

The Relationship between Confucianism Culture on
Chinese International Students' Self-confidence

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Education

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Abstract

Considering the uptrend of educational globalization, the younger generation in China is choosing to study abroad. According to Lundeberg, Fox, Brown and Elbedour's research (2000), Chinese participants have low self-confidence and do not trust their own skills. Furthermore, research shows that that Chinese graduate students tend to refrain from participating in classroom activities (Lu & Han, 2010). The purpose of this research project is to explore how Chinese international students perceive the influence of Confucius culture on their self-confidence, while completing the international graduate program in a single university in Ontario. All data was collected through loosely structured interviews with four Chinese graduate students in the international graduate program. Key findings of this research project highlight the students' educative experience in both Canada and China, the influence of Confucianism on their self-confidence levels and the progression of this trait throughout the whole learning experience.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONFUCIANISM CULTURE ON CHINESE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' SELF-CONFIDENCE

Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation to some individuals who have been part of the research journey with me.

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Joyce Mgombelo, for her guidance, valuable suggestions and encouragement. She guided me to do my research step by step.

Secondly, I also want to acknowledge with a deep sense of reverence, my gratitude towards my family, who always supported me during my studies.

Lastly, I would like to thank my cat Milky, and my dog Mickey, since they are the most lovely and fantastic sweeties in the world. My pets gave me unreplaceable mental support and encouragement during my research journey. I highly appreciate their positive influence in my life.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONFUCIANISM CULTURE ON CHINESE
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' SELF-CONFIDENCE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</i>	1
My Own Story	1
Research Background	2
Chinese International Students in Canadian Higher Education	2
Confucianism in Chinese Education.....	4
Research Problem, Purpose and Questions	7
Research Problem	7
Research Purpose and Questions	8
Significance of the Research.....	8
Research Structure	12
<i>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW</i>	13
Confucianism and Education in China	13
Confucianism and Education	15
Chinese International Students	23
Self-Confidence	26
Self-Confidence and Related Concepts	26
Research on Self-Confidence.....	29
Gap in Previous Research	33
<i>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY</i>	35
Research Questions	35
Participants.....	35
Method	36
Data analysis	37
Procedure	38

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONFUCIANISM CULTURE ON CHINESE
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' SELF-CONFIDENCE

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS	41
Confucian Influences	41
Deeply Rooted Influence	42
Confucian Learning Environment.....	42
Values in Education.....	43
Influence on Education	44
Pedagogical Differences in China and Canada	45
Education System.....	45
Class Environment.....	46
Interactions.....	47
Feedback Strategies	47
Academic Experience in the International Program	49
Learning Predisposition	49
Self-Concept	50
Class Participation	51
How Confucianism Influences Class Participation.....	52
Teamwork	53
Feedback Strategies	54
Disagreement, Challenging Authority and Conflict.....	55
Expectation	57
Changing Motivation	57
Conclusion	58
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS	60
Implications in Theory and Practice	65
Recommendations for Future Research	67
Limitations	69
Final Reflections	70
As a Researcher.....	70

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONFUCIANISM CULTURE ON CHINESE
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' SELF-CONFIDENCE

As a Chinese International Student.....	71
As an Instructor.....	71
Conclusion	71
<i>References</i>	73

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

My Own Story

My own learning experience inspired me to complete this study. I grew up in a traditional Chinese family and acquired a standard Chinese education before I came to Canada. I was taught to respect and follow parents and teachers' instructions, be humble and not become complacent. Since I have memory, my parents and teachers helped me to develop a humble attitude, as well as a need to strive for perfection, while continuously questioning my own skills. When I began learning English at four years old, my teacher taught me language habits such as always showing gratitude to compliments. This particular example clashed with the expectations within Chinese culture where one must reject compliments, while criticizing one's own skills. Throughout my childhood, English classes were simply ordinary courses that did not provide opportunities for any deep reflections on the differences in language habits. However, years later while I was studying abroad, I began to acknowledge these language differences, as well as the impact they may have had in my upbringing. In retrospect, I now recognize that I never truly accepted or believed compliments from friends as they praised my skills or appearance, as I had been raised to reject these commendations. I eventually came to the realization that others' compliments are indeed polite, beautiful words. However, it remains hard and challenging to acknowledge my strengths, achievements and outstanding abilities, as I am never truly satisfied with myself. On the contrary, I still find it easy to accept and overstate my shortcomings, since I was very troubled by my lack of self-confidence. These mixed feelings have encouraged me to attempt to find the deep

reasons that shaped my own perceptions.

As I recall my learning experiences in China, I discovered that Confucianism was always present throughout my education. For instance, I had to memorize and understand many quotes from *The Analects of Confucius*, while studying Confucianism. I was also taught to speak wisely, obey orders and keep a low profile in my life. Once in Canada, my instructors encouraged me to develop critical thinking, which ultimately inspired me to consider the negative aspects of Confucianism and challenge them. Thus, this research not only has academic significance, but also reflects on my personal experience.

This study explores the perceptions developed by Chinese international students regarding the influence of Confucius culture on their self-confidence while attending the international graduate program at a single university in Ontario. The first chapter will present the following sections: (a) the research background, which will discuss different educational experiences; (b) the research problem, purpose, questions, significance and limitations of the study; and (c) the general structure of this Major Research Paper (MRP).

Research Background

The research background is comprised by two sections: (a) Chinese international students in Canadian higher education, and (b) Confucianism in Chinese education.

Chinese International Students in Canadian Higher Education

Considering the uptrend of educational globalization, the younger generation in China is choosing to study abroad. According to Li, Dipetta and Woloshyn (2012), the number of Chinese students accessing higher education abroad has been steadily

increasing. Since the implementation of the Reform and Opening-up policy in 1978, China has had more interactions with other countries in economic, political and educational terms (Huang,2008). Thus, Chinese students have more opportunities to study abroad and learn advanced Western technologies. Furthermore, due to the one-child policy implemented in the past decades, many families can now offer their children the financial support to engage in higher education in international universities (Ge, Brown & Durst, 2019). According to Chen (2006), Canada is the most popular academic destination for students, due to its friendly and safe environment, affordable tuition fees, and a high-quality academic outcome. In recent years, the enrollment rate of international students in post-secondary institutions has reached unprecedented levels both in Canada and across the world (Chen, 2006). For instance, the number of international students in Canada grew by 43% in a two-year period between 2016 and 2018, from 3.5 million to 5 million students (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2018; UNESCO, 2019). According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada in 2005, most international students who studied in Canada arrived from Asia, while the majority of these came from provinces and regions in China, which represents an increasing trend. According to Statistics Canada in 2016, Chinese students represented the largest ethnical group of international students attending Canadian universities (34.1% of the international student pool). Furthermore, the number of Chinese international students attending Canadian universities increased by 5,211 (+8.9%) between 2015 to 2017 (Statistics Canada, 2019).

However, this brings challenging transitions for Chinese international students, due to different education methods, learning approaches, and cultural and living styles.

Some Western ideologies differ from Chinese principles and traditional beliefs.

According to Rao's research (1996), traditional education in China is teacher- and book-centered and shaped by rote memorization. This study also indicates that most interactions within the classroom are initiated by teachers, while student initiatives and student-to-student interactions are limited. In contrast, most teachers in Canada currently apply a student-centered approach to promote interest, analytical research, critical thinking and enjoyment among students (Rangachari, 2010). This teaching method ultimately, does not limit the flow of knowledge from the lecturer to the student (Lindquist, 1995), as the teacher-centered model does.

As part of this academic experience, Chinese students need to overcome many challenges, including language barriers, new cultural norms, and potential discrimination, along with those high expectations from their families. According to Wan's research (2001), Chinese graduate students do not like to participate in classroom activities and discussion, and instead prefer to hide their thoughts and abilities. This research also suggests that some Chinese students even feel ashamed if they fail academically in fear of losing other people's respect.

Confucianism in Chinese Education

Confucianism is deeply rooted in Chinese formal and informal education (Makeham, 2008). According to this scholar, Confucianism was the vital cultural force that ushered China into the twenty-first century after the implementation of the Reform and Opening-up policy. Furthermore, the policy has imbued both a "culture craze" (文化热) and "national learning craze" (国学热) across China, encouraging the learning of Confucianism within schools and households (Deng, 2011).

In light of this, According to Yu (2019), textbooks used in Chinese K12 public schools include many excerpts and quotes from *The Analects of Confucius* (论语). Some Chinese textbooks also include text and poetry by Mencius and Zhuxi (Yu, 2019). As part of the learning outcomes, students are expected to understand and recite these works. In addition, students must translate Confucius' quotes from classical Chinese language (文言文) to vernacular language (白话) and write from memory, during Chinese examinations periods.

According to Fang (2017), some Chinese high schools offer courses that strictly focus their learning activities on Confucius culture in an attempt to promote nationalism. For instance, according to Qingdao No.67 Middle School of the Shandong Province official website (2016), this school implemented Confucianism course in 2012. In this class, *The Analects of Confucius* was used as the mandatory learning material, which prompted instructors to encourage students to apply learning outcomes from the book through their education (Bandao, 2017). Qingdao Middle School also organized an educational retreat in Qufu, Confucius' hometown, to further promote this learning approach. In addition, the school organizes the Confucian Culture Festival, celebrated on an annual basis on Confucius' birthday, where students engage in different performance practices, such as music, dance, drama, calligraphy, Wushu, and tea art (Guanwang, 2018). Confucianism has been deeply rooted within education to the extent that the entrance examination for the National College considers Confucius classics as an indispensable part of the process (Chen, 2012).

Furthermore, Confucius' learning approach is very popular within Chinese private schools, especially in large cities like Beijing and Shanghai. According to Billioud and

Thoraval (2007), *Children Read the Classics* (少儿读经) is one of the most popular books currently used to highlight different traditional cultures. In addition to completing the regular school curriculum, students attending private schools are also mandated to participate in weekend activities in which they read out loud and memorize the Confucian texts.

In result, Confucianism influences the upbringing methods of most Chinese families, since parents encourage their children to read Confucian books at home and participate in collective recitations that bring different generations together (Billioud & Thoraval, 2007).

Asian cultures value family hierarchies and harmonious relationships, which are central concepts within Confucianism (Huang & Gove, 2015). In turn, children are raised to respect and obey parental demands and authority, in detriment of their personal decision-making. Due to this, most Chinese parents believe that obedience and compliance are traits of well-behaved children. This becomes evident when children pursue academic degrees in institutions that their parents favour.

Furthermore, Confucianism plays a significant role dictating the educational practices followed by families (Huang & Gove, 2015). This study describes that Confucian doctrine also highlights that an individual's development and performance are essential to achieve overall familial success. In result, most Chinese parents believe that education is a family investment and thus, strive to provide their children with access to the best educational resources to facilitate their academic success. The scholars also share that families will purchase skyscraper apartments in high school districts to access the possibility of enrolling in elite schools.

Research Problem, Purpose and Questions

This section will introduce the research problem, research purpose, research questions, and the significance of the research. Chinese international students face many challenge in international programs, such as language, culture, etc. This study will attempt the answer the two research questions and help Chinese international students to get a good international learning experience, help instructors to develop more advanced teaching methods.

