

Student Intercultural Engagement in Transnational Higher Education:  
A Single Site Sample of a Transnational Institution Located in China

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## Abstract

The emergence of transnational joint venture universities provides a new model of education internationalization where the stakes are high and where the opportunities to study the under-researched field of student intercultural engagement are multidimensional and compelling. Since their institutional mission statements often involve language about cultivating global citizens and equipping students with the knowledge and intercultural skills needed to thrive as leaders and operators in a globalized marketplace, the importance of student intercultural engagement becomes profound. In this study, I investigate student intercultural engagement at a Chinese transnational joint-venture university located in China and particularly to identify students' self-reported personal and institutional factors that influence student intercultural engagement.

I utilized a mixed-method exploratory sequential research design, first involving on-campus and classroom-based observations, followed by four focus group interviews with 27 students, an online survey completed by 246 students, and finally 15 one-on-one in-depth interviews to explore student intercultural engagement topics in depth. The findings are broadly consistent from all phases. Among both the Chinese and international students that participated in my research, substandard English skills was perceived to be the top barrier to student intercultural engagement on campus. Another important insight is that student intercultural engagement is viewed as an inherently positive paradigm by higher education students; however, overwhelming cases have proved that student intercultural engagement does not “just happen”. Consistent with my qualitative findings, the multiple linear regression model shows that besides language skills, other statistically significant predictors of

self-reported student intercultural engagement level/frequency include cross-cultural group project experiences, whether one is an “initiator” in intercultural interaction, as well as academic level (i.e., being in graduate school is significantly predictive of greater student intercultural engagement level/frequency than being an undergraduate student).

To improve student intercultural engagement and the students’ general experiences on campus, and further to enhance the institution’s cohesiveness and long-term viability, the university needs to take deliberate and strategic actions to help all students on campus, Chinese or international, to jump out of their comfort zone and enter the challenging but rewarding intercultural interaction and engagement. Specifically, I propose the following recommendations: (1) to raise student admissions requirement; (2) to increase international student ratio; (3) to develop joint induction programs for new Chinese students and international students combined; (4) to create an intercultural peer mentoring program; (5) to organize more cross-cultural group projects; (6) to train academic staff on professional development about intercultural engagement; and (7) to establish a Global Engagement Center.

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## Chapter 1

### **Introduction**

The realities of globalization require the development of business leaders and other professionals who have the skills and intercultural competencies to work effectively with diverse teams both at home and across international environments (Asmar, 2005; Birrell, 2006; Ledwith & Seymour, 2001; NASULGC, 2007). Conventional programs in higher education that emphasize knowledge of domestic issues and skill development to meet national corporate needs are widely perceived as insufficient to foster the competencies needed to advance globally interconnected organizations. Institutions of higher education and national governments are increasingly pursuing strategies that encourage students to obtain an internationalized education designed to develop interculturally competent minds that can succeed in an increasingly globalized workplace environment.

Under this background, transnational higher education (TNE) has become trendy throughout the world in recent years and “is at the leading edge of the most fundamental changes taking place in higher education today” (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2006, p. 2). Compared with the international mobility of students as a well-established feature of higher education internationalization, transnational higher education is characterized by international mobility of educational resources, such as courses, programs, campuses and institutions. One of the key objectives usually claimed by transnational institutions is to cultivate global citizens through engagement from different cultural perspectives.

While it may be assumed and expected that students in these transnational institutions will gain the necessary intercultural skills and global perspectives

through engagement with students from diverse cultures, a dearth of both quantitative and qualitative research in this area demonstrates that much remains to be learned about the nature and consequences of student intercultural engagement. This dissertation presents research that addresses a significant gap in academic literature regarding the nature of student intercultural engagement within the context of higher education environments that claim to be internationalized and culturally diverse, particularly the TNE institutions. It examines the extent to which student intercultural engagement is occurring, the factors that support and hinder student intercultural engagement, the perceived value of student intercultural engagement, and the circumstances and conditions in which student intercultural engagement occurs.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The concept of student intercultural engagement derives from student engagement and addresses engagement from the intercultural and international perspective. Student engagement essentially refers to the time and effort that students devote to their educationally related activities (Kuh, 2009a), the connections and evaluations students have with their classes and schools (Axelson & Flick, 2011), as well as how institutions invest in and facilitate such engagement (NSSE, 2015; Trowler, 2011). Student engagement has become a very important contemporary topic and has gained considerable attention among researchers and educators in the higher education setting for approximately four decades.

Kuh (2003), former Director of National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), demonstrates that student engagement matters more to student success and development than other factors such as an institution's reputation or a student's prior



knowledge. Student engagement is also essential to understand the extent to which educational institutions succeed in fostering students' personal and professional development. As Rudduck and Demetriou (2003) contend, "school improvement is about enhancing engagement through achieving a better fit between young people and the school as an institution" (p. 275). Willms, Friesen and Milton (2009) go further, asserting that young people's engagement in school does not only affect the quality of their daily life and experiences now, but also their future.

The significance of student engagement from general schooling and particularly the academic experiences may be obvious, but student engagement from the intercultural and international perspective can never be understated in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world setting. As governments progressively cooperate in a globalized economy, and as corporations increasingly conduct business across national borders and diverse cultures, the means and outcomes of engagement among culturally heterogeneous student populations become all the more imperative (Akobirova, 2011; Astin, 1984, 1993; Chang, 1998; Deardorff, 2011; Gurin, Nagda, & Zuniga, 2013; Heyward, 2002; Scholte, 2005). The engagement of students across disparate cultural groups in educational settings has been argued to play an important role in the effectiveness of academic programs and subsequent enhancement of economies and societies as culturally competent students enter the workforce (Deardorff, 2011; Flynn & Vredevoogd, 2010; Kimmel & Volet, 2012a, 2012b). Naturally, questions arise. What does student intercultural engagement look like in the context of a multicultural institution of higher education, or particularly, a TNE institution? What facilitates productive student intercultural

engagement and what hinders it? To what extent are students engaged in fostering intercultural understanding and intercultural competencies?

As will be further detailed in this chapter, numerous researchers have found that a material number of international students at United States-based campuses ironically fail to benefit from studying abroad, and domestic students fail to gain global perspectives from the inclusion of sojourning international students in the classroom (Barger, 2004; Bennett, Volet & Fozdar, 2013; Crawford & Bethell, 2012; De Vita, 2000; Gresham, Symons, & Dooley, 2013; Halualani 2008, 2010; Kimmel & Volet, 2012b; Korobova, 2012; Mann, 2001; Summers & Volet, 2008). These negative student intercultural engagement phenomena call into question the fundamental purpose of promoting internationalized education through traditional study-abroad programs. In the same vein, they potentially bring an even greater alarm to student intercultural engagement on more contemporary efforts to internationalize higher education more systematically. One such systematic and comprehensive effort is the emergence of transnational universities that are established between geographically and culturally disparate institutions of higher education. Since the mission statements of these transnational educational institutions often involve language about cultivating global citizens and equipping students with the knowledge and intercultural skills needed to thrive as leaders and operators in a globalized marketplace, and also since these TNE institutions blend disparate cultures and diverse student populations, the effectiveness of student intercultural engagement becomes profound. The situation provides a ripe and contemporary context to study student intercultural engagement. Critical questions emerge: to what extent are students engaging with their peers and faculty from

different cultural backgrounds in TNE institutions? How does their student intercultural engagement on campus shape their academic and personal life? Finally, what are the major factors that impact student intercultural engagement in such diverse intercultural communities?

### **Research Goals**

The overarching goal of this research is to understand student intercultural engagement in a TNE institution located in China. Particularly, this study aims to explore how students at a joint-venture transnational university campus in China interact with other individuals and groups from nationally, racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds, and how these culturally heterogeneous students participate in on-campus and off-campus activities. The research intends to explore the ways and the degree to which intercultural engagement becomes part of student life on campus. Further, a central goal is to investigate how Chinese students engage in different cultural perspectives when they are studying on a multicultural campus that is situated within their home country, in contrast to how Chinese students engage in different cultural perspectives when they are studying on a multicultural campus located in a Western nation, which has been studied abundantly. Finally, based on this study, I want to better understand how TNE institutions located in China impact student intercultural engagement from their campuses.

### **Purpose of Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to investigate student intercultural engagement at a Chinese-foreign transnational joint-venture university located in China. It is designed to discover the extent to which student intercultural engagement is occurring, examine the circumstances and conditions in which student intercultural

engagement occurs, explore the challenges and perceived values of student intercultural engagement, and identify institutional and personal factors influencing student intercultural engagement. The study will be guided by the following research questions.

1. How are students being engaged interculturally?
2. What does the notion of intercultural engagement mean to the students?
3. How do students view their intercultural engagement experiences?
4. What are the personal and institutional factors that influence student intercultural engagement?

### **Context of the Study**

The student intercultural engagement issue has evolved from the field of internationalization of higher education. Traditionally, internationalization primarily describes the transfer of students and scholars across borders to participate in various forms of research and study abroad programs (Paige, 1986, 2005). An emerging trend is that, instead of moving students around the world, educational programs, resources and providers are moving to host countries and institutions to promote internationalization, which many researchers call transnational higher education, or TNE (Fang, 2012; Hou, Montgomery & McDowell, 2014; Huang, 2008; Knight, 2008; Mok & Xu, 2008; Sims, 2011; UNESCO & Council of Europe, 2001; Yang, 2008; Zha, 2012; Zhuang, 2009, 2010). TNE is understood as education “in which learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based” (UNESCO & Council of Europe, 2001, p. 1). In general, TNE programs or institutions are established as joint-ventures that are designed to bring together students, faculty members and administrative leaders that reflect diverse

academic philosophies and cultural frames of two or more countries (Burnapp & Zhao, 2009; Fang, 2012; Yang, 2008; Zha, 2012).

In the Chinese language, the term ‘transnational education’ is similar to *Zhongwai hezuo Banxue*, meaning *Chinese-foreign cooperation in running schools*, which was regulated in 1995 by the State Education Commission, the former Ministry of Education. Currently, more than 1,000 Chinese-foreign TNE programs and institutions in China have been approved by the Chinese government (Fang, 2012). Popular transnational education takes the form of collaborative programs, schools, colleges, or fully accredited institutions.

In China, a TNE institution of higher education is jointly established by a Chinese university and an overseas university, with the full approval of the Ministry of Education of China (2017). On the one hand these TNE institutions are globally rooted universities leveraging a novel higher education internationalization model; on the other hand, they are fully Chinese legal entities and treated as a local Chinese university from the legal perspective. What makes them distinct from the traditional Chinese universities is that the TNE universities’ academics fundamentally follow the Western higher education model by leveraging the curriculum and programs established at the foreign partner university, which are predominantly institutions from Western nations.

An important and consistent goal among these TNE universities is to prepare students to be internationally and interculturally competent global citizens. This concept may be envisioned in different ways, but the notion of being globally competent often includes the capability to fluently speak another language, to hold a diverse knowledge base and multiple worldviews, to understand international

economics, and to be adaptive and sensitive of cross-cultural communications (NASULGC, 2007).

A case in point regarding transnational education in China is the sample study university that is the focus of this dissertation research. A central objective of the sample study university, as evident from their mission statement, is to educate students to function more effectively in an integrated global economy. The university, which is located in China but has a well-known Western university partner, supports its transnational education model by following a Western education model and maintaining English as the language of instruction on campus, and all students, faculty, and administrative personnel are expected to be fluent in English. This is unique relative to traditional Western universities, because at the sample study university 95 percent of students are Chinese nationals, so English is a second language for the vast majority of its students, including a large proportion of international students who come from over 60 countries around the world. While the curriculum employed on the sample study campus is based on the Western partner university, courses and materials are embedded with Chinese subject matter and knowledge bases. For instance, business courses may focus on the unique nature of doing business in China, even though the core curriculum is based on Western business degree standards and taught in English. This characteristic makes it necessary for the students to understand diverse worldviews and knowledge bases. Finally, given the presence of disparate cultures on campus and in the classroom, there is an expectation that students at the sample study university hold a certain degree of intercultural sensitivity.

A central responsibility of modern institutions of higher education is to train students to function effectively in an increasingly interconnected and globalized economic system (Akobirova, 2011; Chang, 1998; Deardorff, 2006, 2011; Gurin, Nagda, & Zuniga, 2013; Heyward, 2002; Scholte, 2005). Such being the case at the sample study university, several critical questions naturally follow: To what extent do these transnational academic institutions produce interculturally competent students? In what ways are students engaged interculturally on and off campus? What factors influence such intercultural engagement?

### **Background of the Research Topic**

Academic research on the intercultural relationship topic is fairly recent and researchers in this field have mostly been focused on institutions in Western and developed nations; there is very small amount of research touching intercultural interactions from the TNE perspectives (e.g., Phan, 2017). Next, I will unfold the scholarly review of the student intercultural engagement topic from the Western English-speaking multicultural university settings and the TNE settings, respectively.

The major investigations of student intercultural engagement in the Western English-speaking international university settings have been focused on values of intercultural and global competence (Knight 2008), cultural dynamics (Chong & Razek, 2014), nature and frequency of intercultural interaction (Halualani, Chitgopekar, Morrison & Dodge 2004a; Halualani, Chitgopekar, Morrison & Dodge 2004; Halualani, 2008), intercultural learning (Jon, 2009), friendships (Gareis, 2012), and impacts from the dimensions of language and culture (Bennett, Volet, & Fozdar, 2013; Holmes, 2005), of international student density (Zhao, Carini, & Kuh, 2005), of institutional level (Applebone, 1995; Magner, 1990; Salz & Trubowitz, 1998;

Sampson, 1986) and of environmental aspects (Ozturgut, & Murphy, 2009). There are also studies exploring institutional facilitation of sociocultural adjustment interventions to promote intercultural interactions and relationships (Leask, 2009; Schartner, 2015; Volet & Jones, 2012). Some of these studies are described below with more details.

Al Hazmi and Nyland (2010) explored Saudi Arabian students' experiences in an Australian university and discussed how the gender segregation culture in the Saudi students' home country may impact their engagement within the Australian community. Chong and Razek (2014) conducted a case study at an American private institution to examine first-year international students' perceptions of racial climate, community and diversity in residence halls and how their perception influences engagement and learning outcomes.

Foster and Stapleton (2012) used focus groups to examine attitudes of Chinese international students towards pedagogical tools commonly associated with teaching a business curriculum in a Western classroom, and found that the Chinese international students were not as averse to class participation as some other researchers concluded (e.g., they are passive learners and prefer to learn through memorization and repetition); and also found that Chinese international students have a strong desire to be prepared for class, but that they often lack the skills necessary to overcome the barriers from language and the Western learning culture. This sample study demonstrates how culture influences learning styles, which further impacts student engagement.

Similarly, Holmes (2005) studied 13 ethnic Chinese students in a New Zealand university regarding how they transition from their first culture education



system to new constructs for learning, socializing, communicating, and being in the second culture's education system. Holmes' (2005) findings indicate that due to the typical barriers from the English language and cultural differences of learning styles, the Chinese international students encounter difficulties in listening, understanding, and interacting in the Western learning environment. In addition, ethnic Chinese students are widely reported to raise challenges for professors in responding to common and difficult situations such as plagiarism (Holmes, 2005).

Researchers have examined the nature and frequency with which students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds interact with each other on campus, as well as how the students define and make sense of intercultural interaction and how they live that life (Halualani, Chitgopekar, Morrison & Dodge 2004; Halualani, Chitgopekar, Huynh, Morrison & Dodge 2004; Halualani, 2008). Upon interviewing 80 multicultural students of one campus, Halualani (2008) observed that the students "equate being among or within a demographically diverse campus as engaging in intercultural interaction" (p. 2). That is, simply being on the multicultural campus or appearing in close proximity to students of different cultures is sufficient to qualify as intercultural interaction with out-group members.

