Chinese context is a highly complex process that entails many concepts and discourses. As visualized in Figure 2.10, meanings of democracy have been closely related to eight other concepts: communication, modernity, power, leadership, equality, liberty, rule of law, and governance. Furthermore, there has been fierce competition among six powerful discourses (i.e., Confucianism, authoritarianism, nationalism, socialism, liberalism, and neoliberalism) with shifts in the dominant discourse in different historical periods. Central to this complex process is the construction of Chinese people's collective identities, that is, who the Chinese people are and who they might be. Therefore, this research particularly examines how the above-mentioned concepts and discourses operate with one another in Chinese international students' understanding of democracy.

Figure 2.10
Meaning Making of Democracy for the Chinese Context



The second thematic area relates to Chinese students' engagement with democratic practices in their host countries. As shown in this chapter, a persistent problem in China's democratization history is the lack of experience of democratic practices, a problem perpetuated largely due to the prolonged one-party rule. Therefore, this research stays focused on how Chinese international students engage with democratic practices during their stay overseas. Such practices include but are not limited to the practices associated with democratic elections, and those associated with democratic management of an organization. Since democracy is conceptualized in this research not as a monolithic entity, but a multiplicity of differing practices in process, capturing the students' engagement with

different democratic practices will allow me to locate democratization within pluralities, differences, and multiplicities.

It can even be anticipated that insights into Chinese students' formation as political subjects in Canada and the United States may yield a rethinking of how key players (e.g., the Chinese people, the CPC, and the international community) can relate to and interact with one another in China's democratization in the 21st century.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

This chapter develops a theoretical framework for understanding Chinese students' international mobility in higher education in relation to China's democratization efforts. I develop this framework in relation to my review of literature conducted in Chapter 2, and in relation to the critiques of liberal democracy conducted in this chapter. Since the construction of the framework draws on the work of four theorists (i.e., Carl Schmitt, Chantal Mouffe, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Rancière), particularly their critiques of liberal democracy, it deserves a very brief discussion from the outset on how the work of these theorists relates to each other.

Schmitt¹³ is arguably most known for his notion of “the political”, that is, “the most intense and extreme antagonism” (Schmitt, 1932/2007, p. 62) associated with the distinction between friend and enemy. Concurring with Schmitt's assertion that the political is ineradicable in every facet of human lives, Mouffe on the one hand acknowledges that democratic politics entails a *we/they* relation that can always take the form of friend/enemy. On the other hand, she takes the sharpest edges off Schmitt's notion of the political by advocating that it is also possible and even necessary for liberal democracy to translate the *we/they* as enemy relationship into an adversarial relationship for politics that is agonistic but not antagonistic. To use the words of DesRoches and Ruitenbergh (2018), Mouffe advocates

¹³ It deserves noting that Schmitt is a controversial figure due to his membership of the National Socialist German Workers' Party which is commonly known as the German Nazi Party.

for “rewriting democracy in a way that deepens how we experience the political, without destroying liberal institutions” (p. 285). Liberal democracy, according to Mouffe (2005), “requires a ‘conflictual consensus’: consensus on the ethico-political values of liberty and equality for all, dissent about their interpretation” (p. 121).

Interestingly, in their respective critiques of liberal democracy, Foucault takes liberty as his main target and Rancière focuses on equality. Foucault (1982) challenged the idealized view of citizens’ liberty with his insight that various actors in liberal democracy such as state institutions constantly act upon citizens’ conduct toward certain ends. Rancière (2005/2006) challenged the idealized view of equality among the people with his insight that social orders of liberal democratic countries are also marked by hierarchy and domination. Thus, he argues that the actual model of governance in countries we tend to call “democratic” is best described as “oligarchic” (p. 71).

Informed by these four theorists’ insights, the construction of my theoretical framework revolves around four key concepts: the political, politics, democracy, and political subjectification. The main body of the chapter is, therefore, divided into four sections. In the first section, I take Schmitt’s notion of the political as a starting point and conceive of research participants’ international mobility in higher education as pertinent to a we/they distinction that consists in markers of collective difference between their home country (i.e., China) and the two selected host countries (i.e., Canada and the United States). Aligning myself with Mouffe’s conception of the political, I view the friend/enemy grouping based on such markers as an ever-present possibility, but not as inevitable. Informed by the scope of the research, I move on to examine politics in the three broader contexts produced through participants’ cross-border mobility (i.e., world politics, China’s domestic politics, and the

domestic politics of Canada and the United States). This examination suggests that the Western model of liberal democracy entails grouping not only countries but also the people of a country into a “we/they” relationship that has the potential of being construed as one of friend/enemy. In the third section, I draw on Foucault and Rancière’s critiques of liberal democracy to conceptualize political subjectification as an important dimension of democratization regardless of whether a government is authoritarian or democratic. Thus, I discuss the concept of political subjectification in the last section. By theorizing the two aspects of political subjectification (i.e., the individualizing aspect and the collectivizing aspect), this section sheds light on how research participants can be made into and become political subjects while being internationally mobile.

The chapter concludes with a key theoretical insight into how Chinese students’ international mobility in higher education is related to China’s democratization. That is, their mobility is produced within a nexus of political practices and subjectification practices. This nexus contributes to the development of students into the type of political subjects important for China’s democratization, namely political subjects with an increased awareness of the complex play between autonomy and authority as well as increased competence to promote liberty and equality.

3.2 The Political

The starting point from which this study understands Chinese students’ international mobility in higher education is Schmitt’s (1932/2007) notion of “the political”, that is, “the most intense and extreme antagonism” (p. 62), the type of antagonism associated with the distinction between friend and enemy. This friend/enemy distinction, as conceptualized by

Schmitt, is the ultimate distinction “to which political actions and motives can be reduced” and which is independent from ultimate distinctions in other realms such as “good and evil” in morality, “beautiful and ugly” in aesthetics and “profitable and unprofitable” in economics (p. 59).

Two features of the political are of particular importance for the theoretical framework. The first is that the distinction between friend and enemy pertains to groups, not individuals. As Schmitt (1932/2007) puts it,

An enemy exists only when, at least potentially, one fighting collectivity of people confronts a similar collectivity. The enemy is solely the public enemy, because everything that has a relationship to such a collectivity of men, particularly to a whole nation, becomes public by virtue of such a relationship. (p. 61)

It follows that the political denotes a relationship between a “we” and a “they” of mutual enmity, a public relation that zeroes in on the differences between the two collectivities. As Schmitt states, the political enemy is “the other, the stranger; and it is sufficient for his nature that he is, in a specially intense way, existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible” (p. 60).

The second feature of the political important for the framework is that the political does not tie itself to a substantive distinction of its own but is capable of latching on to any specific marker of collective difference. As Schmitt (1932/2007) puts it,

Every religious, moral, economic, ethical or other antithesis transforms into a political one if it is sufficiently strong to group human beings effectively according to friend and enemy. The political does not reside in the battle itself,

which possesses its own technical, psychological, and military laws, but in the mode of behavior which is determined by this possibility, by clearly evaluating the concrete situation and thereby being able to distinguish correctly the real friend and the real enemy. (pp. 69-70)

In other words, any marker of collective difference can acquire a political quality once it becomes a distinction based on which a group defines its identity and for which the group, if necessary, is willing to go to war against other groups to preserve its own forms of existence.

Noteworthy in this regard is the importance of two groups' participation in specific conflicts over markers of their collective difference. As Schmitt (1932/2007) argues, only by means of participating in such conflicts can members of a group "judge whether the adversary intends to negate his opponent's way of life and therefore must be repulsed or fought in order to preserve one's own form of existence" (p. 60).

From the perspective of these two features of the political, I view Chinese students' international mobility in higher education as pertaining to a *we/they* distinction that consists in markers of collective difference between their home country and host countries. These markers do not just provide the basis of the students' collective identities, but more importantly, identify the students as members of China particularly when their host countries come into conflict with their home country. While my research did not directly examine Schmitt's (1932/2007) idea of war, anti-Asian prejudice could easily be considered an aspect of Schmitt's notion of war in the context of international students' collective identities coming into conflict when living on the Canadian West Coast (Findlay & Kohler, 2010) where half of the twelve participants were selected for my doctoral research. It also deserves mentioning that while there was no active war during my research, there were frequent

tensions over various issues such as human rights, international trade, intellectual properties, and China's support of other foreign regimes. Particularly noteworthy is that the discourses around the recent trade war between the United States and China often seem to embody a we/they distinction construed with an orientation toward mutual enmity (Swanson, 2019; Li, 2019).

Informed by the scope of this study, I focus on markers of collective difference in politics between China and the two selected host countries. Since China's political system is generally regarded as authoritarian whereas its Canadian and U.S. counterparts as democratic, I zero in on liberal democracy.

Here, it is important to stress that my conception of the political is aligned with Mouffe's. This means that, while keeping in sight the ineradicable possibility that the we/they relationship can take the form of friend/enemy, I do not see this possibility as unavoidable.

Furthermore, I hold that the friend/enemy grouping based on liberal democracy as a maker of collective difference between China and the two selected host countries can be averted, a view that I will explain in greater detail in the following sections.

3.3 Politics

The definition of politics on which the theoretical framework draws is also from Mouffe. That is, politics refers to "the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions which seek to establish a certain order and to organize human coexistence in conditions which are always potentially conflicting because they are affected by the dimension of 'the political'" (Mouffe, 2009, p. 550). Therefore, I further conceive of Chinese students'

international mobility in higher education as pertinent not only to the socio-political order established by the ensemble of discourses, practices, and institutions in each of the three broader contexts produced through the students' cross-border mobility (i.e., the world, their home country, and their host countries), but also to the political conflicts that contest the order and existing politics in each broader context.

According to these contexts, the remainder of the section is divided into three parts under the subheadings of “World Politics”, “China’s Domestic Politics”, and “The Domestic Politics of Canada and the United States”. Each subsection is organized in the same way: first, it describes the current order in a specific context with a focus on the role played by democracy in that order; then, it summarizes how politics tends to be played out in that context; thirdly, it outlines how Chinese international students may engage with politics in that context.

3.3.1 World Politics

Since world politics is conceived of as resolving around creating a certain order on a global level, it is fitting to clarify at the outset the assumption about world order that underlies the theoretical framework. That is, world order is a non-permanent order with a “hegemonic nature” (Mouffe, 2009, p. 549). The world order at any given time is, therefore, the product of the power struggles among the nations (especially the great powers in a particular historical era), a product that expresses the temporary hierarchical power relations in the international system. When there is an international power shift, the world order has to go through a reconfiguration sooner or later.

With regard to the current world order, one of its most distinct characteristics is the dominance of the West under the leadership of the United States. Such dominance, according to Kissinger (2014), is largely due to the United States' worldwide promotion of its economic and political model that mainly features free markets and democracy. The dominance was further consolidated with the United States becoming the only super-power after the Soviet Union, its once-mighty enemy in the Cold War, collapsed in the early 1990s.

Such a triumph of the West even triggered a famous optimistic statement regarding liberal democracy as follows:

What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government. ... [T]here are powerful reasons for believing that it is the ideal that will govern the material world in the long run. (Fukuyama, 1989, p. 4)

This end-of-history view, however, is countered by a trend in the 21st century, namely the rise of China. In particular, China offers an alternative economic and political model, often referred to as the China Model, the key feature of which is an emphasis on good governance instead of electoral democracy (Evans, 2014). It should be borne in mind that the China Model is often applied to the field of international development. Thus, good governance in the China Model primarily denotes a process of decision-making and decision implementation through which a developing country can effectively address its development problems and challenges to ensure its sustainable development, regardless of whether its government is authoritarian or democratic.

Noteworthy is that China's experience of economic success since the late 1970s has made the China Model increasingly appealing to some developing countries. For instance, a Western journalist observes, "From Vietnam to Syria, from Burma to Venezuela, and all across Africa, leaders of developing countries are admiring and emulating what might be called the China Model" (Callick, 2007, para. 1).

A Chinese scholar makes a similar observation:

Over the past 25 years, I've traveled to more than 100 countries, most of them developing countries, including 18 in Africa. I have concluded that in terms of eradicating poverty and helping the poor and the marginalized, the Chinese model, however imperfect, has worked far more effectively than what can be called the American model, as represented by the IMF-designed Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) for sub-Saharan Africa and the "shock therapy" for Russia. (Zhang, 2006, para. 9)

Arguably, the rise of China in recent decades and the weakening of major Western economies particularly after the 2008 financial crisis both suggest that the current world order is experiencing a historical realignment of economic and political forces. It can even be anticipated that China will play an increasingly prominent role in reconfiguring the world order in the 21st century. Nonetheless, this reconfiguration process could witness an increase in the intensity of antagonism associated with conflicts over the Western model of liberal democracy between China and the United States as the balance of economic power between the two countries comes ever closer to a tipping point.

As the United States continues its promotion of liberal democracy to the world, the legitimacy of the Chinese government can be challenged particularly by the multi-party

system as a norm in the Western model of liberal democracy. Despite the fact that democratic governance has already been normalized as one of the two values (the other being human rights) at the foundation of current international society (Foot, 2001), the multi-party system poses a threat to the CPC's role as the only ruling party in China's current authoritarian regime.

It is no surprise that the Chinese leadership has responded to this threat with a consistent strategy: accepting democracy as a universal value but arguing for the inapplicability of electoral democracy to the Chinese context. For example, President Xi Jinping continues to insist on the central leadership of the CPC and rule out political reforms oriented toward Western-style electoral democracy in China (Meng, 2014).

In addition to this responsive strategy, a more proactive strategy is taking shape. China seems to use its experience of economic success in recent decades to challenge the conventional wisdom on development in the era of trans-Atlantic dominance under the leadership of the United States after the Second World War, the wisdom that promotes liberal democracy as one of the most important conditions for economic development. In particular, China tends to blame the West's promotion of liberal democracy as driven by ideology that neglects two prerequisites for institutions of the Western model of liberal democracy to take root and function well in non-Western societies: 1) cultivating a culture of political tolerance, 2) establishing the rule of law (Zhang, 2006).

At this point, it should become clear that the current world order, marked by the hegemony of the United States as well as the rapid rise of China, urges us to take responsibility for exploring ways to manage the potential risk of the friend-enemy grouping over the Western model of liberal democracy between the two powers in world politics. One

way, as suggested by Mouffe (2009), is to transform the current unipolar world order into a multipolar one:

Abandoning the illusory hope for a political unification of the world, we should advocate the establishment of a multipolar, agonistic world organized around several big regional units with their different cultures and values. I am not pretending, of course, that this would bring about the end of conflicts, but I am convinced that those conflicts are less likely to take an antagonistic form than in a world where a single economic and political model is presented as the only legitimate one and is imposed on all parties in the name of its supposedly superior rationality and morality. (p. 553)

Concurring with Mouffe that the Western model of liberal democracy should not be imposed worldwide in the name of universalism, I argue further that exploring possible alternatives to this model is required in order to transform the existing unipolar world order into a multipolar one. In this sense, room should be allowed for “a plurality of legitimate alternatives” (Mouffe, 2009, p. 552), the legitimacy of which lies not only in accepting “rule by the people” as an ideal underpinned by human dignity but also in letting the people decide the forms of democracy in their specific contexts.

Chinese international students may engage with specific conflicts over the Western model of liberal democracy in world politics at different levels. They may engage with discourses, practices and institutions that seek to reshape world order in the 21st century. For example, they can observe and/or participate in discussions and debates on China’s role in global governance while attending academic events such as seminars, workshops, symposia, and conferences. The students may also engage with contestations over the hegemony of the

Western model of liberal democracy in their daily interactions with their host societies. For instance, reading articles that represent China as politically inferior to the United States (Suspitsyna & Shalka, 2019) may motivate Chinese international students on American soil to compare the politics of their home country and that of their host country, a conceptual comparison that is of value for exploring possible alternatives to the Western model of liberal democracy.

3.3.2 China's Domestic Politics

China's current socio-political order is officially described as a socialist republic "under the people's democratic dictatorship led by the working class and based on the alliance of workers and peasants" (Constitution of the People's Republic of China, 2004). Noteworthy here is that democracy appears only as an adjective to modify "dictatorship". This word choice in the constitution suggests that the Chinese socialist democracy is a means to maintain the people's dictatorship, an order underpinned by the Hegelian-Marxist notion of the antithesis between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Because of this view of the necessity of the people's dictatorship, the constitution states, "disruption of the socialist system by any organization or individual is prohibited" (Constitution of the People's Republic of China, 2004).

I argue that China's current socio-political order is a product of political conflicts over democracy in the evolution of the Chinese politics since the late 19th century. The most intense and extreme antagonism particularly latched on to democracy in four historical events. The first event is that of the Revolution of 1911. Inspired by Sun Yat-sen's Three Principles of the People, one of which is the Principle of Democracy, the revolution resulted

in the overthrow of China's imperial rule that had lasted for more than 2,000 years and the creation of a republican government on Chinese soil.

The second event is that of the elimination of private ownership in China's economy in the 1950s. Underpinned by the CPC's notion of socialist democracy, this economic revolution was mainly intended to create the foundation of the democratic dictatorship of the Chinese proletariat by means of establishing state and public ownership in all sectors of the Chinese economy. Unfortunately, those Chinese people with means of production then, such as factory owners and landlords, were grouped as an enemy of the Chinese proletariat and even an enemy of socialist China. Not only was their ownership taken away, many also suffered inhuman treatment such as being detained in labor camps.

The third event is that of the '89 Democracy Movement marked by pro-democracy demonstrations of university students on Beijing's Tiananmen Square. The Chinese government under the leadership of the CPC reacted to the movement with the declaration of martial law in late May 1989 and suppressed the demonstrations by military force in the following month. To this day, it has been impossible to verify the exact number of civilians killed in this movement.

The fourth event is that of the 2014 Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong. This movement consisted of a series of pro-democracy protests, particularly contesting a decision made by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of China to reform Hong

Kong's electoral system. It deserves mentioning that the contestation was largely driven by the protesters' demand for universal suffrage.¹⁴

These four political conflicts over democracy have all left their mark on China's current socio-political order, and democracy continues to be a highly sensitive and divisive topic in China's domestic politics. Underlain by the political enmity between those who abide by the people's dictatorship and those who seek to overthrow the socialist system, China's domestic politics tends to revolve around identification of who the people are and contestations over who else can be included in the people so as to better maintain and develop the socialist system. It should be noted that these struggles over identification provide opportunities to identify and dis-identify, which may contradict or resist some of the ways that "the political" identifies the people. Here, then, subjectification itself is political, particularly when it entails "dis-identifying".

Debates about "people society" illustrate this point well. "People society" is a concept coined and advocated by Hu Angang (2013), a prominent economics professor and government advisor in China. He argued in an op-ed published in *People's Daily*¹⁵ overseas edition that people society under the leadership of the CPC, as an important innovation in China, is superior to the Western-style civil society. Since no clear definition of the people was made in his argument, one of the major critiques of his notion of "people society" is that it actually "draws on the Maoist principle that the party governs in accordance with the interests of the majority of the people" (Huang, 2013, para. 7), a principle inherent in which

¹⁴ At the time of final editing of this dissertation, another series of pro-democracy protest erupted in Hong Kong in July 2019, and is still underway (Horton, 2019; Khan & Fan, 2019; Purbrick, 2019; Wan Chan & Pun, 2020).

¹⁵ *People's Daily* is the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China.

is the distinction made by the party between the majority of the people and the minority of the people. This critique, therefore, highlights that hierarchy and domination also exist in the “people society” as envisaged by the CPC.

It also deserves mentioning that the Western model of liberal democracy tends to be a noteworthy marker of collective difference among the Chinese people, particularly between those in favor of liberty for all and those supporting restricted liberty for some in the socialist system. In this sense, the Western model of liberal democracy still has the potential to be latched on to by the utmost degree of antagonism, the most devastating ramification of which is another civil war in the world’s most populous country.

From this perspective, it is no surprise that political reforms modeled on the Western model of liberal democracy have largely stagnated in China since the 1990s, a state of affairs in stark contrast to the country’s rapid market-economic reforms in the same period. Experiments with democratic elections, as shown in the previous chapter, have been conducted mainly at the village level with only sporadic experiments at the township level. Nonetheless, new information and communication technologies such as the Internet and social media have opened new space for the Chinese people to engage with political contestation (Gleiss, 2015; Meng, 2018; Yang 2014).

Although Chinese international students’ temporary residence overseas limits their engagement with domestic politics of their home country, the Internet can facilitate such engagement. As a technology of communication, the Internet provides a means by which the students can work with those in China to address socio-political issues of their common interest in real time, particularly those pertinent to the question of who the Chinese people are. Moreover, the Internet can serve as a communication sphere in which the students can

interact with the public-at-large in China, discussing and debating on pressing socio-political challenges that China faces. One of their most valuable contributions in this regard is arguably their global perspective on these issues. It has to be borne in mind, though, that limitations of internet access are imposed on people within China. Without means to circumvent the limitations, they cannot access certain information provided by Chinese students overseas.

3.3.3 The Domestic Politics of Canada and the United States

The Canadian and U.S. socio-political orders, in general, are different from that of China.¹⁶ This is particularly the case with regard to democracy. Both countries not only have inherited the concept of democracy from ancient Greece, but also have had a much longer, albeit complex and troubled, history of established democratic institutions and practices, including colonization, slavery, and gender and class inequalities (Pilon, 2017; Zinn, 2015).

It deserves mentioning that in the two countries' domestic politics democracy functions as a mechanism through which the antagonistic we/they as enemy relationship between conflicting opponents can be transformed into the agonistic we/they as adversary relationship (Mouffe, 2005). Unlike antagonism that ultimately aims to eradicate opponents as enemies, "agonism" is

a we/they relation where the conflicting parties, although acknowledging there is no rational solution to their conflict, nevertheless recognize the legitimacy

¹⁶ It should be clarified that my intention of putting Canada and the United States together here is not to conflate the Canadian and the U.S. forms of democracy, but to point out that these two countries together represent different political practices from China, in their own respective ways.

of their opponents. They are “adversaries” not enemies. This means that, while in conflict, they see themselves as belonging to the same political association, as sharing a common symbolic space within which the conflict takes place. (p. 20)

Furthermore, the transformation from antagonism to agonism takes place within the limits of agonistic pluralism. As Mouffe puts it,

A democratic society cannot treat those who put its basic institutions into questions as legitimate adversaries. ... [D]emocracy requires a ‘conflictual consensus’: consensus on the ethico-political values of liberty and equality for all, dissent about their interpretation. A line should therefore be drawn between those who reject those values outright and those who, while accepting them, fight for conflicting interpretations. (pp. 120-121)

From this perspective, the current socio-political order in Canada and the United States is underlain by the political enmity between those abiding by the ethico-political values of liberty and equality for all and those who seek to overthrow the entire democratic system including such values. The domestic politics of Canada and the United States, therefore, tends to revolve around conflicting groups’ contestations over whose interpretations of the values of liberty and equality for all can better preserve and further develop an ever more democratic society.

Chinese international students can engage with the domestic politics of the two host countries in various ways. With regard to formal electoral politics, their participation tends to be limited due to the fact that as citizens of China they are legally ineligible to vote in democratic elections of officials or run for elective office in Canada and the United States.

Nevertheless, this theoretical framework conceives these students' political life in broad terms, with politics including contestations over the social order and existing politics both at the regime level and at the local level. This research, therefore, attends to how the students engage with the issues that sort people of their host society into groups who oppose each other over their conflicting interpretations of values of liberty and equality for all. A good example in this regard is that of Obamacare, which starkly divided the U.S. electorate along partisan lines during the 2016 presidential election campaign.

At this point, it should become clear that democracy can be viewed as a nexus of political conflicts from each of the three broader contexts produced through the participants' international mobility. While moving from China to Canada or the United States for higher education purposes, these students can engage with specific conflicts over or pertinent to democracy in and across world politics, China's domestic politics, and the domestic politics of the two host countries. Interactions between and among these three political arenas may even produce a synergistic effect on the degree of the intensity of antagonism associated with democracy, which in turn raises the students' awareness of democracy's potential for carrying the energy of friend-enemy grouping. Therefore, the next section is dedicated to the concept of democracy.

3.4 Democracy

Democracy, as a term, originates from the Greek word *demokratia*, which means "rule by the people". This Greek word, consisting of *demos* ("people") and *kratos* ("rule"), was first coined to refer to the political system that existed in some Greek city-states, particularly Athens. Only the minority of the population, namely those recognized as "citizens", could

participate in the ancient democratic politics by speaking and voting in the city-state legislative assembly inclusive of all citizens but excluding slaves and women. Having said this, those Greek city-states practiced direct democracy mainly because citizens “through assembly, council and law courts controlled the entire political process and... a fantastically large proportion of citizens was involved constantly in the public business” (Raaflaub, 2007, p. 5).

Unlike direct democracy in ancient Greece, modern democracy mainly takes the form of representative democracy. Citizens as a whole are still regarded as a sovereign power; however, their political power is mainly exercised through their elected representatives. An unintended consequence of this distinction between citizens and representatives is that citizens are no longer expected to engage with democratic politics as constantly and fully as in the ancient direct democracy. As noted by Constant (1988), citizens in a representative democracy can choose not to be attentive to public business, and in countries where voting is not compulsory such as Canada and the United States, the two countries selected for this research, they can even choose not to exercise their right to vote.

It should be mentioned that democracy in modern time is a multi-dimensional concept. To many theorists, the core of democracy pertains to the formation of a government by citizens’ selection of their representatives through competitive election that involves more than one party. As Schumpeter (1994) summarizes, democracy is “that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote” (p. 269). Others view democracy as a type of decision-making process in government. Gutmann and Thompson (2004) explain this deliberative dimension as follows,

free and equal citizens (and their representatives), justify decisions in a process in which they give one another reasons that are mutually acceptable and generally accessible, with the aim of reaching conclusions that are binding in the present on all citizens but open to challenge in the future. (p. 7)

As mentioned in the previous section, some theorists conceive of democracy as a mechanism through which the antagonistic relation between political opponents can be transformed into an agonistic one (Mouffe, 2005).

Despite the many dimensions of democracy as a concept, modern democracy is primarily underpinned by a liberal political philosophy, the basic tenet of which is succinctly summarized by Deneen (2008) as follows:

Governments are to be chosen freely by persons who are citizens—autonomous individuals—who, while recognizing the need for government in the preservation of order, suspiciously guard against any illegitimate encroachments on their own personal freedoms by that otherwise legitimate authority. (p. 302)

Deriving from such a philosophy are three basic interrelated assumptions of liberal democracy. Firstly, there is a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate government, and the most important criterion for a government to be legitimate is that of its non-violation and promotion of citizens' political and civil liberties. Secondly, citizens are assumed to be individuals with autonomy to choose their government according to their own decisions that are well informed by free media. It deserves mentioning that citizens' autonomy in liberal democracy is claimed to be guarded and ensured to a large extent by what Zakaria (1997) calls "constitutional liberalism", that is, "the rule of law, a separation of powers, and the

protection of basic liberties of speech, assembly, religion and property” (p. 22). It also deserves mentioning, though, that citizens’ autonomy in liberal democracy tends to be oriented toward their “pursuits of individual private satisfaction” (Deneen, 2008, p. 304). Thirdly, a government consisting of representatives elected by autonomous citizens is assumed to be a democratic government.