Research Problem

The challenging transition Chinese international students experience while attending post-secondary institutions in Canada is affected by several aspects, such as different education methods, learning approaches, and cultural and living styles. As observed by Wan (2001), Chinese graduate students tend to refrain from actively participating in classroom activities, as they feel uncomfortable engaging with peers within the classroom. This is rooted in the fact that some Chinese students are not able to identify their strengths and lack overall self-confidence, as they are unwilling to their thoughts in classes in an attempt to avoid attracting any attention.

Kukulu, Korbkcü, Ozdemir, Bezci, and Calik (2013) define self-confidence as an individual's ability to recognize their own skills and an awareness of their own emotions. This study suggests that self-confidence is also perceived as personal love and care due to positive beliefs. According to research by Lundeberg, Fox, Brown and Elbedour (2000), some cultures tend to have a more negative outlook on their own confidence. The findings of this research showed that Chinese participants have low self-confidence levels and do not trust their own abilities. In addition, Lu and Han's research (2010) highlights that participants from the Chinese international student population were mostly

influenced by their traditional culture, while indicating a preference to listening over speaking. Ultimately, this suggests that Confucianism is deeply rooted in Chinese education and influences most (if not all) Chinese people, since textbooks used in Chinese public schools (including primary, middle and high schools) include many articles and sentences from The Analects of Confucius (论语).

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this research project is to explore how Chinese international students perceive the influence of Confucius culture on their self-confidence, while completing the international graduate program at a single university in Ontario. This study will attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. How does Confucian culture influence self-confidence levels of Chinese international students in academic settings?
2. What are the positive and negative influences of Confucian values on Chinese international students studying in Canada?

Significance of the Research

Due to the Chinese educational reform and the impacts of globalization, more and more scholars are interested in Confucian culture. Different research studies have examined the relationship between Confucianism and education through the use of social (Leung, 1998), pedagogical (Rao, 1996) and business (Jacobs, Guopei, & Herbig, 1995) lenses. However, research focused on pedagogical topics is mostly presented from the instructors' perspectives. In contrast, this research project focuses on the students' psychological perspective, while establishing connections between self-confidence and Confucian values, thus yielding a new outlook.

The significance of this research may serve as a tool that informs Chinese international students about the relationship between Confucius values and their perceived self-confidence. The information gathered and detailed in this project may also help Chinese international students build a stronger sense of self-confidence and ultimately, maximize their academic experience, rather than minimizing their own convictions. Benabou and Tirole (2002) believed that improving self-confidence has three significant values: consumption value; signal value; and motivation value.

According to Benabou and Tirole's research (2002), the *consumption* value refers to one's ability to improve their own well-being. In this research, psychologists place emphasis on the affective benefits of self-esteem and the functional ones. Benabou and Tirole's research (2002) shows that improving self-confidence levels can have a positive influence on the mental health and overall well-being of Chinese international student; it can also help develop resilience when facing new barriers, as well as coping mechanisms when encountering hardships, such as those brought upon by financial or academic stress.

Benabou and Tirole's research (2002) also shows that the *signal* value refers to one's ability of displaying their aptitudes and judgement skills, which will in turn help in the process of obtaining trust from others. This value can help Chinese international students foster positive relationships and encourage their participation in class-related activities. In addition, Rempel, Holmes and Zanna's research (1985) suggests that trust can promote the development of close relationships.

In addition, Benabou and Tirole (2002) believed that the *motivation* value refers to one's ability to undertake projects and persevere in the pursuit of their goals. On this note, academic performance can be improved by establishing clear goals that can

motivate the completion of tasks, as well as developing a clear assessment on one's ability to fulfil these tasks. Furthermore, the literature states that a strong motivation value can help students to understand and better control their emotions, while providing insight on how to better cope with negative effects, such as fear and anxiety (Boekaerts, 1993; Boekaerts & Nieminirta, 2000).

In light of these definitions, Chinese international students can develop their self-confidence by recognizing the relationship between this trait and Confucian culture. This realization can further help students to actively participate in classes, increase their motivation, improve their academic performance, as well as build positive relationships with instructors and peers.

Furthermore, this paper may also help instructors gain a better understanding of the diverse cultural backgrounds of Chinese international students', while guiding them in the development of effective teaching strategies that can facilitate the integration of Chinese international students into Canadian classrooms. As discussed by Kana'iaupuni, Ledward and Jensen's (2010), increasing teacher sensitivity and developing pedagogical strategies that are culturally diverse can create positive learning environments for students. According to Keith (2005), it is difficult for educators to shape or adapt an international curriculum without prior knowledge on multiculturalism, thus making it increasingly challenging for them to empathize with international students. This study further suggests that educational practices that are culturally focused can encourage instruction and learning approaches that are rooted in relevant contexts (culturally and linguistically), which can improve student outcomes. On this note, instructors can develop these teaching methods by recognizing Confucianism and the cultural

background of Chinese international students, and thus, improve their students'

outcomes. Regardless, instructors can benefit from learning about the different cultural backgrounds of international students, especially in a multicultural country like Canada.

Furthermore, this research may help Chinese families build healthier familial relationships and environments. Lau and Kwok (2000) state that higher self-esteem is also associated with the development of better relationships and balance within a family. Additionally, the research describes that a cohesive, stable and successful family environment can improve the self-esteem and self-confidence of children. This research can also help parents to improve their families' education, while ensuring an equitable distribution of the available resources among their families. According to Jacobs, Guopei, and Herbig (1995), Confucianism has a strong sense of hierarchy. Kim and Park (2000) echoed this thought as they suggested that Confucius considered that family and society are organized hierarchically, where each person must fulfill their duties. As described in *The Analects of Confucius*, "[l]et the ruler be a ruler, the subject a subject, the father a father, the son a son" (*The Analects*, 12.11). Ultimately, this paper may help Chinese parents – most particularly fathers – to better understand the negative impact of familial hierarchies and provide equality to females in present and future generations.

Another significance of this paper is that it promotes the integration of educational methods from eastern and western cultures, while enhancing cultural enlightenment in the world. With the progression of globalization, educators need to renew their belief systems and teaching methods to adapt to ongoing changes in their environments. This paper analyzes the cultural background and psychological status of international students, which can ultimately contribute to the integration of diverse

cultural principles and the development of new education methods. With this research, universities can improve their programs by internationalizing education methods and attract more international students.

Research Structure

The first chapter provides a brief summary on the research background by describing the situation of Chinese international students in Canada and Confucian education in China. The chapter also includes the significance of this research.

The second chapter reviews the main tenets of Confucianism from familial and educational perspectives. It describes recent empirical studies regarding self-confidence, especially those that apply a pedagogical lens. The chapter concludes by introducing recent studies focusing Chinese international students.

The third chapter discusses the methodology employed throughout this research project. Related data was collected by conducting interviews with four Chinese international students who completed K12 education in mainland China and studied in a single university in Ontario. All data was gathered in an attempt to find a relationship between Confucianism and self-confidence.

The fourth chapter analyzes key concepts that arose from the interview process, as the interviewees shared their personal experiences.

The last chapter draws a conclusion based on the results and describes the limitations of the study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will present a review of the background literature that informs the research study. Firstly, the review will attempt to discuss the development of Confucianism and its key tenets, including family relationships and education methods. Secondly, the review will present the main concepts about self-confidence, while surveying studies regarding this trait, especially those from an educational perspective. Finally, this review will address recent studies about Chinese international students.

Confucianism and Education in China

As Li & Hayhoe (2021) describe, Confucius (551-479 BCE) is the most influential scholar, educator, philosopher, and politician in China and eastern Asia. Confucius led a rather humble life focused on teaching. He traveled through many provinces throughout China in hopes of achieving his political dream of benevolent governance but was unable to fulfill his mission. He eventually settled back in his hometown, where he taught over 3,000 students until his death. Confucius' philosophy discusses many topics, including family, education, society, politics and orders, among others. Confucius believed that education and self-cultivation could help individuals become sage-king (Jun zi) and better contribute within societies (Li & Hayhoe, 2012). Thus, he became one of the most influential educators in Chinese history by advocating for equal educational opportunities for all students who had a thirst for knowledge (*The Analects*, 15. 39; 7.7).

The Analects of Confucius is a book published by Confucius' students, that compiles Confucius' teachings. This book introduced two interesting discussion topics: (1) what qualities foster a good person and (2) what qualities foster a good government

(Gardner, 2014). According to Yao (2000), Confucius observations focused on humans and the fundamental principles of humanity. Confucius believed that these principles were at the root of social relationships and defined the foundation of the stability, peace and prosperity of individuals, families, and ultimately, the state. Confucius also believed that everything within the universe, including our lives, obeyed a unifying force called the Dao (means “truth” or “way”) (Kim & Park, 2000). Their study also states that Dao can be seen within nature, humanity and spirituality.

The term “Confucianism” was first discovered in a journal by an Italian Jesuit (Rule, 1986). Yao (2000) also provides a historical perspective of Confucian culture and explains that there were five stages, including “Confucianism information”, “Confucianism in adaptation”, “Confucianism in transformation”, “Confucianism in variation”, and “Confucianism in renovation”.

According to Yao (2000), In the first stage (770 BCE – 221 BCE), Confucius established a new school of philosophy based on the old tradition. During the second stage (206 BCE – 420 CE), Confucianism had to adapt to the interaction between Confucian schools and the schools of Legalism, Maoism, Daoism, and Yin-Yang and the Five Elements. In the third stage, during the Song (960 CE – 1279 CE) and Ming Dynasties (1368 CE – 1644 CE), Confucianism was transformed by responding to challenges posed by Buddhism and Daoism, which was coined as “Neo-Confucianism” in the West. The fourth stage is marked by the spread of Confucianism into other east Asian countries and its adoption by local cultures. The fifth stage emerged in the 20th century, where Confucianism transformed and developed as it became in contact with other world philosophies and religions, especially those with roots in Europe.”

Thus, we can see that while Confucianism is deeply rooted within Chinese culture, it has evolved as it encountered different cultures throughout its history.

Confucianism and Education

Confucians believed self-cultivation to be essential to learning as stated at the beginning of *The Analects*, “to learn something and rehearse it constantly, is this indeed not a pleasure?” (*The Analects*, 1.1). According to Yao and Yao’s research (2000), Confucianism has significantly influenced Chinese education methods since 200 BCE. Taixue (太学), the ancient Chinese education system, was established to train government officials through the study of Confucian classics and literature (Yao & Yao, 2000). While Keju (科举), the Imperial Civil Service Examination System, was established in 603 CE and used to select talented people to supervise different departments within government (Yao & Yao, 2000). This examination system has paved the route for people to improve their social status (Wang & Ross, 2010).

According to Yao (2000), Confucius established private and equal education in China, while his followers used Confucian learning methods to promote the development of the Chinese education system. However, ‘equal education’ is not equal for everyone, as females and people in poverty cannot access this education. For instance, women do not have an education right, and most families simply cannot afford to lose their son’s labour around the family plot (Yao & Yao, 2000). Furthermore, Confucius believed that common people should not be well-educated as he states that “the common people can be induced to travel along the way, but they cannot be induced to realize (zhi 知) it” (*The Analects*, 8.9). Thus, the term ‘equal education’ was utopic and non-achievable.