Several scholars have studied how the density of international students on campus impacts student intercultural engagement. For example, Zhao, Kuh, and Carini (2005) conducted a comparison study of student engagement between international and American students using the 2001 NSSE survey which involved 317 four-year colleges and universities of the United States and 175,000 first-year and senior students. The researchers found that as the proportion of international students on campus increases, both international and American students report more

experience with diversity up until a tipping point, where an increasing proportion of international students results in students reporting less diversity experience (Zhao, Kuh & Carini, 2005). One possible explanation is that when the density of international students increases on campus past a certain point, there is a greater ability for peers to form groups with common interests or similar cultural backgrounds. The essence of these findings is further supported by many other scholars, who find that a statistically significant proportion of international students of varying cultural backgrounds fail to engage with domestic and international peers to such a degree that they lose the opportunity for intercultural learning (De Vita, 2002; Gresham, Symons, & Dooley, 2013; Korobova, 2012; Mann, 2001; Summers & Volet, 2008).

Language is also found to be a cause of obstructing effective communication and interaction between international and local students. For example, Bennett, Volet, and Fozdar (2013) conducted a case study of a multicultural Australian university and observed that “in institutions where English is the language of instruction, monolingual local students rarely mix with international students who are not fully proficient in English” (p. 533). The authors suggest several other factors that inhibit intercultural interaction, including demographics and self-defined cultural identity, living arrangements, part time work status, and financial obligations, and found the main factor enabling interactions are previous intercultural interactions (Bennett, Volet & Fozdar, 2013).

Scholars have also studied how institutions impact student intercultural engagement. For example, several researchers observed that the structure of campus life, such as residential arrangement and student organizations, may facilitate limited

intercultural contact and entrenched racial/ethnic separations (Applebone, 1995; Magner, 1990; Salz & Trubowitz, 1998; Sampson, 1986). Institutional operations and academic teaching and learning styles can also impact intercultural engagement. Kimmel and Volet (2012b) found that sharing lectures, classes, and curriculum content encourages stronger bonds between classmates, particularly for students from culturally different backgrounds who do not have many interactions otherwise. In other words, a sense of cohort can be a driving factor for positive intercultural engagement.

### **Rationale for the Study**

Given emerging cross-border cooperative models of internationalizing higher education that have surged in China, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, South Korea, and other Asian nations (Chapman, Cummings & Postiglione, 2010), such as TNE institutions, it is vital to explore the pertinent student intercultural engagement issues within these modern and relatively poorly understood environments. A unique goal of TNE institutions is to serve as a destination for global students and global foreign investment. Because a TNE campus is typically established in the less developed nation of the two partner countries, it aims to work in contrast to the broader national landscape by being an importer, instead of being an exporter, of sojourning students. It has been said that China, which now sends hundreds of thousands of students abroad every year to study under Western education systems, is one of the most promising markets of TNE that is embracing the joint-venture educational model (Fang & Wang, 2014; Yang, 2008).

This study focuses on examining student intercultural engagement at a TNE university in China that is a joint venture between a recognized Chinese university

and an established Western university partner. Despite the growing number of TNE joint-venture campuses in China, there does not appear to be any published research investigating how students of these multicultural campuses engage from the intercultural perspective. Among the few student intercultural engagement research works that have been published, most studies focus on college campuses of Western countries, particularly in the United States and Australia, as the previous section introduced in detail. Most research about TNE in China has been mainly on the transnational system establishment perspective (Fang & Wang, 2014; Yang, 2008).

The emergence of TNE operations provides a new model of education internationalization where the stakes are high and where the opportunities to study student intercultural engagement are multidimensional and compelling. In these institutions, the effectiveness of student intercultural engagement directly relates to the driving purpose of the entire institution. This is not a case where poor and unproductive engagement of a few study abroad students can be ignored.

As such, the innovation of a TNE institution establishment raises critically important, and largely unstudied, questions regarding the nature of student intercultural engagement in such an environment. For example, to what extent are students from Western and East Asian backgrounds engaging from an intercultural perspective in the transnational university setting? What are the factors, institutionally and personally, that impact student intercultural engagement? What can we learn from this? As fundamental and valuable as these questions are to the current and future fields of higher education and global labor markets, there is very little published research on this topic. This is particularly true in the Chinese context, despite the fact that China has been through an exponential expansion of efforts to

promote internationalization in higher education, not to mention that it has been the top country to send students abroad for higher education, and that it is also among the top four countries in terms of the number of international students received in its national institutions of higher education (Tian & Lowe, 2014).

student intercultural engagement is a much-needed area of research that stands to have an important impact on how TNE institutions are organized, structured and delivered to maximize learning opportunities and the intercultural competence of its students. Further, given recent and planned investments in joint-venture transnational higher education colleges and campuses in China, it makes a compelling case for the urgency of such research.

### **Significance of the Study**

This dissertation aims to contribute to the field of higher education internationalization research in the following ways:

First, this study seeks to contribute to the growing knowledge base of higher education internationalization, particularly as it relates to Chinese and East Asia contexts. As Deardorff (2006) argues, a non-Western perspective of research on internationalization and intercultural competence is needed. Given the scale and pace of developments and expansion of higher education internationalization in China, Deardorff's contention is significantly reinforced.

Second, the empirical study of student intercultural engagement is meaningful to contribute to the fields of intercultural communication and competency research, particularly in the context of transnational higher education, which is a trending internationalization strategy and for which there is still limited study. Globalization intensifies internationalization, which further urges expansion

and advancement of transnational education to nurture interculturally and cross-culturally competent global citizens (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Deardorff, 2006; Kuada, 2008; Paige, 2005). As Kuada puts it, “the intensity of globalization in recent years has brought intercultural competence acquisition studies back to the center stage of human resource research” (2004, p. 10). Therefore, academic studies in this area are both important and necessary. This is especially true for jointly established transnational education institutions, which is currently an emerging format of higher education internationalization implemented by many countries and regions of the world. Exploration of how students of such institutions engage interculturally to enhance related competence becomes very important and timely.

Third, this research, as an empirical sample study of a Chinese joint-venture transnational institution located in China, will enable insights to be shared with both leaders of established Western universities seeking to establish such ventures, and leaders of Chinese universities and Chinese policymakers regarding their efforts to promote effective internationalization models that enable students to gain intercultural competency and related skills.

As the establishment of Chinese-foreign joint-venture institutions is a new phenomenon of the Chinese higher education system, and as cultivating interculturally competent graduates is a major goal of such an internationalization model, it is vital to study how students from different cultural backgrounds interact with peers, faculty and other members of the local community, as well as learn what institutional factors can promote or impede such engagement and which may eventually impact their intercultural competency. This can bring practical guidance to institutions on how to structure and operate programs in order to support the

student intercultural engagement and avoid programs or means that tend to have negative impact. Such transnational education models have been developing rapidly yet there has been little study of intercultural student engagement or other topics around such a model, therefore the study becomes all the more important.

### **Key Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, some terms in this dissertation require specific definitions to fit this context. These terms are: 1) “Chinese students” or “domestic students”, 2) “international students” or “foreign students”, 3) “transnational education”, 4) “student engagement”, 5) “culture”, 6) “intercultural communication”, 7) “intercultural interaction”, 8) “intercultural contact”, 9) “student intercultural engagement”, and 10) “intercultural competency”. Each of these terms is defined in turn.

#### **“Chinese Students” or “Domestic Students” and “International Students” or “Foreign Students”**

In this dissertation, “Chinese students” in this sample study refer to students who have grown up in China, reside in China, speak Chinese as their first language and likely hold Chinese citizenship. Sometimes I use “domestic students” or “local students” to replace “Chinese students” in this paper. This aligns with the fact that the sample study institution is located in China. “International students” or “foreign students” in this sample study refer to the students whose first language is not Chinese, who have grown up in a country outside of China, and who resided in another country immediately before coming to China to study at the sample study university.

#### **“Transnational Education”**

Transnational education, also known as “offshore”, “borderless”, or “cross-border” education (Knight, 2005), is widely understood as education “in which learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based” (UNESCO & Council of Europe, 2001). This dissertation focuses on transnational higher education. The term emphasizes mobility of education provisions, such as educational providers, programs, facilities, and/or curriculum, rather than mobility of students, which is a key feature of the traditional international higher education. Transnational higher education in the Chinese context refers to joint-venture initiatives that bring together a Chinese academic institution and an academic institution headquartered outside of China that is typically associated with an established university located in a Western nation. The joint-venture entity is physically located in China but the education provisions are solely or predominantly facilitated by the international partner.

**“Culture”, “Intercultural Communication”, “Intercultural Interaction”, “Intercultural Contact”, and “Intercultural Engagement”**

“Culture” in this dissertation essentially represents the behaviors and beliefs characteristic of a particular national, social, religious or ethnic group; it is also the characteristic features of everyday life shared by people in a place or time or with certain groups. I develop the definition of culture based on Dictionary.com and Merriam-Webster Dictionary (Culture, n.d.).

“Intercultural communication”, frequently referred to cross-cultural communication, “is a field of study that looks at how people from differing cultural backgrounds endeavor to communicate” and “Its core is to establish and understand



how people from different cultures communicate with each other” (Intercultural Communication, 2006, p.1).

“Intercultural interaction” “refers to the behavior (including, but not limited to, verbal and nonverbal communication) that occurs when members of different cultural groups engage in joint activity” (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2014, p.1).

“Intercultural contact” refers to how members of different cultural groups co-exist in the same community, interact with each other and to the host environment, and change their perceptions, attitudes and behaviors towards other cultural groups and their own group (Allport, 1954). “Intercultural contact” studies often focus on examining how contact of intergroup members impact their level of prejudice towards each other and identifying the conditions that facilitate that change. More detailed information on this concept can be found in Chapter 2 of this dissertation in the theoretical framework section.

“Intercultural engagement” emphasizes how cultural groups engage in intercultural activities. Compared with other terms like “intercultural interactions” and “intercultural contact”, “intercultural engagement” is more focused on the time and effort that individuals of different cultures invest in intercultural activities and participation, as well as addressed what can be done at the organization or host environment level to facilitate such engagement of its intergroup members.

### **“Student engagement” and “Student intercultural engagement”**

“Student engagement” represents two critical features of collegiate quality. The first is the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities (NSSE, 2015, p.1). The second is how the institution deploys its resources and organizes the curriculum and other learning

opportunities to get students to participate in activities that decades of research studies show are linked to student learning (NSSE, 2015, p.1).

“Student intercultural engagement” represents the degree of quantitative and qualitative interaction that students have with culturally different individuals or groups on and off campus, as well as the extent of participation in culturally relevant activities. Institutions also play an important role in fostering support and promoting student intercultural engagement, particularly the extent to which they deploy resources and organize programs and opportunities intended to promote student participation in intercultural activities.

#### **“Intercultural competency”**

“Intercultural competency” or “intercultural competence” simply refers to the “ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Deardorff, 2006, p. 248). Other similar expressions are “intercultural effectiveness” (Paige, 1993) and “global competence’ (Lambert, 1994).

### **Conceptual Framework and Theoretical Framework**

This dissertation research studies student intercultural engagement by focusing on personal and institutional factors that influence student intercultural engagement at a joint-venture transnational university located in China.

The established student engagement construct sheds light on the understanding of student intercultural engagement and provides aspects to look at in the student intercultural engagement research, such as, engagement dimensions, indicators, facilitators, evaluations, influences, and so on. student intercultural

engagement in this dissertation is largely consistent with student engagement, only that it emphasizes engagement from the intercultural perspective.

Given that there has been limited study on student intercultural engagement, particularly in the transnational education setting, the student engagement framework utilized in this dissertation is a valuable guide. The student engagement construct has mainly evolved from the student involvement theory (Astin, 1984), which emphasizes time and effort that students devote to their school activities, highlighting both behavioral and psychological dimensions of time on task and quality of effort. Different from other student development theories that emphasize learning subjects and content, school resources, or teaching and learning models, Astin's (1984) student involvement theory especially addresses the importance of student time invested in learning and active participation in learning processes; as a matter of fact, it suggests that student time may be the most precious institutional resource, compared with other school resources.

Developed from the student involvement theory, the student engagement construct besides contending that student time and effort are the key elements of student learning, it also proposes the important role of institutions in fostering engagement of students to enhance their learning and success (Ewell, 2008; Kuh, 2001, 2009b; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2007). Therefore, the student engagement construct does not only look at student engagement from the student perspective, emphasizing the quantity and quality of students' participation in educationally purposeful activities, but also look at it from the institution's perspective, emphasizing how an institution deploys its resources, programs, and support system to promote the student engagement to fulfill their educational goals.

For the theoretical framework, I adopt intergroup contact theory, which studies the relationship between intergroup contact and prejudice reduction. Specifically, it studies how people from differing social-cultural and racial/ethnic backgrounds interact, dialogue, and engage in the host community, and through such intergroup contact, how they perceive their treatment from and relationship with out-group members, and further, whether and to what degree the out-group prejudice would be reduced and the social relations would be enhanced (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998). This dissertation focuses on a transnational and multicultural university jointly established by two academic institutions from two vastly different cultures and nationalities. The joint-venture institution is composed of students from scores of different nationalities, but the majority of the students are from the host country, China. The intergroup contact theory fits seamlessly in this context and provides a sound theoretical foundation for comprehending the student intergroup contact phenomenon and studying student intercultural engagement issues in the TNE context.

Intercultural competence theory plays an important role in facilitating comprehension of the student intercultural engagement study of this dissertation as well. Researchers and experts suggested numerous key personality characteristics, skills and attitudes that a person should possess in order to be interculturally competent (Bennett, 1993; Cugykunst, 1994; Deardorff, 2006; Fantini, 2000; Finkelsterin, Pickert, Mahoney, & Barry, 1998; Hanvey, 1976; Kim, 1988; Lambert, 1994; Paige, 1993; Pedersen, 1994; Pusch, 1994; Wilson, 1994). In her dissertation that studies how experts and higher education administrators define and assess intercultural competence, Deardorff (2006) concludes that there are three specific

areas involving intercultural competence that are equally important, namely, knowledge of other cultures, the development of one's skills (behavioral perspective), and attitudes (affective perspective) in successfully interacting with persons of diverse backgrounds. The current study leverages Deardorff's (2006) conclusion about the areas that signify intercultural competence to explore the relationship between intercultural competence and intercultural engagement.

### **Summary**

This chapter has laid out the foundation for the study of student intercultural engagement and clarified why research on this topic is valuable and urgently needed, specifically as it relates to transnational joint-venture universities. The study is framed in the context of globalization and internationalization of higher education, and focuses on the academic and social experiences of culturally diverse students and the combination of their personal resources and those of the academic institution. The major purpose of this study is to try to understand how the students engage on campus from the cultural perspective, and to identify the factors that impact such engagement experiences. The study aims to add significant value to the study of student intercultural engagement, which currently is an under-researched yet critically important and pertinent topic within the backdrop of increasing globalization and new models of internationalized education that have a primary purpose of developing culturally competent members of society.

Chapter 2 reviews literature on student engagement, intergroup contact and intercultural competence. In Chapter 2, additional details of the sample study site and surrounding community will be addressed. Chapter 3 focuses on research methodology and the approaches adopted during the study to explore student

intercultural engagement. Chapter 4 presents key findings from the research. Finally, Chapter 5 offers my conclusions and recommendations in light of the key findings of the study.

## Chapter 2

### **Literature Frameworks**

This chapter reviews literature and provides a theoretical foundation and framework for the study. There are three sections in this chapter. Section one reviews literature on 'higher education internationalization' and on 'transnational higher education', which is a more recent form of internationalization and is the general setting of this study. Section two concerns literature review of internationalization specific to the Chinese higher education system, concentrating on its historical context, rationales, and issues and challenges, as well as on transnational higher education in China. The third and last section sets up the theoretical framework for this study and reviews the concept of culture, student engagement construct, student intercultural engagement, intergroup contact theory, and intercultural competence.

### **Internationalization of Higher Education**

#### **Definitions of higher education internationalization**

There are numerous and diverse definitions of higher education internationalization in academic literature, though Knight's (1994, 2002, 2004, 2014) definition is arguably one of the most often cited. Knight (1994) first defined internationalization of higher education as a process "integrating an international dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of an institution of higher education" (p. 3). In more recent work, Knight (2004) updated the original definition with the aim of being more comprehensive and more applicable across diverse cultures and nations. In its revised form, higher education internationalization was defined as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions (primarily teaching/learning, research, service)

or delivery of higher education” (p. 11). Compared with the earlier version, three new elements were added to the definition: *intercultural dimension*, *global dimension* and *delivery of higher education*. The researcher believes that inclusion of these elements reflects and responds to the key dynamics of academic debate that have emerged in the field of higher education internationalization over the past two decades. Knight (2014) contends that the strength of her definition is that it focuses on education objectives and functions, but acknowledges that it does not articulate the values that are associated with internationalization, such as partnership, collaboration, mutual benefit, and exchange.