With regard to these assumptions of liberal democracy, the theoretical framework offers two major critiques. The first critique pertains to liberty of the people. Drawing on Foucault’s notion of “governmentality”, the framework challenges the view that citizens in liberal democracy are autonomous individuals. According to Foucault (1982), governmentality refers not just to the governing body of a state or the management of a state in the traditional sense, but also to “the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed” (p. 221), or what he eventually discusses as the “art of government” (1978/2003, p. 229).

Foucault’s notion of governmentality reveals that citizens’ autonomy is constantly acted upon in liberal democracy. For example, a media outlet associated with a particular political party can subtly limit the possible actions that citizens “freely choose” to take in a democratic election. As Miller and Rose (2008) further explain, the very idea of “the human subject as individuated, choosing, with capacities of self-reflection and a striving for autonomy is a result of practices of subjectification” (p. 8), or a singular mode of action that structures the possible field of actions of others. From this perspective, even Zakaria’s (1997) notion of constitutional protection for citizens’ autonomy is the very means with which the democratic subject is constituted. This protection compels the subject to act in particular ways rather than only safeguarding something assumed as autonomous rights.

Informed by the first critique of liberal democracy, my conceptualization of China's democratization is not focused on the moral debates over the legitimacy of the Chinese government, but on political subjectification of the Chinese people. Therefore, this research examines how certain knowledge about democracy becomes taken-for-granted truths in my research participants' thoughts, and how such knowledge influences their actions accordingly. This research also explores the ways in which the participants develop a critical understanding of the complex interplay between autonomy and authority, and the extent to which they are aware of these processes of subjectification when acting, or simply reinforce various subjectifications in the name of, but at the expense of, democracy. In my opinion, the development of such understanding is equally needed for the people of China, the people of Canada, and the people of the United States although the extent of the people's enjoyment of liberties vary greatly in the three countries.

The second critique of the assumptions of liberal democracy pertains to ideas of equality among the people. Drawing on Rancière's (2005/2006) insight that oligarchy is the best description of the actual model of governance in countries we tend to call democracies, the theoretical framework attends particularly to the inequality between those who govern and those who are governed. As Rancière observes, hierarchy and domination are the two characteristics shared by all social orders, and all political regimes try to render harmless the very inequality derived inherently from such social orders. Thus, he argues forcefully, "there is, strictly speaking, no such thing as democratic government. Government is always exercised by the minority over a majority" (Rancière, 2005/2006, p. 52). It deserves mentioning, though, that Rancière does recognize there are better and worse "oligarchies" depending on how much room a specific oligarchy allows for "democracy", a term he

reserves for particular interventions in the dominant social order in which a group that has not been recognized as equals insists on their equality.

From the perspective of the second critique of liberal democracy, the so-called authoritarian regime in China and the so-called democratic regimes in Canada and the United States all maintain hierarchical social orders that determine who has a part in society and who does not. All these three regimes are oligarchic even though they provide different latitudes to democratic practices in Rancière's sense (i.e., the moment of interruption of a regime, a connotation different from democracy in Mouffe's sense, that is, a form of government, or liberal democracy to be more exact). In other words, the Chinese government and its two counterparts in North America allow different possibilities for a truly democratic politics—a politics of the people, in and through which equality is created by the people, not by the state for the people. It is important to note, nonetheless, that discourses and practices regarding civil liberty and popular sovereignty as constraints on oligarchy appear to be more powerful in Canada and the United States than in China.

Following this line of thought, my conceptualization of China's democratization is not focused on changes at the regime level, but on the development of a politics of the people at the grass-roots level. Central to such politics is what Rancière (1995/1999) calls a "wrong":

the mode of subjectification in which the assertion of equality takes its political shape. ... Wrong institutes a singular universal, a polemical universal, by tying the presentation of equality, as the part of those who have no part, to the conflict between parts of society. (p. 39)

Here, the relevance of Rancière's focus on equality in China should be noted. While individual liberty is not a shared value in China, equality as a Marxist value is more in tune with the official ideology of China.

This research particularly attends to the moments in which the participants, based on the value of equality, interrupt a specific hierarchical social order in any of the three broader contexts produced through their cross-border mobility (i.e., the world, their home country, and their host countries). It is when the students speak with a new collective identity that demands their equality with anyone else in a specific hierarchical social order that they become political subjects and contribute to the creation of a socio-political order with greater equality.

So far, this section has shown that democracy is a concept that requires multi-dimensional thinking. In addition, a well-functioning modern democracy requires a people who have the competence not only to think critically to safeguard against buying into taken-for-granted truths about liberal democracy or into the supposed benevolence of the state acting on behalf of the people, but also to act, when necessary, to safeguard their liberty and demand their equality. Foucault (1997/2003) noted this type of check-and-balance when he stated "not being governed like that and at that cost" (p. 265).

Most importantly, this research conceptualizes China's democratization with a different focus—not the traditional focus on how China's current so-called authoritarian regime can be changed into a so-called democratic one, but a new focus on how the Chinese people develop into/emerge/become political subjects with increased awareness of the complex interplay between autonomy and authority, as well as increased competence to promote their liberty and equality in politics.

3.5 Political Subjectification

In this section, I theorize how Chinese students can be made into or become political subjects while pursuing their degrees abroad. First, I discuss the individualizing aspect and the collectivizing aspect of the students' formation as political subjects, the two aspects that correspond with liberal democracy as a marker for individual and collective identifications or disidentifications in politics. Then, I outline the potential effects of their political subjectification on international relations.

3.5.1 The Individualizing Aspect

Insights into the individualizing aspect of Chinese international students' formation as political subjects derive mainly from Foucault's (1982) studies of different modes in which people are made into subjects. The first mode is that of sciences. For example, human beings are made into speaking subjects through inquiries and analyses in the science of linguistics, laboring subjects in economics, and thinking subjects in philosophy. The second mode is what Foucault (1982) terms "dividing practices" (p. 208). People are made into subjects according to certain distinctions that can divide them either internally or externally. For instance, distinctions based on skin color can turn people into racial subjects, or make an individual into a subject who has internal struggles about his/her identification with certain racial groups. The third mode is that of "technologies of the self", which

permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain

state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (Foucault, 1988/2003, p. 146)

A good example in this regard is that of practicing meditation to achieve personal inner tranquility.

Drawing on these three modes, the political subjectification process of Chinese international students chosen for this study can take place in three ways. Firstly, students' political subjectivity can be developed by scientific practices, particularly those associated with academic studies of and/or scientific inquiries into democracy and China's democratization. For example, learning about liberal democracy in a political science degree program may shape the students into individuated political subjects who demand the protection of their individual liberties and rights. Here, it is important to mention that this dissertation is also one of such scientific practices mainly because it examines, analyzes and reports twelve selected Chinese international students' formation as political subjects.

Secondly, the students can become political subjects by a process of division from others and/or within themselves. This process is particularly made possible by the practices in relation to political identities. For instance, the practice of limiting the right to vote to citizens predetermines the participants of this research as ineligible to participate through voting in democratic elections in Canada and the United States. Participants could be shaped into political subjects who are disengaged and even alienated from electoral politics of their host countries, especially when submitting to their legal status as noncitizen.

Thirdly, research participants can become political subjects by connecting themselves to democracy in their thoughts and/or actions so as to enhance their well-being. In other words, the students can be produced as "individualized and active subjects responsible for enhancing

their own well-being” (Larner, 2000, p. 13), a process that could be achieved particularly by the operation of neoliberal mode of government that seeks “to align political ... goals with individual pleasures and desires, and with the happiness and fulfillment of the self” (Rose, 1999, p. 261). For instance, neoliberalism can act upon the students’ actions by inculcating in them its “particular image of human beings as enterprising” (Edwards, 2002, p. 357) as a cultural norm of their host societies. If students accept the norm as a taken-for-granted truth, they are induced to become entrepreneurial subjects oriented toward personal interests, rather than political subjects oriented toward public good or in the name of public good only but without any substantial effects upon it. In this sense, students may not be constituted as political subjects if their engagement with political practices is carried out only in individualistic ways.

It deserves mentioning that the individualizing aspect of political subjectification process entails much work in thought, or what Rabinow (2003) calls a “type of experimental matrix of heterogeneous elements, techniques, and concepts” (p. 56). Therefore, the individualizing aspect can shed light on how a participant may submit to, challenge, or assemble in new ways various practices, discourses, and institutions in existing socio-political orders.

3.5.2 The Collectivizing Aspect

The collectivizing aspect of political subjectification process focuses on the development of Chinese international students’ understanding of who they are and might be as a political collective. This aspect particularly examines how the students may become a collective demanding their equality with anyone else in the existing “police order” (Rancière,

1995/1999, p. 30) both in China and the two Western host countries. The police order here refers to any hierarchical social order with its inequality in the organization of powers: in this order people are considered unequal and are assigned to specific places and ranks.

The collectivizing aspect draws particularly on Rancière's (1995/1999) notion of the political subject:

an operator that connects and disconnects different areas, regions, identities, functions, and capacities existing in the configuration of a given experience – that is, in the nexus of distributions of the police order and whatever equality is already inscribed there, however fragile and fleeting such inscriptions may be. (p. 40)

From this perspective, Chinese international students can become “a collective subject through acting out of the presupposition of equality” (May, 2010, p. 78). They can, in other words, emerge repeatedly as a new “we” when they disidentify from their pre-given identities in existing police orders, and contest these orders based on the value of equality.

To use Biesta's (2011) vocabulary, international students from China can be viewed as “ignorant citizens” (p. 142), a term based on Rancière's (1987/1991) “the ignorant schoolmaster” and coined as a way to rethink citizenship education. Biesta argues that citizenship education should not continue its conventional socialization approach to mold students into particular kinds of citizens but should take the subjectification approach to allow students to become citizens by means of engagement with democratic practices. It deserves mentioning that the word “ignorant” here does not mean the students are ignorant of knowledge about democratic citizenship, but means they are “ignorant of a particular definition” of what an individual is supposed to be as a “good citizen” (p. 152).

Therefore, central to the collectivizing aspect of Chinese international students' formation as political subjects is that of their "disidentification" (Rancière, 1992, p. 61) from any identity that positions them as unequal in a specific existing police order. It deserves mentioning that the concept of disidentification guided me to approach the third research question (i.e., How do Chinese international students become and/or how are they made into political – and possibly democratic – subjects?) in the following three steps. First, I examined what identities were given to Chinese international students by government policies, scientific research, and media. Second, I studied how research participants disidentified from certain pre-given identities. Third, I focused on these students' new collective political identities that emerged in and through their engagement with practices that they deemed as democratic during their stay in Canada and the United States.

It must be clarified, here, that I do not envisage the collectivizing aspect of political subjectification as one that enables the participants to come to have an idealized view of democracy in the sense that democracy will avoid and even replace oligarchy outright. Instead, I envisage this aspect as one that entails the practices associated with their disidentification from particular pre-given identities that position them as unequal in existing police orders. When engaging with such practices (e.g., political protests and social movements), the students may develop not only a critical understanding of the complex relationship between democracy and oligarchy, but more importantly, a "desire for democracy" (Biesta, 2011, p. 151).

In this sense, the collectivizing aspect of political subjectification can counteract the individualizing effects of neoliberal mode of government on research participants, which in

turn may enable them to construct approaches to China's democratization different from those simply accepting the Western model of liberal democracy as an ideal.

3.5.3 Potential Effects on International Relations

The above discussion on "world politics" has shown that conflicts over the Western model of liberal democracy between China and the West (the United States in particular) may take the form of what Mouffe (2009) terms "struggles between enemies" (p. 551) as world order undergoes reconfiguration in the 21st century. Against this backdrop, it can be argued that Chinese international students' political subjectification may even have bearings on international relations particularly in the sense that it may contribute to a more constructive management of such conflicts in two ways.

First, the inquiry into the students' political subjectification challenges simplistic thinking about the differences at the regime level between China and the West in terms of the conventional dichotomy between authoritarianism and democracy. It reveals that some assumptions of liberal democracy (e.g., citizens as autonomous individuals) require critical scrutiny.

Second, political subjectivity can be conceived of as an issue of common concern for both China and the West. For one thing, insights into the individualizing aspect of political subjectification process can shed light on how citizens' autonomy can be encroached upon by unchallenged cultural norms in any societies, whether they are authoritarian or democratic or, using Zakaria's (1997) terms, illiberal or liberal. For another, insights into the collectivizing aspect of the process indicate that hierarchical social orders in China and the West should and can be challenged by citizens who exercise their agency together to disidentify from their

pre-defined identities and demand their equality. In this sense, political subjectivity can provide ample room for collaboration between China and the West to address democratization with less ideological fervor but with more focus on the people.

3.6 Conclusion

The theoretical framework, as constructed in this chapter, highlights that Chinese students' international mobility in higher education can be conceived of as a nexus of political practices and subjectification practices. These practices can contribute to the students' becoming political subjects who are increasingly aware of the complex interplay between autonomy and authority as well as increasingly competent to promote liberty and equality in politics, the type of political subjects that have important bearings on China's democratization in the 21st century.

This conceptualization of Chinese students' international mobility in higher education requires sustained attention to the practices that effect their formation as political subjects, particularly in relation to Foucault's (1982) ideas about scientific practices and subjectification. As a result, inquiries into students' political subjectification should also look beyond higher education institutions where they pursue their degrees. The spaces in which their political subjectification occurs can include but are not limited to sites of events associated with formal electoral politics, organizations where they engage with processes of making decisions and managing conflicts, and even the Internet.

As living links between their home country and host countries, Chinese international students are in a unique position to contribute to a more constructive management of the potential political conflicts over the Western model of liberal democracy in international

politics. If such impacts can take place, they may even play a role in the peaceful evolution of a multipolar world order that gives democracy and democratization a more human face in the 21st century.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

As shown in Chapter 2, current scholarship pertaining to Chinese international students tends to neglect their potential impacts on China's political transformation in the 21st century. This neglect is more problematic given the fact that foreign-educated Chinese, particularly those educated in the West, have contributed significantly to China's democratization in modern history. Addressing this knowledge gap at the intersection of the field of international higher education and that of China's democratization, my doctoral research explores Chinese students' international mobility in higher education from a political perspective, the exploration that focuses on how the students are produced politically through their engagement with democracy during their degree studies in two liberal democratic countries in North America, namely Canada and the United States.

Here, it is worth recalling the three questions that this research intends to address:

1. How do Chinese international students engage with democratic discourses and practices in Canada and the United States?
2. How does this engagement affect the students' thoughts on and/or actions towards democracy?
3. How do the students become and/or how are they made into political – and possibly democratic – subjects?

This chapter presents the methodology of my doctoral research. It begins with why and how I adopted a qualitative case study approach to the research. Then it moves on to why and how I selected two sites to conduct fieldwork for this research. The third section describes

issues relative to participant selection, encompassing sampling strategy, criteria for inclusion, participant recruitment, and participants. The fourth section is devoted to data collection and generation, detailing the procedure, methods, and issues encountered in this regard. In the fifth place, it outlines how the data collected and generated in the fieldwork were analyzed. The chapter ends with some concluding remarks, summarizing the key methodological factors of this study and giving a very brief introduction to the following three chapters on findings.

4.2 Qualitative Case Study Approach

In this section, I discuss two key factors regarding the design of my doctoral research. The first is that of qualitative research paradigm, and the second case study approach.

4.2.1 Qualitative Research Paradigm

I adopted a qualitative research paradigm to guide my research design. As defined by Denzin and Lincoln (2011),

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world.

Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. ... They turn the world into a series of representations, including fieldnotes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

This definition provides an important insight into the kind of knowledge that qualitative research seeks in general, namely knowledge that is in-depth and rich in descriptions and interpretations, not that which is generalizable or has a predictive value.

In this sense, qualitative research fits well with the purpose of my doctoral research. This research does not intend to discover the causal relationship between Chinese international students' engagement with democracy overseas and China's democratization so as to predict whether or how likely this group of students will lead to greater democratization in China. Instead, this inquiry intends to explore how the students become and/or are made into political subjects in and through their engagement with democratic discourses and practices in two Western host countries (i.e., Canada and the United States), a process that I conceive of as an important yet under-researched dimension of China's democratization. This inquiry, therefore, deliberately focuses on contributing to theories in that findings about Chinese international students' formation as political subjects can contribute to the development of theories about subjectification more broadly.

Qualitative research benefited this study in two major ways. First, it equipped me with various methods for data collection and generation, particularly the methods that allowed me to interact with participants in their real life contexts. Since a key feature of qualitative research is that researchers enter participants' social world to gather information in various ways (Creswell, 2007), the sources of information for this study include interviews, fieldnotes, and documents, which are described in more detail in the section on data collection and generation. Gathering information from multiple sources yielded data that enabled me to secure rich descriptions and a nuanced understanding of participants' engagement with democracy in Canada and the United States.

Second, the data collected and generated through qualitative research methods were of particular importance for the analysis of participants' formation as political subjects. On the one hand, the gathered documents enabled me to have a deeper understanding of the social, political, cultural, and historical contexts into which the participants entered when they became internationally mobile. These contexts then helped me to identify the existing democratic discourses and practices that were taken as true in the two host countries. On the other hand, the data generated through qualitative interviewing and observations enabled me to analyze how the participants were subjected to and/or contested these discourses and practices.

4.2.2 Case Study Approach

I adopted the case study as the approach to this qualitative research. As Yin (2009) defines it,

[a] case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real life contexts. ... The case study inquiry copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interests than data points, and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis. (pp. 15-16)

Based on this definition, I view case study as a comprehensive approach to qualitative research, an approach that encompasses research scope, data collection and generation, and data analysis.

With regard to research scope, case study explores a phenomenon through one or more cases within “a bounded system (i.e., a setting, a context)” (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). To borrow Stake’s (2006) vocabulary, such phenomenon is termed a “quintain” – an entity that has “cases or examples” (p. 6). It should be mentioned, here, that the quintain of my doctoral research is that of Chinese international students’ engagement with democratic discourses and practices in their Western host countries. The issue under exploration is how the students become and/or are made into political subjects in and through such engagement.

Therefore, international students from China pursuing their degrees in the West are viewed as cases¹⁷ bounded by time and place. With regard to time, they are bounded by the duration of their degree programs; with regard to place, they are bounded by the geographic territory of their host countries. It is important to note, though, the students are less bounded by place than by time mainly due to their constant international mobility during and after their degree studies.

Informed by case study’s inherent emphasis on the embeddedness of cases in their contexts (Schram, 2006), I gathered information particularly relating to the national and local contexts of participants’ experiences in Canada and the United States. For example, I collected international education policies and immigration policies issued by the Canadian and the U.S. governments. As will be shown in Chapter 5, these policies function as a powerful invisible hand, influencing participants’ engagement with their host countries’ formal electoral politics.

¹⁷ Participants selected for this research are also viewed as cases of Chinese international students in the West. Therefore, I use participants and cases interchangeably in this chapter.

In the process of data analysis, the case study approach yielded three major benefits. It generated detailed contextual information so as to facilitate an appreciation of the nuances of the participants' engagement with democracy in their particular settings. The case study approach also helped me to stay focused on instances relevant to the issue of the quintain of this research when sifting through the large amount of data obtained from fieldwork. Furthermore, the case study approach enabled me to draw on the prior theories of democracy and political subjectification to gain insights into participants' formation as political subjects during their degree studies overseas.

4.3 Research Sites

I selected two universities as the sites for this study, one from Canada and the other from the United States. The Canadian university is a public one located on the West Coast whereas the U.S. university is a private one on the East Coast. Despite being far apart geographically, both are leading research universities with a large number of international students from China.

Noteworthy is the fact that the university in the United States is one of the most prestigious universities in the world, more likely to offer its students what Brown calls (2011) "prestige and social networks that themselves yield social-economic access and status" (p. 30). The participants at the U.S. research site, therefore, may have more access to the people at the top of existing socio-political order (or what Rancière calls the police order) in their host country and home country. In this sense, the participants selected from the U.S. site and those from the Canadian site may differ in how they disidentify from certain pre-given identities.

It is important to note that the selection of the two research sites was informed by the difference in the greater socio-political context between Canada and the United States. Despite both being democracies, the two countries represent two types of liberal democracy: the parliamentary system in Canada and the presidential system in the United States. The two host countries, thus, differ in their distribution of power in the governments as well as the ways to elect government officials (Forsey, 2012). As will be shown in Chapter 5, this difference contributed to the variation in the participants' engagement with practices associated with democratic elections at the two research sites.

It deserves mentioning that inherent in selecting twelve participants from two research sites is what Yin (2009) refers to as a multiple-case design. The data generated by this multiple-case study provided a basis for me to gain insights into how the participants became and/or were made into political subjects in two types of liberal democracy. Such insights are highly useful for analytic generalization, which I will explain in the following section.

4.4 Participant Selection

This section is divided into three sub-sections, each devoted to one of the three issues pertinent to the selection of participants for my doctoral research: sampling strategy, participant recruitment, and participants.

4.4.1 Sampling Strategy

I used "purposeful sampling" when selecting participants for this research. The adoption of this sampling strategy was informed by two factors. The first factor was the critical issues that had already been identified in the scholarship pertaining to China's

democratization in the post-Mao era. As suggested by the review of this era in Chapter 2, the three main critical issues are relations between the CPC and China's democratization, the difference in democratic development between China's rural and urban areas, and relations between religion and China's democratization.

Therefore, the following three criteria were used to select participants for this research. The first related to participants' political affiliation. I particularly strived to recruit at least one student with membership of the CPC at each research site. Considering that China's democratization in the foreseeable future is most likely to proceed under the authoritarian government led by the CPC, it is of great importance for this research to investigate how members of the CPC engage with the Western model of liberal democracy and what bearings such engagement has on their political subjectivity.

The second criterion was participants' places of residence in China. I tried to keep a balance between the number of participants from rural China and those from urban China. This was mainly due to the consideration that democratic elections have only been experimented with in rural China in the post-Mao era. Therefore, my assumption was that participants who had engaged with democratic elections in China and those who had not might have different perspectives on democratic elections in their host countries.

The third criterion was that of participants' religious affiliation. This was mainly due to the theoretical debates about religions' role in a country's democratization process. I tried to select at least one Protestant, one Muslim, and one Buddhist because Christianity, Islam and Buddhism are the three major religions in China.

Using purposeful sampling for this research was also informed by analytic generalization. Unlike generalization to a population by means of a probability sampling

strategy in quantitative research (Firestone, 1993), analytic generalization refers to the generalization of “the conclusion of [a qualitative study] ... in the context of a particular theoretical debate” (Davies, 1999, p. 91). As argued in Chapter 3 when constructing the theoretical framework for this research, my conceptualization of China’s democratization does not focus on how China’s current so-called authoritarian regime can be changed into a so-called democratic one, but on how the Chinese people develop into/emerge/become political subjects through individual and collective practices. In particular, I theorize that Chinese students can become political subjects through political practices and subjectification practices entailed in their international mobility in higher education, a process that I envisage as having bearings on China’s democratization efforts in the 21st century.

Based on this theoretical insight, I used two more criteria for participant selection. One pertained to participants’ academic disciplines, which related both to the content of their studies and to Foucault’s (1982) point that subjectivity is produced through scientific practices. Priority was given to political science, law, media studies, higher education, religious studies and economics, all of which relate directly to the critical issues pertinent to China’s democratization in the post-Mao era as mentioned above. Another criterion was participants’ engagement in student organizations, social movements, and activities on the Internet (e.g., blogging). This was mainly due to my assumption that if a student actively engaged in activities in these spaces, he/she would be more likely to provide rich and in-depth details of their engagement with democratic discourses and practices.

To summarize, purposeful sampling enabled this research to yield findings that would make current theories regarding Chinese international students’ political subjectification

“more refined and incisive” (Eisenhart, 2009, p. 60). For example, as is to be shown in Chapter 7, political subjectification tends to be a shared process (Becker, 1990) undergone by research participants while studying in Canada and the United States, and this process has various “typical or modal characteristics” (Snow, Morrill & Anderson, 2003, p. 188). From the perspective of analytical generalization, certain characteristics of participants’ political subjectification may even be applicable to Chinese international students in other host countries with the same and/or a similar type of liberal democracy.

4.4.2 Participant Recruitment

When recruiting participants, I used two related methods: initial contact of target participants and snowballing. The initial contact was made via email or social media (but not both), inviting a target participant to partake in the research. In the letter of invitation, I described the study, provided my contact information, and encouraged the target participant to forward my participant recruitment message to others in his/her network (i.e., snowballing). When two weeks elapsed with no response, I did not proceed with further contact so as to ensure no coercion was used in the recruitment process.

Consent was obtained directly from research participants in two ways. When a target participant was in my personal or professional networks, I approached him/her directly to obtain consent by asking him/her to sign the consent form (Appendix A). When my contacts or participants facilitated the recruitment of other participants through their personal and/or professional networks (i.e., snowball or referral sampling), I gave them my letter of initial contact and the consent form to send to potential participants via email or social media. When a potential participant gave permission to my contact or participant to share his/her

name and contact information with me, I then approached the potential participant directly to obtain consent.

Participant recruitment went very smoothly in Canada. The whole process was completed within five months between December 2013 and April 2014. This was mainly because I had already established my personal and professional networks at the Canadian research site before the recruitment started. Therefore, it was easier for target participants to have trust in me as a person and a researcher. Such trust is crucial for a target participant to decide to participate in my research since democracy still remains a very sensitive topic for the Chinese people in general, even when they are outside of their home country.

By contrast, I encountered many obstacles in the process of participant recruitment at the U.S. research site. This was mainly because I was less familiar with the site and did not have a network like the one at the Canadian research site. Initially, I only had two contacts from the selected university on the U.S. East Coast. My first contact was a PhD student whom I met at an international academic conference in 2012. He informed me of a Chinese international student organization in the university, which was very active in organizing events in relation to China's social progress and political reforms.

My second contact was an instructor at the U.S. university, whom I met at an academic lecture in Canada shortly before my first field trip to the United States. In my conversation with the instructor I received confirming information about the student organization. Therefore, this organization was my only lead about where I might find potential participants at the U.S. research site. The instructor turned out to be an important gatekeeper of the organization. She introduced me to a leader of the organization, who later brought me to several events where I met other members of the organization.

The leader recommended potential participants but was reluctant to facilitate introductions. This was mainly due to the fact that the organization was closely monitored by the Chinese government. I was informed of many incidents in which members of the organization had been invited to “drink tea” in the United States. “Drinking tea” is a euphemism for interrogation, in which a person working for the Chinese government in the United States questioned the invited student about his/her political activities and warned him/her against further involvement.

It was with the full awareness of Chinese government’s surveillance of my target student organization that I conducted participant recruitment in the United States. The recruitment did not go well at the beginning mainly due to target participants’ concerns about their personal safety and security. It was extremely difficult for them to trust me as a person or as a researcher. In their eyes, I was an outsider who suddenly appeared in their midst, claiming to conduct research about their engagement with democracy, a topic with which they had a love-hate relationship. On the one hand, they were so passionate about democracy that they had become members of this organization committed to exploring democracy’s relations to China’s social and political developments. On the other hand, democracy also brought them much unwanted trouble and fear. It was no surprise that most target participants either did not respond to my initial contacts or simply turned down my invitation without even giving a reason.