Confucian Moral Education. Moral education plays an essential role within Confucian education. Confucians believe that moral education can improve the cultivation of an individual's virtuous personality, while perfecting their ethical order (Sun, 2011). For educators, moral education can improve teaching methods, respect levels for others and listening skills to support students (Huang, 2004).

According to Yao and Yao's research (2000) Confucius understood moral education as governed by four virtues: sincerity, filial piety, righteousness and benevolence. Yao and Yao believed that benevolence (仁) is the most important virtue according Confucian teaching. Wang (2004) states that benevolence is found through the performance of li (rites, rituals, and social and political orders). The teaching material for Confucian moral education includes the Four Books¹ and the Five Classics.²

The main content taught for moral education in ancient Chinese societies is often summarized through The Three Principle Relationships and the Five Constant Virtues (Wang, 2004). The Three Principle Relationships implied a hierarchical connection where the monarch guides the subject, the father guides the son and the husband guides the wife (Chen, 1994). According to Wang (2004), the Three Principal Relationships encouraged ancient Chinese societies to have both national and family ethics. Furthermore, it determined that everyone should be a subordinate of the emperor, while wives and sons must obey husbands' and fathers' orders, which ultimately enforces national ethics and

¹ The Four Books are: *The Analects of Confucius*; *Mencius*; *The Great Learning*; and *The Doctrine of the Mean*.

² The Five Classics are: *The Book of History*; *The Book of Songs*; *The Book of Rites*; *The Book of Changes*; and *The Book of the Spring and Autumn Annals*.

loyalty to the nation. The Five Constant Virtues were the ethical values that shaped the upbringing of members within a society and included benevolence, righteousness, courteousness, wisdom, and honesty (Yao & Yao, 2000). Confucians believed that an exemplary person (君子) should practice caution in their speech, should be arduous in their labour, and should possess introspection and self-control (Yao, 2000). On this note, Confucius insisted that a person will make fewer errors if they are able to listen broadly, avoid discussing topics on which they have limited knowledge, and speak wisely on those topics they do understand (*The Analects*, 2.18). The essence of moral education is in emphasizing harmonious relationships between people and nature, as well as those between individuals and the nation (Yao, 2000). Under this view, humans, society and nature can be in harmony, where individuals are content, and thus, the cohesion and patriotism of the Chinese nation could be enhanced (Zhao, 2007).

Confucian Pedagogical Philosophy. To implement moral education and the effective spread of Confucian knowledge and ideals, Confucian scholars developed several teaching methods and strategies. According to Wang's research (2004), these methods included to proceed in an orderly manner, to teach students according to their natural abilities, to learn from exemplars, to adapt to environmental conditions and practices, as well as hold a commitment to self-cultivation and social responsibility.

Confucian thinkers believe that education should comply with the principle of proceeding in an orderly way and by small increments (Wang, 2004). Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi (1981), founders of Neo-Confucianism, suggested that an excellent teacher practices their pedagogy by following a particular order. Confucius and his followers considered that role modelling by teachers, along with environmental influences were

important for the development of a student's morality. Confucius supports this notion when he states that "[i]t is indeed a privilege to live in a neighborhood where humanity prevails. If a man does not insist on such an environment when selecting his residence, how can he be counted as wise?" (*The Analects*, 4.1). Furthermore, Wang (2004) argued that this method is based on human psychology. As the scholar describes, the method worked by exerting a subtle influence on a person's character, while having a strong and enduring effect on a person's thinking, behaviour, and temperament.

Confucianism also emphasized self-cultivation, which includes four main aspects: having few desires; awakening one's conscience; raising one's sense of shame; and being strict with oneself. When discussing the control of desires, Confucius said: Do not look at what is contrary to courteousness; do not listen to what is contrary to courteousness; do not speak what is contrary to courteousness and do not do what is contrary to courteousness (*The Analects*, 12.1). According to Wang (2004), raising one's sense of shame refers to the self-awareness of one's errors in speech or through actions, and thus, the development of disgraceful feelings for having acted against one's conscience or behaviour. In addition, this sense of shame can be fostered through self-blame brought upon by the condemnation of others (Wang, 2004). This definition is supported by Mencius when he states that "whoever has no sense of shame is not human" (Yang, 1960). Furthermore, this principle is echoed in the *The Great Learning*, where it states that "a noble person is self-critical when alone" (Zhu, 1996). This context provides reason as to why protecting one's reputation and credibility is deeply rooted within Chinese culture. According to Wang (2004), another pedagogical tenet in Confucianism is that virtue lies in practice. This is supported within *The Book of Changes*, "practice is the

foundation of morality” (Zhou, 1991), and in *The Book of Rites*, “a person is approaching benevolence as long as he tries his best in practice” (Zhu, 1996). Wang (2004) argued that practice is both the start and end points for cultivating a person’s moral character, and people should support their words through practice.

Confucianism greatly influences Chinese educational philosophy. The Chinese proverb “diligence compensates for stupidity” supports this belief. In addition, it is a common belief in China that people can achieve any goals if they persist. This perspective contrasts with the view within Western culture, where a student’s ability is considered relatively more important to support their success (Leung, 1998). According to Hess, Chang, and McDevitt (1987), Chinese mothers usually attribute a child’s failure to the child’s lack of effort, while their success is accredited to the school systems. In contrast, from Hess, Chang, and McDevitt’s research (1987) American mothers were more likely to attribute the failure to the child’s lack of ability. This research also found that Chinese mothers prefer to use punishment or the threat of punishment as an incentive. A research study by Stevenson (1987) showed that teachers in Beijing and Hong Kong considered that a student’s efforts had more incidence in their success or failure, rather than their ability. Based on these studies, we can interpret that Chinese parents and teachers are more likely to attribute a child’s success or failure to internal and controllable factors.

According to *The Book of Rites* (Liji), a core text in the Confucian canon, Confucian scholars believed that people should cultivate themselves, regulate their families, manage the nation and bring peace to the world. Thus, people believe that being a civil servant or government official is a great honor that can provide an opportunity to

manage the nation and bring peace to the world. The Imperial Examination System was established under this belief. According to Yao and Yao's research (2000), due to the influence of Confucianism, China is the first country in the world where a national examination system was introduced, as the Keju examination system was established during the Sui Dynasty (A.D. 600). Within the Chinese educational philosophy, examinations are not only an old tradition, but also promote competition between students. Chinese students believe that examinations are a fair method of differentiating between the able and the less able (Leung, 1998). In addition, Leung (1998) believed that "examination[s] [have] acquired the position of something of value in itself and [become] an important incentive for study." According to Cheng's research (1994), education was designed for success in examinations, rather than focusing on the development of practical skills or real-world applications.

Furthermore, Chinese educational philosophy greatly emphasizes memorization. As Liu (1984) describes, Chinese teachers mandate their students to completely memorize Chinese language textbooks. A study by Stevenson and Cunningham (1984) supports this view. The study describes that a higher number of teachers in Beijing and Hong Kong agreed that learning mathematics involves mostly memorizing skills, compared to teachers in London (Stevenson & Cunningham, 1984).

Family Education. Hierarchies and bureaucratic behaviours are reflected in traditional Chinese families. According to Yao and Yao (2000), Confucius believed a person has five relationships: father-son, ruler-subject, husband-wife, older sibling-younger sibling, and friend-friend. According to Gardner (2014), everyone's role and responsibilities is clearly defined. These five relationships provide Chinese families with

a model to follow, thereby bringing harmony to families, communities, and the empire.

Furthermore, a family is considered to be a microcosm of society, as well as the focus when learning about human relationships and the norms that govern them (Gardner, 2014). This model suggests the implementation of specific societal norms and behaviours were a son will be obedient to the ruler; a younger brother will be respectful with elders; and a daughter or wife will be submissive to a man. In a Chinese family, the patriarch is the only member that can make family decisions, parent the children and command his wife.

Parents-Children. In *The Book of Rites* (礼记), Confucian scholars state the following:

“A filial son, in nourishing his aging parents, seeks to make their hearts glad and not to go against their will; to make their ears and eyes glad and bring comfort to them in their bed-chambers; and to support them wholeheartedly with food and drink-such is the filial son to the end of the life. By “the end of the life”, I mean not the end of his parents’ lives, but the end of his own life. Thus, what his parents loved he will love, and what they revered he will reverence. He will do so even in regard to all their dogs or horses, and how much more in regard to the men whom they valued.” (Neizhe, 12)

From this excerpt, we can appreciate that the Chinese family system has a clear and highly structured hierarchy (Huang & Gove, 2015). Children should obey their parents’ authority, and strive to achieve the goals their parents have set out for them. This is filial piety is commonly seen as children often show respect and obedience to parental demands and authority (Leung, 1998). Moneta (2004) supports this with study finding

that suggest that Asian children are comfortable following instructions. In addition, the authority imposed by Chinese parents can be observed through decisions made concerning education choices, such as homework activities, examinations, school selections, and career choices, among others (Huang & Gove, 2012). Huang and Gove (2012) further describe that due to filial piety and familial harmony, Asian families demand academic excellence. In light of this, poor academic performance in children often brings shame to the family and hinders its reputation.

Male-Female. In Confucian culture, males are to govern societies and families, influencing a power balance where females in turn, have a lower position within these bodies (Yao & Yao, 2000). Yao and Yao (2000) believed that under a Confucian perspective, women have no place in public life. Furthermore, Confucius claimed that males should supervise females (Yao & Yao, 2000). In result, family lineage was tracked only through males that came from a male ancestor and would remain tracked as long as the family continued to produce male offspring (Gardner, 2014). Males, as the inherent decision makers, can command females in a traditional Chinese family, while the latter cannot refuse or revolt against male authority.

Confucius said that “[w]oman and petty men (小人) are especially hard to handle” (*The Analects*, 17.23). This sentence serves as evidence to the sexism and disparagement experienced by woman. According to Gardner (2014), girls growing up in high societies would commonly learn to read Confucian texts such as *The Analects*, *The Mencius*, the *Book of Poetry*, the *Book of Filial Piety*, as well as *Lessons for Women* by Ban Zhao. These books educate girls into becoming marriageable women and how to raise their children, while enforcing the same pattern. As described in the books, the purpose of

educating girls is so that they serve their husbands and sons, rather than nourishing their personal needs and aspirations. These learning ultimately forbid girls from developing their own thought processes by limiting the flow of knowledge and access to education. As Gardner (2014) describes, women were never permitted to be government officials, nor were they ever allowed to enter the examination compound. In opposition, women are secluded to serve their families by completing ordinary household chores, such as cooking, cleaning, sewing and weaving. According to Yao and Yao's research (2000), many Confucian proverbs and texts emphasize the subordination of women, leading to a life without autonomy with the sole purpose of serving other family members, where women can be mothers, teachers and homemakers, but cannot be their true self.

Chinese International Students

Many studies investigated the adaptation and transition of international students to the North American campus life (Dillon & Swann, 1997; Kuo & Roysircar, 2004; Liang, 2003; Yang, Noels & Saumure, 2006). Other studies focus on education methods (Jiao, 2006; Zhao, Kuh & Carini, 2005). Furthermore, it has been observed that international student may perceive learning environments differently (Koul & Fisher, 2005) due to the cultural clash that impacts the diverse learning activities (Lambert, 1973).