Elkin and Devjee (2003) expanded upon Knight’s original work, suggesting that internationalization of higher education should “aim to create values, beliefs and intellectual insights in which both domestic and international students and faculty participate and benefit equally. They should develop global perspectives, international and cultural and ethical sensitivity along with useful knowledge, skills and attitudes for the globalized market place” (p. 11). In light of their contention that a comprehensive definition of internationalization of education is nearly impossible to have in a concise statement, Elkin and Devjee (2003) have contributed to the field by emphasizing the primary objectives of internationalization.

Altbach and Knight (2007) provide a descriptive definition for internationalization of higher education while comparing internationalization and globalization. According to them, globalization is a context and an unalterable trend that pushes and pulls higher education’s greater international involvement, whereas internationalization is more concrete and it emphasizes choices, programs, and strategies (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Altbach and Knight (2007) comment on major



trends of internationalization at the time, which included the continuation of student movement from south to north and movement of education providers, services, programs and even institutions, mainly from north to south. The authors note another critical change in the field of higher education internationalization is the emergence of more for-profit educational companies, which they argue has to do with the role of globalization in international trade, recognizing that higher education is considered to be a product that can be imported and exported (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

Other scholars have offered a more general definition. For example, Wande (1997) defined internationalization of higher education as “any systematic, sustained efforts aimed at making higher education responsive to the requirements and challenges related to the globalization of societies, economy and labor markets” (p. 11). The scholars that tend to be more specific in their definitions are prone to criticism for being too narrowly focused. For example, literature demonstrates a degree of academic debate and contention surrounding how the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has defined internationalization of higher education through a curricular perspective, suggesting internationalization is the design of “curricula with an international orientation in content, aimed at preparing students for performing in an international and multicultural context, and designed for domestic as well as foreign students” (Elin, Farnsworth & Templer, 2005, p. 241).

The Association of International Education Administrators defines higher education internationalization as “the incorporation of international contents, material, activities and understanding in the teaching, research, and public service functions of universities to enhance the relevance in an interdependent world” (as

cited in Deardorff, 2006, p. 4). The American Council on Education defines the term as “a broad range of intellectual and experiential activities designed to help individuals understand the global environment in which they live, communicate across borders, and acquire an understanding of the cultural, social, and political systems of other nations and the interactions between nations” (Hayward & Siaya, 2001, p. 43).

While there is not an agreed upon definition of *higher education internationalization*, it is widely recognized that internationalization processes have revolutionized the higher education systems of modern societies and have also transformed itself over time (Elkin, G., 2005; Teichler, 2003). Further, it is widely recognized that the concept of higher education internationalization has established broader meaning and measures over the past two decades. As the field has become more sophisticated and comprehensive, commonly used phrases have emerged among the aforementioned scholars, including *intercultural dimension, exchange and collaboration, global perspectives, cultural and ethical sensitivity, global skills and global attitudes*.

### **Rationales of Higher Education Internationalization**

The rationales for higher education internationalization cannot be overlooked since they are held to be driving forces for nations, governments, institutions and even individuals to make substantial investments in and strategize on the progression of the higher education system (Knight, 2004). Numerous scholars have found the rationales for higher education internationalization to be multidimensional and complex (Huang, 2006; Knight, 2006; Yang, 2002), and varying from institution to institution, from nation to nation and from region to region (Knight, 2006; Yang,

2002). At the institution level, Yang (2002) advises that “the rationale for internationalization lies in an understanding of the universal nature of the advancement of knowledge” (p. 76). Accordingly, with a core mission to advance human knowledge, universities are prone to engage in international cooperation. To elaborate on this point, Yang (2002) contends:

Academic study needs an international approach to avoid parochialism in scholarship and research and to stimulate critical thinking and enquiry about the complexity of issues and interests that bear on the relations among nations, regions and interest group.... It is the responsibility of a university to cultivate the ability to understand, appreciate and articulate the reality of interdependence among nations and to prepare faculty, staff, and students to function in an international and intercultural context (p. 77).

This reality provides higher education institutions, particularly research-oriented universities, with a legitimate reason to dedicate themselves to internationalization. Yang’s (2002) statement also implies that cultivating internationally knowledgeable and interculturally skilled students, staff and faculty are key objectives of the higher education system and internationalization in general.

While Yang (2002) argues that the core responsibility of universities is a rationale for higher education internationalization, other researchers provide rationales from different perspectives, and some focus on the link between motivation of internationalization and direct financial profitability (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Davies, 1992). Clearly, rationales for higher education internationalization are not one-dimensional. In fact, several scholars have specifically sought to categorize all of the driving rationales for internationalization. For example, Aigner (1992) suggests three major reasons and they are related to international security, economic competitiveness, and international relations. Building on Aigner’s (1992) work, Scott (1992) identified seven rationales: (1)

economic competitiveness, (2) environmental interdependence, (3) communities of ethnic and religious diversity, (4) transnational workforce, (5) international business and impact, (6) future international and intercultural leaders and professionals, and (7) national security and world relations.

After examining different universities, Warner (1992) proposed three models to explain the motivation of higher education internationalization at the institutional level, namely, the competitive model (internationalized content incorporated into university academic and campus life to make individuals, institutions and the nation more competitive in the global economic marketplace), the liberal model (self-development in a global education for human relations and citizenships), and the social transformation model (raising awareness of international and intercultural issues in students to promote work on social transformation). Warner (1992) suggested that the rationale behind the social transformation model is the most important one, and this opinion is echoed by Yang's (2002) work. However, economic development and competitiveness appears to have the most frequent mention as a rationale for higher education internationalization in academic literature (Aigner, 1992; Davies, 1992; Johnston & Edelstein, 1993; Knight, 1997; Knight & De Wit, 1995; Scott, 1992; Warner, 1992).

Knight (1997) categorizes what she perceives to be the four core rationales for higher education internationalization: political, economic, academic and cultural/social. This contention enables the development of a framework for the discussion of rationales driving higher education internationalization. However, a lot has changed in the world of higher education since 1997. Currently, it is generally agreed that the realities of globalization "toward greater international involvement"

(Altbach & Knight, 2007, p. 290) are a strong motivator for higher education internationalization. In this light, internationalization of higher education is dynamic as it relates to the global economy, and this phenomenon extends to its evolving rationales. While Knight's (1997) traditional four-rationale categorization still has relevance today, it does not distinguish between rationales at the national and institutional levels, and the distinction is becoming more and more important as internationalization advances, and as Knight readily concedes (2004).

Knight (2006) has since updated identified rationales at both the national and the institutional level. There are five rationales at the national level. First, individual nations and regions are put in a state of heightened pressure to retain talents, improve teaching and research, and further cultural understanding, in order to be competitive in an increasingly globalized world and knowledge economy (Knight, 2006). Second, expanded geographical clashes and tensions push nations and regions to form strategic alliances of institutions to promote the political and economic development of the region (Knight, 2006). Third, as education has become a potentially lucrative trade area, nations and regions are incentivized to generate economic benefits and income through cross-border delivery of education (Knight, 2006). Fourth, in order to strengthen national power for survival in a rapidly changing and highly competitive globalized world, some countries, particularly developing countries that lack the necessary infrastructure and financial resources, have to import more developed educational practices to help build up its educated citizenry and workforce (Knight, 2006). In this light, various international academic projects work to contribute to such nation-building efforts. However, these importing and exporting efforts could potentially be paradoxical: while importing countries are interested in

programs and institutions for nation-building purposes, exporting countries may be intended to pursue income revenue. Fifth is the rationale of fostering social/cultural development and mutual understanding among nations, which Knight (2006) has observed to be significant in the globalized world and increasingly subject to intense competition. Internationalization of education is a major gateway to help resolve the pressing issues and challenges stemming from culturally based clashes within and between countries, and further promote intercultural understanding and national cultural identity.

According to Knight (2006), institutional-level rationales have a close connection to the national level rationales, and the degree of closeness mainly depends on how much the internationalization process is a bottom-up or top-down affair within any given country. Further, she argues that if in a country “internationalization is not given much prominence at the national level...then institutional level rationales have greater importance and may differ substantially from one institution to another” (Knight, 2006, p. 218).

At the institutional level, Knight (2006) contends the rationales for higher education internationalization include achieving international profile and reputation, quality enhancement, student and staff development, revenue generation, network and strategic alliances, and research and knowledge production. In a similar view, Deardorff (2006) states, “the central responsibility of today’s institutions of higher education [is] training students to function more effectively in our integrated world system” (p. 8). Another expert in internationalization, de Wit (2002), concurs by arguing, “internationalization efforts are intended to enable the academic community to have the ability to understand, appreciate, and articulate the reality of

interdependence among nations and to prepare faculty, staff, and students to function in an international and intercultural context” (p. 96). Kuada (2004) offers a similar observation, stating that “the intensity of globalization in recent years has brought intercultural competence acquisition studies back to the center stage of human resource research” (p. 10).

Knight (2006) concludes that rationales of higher education internationalization are “differing and competing” (p. 220) among governments, agencies, for-profit educational organizations, and institutions, but at the same time the realities of globalization require internationally knowledgeable and interculturally competent leaders and performers. This fact presses nations and higher education institutions to produce graduates that can satisfy the demands from global markets and an interconnected world. As a result, a key objective of modern higher education internationalization is to cultivate internationally knowledgeable and interculturally competent global citizens that can be successful within or promote the development of an increasingly interdependent world.

### **Transnational Higher Education**

Higher education internationalization has expanded from the well-established feature of international mobility of students to the current development of international mobility of education provisions, or transnational higher education. Transnational higher education, also known as "offshore ", "borderless", or "cross-border" education (Knight, 2005), is widely understood as higher education “in which learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based” (UNESCO & Council of Europe, 2001). It is a fairly recent phenomenon, yet it “is growing very fast in many parts of the world... widely

acknowledged as an emerging global trend” (Fang, 2012, p. 5) and it “is at the leading edge of fundamental changes taking place in higher education today” (McBurnie & ziguras, 2007, p. 7).

Knight (2015) has developed a common transnational higher education framework of categories and definitions around the transnational education (TNE) field, in which, Knight uses TNE to essentially refer to transnational (higher) education. According to Knight (2015), transnational higher education refers to “the mobility of higher education programs and providers between countries” (p. 2). The definition makes it clear that transnational higher education focuses on education provision mobility rather than student mobility, which was a fundamental characteristic of the more traditional concept of higher education internationalization. This definition, though capturing the key feature of the transnational education, is too generous not to specify the scope of TNE and seems also to be too simple to cover the increasingly complex landscape of the transnational education that presents to the world today. The Council of Europe in the Code of good practice in the provision of transnational education (2002) overcomes this difficulty and offers a comprehensive definition of *transnational education* as:

All types of higher education study programs, or sets of courses of study, or educational services (including those of distance education) in which the learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institutions is based. Such programs may belong to the education system of a State different from the State in which it operates, or may operate independently of any national education system.

It also defines *transnational arrangement* as:

An educational, legal, financial or other arrangement leading to the establishment of (a) collaborative arrangements, such as: franchising, twinning, joint degrees, whereby study programs, or parts of course of study, or other educational services of the awarding institution are provided by



another partner institution; (b) non-collaborative arrangements, such as branch campuses, offshore institutions, corporate or international institutions, whereby study programs, or parts of a course of study, or other educational services are provided directly by an awarding institution (Council of Europe, 2002).

Although this definition is quite comprehensive, it does not capture the increasingly complex phenomena of the TNE field. As one example, the learners in current TNE programs or institutions are no longer just from the host/destination country, but travel from various countries. For instance, the New York University's international campuses recruit students from all over the world. Some of their international employees responsible for their Abu Dhabi campus recruitment are stationed in China and recruit students from the Asia-Pacific region as well as other parts of the world.

It is important to note that “Transnational higher education is neither fully national [nor] international” (Fang & Wang, 2015, p. 3). Knight (2015) takes cross-border higher education (CBHE) and TNE to mean the same thing, although she argues that “CBHE is a more explicit and perhaps a stronger and more descriptive term” (p. 3). As typology of transnational education is not a focus in this dissertation, such terms as transnational higher education, transnational education, and cross-border higher education are used in an interchangeable way, all of which emphasize the mobility of educational providers, programs, facilities and/or curriculum.

Knight (2009) notes developments and distinctions of transnational higher education that set it apart relative to traditional international higher education, including the following examples: (1) the creation of new international networks and consortia; (2) the growing number of students, professors, and researchers participating in academic mobility schemes; (3) more emphasis on developing

international/intercultural and global competencies; (4) steep rise in the number of cross-border delivery of academic programs; (5) an increase in campus-based extracurricular activities with an international or multicultural component; (6) growth in the numbers and types of for-profit cross-border education providers; (7) the expansion in partnerships, franchises, branch campuses; and (8) the establishment of new national, regional, and international organizations focused on international education (pp. 5-6). On the whole, distinct from traditional international higher education, transnational higher education involves new stakeholders, new partnerships, new modes of delivery, and new regulations (Knight, 2015).

Knight (2015) developed a common transnational education framework to distinguish various types of transnational higher education. The major categories Knight (2015) defined were *collaborative TNE provision* and *independent or stand-alone TNE provision*. According to Knight (2015), the collaborative category means that the foreign higher education institution collaborates with a local partner or a counterpart to deliver an academic program, such as twinning programs or internationally co-developed or co-founded institutions. In contrast, the independent TNE provision occurs when the foreign higher education institution independently delivers academic programs in a host country without a local partner or counterpart involvement in this regard (Knight, 2015). Examples of independent TNE provision include international branch campuses, franchise universities, or distance education programs (Knight, 2015). It should be stressed that under independent TNE provision, foreign higher education institutions may have still to follow local regulations pertaining to registration, awards and qualification, and so on.

Knight's categorization and definitions are not without issues. For example, as Knight (2015) concedes, the term 'independent' is misleading given that the mother institution often still controls or oversees multiple aspects of the TNE provision, such as faculty, curriculum, qualification and degrees, monitoring, as well as financial support. The researcher finds strict application of Knight's (2015) 'independent' category definition may inappropriately label certain TNE provisions. For example, several branch campuses that have been established in China in recent years, such as NYU Shanghai and Duke Kunshan University, would be labeled as 'independent' in that they have autonomy over their academic programs and are independent legal entities in the host country (China). However, they do require local partners to comply with registration regulations and the institution presidents have to be Chinese nationals; in the meantime, they utilize the Western university's leadership team, strategic guidance, educational resources, courses and major design, and often funding mechanisms. As Knight (2015) comments, "There is no question that TNE is a dynamic and increasingly complex part of higher education internationalization and that new trends and developments need to be carefully monitored and analyzed" (p. 2).

Transnational higher education has roots dating back to the 1980s but did not grow in earnest until the early 21<sup>st</sup> century when 'education' was listed in the General Agreement of Trade in Services (GATS) in the World Trade Organization (WTO). According to Naidoo's (2009) investigation, at the time there were dozens of home/source/exporting countries and dozens of host/destination/importing countries collaborating with one another in higher education, collectively accounting for thousands of joint-venture programs and scores of subsidiaries, branch campuses, or

independent joint-venture institutions across the world. Naidoo (2009) noticed that transnational higher education collaborations up to 2009 mostly took place in the Asia-Pacific region, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and in South America. The major educational providers or exporters were mostly from Australia, Britain, and the United States (Naidoo, 2009). Ziguras (2011) concludes that the leading importers or receivers of TNE are mostly middle-income countries in which the growth in secondary school completions and labor-market demand for graduates has outstripped the capacity of the domestic higher education system.

Transnational higher education is framed in the context of globalization, higher education internationalization, and multicultural teaching and learning. One of the central challenges for transnational education is quality assurance (Stella, 2006; Hayhoe, 2015). What makes it worse is the presence of market-driven/profit-oriented foreign providers in TNE, which results in provision of poor quality or outdated educational design and delivery. Another challenge facing TNE is to effectively prepare academics to teach in a cross-cultural environment (Deardorff, 2009). In the TNE delivery, teachers are not sufficiently aware of the culturally competent pedagogical strategies on how to respond in culturally sensitive ways and lack the ability to successfully communicate and work with learners from other cultures (Paige & Goode, 2009). In an empirical study of an Australian-Chinese partnership program delivered in a Chinese university in China, Pyvis (2011) finds that the current approach to educational quality formation in transnational education potentially promotes educational imperialism, and cautions that guidelines and practices should be altered to embrace context-sensitive measures of quality.