It deserves mentioning that some target participants refused to take part in the research partly due to their consideration for the benefits of the research. This altruistic consideration is exemplified by the response from one target participant:

Thanks for asking. ... I thought more about your interview, and decided I was perhaps not appropriate for it. As I will be writing about issues related to China's politics for years to come, I am very likely to censor myself in your interview for fear of being identified in the future. I think this self-censorship wouldn't be good for your study.

Even though most of my recruitment attempts were not successful, responses like the one quoted above raised my awareness of the possibility of participants' self-censorship in interviews. This awareness further confirmed the importance of gathering data with the other two methods (i.e., observations and document gathering) when conducting fieldwork in the United States.

I traveled to the U.S. research site in July 2014 with a plan to recruit all six participants needed for the study. However, it was not until the end of the third week that I succeeded in recruiting the first participant. Despite the unexpected difficulty in participant recruitment, being in the field increased my knowledge of the target student organization.

In particular, I became cognizant of the inclusivity of the organization's membership. I had thought that only current students of the selected university could become its members, but it turned out that the members also included students from other universities and even working professionals in the metropolitan area where the selected university is located. This inclusive membership was made possible mainly due to the fact that the metropolitan area is an education hub with several universities, many of which boasted a large number of international students from China. The steady and continual economic growth of the area attracted many Chinese graduates to stay for job opportunities. Besides, many Chinese graduates from universities around the United States also worked in the area.

Even by taking advantage of the diverse backgrounds of the organization's members, I recruited only four participants in my first field trip in the summer of 2014. This unexpected scenario necessitated a second round of participant recruitment, which was facilitated by the contacts I had established in the first visit. My contacts helped me to secure two more participants before my second visit to the United States in the summer of 2015.

4.4.3 Participants

I recruited a total of twelve self-identified Chinese international students as my research participants, six at the Canadian research site and six at the U.S. site. Due to the fact that democracy is still a highly sensitive topic in China's current political climate, extra measures had to be taken to make participants as unidentifiable as possible. Therefore, no detailed descriptions of individual participants are offered in this dissertation. Nonetheless, I can offer an overview of the participants as two groups from two research sites as shown below in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1
Overview of the Participants as Two Groups

	The Canadian research site (6)	The U.S. research site (6)
Level of study	(6) Doctoral level	(2) Doctoral level (3) Master's level (1) Bachelor's level
Academic discipline	(2) Political science (2) Economics (1) Law (1) Community and regional planning	(1) Political science (1) Public Policy (1) Business (1) Computer Science (1) Physics (1) Engineering
Place of residence in China	(0) Rural (6) Urban	(0) Rural (6) Urban
International mobility for education purpose	(5) Current host country alone (1) More than current host country	(5) Current host country alone (1) More than current host country
Legal status in host country	(4) Temporary resident (1) Permanent resident (1) Citizen	(6) Temporary resident (0) Permanent resident (0) Citizen
Gender	(2) Male (4) Female	(4) Male (2) Female
Membership of the CPC	(1) Yes (0) No (5) Unknown	(0) Yes (1) No (5) Unknown
Religion	(0) Christianity (0) Islam (0) Buddhism (6) Unknown	(1) Christianity (0) Islam (0) Buddhism (5) Unknown
Membership of Chinese international student organizations	(0) Yes (6) No (0) Unknown	(6) Yes (0) No (0) Unknown

The table shows that participants at the two research sites are similar mainly in three ways. The first commonality pertains to their place of residence in China. Although I tried to recruit students from rural areas in China, all twelve participants are from urban China. This may suggest the unbalanced access to international higher education between people in China's urban areas and those in rural areas.

The second similarity between students selected from both sites relates to their international mobility for education purpose. In each site there is one participant who has pursued degree studies in more than one Western country. The student undertaking doctoral studies in Canada at the time of my fieldwork had obtained a Master's degree in the United States, and the student pursuing Master's degree in the United States at the time of my fieldwork had completed undergraduate studies in Canada.

The third common feature shared by participants at the two research sites is pertinent to their political and religious affiliations. In order to foster psychological safety for participants in the research process, I made no deliberate attempt to ask about their religious beliefs or their membership of political parties. It was only in the setting of one-on-one interviews that I received confirming information from two interviewees that one is a Christian and the other is a member of the CPC.

The table also shows three major differences between the two groups of participants. The first difference pertains to their education background. The six Canadian participants were all undertaking doctoral level programs predominantly in social sciences at the time of the fieldwork. However, participants in the United States showed more diversity in this regard. Only two received doctoral level training. At the time of my fieldwork, one was still pursuing doctoral studies, and the other became a working professional shortly after

obtaining his PhD degree. Among the other four participants in the United States, three were pursuing Master's degrees, and one just graduated from an undergraduate program looking for job opportunities in the metropolitan area. In terms of academic discipline, half participants at the U.S. research site studied social sciences, and half natural sciences.

The second notable difference between the two groups relates to their legal status in their host countries. The group in Canada demonstrates a greater variety of stages in the course of immigration. All six participants came to Canada as international students. However, at the time of my fieldwork one had already obtained Canadian permanent residency, and another even had been granted Canadian citizenship. As for the other four students with legal status of temporary resident, they were all aware of immigration to Canada as a possible life trajectory during their degree studies and after graduation. Two of them were seriously preparing for their immigration application.

Unlike the group in Canada, all six participants in the United States were temporary residents. Even though they all mentioned working in the United States during and/or after their degree studies as a desirable experience, none of them expressed interest in or desire for immigrating to the United States. Instead, five out of the six participants considered going back to China as the most likely, if not desirable, life trajectory after graduation. Noteworthy is that the one exception had actually obtained permanent residency in Canada before pursuing a Master's degree in the United States, and at the time of my fieldwork he just received Canadian citizenship.

The third main difference between the two groups is pertinent to their involvement in Chinese international student organizations. None of the six students in Canada mentioned their membership of any Chinese international student organizations, nor did they recount in

interviews their participation in activities organized by such organizations. However, all six participants in the United States were members of at least one Chinese international student organization. They all participated in the events of their organizations, and two of them even occupied leadership positions in their organizations.

4.5 Data Collection and Generation

In total, the process of data collection and generation lasted for 21 months from December 2013 to August 2015. This is much longer than originally expected mainly due to the necessity of conducting two rounds of fieldwork in the United States as detailed in the previous section. Considering the long distance between the two research sites, I conducted data collection in two stages, first stage in Canada and the second stage in the United States. I started collecting data at the Canadian site and completed the task in June 2014. Then I traveled to the U.S. field in July 2014 and spent five weeks collecting data. After this trip, I made some changes to participant inclusion criteria and data collection methods at the U.S. research site, the changes that I deemed necessary in light of my experience of the first field trip. These changes were approved by UBC's Behavioural Research Ethics Board in November 2014. I made my second trip to the U.S. research site in August 2015 and completed data collection within two weeks.

4.5.1 Methods

In this section I offer both brief justifications for and detailed descriptions of the three methods that were used to collect and generate data for this research, namely qualitative

interviewing, observations, and document gathering. I also give accounts of what did not go as planned and reflect upon those incidents as heuristic opportunities.

4.5.1.1 Qualitative Interviewing

I used qualitative interviewing mainly because it enabled me to talk directly with participants so as to obtain firsthand information regarding their engagement with democratic discourses and practices in the two selected host countries. The information derived from interviews, in turn, helped me to gain access to participants' accounts of such engagement and their sense-making of democracy. This is mainly because qualitative interviewing is "particularly well situated for studying people's understanding of the meanings in their lived world, describing their experiences and self-understanding, and clarifying and elaborating their own perspective on their lived world" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 116).

I conducted two types of qualitative interviewing, namely semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews. In total, 24 semi-structured interviews were conducted with all 12 participants recruited for this research. With each participant, I did two semi-structured interviews in person. The first one ran about 60 minutes, and the follow-up interview lasted from 40 minutes to 60 minutes. Both interviews were scheduled at a place and time of the participant's choice. All 24 interviews were conducted in Chinese (i.e., the native language shared by the participants and the researcher) so as to make it easier for the participants to provide in-depth and nuanced information regarding their engagement with democracy in their host countries. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Due to the sensitivity of the research topic, only code numbers were assigned to interviewees to minimize the possibility of them being identified.

Semi-structured interviews benefited both the interviewees and the interviewer in this research. It gave interviewees the power to control the content when answering the questions (Barbour, 2008; Glesne, 2011). It provided me, the interviewer, the flexibility of varying the order of the interview questions and the freedom to ask probing questions when significant responses appeared during the interview, thus ensuring issues and concerns were explored promptly and in depth (Wright, 2004).

With regard to the interview schedule (Appendix B), I only translated the first two research questions in the written form into particular interview questions in the oral form. This is because the third research question (i.e., How do the students become and/or how are they made into political – and possibly democratic – subjects?) was mainly examined by the interviewer at the data analysis stage.

The second type of qualitative interviewing used in this research is that of focus group interviews. The choice of focus group interviews was mainly informed by their potential democratizing effects (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2011) on the research process. For one thing, focus group interviews can help participants to establish a more equal power relation with the researcher by decentering the researcher in the data collection process. For another, such interviews can be conceived of as a deliberative practice in a group setting, in and through which participants may emerge as a new “we”. If such emergence occurs, it could shed valuable light on the collectivizing aspect of participants’ formation as political subjects.

Despite the sound rationale and good intentions, I conducted focus group interview once only with three participants at the Canadian research site. The focus group interview guide (Appendix C) was organized around “themes” that emerged from my one-on-one semi-

structured interviews with the six participants in Canada. Half of the participants were not able to join the interview mainly due to their busy schedules and other commitments.

Informed of the possible timeslots of all three participants who were available and willing to take part in focus group interviews, I proposed the place and time for the first interview. With the agreement from all three participants, I moderated the interview in Chinese for about 70 minutes. The interview was audio-recorded and transcribed.

Two related features of interviewees' participation in the focus group interview drew my attention. First, all three participants appeared more nervous and cautious in the group setting than in the one-on-one interviews. Second, they mainly repeated their views as expressed in their previous individual interviews and were even reluctant to express the more critical views as given in the one-on-one interviews. These two features were likely to be emanated from interviewees' suspicion that one of them might be a member of the CPC.

My original plan was to conduct a follow-up focus group interview with the same three participants. Before the follow-up group interviews, I had planned to ask each of them to write down or audio-record his/her reflection on his/her participation in the first focus group interview. I had also planned to ask each of them for one or more short conversations (audio-recorded) about his/her reflections on his/her participation in the two group interviews shortly after the second group interview would have completed. In this sense, I conceived of the focus group interviews as part of continuity of data collection and analysis so as to capture participants' political subjectification as an ongoing process.

However, my observation of the first focus group interview debunked my previous belief that the group setting could empower my participants to express their views that might be less accessible through individual interviews. This realization was further confirmed by

my private conversations with the participants of the first focus group interview. They all agreed that my original plan was well intentioned but suggested that I should not proceed with the plan. I listened to them, so in the end only one focus group interview was conducted.

Informed by my experience of the focus group interview in Canada, I was very cautious about conducting this type of interview at the U.S. research site. The participant recruitment in my first field trip also made me aware that the topic of democracy had caused target and actual participants to have serious concerns over their safety and security. Therefore, I abandoned focus group interviews as a data collection method in the United States.

4.5.1.2 Observations

I conducted observations mainly because they enabled me to enter participants' world to produce fieldnotes (Glesne, 2011; Spradley, 1980) of their engagement with democracy in natural settings. These fieldnotes, in turn, yielded a "thick description" of how they engaged with democratic practices in Canada and the United States, the type of description that "goes beyond the mere or bare reporting of an act (thin description), but describes and probes the intentions, motives, meanings, contexts, situations and circumstances of action" (Denzin, 1989, p. 39).

With permission, I observed participants' engagement with what they perceived as democratic practices in their daily life. Noteworthy is the difference in the use of observations between the two research sites. In Canada none of the participants invited me to a site to conduct observations. Therefore, no observation was conducted at the Canadian research site. However, four out of the six participants at the U.S. site invited me to events

held online and/or in public spaces where I conducted participant observations, but my involvement in these events remained minimal.

4.5.1.3 Document Gathering

For this research, I mainly collected two types of documents for the purpose of generating insights into the contexts of participants' engagement with democracy. First, I gathered documents published by the Canadian and the U.S. governments, particularly those in relation to the interests of Chinese international students (e.g., international education strategies and immigration policies). These government documents offered important information about the social, political, and cultural contexts in which the participants engaged with democracy at the macro level in their host societies.

Second, I collected documents published by three Chinese international student organizations where my participants had membership at the U.S. research site, particularly those documents pertinent to the structure and culture of specific organizations (e.g., the constitution of an organization). These documents provided important information about the organizational contexts in which the participants engaged with democracy at the micro level.

4.5.2 Issues Encountered

In the process of data collection and generation I encountered two particular issues: untranslatables and trust.

4.5.2.1 Untranslatables¹⁸

The issue of untranslatables derived mainly from interviews. Here, by untranslatables I mean “those words or phrases in a source language that pose great challenges to translators because no direct equivalent is available in the target language” (Ruitenberg, Knowlton, & Li, 2016, p. 612). For my doctoral research, the interview guides were written in English, but the actual interviews were conducted in Chinese, the native language of both the participants and the researcher. It was, therefore, necessary to translate particular interview questions in the oral form from English into Chinese. In this translation process, democracy as the central concept in the interview guides became an untranslatable.

Even though *minzhu* (民主) is the most common word for ‘democracy’ in Chinese¹⁹ (Schaffer, 1998), it is not a perfect translation because certain connotations of the English word “democracy” are not carried over into the Chinese word *minzhu*, and vice versa. The English word “democracy” with its roots in the ancient Greek culture has two basic connotations: 1) citizens as a whole are a sovereign power; 2) citizens exercise their political power indirectly by means of electing their representatives. The notion of citizen, therefore, is pivotal to democracy. Furthermore, democracy is a concept closely associated with “constitutional liberalism”, that is, “the rule of law, a separation of powers, and the protection of basic liberties of speech, assembly, religion and property” (Zakaria, 1997, p. 22).

¹⁸ Significant portions of this section were published as my authored part of the co-authored article “The productive difficulty of untranslatables in qualitative research” in the journal of *Language and Intercultural Communication* 16(4), 610-626. The other two authors are Claudia W. Ruitenberg and Autumn Knowlton.

¹⁹ It deserves mentioning that *minquan* was another influential term used historically for the English word “democracy”. As shown in Chapter 2, Sun Yat-sen’s *minquan zhuyi* was translated as the Principle of Democracy. Although *minquan* literally means “people’s power”, “democracy” has become the standard translation for this term.

Having no roots in China's ancient culture, democracy was imported to China as a Western concept at the turn of the 20th century. Its Chinese translation – *minzhu* (民主) – was actually borrowed from Japanese. The Japanese invented the word *minshu* (民主) to refer to democracy by recombining existing Kanji characters of the Japanese literary language in new ways when Western political texts were translated into Japanese in the late 19th century (Liu, 1995). Since all Kanji characters come from Chinese characters, the written form of democracy is the same in Japanese and Chinese: 民主. However, the pronunciation of 民主 is slightly different: *minshu* in Japanese and *minzhu* in Chinese. The literal meaning of *minzhu* is “people at the head”. While sharing with democracy the connotation that the people are a sovereign power, *minzhu* gives less weight to the notion of citizens.

More importantly, *minzhu* is a much more contested concept in terms of the meanings it carries regarding how rule by the people can be realized. At present, the official and dominant conception of *minzhu* still draws heavily on Mao's (1942) notions of “democratic centralism” and “mass line”. Democratic centralism refers to the combination of bottom-up deliberative participation of the people and top-down policy-making in the CPC. Mass line signifies the idea that the CPC's policies should be based on the people's ideas and subsequently gain the people's feedback and support. At the same time, Chinese proponents of democracy (e.g., those in online communities) also use *minzhu* to challenge the official meaning of this term. When discussing *minzhu*, they tend to favor liberal aspects such as the protection of basic liberties, the rule of law, a separation of powers, and multi-party elections.

From this perspective, *minzhu* is open for further contestation and development although it bears certain resemblance to democracy.

When dealing with democracy as an untranslatable, I drew on Apter's (2013) conception that the untranslatable serves "as a linguistic form of creative failure with homeopathic use" (p. 20). To put it differently, some untranslatability may well create a moment of learning, but too much untranslatability may easily lead to communication breakdown. Rather than treating the untranslatability of democracy from English to Chinese as a technical hurdle during interviews, I treated it as an opportunity for me to consider not only the linguistic specificity of democracy as a central concept of this research but also the cultural assumptions it brings to the interviews.

Recognizing democracy as an untranslatable alerted me to the danger of imposing democracy as a Western concept in the process of data collection and generation. Therefore, I deliberately used both democracy and *minzhu* when conducting the interviews. Two questions were specifically phrased as follows: (1) "你如何描述 *democracy*?" ("How would you describe *democracy*?"), and (2) "你在加拿大/美国对 *democracy* 的经历如何影响你对中国民主的认识?" ("How does/do your experience(s) of *democracy* in Canada/the United States influence your understanding of *minzhu* in China?").

Nine out the 12 interviewees did not notice the different usage of democracy and *minzhu* by the researcher, and they used the two terms interchangeably in their own speech. One interviewee noticed it but did not dwell on it. Two interviewees, however, commented on the different terms in more detail.

The first interviewee used ‘democracy’ and *minzhu* interchangeably when answering the question ‘How would you describe democracy?’ However, he was forced to recognize the different usage of the two terms when I posed the question: ‘How does/do your experience(s) of democracy in Canada/the United States influence your understanding of *minzhu* in China?’ This imposed recognition surprised the interviewee, who responded to this surprise with an extended discussion of different interpretations of *minzhu* in Chinese to justify his view that ‘democracy’ and *minzhu* have the same meaning. In doing so, the interviewee highlighted a common confusion about what *minzhu* looks like in the process of adapting democracy to the Chinese context, a process the interviewee referred to as the development of ‘democracy with Chinese characteristics’:

I think democracy and *minzhu* are the same thing, aren’t they? Isn’t the translation of ‘democracy’ in Chinese *minzhu*? Haven’t Chinese people talked about *minzhu* since the 1919 May Fourth Movement? In its early years the Chinese Communist Party talked about *minzhu*, right? The Nationalist Party also talked about *minzhu*. In the early years of China’s modern history, everybody talked about *minzhu*. Of course, as time went by, things changed in history. But, first of all, the authorities talk about *minzhu*, too. Of course, people have become a bit confused about the practices and meanings of *minzhu* because of the democracy with Chinese characteristics.

Unlike the first interviewee, the second research participant was fully aware of the difference between ‘democracy’ and *minzhu*. He showed this awareness even when he described democracy in his own words:

Well, personally speaking, I feel that there are different dimensions of democracy. First of all, what we call *minzhu* in China means at least people's participation. It is DEMO CRACY, right? [The interviewee used English to stress the two parts of the word.] Usually, it refers to a generally accepted scenario. That is, policies are determined by the will of the majority of the people through elections. It means the rule of the state by the people. ... In my view, *minzhu* in itself is a very complex concept. Well, the concept I am talking about here is not *minzhu*, but 'democracy.' 'Democracy' is very complex. It has different dimensions. [The interviewee went on to sum up different types of democracy, for which he used the English terms: egalitarian, deliberative, participatory, etc.]

This self-recognition of the untranslatability of 'democracy' offered a good opportunity to probe the interviewee's nuanced understanding of the similarities and differences between 'democracy' and *minzhu*, which are shown in the following exchange between the researcher (R) and the interviewee (I).

R: You just said the concept you were talking about was not *minzhu*, but 'democracy.' Is it because you think there are some differences between the two?

I: Well, I think there are certain differences between 'democracy' in English and *minzhu* in Chinese. In many cases, the expression of *minzhu* was related to China's historical era and context. When Sun Yat-sen used *minzhu*, he actually wanted to emphasize the concept of *minzu* (民族), right? That is, *zhonghua minzu* ((中华民族, meaning Chinese nation). It was about nation

building, and *minzhu* is only a point in Sun's talk about nation building. From the perspective of that historic era, it is because there was a republican system that *minzhu* was needed and exercised. However, when we talk about 'democracy' in daily life, it is a word used more widely, more value-neutral, and with a much longer history from ancient Greece to present. Chinese people started to talk about *minzhu* only in 1911. *Minzhu* has a history of only a little more than a century. So there are some limitations when people only talk about *minzhu*. How to translate 'democracy' into Chinese is also about the change in discourse, right? The question you just asked is about democracy, so I was more inclined to talk about democracy.

The second interviewee adds further twists to the knot of untranslatability. First, he appears to assume that the English word 'democracy' is 'more value-neutral' than the Chinese *minzhu*. While this was not discussed during the interview, the interviewee possibly reflects how a foreign language can be perceived as a more neutral medium because its histories and connotations are more hidden from the user. Second, the interviewee points out the multiple meanings and translations of the single English word 'people' in expressions such as 'power of the people' (*demokratia*) and 'people at the head' (*minzhu*). 'Democracy' relies on the Greek *demos*, which corresponds to 'the people' (as in *minzhu*, 'people at the head'). By contrast, *minzu* in the expression *zhonghua minzu* refers to the idea of *ethnos*, 'a people' in the sense of a nation or community. Of course, such a dense web of etymologies and translations can rarely be sorted out in the interview itself. The interviewer, nonetheless, needs to remain attentive to the various points of untranslatability, sometimes seeing more

nuance in the source language than can be captured tidily in the target language, sometimes the other way around.

4.5.2.2 Trust

The issue of trust was encountered at both research sites mainly due to the fact that democracy remains a highly sensitive topic in China's current political climate. However, this issue took different shapes in the two research fields.

At issue in the Canadian field was participants' lack of trust in each other during the focus group interview. All three participants of the group interview had trust in me as a person and a researcher, but they were strangers to each other. The group interview, therefore, became a site where participants' identities could be leaked by other interviewees. This encounter with the issue of trust taught me a valuable lesson. That is, in order to conduct focus group interviews effectively, it is extremely important for the participants to trust each other, particularly when the topic under investigation is of sensitive nature in the socio-political background shared by the interviewees.

In the U.S. site, participants lacked trust in me as a person and a researcher even in one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The following incident illustrates this. Shortly before the start of an interview, the participant questioned my identity as a current doctoral student at my university. Seeing the confusion on my face, the participant explained, "If you are a current student at UBC, why does your email address include the word 'alumni'?" Then I realized the interviewee's concern derived from the two email accounts I used for communication at the U.S. research site. My Gmail account was used on the consent form, but I also used my UBC email account as a way to build my trustworthiness as a researcher

who was officially affiliated with my university. I had never thought my institutional email account ending with “alumni.ubc.ca” could raise a suspicion of my identity as a researcher. The interview did proceed after I explained that UBC offers the same email account in the format of “name@alumni.ubc.ca” to its current students and alumni.

However, this incident taught me how far a participant would go to ensure his/her safety and security when taking part in a research on a sensitive topic under an adverse political climate. The incident also convinced me of the paramount importance of ethical conduct for research that involves humans in general.

4.6 Data Analysis

The case study research approach to this qualitative inquiry helped me to focus my analysis of data on three key aspects, namely contexts of the participants, participants’ engagement with democratic discourses and practices, and participants’ formation as political subjects.

4.6.1 Contexts of the Participants

Drawing on case study’s emphasis on the contexts of the cases, I analyzed the collected data, particularly documents and fieldnotes, from the perspective of contextual factors. I coded the data with the help of NVivo, a qualitative data analysis computer software. These codes were then used to search for themes that provided national and local contexts in which participants engaged with democracy in their host countries. The key contextual factors that emerged in this process mainly pertained to the existing socio-political orders that had been established in the two host countries as well as the existing power structures in the three

Chinese international student organizations where the participants held membership at the U.S. research site.

4.6.2 Participants' Engagement with Democratic Discourses and Practices

When analyzing participants' engagement with democracy in their host countries, I adopted three inter-related forms of data analysis in case study research, namely direct interpretation, categorical aggregation, and pattern establishment (Stake, 1995).

In direct interpretation, I examined instances of each participant's engagement with democracy. In categorical aggregation, I examined instances of participants' engagement with democracy from the data collected at the same research site so as to draw categories related to their engagement with democracy in their shared contexts. Based on the codes and categories produced by direct interpretation and categorical aggregation, I then established patterns in how participants engaged with democracy by building correspondence between two or more categories.

It deserves mentioning that I coded participants' engagement with democratic practices according to three models of democracy, namely aggregative democracy, deliberative democracy, and agonistic democracy. With regard to aggregative democracy, I examined participants' engagement with those practices associated with formal electoral politics in Canada and the United States. Informed by deliberative democracy, I examined participants' engagement with those practices associated with making decisions and/or solving problems that affected their interests. In addition, I looked into three aspects of participants' engagement with practices associated with agonistic democracy (Ruitenberg, 2009): 1) their political emotions in relation to the construction of collective identities in democratic

practices; 2) their understanding of the differences between political adversaries and moral enemies; 3) their “political literacy”, that is, their ability to “read the social order...in terms of disputes about the interpretation of liberty and equality and the hegemonic social relations that should shape them” (p. 278).

4.6.3 Participants’ Formation as Political Subjects

When conducting analysis of participants’ formation as political subjects, I coded the data according to my theoretical perspectives on political subjectification as detailed in Chapter 3. These codes drew my attention to two particular aspects of participants’ subjectivity. The first aspect pertained to how participants’ thoughts on and/or actions towards democracy were acted upon by the dominant practices and discourses in the existing politics both at the macro level and at the micro level. The second aspect pertained to participants’ contestations over the existing politics based on their demand for greater liberty and equality. These contestations shed important light on participants’ disidentification from their pre-given identities in the existing socio-political orders not just in their host countries, but more importantly, in their home country.

It should be mentioned that I paid special attention to participants’ newly developed perspectives on democracy, particularly those resisting and/or challenging the assumptions of the Western model of liberal democracy and those of China’s official conception of *minzhu*. These perspectives, in turn, offered important insights not only into how participants envisioned China’s democratization in the 21st century but also into their perspectives on who the Chinese people might become in China’s politics.

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented key methodological factors associated with my doctoral research. I adopted a qualitative case study approach to inquire into Chinese international students' engagement with democratic discourses and practices in two liberal democratic host countries in North America (i.e., Canada and the United States). I was particularly interested in these students' formation as political subjects in and through such engagement.

Two sites were selected for the fieldwork of this study, one on the Canadian West Coast and the other on the U.S. East Coast. Six participants were recruited from each site, and data were collected and generated over an extended period of time from three sources: interviews, observations, and documents.

Data analysis focused on contexts of the participants, the participants' engagement with democratic discourses and practices, and the participants' formation as political subjects. Two methods were used when analyzing the large amount of texts in the forms of interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and documents. The first method was that of thematic analysis, and the second theoretical analysis.

The following three chapters are devoted to the findings of this research. Chapter 5 reports on research participants' engagement with the domestic politics of Canada and the United States, focusing on how they engaged with practices associated with formal electoral politics in the two host countries. Chapter 6 reports on participants' engagement with politics in three Chinese international student organizations at the U.S. research site, offering detailed descriptions and analyses of how they engaged with practices associated with organization design and management. Chapter 7 reports on findings on the changes in participants'

political subjectivity in relation to their international mobility in higher education,
particularly focusing on the three features of those students who became democratic subjects.