A significant body of research also shows that international students face more challenges on campus when compared to domestic students (Kuo & Roysircar, 2004; Zheng & Berry, 1991). Challenges include difficulty with the English language, cultural shocks, and loneliness (Berry, 1997; Kim & Abreu, 2001). Similarly, not only do international students have to face language barriers, but also have different expectations and studying methods than local students do (Grey, 2002). Language barriers is the most

significant issue international students face, as they express difficulty is in the use of the English language (Mori, 2000). Stafford, Marion, and Salter (1980) support this claim when they reported that Asian international students in general, express similar idiomatic challenges when compared to international students from other continents. For example, Chinese students struggle with unfamiliar vocabulary, comprehension of lecture content, and knowledge presuppositions (Beres & Woloshyn, 2017). Multiple research studies show that there is a correlation between English language fluency levels and the academic performance of international students (Kao & Gansneder, 1995; Lin & Li, 1997).

Yeh and Inose's research (2003) stated that Chinese students are likely to experience an academic problem. Liu (2009), additionally, believes that a strong emphasis on academic achievement can result in international students feeling highly pressured to succeed. Furthermore, a study by Sue and Sue (1990) shows that Asian students are more afraid of academic failure than other students. Thus, Chinese international students experience considerably higher levels of anxiety, pressure and loneliness, as well as more challenges in social settings when compared to other students (Sue & Morishima, 1982). Influenced by their previous educational experiences, it seems that international students prefer listening rather than speaking within classes (Edwards & Tonkin, 1990). Additional research further supports this view as it shows that Chinese graduate students tend to refrain from actively participating in classroom activities (Chen, 1996; Pinheiro, 2001; Wan, 2001).

Furthermore, according to Portin's research (1993), Chinese international students are less likely to ask questions or express their opinions in class, as they tend to be unsure

how and when to interrupt in an unfamiliar sociolinguistic context. Hessler (2001)

supports this by saying that "Chinese teachers are respected without question. The teacher teaches and is right, and the students' studies are wrong" (p.68). The teacher-centered lecture method used currently in Chinese education, has been the dominant approach used for centuries (Wang & Farmer, 2008). On this note, Oxford, Holloway and Horton-Murillo (1992) suggest that culture has a significant effect on learning. For example, the Chinese proverb *silence is gold*, emphasizes the importance of remaining reserved in order to show courtesy instead. The proverb suggests that one should listen to others and absorb their opinions before providing their own thoughts (Frank, Harvey & Verdun, 2000). Some researchers believe that Chinese international students do not participate in classroom settings, because they do not want to damage their reputation (Lu & Han, 2010). In result, Chinese students prefer to carefully consider a topic before responding to related questions or participate in group discussions. While Lu and Han (2010) also believe that personality and traditional culture can influence student participation levels, their research does not investigate specific character traits, nor precisely how culture affects overall participation. Furthermore, the fear of losing others' respect along with reticent tendencies due to shyness and modesty, may influence Chinese students' reluctance to participate in group discussions (Beres & Woloshyn, 2017).

Homesickness is another challenge international students regularly face.

According to Adelman's (1988) research, international students experience feelings of loneliness as they long for their families, while dealing with social acceptance.

International students also have added pressures due to transitioning challenges that arise as they adapt to new cultural environments, different educational systems and languages

(Campbell, 2012). Fisher and Hood (1987) further support that homesickness often accompanies students' transition to university life. As previously mentioned, strong familial links within Chinese culture are likely to exacerbate this problem among Chinese international students. As Liu (2009) describes, children raised in China are taught to be obedient, have respect and a duty to their parents, which has lasting effects on the mental health of Chinese international students'. In addition, while filial piety is highly valued among Chinese people, nearly all Chinese students seeking counseling experienced stress associated with it (Bourne, 1975).

Other challenges, including racism, restrictions due to non-immigrant visas, as well as financial problems, also increase stress levels of Chinese international students, which may lead to psychological ramifications (Liu, 2009). Lee and Rice's (2007) study revealed that students from the Middle East, Africa, East Asia, Latin America and India face discrimination, making the adaptation process difficult.

Self-Confidence

This segment introduces definitions for self-confidence and other related concepts, including self-efficacy, self-esteem, self-satisfaction and self-worth. Additionally, this section includes a review on the current research regarding overall student confidence.

Self-Confidence and Related Concepts

Many terms can be used to describe one's perceived capability to reach an effective performance level, including self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-esteem, self-satisfaction and self-worth.

According to Kukulu, Korbkcü, Özdemir, Bezci, and Calik (2013), self-confidence is defined as an individual's ability to recognize their own skills, while being capable of loving themselves and having an awareness of their own emotions. On this note, self-confidence can help develop feelings of well-being due to deepening positive emotions. Self-confident people also trust their abilities and are able to exercise control on their lives (Kukulu, Korbkcü, Özdemir, Bezci & Calik 2013). In turn, they believe that they can accomplish what they wish and plan for. Alias and Hafir (2009) describe that acceptance of oneself and one's limitations, along with trust on one's abilities while maintaining realistic expectations, can help maintain a positive attitude.

Self-efficacy can be described as the conviction one should possess to successfully execute a plan to produce a specific outcome (Bandura, 1977). This can also be considered as situation-specific self-confidence (Bandura, 1977). Bandura (1986) argues that self-efficacy is not focused on the skills an individual has, but rather on what can an individual accomplish with the skills they possesses. The scholar also distinguishes self-efficacy from self-confidence, by stating that the latter refers to the strength of one's conviction regardless of the level of perceived competence (Bandura, 1986). Bandura (1986) prefers to use the term self-efficacy to determine one's perceived performance level and the strength of that belief.

Self-esteem can be understood as the self-perception of one's worth level (Feltz, 1988). Diener and Larsen (1993) describe self-esteem as one's balance between positive and negative, ultimately contributing to their life satisfaction level. According to Neff's study (2011), individuals with high self-esteem consider themselves important, worthy of

other's respect and approval, and able of having a beneficial effect. In opposition, individuals with low self-esteem do not consider themselves important, lack lovability and confidence, nor do they trust their capabilities (Neff, 2011). In light of this, high self-esteem tends to result in a better psychological health, while low self-esteem is associated with poorer psychological health and functioning levels (Arslan, Hamarta & Uslu, 2010). Feltz (1988) argued that self-confidence and self-esteem may be related. For instance, while some individuals may not have a strong self-confidence for completing a given activity, they still view themselves in a positive way (Feltz, 1988). In contrast, other individuals may regard themselves as highly competent at a given task, but still do not have a favourable view about them (Feltz, 1988).

Some research studies argue that self-confidence has often been conceptualized and understood as "self-concept" and "self-efficacy" (Bong & Clark, 1999; Bong & Skaalvia, 2003). Sheldrake (2016) believed that self-concept helps develop a general image of one's trust in their abilities by integrating historical experiences (such as specific academic occasions or challenging accomplishments), with current evaluative or interpretative beliefs (for instance, whether a student is currently succeeding academically or proficient in a given subject). Alternatively, Sheldrake (2016) believes that self-efficacy considers one's evaluative beliefs on their performance in future challenges, including their confidence in getting a particular examination grade, or successfully accomplishing a particular exercise. Self-concept refers to one's current self-confidence level regarding their active task, while self-efficacy refers to one's self-confidence level in future challenges.

Research on Self-Confidence

This section will introduce the previous research about self-confidence from different aspects. Including academic performance, class participation, language, feedback, leadership, culture and gender.

Confidence and Performance. Confidence has been identified as an important factor that affects academic performance (Nicholson, Putwain, Connors & Hornby-Atkinson, 2013). Leman (1999) supports this thought when he notes that the greater the trust on one's ability, the greater the possibility of anticipating success when facing a challenge or completing a task. Zorkina and Nalbone conducted a well-known research study about self-efficacy and academic performance in 2003. In the study, they randomly allocated students to two different groups and asked them to complete the same test. One group was told that the test was designed for Ivy League university students, while the other group was told that it was prepared for high school students instead. The test results suggested that this setting difference influenced the participants' performance and confidence level. This research also revealed that student confidence and academic performance are influenced by the environment and the instructors' use of language. Alfassi's (2004) research also evidenced the importance of self-efficacy in education. This study showed that promoting self-efficacy for students who are at risk of withdrawing from school can improve their academic performance and self-confidence levels.

Confidence and Class Participation. Several scholars set their research focus on the relationship between student self-confidence and class participation. Studies by Fassinger (1995) and Neer (1987) highlight that student confidence is the major influence

for class participation. The scholars suggest that student confidence levels and class participation are both affected by overall language skills and cultural backgrounds. In addition, peer support also plays a considerable role in helping international students build the confidence to participate in classroom activities (Liu, 2007; Lu & Hsu, 2008; Tompson & Tompson, 1996). Furthermore, other studies show that students may feel intimidated or inadequate when speaking in class settings, resulting in low participation (Armstrong & Boud, 1983; Fritschner, 2000; Howard & Henney, 1998; Hyde & Ruth, 2002; Karp & Yoels, 1976; Weaver & Qi, 2005). Due to this, student confidence is considered a crucial factor that motivates student participation (Armstrong & Boud, 1983; Fassinger, 1995; Wade, 1994; Weaver & Qi, 2005).

Confidence and Language. Clément's (1996) research presents the term *second language confidence* and defines it as one's confidence in being able to communicate in an efficient way when using a second language. Many studies within the literature focus on confidence level of international students' pertaining to the use of a foreign language, revealing that language anxiety has a negative impact on students' academic performance (Aida, 1994; Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). Sawir's (2005) research brought to light some of the problems that international students encounter when coping with a second language, including linguistic confidence, English proficiency and motivation. This study also suggested that the lack of confidence in using a second language was one of the more serious learning difficulties international students face. According to Pak, Dion and Dion (1985), high levels of self-confidence in the use of the English language had a positive influence on self-esteem, the perceived sense of self-control, and overall quality of life among international students in Toronto. Furthermore, ,

a student's willingness to express themselves in their first language has a correlation with their confidence in speaking the second language (Osboe, Fujimura & Hirschel, 2007).

Confidence and Feedback. There is limited research regarding the relationship between self-confidence and feedback within the education industry. According to a study by Tzetzis, Evandros, and Kourtessis (2008), encouragement along with constructive feedback may help a child improve their performance, strive to achieve better results and raise self-confidence levels. Additional research showed that feedback can influence self-confidence levels in athletes (Allen & Howe, 1998). From these studies, we can infer that positive feedback can act as a rewarding tool that may increase self-confidence levels, while negative feedback can do the exact opposite.

Confidence and Leadership. The literature highlights the relationship between confidence and leadership. Some researchers believe that leadership self-efficacy refers to one's confidence in their ability to lead, and this quality frequently impacts whether or not one decides to lead (Hannah, Avolio, Luthans & Harms, 2008; Komives & Dugan, 2010; Murphy, 2002; Paglis, 2010). According to research by McCormick, Tanguma and Lopez-Forment (2002), leadership self-efficacy also means that one has the aptitude and knowledge to perform a specific task in a leader role. The researchers further state that this personal belief can change based on self-esteem, competency and environment, and conclude that self-efficacy levels are proportional to the number of leading attempts conducted by a person. Chhokar, Brodbeck and House (2007) argued that leadership can be influenced by culture and may be rooted within cultural practices and values.