## **Chinese Higher Education Internationalization and Transnational Education**

### **Historical review of Chinese higher education**

The Chinese higher education system has evolved over a long history that traces all the way back to ancient dynasties, yet its contemporary higher education system has only about one century of experience (Min, 2004; Mohrman, 2008). After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, China's higher education system became nationalized; institutions were reorganized and restructured with a bias toward the Soviet Union model during the 1950s and early 1960s (Mohrman, 2008). As a result, the education system then became rigid in structure and lacked management and operational autonomy due to the national-level, top-down organization and decision-making. During the so-called Cultural Revolution, which lasted from 1966 to 1976, all educational activities in China essentially ground to a halt, which produced a profound impact on the Chinese education system and resulted in a dearth of well-educated and professional workforces for nearly an entire generation within the society (Zhao, 2008). Following China's Reform and Opening up to the world in the late 1970s, the roots of the Chinese higher education system resumed their growth and quickly took on a path toward internationalization (Huang, 2003; Zhao, 2008).

Since the 'opening' of China more than thirty years ago, China's higher education system has drawn the world's attention with its rapid development. It has established a mass higher education model and achieved the gross enrollment ratio of nearly 35 percent in 2013 (Ministry of Education of China, 2013); it has produced globally recognized research institutions such as Tsinghua and Peking universities; it has become the world's second largest country for the number of original scientific

research publications next to the United States (Yonezawa, Kitamura, Meerman & Kuroda, 2014); it has become the number one country in the world to send students abroad for higher education (UNESCO, 2014); it has become a top-four recipient of international students (UNESCO, 2014); and it has emerged as one of the most active countries for transnational higher education development, having already established nearly 2,000 Chinese-foreign cooperative tertiary institutions and programs (Ministry of Education of China, 2015). It might not be a coincidence that the number of joint-venture transnational higher education programs is nearly equivalent to the number of public higher education institutions in China that form the backbone of nation's higher education system. However, despite all these achievements, China's higher education system faces no shortage of obstacles, issues, concerns and criticisms, many deriving from the general lack of autonomy that Chinese universities have in terms of educational initiatives and decision making that result from the involvement of and censorship from government stakeholders (Zha & Hayhoe, 2014).

### **Chinese Higher Education Internationalization and Rationales**

Internationalization of the Chinese higher education system effectively began with the implementation of the nation's opening-up policy by the end of the 1970s. The Cultural Revolution of China destroyed the nation's higher education system, and when those policies were reversed with the opening of China, Chinese leadership had no alternative than to turn to the outside world for help in reestablishing the nation's higher education system. There is no dissent among observers and scholars in the education field that the effective closure of Chinese universities during the Cultural Revolution forced the country into a disastrous state both economically and socially (Huang, 2003; Zhao, 2008).

Economic development became the priority of the country once it opened its doors to the world, yet it lacked an educational system of its own to develop highly educated and skilled professionals. Therefore, the requirement for training experts and high-level professionals was met by sending Chinese students and scholars abroad (Huang, 2003). During the period of 1978 to 1992, selecting and dispatching in-service teachers and university students to study abroad was the major part of the nation's efforts to internationalize higher education, and these efforts had almost total support from the public budget (Huang, 2003). It is evident that three decades ago Chinese leaders perceived the country's nation-building capacity could be promoted through cultivating groups of highly skilled professionals via higher education systems. This was a fundamental rationale behind higher education internationalization in China, and it was present at the earliest stage in its modern history.

Since the 1990s, China's advancement of higher education internationalization has been motivated by more and diverse factors. Following the Chinese government's expansion of deeper economic reforms and transition to the market economy in the early 1990s, and combined with challenges of economic globalization and membership in the World Trade Organization, there came an imperative "need to improve academic standards and enhance the quality of education and research in light of those international standards (now) achieved in the advanced Western countries" (Huang, 2003, p. 235). Further, China's higher education system was still in an elite-only phase with approximately 4 percent of the population aged 18-22 involved in higher education in the mid-1990s (Chapman, Cummings & Postiglione, 2010), largely due to the limited number of higher

education institutions established in China. In the meantime, China's rapid economic development through the 1990s put forward an increasing demand for higher education; the gap between the growing need for high-quality educational institutions and the inability domestically to fulfill the development of a skilled workforce has grown into a serious social issue. As a result, the Chinese government has taken measures and started to move to mass education and in the meantime encourage more and more students and scholars to study abroad and to stimulate development of transnational higher education (Hayhoe, Lin, & Zha, 2012).

An emerging trend in China is that more and more of its national universities have started to actively recruit international students with the purpose of exporting Chinese culture and education, as well as increasing the nation's international influence and soft power (Ren, 2016). So far, China has become the largest destination in Asia for international students, with more than 440,000 students from 205 countries and regions studying in China in 2016, which is an 11.4% increase from the previous year (Zhao, 2017). Behind the international student increase is the Chinese central government's deliberate and strategic effort on attracting overseas students (Zhao, 2017). In addition to there being over 2,000 TNE programs and institutions, more than 150 traditional Chinese universities are officially approved to admit international students and provide centralized online applications (CUCAS, n.d.). These institutions are known to set up favorable admissions requirements to attract international students, which are significantly less strict than the requirements for domestic students (Ren, 2016). In the meantime, the central government has set up policies and regulations regarding how Chinese schools should manage international students. Specifically, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Public



Security, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs jointly issued Regulations for Schools on Admitting and Cultivating Students from Overseas, which took effect on July 1st, 2017, and included articles articulating standard procedures that Chinese universities should follow in admitting and managing international students (MOE, 2017). For example, these regulations state that institutes of higher education in China must respect the customs and religious beliefs of international students, but cannot provide places for religious activity (MOE, 2017). On one hand, the regulations protect certain aspects of international students' lives in China and promote ethnic diversity, yet on the other hand they let certain groups of international students feel restricted, or uncomfortable in exercising some of their daily-life activities. In general, the Chinese government and universities welcome a diverse range of international students from vastly different national and cultural backgrounds, and admit them into a broad range of academic and professional programs.

### **Transnational Higher Education in China**

Transnational higher education, or TNE, in China “refers to the cooperation between foreign higher education institutions and Chinese higher education institutions in establishing programs or institutions to deliver higher education service within the territory of China mainly to Chinese citizens” (Fang & Wang, 2014, p. 2). TNE in China has a Chinese-characteristic name, called *Zhongwai Hezuo Banxue* in Mandarin Chinese, meaning Chinese-foreign Cooperation in Running Schools. *Cooperation* is a key word in transnational higher education in China. Any TNE institution or program in China must be jointly delivered by foreign and Chinese higher education institutions. Again, as noted previously, the president of a transnational higher education institution in China must be a Chinese citizen. After

China's entry into the WTO in 2001, China's higher education started to open up to the world and the implementation of the Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools in 2003 marked the beginning of the Chinese higher education to engage in transnational education provision (Mok & Xu, 2008).

China is one of the most popular nations for implementing transnational education (Yang, 2008). The first recognized TNE establishment in China was Johns Hopkins–Nanjing University Center for Chinese and American Studies, founded in 1986 and financed by both Chinese and American governments (Huang, 2003). By 1999, more than 70 higher education institutions were granted qualifications to undertake TNE in China (Huang, 2003). As of 2015, 1,148 TNE program provisions are published on the website of the Ministry of Education (2015). China's counterparts in TNE provisions are typically from English speaking countries and regions, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Hong Kong, as well as select countries in Europe including France, Netherlands, and Norway.

Besides importing education from other, usually Western, countries, efforts have also been made since the 1990s by some leading Chinese institutions to export education services abroad, usually with programs of teaching Chinese language or traditional Chinese medicine (Huang, 2003). One example is Fudan University of China and Singapore National University, which together established a branch campus in their respective universities, cooperating on a range of issues affecting recruitment of students, curricula development and teaching, credit assignment, and granting of diplomas and degrees (Altbach, 2007).

I find that TNE in China can be generally classified into one of two categories, *TNE programs* and *TNE institutions*. A TNE program is usually established within the Chinese partner university system and operates on the university campus, often as an independent college within a broader university that has different governance structures. Examples of TNE programs include Beihang Sino-French Engineer School, Shanghai Jiao Tong University SJTU-UM Joint Institute, and Sino-German College of Applied Science of Tongji University. The TNE programs usually recruit all domestic Chinese students, likely with a very small number of students from its partner university campus as study-abroad students.

Similar to TNE programs, TNE institutions also result from a collaborative establishment by the host (China) and foreign university. However, the key distinction is that a TNE institution in China is an independent legal entity, registered in China and regulated by the Ministry of Education of China. These are often called Chinese-foreign joint-venture institutions. The TNE institutions in China strive to recruit students from all over the world, although a majority of them are domestic to China. While international students at these TNE universities are frequently less than 10 percent of the total student body, a small number of universities take proactive steps to ensure more robust diversity, such as NYU Shanghai, which has a number of system-wide diversity programs that aim to create an equal balance between Chinese and international students (Diversity of Initiatives, 2017). According to my conversations with administrators of these institutions, a key purpose of enrolling international students is to develop the university's brand as a global institution. In a sense, TNE universities in China gain credibility from having international students on campus.

From the operational perspective, I find that TNE institutions in China are run quite differently from their local Chinese counterparts in that: (1) TNE institutions are generally run by a board of trustees, whereas their Chinese counterpart institutions lack this governance structure; (2) TNE institutions typically utilize faculty who are sourced globally, often coming from the foreign “mother” university and are usually not sourced from local Chinese universities; (3) the curricula, majors, standards and academic requirements regarding courses and graduation are consistent with or are similar to the foreign ‘mother’ institution; (4) the working language on campus and in the classroom is English; (5) the campus facilities and atmosphere are broadly more reflective of the foreign campus culture than of traditional Chinese institutions of higher education; and (6) enrolled students at TNE institutions are substantially more ethnically diverse and multicultural. Of note, this dissertation focuses on student intercultural engagement investigation at one of such Chinese joint-venture transnational institutions located in China.

### **Issues and Challenges of Chinese Higher Education Internationalization**

Brain drain, or the exodus of highly educated or professional citizens from one country to another for perceived improvements in standard of living or quality of life, has long been a reality for China since its efforts to send students and scholars abroad for the purpose of improving the nation’s education system and workforce capabilities and competitiveness more generally. During the period from 1978 to 2001, two thirds of the approximately 380,000 Chinese scholars and students sent overseas remained abroad, including many of those sent and financed by the government and other public sectors (Shen, 2001). Among those, many of them are very well qualified experts with advanced knowledge and skills that add value to China’s

economy. The Chinese government has made a serious effort to both try to reduce the outflow of Chinese scholars and students and encourage the return of overseas Chinese students and scholars, including offering financial incentives and facility in changing one's permanent residence status (or 'hukou'), which is typically linked to an array of social benefits.

Another important issue is quality assurance and control of the activities concerning transnational higher education (Huang, 2003). Specifically, there are uncertainties in how to adjust the balance between benefiting from transnational higher education and maintaining a national identity and character (Huang, 2003). One of the major problems is that the regulations for transnational higher education programs and operations in China have been restrictive and rigid in terms of requirements and procedures. For example, a foreigner cannot be president of an institution; the governing body of an institution has to be dominated by Chinese; delivery of teaching concerning humanities and social science subjects is limited; and teaching concerning religious doctrines is forbidden (Huang, 2003). Again, there is a general lack of autonomy by university leaders in contrast to their Western counterparts.

### **Intergroup Contact Theory**

This study employs intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2005) as the theoretical foundation of the student intercultural engagement study. Intergroup contact studies focus on examining intergroup contact-prejudice relationship, contact conditions, and attitudinal perceptions and changes. A major body of the intergroup contact research is the

sizeable collection of the knowledge about contact conditions that scholars identified to produce favorable contact and lead to maximum reduction of intergroup prejudice.

Allport (1954) contends that as people with differing cultural backgrounds come into contact, their prejudiced ideas towards the out-group member(s) will diminish when they truly understand and appreciate the other member(s). Allport (1954) investigated and identified a number of constructive conditions or criteria to facilitate positive intergroup relations, reduce prejudice or cure conflict, namely, (1) equal status of the groups involved in contact, (2) common goals shared by members from different groups, (3) cooperation rather than competition between or among intergroup members, and (4) support from authorities on the intergroup contact and interactions.

Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis is empirically supported by studies of the contact-prejudice relationship issue, according to Tropp and Pettigrew (2005), who reviewed 515 research papers on this topic published between the early 1940s through the year 2000, which included 713 independent samples and 1,383 non-independent tests, involving 250,000 participants from 38 countries. In their findings, the general association of greater intergroup contact and lower intergroup prejudice is well supported through the entire body of the literature they review, although the analyses also indicate that contact-prejudice effects vary significantly in relation to the societal status of the groups involved (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2005). Specifically, contact-prejudice relationships were generally weaker for members of minority status groups than for members of majority status groups. For these findings, Pettigrew and Tropp (2005) explain, "for members of minority status groups, an ongoing recognition of their group's devaluation inhibits the potential for positive contact

outcomes, whereas such an effect is unlikely to occur among members of majority status groups” (p. 956). This explanation has support from some other recent studies showing that minority group members’ intergroup attitudes are closely related to their perceptions of prejudice from the majority group (Livingston, Brewer, & Alexander, 2004; Monteith & Spicer, 2000) and that exposure to prejudice from the majority group can provoke more negative intergroup attitudes among members of the minority group (Tropp, 2003).

Allport’s (1954) contact hypothesis has received a lot of respect and citation in academic literature, though not entirely free of criticism. Some intercultural contact scholars find evidence indicating that the contact hypothesis does not work uniformly, but differently for each racial/ethnic group (Ellison & Powers, 1994; Ford, 1986; Sigelman & Welch, 1993). In other words, Allport’s conditions are predetermined. Further, other scholars (Bramel, 2004, Dixon, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2005; Pettigrew & Troop, 2000) have criticized that Allport did not explore how intergroup contact members themselves define, experience and make sense of the intercultural contact they live in. It is apparent that more recently scholars emphasize individual’s definitions and interpretations of their intercultural contact in specific heterogeneous contexts and investigate how intercultural interaction takes place and affect those who live in it.

The intergroup contact theory also supports studies of attitudinal perceptions and changes between contact groups. Particularly, it suggests four overlapping and interrelated processes of attitude change through intergroup contact (Pettigrew, 1998). The processes are (1) learning about out-group, (2) behavioral change, (3) affective ties, and (4) ingroup reappraisal. Learning about the out-group is the initial

process to help correct negative views of the out-group and reduce prejudice (Pettigrew, 1998). When more positive information about the out-group is obtained, particularly when the stereotyped beliefs about the out-group are disassociated, individuals during the intergroup contact tend to modify their behaviors and change their attitude (Pettigrew, 1998). Repetition of such contact tends to reduce anxiety, diminish negative reactions, and arouse positive emotions (e.g., empathy), which can mediate intergroup contact effects and generate affective ties (Pettigrew, 1998). Finally, such optimal intergroup contact can reshape the individuals' view of their ingroup and let them realize that ingroup norms and customs turn out not to be the only way to work with the world (Pettigrew, 1998).

The intergroup contact theory is the foundation to understand how the culturally different students in my sample study university live, interact and engage with out-group members; how they develop their cross-group relationships and form friendships if they do; how they define their intercultural engagement and how they comprehend their engagement experiences; and further how the university community conditions nurture or hinder the relationship development.

Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis is highly applicable to my dissertation study setting, a Chinese-foreign joint-venture transnational university that houses students from scores of different nations across the world. On more traditional Western multicultural campuses, the majority of students are usually the host nationals whose first language is the language of instruction on campus and who have grown up within the host culture; the minority of students are sojourners whose first language and culture are not the same with that of the host nationals. On traditional Western campuses, researchers have found that domestic students



typically have a low level of interest to engage with the international or sojourning students (Bennett, Volet, and Fozdar, 2013; DeVita, 2000; Gresham, Symons, & Dooley, 2013; Korobova, 2012; Mann, 2001; Summers & Volet, 2008). Quite different from most traditional Western multicultural campuses, my sample study university is a joint-venture transnational university between China and a Western nation, which relies on educational provisions of the Western campus (curriculum, degrees, faculty, pedagogical styles, facilities and the campus atmosphere set up) and utilizes English as the language of instruction, even though it is located in China and has significantly more Chinese citizens on campus than sojourners from other nations. It would be fascinating to find out how the intergroup contact phenomenon proceeds in such a newer model of international campus, and to what degree the host nationals in the traditional Western multicultural campuses are similar to or different from the so-called host nationals in the new model multicultural campus located in a Eastern nation.

*Equal status.* Allport (1954) contends that to foster positive intergroup relations, groups must engage equally in the relationship and the members have similar backgrounds, qualities and characteristics. In my sample study university, the Chinese students and international students are from very different cultural and educational backgrounds and speak different native languages, although the common classroom language is English. How might Chinese students feel and engage on campus as the majority group in contrast to how the international students feel as a minority group, even though the Western educational model being utilized is generally consistent with that of their home nation? The situation at the sample study university offers an opportunity to study student intercultural engagement dynamics

from a unique perspective. In this context, what are the groups' statuses? Further, how would that status situation impact the student intercultural engagement experiences on campus?

Besides intergroup peer status, another important relationship type at universities involves student-teacher relationships. It is widely reported that students from Eastern cultures value educators as seniors and with high social status whereas students from Western cultures value educators don't necessarily hold educators in high regard socially. At my sample study university, the faculty, staff and administrative staff come from around the world, and accordingly they likely have quite differing understanding and perception of their status on campus. How might students from different groups interact with the teachers and officials of the university?

*Common goals.* Allport (1954) believes that to improve intergroup relations, there must be common goals shared between or among the groups in contact. Common goals pull together the intergroup members' efforts and resources. In the university setting, it is easy to understand that people share common goals from the institutional perspective, particularly if related to university reputation or long-term goals such as a university vision. Nevertheless, the goals each cultural group holds for themselves should shed light on student intercultural engagement experiences. For example, the question "why did you choose to come to this university" for the students may identify differing goals among cultural groups and guide their priorities on campus and to what degree they engage in intergroup interactions and activities.

*Intergroup cooperation.* Allport (1954) asserts that groups must work together for their common goals without competition, which would divide them

further apart. In universities, group projects and assignments are a typical format for students to cooperate with each other. How does the group cooperation between out-group members look like in the transnational education model? Would the Western students react similar to how they normally behave back home? Would the Chinese students react similar to their compatriots who are studying in the Western institutions? Would English language be an issue for their communication and cooperation? How does the atmosphere feel when the Chinese students presumably outnumber the Western students and work in their own home country but speak a language that is less comfortable for them? Who are engaged and who are not? Would the cooperation really facilitate prejudice reduction? If that, would out-group friendships be possible? When and how would that occur if yes?

*Support from authorities.* According to Allport (1954), intergroup members also need to attain institutional, organizational and societal support from authorities, law or customs for the contact. That is to say, in the university setting, students are not the only players in student intercultural engagement, the institution itself is the other player. As an enabler, facilitator or organizer of student intercultural engagement, ideally the institution establishes policies, deploys its resources, and builds up programs to promote student intercultural engagement on campus. As a transnational and multicultural campus, what does this sample study institution do to promote intercultural engagement and how does that impact student intercultural engagement on campus?

### **Student Engagement**

The literature review of student engagement theory includes Astin's (1984) student involvement theory and the development into student engagement theory by

Kuh (2009a) and National Survey of Student Engagement (2015). I review the definitions of the terms, the features and players around the concepts, and related terms, such as engagement indicators, facilitators and dimensions.

According to Astin (1984), *student involvement* refers to “the quantity and quality of the physical and psychological energy that students invest in the college experience” (p. 518). Astin (1984) sees involvement as an active term emphasizing participation, as he stated, “It is not so much what the individual thinks or feels, but what the individual does, how he or she behaves, that defines and identifies involvement” (p. 519). Therefore, Astin (1984) highly emphasizes the vitality of student time element in the involvement theory. To Astin (1984), the concept of *involvement* closely resembles the concept of *cathexis*; it is also close to the concept of *effort*, although the latter concept is much narrower. Astin (1984) used many verb phrases to describe involvement and help people make a better sense of the concept, among which he used such behavioral terms as ‘attach’, ‘commit’, ‘devote’ and ‘engage’. In Austin’s (1984) words, a student who commits considerable energy to study, spends significant time on campus, interacts frequently with teachers and peers, and participates actively in student organizations and extracurricular activities is a highly involved or engaged student. On the contrary, an uninvolved student neglects studies, spends little time on campus, interacts infrequently with teachers and peers, and refrains from extracurricular activities.

According to Astin (1984), there are five postulates involved with the involvement theory: (A) involvement refers to investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects; (B) involvement occurs along a continuum; that is, different individuals may have different levels of student engagement in

different activities at different times; (C) involvement has quantitative (time allocated) and qualitative (energy invested); (D) the amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program; and (E) the effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student engagement.

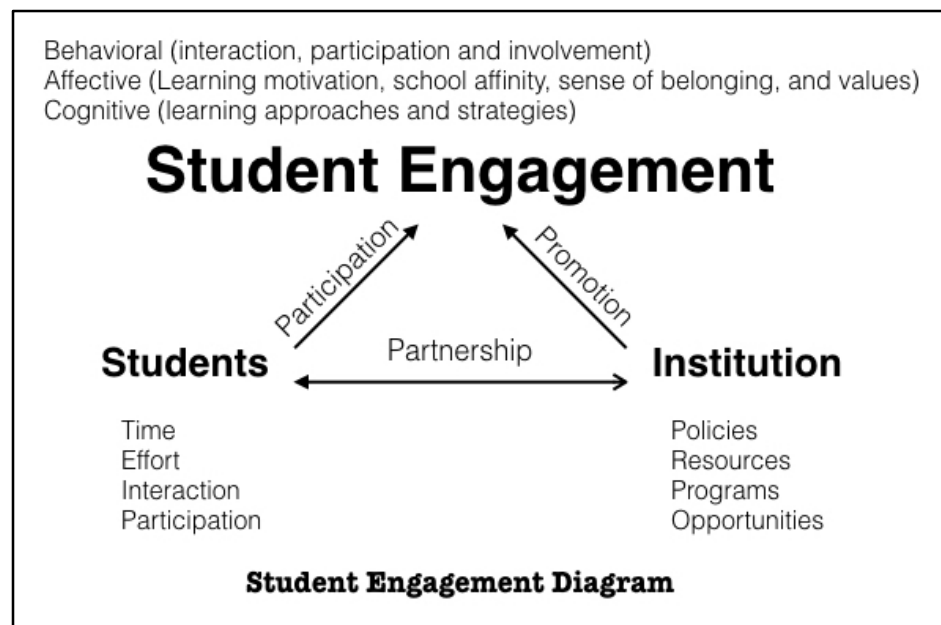
Austin's (1984, 1999) student involvement theory attained a lot of attention and also invited some criticisms. For example, some argue that the student behavior of involvement does not necessarily guarantee such behaviors are actively engaging (Harper & Quaye, 2015) or linking to any high-quality learning outcomes (Krause and Coates, 2008), hence Kuh (2009a) later used student engagement to replace student involvement. Some experts also argued that student engagement should not be just looked as the behavioral participation of students, it should also be looked as how they are connected to their classes and institutions (Axelson & Flick, 2010) and how they feel towards their institutions, such as school affinity, sense of belonging and values (Axelson & Flick, 2010). Further, scholars have argued that student engagement should include not only students, but also institutions, and how these two players collaborates with each other to promote the student engagement (Kuh, 2009b; NSSE, 2015; Trowler, 2011). Finally, some argue that the outcomes and benefits of student engagement should not only be with students but also with institutions, such as, performance and reputation of the institution (Trowler, 2011). To summarize, student engagement, a term that stresses active collaboration of both students and institution, links objectives or outcomes, and implies student-institution

connections, values and sense of belonging, has broadly replaced the term student involvement, which emphasizes student behavioral participation.

Student engagement, according to Kuh (2009a), “represents the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college and what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities” (p. 683). The National Survey of Student Engagement or NSSE (2015), expands upon Kuh’s definition and develops a full description of student engagement, stressing that both students and institutions are critical players in education and learning, and emphasizes how both students and institutions collaborate together to promote student engagement:

Student engagement represents two critical features of collegiate quality. The first is the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities. The second is how the institution deploys its resources and organizes the curriculum and other learning opportunities to get students to participate in activities that decades of research studies show are linked to student learning (p.1).

Based on the aforementioned review of the scholars’ opinions and statements on the concept of student engagement, I develop the following working model (Figure 1) to show the features, structure, and relationships evolving the concept of student engagement.



**Figure 1: Student Engagement Model**

As the above model shows, the major relationships of the student engagement construct can be shown by the Three P's (Participation, Promotion and Partnership). Students and the institution are the two major players of student engagement. Students function as participants; they participate and are engaged in various interactions and activities on campus that are linked to their learning outcomes. The level of energy invested, the amount of time spent, the frequency of interaction with peers, faculty and others in their colleges and universities, and the activeness of participation in various school activities, are major indicators to show the extent to which a student is engaged. Therefore, student engagement is an active term, stresses participation, both physically and psychologically, as well as the quantity and quality of participation. Particularly, student time is especially looked as a critically important aspect of student engagement. Astin (1984) argues that student time may be "the most precious institutional resource" (p. 522). Kuh (2009) agrees with the engagement premise; simply, the more time students spend on study a subject, the

more they know about it, and the more they practice and get feedbacks, the deeper they come to understanding what they are learning. The institution functions as the organizer and supporter to promote student engagement. The institutional policies, resources, programs and opportunities provided are external factors that contribute to student engagement and they are called facilitators of student engagement (Lam, Wong, Yang, & Liu, 2012; Skinner, Furrer, Marchand, & Kindermann, 2008). The students and the institution collaborate with each other to improve the students' learning outcomes, inspire their learning motivation, strengthen their connections with the institution, and enhance their affinity and sense of belonging to the school community; at the same time engagement helps to boost the school in spirit and develop institutional reputation.

### **Dimensions of Student Engagement**

Student engagement is typically described as three-dimensional construct with behavioral, cognitive, and emotional/affective components. The behavioral dimension usually refers to the physical participation side, such as attendance and classroom participation (Hughes & Kwok, 2006; Skinner & Belmont, 1993), extracurricular activities in school (Finn, Pannozzo, & Voelkl, 1995), and involvement of positive conduct and absence of disruptive or negative behavior (Fredrick, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Cognitive engagement refers to the amount and types of cognitive strategies that students employ in educational settings (Walker, Greene & Mansell, 2006). In other words, it indicates the approaches and strategies that students utilize to process learning. These strategies could be more superficial (e.g., rote memorization) or more profound (e.g., strategic simulation). Experts believe that cognitively engaged students would be invested in their learning,



seek to go beyond the requirements, and take pleasure in challenge (Fredrick, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Emotional/affective engagement refers to students' feelings about learning (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Skinner & Belmont, 1993) and the school they attend (Finn & Rock, 1997). The feelings about learning activities are reflections of intrinsic motivation, while the feelings about the school are a manifestation of school bonding (Lam, Wong, Yang, & Liu, 2012). Students who engage emotionally would experience affective reactions such as interest, enjoyment, positive attitude about learning, or a sense of belonging (Fredrick, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004).

### **Institutional Role in Student Engagement**

As discussed earlier in this section, both students and the institution are held to share responsibilities to promote student engagement. From the institutional side, faculty, staff and administrators are all found to be important to facilitate and enable engagement to take place. Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005) used two national data sets, including the NSSE, to explore the relationship between faculty practices and student engagement. They found that students report higher levels of engagement and learning at institutions where faculty members use active and collaborative learning techniques, engage students in experiences, emphasize higher-order cognitive activities in the classroom, interact with students, challenge students academically, and value enriching educational experiences. Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005) then concluded that “the educational context created by faculty behaviors and attitudes has a dramatic effect on student learning and engagement” (p. 173).

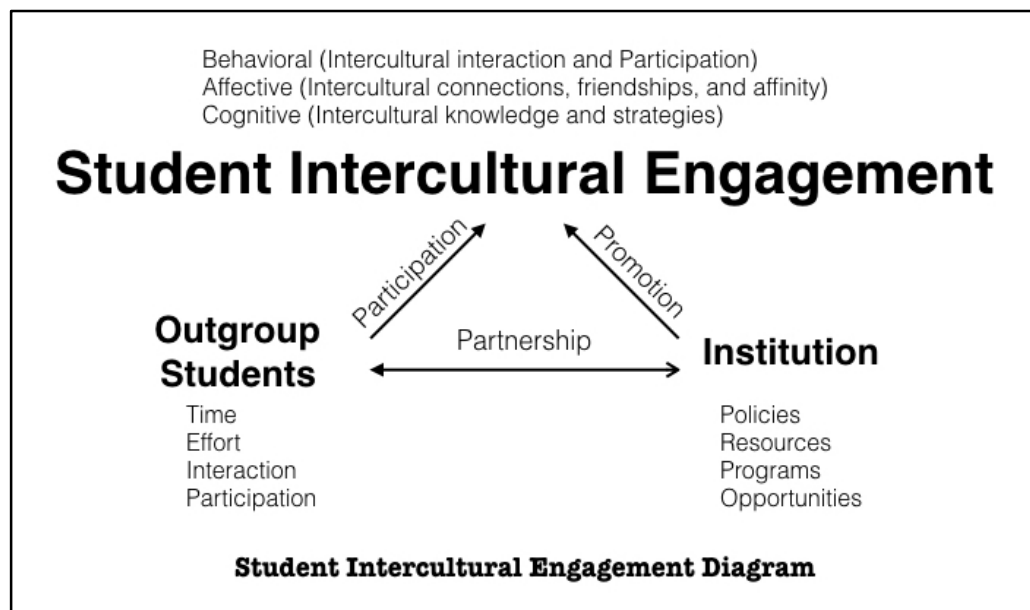
The faculty role in the promotion of student engagement obtains support from

other researchers as well. Coates (2005) suggests student engagement is fostered when academic staff make themselves “available for consultation outside class time” (p. 26). Hu and Kuh (2002) indicate that all institution employees “can influence the extent to which students perceive that the institutional environment values scholarship and intellectual activity by communicating high expectations” (p. 570-571). Finally, Baron and Corbin (2012) offered a comprehensive suggestion on how faculty and staff can contribute to the facilitation of engagement, including requiring group studying, encouraging feedback adoption, stimulating student connection in class, researching professional application, incentivizing staff that take part in pertinent activities of the university, and supporting extracurricular activities.

Besides the individual faculty and staff that play a critical role to promote student engagement, many researchers believe it is vital to create an institution-wide inclusive environment and culture that persistently encourages and strengthens student engagement (Coates, 2005). Pike and Kuh (2005) argue that, “the most important institutional factors are thought to be policies and practices adopted by institutions to increase student engagement” (p. 187). They found that engaging institutions “were marked by an unshakeable focus on student learning emphasized in their missions and operating philosophies” (p. 187).

### **Student Intercultural Engagement**

I adopt student engagement as the conceptual framework to explore the topic of student intercultural engagement. Following the student engagement diagram, I develop the student intercultural engagement working model in Figure 2 to show the features, structure and relationships of student intercultural engagement construct.