Chapter 5: Participants' Engagement with the Domestic Politics of Canada and the United States

5.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 3, cross-border mobility in higher education entails a socio-political context change for Chinese international students. When a Chinese citizen arrives in Canada or the United States for education purposes, he/she has moved from China's authoritarian society to a liberal democratic society. The data of this research showed that interactions with the Canadian and the U.S. societies offered the participants many opportunities to engage with democratic practices while pursuing their degree studies abroad. A major realm in which such engagement took place is that of domestic politics of the two host countries. In general, participants' engagement with democracy in this realm revolved around practices associated with political elections at various levels²⁰. However, there were notable differences in their engagement with elections at the federal level, a pattern pertinent to the different systems of government adopted by the two host countries.

The main body of this chapter, therefore, is divided into two parts under the headings of Canada and the United States respectively. Each part follows the same structure: first, there is a brief description of a host country's system of government as the institutional context of various political elections in that country; then, there are detailed descriptions and analyses of research participants' engagement with practices associated with the country's formal

²⁰ Canada and the United States both hold elections for legislatures or governments at three levels. However, the three levels are termed differently, that is, the federal, provincial/territorial, and municipal levels in Canada whereas the federal, state, and local levels in the United States.

electoral politics. This chapter concludes with a summary of key insights into participants' engagement with elections in the two host countries and how such engagement pertains to their formation as political subjects.

5.2 Canada²¹

This section deals with participants' engagement with democracy in the domestic politics of Canada.

5.2.1 System of Government

The Canadian system of government has three key features, namely that it is a constitutional monarchy, a federal state, and a parliamentary democracy. As a constitutional monarchy, Canada's head of state is Queen or King of the United Kingdom, a hereditary Sovereign who reigns in accordance with the Constitution. The Sovereign is represented in Canada by the Governor General, who is appointed by the Sovereign on the recommendation of Canada's Prime Minister.

As a federal state, Canada brings together ten provinces and three territories under a federal government. It is important to note that the Canadian constitution divides responsibilities between the two levels of government. Particularly related to Chinese international students in Canada are the responsibilities of education and immigration. With the exception of First Nations education, which is governed federally by the Department of

²¹ Significant portions of this section were published as my single-authored article "Politically sensitive Chinese students' engagement with democracy in Canada: A case study" in *Journal of Chinese Overseas* 12(1), 96-121.

Indigenous Services, education is the jurisdiction of the provincial governments; therefore, the federal government does not have a ministry or department of education. The responsibility of immigration is shared by the federal government and the provincial/territorial governments.

Canada's parliamentary democracy entails that Canadian citizens elect their representatives to the House of Commons (i.e., the Lower Chamber of Parliament) through federal elections. The leader of the political party with most seats in the House of Commons usually becomes Prime Minister or head of the federal government, who then selects the Cabinet ministers and directs the governing of the country. In like manner, the leader of the political party with most seats in a provincial/territorial legislature usually becomes Premier of the province/territory, who then selects provincial/territorial cabinet ministers and provides leadership and direction to the provincial/territory government. Besides federal and provincial/territorial elections, municipal elections allow Canadian citizens to elect representatives to the local council, which usually includes a mayor and councillors. It should be borne in mind that only Canadian citizens have the rights to vote in elections for members of Parliament, provincial/territorial legislatures and municipal councils, or run for elective office.

5.2.2 Participants' Engagement with Formal Electoral Politics

The above-described system of government provides the institutional context of research participants' engagement with Canada's three-level elections. A pattern that stood out is that their engagement with the Canadian formal electoral politics varied greatly according to participants' legal status in Canada. Although all six participants came to

Canada as international students, at the time of research four participants remained as international students whereas one had obtained Canadian permanent residency and the other Canadian citizenship.

Here, it deserves mentioning briefly that the diversity in participants' legal status was pertinent to Canada's student immigration policies, a point to be discussed in greater detail. The remainder of this sub-section is, therefore, organized according to the legal status held by the participants, namely international students, permanent residents, and citizens.

5.2.2.1 International Students

The four participants with international student status tended to be active observers of democratic elections in Canada although they were not legally eligible to participate in them through voting. For some, the observation of political elections in liberal democratic countries even preceded their studies abroad. The democratic elections that they followed closely in China, however, were not those in Canada but primarily in the United States.

After coming to Canada, some participants developed a highly nuanced understanding of the role that political elections play in Canada's liberal democratic society. As one participant put it,

Now I am living in Canada and seeing that Canadian citizens can elect their members of Parliament. However, if you never live here, you cannot experience what is really included in a democratic society. Federal elections take place only every four years, right? Does it mean Canadian society is only democratic at the point of election in this four-year period? Of course not! Democracy is embodied in every aspect of life at every moment. Most of the

time it is embodied in individual liberties and in society under the rule of law. Elections happen every four years, and it is only one point in a period. ... Is it not too narrow-minded to understand democracy only as elections? If you define democracy as the point at which elections take place, it is as if there is no democracy in society for the rest of the four-year period. This is not the case at all! (Participant 1, doctoral student, Canada²², male)

The above excerpt shows that the participant's observations of democratic elections in the Canadian society broadened his understanding of democracy in the sense that democracy not only refers to regular democratic elections, but more importantly, a democratic way of social organization and social life on a daily basis. His daily experience in Canada particularly made him aware of the importance of the rule of law and freedom under the law in Canada's democratic society.

Another student (Participant 4, doctoral student, CA, female) gave a telling anecdote of her unexpected exposure to a provincial election. The Premier, who was campaigning for the then forthcoming provincial election, happened to be visiting a local community center where the participant took her child for some pre-planned extracurricular activities. The observation of this campaigning event led the student, who was then pursuing her PhD degree in political science, to compare how a person became a political leader in Canada and in China. As an international student, she imagined herself as a Canadian citizen on that occasion and concluded that Canada's democratic elections could create more opportunities

²² Hereafter, Canada is abbreviated to "CA" for all of the identifiers of participants recruited from the Canadian research site.

for the common people to interact and communicate with politicians in person so that politicians can hear – and possibly consider – the people’s voices in their policy-making processes.

5.2.2.2 Permanent Residents

For the student with Canadian permanent resident status (Participant 5, doctoral student, CA, male), his engagement with electoral politics was more than observations. He was somewhat disappointed with the fact that his permanent residency did not make him eligible to vote in elections. Nonetheless, he was actively learning the rights and responsibilities of a Canadian citizen and paid close attention to the changes in immigration policies that could affect his interests.

He especially anticipated the day when he would have transitioned from a permanent resident to a citizen in Canada. As he put it,

I really look forward to voting in elections. Take immigration bills as an example. I am very unhappy about making immigration to Canada harder for parents of Canadian immigrants. If I were a citizen, I could talk with a candidate to find out his or her ideas about this issue. If I like one candidate’s ideas, I’ll vote for him or her. In this way, I can fight for and possibly secure my interests.

This extract shows that the student had a very strong desire to participate in democratic elections as a means of choosing his representative in the legislative branch of the Canadian federal government, that is, his Member of Parliament (MP). It seems that the student’s strong motivation to vote was mainly driven by his awareness that if the candidate backed by

him could win the election, his interests would be properly heard and considered – and possibly protected – through this MP in the law-making processes.

Although only one participant’s legal status changed from international student to permanent resident at the time of the research, it should be mentioned that three out of the four participants with international student status had expressed their intention to stay permanently in Canada, and two were even preparing their respective immigration applications.

This is primarily due to the fact that Canada’s student immigration policies have turned international education into a pathway to Canadian permanent residency. According to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (2001), Canada’s immigration program includes three main categories: family class, economic immigrants, and refugees. In 2008 the Canadian federal government introduced “the Canadian Experience Class” as a new sub-category of economic immigrants so as to make it easier for those who have graduated and recently worked in Canada or have recent Canadian work experience to become permanent residents. In 2011, Canadian immigration was made easier specifically for international PhD students, who were allocated a permanent residency quota (up to 1,000 per year) through the federal skilled-worker visa program. In 2014, new rules were introduced to make it easier for international students to work in Canada during and after their studies. Currently, most Canadian provincial governments also have their own provincial nominee programs allowing international graduates of a Canadian university or college to gain permanent residency in Canada.

As will be exemplified by the participant in the following subsection, those international students who undertake advanced-level degree programs that require a

considerable length of time to graduate can become not just Canadian permanent residents during or shortly after their studies in Canada, but even Canadian citizens.

5.2.2.3 Citizens

The student who had obtained Canadian citizenship at the time of research (Participant 2, doctoral student, CA, female) illustrated the most complex engagement with democratic elections in Canada. Three features stand out in how she engaged with electoral politics as a new Canadian citizen. First, the engagement was informed by her awareness of the historical discriminations against Chinese immigrants in the domestic politics of Canada.

Many old Chinese immigrants have a different political mentality. If I remember correctly, they did not have voting rights until 1947. Chinese Canadians won voting rights after they participated in the Second World War, so they were very passionate about using their hard-won voting rights. ... They felt as if they must use these rights.

Here, the student was accurately referring to Chinese Canadian citizens' receiving the right to vote in 1947 as a significant political victory.

There was, in fact, another equally important victory in the same year: the repealing of the Chinese Immigration Act, or the Chinese Exclusion Act, which almost completely banned Chinese immigration to Canada between 1923 and 1947. The Chinese Exclusion Act also had a precursor, namely the Head Tax, which was in effect between 1885 and 1923. As a means of discouraging Chinese immigration to Canada, the Head Tax was only charged to Chinese immigrants upon their arrival in Canada. This citizenship-based entry fee increased from \$50 in 1885 to \$500 in 1903, and the latter fee equaled the amount of two years' salary

or the purchase of two homes then. From 1885 (i.e., the year in which the Head Tax came into effect) to 1967 (i.e., the year in which race-based preferences were finally removed from Canada's immigration laws), Chinese immigrants endured a total of 82 years of discriminatory immigration policies in Canada. The length of such institutional discrimination seems even more appalling when considering the fact that Canada has a history of only 152 years as a country.

Second, the participant's engagement with formal electoral politics was also informed by her knowledge of Canada's current socio-political context. Well aware that policies and laws regarding multiculturalism²³ could protect her from being discriminated against under Canada's current political system, she conceived of herself as a member of a new generation of Chinese immigrants particularly in the sense that they tended to have less enthusiasm for voting in democratic elections:

The new immigrants like us are very practical. In fact, my vote is just to maintain the status quo and the existing political system. This system is neither good nor bad for us. So it really does not matter if I vote or not because whichever politicians are elected, they do things according to the current political system.

Third, the participant had even developed a subtle strategy for her voting behavior in Canada's electoral politics at different levels. Her strategy was mainly based on her knowledge of a structural constraint in Canadian political governance, the knowledge

²³ According to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom (1982), multiculturalism is a fundamental characteristic of Canadian heritage and identity. Therefore, pluralism is respected and promoted in Canada.

acquired through her disciplinary studies:

Where our taxes go is the same everywhere in Canada: 8 per cent to municipal governments, 32 per cent to provincial governments, and 60 per cent to the federal government. [In other places, the student calls this a structural constraint in Canadian political governance.] The federal government has a lot of our taxes, so its decisions have the largest impact on each person, each city, and even the whole country. You can imagine what it would look like if the federal government spent most of our taxes on national defence, not on matters relating to our livelihood. ... So I think I will vote in the federal elections. I may not vote in the provincial elections or the municipal elections because the results of these elections won't make much difference to my life.

The excerpt shows that, as a new Canadian citizen, the student's actions toward voting in democratic elections tended to be mainly driven by her concerns for the issues that could affect her directly. This tendency can be viewed as a sign of neoliberalism's influence on the student's formation as a political subject in and through her selective engagement with Canada's formal electoral politics. In this sense, she was becoming a private consumer of politics with her voting right as a means of investing in personal interests rather than a member of citizenry using their right to vote to invest in collective interests.

Even though the issues she perceived as her individual interests happened to be most aligned with federal politics at the time of research, it can be suspected that her perceptions of what elections matter are to change over time. For example, if this participant has children who end up going to school in Canada, she is highly likely to participate in provincial elections due to the fact that education is a provincial jurisdiction.

Here, it is worth juxtaposing the voting behavior of this student and that of the student who had also obtained Canadian citizenship but was selected from the U.S. research site. Although the student selected from the Canadian research site was not enthusiastic about voting in elections at the provincial and municipal levels, she had motivation to vote at least in elections at the federal level. In contrast, the student selected from the U.S. research site (Participant 11, Master's student, the United States²⁴, male) was markedly reluctant to engage with Canada's elections at all levels despite his right to vote endowed by his Canadian citizenship.

Two factors appeared to have contributed to his reluctance. The first factor was that he did not believe casting his vote would make much difference to the result of the elections. This echoed his Canadian peer's reasoning behind the lack of enthusiasm for voting among the new generation of Chinese immigrants.

The second factor pertained to the student's perception of Canada's political system. As he explained,

I don't know much about the entire political system of Canada. Besides, my mind is full of conspiracy theories, you know, stuff like those shown in "House of Cards"²⁵. So I don't really trust the political system or the politicians. I also can't tell how one candidate is different from other candidates. I only know some aspects of who some candidates are or what they have done. But such knowledge can't help me to get a clear image of even one candidate. Besides,

²⁴ Hereafter, the United States is abbreviated to "US" for all of the identifiers of participants recruited from the U.S. research site.

²⁵ "House of Cards" is a Netflix original production, which portrays Frank Underwood's rise to the U.S. presidency through ruthless pragmatism, manipulation, and deception.

the aspects I know of one candidate are different from the aspects I know of the other candidate, so in most cases I can't compare different candidates in terms of one same aspect. To be honest, I can't convince myself to vote in these elections.

The participant uttered these words in response to my question about his engagement with the then forthcoming 2015 Canadian federal election. In light of this, the excerpt not only shows his distrust of the information about the candidates for the election, but also suggests that he thought it almost impossible for any voter to get sufficient and accurate information about the candidates. Here, the participant appeared to have discovered a limit of democratic elections that are supposedly based on rational decisions by well-informed voters. That is, democratic elections, to a greater or lesser extent, rely on irrational decisions by voters who are in effect imperfectly informed. It is interesting to note that the discovery of this limit turned out to demotivate the participant to vote in the federal election.

5.3 The United States

This section deals with participants' engagement with democracy in the domestic politics of the United States.

5.3.1 System of Government

The U.S. system of government also has three key features, namely that it is a republic, a federal state, and a presidential democracy. As a republic, the United States is different from Canada in that its head of state is not a hereditary Sovereign, but a president indirectly elected by the U.S. citizens.

Like Canada, the United States is a federal state: a union of fifty partially self-governing states under one federal government. Education and immigration are also two government responsibilities closely relevant to Chinese international students' life and study in the United States. According to the U.S. constitution, education is primarily a responsibility of the state governments. The federal government, nonetheless, has a department of education, whose mission is "to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access" (The United States Department of Education, 2018). Different from education, immigration is primarily a responsibility of the federal government.

In the U.S. presidential system of government, the President is the head of government, who leads the executive branch that is separate from the legislative branch, or Congress. Due to this separation of powers, there are two types of elections at the federal level, namely the presidential elections and the congressional elections. The President is elected indirectly by the citizens of each state through an Electoral College, whereas all members of two chambers of the Congress (i.e., the House of Representatives and the Senate) are elected directly by the citizens of each state. Since the separation of powers also applies to the states, two types of elections are held at the state level, through which citizens of each state directly elect their governors and members of their state legislatures. Elections are held at the local level as well, through which county and city government positions are filled. Here, it is important to mention that international students do not have the rights to vote in any of these elections in the United States.

5.3.2 Participants' Engagement with Formal Electoral Politics

It is in the system of government as described above that the research participants engaged with the U.S. formal electoral politics. Different from the diversity in legal status of the six participants selected from Canada, all six participants selected from the United States had the same legal status (i.e., international student) at the time of research. Furthermore, none of them expressed an intention to stay permanently in the United States after graduation.

A notable feature of these six Chinese international students' engagement with U.S. electoral politics is its breadth and depth despite their ineligibility to participate in elections through voting. The remainder of this sub-section is, therefore, structured according to the four types of elections with which the participants engaged, that is, presidential elections, congressional elections, state governor elections, and city council elections.

5.3.2.1 Presidential Elections

The data of this research provided detailed information on participants' observations of, reflections upon, and even participation in the practices associated with different stages of the U.S. presidential elections, namely the primary process, the general election campaign, and the post-election events.

5.3.2.1.1 The Primary Process

The primary process is an important stage of the U.S. presidential election, in which those who want to be President travel around the country and campaign against each other to win their party's nomination. With only two major political parties (i.e., the Republican Party

and the Democratic Party), most candidates go through a series of state primaries and caucuses, both of which entail party members' voting directly or indirectly for the candidates who they think would be the best party candidate for presidency. When the primaries and caucuses are completed, each party holds its own national convention, during which the winning candidate in the primaries and caucuses receives a nomination. The Presidential candidate of each party then campaigns throughout the country to win the support of the general population.

The PhD student, who studied political science, followed the U.S. presidential elections closely and reflected upon his observations on a regular basis. In the following interview excerpt, he described an epiphany that he had regarding the primary process the day before our second interview.

Yesterday it dawned on me that the primary process of the presidential elections poses a very serious problem for the U.S. political institutions. The original purpose of the primary is for a political party, particularly for a party's elites, to select a nominee to unite behind. An unintended consequence is that the candidates would chase the base of their parties in the primaries, but they would chase the median voters in the general elections. Generally speaking, the Republicans tend to be on the right of the political spectrum, and the Democrats on the left. Even among the Republicans, there are differences in their positions on the right side of the political spectrum. As an important part of the Republican base, evangelicals are extremely conservative on the far right of the political spectrum. But the moderately conservative Republicans are close to the middle of the political spectrum, and they may even apply

some values of the Democratic Party. In order to win the Republican presidential primaries, it is better for a candidate to position him/herself in the middle of the right side of the political spectrum. By doing so, he/she has a better chance to win the support of the majority of the Republicans. However, once a candidate wins the primaries and runs for the president, he/she has to chase those voters around the center of the political spectrum. Otherwise, it would be very hard to win the votes of those on the other side of the political spectrum. The primary process, therefore, leads to the flip-flops of some presidential candidates. In the primaries a candidate would voice opinions that help him/her to win the popularity especially among the extremists in his/her own party. But in the general election, he/she would demonstrate him/herself as very moderate. This is very inconsistent! (Participant 9, doctoral student, US, male)

This extract demonstrates that the participant identified a presidential nominee's inconsistency in his/her political stance between the primary process and the general elections as a serious problem. For one thing, such inconsistency is highly ineffective in uniting the citizenry. Rather, it polarizes even the voters belonging to the same political party. For another, such inconsistency can lead to the image of a presidential nominee as a self-regarding political opportunist, who tries to maximize his/her popularity by strategically pleasing different targeted voters at different stages of the election. Following his line of thought, it can be further argued that such inconsistency may lead to voters' sudden loss of confidence in a presidential nominee's integrity, and even the loss of confidence in the integrity of the U.S. political institutions in the long run.

5.3.2.1.2 The General Election Campaign

Subsequent to the primary process is the general election campaign. The presidential nominee of the Republican Party and that of the Democratic Party travel around the country with two main tasks: to communicate their views on and plans for important policy issues to the general population, and to win over undecided voters. The data demonstrated that the general election campaign provided certain opportunities for some research participants to engage with the practices associated with this stage of the presidential elections.

One participant, who had received his doctoral degree in computer science shortly before my fieldwork in the United States, watched several general election debates on television and the Internet. Well aware of the fact that general election debates had played an important, and in some cases even determining, role in the results of presidential elections in history, he expressed his disappointment with the debates that he observed.

I watched some of the presidential election debates, but I think they seemed a bit like play-acting. These debates can be seen as a practice of participating in the U.S. democratic politics through language. Many candidates were very skilled at evading the questions raised by their opponents and quickly launching counterattacks. There was a lack of candid discussion about significant issues. In my opinion, the focus in these debates should not be on rhetoric or eloquence, but on significant issues such as policy proposals that are backed up by factual information. (Participant 8, doctoral graduate, US, male)

This extract echoes the previous political science student's argument that undue focus on image shared by those who run for president is a serious problem in the U.S. electoral politics. Starting in the primary process and continuing to the general election campaign, this focus on image could be particularly evident when the two or more presidential hopefuls engage in the debates broadcast live on various media to millions of U.S. citizens and the foreigners on American soil such as this participant from China.

The participant also saw some U.S. voters as responsible in part for such an undue focus on image in the presidential debates. As he put it,

Many voters cared not so much about what the candidates were saying. Instead, they paid more attention to a candidate's eloquence, charisma, age, and how appealing his/her words sounded. All these factors, in turn, determine how they vote.

It is clear that watching the debates had made this former computer science student acutely aware that some U.S. voters paid undue attention to the candidates' rhetoric and physical aspects, and they seemed to have neglected what he saw as the primary purpose of the debates. That is, as a deliberative practice in the U.S. electoral politics, the presidential general election debates are to help citizens to decide whom to vote for by comparing different candidates' views and plans regarding issues with significant ramifications beyond their individual interests. Following his line of thought, it can be stated that these voters appeared to have blurred the lines between politics and entertainment, which in turn might have even encouraged certain presidential candidates not just to evade the controversial yet important questions in the debates, but also to play tactically just enough to secure their popular image among the targeted voters.

Another participant (Participant 12, Master's student, US, male) was so intrigued by the presidential election of 2016 that he had a strong desire to volunteer in the general election campaign in his local area. It should be mentioned that his desire to volunteer was not driven by his alignment with any particular political party or presidential nominee, but primarily by his interest in gaining direct experience of how the general election campaigns operate in the United States. Nonetheless, the participant did pay special attention to presidential nominees' positions on immigration because the U.S. immigration policies could affect his personal interests in the foreseeable future, particularly upon the completion of his degree study.

A major obstacle to this student's intended engagement with the general election campaign pertained to his confusion in two respects. Firstly, he was not certain whether his international student status would make him legally ineligible to volunteer in the U.S. formal electoral politics. Although he mentioned two possible sources (i.e., the Internet and the campaign organizations of the presidential nominees) to get answers to this concern, he gave no clear indication that he would take actions in this regard. Secondly, he still did not quite understand how political parties interact with U.S. domestic politics in general and U.S. electoral politics in particular. This second confusion may be related to the fact that physics was this student's field of study, so he was not learning about the U.S. domestic politics as part of his degree program.

5.3.2.1.3 The Post-election Events

Two types of events usually follow the official announcement of the result of a presidential election. Due to the highly competitive nature of the general election campaign inherent in the U.S. two-party system, the first type of events pertains to celebrating the

victory of the president-elect, particularly among those who voted for him/her, whereas the second type pertains to protesting against the president-elect, particularly among those who voted for the opponent of the president-elect.

Although having the legal status of international students prohibited all six participants from influencing the result of the U.S. presidential elections in any real sense, it did not prohibit them from participating in the post-election events. This can be exemplified by one participant's anecdote about her participation in a protest against George W. Bush as the president-elect of the 2004 presidential election. It should be noted that the anecdote was offered by a doctoral student recruited from the Canadian research site, who had obtained her master's degree in the United States. Therefore, her participation in the protest took place when she was a Master's student in the United States.

The background was given as follows:

The city in which my university is located is very liberal. On my way to campus the morning after George W. Bush won his second term, I saw most students wearing all black. At that time the black clothes didn't strike me as an outward sign of these students' distress and mourning due to the result of the election. When I arrived at my university, I became aware that a protest march against Bush's reelection was organized for that day. (Participant 3, doctoral student, CA, female)

It is clear that as the student started the day, she was aware of where her city fell on the political spectrum, who was elected the president, and what event was organized in her university to protest against the winner of the election. These three factors, however, seemed

quite distant from her at the beginning. Otherwise, she could have immediately understood why so many students she met chose to wear all black that day.

However, there were changes in the student's attitude toward the protest march the rest of the day. As she explained,

I didn't have much of a good impression of Bush, so I decided to have a look at how this march went about. When I was around the marching students, I felt the need to march with them because I shared their political position on Bush's reelection. As the march went on, the police came mainly to maintain order. Although the march was peaceful, I thought uncertain violence could arise anyway. As an international student, I didn't want to get into any trouble, so I decided to go back to campus when the march reached the City Hall. I didn't finish the rest of the march.

This account shows that the student's observation of the protest march made her aware of the position on Bush's reelection shared by her and the protestors. It was this shared position that motivated her to join the march. It deserves noting that her participation proceeded with much caution partially due to her ambivalence toward her involvement in the U.S. domestic politics as an international student.

Most telling is the student's reflection on her joining this protest march as her first experience of participating in social movement.

I was shocked by my participation in this protest march. I didn't plan to do that at all. However, I was absolutely upset about Bush's reelection! At the beginning, I had an on-looker mentality, amused by the thought that you cocky Americans ended up electing a blockhead as your president. At the beginning

of the march I had a fleeting question: I had never taken part in any protest march in China, but how on earth did Americans' election of their president have anything to do with me? As I marched along, I felt Bush's reelection has something to do with me. Bush was not just the leader of the United States, but also a leader of the world. I didn't mean that the U.S. president represents the entire world, but that the U.S. president has a power of global influence. We are global citizens, so Bush's winning second term was a tragedy for us. I felt that Americans didn't elect a competent president for themselves, and this result would affect all of us global citizens.

The excerpt shows that the student had never partaken in any group action with a clear focus on a political issue either in her home country or in her host country until the moment when she joined the protest march against Bush's reelection on her campus. As a political science student, she was shocked by this contingent experience because her first-time participation in social movement was not completely rational. Particularly noteworthy is the emergence of her self-perception as a global citizen when she tried to search for a rationale behind her participation in the protest march. As a global citizen, the student became increasingly aware of the interconnectedness between the U.S. political leadership and the well-being of the world, an awareness that could not have been raised to this degree if she had not become internationally mobile for education purposes.

5.3.2.2 Congressional Elections

The data also provided in-depth information on two research participants' engagement with congressional elections. It should be borne in mind that the campaigns for the

congressional elections are of much smaller scope than those for the presidential elections. A presidential candidate campaigns over the entire country. However, a Senate candidate campaigns an entire state, and a candidate for the House of Representatives campaigns only in his/her specific congressional district.

5.3.2.2.1 Senate Elections

One student (Participant 7, undergraduate student, US, female) gave a detailed account of her engagement with practices associated with a senate election campaign in the state where she studied. This engagement was well informed in two respects. First, she was well aware of the background of the campaign. That is, a special election for the U.S. Senate in her state was called to fill a vacancy due to the resignation of one senator to serve in the Cabinet in the 2000s. The state is known as a Democratic Party stronghold. Therefore, the prospect for any Republican candidates winning the special election looked bleak.

Second, the student was well informed about the candidate, for whose primary campaign she volunteered. As she put it,

From the beginning, I know it would be very hard for a Republican candidate to win the senate election in my state. Among the three Republican Candidates, Edward Harley²⁶ was the only one who had his own ideals, strategies and methods. He didn't woo the voters by his own fame or money.

²⁶ In order to mask the state in which this research participant studied, Edward Harley is a pseudonym of the Republican candidate for whose campaign the participant volunteered.