Confidence and Culture. Bachman and O'Malley's study (1980) found that a child's self-confidence could be positively influenced by the family's background and academic

aptitudes. Goodman and Gregg' (2010) unearthed a robust intergenerational correlation between cognitive skills and confidence. Lunderberg, Fox, and Brown's (2000) research shows that cultures can also influence self-confidence. This study also states that people from certain cultures tend to display overconfidence, while in opposition, those from other cultures may choose to remain circumspect (Lunderberg, Fox & Brown, 2000). The research concluded that students from Taiwan had the lowest self-confidence levels when compared to students from other world regions³. This study also suggested that educational methods within the Confucian philosophy tend to foster a prudent demeanor.

Confidence and Gender. Tavani and Losh (2003) provide an overview of the literature, which highlights that males typically have higher levels of self-confidence than females within professional and social situations. In a study observing children, it was noted that boys are prone to identifying self-enhancing patterns when describing their aptitudes and achievements, while girls are instead prone to demonstrating self-derogating patterns (Burgner & Hewstone, 1993; Furnham & Rawles, 1995; Stipek & Gralinski, 1991). This, ultimately, supports the view that girls show less self-confidence than boys.

Second Language Confidence and Willingness to Communicate. Previous studies attempted to understand why some individuals sought (whereas others avoided) second language interactions from psychological, educational, linguistic, and communicative perspectives (Brown, 1991; Skehan, 1989; Tucker, Hamayan & Genesee, 1976). Communication anxiety and perceived communication competence have also been repeatedly identified in many studies as two of the most influential predictors for

³ Regions included in the study: Israel, Netherlands, Palestine, Taiwan, and the United States.

understanding the willingness to communicate (Baker & MacIntyre, 2000; McCroskey & Richmond, 1991). Furthermore, linguistic confidence was determined as an important predictor of foreign language proficiency (Clément, Dörnyei & Noels, 1994).

Gap in Previous Research

This literature review discovered an overall absence of studies regarding links between Confucianism and self-confidence. On this note, most studies analyzing Confucianism in education tend to focus on pedagogical methods from an instructor's perspective.

Regardless, previous research in the field established the influence that a cultural background can exert on a student's self-confidence (Fassinger, 2000; Neer, 1987; Lunderberg, Fox & Brown, 2000). However, these studies did not investigate how a specific cultural background may influence self-confidence levels in students. In addition, many studies (Sawir, 2005; Brown, 1991; Skehan, 1989; Tucker, Hamayan & Genesee, 1976) are only focused on confidence levels for international students regarding linguistic applications. While confidence levels for the use of a second language do play an important role for international students, their academic performance, communication skills and mental health are influenced by multiple confidence predictors (Lu & Han, 2010). Furthermore, studies investigating relationships between feedback and self-confidence are mostly focused on the sporting industry and the impact on athletes.

In light of these limitations, this research project focuses on Confucian culture and investigates the correlations between cultural backgrounds and self-confidence

levels. This study strives to address the literature gap by focusing on the link between Confucianism and confidence levels from a student perspective. This research also aims to show how constructive feedback can influence self-confidence level for students. Ultimately, this study undertakes a multilevel investigation regarding self-confidence levels pertaining to class participation, leadership, teamwork and feedback, for Chinese international students.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter introduces the key research questions guiding this study.

Furthermore, this part will also present details pertaining to the participants' background, along with the structure, procedure and method governing the data collection and analysis processes. Pseudonyms were either chosen or assigned to the participants, and personal identifiers (e.g., name, birth date, age, address, etc.) were removed from the transcription.

Research Questions

The purpose of this paper is to explore the influence of Confucian culture on the reluctance to actively engage within a classroom observed in Chinese international students and thus, draw connections between self-confidence levels and the deeply rooted Confucian teachings. This study will attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. How does Confucian culture influence self-confidence levels of Chinese international students in academic settings?
2. What are the positive and negative influences of Confucian values on Chinese international students studying in Canada?

Participants

For the purpose of this investigation, Chinese international students are identified as Chinese-born students who completed K-12 public education in mainland China and are currently enrolled in postsecondary education programs in Canada under a student visa. This unique cohort of international students shall be distinguished from the following university student groups: students who did not complete Chinese elementary education; students who were enrolled in international schools within mainland China; students who studied in Taiwan or Hong Kong; and students who possess a Canadian

permanent resident visa.

The research participants were four Chinese international graduate students from mainland China who, at the time of the interview, were only enrolled in one academic institution and working towards a single program diploma. All students voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. Since Confucianism stipulates different roles for males and females, thus resulting in different self-confidence levels for each gender, this study also aims to explore those differences. Participants recruited included an equal number of males and females ranged in age from 23 to 36 years ($M=24$), and capable of communicating in Mandarin.

Method

This study utilized qualitative research design. This approach aims to explore a phenomenon by relying on the views of participants (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2014). The current study conducted rigorous interviews in a semi-structured format to collect and examine data regarding Confucian influences on the self-confidence levels of Chinese international students. The aim of qualitative, interview-based research is to explore multiple perspectives about how the participants perceive, interpret and experience their lives (Schultze & Avital, 2011). Thus, it is conducive to ensure that these interviews probe into the stories, experiences, and perspectives that provide a glimpse of the interviewees' self-confidence levels. Additionally, the use of open-ended questions in semi-structured interviews permits the researcher to capture instinctive responses and perspectives during the process, while allowing for follow up questions probing to seek confirmation and clarification (Patton, 2002). Due to this, this interview method was used throughout this study to collect detailed information about the participants' acculturation

experiences. Since Mandarin is the interviewees' mother tongue, the interviews were conducted in this language to provide the participants with the opportunity to express their experiences, thoughts and emotions accurately. The interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams due to the restrictions in light of COVID-19. The interviews were broken down into two parts to provide an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the process of acculturation: (1) Awareness of Confucius Values; and (2) Learning Experience in the International Program.

Data analysis

According to Plano Clark and Creswell (2015), the analysis of qualitative data is completed by following these five steps: preparing the data; exploring the data; coding the data; developing description and themes; and validating the findings (p. 354). This research applied this data analysis procedure. The audio for the interviews was recorded and transcribed. Following this, transcriptions were verified to ensure accuracy, and all data was reviewed to ensure that the information was adequately prepared for the next step.

After preparing the information, I began coding the data manually by identifying and highlighting segments of text and assigning a code that summarizes their meaning (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015). This research applied two coding strategies: open coding; and axial coding. Open coding refers to the act of "summarizing the content of short sections of text (each "unit" of meaning) in a few words, on a line-by-line basis" (Hancock et al., 2007, p. 27). Once the open coding process is completed, the axial coding strategy is employed. Axial coding allows to classify great quantities of codes into broader categories and order them to discover emerging patterns and themes. The

information derived from these processes are recorded as memos and reflections in the margins. Accurate interpretations of both instructor and student perceptions, experiences, preferences and languages is crucial during the coding stage, since it is helpful for the identification and development of themes from the available data. Lastly, I used a data table and mind map to ensure that the information remained clear and well-organized, allowing me to gain a better understanding of the data.

Procedure

The research examined the influences of Confucianism on self-confidence levels of four Chinese international students, who were, at the time of the interview, enrolled in master's programs at a single university in southern Ontario. All the interviews were conducted in July 2020. Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Board in June 2020 (File Number: 20-108-MGOMBELO). The participants for this study were chosen by using purposive sampling, meaning that the participants selected were considered to be the most appropriate for this investigation (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015). The interviewees were recruited using social media platforms (such as WeChat), and were picked from a cohort of full-time graduate students in Ontario, set to graduate in Fall 2020. Students who showed interest in taking part within this research study, and met the inclusion criteria listed above, were contacted and provided with the details pertaining to the interview.

Before commencing the interview, participants were asked to sign informed consent forms detailing the purpose of the study, potential benefits and risks, confidentiality issues, and the implications of participating in the research. The interview questions were translated into Mandarin and distributed to the participants once they

confirmed their participation and signed the corresponding consent form. Interviews were approximately 30 minutes in length and were individually conducted with each student. All the interviews were carried out in Mandarin to ensure clear verbal expression, as well as effective and meaningful communications. The interviews were conducted using Microsoft Teams due to lockdowns related to COVID-19, while ensuring social distance protocols. Interviewees were given the opportunity to stay in their homes, and thus, provide a comfortable and safe environment that can enhance the experience. Participants were also informed in advance about their right to refuse or withdraw from the study at any time before the interviews formally began. While no significant risks were identified within this study, it was recognized that the students may feel distress when recalling negative occurrences experienced while completing their academic programs. To minimize risks, participants were informed of this potentiality both through the letter of invitation and the consent form. In addition, the students were advised prior to the interview that there would be no consequences if they chose to withhold information related to their negative experiences. Participants were also told that interviews could be ended immediately, should they feel any emotional discomfort.

All interviews were audiotaped, transcribed verbatim, and selectively translated into English. To help ensure the accuracy of interviewee responses, answers were reflected back, and probes were used to seek confirmation and clarification during the interviews. The information the participants provided will be kept confidential. In result, participant names have not been included within this study and will not be included in any subsequent work or reports arising from this study. Recordings were repeatedly listened to and continuously verified to ensure transcriptions were accurate. Furthermore,

copies of the individual interview transcripts were provided to each participant shortly after the interview, to provide them with an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversations, and to expand on or clarify any points, as needed. Participants were also given the opportunity to clarify any information that was deemed ambiguous by the researcher. Lastly, a complete data set was confirmed after a thorough scrutiny of the transcriptions to ensure the consistency and credibility of the findings.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This study examined how Confucianism influences self-confidence levels on Chinese international students. The participants recruited for this research included four female and one male Chinese international students, who simultaneously completed a regular K-12 diploma and an international education program in China. The data collected from the interviews, along with its posterior analysis, allowed to identify two aspects that affect the perceptions these international students develop regarding the influence of Confucian culture on their self-confidence levels while completing the graduate program. These aspects are: Confucian values; and education experiences in China and Canada. Furthermore, the data analysis attempted to explore the relationship between Confucianism, the participants' overall academic experience, and their introspective process during this period.

This chapter presents a summary of the findings of this research study. These results have been nested within the following themes: Confucian influences; pedagogical differences between China and Canada; and academic experience in the international program.

Confucian Influences

Confucianism, the most widespread and significant philosophy in Chinese culture, has shaped the education field (Huang & Gove, 2012). This section presents the perceptions the participants developed regarding: the overall influence of Confucianism on their lives; the most influential Confucian values; and the positive influences of Confucianism in their education.

Deeply Rooted Influence

The findings indicate that Confucianism has a significant influence on Chinese international students. All participants expressed the belief that the philosophy had a deep impact on their studies and lives. The participants indicated an overall lack of awareness regarding the direct influences of Confucian learnings on actions taken or ideas they developed during their learning experiences. However, upon further reflection, they all believed that their behaviours are reflected within Confucian culture. As Mike, one of the participants, noted, "I think Confucianism has penetrated our education, words, deeds, and established some unwritten behaviours. It permeates every aspect of our lives". This suggests that participants believe that Confucianism is deeply rooted within their subconsciousness. Mike supports this notion when he said:

"From the beginning, I didn't actually feel that my own words and behaviours are related to Confucianism. Later, when I learned some of the contents of Confucianism, such as cherishing life, being friendly and tolerant, I realized that Confucianism has influenced my life."