**Fig. 2: Student intercultural engagement model**

As discussed in previous sections, how students are engaged in school and how institutions support student engagement are highly associated with students' learning and their school affinity, as well as the institution's development and reputation (Astin, 1984; Axelson & Flick, 2011; Kuh, 2009b; NSSE, 2015; Trowler, 2011). In what ways and to what degree do students invest their time and effort, interact with other students, faculty and administrative people on campus, and participate in various school activities—all these determine how engaged students are in school (Astin, 1984; Kuh, 2009a; Trowler, 2011). In the same vein, I assume that numerous factors should determine how interculturally engaged students are in school, including how and to what degree students invest their time and effort; how students interact with other nationalities, races and ethnically diverse students, faculty and administrative people on campus and within the surrounding community; and how students participate in various intercultural activities on and off campus. In addition, institution is viewed as an enabler, supporter and facilitator of student

engagement (Axelson & Flick, 2011; Kuh, 2009b; NSSE, 2015; Trowler, 2011). As described previously, there are three dimensions of student engagement: behavioral, affective and cognitive. Student intercultural engagement should also have these three dimensions. The behavioral dimension indicates intercultural interaction and participation physically (time spent) and psychologically (energy and effort invested). The cognitive dimension involves employing related knowledge, experiences and strategies in the intercultural interaction and participation. The affective dimension reflects students valuing the connections with other culturally different individuals and groups, as well as the affinity with the multicultural institution they live in; it also reveals students holding their values and belief systems related to the intercultural engagement.

As Chapter 1 mentioned, there is paucity of literature investigating the student intercultural engagement topic and I have not found a particular definition for it among the literary works that I have reviewed. Therefore, in this dissertation, I offer a working definition of student intercultural engagement by combining the meanings of ‘intercultural’ and ‘student engagement’. ‘Student intercultural engagement’ represents the amount of quantitative and degree of qualitative interaction and participation students have with culturally different individuals, groups and context both on and off campus, as well as how the institution deploys its resources and organizes programs and opportunities to promote students to participate in such intercultural activities.

### **Intercultural Competency**

‘Intercultural competency’ has been frequently employed as a theoretical foundation for academic studies of student behavior and development in international

and intercultural contexts. Intercultural competency is useful in this dissertation in that it enables analysis of the intercultural engagement phenomenon. Further, it provides insights on how to promote intercultural engagement and intercultural competency among students immersed within intercultural and globalized environments.

Although there have been quite a lot of studies on intercultural competency, so far there does not appear to be consensus on the use of terminology or the definition. A large group of scholars define intercultural competency by listing individual characteristics, skills and qualities from various perspectives. One of the earliest definitions of intercultural competency was created by Tewksbury (as cited in Deardorff, 2006), who listed 21 “Characteristics of a Mature International Person” to unfold the concept of intercultural competency into concrete meaning. The 21 competency characteristics can be broadly categorized into such labels as cultural self-awareness, cross-cultural awareness, willingness to learn, commitment to making the world a better place, having international friendships and membership in an international organization, and so on (Wilson, 1994). Paige (1993) adopted the term ‘intercultural effectiveness’ and identified six factors influencing intercultural effectiveness, such as, knowledge of target culture, personal qualities, self-awareness, behavioral and technical skills, and situational factors. Lambert (1994) employs the term ‘global competence’ to emphasize individual ability (e.g., world knowledge, foreign language proficiency, empathy for other cultural viewpoints) to practice in an international setting. Later, Fantini and Tirmizi (2006) summarized what other scholars and experts identified as important characteristics in individuals

for their intercultural competence into four dimensions: knowledge, skills, attitude and awareness.

For the purpose of this study, I adopt Deardorff's seminal definition of intercultural competency, which is simple to understand and sufficient to cover all the key elements. In her definition, 'intercultural competency' refers to the "ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (2006, p. 248). At the same time, other scholars' contributions are informative to understanding the specific elements, behaviors, personalities, and skill-sets that work to indicate the intercultural competence of an individual.

Some scholars suggest the ways and approaches to promote individuals to become interculturally competent are through global education (Hanvey, 2001) or cultural education (Finkelstein, Pickert, Mahoney, & Barry, 1998). The American Council on International Intercultural Education (1996) also emphasizes learning and defines a 'globally competent learner'. The Council listed nine specific items as the explicit goals of the 'globally competent learner', in which the most notable one is capability of working in diverse teams and responsibility of global citizenship. Notably, the learning perspective is supported by Deardorff (2006), who articulated, "One meaningful outcome of internationalization efforts at postsecondary institutions is the development of interculturally competent students" (p. 241).

Finally, it is worth mentioning that another group of intercultural researchers conceptualize intercultural competence from the vertical perspective, or the developmental and process point of view of intercultural competence, including Bennett (1993), Pedersen (1994) and Kim (1988). Bennett (1993) created a six-stage

developmental model of intercultural sensitivity based on the way individuals experience cultural differences, from more ethnocentric to more ethnorelative stages. Similar to Bennett's developmental model, Pedersen (1994) views multiple development as a continuous learning process based on three stages of development: the awareness stage, the knowledge stage, and the skills stage. Kim (1988) also created a three-step process model (stress, adaptation, and growth) to depict an individual's psychological journey from being a stranger to a new culture to being an interculturally competent person.

### **Summary**

This dissertation primarily focuses on investigating, via sample study, student intercultural engagement issues within a joint-venture TNE institution located in China that has a well-known university partner based in a Western country. The topics of student intercultural engagement and TNE are both emerging in presence and understudied in literature, and even more so in East Asian or Chinese contexts. This dissertation conducts one of the first, if not the first, study of its kind in China; it seeks to contribute to the fields of transnational education, student development within the era of globalization, and higher education internationalization in general.

The literature reviewed in this chapter provides a valuable foundation to guide and support the study. The reviews of higher education internationalization and transnational higher education in China provide a background and contextual understanding of the higher education system and institutions in China, which is the main research setting of the study.

I employ the intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954; Halualani, 2004, 2008; Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2005) as the theoretical foundation of the

student intercultural engagement study. Intergroup contact theory investigates the relationship between intergroup contact and prejudice reduction (Allport, 1954). Allport (1954) identified a number of variables, known as contact hypothesis, to be associated with developing positive intergroup relations, such as, equal status, common goals, cooperation, and authoritative support. The contact theory is highly applicable to my sample study context to understand how culturally diverse students on campus live, interact and engage with out-group members, how they develop their cross-group relationships and form friendships, how they define their intercultural engagement, how they comprehend their engagement experiences, and how the university community directly or indirectly nurtures or hinders student intercultural engagement.

The student engagement construct provides a conceptual framework of the student intercultural engagement study and particularly Astin's student involvement theory lays a critical foundation for it. Essentially, engagement involves two aspects, student time spent and effort invested in educationally purposeful activities. Both Astin (1984) and Kuh (2009) particularly emphasize the time aspect, as is simple to understand: the more time students spend on school learning, the more they learn. The time aspect that these researchers value also plays a fundamental function to guide my research in understanding the degree of student intercultural engagement in the present sample study institution. In addition, this study also reviews important functions of both students as the engagement participants and institutions as the engagement facilitators to promote the engagement level. Based on the findings of scholarly research related to student engagement, I developed a student engagement diagram to show how students and institutions collaborate with each other to



improve student engagement. Combining the concepts of student engagement and intergroup contact theory, I developed a student intercultural engagement diagram to show how students and institutions collaborate with each other to improve student intercultural engagement.

Finally, the intercultural competence theory also plays an important role in facilitating comprehension of the student intercultural engagement study of this dissertation. The definitions, dimensions, personal characteristics of intercultural competence provide theoretical guidance of the present study of student intercultural engagement analysis from the competence perspective. It is expected to see a relationship between student intercultural engagement and intercultural competence in the study and further provide guidance in the recommendation section in Chapter 5.

### **Methodology and Research Design**

The purpose of this study is to determine factors that influence student intercultural engagement at a transnational university located in China that is a joint-venture of a local university and a well-known Western university. The research questions guiding this study are: (1) How are students being engaged interculturally; (2) What does the notion of intercultural engagement mean to the students; (3) How do students view their intercultural engagement experiences; and (4) What are the personal and institutional factors that influence student intercultural engagement?

This chapter encompasses a description of the methodology used to conduct a sample study of student intercultural engagement. Specifically, it consists of nine parts, namely, research design and rationales, the case setting, population and participants, sampling methods of focus groups, qualifications and role of moderators, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, timetable, and limitations and delimitations.

#### **Rationales, Research Design and Methods**

According to Creswell (2013), a research design consists of three different but interrelated aspects: philosophical worldviews, strategies of inquiry, and specific research design and methods. This study adopts a constructivist framework and sample study strategy to advance the research on topics related to student intercultural engagement. In terms of specific research design and methods, it employs the mixed methods approach, specifically a two-phase exploratory sequential design, initially with qualitative methods research (observation of the site and focus group interviews with selected students) followed with quantitative

research utilizing survey questionnaires completed by participating students. Finally, one-on-one in-depth interviews follow the online survey to ensure a thorough comprehension of the phenomenon and the participants' feelings and thoughts. In this study, the qualitative component will lead the subsequent research design and shape the direction of the entire study.

### **Constructivist framework**

According to Creswell (2013), social constructivists assume that individuals actively seek understanding of the world in which they live and work, that they develop subjective meanings of their experiences towards certain objects or things through interacting with others, and that these meanings are varied, multiple and social. Therefore, in order to understand the complexity of the experiences, a researcher needs to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of situations being studied. Accordingly, the researcher's questions usually become broad, general and open-ended so that the participants have opportunities to negotiate and construct the meanings of various situations, typically forged in discussions and interactions (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, constructivist researchers tend to visit research sites and gather information personally, often focusing on specific social and historic contexts in which the participants live and work, addressing the processes of interactions among participants, and trying to interpret the meanings that the participants or others have about the world, instead of starting with a theory to understand given situations. Constructivist researchers also recognize that their own experiences and backgrounds will also shape how they interpret other's experiences and meanings (Creswell, 2013).

### **The case study strategy**

Given that constructivism emphasizes in-depth knowledge of experiences displayed by participants and the social and cultural contexts that the participants live within, Creswell (2013) suggests that the sample study method can be an effective choice for a research design under the constructivist philosophical foundation.

Creswell (2013) describes a sample study as a strategy of exploring a program, event, activity, process, interaction or people (individuals or groups) that usually involves in-depth examination and detailed data collection.

The sample study method is ideal for my dissertation study, and both the rationale and methodology largely follows the tenets described by Creswell (2013) and Yin (2013). In my study, it was very important to obtain in-depth knowledge and thorough understanding from individual participants pertaining to their student intercultural engagement experiences and perspectives. As Creswell (2013) argues, relative to other social science research approaches, the sample study method enables the deepest examination of people and their interactions for the purpose of comprehending social-cultural behaviors and the outcomes of such behaviors. This echoes Yin's (2013) opinion that the more the study needs in-depth explanation of the current phenomenon, the more the sample study method will be relevant. In my study, I needed to have a thorough understanding of how individual students from various nations and cultures studying in this particular joint-venture transnational university have their personal experiences in interacting with others on campus, how they engage in this multicultural campus, and how they form their unique feelings, thoughts, opinions and attitudes towards this community. Furthermore, the

transnational university in China is an emerging trend that has not been researched in publicly available academic literature.

In addition, as Yin (2013) argues, studies that involve a contemporary set of events, over which a researcher has little or no control and where the research questions focus mainly on “how” and “why”, a sample study would likely be the preferred research method. In my study, the intercultural engagement issue in a transnational institution setting is a contemporary phenomenon that has not generated much investigation yet and that needs in-depth exploration and explanation, hence the sample study approach is highly relevant. I made my explorations by asking “how” the students are being engaged interculturally, ‘how’ the students view their intercultural engagement experiences, and so on.

### **Mixed methods exploratory sequential design**

Mixed methods, according to Creswell (2013), is essentially an approach to research where the investigator gathers and integrates both qualitative and quantitative data and draws interpretations based on the combined strengths of both data sets. Creswell’s (2013) methodology of harnessing qualitative and quantitative data is followed in this dissertation. According to Creswell (2013), research questions asking “how” are qualitatively oriented while research questions asking “what” are quantitatively oriented. To enhance validity, Creswell (2013) believes that it makes sense to conduct research in two phases with appropriate methods at each stage. In my study, the research questions indeed ask both “how” (e.g., how students are being engaged interculturally, and how students view their intercultural engagement experiences) and “what” (“what” factors influence student intercultural

engagement). Therefore, it is powerful to use both qualitative and quantitative methods, hence, mixed methods, to do the research.

Within the mixed methods, according to Creswell (2013), there are altogether six specific designs underneath two categories, sequential mixed method category and concurrent mixed method category. For sequential mixed methods, there are (1) sequential explanatory approach, (2) sequential exploratory approach, and (3) sequential transformative approach (Creswell, 2013). For concurrent mixed methods, there are (1) concurrent triangulation approach, (2) concurrent embedded approach, and (3) concurrent transformative approach (Creswell, 2013).

Sequential mixed methods usually involve a first phase of (quantitative or qualitative) data collection followed by a second phase of (qualitative or quantitative) data collection, which builds on the first phase. For example, the explanatory sequential design involves an initial phase of quantitative data collection and analysis, followed by a second phase of qualitative data collection and analysis that builds on the results of the first quantitative phase (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) added that “Weight typically is given to the quantitative data, and the mixing of the data occurs when the initial quantitative results informs the secondary qualitative data collection. Thus, the two forms of data are separated but connected” (p. 210). The qualitative data is usually adopted to explain the unexpected or surprising results arising from the quantitative stage.

As for the exploratory sequential design, it is essentially the opposite of the explanatory sequential design. The initial phase involves qualitative data collection and the second phase involves quantitative data collection; the qualitative data provides guidance on the quantitative research design; and the qualitative data is

usually given more weight and both sets of data are connected (Creswell, 2013). For the transformative sequential approach, it also has an initial phase (either quantitative or qualitative) followed by a second phase (either qualitative or quantitative) that builds on the earlier phase, but the key is that this approach has a theoretical lens, which shapes research questions, creates sensitivity to collecting data from marginalized or underrepresented groups and ends with a call for action. The theoretical lens is more important than the use of methods alone for the transformative sequential approach. Research using this approach often aims at exploring some social problem, such as inequality, discrimination, or injustice (Creswell, 2013).

Concurrent mixed methods involve the researcher collecting qualitative and quantitative data concurrently or one data collection phase. For the concurrent triangulation approach, the researcher collects both quantitative and qualitative data concurrently and then compares the two databases to determine if there is convergence, difference, or some combination (Creswell, 2013). In this strategy, usually both methods are equally important to the researcher. Unlike the concurrent triangulation approach, the concurrent embedded approach has a primary method (quantitative or qualitative) that guides the project and a secondary method (qualitative or quantitative) that provides a supporting role in the procedures (Creswell, 2013). Hence the secondary method is *embedded* within the primary method. This method is often employed for the secondary database to enrich the predominant database; it can also be employed to collect data with different groups of subjects, such as general employees of an organization can be studied quantitatively and leadership people can be qualitatively interviewed (Creswell,

2013). Finally, the concurrent transformative approach is the same with the sequential transformative approach in that it involves guiding theoretical perspective as the driving force of the approach as well as both quantitative and qualitative data collections; what is different is that with the concurrent transformative approach, the two types of data are collected at the same time (Creswell, 2013).

Following Creswell's (2013) analysis of the aforementioned six mixed methods, I adopt the exploratory sequential design for the current research. According to Creswell (2013), if it makes sense for the qualitative data to be collected first and given more weight, then sequential methods with the qualitative approach at the first phase should be considered; on the contrary, if it makes sense for the quantitative data to be collected first and given more weight, then sequential methods with quantitative approach at the first phase should be considered.

As for my study, given that there is limited academic research available on the emerging topic of student intercultural engagement, and considering that no research was uncovered that addresses the new trend of Chinese-foreign joint-venture transnational higher education campuses in China, little is known about the dynamics of intercultural engagement among college students in such contexts and the study is well suited for a sequential and qualitative-first mixed method design. As Creswell (2013) argues, "if a concept or phenomenon needs to be understood because little research has been done on it, then it merits a qualitative approach" (p. 18). Further, as Creswell (2013) contends, "if the problem calls for (a) the identification of factors that influence an outcome, (b) the utility of an intervention, or (c) understanding the best predictors of outcomes, then a quantitative approach is best" (p. 18). A key objective of my study is to identify factors that influence student



intercultural engagement at a Chinese-foreign joint-venture transnational higher education campus. Therefore, a quantitative approach for this study should provide further value to understanding the study topic. Creswell's (2013) statements provided a clear rationale and guidance for the current study to firstly employ the qualitative research method and to secondly employ the quantitative method. The first phase qualitative data are used to explore some essential understanding of the topic and identify important variables and factors to examine in more detail in subsequent research, while the employment of the succeeding quantitative methods, such as survey instruments with greater participation rates, would help strengthen the validity of findings.