He was very competent. I liked his views on many policy issues. The Republican Party also saw him as somebody with potential to effect positive changes not just in his state, but even in the entire country.

This excerpt shows that the student's decision to volunteer for Edward Harley was made after careful comparison among the three Republican candidates particularly against one criterion, namely their positions on issues with significance for the state and beyond. It was no surprise, therefore, that the student volunteered with an all-out effort in the Republican candidate's primary campaign.

The student engaged mainly with two practices during the primary campaign. First, she participated in research on voter demographics. She worked with others in the campaign team to collect and analyze statistics about two voter groups: the senior citizens and voters of one ethnic group. The aim of this research was to help Edward Harley develop effective strategies to win these two targeted voter groups in the senate Republican primary.

Second, the student conducted telephone survey with over 10,000 voters across the state to highlight information about Edward Harley. Such a daunting task was completed by her calling around 560 voters in a 12-hour workday on average. Below is a brief description of the procedure of a typical conversation between the participant and a voter on the phone.

When a voter answered my call, I would tell him or her there was a Republican primary for the Senate special election in our state. Then I would ask which candidate he/she would like to select to run for the state senator. If the voter gave me a specific name, I would then ask why he or she made such a choice. If a voter said he or she had no clues about which candidates were running the primary campaign, I would ask, "Have you heard of Edward Harley?" If the

answer was “yes”, I would follow up asking, “Would you like to vote for him?” But most people told me they would not vote for Edward no matter how hard I tried to encourage them to know more about him. In my opinion, anyone who really had a look at Edward Harley’s policy would have a much higher chance to vote for him, but only a few people really checked his website.

Since the student aligned closely with Harley’s positions on many policy issues after thoughtful consideration, it is no surprise that she was appalled by some voters’ responses to her suggestions for getting to know more about the candidate:

I remember one person told me, “He has a European last name, and it sounds like he is from a noble family. I don’t like it. I don’t think people like him would represent me!” Another voter said, “He looks very old, and is not good looking. I will not vote for him!”

The student was even more appalled by the self-absorption that seemed to have underpinned the thoughtless voting behavior of the majority of those whom she surveyed on the phone. As she reflected,

To be honest, almost 75% of the people who answered my call would choose randomly without even trying to know a candidate’s policy proposals. You know, the education level of the general population of this state is one of the highest in the United States. I knew many people with higher education levels tended to be more aware of the policy proposals of different candidates. But from my telephone survey experience, most people voted to feed their own ego and to satisfy their own interests without much concern for the whole society. That’s the norm! I got totally shocked by how these people voted.

In the end, only slightly over 10% of the voters supported Edward Harley in the Republican primary election for the U. S. Senate in the state. Despite the disappointment of this failed attempt to help Harley win the election, the volunteering experience helped the student gain some valuable insights into how attention to superficial matters could lead to serious problems in some U.S. citizens' participation in democratic elections. Strong biases against factors such as name, age, appearance, and ethnicity could lead some voters, regardless of their education levels, to ignore the actual political platforms of the candidates. Such voters' thoughtless behaviors could further develop into political apathy toward issues with significance for the greater social good.

5.3.2.2.2 House of Representatives Elections

The participant whose reflection on the primary process of the U.S. presidential elections was discussed earlier also observed the U.S. House of Representatives elections through a comparative lens. The federal government shutdown in 2013, which was largely due to the deadlock between Republicans and Democrats in Congress, particularly intrigued this student and led him to reflect on the different processes for a candidate to become the president or a member of House of Representatives through competitive elections in the United States. As he explained,

Unlike the president, a member of the House of Representatives is elected only by the citizens of a specific congressional district. This means the need for a candidate to chase the voters at the center of the political spectrum in the House of Representatives elections is not as great as in the presidential elections. Therefore, in order to win the seat in the House of Representatives,

candidates of the Republican and Democratic parties would both try their best to chase the base of their parties in the same district. One consequence is that members of the House of Representatives elected in this way tend not to compromise with one another across the aisle so that they can maintain the appeal for their party base in their own districts. (Participant 9, doctoral student, US, male)

In this extract, the participant highlighted a serious problem inherent in the process of the House of Representatives elections. That is, electing a member of the House of Representative by a congressional district alone can contribute to a bipolar left/right environment in the Congress. Such an environment, in turn, may embolden the Republican and Democratic parties to become increasingly reluctant to compromise, if at all, over controversial issues. In the most extreme case, their confrontation could take the form of political gridlock as embodied in the 2013 federal government shutdown. Therefore, the student's reflection shed some light on how the House of Representatives elections can be correlated with the dysfunction of the U.S. federal government, and even the ineffectiveness of U.S. domestic politics.

5.3.2.3 State Governor Elections

Besides engaging with elections at the federal level, one participant had a unique experience of casting a ballot in a state governor election. Since such an experience was so counter-intuitive, he recounted how he did it with some explanations.

I stayed with a host family when I first came to study in the United States. My host mom always tried to create some opportunities for me to experience

democratic practices in the U.S. elections. For example, she took me to the polling places several times. In a governor election, she even helped me to cast a ballot. You may ask how this was possible for me as an international student, right? Well, my host mom led me into the voting booth that day. Then she said, “I want you to experience how it feels when a citizen casts his/her ballot in an election. So today you can cast my ballot on my behalf.” I asked her, “Whom do you want to vote for?” After hearing the name of the candidate of her choice, I completed every step of the ballot casting. (Participant 9, doctoral student, US, male)

When reflecting on this experience, the student commented,

I knew I was not a U.S. citizen. I knew I did not have the right to vote in elections in the United States. I knew the ballot I cast that day was actually the ballot of my host mom. But the experience of the whole process of ballot casting means a lot to me. I went inside the voting booth. The curtains were drawn behind. In that place, no one was allowed to come inside to tell me which candidate I should vote for. I did it all alone. The very moment when I dropped the vote into the ballot box, I knew it would finally be counted. It was such a novel experience! Very few of Chinese international students have this type of experience.

These words indicate that the student seemed to perceive his practice of casting a ballot almost as a sacred rite of passage, through which he, at least for a moment, had a foretaste of how inextricably a citizen’s liberty and responsibility were intertwined in the process of choosing elected officials through voting in a well-established democracy.

5.3.2.4 City Council Elections

Two out of the six participants recruited at the U.S. research site engaged with the forthcoming city councillor election in their local area at the time of my fieldwork. Their engagement was made possible mainly due to the fact that one of these two participants had established a network of local politicians through his academic and professional activities. It is no surprise, then, that the two research participants played different roles when engaging with this local election.

For the student with local politician contacts, he acted mainly as an information disseminator and an organizer. In an attempt to encourage Chinese international students to learn more about local elections in the United States, he created a group on WeChat, a Chinese social media mobile app with functions similar to those of Facebook. Most of the students whom he invited to join the group were those with whom he had become acquainted through various Chinese international student organizations in the local area. It deserves noting that one of his contacts, Susan Deng²⁷, a woman of Chinese descent, was running for the city councillor election; he disseminated information regarding her campaign on a regular basis. For example, he informed the members of the WeChat group that Susan still needed more volunteers for her campaign. He also provided updates on her campaigning events.

The other participant happened to know the first participant in a Chinese international student organization. Mainly driven by his interest in the U.S. local elections and his desire to

²⁷ In order to mask the city, Susan Deng is a pseudonym given to the city councillor election candidate with whose campaign the two students particularly engaged.

build contacts with local politicians, he joined the WeChat group without hesitation. He followed closely the information posted in the group and responded often to invitations to participate in Susan's campaigning events. For instance, he attended one of Susan's candidate information sessions, and expressed strong willingness to volunteer for her doorstep canvassing work.

5.4 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has shown that most participants of this research engaged with formal electoral politics in Canada and the United States despite the fact that their international student status legally prohibits them from voting in democratic elections or running for elected office in the two host countries. Moreover, such engagement mainly took three forms, that is, observation of, reflection upon, and participation in the practices associated with the processes of their host countries' citizens choosing their representatives in governments through competitive democratic elections. The practices of observing, reflecting, and participating appeared to be forms of subjectivity produced in direct proportion to how democracy was operationalized and performed (e.g., candidates' debates, voters' casting ballots, and marching) in the two host countries.

Particularly noteworthy was how three contextual factors had bearings on a participant's political subjectivity. The first factor is that of the system of government established by the constitutions of Canada and the United States respectively. On the one hand, it provided the institutional context that set limits on the types of practices with which a participant could engage in the formal electoral politics of a specific host country and through which a participant could actively constitute him/herself as political subjects. On

the other hand, it positioned a participant on a student visa as a noncitizen who had no right to vote in his/her host country. In this sense, active engagement with the formal electoral politics of Canada and the United States can be conceived of as a student's practices of contesting the specific police orders of the two host countries, the practices through which he/she resisted being subjected to such an order.

The second factor is that of Chinese immigrants' past experiences in the two host countries, particularly their experiences of historical discriminations in the realm of politics. It offered the historical context that could remind a participant of the importance and even necessity of exercising the right to vote once he/she obtains citizenship of his/her host country. In this sense, Chinese immigrants' past experiences could produce a participant as a type of political subject who inherited and even developed an agonistic relationship with his/her host country's current police order.

The third factor is that of a host country's immigration policies. It established the current policy context that set limits on the possibilities of a participant's immigrating to his/her host country through international education. As shown in this chapter, changes in immigration status from international student to permanent resident and even to citizen could influence a participant's engagement with democratic elections in his/her host country to move beyond mere observation and reflection. The policy context, therefore, constituted Foucault's "dividing practices" through which participants were produced into subjects with different political rights in their host societies, the differentiation based on the changes in their immigration status.

It deserves noting that obtaining citizenship did not automatically produce a former international student into an active citizen in elections of his/her previous host country and

now home country. A serious problem that should be addressed is how to provide an international-student-turned citizen with accurate and sufficient information so as to build his/her trust in the new home country's political system. Without such trust, a new citizen would be likely to be suspicious of the effectiveness of casting his/her ballot in effecting socio-political changes. This lack of trust might in turn manifests itself in a participant's cynical outlook on active engagement in electoral politics, a point to be discussed in Chapter 7.

Informed by the insights as summarized above, it can be argued that the domestic politics of Canada and the United States, particularly the formal electoral politics, serves as a very important space in which Chinese international students can be produced as political subjects. The next chapter will focus on another space of this kind, namely politics in Chinese international student organizations.

Chapter 6: Participants' Engagement with Politics in Chinese

International Student Organizations

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has shown that only two of the total twelve research participants enjoyed the right to vote in large-scale democracy of their host countries thanks to obtaining Canadian citizenship. Nonetheless, it should be borne in mind that this study conceives democracy not merely at the regime level, but also at the level of local associations. Such conception, in turn, has contributed to valuable findings on some participants' engagement with politics in Chinese international student organizations, the engagement that revolved around experimenting with democratic practices associated with organization design and organization management.

Findings in this chapter are based on the data collected and generated from the fieldwork in the United States only, due to a stark contrast between the participants recruited at the Canadian research site and those at the U.S. site. While none of the six participants in Canada mentioned his/her membership or involvement in any local Chinese international student organizations, all six participants in the United States were active members of three local Chinese international student organizations, namely Organization X, Organization Y, and Organization Z²⁸.

²⁸ In order to protect the identity of research participants, X, Y, and Z are pseudonyms given to the three Chinese international student organizations with whose design and management the participants engaged.

The remainder of the chapter is divided into three parts. The first part describes the macro and micro contexts of participants' engagement in the three Chinese international student organizations so as to facilitate a deeper understanding of how such engagement was related to China's democratization efforts in the 21st century. The second part describes and analyzes how participants experimented with democratic practices in the processes of organization design and organization management. The experiments in the former process focus on the practice of constitution writing, and those in the latter focus on that of decision-making. The third part summarizes key insights into participants' engagement with organizational politics and discusses briefly how such engagement pertains to their formation as political subjects. As such, this chapter provides information and insight into all three of the posed research questions (albeit in relation to the context of the United States).

6.2 Contexts of Participants' Engagement in the Three Chinese International Student Organizations

This part contextualizes participants' engagement in the three Chinese international student organizations both at the macro level and at the micro level. To be precise, the macro contexts refer to the institutional contexts of respective government systems of China and the United States, and the micro contexts refer to the most immediate contexts of the three organizations.

6.2.1 The Institutional Contexts

For the six students recruited at the U.S. research site, their international mobility in higher education entailed two major institutional contexts, that is, the systems of government

of their home country and their host country respectively. It is interesting to note that, despite being geographically in the United States, these six students were politically out of the institutional context of the U.S. government system in the sense that they were prohibited from participating in the U.S. domestic politics through voting because of their legal status as temporary residents on student visas. On the other hand, despite being geographically out of China, they remained politically within the institutional context of the Chinese government system thanks to their Chinese citizenship.

Having described the U.S. government system in the previous chapter, this section focuses on its counterpart in China. The Chinese government system is marked by one overarching feature, namely socialism with Chinese characteristics. This feature is evident in Article 1 of Constitution of the People's Republic of China (2004):

The People's Republic of China is a socialist state under the people's democratic dictatorship led by the working class and based on the alliance of workers and peasants. The socialist system is the basic system of the People's Republic of China. Disruption of the socialist system by any organization or individual is prohibited.

In the most recent constitutional amendment, one more sentence was added to this article. That is, "The leadership of the Communist Party of China is the defining feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics"²⁹ (Xinhua, 2018).

From the constitutional perspective, the Chinese government system can be defined as one under the CPC's leadership. This defining feature is arguably underpinned by a

²⁹ This newly added sentence is in Chinese only at the moment.

communist assumption about how the communist party, the state, and the society relate to each other under socialism. As Schurmann (1968) succinctly puts it,

All Communist countries accept the fact that under “socialism” a distinction remains between state and Party. ... Soviet and Chinese Communist literature makes it clear that “state” (gosudarstvo or kuochia³⁰) means the formal organization which dominates society. The state is a conscious contrivance. It is the most important element of the superstructure of society, the instrument of its ruling class; in the dictatorship of the proletariat, it is the instrument of the proletariat. As an instrument it has “structure” – a word commonly used in Communist lexicons in association with the concept of state. The state is bureaucracy, army, law; the body of organized formal instruments from which command flows. The Party, on the other hand, is the organized expression of the will of society. ... For the Chinese it represents “the interests of the people”. The Party actualizes the control of society over the state. (pp. 109-110)

According to this assumption, the Chinese government is in theory an instrument through which the Chinese people in general, and the ruling working class in particular, express and serve their interests with the CPC as their representatives.

Therefore, a distinctive feature of the Chinese government at all levels³¹ is that the leadership positions are predominantly occupied by the CPC members. Illustrative in this

³⁰ It should be noted that “kuochia” in Chinese characters is 国家, which is now Romanized as “guojia”.

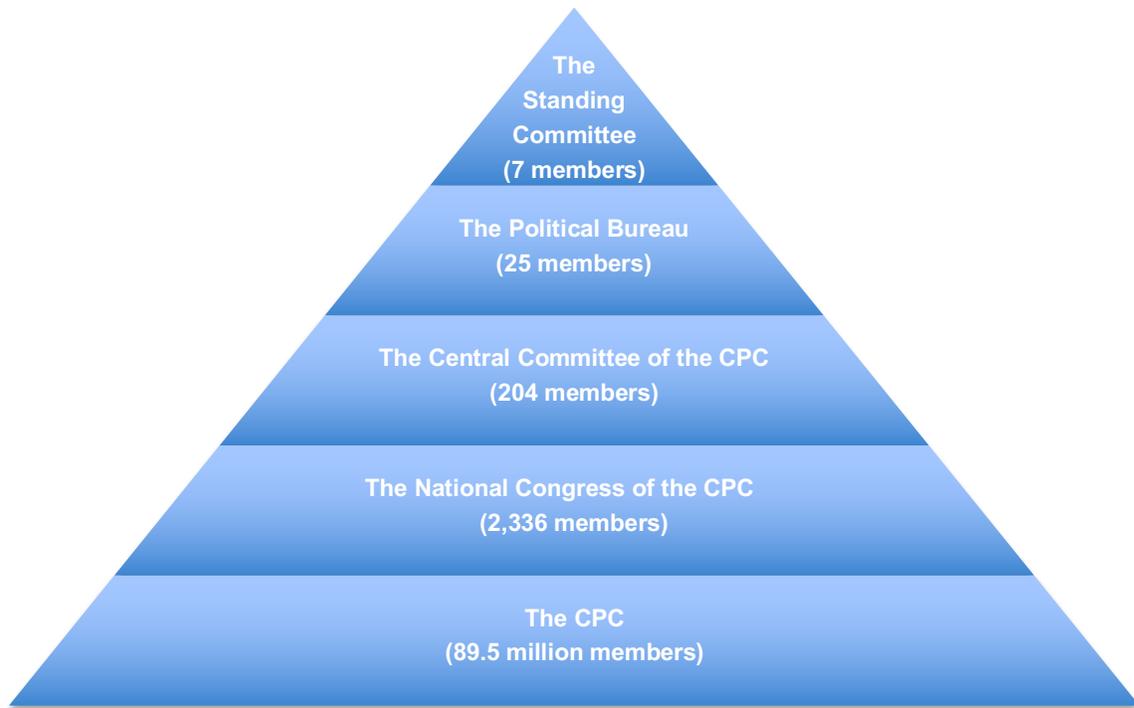
³¹ There are five levels of government in China: the national or central level, the provincial level, the prefectural level, the county level, and the township level.

regard is how the party's highest-ranking leaders share the most important leadership posts of the Central Government. As shown in Figure 6.1, the party's hierarchical structure confers paramount institutional power on the seven members³² of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee, usually known as the Politburo Standing Committee (the PSC). Among these seven members, four hold key leadership positions in the current Central Government that consists of six state organs³³ (i.e., the legislative organ, the executive organ, the judicial organ, the military organ, the presidency, and the supervisory organ). Li Zhanshu is Chair of the National People's Congress (the NPC), the legislative organ of the Central Government. In the executive organ (i.e., the State Council), Li Keqiang is the Premier as the head of government, and Han Zheng holds the post of the first Vice Premier. Xi Jinping not only is the President of China as the head of state, but also occupies the highest position of the military organ, that is, the Chairman of the Central Military Commission.

³² The seven members of the current PSC are Xi Jinping, Li Keqiang, Li Zhanshu, Wang Yang, Wang Huning, Zhao Leji, and Han Zheng, all of whom are men.

³³ It is worth mentioning that this entire Leninist state structure was borrowed from the Soviet Union and imposed after 1949.

Figure 6.1
The Hierarchy of the CPC



It should also be noted that the CPC has turned all state organs of the Central Government into its strongholds since it came to power in 1949. The party's leadership over the Central Government has been achieved mainly by one strategy, that is, retaining an absolute majority of the seats in the NPC. For instance, the current NPC has a total of 2,980 seats, and the CPC occupies 2,119 seats with the remaining 861 seats shared by representatives of various non-communist parties and public figures without party affiliation. This strategy has been highly effective because the NPC is the highest organ of state power that has “the rights of legislation, decision, supervision, election and removal” pertaining to all other five state organs. (The Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China, 2018, the National People's Congress, para. 1)

Here, three points are of use to connect the six research participants with the institutional context of the Chinese government system, a connection that paves the way for analyzing political ramifications of participants' active engagement in the three organizations in the following subsection. First, the Chinese Constitution has created a specific socio-political order (or what Rancière calls the police order) by which the six participants are bound as Chinese citizens. This binding normative order also set limits on their actions with respect to China's domestic politics. For instance, the 2018 amendment rules out challenging or even undermining the CPC's leadership in China's existing police order.

Second, the Chinese people's control over the state is constitutionally vested in the CPC, a party that in theory represents the people's interests. In effect, the CPC's leadership role in the Chinese government not only confers far more institutional power on the Party than on the Chinese people, but also divides the Chinese people based on their membership of the CPC. It is particularly worth noting that some Chinese people without the CPC membership refer themselves as "shitizen"³⁴ (pimin, 屁民) on the Internet to signify their identity as "ordinary people who are powerless" (Goldkorn, Tao, Niewenhuis, & Feng, 2017) in China's existing police order. Interestingly, such a sense of powerlessness was evident in my interviews with the six participants, and one participant even used the very word of "shitizen" for self-reference.

Third, it is helpful to recall two efforts made by the CPC regarding China's

³⁴ The literal translation of pimin in English should be "fart people". However, its more widely used translation is "shitizen" probably due to the witty sarcastic manipulation of both the sounds and the meanings of "shit" and "citizen" in English.

democratization in the 21st century as discussed in Chapter 2. The CPC views democratization mainly as a means to maintain China's current socio-political order. Therefore, the first effort focuses on governance improvement, particularly in the form of changing the Chinese government's approach to socio-political tensions from repression to negotiation. Such a focus on governance improvement, in turn, creates opportunities for Chinese international students such as the six students recruited at the U.S. research site to participate in the processes of addressing some of the socio-political challenges faced by China. The second effort is that of "intra-Party democracy" which mainly entails multi-candidate elections and decision-making by votes within the CPC. In this sense, a participant cannot engage with practices associated with intra-Party democracy unless he/she holds membership of the CPC.

6.2.2 The Organizational Contexts

This subsection is divided into three parts under the headings of Organization X, Organization Y, and Organization Z respectively. Such a division is informed mainly by the chronological order of the three organizations' interrelated development. Organization X was founded in the early 2010s. Two years later, Organization Y evolved from one project of Organization X. A year after the establishment of Organization Y, Organization Z was co-founded by one former leader of Organization Y.

Each part of this subsection follows the same structure: first, there is a synopsis of key information of a specific organization (e.g., milestones of development, vision statement, mission statement, and main activities) to provide the most immediate contexts of participants' active engagement in that organization; then, there are some brief analyses of

the political ramifications of such engagement in light of a specific organization vis-à-vis the Chinese government system.

6.2.2.1 Organization X

Organization X was officially registered at A School of A University³⁵ in the early 2010s. From the very beginning, it was explicit about its active engagement in China's democratization process. One of its stated purposes was to engage overseas Chinese students and scholars with endeavors to explore practical plans for China's political democratic reforms. Activities of the organization revolved around raising social consciousness about some of China's pressing political issues (e.g., digital activism, and ethnic tensions in Tibet) so as to facilitate young Chinese citizens' participation in China's democratization.

The events of the organization were mainly of an academic nature. A typical event was the weekly discussion, usually preceded by a lecture on a specific political issue. The lecturer was either a member of the organization or an invited scholar, who had conducted theoretical and/or empirical research on the issue chosen for the week. The key role for each discussion was that of the coordinator, who was responsible for disseminating the information about the discussion to its intended audience, facilitating the discussion, and documenting the event. It deserves mentioning that alternative opinions and multiple perspectives were encouraged in the discussion. The organization also ran reading groups that studied Western social theories

³⁵ To protect the identity of research participants, A School of A University is a pseudonym given to the school with which Organization X was affiliated.

and political theories, hoping to offer its members different theoretical perspectives on issues pertaining to China's democratic reforms.

Due to its active engagement in China's democratization and its increasing political influence among overseas Chinese intellectuals, Organization X became a target of the Chinese government's watchful eye. According to one participant, many members of the organization were interrogated by Chinese government officials in the United States, an interrogation that was often dubbed "drinking tea"³⁶ in the interviews.

"Drinking tea" usually proceeded in the following three steps. The first step was the invitation to tea. That is, a person working for the Chinese government in the United States approached a member of Organization X, inviting him/her to at a place in the local area. The second step was the interrogation or drinking tea. That is, either the person who had invited the student to tea or another person also working for the Chinese government probed into the student's engagement with activities of Organization X and warned him/her against further involvement. The third step was a repeated cycle of being invited to tea and drinking tea for some of the interrogated students who disregarded the previous warning(s).

Here, two points are in order regarding political ramifications of participants' active engagement in Organization X. First, for the five participants who held membership of this organization, they were associating with one another and other like-minded young Chinese citizens to explore and develop possible alternatives to China's official approach to democratization (i.e., intra-Party democracy) in the 21st century. The practices associated

³⁶ "Drinking tea" (hē chá, 喝茶) is a euphemism for "interrogation" (hé chá, 核查) in Chinese because the pronunciation of these two words is almost identical. The only difference is that the first character of "drinking tea" (hē) is pronounced with the first tone whereas that of "interrogation" (hé) with the second tone.

with weekly discussions and reading groups, in this sense, are in effect those of contesting China's existing police order that positions them as ordinary powerless people vis-à-vis China's official democratization efforts under the leadership of the CPC. Second, the interrogations regarding their active engagement in Organization X manifested the power of the Chinese government even on American soil. "Drinking tea", therefore, can be conceived of as a practice of the Chinese government to mold members of Organization X into governable political subjects, that is, the type of political subjects who do not challenge or undermine the CPC's leadership.

As could be expected, the Chinese state's surveillance played a detrimental role in the development of Organization X. Stories of its members' drinking tea were spread by word of mouth within the organization, which in turn generated a growing fear of the Chinese government. Only one year after its establishment, the organization became increasingly stagnant.

On the surface, the organization's intended purpose to engage Chinese international students with China's democratic reforms seemed to have been nipped in the bud by the seemingly almighty hand of the Chinese government. However, such an appearance paled in comparison to the resilience of Organization X as shown in its design of one project that led to the establishment of Organization Y.

6.2.2.2 Organization Y

In order to mitigate the risks of being under Chinese government's close surveillance, the nucleus of Organization X designed a project that deviated from their original plan to engage overseas young Chinese citizens directly with China's democratic reforms. Two core

members initiated the idea of designing a project to cultivate citizenship spirit among Chinese youth. In particular, the project aimed to engage young Chinese citizens abroad with seeking creative resolutions to some of China's pressing social problems. This initiative soon gained support from another six Chinese international students at four universities in the metropolitan area where A University was located. These eight students, then, became co-founders of the project. Thanks to the strategic shift of the purpose of the project from engaging young Chinese citizens with China's political issues to that with China's social issues (e.g., healthcare issues and environmental issues), the project attracted little attention of the Chinese government and was a big success.

This positive experience motivated the nucleus of Organization X to establish another organization dedicated to the project alone. Therefore, Organization Y came into being, independent of Organization X but still affiliated with A University. According to its mission statement, Organization Y deliberately distinguished itself from Organization X by orienting its activities to some of China's pressing social problems. It designed training programs to develop young Chinese citizens' competencies to create and manage social innovation projects to address specific social problems. It is no surprise that typical events of Organization Y were of a more pragmatic nature.

The formation of Organization Y testifies that although the Chinese government could set political limits to the possibilities of Chinese international students' participation in China's democratization, this limitation as a practice of governmentality also opened new spaces for decision-making and action on the part of the students. In this sense, the practices associated with the training programs of Organization Y can be conceived of as those of creatively resisting the power of the Chinese government. It can be argued that, through these

practices, members of Organization Y including four participants of this research not only succeeded partially in resisting the CPC's attempts to subject them to China's official democratization efforts, but more importantly, constituted themselves as a group of young Chinese citizens with increased competence to participate in addressing some of China's pressing social issues that are often intertwined with political ones.

6.2.2.3 Organization Z

Organization Z was registered at B University³⁷ in the same metropolitan area where A University was located. Although key documents, such as a vision statement and mission statement, were not available for Organization Z, certain detailed information on its key project (i.e., the story-sharing project) was obtained from one research participant who held membership of this organization (Participant 9, doctoral student, US, male).