It is when participants recall their behaviours and thoughts, that they find many shadows of Confucianism behind their actions, as they are not always aware on how Confucian tenets are reflected through their activities.

Confucian Learning Environment

There are several ways in which participants can acquire Confucian knowledge, including through learning opportunities at homes and schools. Furthermore, in Chinese provinces where the influence of Confucianism is more prevalent, Confucian teachings

can also be learned in public places. Shandong, which was Confucius' hometown and the birthplace of Confucian philosophy, is one example of these provinces. In the case of this study, all participants had to learn Confucianism in schools. The findings of this paper revealed that Chinese students must be able to quote and understand classical Chinese texts during examinations. *The Analects of Confucius* provides the main teaching content for Chinese K-12 students. In addition, some participants affirmed that they learned Confucian ideals at home, where their upbringing instilled how to respect and maintain relationships with others, particularly relations with elders, parents, siblings, and teachers. Sarah, originally from Shandong, also confirmed that she did learn Confucian tenets in public places. For instance, passengers can find copies of *The Analects* on planes owned by Shandong Airlines.

Values in Education

Three of the participants (Sarah, Amber and Sherry) believed that the most important Confucian value is to nurture students' strengths (因材施教) and everyone can access education (有教无类). These interviewees also believe that students have different talents and abilities, and in turn consider that teachers should apply different teaching methods to align with the students' skills. On this note, they reckoned that teachers should not assess students through scores but should rather nourish the students' strengths, thus providing all the students with the opportunity to receive a rounded education. However, some participants (Sarah and Alice) noted that the modern Chinese education model (score-oriented) conflicts with this educational perspective.

Furthermore, all participants believed that people should generally portray certain behavioural traits. For instance, people should: maintain a humble demeanor; restrain from displaying prideful behaviours; ask others for advice before making decisions; avoid showcasing abilities and skills; and deflect opportunities to share personal values. In Chinese, the word *proud* is considered a derogatory term that reflects arrogance, and due to its meaning, it leads people to feel unsatisfied with their achievements. Amber also considers a cordial, upright, courteous, temperate, and complaisant demeanor to be another important Confucian value (温良恭俭让). This value enforces the Confucian notion that people should have a humble attitude, which echoes Amber's personal belief when she states, "I think a person needs to be humble. This is for sure. Also, I believe that low-key people are very good. In fact, I think low-key is a kind of Confucian value." Similarly, Sarah shared that "[w]hen [people] have outstanding skills or talents, they should hide their strength and believe that there are other people who are better than them."

Influence on Education

Confucianism still has a practical value in a multicultural environment, as those promoted within the framework of an international education program. To some extent, social justice and "everyone can access education" have similar propositions. In China, the "everyone can access education" value promotes universal access to education and improves ideologies, striving to provide all students with the same education opportunities. Within an international education program, "everyone can access education" raises confidence levels of Chinese students due to the inclusive learning

activities, while promoting an open mind approach to other cultures. Sarah, Amber and Mike agreed that “everyone can access education” was reflected within the international education program they completed, and concepts discussed helped them develop cultural inclusivity. Furthermore, Sarah noticed that “[i]n this [program], age, race, religion, and language have never become obstacles to the students’ learning.” Mike added that “[w]e should respect other cultures. This value can make me have a great enthusiasm for other cultures and accept intercultural differences with a more tolerant attitude.” These views support that Chinese international students tend to accept other cultures, and in turn, respect the cultural backgrounds of other students enrolled in the international education program.

Pedagogical Differences in China and Canada

In this section, I present the perceptions developed by participants regarding the difference between Chinese and Canadian education models. These perceptions include: the education systems; class environments; student-teachers interactions; and academic feedback strategies. The findings indicate that Chinese education is influenced by Confucianism and also suggest that Chinese students need to cope with conflicts as they complete the international program.

Education System

Sarah, Mike and Sherry believed that China and Canada have different education systems. Chinese education relies on examinations. On the contrary, Canadian education focuses on the development of creative skills. As Sherry said, “I had to spend all my time preparing for exams every day from elementary to high school. But in the international

program, I have more time to have some independent thinking.” Sarah added, “[m]y parents and teachers paid close attention to my academic performance, from elementary to high school. When I study in Canada, I have a lot of free time and less pressure from schoolwork. Our teachers encouraged us to have academic research and activities.” Mike also mentioned that Chinese education is teacher-centered and flows in one direction where students are the knowledge recipients.

Confucianism advocates that learning is the top priority for Chinese families and societies. This led to an improvement of the imperial examination system, which in turn served as the foundation of college entrance examinations. This reflects the importance of learning and testing within the Chinese education system.

Class Environment

Research (Wan, 2001) shows that Chinese classrooms are quieter and more tedious than Canadian classrooms. Sarah and Mike believe that Chinese and Canadian classes also portray different environments. They also shared that peer interactions were inexistent within the classroom during their education experience in China, thus avoiding pedagogical opportunities through group discussions, teamwork and presentations. However, group activities that encourage the exchange of ideas between students are the norm within the international program. In addition, the participants believed that class environments in Canada are active, which differs from the silent Chinese classrooms. On this note, Mike stated that “in the international program, students are very happy to share their opinions and have some debates. Students are very active and enthusiastic in the class, but in Chinese classrooms, students are quiet and listen to teachers.” Sarah also

noted that “in our project, students are willing to share their thoughts, even if their English pronunciation or oral English is not very good. This is different with Chinese classrooms.”

Interactions

Another difference is seen through the interactions between instructors and students. All participants agreed that relationships between teachers and students are different in China and Canada. Chinese classrooms are ridden with limitations and restrictions, where students respect teachers and obey their commands. However, Canadian classrooms do not have as many regulations. Some participants reflected that the teacher's role is viewed differently in each country, as they believed that Chinese instructors are seen as the “absolute authority” within Chinese classrooms, while Canadian teachers are seen as “friends” in Canada. Sarah shared some of the restrictions experienced in Chinese classrooms:

“Chinese classes are governed by orders and restrictions. For example, students have to stand up and greet teachers in every class. When students answer questions, they have to raise a hand, stand up and remain standing until the teacher allows them to sit back down. In Canadian classes, they can freely answer questions while sitting on their chairs, and teachers act in a friendly manner within the international program.”

Feedback Strategies

Amber and Sarah highlighted the different feedback strategies employed by Chinese and Canadian teachers. Amber believes that “teachers here [in Canada] love to

praise students, while the criticism in the international program is not very direct, and it is very discreet.” This approach provides a sense of acceptance. In contrast, both Amber and Sarah consider that teachers in China prefer not to praise the students. To illustrate this thought, Amber jokingly states that even in the case of scoring “a 100% in a test, a Chinese teacher may suggest that [the student’s] handwriting could be better.” Sarah shared a similar experience:

“Teachers taught us that even when you study well and have good grades, you shouldn’t feel pride for your achievements, as it is your responsibility to do well. Once you are proud, you will fall and get lost. They don’t want students to be proud and self-satisfied.”

Amber believed that the reason as to why Chinese teachers do not praise students is rooted in Confucian culture. On this topic, she stated:

“Teachers may think that you will never be perfect until you become a saint like Confucius. The cultural environment does not allow them to validate me. If teachers validate you often, it may cause you to regress. They feel that they are not strict enough with you.”

Confucianism influences the teaching methods and values of Chinese teachers. Due to this, teachers believe that praising students can negatively shape their behaviour as they may develop feelings related to vanity, which can in turn lead them to finding satisfaction with their current academic achievements. Thus, students would stop working hard and pursuing higher achievements.

Academic Experience in the International Program

This section describes the perceptions participants developed regarding their learning experiences in the international program, including learning predisposition, self-cognition, class participation, teamwork, feedback, and conflicts. The research discovered that participants' views on the relationship between their education experience and Confucianism changed during their time in the international program.

Learning Predisposition

“Do not stop learning” was a general value for all participants during their learning experiences in the program, which encouraged their curiosity and a strong work ethic. Some participants also believed that learning should happen anytime and anywhere, rather than it being limited to schools. Furthermore, they considered that students should set learning as a “life-long career” to continuously improve their education. Since knowledge and morality are infinite, people should have a humble attitude and strive to continue learning with others. On this note, Sarah quoted *The Analects* when she said, “when I walk along with two others, they may serve as my teachers.” She also added that “we should humbly learn from others, because other people will definitely have something worth learning.” Thus, continuous learning is a reflection of a humble attitude.

Confucianism, in particular, can help students to develop resiliency to better cope with pressure and frustration. Inspired by Confucian culture, Sherry reported that she persevered when facing obstacles:

“Confucius advocates for temperance and resiliency, which comfort me when I fail an exam or my future is unclear. These have provided solace during the college entrance examinations and the IELTS tests as part of this international program. I should not give up, even though I feel kind of overwhelmed. We must have the spirit to pursue learning. Do not stop learning when you leave school, and never give up. We should always be a student and maintain a humble attitude.”

In summary, Confucianism can promote students to develop curiosity and temperance during the international program. Especially in a multicultural environment where international students face more stresses and burdens. Confucianism comforted and inspired participants to overcome challenges, while remaining focused on their education.

Self-Concept

Participants expressed their views on certain terms during the self-assessments portion in the interview process. For instance, they all agreed that people should not boast about their success, and concluded that they should also strive for higher achievements rather than being content with current ones. Furthermore, it was evident from the interviews that “pride” is, in most cases, seen as a derogatory word in Chinese. Three female participants reported that they should not develop pride due to their achievements when they successfully accomplish a task. As Sarah said, “I cannot be proud even if my grades were good and I studied well, because pride will cause me to fall and get lost.” This thought echoes a Chinese proverb that states, “modesty helps one go forward,

whereas pride makes one lag behind.” Therefore, the participants habitually downplay their achievements and focus on their shortcomings to promote their progress.

Class Participation

The data analysis showed that three female participants were usually reluctant to share their views within the classroom, even though they had opinions on the subjects discussed. Participants reported that their personalities and Confucianism were two considerations that influenced their class participation. For instance, some participants reported that they prefer not to introduce themselves and display their thoughts in public. As Sarah elaborated, “I had my views and opinions, but I lacked the confidence to share them.” Sherry added that, “[s]ometimes I really want to talk, but the notion of careful speech pressures me not to speak lightly.” As seen, the Confucian tenet “speak consciously” (only those with adequate knowledge can discuss a topic) affected their desire to participate. In contrast, Mike, to a certain extent, felt proud and happy to share his own thoughts. He enjoyed sharing his point of view and encouraging class discussions.

However, all participants noted that they felt nervous and anxious when sharing their thoughts. They were concerned about potential reactions and comments from teachers and peers. For example, Sherry was worried about being interrupted by teachers and being ridiculed by classmates. Sarah and Amber were stressed about being misunderstood by instructors and students. Furthermore, Mike feared disagreements and was bothered when others disagreed with him. Regardless, all participants were

concerned about the classroom's overall reception to their comments, which lead to apprehension to participate in classes.

How Confucianism Influences Class Participation

All participants insisted that Confucian values influenced their class participation. Confucianism advocates that people should have a humble attitude, be moderate and speak wisely. On this topic, Sherry said:

“I didn't show myself very much when I was growing up because the sky is there. The bird that leaves the group will be shot. I don't want to be that bird. It isn't very good, so I didn't show myself too much.”