Accordingly, I employed both qualitative and quantitative methods in the data collection and analysis of my study. Consistent with Creswell's (2013) recommendations, I put more weight on the first phase of qualitative research design and used it as the exploratory force, examining the potential variables that impact student intercultural engagement through on-site observation and interviews with student enrollees of the sample study institution. I developed the second-phase quantitative survey questionnaires in response to the findings of the first-phase qualitative research. Hence, my first-phase qualitative research design guided the second-phase data collection design and further shaped the entire study.

### **Research Site**

As noted previously, the sample study location is a joint-venture transnational university located in China, and which is a partnership between a Chinese university and a well-known Western university. The transnational university can be described as a comprehensive university offering degrees from bachelors to doctorates in the

fields of science, engineering, business, humanities, and social studies. The Western partner university is broadly responsible for setting curriculum, university standards, and the overall educational model and operations of the university. Successful undergraduate students will earn degrees and diplomas citing both the Chinese and the Western partner universities. Successful graduate students will earn degrees and diplomas from only from the Western partner university. In other words, graduates from the China campus will have diplomas that refer to the well-known Western university.

The majority of students on campus are enrolled in undergraduate programs. Generally speaking, students in the undergraduate programs can opt to study at the Western partner university's home campus for their third and fourth year, following the first two years of successful study at the transnational campus in China. International students represent about 5% of the total student body, but draw from over 60 unique nations around the world. The distribution of international students on campus is uneven, with a few degree programs having over 20% international students and others having a small to nonexistent proportion of international students.

### **Participants**

This study employed several primary data collection methods, including observations, focus group interviews, survey questionnaires, and one-on-one in-depth interviews, respectively. All students in the sample study university were invited to participate. Specifically, for focus groups, all students were notified and asked for consideration to be included for selection. All students were invited to participate in

the survey. Students that completed the survey indicated whether they would like to participate in in-depth interviews.

### **Data Collection**

As noted previously, this study employed mixed research methods, particularly an exploratory sequential design. For the first phase of qualitative data collection focused on classroom and on-campus observations, as well as focus group interviews. The second phase of quantitative data collection involved an online survey questionnaire, which was developed in response to findings of the first phase of research. Finally, one-on-one in-depth interviews were held with diverse students to gain further understanding of student intercultural engagement at the deepest level possible. Each of the techniques used are described below both in terms of the academic justification for its utilization and how it aligns with my specific research objectives.

### **Observation**

Observation has been described as a systematic data collection approach because it uses all of the senses to examine people or situations (Qualitative Research Guidelines Project, 2017). There are many reasons about why investigators collect observational data and two of the reasons are highly related to this dissertation. The first is when the topic is relatively unexplored and little is known to explain the behavior of people in a particular setting; and the second is when the nature of the research question to be answered is focused on answering a how or what-type question. Student intercultural engagement is an emerging topic and little scholarly research has been written about the dynamics of student intercultural engagement, yet alone student intercultural engagement at transnational campuses in China.

Visiting the sample study university is essential and informative, providing an opportunity to observe the natural setting and how people in this setting interact with each other and with the environment. For my research, several observational experiences facilitated the identification of possible factors to explore that may impact student intercultural engagement experiences happening on campus, such as English language skills and individual attitude.

One whole week was used to observe students' behaviors in various environments on campus, including large lectures and small discussion classes, the library, the student center, student dormitory zones, campus cafes and food courts, and general campus areas. Generally, observations were made discretely, with the only exception that I was introduced to students of the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) class, which I observed for one class period. Observations were made on field notes instead of through video or audio recordings, primarily in an effort not to disturb the natural environment or what was naturally taking place in the aforementioned locations.

### **Focus Groups**

Focus group interviews were a primary research method employed to form an understanding of the student intercultural engagement phenomenon at the sample study institution. According to Krueger and Casey (2014), a researcher should consider using focus groups when the goal is one of the following seven prospects: 1) looking for a range of opinions, perceptions and feelings; 2) discovering factors influencing the topic to study; 3) trying to understand differences in perspectives among groups; 4) seeking synergetic ideas from a group of people; 5) pilot-testing ideas and materials; 6) aiming to pursue information to shed light on a large-scale

quantitative study; or 7) aiming to pursue information to shed light on a large-scale quantitative study already connected. In my case, focus groups align well with most of the aforementioned research goals. For example, focus groups provide insight into a range of perceptions and feelings on student intercultural engagement from a cultural and demographically diverse group of students.

Focus groups enabled me to better understand the extent to which students from different national backgrounds have different perspectives, shared experiences and synergistic ideas. These insights formed the basis for the second phase of primary data collection, which was a survey instrument that enables quantitative analysis of factors that potentially are associated with or correlated to student intercultural engagement. Undoubtedly, focus group interviews were a critically important and insightful technique to use at the initial stage of data collection.

I developed structured focus group interview questions consistent with the research questions. For example, my first research question is, “How are students being engaged interculturally?”, and a related focus group question was, “Tell me about some intercultural interactions or activities that you have had on this campus”. As another example, my second research question asks, “What does the notion of intercultural engagement mean to the students?”, which aligns with the following two focus group questions: “Please give me an example of an on-campus intercultural activity that you, or somebody else, were really engaged in (when, where, what, how and why)”, and “Please give me an example of an on-campus intercultural activity that you, or somebody else, were not engaged in (when, where, what, how and why)”. Other questions related to values, frustrations, strategies or

best practices, as well as personal or institutional influencing factors of student intercultural engagement.

To conduct focus group interviews, I followed Creswell's (2013) focus group interview protocol of asking questions and recording answers. The protocol includes the following six components:

1. The date and place of the interview, and the names of interviewer and interviewees (in this case, interviewees will be asked to present any name they prefer just for the purpose of addressing them during the interview);
2. Instructions for the interviewer to follow so that standard procedures are used from one interview to another;
3. Ice-breaker questions at the beginning, 4-5 sub-questions closely related to the research questions, and some concluding statement or question;
4. Probes to follow up on the 4-5 questions;
5. Pauses between the questions to record responses; and
6. A final thank-you statement to acknowledge the time interviewees spent during the interview.

Following the aforementioned protocol, I took a multifunctional role as a moderator, recorder, observant and host. At the time of facilitating the focus group interview, I made a self-introduction and explained again to each participant about the purpose of the meeting, in a professional and friendly manner. I also established the ground rules and pointed out that the entire session would be recorded. The permission of recording the focus groups has been obtained in advance with each selected and invited focus group interviewees. During the entire focus group interviews, I did not make any personal comments or judgment following the

participants' sharing of their feelings, thoughts or attitudes. In addition, I made sure the atmosphere was appropriate for such a meeting from end to end. I followed the advice of Krueger and Casey (2014) not to conduct more than two focus groups on the same day because of the mental and emotional discipline required. By holding one focus group on a given day I was able to immediately transcribe the audio recordings and alter anything or add new discussion points for subsequent focus groups. Altogether I conducted four focus groups.

### **Survey research**

A survey design provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population (Creswell, 2013, p. 145). The survey technique has multiple strengths according to academic literature. It is relatively inexpensive, useful in describing characteristics of a large population; it is flexible in the ways of administration and in the time when the respondents can reply; and finally, anonymous surveys are generally dependable in that it allows the respondents to answer with more honest and valid answers (Wyse, 2012).

Again, this study was a mixed-method exploratory sequential design, so the qualitative methods from on campus observations and moreover the focus groups shaped the development of the survey instrument. In other words, I designed the survey from scratch based on initial findings of the first phase of analysis from the observations and focus groups. There were three categories of questions on the survey. The first category pertained to personal background information, such as gender, academic year level, racial/ethnic background, and previous international or intercultural experiences. The second category pertained to the frequency and

nature of student intercultural engagement. For example, the participants were asked how often (within a certain period of time) they conducted group projects, had conversations, participated in university-hosted events, or other types of activities with students from a different culture; they were also asked in what settings or situations on campus they interacted (using specific activities as mentioned above) with students from a culture different from his or her own; they were also asked about friendship making with students of other nationalities or cultural backgrounds. The third category pertained to personal experiences of intercultural engagement on campus, aiming to find out if students are being engaged and what benefits they may have gained from the intercultural engagement; student perceptions on challenges of student intercultural engagement and their opinions on what promotes or hinders the intercultural engagement; and how students view the role of the transnational university in promoting intercultural engagement and their opinions on what could be done to improve such engagement on campus. Finally, an open-ended question was created to invite participants to add any information or make any comments.

I created the surveys on a popular online survey platform developed for the Chinese market, called Sojump. The survey questionnaire is compatible with the most popular social media platform in the Chinese market, WeChat, thus participants could take the survey either on their computers or mobile devices; the flexibility and user-friendliness undoubtedly promoted participation. I invited all the students through the transnational university's official email system for the survey participation and sent out another one reminder through the same system one week later. The online survey was open for access for three weeks.



### **One-on-one in-depth interviews**

I adopted one-on-one interviews as the final step of the data collection process. This allowed me to obtain detailed information regarding how individual students on campus engage in their intercultural experiences and how they feel and view the dynamics around the topic on their campus, which I could not acquire in as much detail through focus groups or surveys. Further, the individual interviews provided me with the opportunity to ask sensitive and/or personal questions within a safe environment for the students.

To recruit student for one-on-one interviews, I started with the online survey questionnaire; specifically, I asked the survey participants to add their email addresses if they were willing to participate in a one-on-one interview with me. Again, the survey itself was anonymous. I invited several students that participated in the first phase of focus group to come back for an individual interview in order to have a more detailed conversation with them. Further, I also invited others to get a broader sample of diverse cultural backgrounds and across different demographics. Altogether I held 15 one-on-one interviews.

### **Bilingual interviews and surveys**

Given that the university work language is English and that most interviewees and survey participants were Chinese native speakers, the interview and survey processes were bilingual or based on the interviewees' preference. In other words, the interview and survey questions were presented in both English and Chinese. I am bilingual in English and Chinese language, and accordingly I conducted interviews in either English or Chinese based on the interviewees' preference. The interview and survey questions were originally developed in English and translated to Chinese. In

order to ensure the translated Chinese remains accurate with the original English, the Chinese translation has been translated back to English and verified. To ensure the credibility of the translations, I invited two University of Minnesota alumni with advanced degrees to be involved in the translation and review processes. One is a native English speaker and the other is a native Chinese speaker.

### **Sample Size and Sampling**

The final sample size for focus groups were 27 student participants, there were 246 completed survey responses, and 15 students participated in one-on-one interviews. More information and a demographic breakdown of the sample population for each type of research is provided in Chapter Four of this Report.

Sampling refers to the procedures for selecting participants and to the sampling strategies employed within each of the designs (Creswell, 2014). Quantitative sampling aims to generalize from a sample to a population, whereas qualitative sampling seeks to purposefully select a sample of participants who can help the researcher understand the central phenomenon being explored (Creswell, 2014). In this study, primary data collection techniques involved both a quantitative and qualitative methods. The next section explains sampling for each of the techniques.

#### **Sampling for observations: purposeful sampling and random sampling**

For observations, I adopted a combination of purposeful sampling and random sampling. Given my research topic, I needed to see interactions that students had with individual or groups that are from different national or cultural backgrounds; in other words, I needed to observe intergroup activities. Therefore, I purposefully observed typical places on campus that have or potentially have such

intergroup activities, such as in classrooms, cafeteria, the student center, on-campus cafes, dormitory areas, food streets on or by the campus, and so on. For the actual visits and observations, I adopted the random method and did not make much planning, simply following the principle of accessibility. In other words, I observe as long as I have access to the sites where there may exist student intercultural interactions. I observed as much I could.

### **Sampling for focus groups: stratified sampling and maximum variation sampling methods**

For focus groups, I used a combination of stratified sampling and maximum variation sampling methods. I first divided the university student body into five groups, representing each year level of the undergraduate programs from Year One to Year Four and the graduate programs. In other words, they are Group 1 of Year One undergraduate students, Group 2 of Year Two undergraduate students, Group 3 of Year Three undergraduate students, Group 4 of Year Four undergraduate students, and Group 5 of graduate students. Following that I used the maximum variation sampling method to select a number of students from each cluster to form a focus group.

I should point out why I divided the student body into groups according to their academic year level rather than first based on their nationalities or cultural backgrounds. The reasoning is from the following aspects. Firstly, based on my previous observations and informal conversations with students on campus, undergraduate students and graduate students seemed to be quite different regarding their intercultural engagement experiences, thoughts and attitudes. Further, within the undergraduate programs, it seemed that lower academic year students (Year One

and Year Two) are different from upper academic year students (Year Three and Year Four). As one example, participation in student clubs and organizations was perceived to be much more significant among the first and second year undergraduate students relative to the third and fourth year undergraduate students. Students reported having more ‘time’ and ‘energy’ to participate in extracurricular activities during the first two years of undergraduate school, and considering that grade point average only counts for the third and fourth year of study, students reported typically leaving clubs behind to focus on grades for the upper academic years. Secondly, there was only 5% of international students on campus and they are scattered in various academic levels and programs, and the number of international students who were willing to participate in the focus groups was even smaller, therefore, it was not practical to form an international student group for each academic level. Thirdly, I did not ask overly sensitive questions to the focus groups; for the questions that would be potentially sensitive, I saved for the later on one-on-one interviews. Finally, the first focus group that I hosted was composed of both Chinese and international students, and there was no sign of uneven participation by cultural group. In a sense, I believed this diverse group arrangement could be an effective approach for participants to hold deeper and more meaningful conversations. Therefore, each focus group was composed of participants from different nationalities and cultural backgrounds. I combined the Year 3 and Year 4 students together to form one focus group, as there were not enough students in each of the two levels for a focus group interview. Therefore, altogether I facilitated four focus groups.

I solicited focus group participants through email that was distributed to all campus students. In this email, I explained my academic mission and the purpose of the study, and introduced my high-level plan for the focus group interview. Also in the same email, I asked interested students to provide select personal information such as gender, identity (domestic vs. international student), country of origin, major of study, ethnicity and hometown, and the number of countries stayed in for at least one month. The purpose was to use these factors to ensure selection of a diverse range of cultural and demographic backgrounds among those who affirmatively replied to my email inquiry.

I received 84 valid responses from students that expressed their willingness to participate in a focus group. To achieve the depth and breadth of understanding of the intercultural engagement issue, my selection criterion was to promote variations, regarding gender, nationality, academic major, previous international and intercultural experiences, and so on. Following this analysis, I selected 32 students out of the 84 valid responses into the four focus groups introduced previously; due to time conflict, I finally had 27 students join the focus groups.

I arranged the focus group interviews in a quiet area of a large-size coffee shop on campus that is the most popular among the students, faculty and other university staff. This arrangement is consistent with various scholars' suggestions on focus group sites. As one example, Krueger and Casey (2014) recommend that a focus group be (1) a carefully planned but relaxed series of discussions (2) designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest (3) usually conducted with a small group of people (4) led by a skilled interviewer or moderator (5) in permissive, nonthreatening environment (p. 2). It suggests that focus groups should be hosted in

a permissive, nonthreatening environment. Accordingly, I held the focus group interviews at a site that was relaxing and familiar to the students and let them feel comfortable to share their honest and candid thoughts.

### **Sampling for surveys**

I chose to invite all the current students of the university to participate in the survey study – a population sample. To have as many students as possible to participate in the survey promotes the generalizability of the findings. I collected 246 completed surveys.

### **Sampling for one-on-one interviews**

Following the survey phase of data collection, I selected 15 students for in-depth conversations. This quantity enabled me to achieve representation from a range of cultural backgrounds and academic levels. I chose the students to interview that I believed would best advance the aforementioned objectives of the one-on-one in-depth interviews, namely acquiring more detailed information that students might not have felt comfortable sharing in a group situation. I invited a few students who came to my earlier focus groups and who I perceived to have interesting cases regarding the student intercultural engagement topic. Further, I invited a few students who were introduced to me by their friends who also came to my focus groups and shared with me the intercultural interactions and activities they had had together. Finally, I recruited some students from among those who completed the surveys and did not participate in the earlier focus group interviews. The criterion again was to have students who represented different cultural backgrounds and who appeared genuinely interested to participate in individual interviews.