The project combined storytelling and public discussion. Most story-sharing events were small scale with up to 20 participants including Chinese international students and scholars, as well as Chinese working professionals in the Metropolitan area where B University is located. Occasionally, the project organized story-sharing events on a much larger scale that were attended by over 100 participants.

It is interesting to note the order of storytelling in these story sharing events. Although all attendees were encouraged to share their stories during an event, a Chinese or American

³⁷ To protect the identity of the participant, B University is a pseudonym given to university with which Organization Z was affiliated.

elite member from politics, business, or NGO sector was usually invited to tell his/her story first.

As explained by the participant below, such an order was intentionally designed for the purpose of experimenting with storytelling as practiced in U.S. formal electoral politics.

Now there is not much market for preaching great truths or lecturing success formula. People prefer to hear more about what decisions you made in challenging situations and how you made them. Your decisions actually reflect your personal values. Everyone has stories. When you tell your stories, you also tell your values to your listeners. In fact, this is what candidates do in their political campaign in the United States.

The political ramifications of participants' active engagement in Organization Z derived mainly from the two interrelated practices of storytelling and story-sharing. For one thing, storytelling could subtly influence and even persuade members of the organization to accept a main storyteller's political values. For another, sharing stories with one another within the organization could even translate individual members' narratives, particularly those of the leaders into an overarching collective narrative, which in turn might unite and mobilize all members to take actions to effect changes with political ramifications beyond their own organization. These two practices, therefore, pertained to the collectivizing aspect of its members' formation as political subjects. In other words, members of Organization Z were constituting themselves into a "we" in and through the practices of constructing their collective narrative.

6.3 Experiments with Democratic Practices in the Three Chinese International Student Organizations

As can be seen in the previous section, it is in the macro contexts (i.e., the institutional contexts of participants' home country and host country), the micro contexts of a specific organization, and the interactions between the two contexts that the six students recruited at the U.S. research site actively engaged in the three Chinese international student organizations. It is interesting to note that such engagement offered the participants many opportunities to get involved in politics at the organizational level. Furthermore, the data revealed that the politics in the three organizations revolved around experiments with democratic practices in the processes of organization design and organization management. The remainder of this part is, therefore, divided into two subsections, one dedicated to the experiments in the process of organization design, and the other to those in the process of organization management.

6.3.1 Experiments with Democratic Practices in the Process of Organization Design

According to the data, participants identified constitution writing as the most salient democratic practice in the process of organization design. The experiments with constitution writing, however, showed some variations in the three Chinese international student organizations.

6.3.1.1 Organization X

In Organization X, constitution writing was practiced exclusively by its two co-founders. As one participant recounted,

A proposed constitution is one of the required documents for setting up Organization X under A School of A University. The school gave us a sample constitution. We could change the specific wording in the sample to show the characteristics of our organization, but a committee would judge whether our proposed constitution was a legitimate one. ... The sample constitution is only a reference, but nobody can propose a constitution that legitimizes one leader running the organization like an autocrat. Such a constitution will absolutely not be approved by the committee. Any proposed constitutions must include elections for the leadership positions. ... The articles in the sample constitution, in fact, reflect the spirit of democracy. (Participant 8, doctoral graduate, US, male)

According to the excerpt, the student seemed to accept the minimalist conception of democracy as taken-for-granted truth that democracy refers to “that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote” (Schumpeter, 1994, p. 269). This speculation was affirmed by the following exchange between the researcher (R) and this interviewee (I):

R: As you said, both students, who wrote the proposed constitution, are from China. I wonder if any of you asked why it must include articles that require elections for the leaders of the organization?

I: No. Not many people participated in the constitution writing process, only the two core members. I didn’t feel that the committee coerced us to use

the sample constitution. In principle, it only wanted to ensure the leaders of our organization should be elected. In other words, the committee wanted to make sure our proposed constitution is in accordance with the spirit of democracy.

The answer given by the participant indicates that his accepting the minimalist conception of democracy as truth seemed to be a consequence of the influence from the norms set by the school's sample constitution that embodied and promoted competitive elections for leaders. In this sense, it can be argued that through the practice of constitution writing the two co-founders of Organization X became subjected to the election-based system of the Western model of liberal democracy without even being aware of such subjection.

6.3.1.2 Organization Y

Similar to Organization X, Organization Y offered opportunities to experiment with constitution writing only for its core, that is, the seven board members. It is interesting to note that the constitution of Organization Y bore a resemblance to that of the United States in terms of the divisions of responsibilities.

According to the constitution, Organization Y is divided into three parts, namely the Governing Board, the Supervisory Board, and the Administrative Team. The Governing Board consists of seven members, who together bear four main responsibilities: 1) making and amending the constitution, 2) making policies regarding mission, vision, and strategies of the organization, 3) making decisions regarding key leadership roles, and 4) overseeing the Administrative Team.

The Supervisory Board comprises three to seven members. It is mainly responsible for holding the Governing Board accountable, particularly checking whether a decision made by the Governing Board complies with the constitution. It has the power to nullify a decision on the ground of its unconstitutionality. It deserves mentioning that the constitution requires that members of the first Supervisory Board should be the Governing Board members who do not seek a second term in the Governing Board. This requirement, however, could lead to conflicts of interest between the two boards, and put the impartiality and integrity of members of the Supervisory Board under doubt.

The third part of the organization is that of Administrative Team, responsible for the execution of the decisions made by the Governing Board. It is headed by one secretary-general, who is supported by one to two vice secretaries-general. The constitution specifies that all secretaries-general of the Administrative team report to the Governing Board.

Here, it is not difficult to see the similarity between the three parts of Organization Y and the three branches of the U.S. federal government. The Governing Board resembles the legislative branch that makes laws. The Administrative Team looks like the executive branch that carries out the laws. The Supervisory Board seems similar to judicial branch that evaluates laws.

Despite the resemblance on the surface, the two constitutions are markedly different in their treatment with power. The constitution of the United States confers power to each of the three branches (i.e., judicial review, the presidential veto, and the congressional override) to prevent any one branch from becoming too powerful. On the contrary, the constitution of Organization Y centralizes power to the Governing Board particularly by means of its prescribed leadership generation processes for all three parts of the organization. Although

there is an annual organization-wide election for members of the Governing Board, the candidates are nominated either by a member him/herself or by the Governing Board. It can be easily assumed that nomination by the Governing Board tend to have more weight than a members' self-nomination when the ballots are cast. Moreover, the constitution prescribes that both the members of the Supervisory Board and the heads of the Administrative Team are to be nominated and approved by the Governing Board.

The constitution of Organization Y, in effect, established a hierarchical power structure with the Governing Board and the Supervisory Board at the top and the Administrative Team at the bottom. Furthermore, serious doubts can be raised about the extent to which the Supervisory Board can actually hold the Governing Board accountable because conflicts of interests between the two boards were not even addressed properly in the first place. From the perspective of checks and balances, this organizational constitution has another serious defect, namely that the Governing Board can easily exert too much power on the other two parts of the organization.

Quite different from the analysis above, the leadership of Organization Y shared a strong sense of optimism that the organization would be managed in a democratic way when the writing of constitution was completed. This is particularly the case among the Governing Board. For instance, one participant, who was a member of the Governing Board then, expressed his optimism in the extract below.

We wrote a constitution for the organization, in which there are specific requirements for decision-making processes. For example, we've specified the number of attendees required for a decision to be made, and the process of

electing the Governing Board members. All in all, we are learning how to self-manage our organization. (Participant 8, doctoral graduate, US, male)

6.3.1.3 Organization Z

Constitution writing was experimented with quite differently in Organization Z. Although only the co-founders participated in the writing of the organization's constitution, its members reviewed the constitution on a regular basis. When a review was conducted, members were asked to reflect on their practices within the boundaries set by the constitution. If the majority of the members found certain articles ambiguous or certain normative rules hard to be enforced, a motion could be proposed to amend such articles. Constitution writing in Organization Z, therefore, was not a once-and-for-all experiment conducted only by the leadership, but an ongoing experiment conducted by all its members.

It is worth noting that a more flattened, fractal organizational structure emerged from this ongoing process of constitution writing in Organization Z. As a participant described below, such a structure was more democratic than a hierarchical structure in that it tended to decentralize power in the organization.

A democratic structure is promoted in this organization. It is different from a hierarchical structure, in which those at the bottom listen to the leader(s) at the top. Management in a hierarchical structure is very vertical and bureaucratic. We try to avoid a hierarchical structure and promote a more flattened structure, in which management is more horizontal, and gives the organization a team vibe. ... Democracy is our best alternative or our top choice in our management of the organization. (Participant 9, doctoral student, US, male).

In the following extract, the participant further depicted the features of roles and responsibilities in Organization Z.

No one knows who the number-one person is in this organization. All members take turn to play different roles. For example, you are the main coordinator this year. We use “coordinator”, not “president” for the title. At the same time, everyone else is also responsible for something. This way our organizational structure is just like a snowflake. ... We all take responsibilities, and we rotate duties. You know, international students come and go. They may be here only for two years. This is an issue all student organizations face. But in a snowflake model, there can be several positions on one dot, and one responsibility can be shared by several members. This way, all roles can be continued to be played by different members. When it’s time to rotate duties, you can play the role of your interest.

The description above illustrates three ways in which a democratic organizational structure influenced the culture of Organization Y and its members’ daily practices. First, the authority figure was downplayed by deliberately choosing “coordinator” as the title for the leadership role. Unlike the title of “president” signifying the highest authority, “coordinator” carried a tone of equality and interdependence among different roles in the organization. Second, members tended to view each other as equal contributors in light of the practices of all sharing responsibilities and taking turns to play different roles. Third, members could feel empowered particularly when taking on leadership roles.

6.3.2 Experiments with Democratic Practices in the Process of Organization

Management

It deserves mentioning that data on experiments with democratic practices in the process of organization management were derived predominantly from interviews with four members of Organization Y. According to the data, decision-making was identified as the most important democratic practice in this process. This subsection is further divided according to two matters (i.e., leadership transition, and meeting protocol), the decisions on which stood out as having direct bearings on the development of politics in Organization Y.

6.3.2.1 Leadership Transition

The matter of leadership transition was first raised by the chairperson of the board of Organization Y. Driven by his desire to practice democratic management, and informed by his expertise in democracy, the chairperson attempted to promote institutionalizing rules of democratic processes for leadership transition for the organization's long-term development.

This attempt, however, met strong resistance from many other board members. As recounted by one participant,

The promotion of institutionalizing democratic processes led to serious conflicts with existing political power of Organization Y. Most board members resisted the proposal one way or another. Some even tried to seize power over the board. Eventually, the board simply couldn't function properly. These political struggles were so complicated and unpleasant, but I regard them as a learning experience. (Participant 9, doctoral student, US, male)

In retrospect, the participant seemed to attribute the failed attempt to two particular factors. The first was that certain existing leadership practices in China, particularly those in China's education institutions, still exerted strong influence on Chinese international students' practices regarding leadership transition in Organization Y. As he put it,

There are elections of class monitors from elementary schools onward to universities in China's education system. However, once a person is elected monitor, he/she would not like to let go of his/her power. If the leader's power was challenged, he/she would not like to solve the problem with certain institutionalized democratic means, but with means such as resource mobilization, and under table kicking. This is exactly how politics was played in our board. To be honest, the chairperson didn't lack resources, but he wanted to see if experiment with institutionalizing democratic rules would work. Unfortunately, it didn't.

As indicated by the excerpt, the proposed institutionalization of democratic rules for leadership transition might pose a serious threat to many Board members' desire to maintain their positional power, a desire molded by their learning of cultural norms regarding leadership in China. Following this line of thought, it is no surprise that the conflicts in the board centered on power struggles, and some board members even used strategies such as "resource mobilization" (i.e., utilizing material resources as well as contacts within one's personal and/or professional networks) and "under table kicking" (i.e., working secretly to undermine other people's credibility and/or power) to protect and consolidate their positions in the organization for the long run.

The second factor was that most board members of Organization Y lacked engagement with institutionalized democratic practices in their host society. The participant touched on this attribution below:

Many people think Chinese international students are exposed to liberal ideas overseas. But according to my experience, I don't think they are ready to truly practice democracy. The reason is that very few of them have engaged with healthy democratic practices in the United States before they participate in activities of Chinese international student organizations. ... Most of them still continue the practices they've learned and acquired in China.

Here, the participant seemed to suggest that engaging with established democratic practices for leadership transition in the United States was a prerequisite for Chinese international students including members of Organization Y to resist and even break away from cultural norms of leadership in China. If this reading is correct, it can be even argued that although board members could claim their management of Organization Y as democratic, their management practices were actually undemocratic.

Interestingly, another participant also experienced conflicts over the proposed institutionalization of democratic rules for leadership transition. Below she vividly described how one board member strategically increased her power even beyond the board.

The secretary general was ranked 4th in terms of position in the Board. Her main responsibility was managing relationships with our media stakeholders both in China and the United States. But another board member simply cut her off and seized her responsibility. To make things worse, that board member replaced some valuable volunteers with those who simply followed her

commands so that her power wouldn't be challenged. (Participant 7, undergraduate student, US, female)

When asked why some board members were drawn so much to power in Organization Y, the participant provided a very helpful insight. That is, board members were heavily influenced by the great power and privileges derived from two sources. As can be seen from below, one source was that of the project's close relationship with B School of A University³⁸.

The University is one of the most prestigious universities in the world, and among all its schools, B School is one of the most famous and the most powerful in the world. The school is especially popular among social science students. It is very normal every board member wanted to have a share of the power and fame. Everyone wanted to be in control!

Informed by her studies in international affairs, the participant also identified the social innovation projects as another source of power and privileges.

I used to read a book very closely. It is called "Microfinance and its discontent". Then I became aware that a non-government organization (NGO) could be used by interest groups and manipulated by academia. An NGO can get some data, manipulate some data, and create some data, so it can get funded. Right? The best scenario is that different institutions from around the world give funding to your NGO projects. Think about it: you can make a

³⁸ To protect the identity of research participants, B School of A University is a pseudonym given to the school whose faculty members gave support to the project of Organization Y.

living with all this money! Plus, you get prestige! Our social innovation projects are also NGO projects. When running these projects, many young people believe in ideals, but they are not fools. In my opinion, NGO is an industry, only next to that of finance, which gives a person a shortcut to connect with the elite class. Compared with the industry of finance, NGO has comparatively low requirements for a person to enter. In this sense, NGO offers a person the best shortcut to elite status!

The above excerpt indicates that some board members might view their leadership roles in Organization Y as a gateway to the privileged elites around the world, which in turn could be beneficial for their personal upward mobility not just in specific nation-states, but also in the global community. From this perspective, most board members' decision-making practices regarding leadership transition constituted Foucault's "technologies of the self" in that their decisions were oriented primarily toward achieving elite status as a means to fulfil themselves and enhance their own well-being.

As shown in the following extract from the interviews with the same undergraduate student, managing Organization Y in individualistic ways was not only detrimental to democratizing the organizational politics, but also fraught with hypocrisies and ideological fervor.

One board member had a desire for democracy because she thought democracy is a good thing, but I don't think she practiced democracy. She didn't gain the power or do other things through democratic means. ... The persons that she wanted to work for the organization were not those who form and express their opinions based on the socio-political realities in China, but

those who have simplistic views about China. For example, they often said China is bad; Chinese government is bad; the Communist Party of China is absolutely evil! This board member often showed a strong sense of self-righteousness by saying, “let it be if we are put on the Chinese government’s blacklist of political activists”. However, she once said to someone, “I heard one of your friends has some good connections with China’s top leadership. Can you ask him to help wash our organization clean, I mean, to help us to get off the blacklist?”

6.3.2.2 Meeting Protocol

Besides leadership transition, meeting protocol was another matter that had important bearings on the development of politics in Organization Y. Arranged by the organization, two participants attended training sessions on “Robert’s rules of order”³⁹ offered by an American organization, whose mission is to improve the health of democracy by engaging citizens in the process of public policy making. Both participants had highly positive impressions of “Robert’s rules of order” as a guide for practicing democracy in meetings.

One participant could even retell the rudiments of these rules in great details during the interview:

“Robert’s rules of order” are about how to have effective meetings. There should be a facilitator and an agenda. The facilitator should remain impartial,

³⁹ “Robert’s rules of order” is a book that offers a set of rules for a group to conduct meetings and make decisions both efficiently and effectively.

not expressing his/her own opinions. He/she must make sure every attendee has opportunities and enough time to voice his/her views. All attendees must speak, but they should speak one at a time and within the time limit. A meeting shouldn't be dominated by only one person. ... A meeting must lead to decisions, but decisions should be made effectively through certain protocol. And the facilitator should also produce meeting minutes and disseminate the minutes to all the attendees. (Participant 12, Master's student, US, male)

Noteworthy is that this participant did not mention whether the board of Organization Y had actually practiced "Robert's rules of order" in their meetings. However, when answering my question of how disputes were settled in the board meetings, the participant, who was a member of the Governing Board, offered a glimpse of the board's decision-making style:

According to the constitution, there are seven members in the Governing Board. This odd number ensures there will always be a majority when board members vote on a decision regarding a controversial issue. Whether or not a board member is satisfied with the result of the vote, our decision-making protocol can always help us resolve the disputes in the board meetings. (Participant 8, doctoral graduate, US, male)

In my opinion, this is a very telling answer. Only mentioning the protocol on the decision-making process indicates that the board meetings tended to be more result oriented. If this is the case, some serious questions can be raised regarding democratic practices that are important for making decisions effectively. For example, what did a meeting facilitator do to encourage frank and sufficient discussion before the board is called to vote on an important decision? How did board members detect early signs of unhealthy agreement

and/or groupthink in their meetings? How were voices of the minority respected and protected in the deliberation or even incorporated into the final decisions?

Different from the uncertainty about actually practicing “Robert’s rules of order” in the meetings of the Governing Board, these rules were not put into practice in the meetings of the Administrative Team. Affirmation in this regard mainly comes from one participant, who was a member of the Administrative Team then.

It is worth mentioning that this participant set up his training sessions on “Robert’s rules of order” against the background of a news report that he read in China.

There is something called “Robert’s rules of order”. These rules for conducting meetings are very important in democracy. To some extent, democracy is about meetings, right? Before I came to the United States, I read a report in *Southern Weekly* (南方周末)⁴⁰ that two Chinese people translated “Robert’s rules of order” into Chinese, and practiced these rules in China. They even experimented the rules in some villages in China. They simplified the rules according to the local contexts and asked villagers to conduct their meetings according to these simplified rules. Surprisingly, their meetings were very efficient and effective. It even became news on *Southern Weekly*!

(Participant 12, Master’s student, US, male)

Against this backdrop, it is easy to imagine the excitement that the student must have had about attending the workshop on “Robert’s rules of order” in the United States. It is

⁴⁰ *Southern Weekly* is widely considered one of the most influential liberal news outlets in China.

equally easy to picture his discouragement about the fact that these rules were never practiced in the meetings after the training.

In the following extract, the researcher (R) raised a probing question for the interviewee (I) with an obvious fact in the news report.

R: As you said, even the villagers can practice “Robert’s rules of order”! In your opinion, why weren’t these rules practiced in your meetings?

I: Why? I’m not one of the rule makers up there. I don’t know why that training workshop led to nothing. In fact, we suggested in many meetings that we try “Robert’s rules of order” for our next meeting, but these suggestions resulted in nothing. I really wanted to know why the rules were never tried in our meetings, but I never asked because I felt other members might regard me as a weird person. ... After all, I think not practicing “Robert’s rules of order” is a typical problem in China. We may find something good overseas but return to China doing things in the same old way! I don’t know why this is the case, but I think it is a very common phenomenon. ... In terms of my understanding of “Robert’s rules of order”, I really think there will be many benefits if they are promoted. At least, practicing the rules can simplify the procedure of meetings so that the meetings can be conducted more efficiently and effectively. In the long run, it can even promote democracy because it provides a way for people to understand at least how democracy works in meetings. I think it would be a good thing if everyone practices “Robert’s rules of order” in meetings. ... When people practice the rules, they may make small changes here and

there to meet the needs of their specific contexts. Sure, the actual practices may divert from the original texts of “Robert’s rules of order”. Will this affect the final result? It depends! It may be the case that these small changes can produce better results for China’s contexts. We call this process localization or doing things with Chinese characters. If this is the case, it is also good!

The participant’s response clearly shows that the organization lost an important opportunity to engage its members with a set of rules for democratic decision-making practices in their meetings, which could have had a democratizing effect on the organization and beyond. The fault could lie in the hierarchical organizational structure, which made it hard for information from the bottom to percolate to the top. The fault could also lie in the Governing Board at the top of the hierarchy, who did not heed or respond to the desires of some Administrative Team members to experiment with “Robert’s rules of order” in their own meetings. The fault could even lie in those at the bottom of the hierarchy such as the participant, who could have pushed harder the agenda for practicing these rules.

However, considering the power struggles among the board members, the power centralization to the Governing Board, and the lack of transparency about the Governing Board’ decision-making processes, I would argue that the Governing Board did leave itself open to suspicions. That is, board members’ pursuit of power, largely driven by their personal interests and/or other hidden reasons not related to the organization’s vision and mission, was, in effect, shaping Organization Y’s culture of “promoting but not practicing” certain key democratic elements in organization management such as those embedded in “Robert’s rules of order”.

6.4 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has shown that all six participants recruited at the U.S. research site engaged with politics in three Chinese international student organizations (i.e., Organization X, Organization Y, and Organization Z), the engagement that was derived mainly from experiments with democratic practices in the processes of organization design and organization management. These forms of engagement inform the first research question.

Experiments with two democratic practices (i.e., constitution writing and decision-making) stood out due to their significance for democratizing politics in the three organizations. For one thing, the constitution of a specific Chinese international student organization created a power structure in which politics was to be played in the organization. For another, tensions and conflicts in organizational politics tended to revolve around decisions regarding leadership transition and meeting protocol.

It should be noted that experiments with democratic practices in the three organizations were conducted at the intersections between the macro contexts (i.e., the institutional contexts of participants' home country and host country) and the micro contexts of a specific organization. On the one hand, certain practices common in the U.S. domestic politics (e.g., constitution-writing and storytelling) were borrowed by and adapted to specific Chinese international student organizations. On the other hand, certain practices common in the Chinese domestic politics (e.g., leadership practices) continued to exert a strong influence on how Chinese international students including the six participants of this research engaged with politics in the three organizations. Experiments, then, address, in part, my second and third research questions.

Findings in this chapter strongly suggest that the three organizations can be conceived of as arenas in which cultural norms of China and those of the United States compete with each other in constituting Chinese international students as political subjects. Herein the potentiality of the students' becoming democratic subjects opened up. As demonstrated by some participants of this research, they became increasingly aware of how their political subjectivity had been or could be subjected to certain undemocratic cultural norms of their home country and host country. More importantly, they became increasingly competent to resist such political subjection, and even constitute themselves as Chinese citizens associating with one another and participating together in addressing some of China's pressing socio-political challenges.

Putting together the three organizations' seemingly distinct purposes (i.e., Organization X's aim to engage young Chinese citizens with China's political democratic reforms, Organization Y's aim to engage young Chinese citizens with China's pressing social problems, and Organization Z's aim to build young Chinese citizens into a community), it is clear that their members, including the research participants, were in effect disidentifying as 'shitizens' (i.e., ordinary powerless people) but identifying themselves as citizens, a point to be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

Chapter 7: Participants' Political Subjectivity in Relation to Their International Mobility in Higher Education

7.1 Introduction

As shown in Chapter 3, this research conceives of Chinese students' international mobility in higher education as a nexus of political practices and subjectification practices. It also envisages that engagement with these practices is pivotal to the students' formation as political subjects, a process that has important bearings on China's democratization in the 21st century. The previous two chapters have focused on participants' engagement with political practices in two settings, namely formal electoral politics in Canada and the United States (Chapter 5) and politics in Chinese international student organizations (Chapter 6). This chapter focuses on the core question of this research: how do Chinese international students become and/or how are they made into political – and possibly democratic – subjects?

The data pertinent to each participant's political subjectification process varied greatly in detail. Nonetheless, closer examination revealed that their political subjectivity in relation to their international mobility in higher education was marked, to a greater or lesser extent in different contexts, by three features (i.e., subjects in subjection, disidentifying subjects, and democratic subjects in the making). On the one hand, these features were distinctive from each other in the sense that they derived mainly from identifiable changes in participants' political subjectivity over time, the changes captured particularly by the comparisons between their political subjectivity before studying abroad and that after studying abroad. On

the other hand, these features were interrelated with each other in the sense that participants' political subjectivity comprised not just internal differences, conflicts, and contradictions, but also extensions, relations, and connections.

The main body of this chapter is, therefore, divided into three parts, each dedicated to one of the three features demonstrated by participants' political subjectivity in relation to their international mobility in higher education. The first part describes and analyzes how most of the twelve participants were subjected to China's existing socio-political order prior to their study abroad, feeling disempowered, disillusioned, and cynical about participation in politics. The second part describes and theorizes how international mobility in higher education enabled many participants to disidentify as cynical political subjects and speak as citizens in their talks pertaining to democracy. This change in their political subjectivity manifested itself particularly in participants' reactivated interest to actively engage in politics, the reactivation that was derived mainly from one of their newly developed perspectives on democracy (i.e., viewing democracy as an ecosystem). The third part describes and analyzes how six participants emerged as democratic subjects with increased commitment to democracy and prioritizing democratization over democratic elections, the emergence that was facilitated particularly by their disciplinary studies in social sciences.

The chapter concludes with a summary of key findings on participants' political subjectivity in relation to their international mobility in higher education and a very brief discussion on the political significance of such students' emerging as a distinctive group of young Chinese democrats.

7.2 Subjects in Subjection

Subjectivity in subjection was the first feature demonstrated by participants' political subjectivity in relation to their international mobility in higher education, particularly before their studies abroad. The data revealed that prior to studying in Canada and the United States most participants were subjected to China's existing socio-political order (or what Rancière calls the police order), an order that was created and sustained by the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions (or what Mouffe calls politics) specific to the Chinese context, and well embodied by China's current system of government.

In general, the institutional context of the Chinese government system, as described in the previous chapter, severely restricted most participants' actions with respect to politics, which contributed to their cynical and skeptical view of participation in China's formal institutional politics. Two factors appeared to have particularly contributed to subjecting participants to China's current socio-political order. One was that of political disempowerment, and the other disillusionment with opportunities to actively engage in China's domestic politics. It is interesting to note that these two factors also seemed to serve as 'technologies of the self' that enabled some participants to form a somewhat agonistic relationship with China's existing police order.

The remainder of this section is, therefore, divided into two subsections. The first subsection describes and analyzes how most participants became disempowered in and by China's current police order. The second subsection describes and analyzes how they became disillusioned and cynical about participation in China's domestic politics, particularly by a dividing practice (i.e., "within the system") in the processes of addressing some of China's pressing socio-political issues.

7.2.1 Political Disempowerment

The data revealed that most participants depicted themselves as politically disempowered in the institutional context of the Chinese government system. This sense of powerlessness, as touched on in the previous chapter, was conveyed particularly by the word “shitizen” (i.e., ordinary powerless people), a word used by a few participants for self-reference in the interviews. Furthermore, they tended to attribute their disempowerment to China’s socio-political order, an order that is inscribed with the CPC’s leadership as manifested by the new constitutional amendment.