Sarah shared a similar opinion, “I did not take the initiative to perform, and create some opportunities for myself. I think this may be one of the reasons why I lack some self-confidence while studying abroad.” Amber reflected that her behaviour was influenced by moderation when she stated that she does not enjoy “being involved (出头) in school performances. I prefer to be in the middle; rather than being the first or last one.”

Sarah and Sherry reported that they are influenced by the “speak consciously” principle when participating in classes and agreed that people should replace words with actions. Furthermore, some participants believed that overtalking, can lead to mistakes and a sense of guilt. On this topic, Sherry said:

“Due to the influence of Confucianism, I prefer to talk less. I think if you are very reckless expressing your views, and if your opinion is wrong, it is a very

shameful and a bad thing. So, I always observe first, wait a moment, listen to what others say, and then express my own opinions. When I share my thoughts, I was very nervous and presented my ideas very quickly because I was afraid of being interrupted by the teacher or laughed at by my classmates.”

Teamwork

While most participants enjoyed working in teams, they usually took on a follower role. They liked to work in teams since it gave them the possibility of centralizing the team members' wisdom and abilities. They were able of discussing different ideas with and learning from other team members, which improved work efficiency. In contrast, Amber and Mike expressed some disadvantages of teamwork. Mike reported that sometimes he had to dedicate extra time to deal with conflicts within the team, because each team member had their own ideas and unique thinking processes. Amber reflected that teamwork is a relative concept, since assignments are actually being completed individually. Furthermore, three female participants stated that they prefer to take on a follower role within a team. In light of this, Sarah reported:

“I am the one being led in the team. It may seem because of my personality. I am not the kind of person who likes to be a leader. I don't want to express my thoughts and show my abilities, and I also feel that my leadership is not very strong, so I simply follow other's leadership decisions in the team.”

Personality and limited leadership skills aside, Sherry indicated that language competence is another barrier faced to be a leader, “since I am personally introverted, and my oral expression skills are not very strong, I don't have much confidence to be a

leader.” In addition, Amber dislikes undertaking teamwork responsibilities. She believed that leaders have more responsibilities and need to oversee everyone. In contrast, as a follower, one is only responsible for completing part of an assignment.

Mike had a different perception than the other participants as he felt that experience and knowledge can help determine who takes on follower or leader roles. On this note, he insisted that he would like to be a leader if his experience level is superior to others’:

“If I have done a similar project two or three times before, I have done it many times. It is very, very clear, and I know what the following measures will be and what challenges will there be in the whole process. At this time, I feel that I can be a competent leader. However, if I do not have much experience and knowledge, I prefer to be a follower.”

Feedback Strategies

Participants compared the feedback strategies used by Chinese teachers and parents with those applied by their Canadian counterparts, and shared their thoughts. To begin with, all participants expressed a humble attitude towards negative feedback. While they accept all criticism, negative feedback does make them feel uneasy and upset. These feelings encourage them to learn from critiques and strive to achieve better results in the future. Sarah supported this notion when she stated that “it is a great honor when my teachers and classmates give me feedback, which can make me aware of those personal deficiencies that I cannot see for myself. They can put forward some better opinions on my homework.”

Participants welcomed positive feedback throughout the international program, as it made them feel joyous. However, most of them still did not believe that they performed well despite of the positive feedback provided by instructors. While they considered that their work was decent, they believed that it was far from perfect. On this topic, Amber said, "I really think I deserved an eighty percent or even fifty percent, though I believe that teachers here give very positive feedback because they love to use positive words and praise students." Sherry shared a similar thought, "I don't think that I receive positive feedback because I did well. Maybe my teacher wants to encourage me to do better instead."

Disagreement, Challenging Authority and Conflict

This section will introduce the situation when interviewees have different opinions with their peers and teachers.

Disagreement. Only Mike shared an experience where he disagreed with others. When the participant had a different opinion than others, he chose not to express it. As he recollected, "what I learned from childhood is to be kind to others and restrain myself. When other people have different opinions, I may subconsciously tell myself that this is an opinion of other people, and I am not kind if I express disagreeing opinions directly."

Challenging Authority. While all participants believed that teachers can make mistakes, only half of the participants expressed that they would feel confident informing the teacher of their error. They also shared their experience when highlighting teachers' mistakes in elementary and high schools in China. Two participants believed that teachers hope that and feel pleased with students that will openly identify teachers' errors. The

other two participants believed that the context needs to be analyzed prior to addressing teachers' mistakes, as this may not be appropriate at all times. Sherry elaborated that one context relates to the country, as she would not dare to point out teachers' errors in China, but feels confident to do so in Canada:

“I don't dare to let teachers know in China because the role of the teacher is inviolable. However, in the international program, I have the courage to let teachers know because I am an equal to the teacher.”

Amber identified age to be another contextual factor used to determine whether to address teacher mistakes, or not.

“When I was young in China, I would definitely not. When I become older, I would point out teachers' mistakes with a bit of euphemism. I think teachers were the absolute authority when I was young in China. I didn't have enough knowledge to prove that the teacher must be wrong, even if he wrote one plus one equals three, which is an obvious mistake. Another reason is that teachers may lose face (没面子) if I point out their mistakes. Many students can point out the mistake when they see it; so, why me instead of them? Then I choose not to.”

Conflict. Two participants mentioned that they experienced conflicts with others. However, neither of them like to express discontent and have direct conflicts with people. By contrast, they would prefer to take a passive or pensive attitude to deal with conflicts. Amber expressed this view when she said, “I feel sad and less comfortable when I met people who are not very cooperative in teamwork. I always bear with the

burden and try to adapt to others, rather than expressing my discontent.” Furthermore, Mike said, “I am not a person who would like to react to others’ actions, so when I have conflicts in a team, I prefer to calm down, sit at a table and drink a coffee. Then, I aim to have a more peaceful way to solve conflicts, and exchange opinions and thoughts with others.”

Expectation

All participants share the same expectation – to complete the international program and obtain the diploma. Furthermore, they intend to study hard, have harmonious interactions with teachers and peers, and avoid making mistakes during the experience. While Amber hopes to access the education industry and become a teacher, the other participants recognized that they reached their academic goal and performed well, since they earned the diploma, made new friends, acquired helpful knowledge and experienced different cultures. Amber also stated that she exceeded her own expectations, since she was able to learn many valuable and diverse concepts in this program. In addition, Sarah expressed satisfaction in her performance throughout this program as she said, “earning the degree was a smooth process. My self-confidence has improved, because I tried my best to adapt to the new environment, and the teachers were supportive.” Only one participant remained unsure about whether she met her expectations or not.

Changing Motivation

The three factors that can help participants develop their self-confidence are: peers, instructors, and knowledge. The interviewees felt safe and inspired as their

classmates led by example and exerted positive peer pressure on them. As Sarah described:

“In our program, other students are very confident with sharing their opinion, even if their English oral pronunciation is not very good. They are willing to share their own thoughts, and that gives me some confidence, which makes me more willing to share my thoughts.”

The supportive nature of the instructors is another essential factor that helps participants develop their self-confidence. When instructors provide thorough responses and positive feedback, students are encouraged and lose the fear of being punished.

All participants believed that gaining knowledge could improve their self-confidence. Due to the experience accumulated and the broader academic understanding, the students felt that they were capable of developing more ideas and performing better in the classroom when working individually and in groups. As Mike's impression on this topic shows:

“We should improve ourselves first by reaching the desired level of knowledge in a specific field. This will significantly help with self-confidence when applying to schools and job-hunting in the future.”

Conclusion

Some participants believed that Confucianism had an excellent influence on their learning experience and self-confidence levels. Additionally, some reported being

conflicted due to the differences between the Confucian and the Western education methods. These students felt restricted to share their thoughts by the Confucian tenets indicating to speak wisely, and to avoid displaying their skills. On this note, Amber reflected that Chinese students in the international program must experience existential conflicts due to their deeply rooted Confucian academic background. The participant added that Chinese international students “should adjust and adapt to the new environment.” Sherry also her thoughts on these existential conflicts reporting that “we should not overregulate the Confucian concept to “speak wisely,” but rather feel free to show yourself.” All participants believed that self-confidence is important and understood that their lack of confidence is not due to potential academic mistakes or language barriers. As Sarah eloquently summarized, “the first step of building confidence is believing that I can do well.”

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This research explored the perceptions developed by Chinese international students regarding the influence of Confucian culture on their self-confidence levels throughout the international graduate program. In doing so, this study addressed the following questions:

1. How does Confucian culture influence self-confidence levels of Chinese international students in academic settings?
2. What are the positive and negative influences of Confucian values on Chinese international students studying in Canada?

The results indicate that Confucianism is widespread and deeply rooted among Chinese international students and the Chinese education system. According to the findings, Chinese international students perceive a humble attitude, diligence, a cautious speaking demeanour, and a low profile as the most influential Confucian values. Confucianism is a mandatory subject throughout Chinese K-12 education, which leads all Chinese international students to understand and accept the corresponding values. As the most famous pedagogical thought in China, Confucianism impacts the Chinese education system, by influencing teaching methods, learning habits and attitudes.

Furthermore, this research also revealed the differences between the Chinese and Canadian education models, as seen both on individual and group perspectives. This study supports several investigations (Kuo & Roysircar, 2004; Gery, 2002; Zheng & Berry, 1991), which describe that Chinese international students face language barrier and inner conflicts pertaining to their personal values during their learning experience.

Most participants' perceptions showed an overall lack of confidence while completing the international program. Their views suggested that Chinese international students have a humble attitude and are cautious with their words, qualities that are reflected in their learning predisposition, class participation and teamwork activities, along with those interaction with instructors and peers. Most of the participants described concerns with misunderstanding course content, while they often also tend to neglect their achievements.

The research finds that Confucianism has both positive and negative influences on the self-confidence levels of Chinese international students, which in turn impacts their learning behaviours. The study also revealed motivating factors that can improve self-confidence levels for these students during learning experiences.

Confucianism has advantages that can help a student develop a strong learning attitude and improve their cultural inclusiveness. The participants' perceptions indicate that Chinese international students have high enthusiasm for learning and persistence to face challenges. Furthermore, their hardworking and diligent demeanour is also important for an individual's success, which aligns with the literature (Leung, 1998; and Hess, Chang & McDevitt's, 1987). Placing a considerable value on education supports Leung's (1998) research, which relays the Confucian thought that learning is important for everyone and can even change one's destiny. Chinese international students are taught the importance of learning, which inspires them to study hard and develop diligence. Due to the fact that Chinese students can confront their shortcomings since they are never satisfied with themselves, they are often highly motivated to work harder to improve their

skills. In contrast with some studies that suggest that Chinese international students are likely to experience academic problems during their international education (Yeh & Inose, 2003; Sue, 1990; and Liu, 2009), the findings of this research show that these students can meet their academic expectations and obtain a degree.

Other research (Dillon & Swann, 1997; Lambert, 1973; Koul & Fisher, 2005) showed that cultural backgrounds could help support the students' adaptation to new learning and cultural environments. On this note, harmony and inclusiveness are the most important values in Confucianism (Huang & Gove, 2012). All participants echoed these values as they indicated a positive attitude towards multicultural inclusiveness, which helps to avoid conflicts with others. Furthermore, harmony and inclusiveness help Chinese international students engage in the international program with fewer challenges and conflicts, while promoting good relationships with faculty and peers.