One student’s comment below provides a good example.

There is a constitution in China, but no constitutionalism. Constitutionalism entails that citizens have the constitutional right to hold their government accountable. When citizens effectively exercise this right, they can prevent the unrestricted expansion of the government’s power. That means citizens are putting the constitution in practice. You know, governments in China are under the leadership of the CPC. So, to practice constitutionalism in China’s context, citizens should also hold the CPC accountable. But now it is the CPC who leads the law-making body, the National People’s Congress, to write the constitution. Don’t you think this is ridiculous? (Participant 4, doctoral student, CA, female)

Above is a telling extract in which the participant viewed the CPC’s leadership not as a feature of the Chinese government system to be celebrated but as a reason for her political disempowerment in China. It appeared that she did not buy into the CPC’s ideal that the

party expresses and serves the Chinese people's interests in and through the government. Instead, she viewed the government and the CPC as a totality that should be held accountable by China's citizenry. The rationale behind her argument for constitutionalism seemed to echo the old adage that "power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

In this sense, political disempowerment appeared to have led this participant to develop a somewhat agonistic relationship with China's current socio-political order. Nonetheless, she sounded very suspicious of this order being able to tilt toward constitutionalism due to her awareness that the CPC's leadership is deeply ingrained and self-reinforcing in China's legal system. It is no surprise that the student ended this excerpt on a highly sarcastic note.

Here, two important points deserve mentioning with regard to the argument for constitutionalism in China. First, the participant's comment raises the question whether there is a broader rethinking its relationship with the communist party in socialist China against the backdrop of the CPC's transition from a revolutionary party to a ruling party. Second, the argument for constitutionalism clearly shows that the participant is critical of the CPC's patronage in China's socio-political order, which raises two pertinent questions: 1) Are there other Chinese citizens like the participant here? 2) If so, are they only outside of China or also in China?

Both points raise the possibility—although not predictable from this small, qualitative study—that judicial reforms may be a key and fertile field for changes in China's socio-political order in the 21st century. From this perspective, the sentence newly added to Article 1 of China's Constitution (i.e., "The leadership of the Communist Party of China is the defining feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics") could even be viewed as one of the CPC's attempts to counteract the society's increasing demand for its equality with the

party.

Another participant threw some light on how the power structure embedded in China's socio-political order had inculcated a strong sense of powerlessness in him. As he put it,

Before going abroad, we lived in a power structure with the state as the dominating force. This made us feel that the state was the only actor that could solve problems. So whenever facing a problem, we felt we must turn to the state because if the state didn't deal with it, anything done by us would be futile. To be honest, this logic was ingrained so deeply in our minds. It's like an ideological box! (Participant 1, doctoral student, CA, male)

This excerpt offered important insights into two mutually reinforcing aspects of political disempowerment at the level of individuals. The first aspect pertains to agency. As suggested by the interview excerpt above, the participant did not feel like he was a political subject with agency. Instead, he felt subjected by China's political system. In this sense, China's power structure can inculcate in a citizen a belief that the state (i.e., the government under the CPC's leadership) is the determining and only capable actor in the processes of solving problems. Such a belief, in turn, may further develop in the citizen not just a weak sense of ownership of the problems, but more importantly, a strong sense of dependence on the state. The second aspect relates to action. Due to the lack of perceived agency and confidence to address the problems, a Chinese citizen can become passive and even blinded to non-state actors including him/herself who might offer a wider array of and/or more effective solutions to the problems. This way individual citizens can further become demotivated to engage with effecting socio-political changes in China.

Interestingly, the same participant also remarked on how his own political

disempowerment had even contributed to his skepticism about the political potency of Chinese civil society.

When I was in China, the civil society did participate in addressing some socio-political issues. For example, some NGOs tried to help certain marginalized groups, and other NGOs attempted to protect China's environment. I really respected their courage, but I didn't believe they could make a difference. To be honest, I even felt they were wasting their time. Politically speaking, what they did almost meant nothing. You know, the CPC is at the top, the very top, above everything, above everybody! At the end of the day, it is the government who decides what happens in China, not the civil society, not the small NGOs!

7.2.2 Disillusionment with Opportunities to Actively Engage in China's Domestic Politics

Besides describing their political disempowerment, some participants also mentioned their disillusionment with opportunities to actively engage in China's domestic politics. Such disillusionment derived from two major sources, namely ineffective participation in formal electoral politics and alienation from the processes of governing.

Formal electoral politics in China, as entailed in the people's democratic dictatorship, revolves around citizens' electing their representatives to the People's Congresses at the national, provincial, and local levels. Despite the fact that all the twelve research participants were of voting age, only one had exercised the right to vote, and once only.

Even this participant became disillusioned with her participation in elections through voting. In the following extract, she reflected upon her voting experience in China.

Being citizens of China means we all have the right to vote. But when I actually cast my ballot, I found that I even didn't know most of the candidates! I did vote in the election, but my overall experience is just so-so. (Participant 4, doctoral student, CA, female)

It deserves mentioning that her initial voter disillusionment was further strengthened by her subsequent realization that almost all members of the People's Congresses were approved by the CPC ahead of the elections. Her disillusionment became so strong that she stopped participating in elections afterwards. In this sense, the participant became disenfranchised by China's nominal electoral politics.

Many participants also became disillusioned with active engagement with China's domestic politics due to their alienation from the processes of governing. This alienation was often indicated by the phrase of "within the system"⁴¹ (tizhi nei, 体制内) in the interviews, a phrase used to describe the default approach to solving problems with significant ramifications for China's domestic politics.

For instance, one participant used "within the system" when talking about the challenge of fighting against corruption in China.

The anti-corruption campaign under Xi Jinping is basically conducted *within the system*. It was not we the people who hold those with public power

⁴¹ The system in this phrase refers to China's system of government under the leadership of the CPC.

accountable. The campaign was something initiated from the CPC. In this sense, the approach to the campaign is still top-down. (Participant 4, doctoral student, CA, female)

Despite agreeing with the CPC that corruption was a serious challenge in China, the participant clearly disapproved of the CPC's top-down approach to the anti-corruption campaign. She appeared to be arguing that by alienating the Chinese people from the processes of fighting against corruption, the party not only deprived the people of their ownership of the challenge, but more importantly, deprived the people of their right to participate in addressing the challenge. In this sense, "within the system" constitutes Foucault's "dividing practices" in and through which many Chinese people such as this participant were made into disillusioned political subjects in the processes of solving some of China's pressing socio-political issues.

The extract also seems to be a comment on the fact that the system is totalitarian, in which everything – even the supposed checks and balances – is "within" the regime. This comment, therefore, suggests that there is a total lack of accountability to an independent body outside of the system.

The phrase "within the system" was also used in some interview segments relevant to democracy in China. The following extract from the same participant provides a good example.

Some of my relatives were civil servants. When I asked them about what democracy meant in China, they told me it basically referred to intra-party democracy, or democracy with Chinese characteristics. Both of them are phrases *within the system*.

This is a very telling extract as it cast some light on the CPC's approach to China's democratization. That is, democratization is carried out under the leadership of the CPC and within the CPC. Considering the fact that the CPC's 89.5 million members account for only 6.3 percent of China's population of 1.41 billion, the vast majority of the Chinese people are in effect alienated from the CPC's intra-party democracy. A daunting question raised by this approach to democratization is how long the CPC can continue to tinker with its self-proclaimed rootedness in and representation of the people while the people's interest in participation in politics is gradually reactivated in the 21st century. This reactivation characterized the second feature of participants' political subjectivity.

7.3 Disidentifying Subjects

Disidentifying subjectivity was the second feature demonstrated by participants' political subjectivity in relation to their international mobility in higher education. According to the data, moving from China to Canada and the United States seemed to have enabled many participants to disidentify from their role as "shitizen" and to speak as full "citizen" in their talks pertinent to democracy. Particularly noteworthy was that this disidentification tended to manifest itself in participants' reactivated interest in participating in politics.

This reactivation was, in general, an unintended consequence of participants' observations of the domestic politics of Canada and the United States as well as their comparisons of politics in different national contexts. Nonetheless, it was particularly evident among those students who studied social sciences. For these students, the reactivated interest in actively engaging in politics was driven largely by one of their newly gained perspectives on democracy, namely that democracy can be viewed as an ecosystem encompassing

democratic elections and all other elements conducive to the well-functioning of a liberal democratic society. As one interviewee vividly put it,

Only after coming to Canada did I start to understand that democracy has many other dimensions, not just democratic elections. Democracy is like an ecosystem, which includes not just a tree [in another place the student had likened democratic elections to a tree], but also soil, air, and other factors.

(Participant 1, doctoral student, CA, male)

Here, it is important to theorize how viewing democracy as an ecosystem could induce some participants to become interested in participation in politics again. The first plausible explanation pertains to the sense of life that is implied in the simile of likening democracy to an ecosystem as shown in the extract above. The simile suggests that democracy is alive or living, and as such, is a system consisting of multiple aspects that sustain the life of democracy. This sense of “life” not only ran counter to the sense of “decay” and/or “death” associated with participants’ previous political disempowerment, but more importantly, strengthened them to resist the severe restrictions that China’s socio-political order had placed on their political subjectivity before they studied abroad.

The second plausible explanation pertains to the implications for change in viewing democracy as an ecosystem. That is, an ecosystem is not static but organically dynamic in the sense that it can evolve slowly but constantly thanks to the changes in and the interactions among its constituent elements. While accepting the unlikelihood of institutional changes in China’s electoral politics in the short run, some participants found hope for greater democratization in China in the long run. This hope lies in that seemingly slow, minor and

insignificant progress in other constitutive elements of the ecosystem of a democracy can and will contribute to incremental democratization.

The remainder of this section is organized according to the four elements that emerged from the generated data as constitutive of democracy, namely democratic elections, the rule of law, individual liberty, and deliberation. As will be shown by the interview excerpts included in this section, none of the participants referred themselves as “shitizen” anymore; rather, all of them spoke directly or indirectly as “citizen” when speaking of the four constitutive elements of the ecosystem of a democracy.⁴²

7.3.1 Democratic Elections

All participants identified democratic elections as a very important element of the ecosystem of a democracy. They also recognized that democratic elections serve as the most notable difference between China’s system of government and its counterparts in Canada and the United States.

It should be noted, though, that many participants’ engagement with electoral politics in Canada and the United States, as shown in Chapter 5, appeared to amount to a critique of the institutionalized system of democratic elections. On the one hand, they tended to have a favorable impression of democratic elections as an institutional arrangement through which *citizens* positioned differently on the political spectrum choose their representatives to form a government of limited duration, thereby keeping the government open for contestation and

⁴² To emphasize participants’ disidentifying as “shitizen” but speaking as “citizen”, both “citizen” (either in singular or plural form) and “citizenry” are italicized in the interview excerpts as well as in the analysis in the remainder of this section.

change. In particular, they viewed governments thus elected in their host countries as being more effective than the Chinese government in mitigating the intensity of the antagonism between groups of opposing interests among the people.

On the other hand, some participants recognized certain problems with their host countries' democratic elections, among which two stood out. The first problem was that of the undue influence of media on the processes and results of democratic elections. Observing such influence raised some participants' awareness that *citizens* in their host countries did not elect their governments by voting as freely as they had thought. In addition, election results did not reflect each *citizen's* vote as equally as they had thought. The second problem was that of political polarization as an inherent challenge of the institutional arrangement for forming government through competition among different political parties in their host countries. This challenge was more acutely felt by the participants in the United States where they witnessed how the Republican Party and the Democratic Party dominated formal electoral politics and how extreme political polarization led to the deadlock between the two parties in the Congress and even the shutdown of federal government. It is no surprise that some participants expressed reservations, and even cynicism about the effectiveness of democratic elections in managing the increasingly diversified, if not the increasingly opposing interests among the *citizenry* of their host countries in the 21st century.

7.3.2 The Rule of Law

The rule of law was the second most commonly identified element of the ecosystem of a democracy. As one student put it,

Now what has become very clear to me is that one of the biggest differences

between the Western and the Chinese political systems lies in how the society is ruled. The West practices the rule of law, but China practices the rule of man. (Participant 5, doctoral student, CA, male)

It should be noted that drawing a distinction between the rule of law and the rule of man⁴³ cast new light on how conflicts were fought differently in politics of their host countries and that of their home country. The student continues,

In the West, there are different and even opposing interests among the *citizenry*, and this leads to conflicts in the society. Since the rule of law is practiced, conflicts are fought mainly in the law-making processes. You know, representatives of *citizens'* different interests argue and debate in the congress. But in China, there are different and even opposing lines among the leadership of the CPC, and this leads to line struggles⁴⁴ within the party. Because the rule of man is practiced, line struggles are not fought openly in the congress as in the West, but in secret usually between two leading figures of the party! Then members of the party have to take side and get involved in these line struggles.

Here, the participant reasoned that the rule of law is a prerequisite for democracy to function as a mechanism to manage the conflicts arising from different interests among the *citizens* in his host society. Following this line of thought, democracy entails not only electoral politics through which a government can be formed to represent the interests of the

⁴³ “The rule of man”, as used by the interviewee here, denotes that China’s society is ruled by the CPC in an autocratic way and there is only nominal restraint on the CPC’s power by laws in China.

⁴⁴ The participant’s use of “line struggles” here alludes to the struggles between the left trend and the right trend within the CPC. The left trend is more aligned with the interests of the proletariat whereas the right trend is more aligned with the interests of the bourgeoisie.

majority of *citizenry*, but also governance politics which revolves around the laws and policies made by the elected representatives for all *citizens* to abide by for the duration of their effect.

Noteworthy is the direct bearing that the awareness of the importance of the rule of law to the well-functioning of a democracy had on some participants' political subjectivity. For example, one participant remarked,

Here in Canada, society is ruled by law. The expectations of social interactions are written in laws, but it is different in China. China has a relational society, in which my expectations are not stable because relations are fluid and can change very easily. If one day China has an actual system of democratic elections but lacks other factors such as a society ruled by law, I still worry about the quality of that democracy. (Participant 1, doctoral student, CA, male)

This excerpt suggests that the participant was inclined to dis-identify from his previous identity as a relational being within China's hierarchical socio-political order. More importantly, the excerpt indicates that he was on the verge of becoming a political subject who demanded equality under the law with anyone else in his envisioned democratic China.

7.3.3 Individual Liberty

Besides democratic elections and the rule of law, individual liberty was recognized by many participants as another important element of democracy. One participant argued,

Personally speaking, I place more importance on matters regarding liberalism, or the liberal part of liberal democracy. This means that governments should

not excessively interfere with an individual's political freedom, political rights, economic freedom, and personal life. ... I also apply this to my experience in Canada. As an international student, I do not have the right to vote here, but I am fairly satisfied with my life. This is not because I can participate in democratic elections, but because my freedoms are protected in Canada. ... I feel that I do not have to worry too much about what I say in Canada, and people have diverse ideas. This is most evident in our discussions in class. ... If I describe our discussions from the perspective of deliberative democracy, everyone is arguing on the basis of his or her evidence. We are all equal in the face of the argument. (Participant 1, doctoral student, CA, male)

The quote shows that the student was well aware of the connection between democratic elections and liberalism of the democracy in his host country. He expressed his appreciation of the freedom under the law, particularly freedom of speech, in Canada. He even applied his knowledge of deliberative democracy to his engagement with discussions and debates in class and redefined them as practices pertaining to his political subjectivity.

7.3.4 Deliberation

A few participants identified deliberation as the fourth constitutive element of the ecosystem of a democracy. Such identification derived mainly from the perspective of deliberative democracy, as shown by one student's words below.

According to deliberative democracy, discourses are an important component of democracy. You know, discourses generate ideas! (Participant 3, doctoral student, CA, female)

The student also compared the typical deliberation style in the political culture of her host country and that in her home country.

From my first day as a political science student in the United States, I've been in an environment that has a high level of political consciousness. We, I mean, I and those around me such as my classmates and professors, we express our opinions as equal persons when discussing a topic, regardless of whether the topic is about China or the United States or anything else. Our discussions are both responsible and meaningful. ... But it is very different in China. You know, there is much cynicism in the Chinese political culture. When I expressed my opinions, people usually responded by sarcastically saying something like "Why bother?", "Does that have anything to do with you?" or "Who cares?".

When reflecting upon how the U.S. political culture impacted her, the participant became explicit about her political subjectivity.

I do feel that the United States, to some degree, has inherited the tradition of ancient Greek democracy. I mean, in this tradition you are a respected person only when you are a responsible *citizen*. ... Here it dawned on me that I became a respected individual for my opinions! You know, a lot of people didn't know where I came from, who I was, or what I did. But when they heard my opinions, they tried to make sense of what I said. This way I had added more dimensions to their thoughts. You know, I became assimilated into deliberative democracy right away! Of course, I had some language

difficulties when participating in the deliberations in English. But there was no difficulty for me to become a member of deliberative democracy!

The words above are worth quoting at length because they demonstrate how the participant's engagement with deliberations as an equal contributor on her U.S. campus had enabled her not just to move away from the cynicism she had experienced in the Chinese political culture, but also to emerge as a responsible *citizen* in the U.S. political culture. Even more striking is that she ended this section of the interview with an explicit statement regarding her sense of membership in deliberative democracy.

Now that all four constitutive elements of the ecosystem of a democracy have been discussed, it deserves mentioning here that the ecological perspective of democracy implies a distinction between electoral politics and governance politics. This distinction, in turn, tended to motivate some of the recruited students to participate in China's politics again. The main reason is that such a distinction created not just conceptual possibilities, but more importantly, practical possibilities for participants to effect socio-political changes in China by actively engaging with issues that affected their individual interests as well as public interest even when changes in the institutional arrangement for generating political leadership were beyond their reach.

How this distinction could lead to actions to participate in governance politics was well captured in one student's reflection on his changing attitudes toward civic engagement and governance in China.

I've seen, heard, and read many cases that show how powerful civil society is in effecting positive changes in many countries including China. I started to realize that the power of *citizens* is very great, and the government is not as

powerful as I had thought. Sometimes the government even doesn't have a clear picture of what or how to do with a problem. I used to think the government is very capable of governing, but now I see it often makes mistakes. So my confidence in the competence of the government has decreased. ... Besides, the Chinese government is becoming more responsive to the demands of civil society. For example, the government now publishes PM 2.5⁴⁵ pollution data when more and more people put pressure on it to do so. Even though I am not very optimistic about development in democratic elections in China, I am no longer that pessimistic about development in good governance. The key variable is the awakening of civic awareness in the Chinese people. I mean, more and more Chinese *citizens* including myself not only care about certain problems, but also do something about these problems to the best of our power. What I've found is that our efforts often lead to some positive results. (Participant 1, doctoral student, CA, male)

Here, a caveat should be given. Most of the participants who did not study social sciences became more confused about democracy. For example, one interviewee described below his progression toward a state of confusion regarding democracy that resulted from his observations of and comparisons between the politics of his home country and that of his host country.

In the first step, I saw how the U.S. politics differed from the Chinese politics.

⁴⁵ PM 2.5 refers to particulate matter in the forms of tiny particles or droplets in the air that are 2.5 microns or less in width. As a very harmful air pollutant, it has become a serious concern for many Chinese people because its levels are high in places where they live and/or work.

Unconsciously I regarded the differences such as democratic elections as good. In the second step, I became more familiar with the U.S. politics and realized that it was not as good as I had thought. In the third step, I recognized that both politics have their own advantages. I think I am in this step now. Maybe there is a fourth step, in which I can clearly tell which politics is better. But I'm not there yet. (Participant 11, Master's student, US, male)

The extracts such as the one above indicate that observing and comparing politics in different national contexts does not automatically enable Chinese international students to reach a clearer understanding of democracy. Nonetheless, this indication all the more illustrates the importance of disciplinary studies in social sciences, particularly those through which human beings are made into political subjects (or what Foucault calls scientific practices), to the development of disidentifying subjectivity (i.e., the second feature of participants' political subjectivity in relation to their international mobility in higher education). As will be shown in the next section, these studies also played an important role in facilitating participants to emerge as democratic subjects.

7.4 Democratic Subjects in the Making

Democratic subjectivity in the making was the third feature that marked participants' political subjectivity in relation to their international mobility in higher education. It should be noted that the six participants who emerged most clearly as democratic subjects were predominantly doctoral students in social sciences. All of them, including the only natural science student and the only undergraduate student, engaged with studies of social and/or political theories relating to democracy, studies that were either required by their degree

programs or initiated by their personal interest.

The data revealed that the feature of becoming democratic subjects manifested itself particularly in two aspects. On the one hand, these participants were increasingly committed to democracy. On the other hand, they tended to prioritize democratization over democratic elections. The remainder of this section is, therefore, divided according to these two aspects.

7.4.1 Participants' Increased Commitment to Democracy

According to the data, participants' increased commitment to democracy derived mainly from their disciplinary studies in social sciences. As scientific practices, such studies appeared to have enabled the six participants to go through a reciprocal process of learning the unknown and unlearning the known about the politics of their host countries and that of their home country. The process appeared to have enabled the participants to develop a tolerance to and even an appreciation of the unknown, the irrational, and the unexplainable about politics, a development that in turn facilitated them to conduct continuous learning and unlearning about democracy.

Despite the variety of lenses provided by the six participants' disciplines to view democracy, all these lenses appeared to have led the participants away from an idealistic view of democracy as an institutional arrangement for forming government through competitive elections, and closer to a pragmatic view of democracy as a mechanism pertinent to the rights and interests of the people of a country.

For instance, one participant came to view democracy primarily as a political system for reconciling conflicts over different interests among the people, conflicts that naturally result from ongoing changes in a country's society, politics, and economy.

I think concepts like democracy are the results of social movements, not the causes of social movements. I prefer to explain democracy from the perspective of sociology, or the perspective of political economy, as my academic discipline does. ... Democracy, in fact, is one of the concepts resulting from the ongoing movements of different classes or social groups. ... These concepts are not the prerequisites for social movements to happen. Take the French Revolution for example. The main reason why it happened is not that a group of people in France believed in ideals of liberty, democracy and fraternity, but that the conflicts regarding issues such as taxation became irreconcilable among three major social classes. After the Revolution broke out, the people of France needed a blueprint about what to do next. It was at that time that the concepts of liberty, democracy and fraternity became meaningful. ... So my definition of democracy is relatively practical. Democracy is a political system through which the actual conflicts in the people's lives can be reconciled. Of course, democracy is also an ideal, but I place more importance on its on-the-ground aspect. This aspect refers mainly to the dynamic changes in specific social, political, and economic relationships. This aspect is not ideal, but pragmatic. It is about people's actual interests. (Participant 1, doctoral student, CA, male)

Another participant was more explicit about why democracy was becoming more important to the Chinese people against the backdrop of China's continuous reforms in the Post-Mao era (1976 – Present).

In the past four decades, people's standards of living have been raised

tremendously. The Chinese government's capacity to govern has also increased a lot. However, the success in these two respects has been achieved mainly by non-democratic means. I mean, the policies regarding the country's economic and political reforms were dominantly made by the government alone without much participation of the Chinese people. Now the government is facing a huge challenge of how to continue to improve its governance. To me, it can be dealt with effectively by two methods. One is to welcome more participation of the people in the processes of making decisions and solving problems that affect their interests. The other is to give the people more power to hold government accountable. (Participant 9, doctoral student, US, male)

An anecdote offered by a third participant illustrates the government's violation of the people's rights and interests as a pressing concern in China's society.

The family of one of my friends had a piece of rural land in China. The local government told his family that their land would be expropriated, and then it happened very quickly. They lost their land just like that! Before these events concerning their land, I had met him in Canada, and he had looked fine, but two weeks later he told me his mother was in hospital because she was very angry about the government's taking away their land and became sick. So I felt very shocked! (Participant 2, doctoral student, CA, female)

Triggered by this anecdote, the student compared urban planning practices in China with those in Canada and came to view democracy as being able to offer a procedure (rule of law) to protect the people's rights and interests in the process of economic and social development.

There is a procedure for the government here [in another place the student explained that municipal governments in Canada are required to elicit and address local residents' concerns in their urban planning process, without which the governments cannot proceed to implement their plans]. It is impossible for the government in Canada to do whatever it wants. Ignoring the people is impossible here. After all, there is a procedure, a democratic procedure, which is very good because it can protect the people's rights.

A fourth participant further conceived of democracy as a vital mechanism for the people of a country to protect their rights and interests against the increasing influence of global capitalism on domestic and local politics. As he put it,

In today's globalized world, the big corporations, in particular the financial institutions, have more influence than average people on the political parties that make policies and laws. To fight for his or her individual interests, a person must use political appeals through his or her participation in democracy. (Participant 5, doctoral student, CA, male)

This excerpt suggests that the participant's disciplinary studies made him aware of a risk inherent in the current system of global governance that has no global government. That is, the rights and interests of the people of a country could be encroached upon by the decisions made by a few global governing institutions (e.g., the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization), all of which are closely linked to the financial and commercial interests of global capitalism. The participant appeared to be particularly concerned that the voices of the people at the local level are often not heard in the decision-making processes at the global level.

The insights offered by the above four participants all indicate that their social-science learning enabled them to realize that democracy is in effect becoming more important for the people of any country to protect their rights and interests at the national and local levels in an increasingly globalized world in the 21st century. It is no surprise that such realization in turn contributed to their increased commitment to democracy.

7.4.2 Participants' Prioritization of Democratization over Democratic Elections

It should be stressed first that participants' prioritizing democratization over democratic elections was underpinned by their increased awareness of the inseparability of the political and politics, which resulted mainly from their discovery of the dark side of their host countries' history. For instance, one participant touched on the usually untold events related to the Bonus Army in the U.S. history. Rightly assuming that I as his interviewer had little knowledge about the Bonus Army, he started recounting how the events led to bloodshed with a question:

Have you heard of the Bonus Army in the United States? It mainly consisted of the U.S. World War I veterans and their families. In the 1920s, the U.S. government awarded these veterans bonuses in the form of certificates that could not be redeemed until the 1940s. But in the 1930s the Great Depression hit the United States very hard, and many veterans lost their jobs. So tens of thousands of veterans camped with their wives and children in their capital city Washington D.C., and demanded immediate cash payment of their certificates. But do you know what happened to these veterans who had fought and sacrificed so much for their own country during World War I? First,

Washington police were employed to remove the veterans. There was resistance of course, so shots were fired. Some veterans were wounded and even a few died. Then, President Hoover ordered the U.S. Army to clear these veterans' campsite. If I remember correctly, it was Douglas MacArthur who was in charge of the clearing. You know what? He even used tanks to do that!

(Participant 9, doctoral student, US, male)

As can be expected, uncovering the Bonus Army had a significant impact on the student's understanding of politics. As he put it,

The killing of some U.S. veterans in Washington D.C. during the Bonus Army protests sounds so similar to the killing of civilians in Beijing during the '89 Democracy Movement. What shocked me the most is that this type of tragedy also took place in the United States, a country that advocates liberty, a country that boasts the Bill of Rights!

The excerpt shows that the student immediately saw the parallel between the politics of the United States and that of China in the sense that conflicts over the demands of certain groups of the people could lead to a deadly response from the government in both countries. Despite the initial shock by such a parallel, he came to realize that political conflicts exist not only in his home country but also in his host country. He further reasoned that the demand of a group of the people could lead to political conflict with the government, in which case it is the group members' rights, interests, and even lives that are more likely to be adversely affected.

It should be noted that the participants, as democratic subjects in the making, tended to prioritize democratization over democratic elections as a more fundamental and effective

means to protect the rights and interests of the people. They envisioned democratization as an ongoing process that rests on democratic relevance rather than democratic traditions. Here, democratic relevance refers to any issue that has a bearing on the people's rights and interests while democratic traditions refer to the multi-party system of the Western model of liberal democracy. Informed by this distinction, the participants further argued that democratization is needed in any socio-political order, regardless of whether or not an order is created by democratic elections.

It should also be noted that these participants, while emerging as democratic subjects, endeavored to collaborate with the Chinese government in the processes of making decisions and/or solving problems that affect the public interest. Their practices in this regard revolved around transparency and participation, the two issues that arose from problematizing their engagement with formal electoral politics and organizational politics in Canada and the United States.

With respect to transparency, the participants demanded more access to the requisite information, including information from alternative sources, so that they could better hold those with institutional power accountable and participate more effectively in the decision-making processes that lead to well-informed decisions. While acknowledging the importance of an active and diverse media to keep the people well informed, the participants also became increasingly aware of media's subtle influences on the people's thoughts and actions, and how these influences may compromise their independence and freedom in the decision-making processes.

For instance, one participant's general comment on media's role in politics represents an important caveat to the ideal that the people of a liberal democratic society are free to form their own opinions and make their own decisions.

People can be deceived or even manipulated by the information they received from media. Here, I am not talking about conspiracy theory. What I want to say is this: if the media repeat the same message about an issue over and over again, that can bombard people's brains to the extent that their perceptions about the issue can become very similar to that message. (Participant 7, undergraduate student, US, female)

Another participant specifically commented on how the Internet as a dominant medium in the 21st century could even deprive the people of their abilities to make decisions based on their independent research and critical thinking.

Compared with other traditional media such as newspaper, radio, and TV, the Internet tends to present information in a more fragmented way. Twitter⁴⁶ is a good example. First, the Tweets are too short to give a reader enough information to get the big picture of a specific issue. Second, Twitter can be very addictive so that a user may become less able to pause from the use of Twitter. That way, he/she may not even have the time to go through the process of critically reflecting on the Tweets, doing his/her own research, and forming his/her own conclusion. What scares me most is that a user may not

⁴⁶ Twitter is an online news and social networking service. Its users communicate in short messages commonly known as "tweets", the size of which was originally restricted to 140 characters but is now doubled to 280 characters.

even be aware that he/she is losing the abilities to do independent research and think critically. Before long, he/she may unconsciously become more susceptible to media's influences. (Participant 12, Master's student, US, male)

With respect to participation, the participants argued not only for the necessity of the people's going beyond voting in formal electoral politics, but more importantly, for the people's participating in making decisions and/or solving problems that affect the public interest. Organization Y in Chapter 6 provides a good example in this regard. Despite the awareness of the possibility of being under the Chinese government's surveillance, eight Chinese international students associated with each other and co-founded the organization to collectively improve competencies of the Chinese youth to create social innovation projects to address some of China's pressing social problems. In and through the practices associated with the design and management of these projects, they emerged as a collective of democratic subjects who attempted to participate in China's governance politics.

It deserves mentioning that the six students whose political subjectivity demonstrated the feature of democratic subjectivity in the making appeared to favor deliberation as a feasible and effective way for the people to participate in China's governance politics. In particular, they made four demands regarding deliberation. Firstly, there must be a free, diverse and balanced media that keep the people well-informed. Secondly, freedom of speech must be protected by law and respected in society. Thirdly, there must be an inclusive public sphere where the people can express their ideas and opinions. Fourthly, deliberation should lead to concrete decisions and actions to effect changes in a timely manner.

7.5 Conclusion

Findings in this chapter affirm the premise that international mobility in higher education plays a significant role in Chinese international students' political subjectification, a premise derived both from the review of the history of China's democratization in Chapter 2 and from the construction of the theoretical framework for this research in Chapter 3. This chapter has shown that moving from China to Canada and the United States for the purpose of higher education facilitated most research participants not just to disidentify as "shitizens" who were disempowered, disillusioned, and cynical about active engagement with politics, but more importantly, to speak as "citizen" with a reactivated interest to participate in politics. Arguably, the most striking finding is that half of the twelve participants, mostly doctoral students in social sciences, emerged as democratic subjects who were increasingly committed to democracy and tended to prioritize democratization over democratic elections.

It deserves mentioning that international mobility in higher education seemed to have created both a conceptual space and a structural, procedural space that made it possible for the six participants to become democratic subjects. One reason is that the participants' disciplinary studies, particularly those in social sciences, served as a conceptual space that allowed them to engage with scientific practices associated with continuous learning and unlearning about democracy. In and through such scientific practices, the students increased their commitment not only to democracy by building closer connections between democracy and the Chinese people's rights and interests, but also to China's democratization by raising their awareness of the inseparability of the political and politics in any socio-political order, regardless of whether or not it is created by democratic elections. It seemed that the participants developed stronger agonistic relationships not only between themselves and

China's existing socio-political order, but also between their engagements with Western democratic practices and China's official democratization efforts.

Another reason is that electoral politics in Canada and the United States and politics in Chinese international student organizations served as a structural, procedural space that allowed the students to problematize democratic elections at the regime level and to experiment with various democratic practices at the organizational level. Such problematization and experiments, in turn, led many participants to view democracy less from the perspective of individual well-being, but more from that of collective well-being. In and through their engagement with democratic practices in this structural, procedural space, six participants of this research became increasingly aware of the importance of going beyond voting and deliberatively participating in making decisions and/or solving problems that affect their collective rights and/or interests.

Particularly noteworthy is that some participants associated with other Chinese international students to collectively engage in addressing some of China's pressing social issues. It can be argued that such association suggests their emergence as a distinctive group of young Chinese democrats. This group did not develop from "within the system" (tizhi nei, 体制内) to maintain or reinforce "what is" in China's current socio-political order (i.e., the leadership of the CPC). Instead, this group emerged overseas with sufficient independence from the CPC, careful not to be overly critical of the CPC yet sensitive to the rights and interests of the Chinese people. Together they endeavored to materialize "what might be" in China's future socio-political order (e.g., greater rule of law, greater individual liberty, greater government transparency, and the people's greater participation in politics).

If we view the emergence of some Chinese international students as a group of democratic subjects against the backdrop of China's continuous reforms in tandem with its rise in the 21st century, it is not an overstatement that such a group may have unintended but far-reaching effects not just on the future of China but even that of the world.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Key Findings of This Research

This study examined twelve research participants' engagement with democratic discourses and practices in Canada and the United States so as to gain insights into their formation as political subjects while they were internationally mobile for the purpose of higher education. These twelve participants are by no means a representative sample of the large population of Chinese international students in the two host countries. Nonetheless, findings of this qualitative inquiry demonstrate that international mobility in higher education had significant bearings on participants' political subjectivity. In particular, half of them emerged as democratic subjects with increased commitment to democracy as well as increased competence to effect democratization in China.

Three kinds of practices stood out in terms of their contributions to participants' formation as democratic subjects. The first kind were practices associated with participants' disciplinary studies in social sciences, which enabled them to engage with an ongoing process of learning and unlearning about democracy from different disciplinary perspectives. In and through these scientific practices, the participants became aware that democracy plays an increasingly important role in protecting, if not promoting, the rights and interests of the Chinese people as China continues its economic and political reforms in the current system of global governance, a system under strong influence from the financial and commercial interests of global capitalism. In addition, the participants developed a more realistic view of the place of democratic elections in China's democratization in the 21st century. That is, democratic elections should be taken as a long-term goal although in the short term they are

highly unlikely to be institutionalized and practiced under China's current socio-political order.

Nonetheless, China's democratization is underway in light of an ecological perspective of democracy, developed out of participants' studies in social sciences. That is, democracy can be viewed as an ecosystem constituted by four interrelated elements (i.e., democratic elections, the rule of law, individual liberty, and deliberation). It is no surprise that some participants perceived the increased awareness of the importance of any of these four elements among the Chinese people as the driving force behind China's democratization in the 21st century. This perception, in turn, seemed to have helped the participants to guard against impatience with or pessimism over the current slowness of political reforms oriented toward democratic elections in China. The perception seemed even to have injected into the participants' minds a sense of hope, if not cautious optimism, about the long-term prospect for democratization in their home country.

The second kind of practices that contributed to participants' becoming democratic subjects were those practices in the domestic politics of Canada and the United States. In particular, most of the twelve participants observed and reflected upon a broad range of practices associated with the process of citizens' electing their representatives to different levels of government in the two host countries. Some of them even participated in these practices.

In and through their engagement with these practices, many participants became aware of two particular limits of democratic elections. One limit is that democratic elections primarily, though not exclusively, focus on citizens' occasional exercise of the right to vote. The other limit is that democratic elections cannot eliminate political conflicts from politics

and specific political conflicts are more likely to adversely affect the rights and interests of those people who contest the existing politics. Therefore, for those participants who became democratic subjects, they deemed going beyond voting necessary and demanded the people's participation, particularly in the form of deliberation, in everyday-life processes of making decisions and/or solving problems that affect their interests. In this light, their conception of democracy was less aligned with aggregative democracy or agonistic democracy, but more aligned with deliberative democracy.

The third kind of practices were those associated with politics in Chinese international student organizations. A key finding is that six participants, all of whom were recruited at the U.S. research site, experimented with a variety of democratic practices in the processes of organization design and organization management. These experiments had an explicit or implicit purpose to develop and practice democracy at the organizational level. It is worth noting that their experimented practices tended to be either modeled on those in the U.S. domestic politics (e.g., practices associated with constitution writing, practices associated with generation of political leaders, and practices associated with checks and balances), or modeled on those in politics of local organizations in the United States (e.g., practices associated with decision-making in meetings).

In and through engagement with politics in the three Chinese international student organizations, those participants who became democratic subjects were increasingly aware of two subtle yet formidable obstacles to democratization. One obstacle is that of certain cultural norms in China (e.g., leadership practices oriented towards power centralization). The other obstacle is that of certain “technologies of the self” deployed by members of an organization, particularly those with leadership roles, to achieve personal goals in the

organization (e.g., practices of protecting and consolidating one's own power, and practices of pursuing personal upward mobility). Noteworthy is that a few participants countered and even removed some of these obstacles with practices in the processes of forming the structure and culture of specific organizations (e.g., practices used to flatten organizational structure, practices used to decentralize power, and practices used to increase members' participation in decision-making processes).

8.2 Contributions of This Research

The contributions of this research lie mainly in the insight it offers into current Chinese international students' formation as political subjects at the intersection of the field of international higher education and that of China's democratization.

The research advances conceptual bases of Chinese international students and their mobility in higher education. The students, in this study, are situated in the historical flow of internationally mobile Chinese people. Informed by these people's significant contributions to China's democratic development since the late 19th century, I re-imagine the students as political subjects in the making, and envisage that their meaning making of democracy as a concept and their engagement with democratic practices abroad can have far-reaching effects on China's democratization in the 21st century. This image of political subjects in the making is notably a new addition to the three conventional ones (i.e., consumers in international higher education markets, learners across borders, and human capital) that have been projected onto Chinese students by the existing literature in the field of international higher education.

I also argue that Chinese students' international mobility in higher education produces three broader contexts (i.e., the world, their home country, and their host countries), each of which provides the students with opportunities to engage with politics. Worth repeating, here, is the definition of politics adopted in this study: "the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions which seek to establish a certain order and to organize human coexistence in conditions which are always potentially conflicting because they are affected by the dimension of 'the political'" (Mouffe, 2009, p. 550). Informed by this definition, the students' engagement with politics is conceived of as entailing not just a specific socio-political order that has been created by certain ensemble of discourses, practices, and institutions in each of the three broader contexts, but more importantly, the political conflicts that contest the order and existing politics.

Furthermore, I zero in on the Western model of liberal democracy. This is because this model is conceived of both as a nexus of political conflicts from all three broader contexts, and as a marker of collective difference in politics between Chinese international students' home country and their host countries in the West. On the one hand, the Western model of liberal democracy can provide a basis of the students' collective identities. On the other hand, engaging with political conflicts over this marker in world politics and domestic politics of their host countries can facilitate the students to decode and even recode their political identities within the ensemble of discourses, practices and institutions different from that of their home country.

Therefore, this research builds a conceptual connection between Chinese international students' engagement with politics in Western liberal democratic host countries and one often-overlooked dimension of China's democratization, namely the political subjectification

of the Chinese people. The students, like those who stay in China, can be subjected particularly to those discourses, practices, and institutions that have created and are maintaining China's current socio-political order. The students, unlike those who stay in China, are more likely to become aware of how their political subjectivity was acted upon before their studies abroad in and through their engagement with politics in their host countries. More importantly, the students may even disidentify from their pre-given identities and become a new type of political subjects.

In addition to the conceptual advancement as mentioned above, the methodological strategy of selecting Canada and the United States as the two host countries ensures that this research covers the two major types of liberal democracy, to which the majority of current Chinese students are exposed abroad. The first type is the presidential system in the United States, and the second is parliamentary system in four Commonwealth countries (i.e., the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand). As shown in Chapter 2, these five English-speaking countries host approximately two out of every three Chinese students pursuing higher education abroad. This research, therefore, represents a valuable opportunity for stakeholders of international higher education (e.g., scholars, institutional leaders, policy makers, and practitioners) to understand Chinese students' political subjectivity in relation to their international mobility in higher education, which creates opportunities for most of them to expose to and even engage with politics in the two major types of liberal democracy.

Of particular value in this regard are the empirical findings pertinent to the three features that marked participants political subjectivity in relation to their international mobility in higher education (i.e., subjectivity in subjection, disidentifying subjectivity, and democratic subjectivity in the making). As shown in Chapter 7, before studying abroad most

participants were shaped into cynics who viewed active engagement in politics with skepticism. It seems that their agency and actions regarding participation in politics were severely restricted by the ensemble of discourses, practices, and institutions that have created China's current socio-political order, an order with the CPC's leadership as its defining feature. Nonetheless, international mobility in higher education reactivated in many participants an interest to participate in politics. This reactivation derived from the participants' observations and comparisons of politics in different national contexts in general, and from their newly gained ecological perspective of democracy in particular. More importantly, international mobility in higher education facilitated six participants to become democratic subjects who associated with one another and with other Chinese international students to actively engage in effecting changes in China's politics, society, and culture.

8.3 Limitations

Here, it is worth revisiting briefly certain limitations that I have mentioned in Chapter 4 (i.e., the methodology chapter). The first pertains to the sample size. Although the twelve recruited participants are fitting for this qualitative doctoral research, the sample size is not representative of the large population of Chinese international students who pursue their degrees in Canada and the United States. The second limitation is that I ended up not being able to compare all aspects and methods. For example, I had hoped to recruit participants from both rural and urban backgrounds but was not able to do so. I had to abandon my plan to ask the participants about their political and religious affiliations in order to foster their psychological safety to participate in this study. In addition, only the students selected from the U.S. research site were engaged with Chinese international student organizations.

Now that my doctoral research has been completed, I can also draw on the findings to outline some limitations with regard to the theoretical and methodological choices made for this research. The theoretical framework that was constructed in Chapter 3 turned out to be very useful for conceptualizing and analyzing how the twelve research participants were made into and became political subjects in and through their engagement with democracy at the regime level and at the local organization level in Canada and the United States. Nonetheless, the framework missed two factors that the data has revealed as having important influences on participants' engagement with democratic practices. The first factor was that international mobility in higher education could lead to changes in participants' legal status in their host countries. As shown in Chapter 5, the Canadian immigration policies enabled two participants to obtain citizenship and one participant permanent residency in Canada. This change in turn offered them new ways to engage with democratic practices associated with Canada's formal electoral politics. The second factor was that democracy is closely related to media in Canada and the United States. As shown in Chapter 5 and Chapter 7, many participants touched on how media representations of democracy in their host countries influenced their perceptions of and engagement with democracy.

As demonstrated by the findings in Chapter 7, the qualitative case study approach taken for this research was very useful for developing theories of participants' formation as democratic subjects. However, these theories were constrained by the timeframe of their degree studies in Canada and the United States. Findings on the changes in participants' political subjectivity during their studies abroad highlight the importance of continuing to inquire into their political subjectivity after graduation.

Informed by the key findings of this research as well as its limitations, I suggest three promising lines of research in the following section.

8.4 Directions for Future Research

The first direction for future research is to further explore Chinese international students' political subjectivity while pursuing their degrees in Canada or the United States. One variant is to focus on those students from rural backgrounds and those with specific religious affiliations. Research on the former group would allow the researcher to find out whether any of the students from rural China had experienced democratic participation at the village level before studying abroad, and how such experience could affect their self-understanding as democratic subjects. Research on the latter group would shed light on how religious beliefs and practices could be related to the students' becoming democratic subjects. The other variant is to examine how Confucianism may influence Chinese international students' formation as political subjects. Such influence is suggested by literature related to the 'Confucian Model' of higher education in certain East Asian countries (Marginson, 2011). The third variant is to inquire into how the students engage with media representations of democracy. The fourth variant is to explore the bearings of immigration policies of Canada and the United States on the students' political subjectivity. Informed by the finding that immigration policies of Canada have created a welcoming policy context for Chinese international students, a question worth asking and exploring is how policy makers in Canada can envisage those students intending to stay on a permanent basis as future citizens. From this perspective, these students' sense of belonging to Canada could be nurtured long before they take the Oath of Citizenship. Therefore, research could be

conducted to examine the extent to which current Canadian and the U.S. immigration policy making processes is informed by the short-term and the long-term political significance of Chinese international students to the two host countries.

The second direction for future research is to explore how Chinese international students' increased commitment to democracy and increased competence to effect democratization play out when they return to China after completing their higher education abroad. I envision that this increase in commitment and competence is more likely to manifest itself when the students engage in the politics of local organizations, particularly when they participate in the processes of making decisions or solving problems that affect their rights and interests and/or the public interest. Such likelihood seems to be indicated by an important finding of this research. That is, some participants associated with their peers abroad, designing and managing various social innovation projects to address certain pressing socio-political issues that their home country faced. It can be anticipated that inquiry into returnee students' engagement with politics at the organizational level will yield valuable insights into not just how reentering China can act upon these students' political subjectivity, but more importantly, how some students effect changes in China's politics, society, and culture by living and working again as democratic subjects at the grass-roots level. How would their political subjectivity change if they stayed outside of China? Here, it is also worth adding a variant of this line of research: follow-up research can be conducted to explore changes in political subjectivity of those Chinese international students who stay outside of China after completing their degree programs.

The third direction for future research is to continue the search for approaches to democratization with more focus on the people's rights and interests in the 21st Century. This

recommendation is informed by a key argument made by those participants who became democratic subjects. That is, democratization is needed both in their home country and in their two host countries, regardless of whether or not a specific government is formed through democratic elections. The argument is based mainly on these participants' increased awareness that politics in any given socio-political order is inseparable from the political, and democratization can protect the people's rights and interests more effectively when political conflicts arise over specific issues. It is important to stress that democratization, as they envisioned, is an ongoing process that rests on democratic relevance (i.e., any issue that affects the people's rights and interests), rather than democratic traditions (i.e., the multi-party system of the Western model of liberal democracy).

Therefore, any inquiry in this third line of research, either theoretical or empirical, can be viewed as a response to Mouffe's (2009) call for alternatives to the Western model of liberal democracy, the legitimacy of which rests both on accepting "rule by the people" as an ideal underpinned by human dignity and on allowing the people to decide the form of this ideal in their specific contexts. Findings that derive from such inquiries will offer invaluable insights into how to condition existing politics by the people's rights and interests to an ever-increasing extent at the local, the national, and even the global levels.

8.5 Closing Words

Out of personal experiences of participating as a Chevening Scholar in the United Kingdom between 2007 and 2008 arose my initial hunch that Chinese international students could become political subjects in their Western host countries. Now as I come to the end of this dissertation, I have become increasingly convinced that these students' formation as

democratic subjects holds the key to some of the most contentious issues pertinent not just to China's democratization, but even to the reconfiguration of world order in the 21st century.

At this point, I am relatively optimistic that the time is ripe for my dissertation to meet its readers. A hopeful sign in this regard appeared in July 2019 when a journalist of *South China Morning Post*⁴⁷ approached me for insights into Chinese international students' engagement with conflicts over some of China's hot-button issues (e.g., the 2019 Hong Kong protests) in Canada. It indicates that the public is interested in information from scholarly sources on contentious issues related to China's democratization. On August 10, 2019, the feature co-authored by the journalist who interviewed me was published under the title "Hong Kong protests to Uygur camps: How Chinese students became a subject of scorn". While reading the article (Tai & Power, 2019), I had a new hunch: some people are ready to read my dissertation!

⁴⁷ *South China Morning Post* is Hong Kong's major English-language newspaper. It has a large circulation, and its editorial and newsgathering functions are considered authoritative.

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Appendices

Appendix A Consent Form

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



Department of Educational Studies

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Consent Form

Overseas Mainland Chinese students' engagement with democratic discourses and practices in Canada and the United States

I. STUDY TEAM

Principal Investigator:

P. Taylor Webb, Associate Professor

Department of Educational Studies (EDST), University of British Columbia (UBC)

Co-Investigator:

Gang Li, PhD Candidate, EDST, UBC

II. INVITATION AND STUDY PURPOSE

We want to learn more about how overseas Mainland Chinese students are changed politically through their experiences with democracy while pursuing degrees at Canadian and American universities. Specifically, this study will help us learn more about how overseas Mainland Chinese students engage with democratic discourses and practices in Canada and the United States (the US), and how this engagement changes the students' thoughts on and/or actions towards democracy. We are inviting people like you who have international higher education experience in North America to help us.

III. STUDY PROCEDURES

If you say 'Yes, I want to be in the study', here is how we will do the study:

1. The co-investigator will give you a form with questions to answer. You will need about 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire. You will receive a copy of the translation of your

completed questionnaire, and have the opportunity to change, delete or add anything you wish.

2. The co-investigator will ask you to take part in one 60-minute interview and one 40-minute follow-up interview. Both interviews will take place at a time of your convenience and at place(s) of your choice. The interviews will be audio-recorded, transcribed and translated. You will receive a copy of the transcript in both Chinese and English, and have the opportunity to change, delete or add anything you wish.

3. The co-investigator will negotiate with you a time if and/or when he can visit your university and/or other places to observe and note how you engage with what you perceive as democratic practices over a period of two to four weeks. The co-investigator will ask you for one or more short conversations (audio-recorded) about the meaning and importance of these activities. The conversation(s) will be held at a place, time and duration of your convenience. You will also be encouraged to keep a journal of your experience of democracy in Canada or the US either in written or oral form. You will receive a copy of the co-investigator's observation notes, the transcript of the conversation(s), and the translation of your journal in both Chinese and English, and have the opportunity to change, delete or add anything you wish.

4. If you are in Canada, the co-investigator will ask you to take part in two 70-minute group interviews. Your group members will be five other students from your university, and the co-investigator will moderate the group interviews. The group interviews will be organized around the common topics that emerge from questionnaires, interviews with you and other students, and observations. Each group interview will be held at a place and time agreed by at least 5 members of your group. Before the second group interview, you will be asked to write down or audio-record your reflections on your participation in the first group interview. After the second group interviews, the co-investigator will ask you for one or more short conversations (audio-recorded) about your reflections on the two group interviews. The conversation(s) will be held at place, time and duration of your convenience. You will receive a copy of the transcript of the group interviews, the conversation(s), and your reflections in both Chinese and English, and have the opportunity to change, delete or add anything you wish.

IV. STUDY RESULTS

The results of this study will be reported in the co-investigator's doctoral dissertation and may also be published in journal articles and books. The co-investigator will send you a report on the findings of the study by means of registered mail.

V. POTENTIAL RISKS OF THE STUDY

We do not think there is anything in this study that could harm you or be bad for you physically. Some of the questions we ask might upset you. Please let us know if you have any concerns. Some of the questions we ask may seem sensitive or personal. You do not have to answer any question if you do not want to.

There is a possible but unlikely risk of loss of your privacy. However, measures will be taken to safeguard your privacy and the confidentiality of your data, which will be explained in the section of confidentiality.

VI. POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

This study will give you an opportunity to share your experiences of democracy in your western host country, and voice your opinions about China's democratization.

This research is very likely to raise the public and policy makers' awareness of the political significance of overseas Mainland Chinese students in China's democratization process. The findings of this inquiry can help to advance the knowledge about international higher education, and benefit other Chinese people in China's democratization process.

VII. CONFIDENTIALITY

Your identity will be kept strictly confidential. All documents will be identified only by code number and kept in locked filing cabinets and password secured computer files. You will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study. Your identity will be disguised with a pseudonym in any information used from your interviews. We encourage all participants to refrain from disclosing the contents of the discussion outside of the focus group. However, we cannot control what other participants do with the information discussed.

The data of this study are to be kept for a minimum of 5 years after the study results have been published or otherwise presented. After these 5 years, all paper copies will be shredded, and all electronic files will be securely deleted.

VIII. PAYMENT

We will not pay you for the time you take to be in this study. However, we will pay the costs of your bus or taxi fare and parking. You will also get a meal with the value of up to 20 Canadian dollars after you complete the questionnaire.

IX. CONTACT FOR INFORMATION ABOUT THE STUDY

If you have any questions or concerns about what we are asking of you, please contact Dr. P. Taylor Webb or the co-investigator, Gang Li.

X. CONTACT FOR COMPLAINTS

If you have any concerns about your rights as a research subject and/or your experiences while participating in this study, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 1-604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail RSIL@ors.ubc.ca or call toll free 1-877-822-8598.

XI. PARTICIPANT CONSENT AND SIGNATURE PAGE

Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time

without giving a reason. Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

Participant Signature

Date

Printed Name of the Participant signing above

Mailing address of the Participant signing above for a report on the research findings

Appendix B Interview Schedule

1. How would you describe *democracy*?
2. Is *democracy* important to you? Why?
3. What activities do you participate in that help you engage with *democracy*? Explain.
4. What does democratic practice look like to you? Explain.
5. How does/do your experience(s) of *democracy* in Canada/ the United States (make the experience specific if necessary) influence your understanding of *minzhu* in China?
6. How is your understanding of *democracy* the same or different after coming to Canada/ the United States?
7. How do you think your actions will be changed (or not) when you return to China?

Appendix C Focus Group Interview Guide

1. Opening question:

Let us begin by introducing ourselves around the group. Please tell us your name and what you enjoy doing most when you are not studying.

2. Introductory question:

What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the terms of *democracy* and *minzhu*?

3. Transition question:

What do *democracy* and *minzhu* actually mean to you?

4. Key questions:

- Could you please tell us your experience(s) of democracy in Canada?

- How do you see Chinese people as political beings?

- How would you like China to develop politically in the coming 10 to 15 years?

5. Ending questions:

- Our discussion is now almost over, so I would like to summarize the main themes discussed in our group... Do you think this is an adequate summary of the issues? Are there any issues missed or misinterpreted?