However, Confucianism may also exert a negative influence on self-confidence levels of Chinese international students. Certain Confucian values, such as those pertaining to speaking wisely, obeying orders and showing no pride, may influence how Chinese international students participate in class and teamwork activities, and their self-cognition and critical thinking abilities. Moreover, this study discovered that Chinese international students feel nervous and lack confidence when they participate in small group or class discussions. This is seen in the literature (Armstrong & Boud, 1983; Fassinger, 1995; Wade, 1994; Weaver and Qi, 2005), as class participation is a reflection of self-confidence. In addition, the participants indicated that Chinese international students are often unwilling to share their thoughts (opposing ideas especially) as they

worry about making mistakes and facing disagreements in opinions. This finding supports prior studies (Sue & Morishima, 1982; Edwards & Tonkin, 1990; Portin, 1993; Frank, Harvey, & Verdun, 2000) that state that Chinese international students experience considerably more anxiety and pressure within classrooms, leading them to listen, learn and absorb other's opinion, before sharing their own thoughts. Previous research (Aida, 1994; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991) attributes this phenomenon to language barriers. The present study revealed that cultural factors influence class participation for Chinese international students, thus, filling the gap between culture and education.

Furthermore, all participants interviewed expressed that they would rather take on a low-proMETH role and avoid displaying their skills and talents. On this topic, most participants actually quoted the proverb "The bird that leaves the group will be shot," suggesting that Chinese international students prefer to be followers when working in teams. This finding is supported by previous studies (Hannah, Avolio, Luthans, & Harms, 2008; Dugan & Komives, 2010; Murphy, 2002; Paglis, 2010) which describe that leadership refers to one's confidence in their ability to lead, thus frequently impacting one's decision whether to lead or not. Moreover, the findings show that Chinese international students usually do not want to display their abilities through a leader role. This supports research by Chhokar, Brodbeck, and Househ (2012), which presents that cultural practices and values affect leadership, thus clearly showing the influence of Confucian culture.

The views presented by the participants also showed that some Chinese international students dislike challenging authorities, supporting Hessler's research (2001) that states that regardless of the situation, teachers within the Chinese education system are always deemed to be correct, while students are considered to be wrong. In addition, the findings showed that while Chinese international students willingly accept negative feedback, they rarely value their own strengths. Furthermore, the findings indicate that positive feedback can improve, to some extent, self-confidence levels for Chinese international students. However, the participants also suggested that some Chinese international students may not believe positive feedback extolling their work within Canadian classrooms. On this note, these students often trust that Canadian instructors are using praise as a comfort strategy, rather than highlighting their weaknesses.

This research study also indicates motivations that can improve self-confidence levels for Chinese international students in the international program. For instance, enriching student knowledge is the most influential factor for their self-confidence, aligning with the investigation by Bachman and O'Malley (1980), which describes that academic ability can affect students' self-confidence. All students interviewed in the present study believed that they had the confidence to express their views during class discussions and team activities, as long as they knew that they were correct. Another important element is peer role models. On this topic, participants reflected that behaviours by students from other countries may serve as positive examples within the classroom, which may in turn encourage Chinese international students to have the self-confidence to display their thoughts and abilities. Furthermore, some participants

reported that their interactions with other international students and instructors made them realize that their views do not need to be unique in order to participate in class and gain self-confidence. These findings echo research in the field (Lu and Hsu, 2008; Tompson and Tompson, 1996) that suggests that peer relationship plays a considerable role in developing international students' confidence. Furthermore, instructor encouragement is important to stimulate the self-confidence of Chinese international students. Thorough responses and positive feedback can provide Chinese international students with an evident sense of accomplishment and the ability to recognize their achievements.

Lastly, this research finds support in previous studies (Burgner & Hewstone, 1993; Furnham & Rawles, 1995; Stipek & Gralinski, 1991) that insist that females have lower confidence levels than males. When compared to male Chinese international students, female students described lower amounts of self-praising and self-satisfaction caring attitudes, along with a lower willingness to participate in class activities.

Implications in Theory and Practice

This study explored the perceptions Chinese international students developed regarding the influence of Confucian culture on their self-confidence levels throughout the international graduate program. The research might shed light on how the deeply rooted Confucian culture negatively influences the participation behaviours of Chinese international students within the classroom, while drawing connections between self-confidence levels and Confucian values. This section outlines the implications that arose from this study. It is hoped that these implications will help build an understanding of the

correlation between Confucianism and self-confidence levels of Chinese international students, and thus, their class participation.

This research study has implications for theoretical underpinnings, which might inform future research focused on teaching within international programs. For instance, researchers may be able to comprehend a theoretical underpinning that can help better understand students' psyche and help determine how to provide more targeted supports that consider different cultural backgrounds.

Furthermore, advancing theories and practices regarding the cultural influences on learning activities may also contribute to the improvement of the well-being and mental health of international students, as well as promoting a sense of belonging. The study highlights an implication concerned with international students' original country instructors. This could help instructors to develop cultural introspection, while remaining attentive of students' mental health. Moreover, instructors may gain awareness of the disadvantages traditional cultural values might pose and discourage them from adopting traditional teaching methods in the new environment. For example, instructors could aim to provide Chinese students with more positive feedback to encourage and develop their self-confidence.

Another implication to consider within practice, is that this study promotes cultural diversity and inclusion in universities and society. This study may encourage universities to organize more cultural activities that enhance cultural communication. Multicultural events could help university and community members better understand the diverse cultural backgrounds of Chinese international students. In return, this type of

activities could expose Chinese international students to other cultures and inspire them to further develop their self-confidence.

In addition, this research can highlight the limitations of mental health services in universities and societies as a whole. In light of this, the findings provide first-hand data from Chinese international students showing issues related to cultural barriers, needs, concerns and mental wellness. This information could help counseling services provide targeted support and meet the needs of Chinese international students.

Recommendations for Future Research

This qualitative study explored the perceptions students developed regarding the influence of Confucianism on their self-confidence. Future research should focus on other cultures and use the general international student population to help advance this field of study. This would lead to designing larger-scale studies with more diverse groups of participants, and to explore the complementary influences on international students.

While this research focuses on Confucianism and its intricate relationship with Chinese culture and self-confidence in the education field, research studies investigating how other cultural biases may affect students are limited. This shows a gap in the literature that can be filled by further research on how different traditional cultures influence self-confidence levels of international students, in a broad sense. Previous research (Lunderberg, Fox, & Brown, 2000) evidenced that different cultures have different influences on students' confidence, thus showing the potential of further research in this field.

Another recommendation for future research is to study Confucian influences on other educational or life aspects. Researchers can examine how the culture influences other parameters, such as stress, personal values, and academic outcomes. The interviews conducted in this study revealed students' perceptions regarding Confucian influences while completing the international program. Furthermore, the study suggests that cultural backgrounds have an influence on students' mental and learning behaviours. While this study focuses on learning behaviours, the influences of Confucianism on Chinese international students affects other aspects such as interpersonal relationship and social perspective. Future research should focus on these latter topics.

Furthermore, while this research focuses on formal education, relationships and values within Chinese families also affect children's self-confidence. Future studies could investigate how Confucianism influences self-confidence levels through family education, which could enrich theories on self-confidence development both in formal and informal education.

Lastly, the findings of this research also indicate the need for more studies regarding cultural conflicts in the international program and overcoming these challenges. Previous research (Kuo & Roysircar, 2004; Zheng & Berry, 1991; Grey, 2002; Campbell, 2012) mostly focused on reviewing students' perspectives on how to overcome cultural conflicts. In light of this, it is crucial to explore solutions and strategies from the instructor's perspective to help international students better cope with cultural conflicts.

Limitations

There are still many limitations in this research study that need to be considered when interpreting the findings. In first place, the sample size in this study only represents partial views from the Chinese international student population. As such, the conclusions drawn only contribute a limited perspective about the influence of Confucianism on self-confidence. Future research should recruit a demographically diverse participant pool from several academic institutions to address the research questions, which could yield deeper insights on the relationships between different pedagogical methods and cultural influences.

In second place, individual differences should be considered over group generalizations. In opposition, all members in this study were enrolled as graduate students in the same academic program, which questions the findings of this study and their relevance when applied to students enrolled in other academic programs at different education levels (such as high school and postsecondary institutions).

In third place, the participants recruited for this study volunteered to share their experiences. Thus, significant differences may have been observed on those students who were currently adapting to a new environment at the time of this study, as these individuals may have been unwilling or unable to share their acculturation experience.

In last place, the interviews were conducted in Mandarin. The responses gathered were translated from Mandarin to English, which may have resulted in translation inaccuracies since some Mandarin words do not translate into English words accurately.

Due to this, the translations may be detrimental to the reader's understanding of the interviewees' deep reflections.

Final Reflections

This qualitative research provided an opportunity to learn how Confucian values influence cultural understanding, self-confidence levels, and overall perceptions of Chinese international students. The findings have indicated the importance of raising awareness on how self-confidence can affect Chinese international students as they complete an international program. The last section of this research paper illustrates my final reflections as a researcher, as a Chinese international student, and as an instructor.

As a Researcher

This is the first time I conducted academic research. The research journey was like an adventure. I was able to reach the other side of the river by stepping on the stones along the water. There were many novel and unknown things throughout this project, but also several difficulties and challenges. During this process, I was able to put theory into practice, while learning a wealth of knowledge. After completing this research, I realized that the impact of culture is enormous and encompasses a wide influence range, affecting individuals as well as the entire society. I also now have a better understanding of the cultural conflicts experienced by Chinese international students. Furthermore, and in my opinion, the conflicts reflected in this research are different from regular culture shock. The cultural conflicts are deeply rooted and influence students' mental health.

As a Chinese International Student

As a Chinese international student, I also experienced the same challenges that participants shared in this research. I always felt stress and struggled to share my ideas during class discussions. This led to doubts and worries due to language barriers, restraining me from raising my hand and participate. This research allowed me to discover that others share my apprehension, and also emphasized the importance of building self-confidence. Thus, I now look forward to using this awareness to help build a confident Chinese community, since this research shows that peer encouragement is a significant motivator for the development of self-confidence.

As an Instructor

As a part-time English instructor, this study inspired me to abandon the ineffectual teaching methods from Confucianism, such as test-oriented, teacher-centered, and repressive education models. This research gave me the inspiration and practical support to rehaul my curriculum design processes. Moving forward, I will encourage my students to share their thoughts and abilities in the classroom, which will better prepare them for future education. Furthermore, I will praise students in my class as they question orders and challenge instructors, rather than reprimand them. In addition, I will include compliments in my feedback to encourage student pride and promote a safe space where students can share their thoughts and abilities.

Conclusion

Ultimately, this study provided me with the opportunity to have a better understanding of international students' inward world. The perceptions and learning

experiences that the participants shared, resonated with me. My learning and research experience helped me realize that the relationship between ability and self-confidence is not simple. However, I was able to conclude that self-confidence can be understood as the trust you have in your own abilities. In conclusion, this research has been meaningful for me – it inspired me to challenge traditional and deeply rooted cultural influences, develop my self-confidence, and gain the courage to represent myself.

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