## **Focus Groups, Survey Instrumentation and Individual Interview Guide**

In this section, I discuss how I developed focus group questions, the online survey questionnaire as well as thoughts on structuring the final phase of the interview questions.

### **Phase one: focus group interview**

The focus group interview questions were developed to promote an understanding of all the four research questions. As an explorative research, the first phase of the qualitative study was the key to help understand the general situation of the research topic and to help develop the second phase of the quantitative study questions, which took the form of a survey instrument.

I developed a structured set of questions to guide the focus groups, and follow up questions were asked based on the actual conversation of each focus group. The set of structured interview questions is presented in Appendix 1. The interview started out by asking students to introduce any intercultural interactions or activities that they had on campus to get a basic understanding of the students' intercultural life in the university. Follow up questions aimed at understanding how they were interacting interculturally from key places on campus that cultural groups may meet, such as academic environments (e.g., classes, group projects), extracurricular activities (e.g., clubs and organizations), and social life. These questions primarily related to the first research question.

Then, I asked participants to share a specific intercultural occurrence in which they themselves or somebody else were really engaged. This question required them to have a detailed description of a full event or activity that they shared. The purpose was to try to acquire how they comprehend student intercultural engagement, which

is the basis for my second research question. Following that I asked them to share a specific intercultural occurrence in which they themselves or somebody else were *not* engaged or disengaged, with the same requirement and purpose.

Following that, I asked focus group participants what they viewed was the most valuable thing and the most frustrating thing that they experienced from working with people from other cultures on campus. This encouraged students to think of how they viewed their personal intercultural experiences on campus from both a positive and negative perspective, which is the basis of my third research question.

Finally, I asked students to share their ideas on what personal and institutional factors they have experiences impact student intercultural engagement on campus. This is the basis of my fourth research question, and the topic was explored both from supportive factors and factors that may hinder student intercultural engagement.

The focus group interview questions were carefully designed following recommendations from Creswell (2014) and Patton (2014), such as to maintain basic lines of inquiry, make best use of time for key interview questions, and confirm key points. The focus group interview questions were pilot tested with two students in the sample study university, one Chinese and one international student, respectively. This process enabled me to adapt and enhance the question design before the official launch of focus group research. Again, the final version of the structured focus group questionnaire is presented in Appendix 1.

### **Phase two: survey variables and instrumentation**

For the quantitative research phase, I developed a survey questionnaire based on the extant key research in the field of intercultural contact and engagement as well



as the first qualitative phase data collected specifically about the university and experiences shared among students. The variables in this phase are mainly around the following areas: (A) the frequency, amount, location/setting, topics, friendship and outcomes of intercultural contact, (B), the individual quality, experiences, and feelings around intercultural contact, and (C) personal and background information. The focus of this study is to examine factors that impact student intercultural engagement of the university. A multiple linear regression (MLR) analysis is used to determine the correlation and predictive nature of the model.

**Dependent variable: self-reported frequency and duration of intercultural interactions.** As described in Chapter Four of this dissertation, students conceptualized their respective student intercultural engagement level as the frequency and duration of intercultural interactions with peers, many of which further emphasized meaningful or positive encounters that promote learning, awareness, friendship, and so on. Accordingly, I designed a survey question that asks students to identify their own perceived level of student intercultural engagement, as determined by the frequency and duration of student intercultural engagement experiences on campus. This is the dependent variable in the quantitative MLR analysis detailed in the final section of Chapter Four of this dissertation. One of my major goals in this research is to identify factors that influence student intercultural engagement, and this will facilitate that understanding from a quantitative perspective, in addition to findings from focus groups and one-on-one interviews.

For my dissertation, a major inspiration of student intercultural engagement variables comes from research conducted by Halualani, Chitgopekar, Mossion and Dodge (2004) on intercultural contact and interaction in a sample study multicultural

university in the United States. In order to find out how students are interacting interculturally on campus, Halualani, Chitgopekar, Mossion and Dodge (2004) essentially investigated frequency and nature of intercultural interaction on campus to find out how students from different cultural groups in that specific setting are interacting. The frequency of interaction shows the engagement level of the intercultural contact in their research. In the meantime, my research topic, 'student intercultural engagement' is established partly on the construct of 'student engagement', in which the level of 'engagement' is determined by time and effort that students put to their educationally purposeful activities (Astin, 1984, 1993; Kuh, 2003, 2009a). Therefore, the amount of time, or frequency is a most important variable to represent the engagement level. Hence, I set up the frequency of student intercultural engagement as the dependent variable in my analysis.

**Independent variables.** There are multiple independent variables in the study. The selection of independent variables is rationalized by related extant research as well as the data I collected from the first focus groups' phase.

*Intercultural friendship.* Friendship has become an interesting topic for the researchers in the intercultural field. As early as in the 1970s, Klineberg and Hull (1979) investigated 2,500 international university students studying in 11 countries and found that regardless of the host country, the most regular contact for the international students was with co-nationals and that the majority of the international students have their best friends either from their home nation or another country other than the host nation. Three decades later, some researchers in their longitudinal research found the positive development of intercultural friendships on a Western multicultural campus (Bennett, Volet & Fozdar, 2013). Other researchers examine

variables around the intercultural friendship formation. Kudo and Simkin (2003) examined intergroup friendship factors and identified frequent intercultural contact as a major influencer. Lee (2008) uncovered a staged intercultural process (initial encounter, interaction, and involvement) in intercultural friendship, which suggests a relationship between transitioned friendship and deeper level of intercultural contact. Further, Gareis, Merkin and Goldman (2011) discovered that communication variables, such as language proficiency, are significantly related to intercultural friendship. Other researchers' investigations of both positive and negative intercultural friendship development in intercultural contact also provide rationale on the friendship variable (Halualani, 2008; Li & Campbell, 2008; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2005; Montgomery & McDowell, 2014; Sakurai, McCall-Wolf, & Kashima, 2010; Ward, Masgoret, Ho, Holmes, Newton & Crabbee, 2005). In the meantime, in my study, the focus groups participants implied there is a notable relationship between intercultural friendships and intercultural engagement level.

*English language skills.* English language skills are a high-profile issue well documented by a lot of researchers that have studied how English proficiency impacts intercultural interactions and international student experiences in the traditional Western and Eastern multicultural campuses, particularly where English is the language of instruction (e.g., Gareis, 2000; Leask & Carroll, 2011; Kudo & Simkin, 2003; Morita, 2012; Sias, Drzewiecka, Meares, Bent, Konomi, Ortega, & White, 2008). This association also includes Chinese-foreign transnational programs (Zhuang & Tang, 2012). In my current study, the first phase of the focus groups overwhelmingly stressed the impact of English language proficiency on intercultural engagement.

*Cross-cultural group work participation.* During the first phase of the focus groups, the majority of the students stressed the tremendous experiences of participating in group projects with peers from different cultural backgrounds and how that related to the student intercultural engagement level on campus. Both Chinese and international students expressed how much they learned from their cultural peers in academics, cultural understanding and skills, language skills, and developed out-group friendships as well. The experience of cross-cultural group work contributing to intercultural engagement also found support in other multicultural university settings. For example, a Korean student in a US university reported how class discussions and group work help improve his intercultural participation level and build up his rapport with people from other cultures (Yoon, 2013).

In other two courses, I don't speak a word during the class, but in one class, I participate a lot. There are eight students in the class... I did a group project with four of them, after then, I feel friendly with all of them. So although I hadn't talked a lot before, when the professor asked me something today, I just said something because it was so comfortable. So just with the feeling that I am friendly with other classmates, I am naturally speaking so comfortably in the class. (p. 69)

Many other researchers also suggest that intercultural peer interactions in both in-class discussion and academic group projects can have substantial and positive effects for cultural diversity outcomes (Chang, 2000; Gurin, 1999; Orfield, 2001; Umbach & Kuh, 2006). These cases are also theoretically supported by what the intergroup contact hypothesis identified, that personal interaction and cooperation with common goals are some of the primal conditions for intergroup members to lower their prejudice, truly understand each other, or even develop out-group friendships (Allport, 1954).

*Initiator.* The focus groups participants shared that students who are interculturally active and have developed out-group friendships were observed and/or self-reported to often take an initiative in intercultural settings. Students believed that initiative taking is an important factor of student intercultural engagement on campus during both academic and sociocultural activities. Yoon's (2013) investigation in a multicultural campus in the United States indicates similar positive relationships between willingness and actual initiative taking and the increase of the intercultural petrification. It also is logical that a person that tends to take initiative and is proactive in interacting or collaborating with cross-cultural groups could have greater student intercultural engagement than reserved or introverted students.

*Academic level.* The focus group participants ranged the spectrum of academic levels, from first year undergraduate to doctoral student. Based upon my observation of students and their comments, undergraduate students had considerably less group projects than graduate students, and graduate students had a more mature worldview. I am interested to see whether that relationship shows true from the expanded student body.

*'Diversity' is a primary reason for selecting university.* During the focus groups, I often asked students why they chose this university, and the range of answers spanned from "easy admission" to "diversity" to "can earn a diploma from a well-known Western university". It seems intuitive to me that if a student chose this university mainly because of the unique and diverse atmosphere on campus, this student would be more active intercultural participation. To be clear, many students specifically stated that "diversity" was not a factor in their decision to join the university. "Diversity" as a primary reason to select the university could be another

fascinating variable to investigate and find out whether it has a significant relationship with student intercultural engagement.

The final online survey questionnaire is presented in Appendix 2.

### **Phase three: individual in-depth interview**

The third phase of the data collection followed administration of the survey questionnaire, and took the form of a semi-structured one-on-one interview method. The purpose of the individual in-depth interview in the third phase is further confirmation of the data collected from the focus groups in the first phase and clarification of the online survey responses. In addition, some questions that may have been seen as sensitive to ask in front of a focus group with many participants could be explored in a safer setting for the participant.

The individual interviews generally proceed with three sections, (A) personal background introduction, (B) going through some outstanding responses of their online survey questionnaire, and (C) seeking further detail and explanation on a range of topics. The personal background introduction was to understand more about the student's family background, why they chose this university, and previous international and intercultural experiences. Going through some key questions of the online survey questionnaire and particularly their own answers was helpful to take the conversation to a deeper level of understanding. For example, one student selected cultural "diversity" on the survey as the major reason for him to go to this particular university, but on the survey, he also indicated that he did not have any intercultural contact experiences on campus. It was surprising to me that on an international campus, a student who was attracted to the sample study university for its diverse student population, and thus likely more outgoing to communicate with

out-group peers, would not have a single intercultural contact experience on campus.

When this did not happen as expected, the one-on-one interview provided a great opportunity to find out the reasons and potentially acquire more information and thoughts beyond the surface. In the third section, I made an effort to get further explanation or different perspectives from students on a range of topics relevant to the subject of student intercultural engagement of my initial findings.

### **Research Steps**

This study took a mixed-method exploratory sequential design for data collection. The entire research procedures are as follows:

1. I travelled to the research site university and did observations for a week on campus.
2. In the meantime, I sent an email to all the university students through the university's official mass email system, encouraging them to consider a potential focus group interview with me. In this email, I explained my study purpose, how focus group interviews work, selection criteria, as well as compensation.
3. I received email responses from students who were interested in joining my focus groups.
4. I selected a number of students among the respondents to form four focus groups, using a combination of stratified sampling and maximum variation sampling methods.
5. I confirmed with all the selected students and communicated to them all preparations, including when, where and how the focus groups were going to be conducted, and so on.

6. I travelled to the university and conducted focus groups on campus for another week. The focus group interviews were audio-recorded and simultaneously involved note taking, and were conducted at the pace of one group per day.
7. I transcribed each focus group interview's audio recordings within the same day of the focus group interview in order to gain insights and prepare for subsequent focus group interviews.
8. I designed online survey questionnaire based on my observations and the focus group interviews.
9. I invited all students of the transnational campus to participate in the online surveys through the university's official mass email system and communicated compensation matters.
10. Following the online survey, I selected students for one-on-one interviews and communicated to them with all the preparations including the interview site and schedules, as well as compensation matters.
11. Finally, I travelled back to the research site university and conducted one-on-one interviews.

To promote participation and to show appreciation for the participants' time, attendance and sharing, I provided coffee vouchers to each participant that completed the focus group interview (\$30 equivalent per person), the online survey (\$15 equivalent per person, for 5% of the participants), or the one-on-one interview (\$30 equivalent per person). I also treated each focus group or one-on-one interview



participant with a drink of their choice while we were conducting the interviews in an on-campus cafe.

### **Data Analysis**

This study involved mixed methods data analysis as it involved both qualitative and quantitative analytical techniques within the same framework. My approach was consistent with the methods and definition put forth by Creswell (2013), and applied to my research that was based on mixed methods exploratory sequential design, where the qualitative analysis phase preceded the quantitative analysis phase, and the findings from the initial analysis phase informed the subsequent phase. Qualitative analysis was conducted again after analysis of the quantitative survey instrument as a follow up. The qualitative analysis strands were given priority determined by the exploratory mixed methods design. Creswell (2013) stated that in an exploratory sequential study, the qualitative data collection and analysis should come first, followed by quantitative data collection and analysis, and that the researcher typically presents the project as two distinct phases, with separate headings for each phase in the report writing, and then in the conclusions or interpretation phase of the study, the researcher is recommended to comment on how the quantitative findings helped to elaborate on or extend the qualitative results. I have followed this approach.

#### **Qualitative data analysis**

For the qualitative data analysis procedures and techniques, this study followed Creswell's (2013, p. 185-189) six-step framework:

Step 1: Organize and prepare the data for analysis.

Step 2: Read through all the data.

Step 3: Begin detailed analysis with a coding process.

Step 4: Use the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis.

Step 5: Advance how the description and themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative.

Step 6: Make an interpretation or meaning of the data.

This six-step approach suggests linear and hierarchical analysis, but in practice, as Creswell (2013) confirms, the steps are substantially interactive and interrelated and thus may involve simultaneous or iterative analysis. I worked back and forth among different qualitative data to refine findings and recognize key themes and form conclusions.

I first read through the entire transcriptions and my focus group notes, and developed a database in Excel Sheets to track common themes, basic demographic data, and various notes on relevant student intercultural engagement topics. I clustered together the similar topics appearing from each interview and cross-analyzed all the underlying meanings. For example, most Year One and Year Two undergraduate students shared their student club experiences; most Year Three and Year Four students shared their student-faculty communication experiences; and most graduate students shared their class discussions and group project experiences. Undergraduate students shared very little experiences of how they were interacting with peers from different cultures on campus, particularly the Chinese students among whom many expressed that they did not have such opportunities. Conversely, graduate students expressed having a relatively significant amount of intercultural experiences, but the majority reported negative impressions of these experiences.

Based on these differences in academic level, I tentatively clustered intercultural contact occasions, academic groups, experience scenarios, as well as contact and thought characteristics.

In the meantime, I evaluated any unique or unexpected topics, thoughts, or attitudes that emerged from any of my participants and analyzed how these variations can be related to the other topics, thoughts or attitudes generated from the interview. For example, I noticed that some Chinese students indicated their positive attitudes of their university experiences and intercultural experiences on campus, yet they in the meantime also reported to have very limited opportunities to physically meet with international students on campus. I therefore became alert of their related sharing and also made sure to obtain more information in this regard from the next groups of students I was going to work with. After I had the whole list of topics I derived from the database, I abbreviated them as codes and categories, and used these codes and categories to go over the database one more time to see if there were new codes and categories emerging. This was an iterative process.

Creswell (2013) argues that qualitative data analysis is conducted concurrently with gathering data, making interpretations, and writing reports. This resonates with Corbin and Strauss' (1990) Grounded Theory in terms of a well-crafted data analysis process. In Grounded Theory, the analysis begins as soon as the first bit of data is collected; investigation of the first bit of data helps with the next data collection processes by bringing in cues and potential adjustment to be made by the researcher (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). In other words, data collection and analysis are an interrelated process. Following this guidance, I began transcribing and analyzing audio-recordings right after each focus group interview, found out key

concepts, themes and patterns so that I could facilitate better informed and better prepared data collection with each focus group. As scholars have noted, it is viewed as important to use constant comparisons for similarities and differences among incidents until themes and patterns are found out (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Therefore, I made sure to ask every new group about all the key points that each prior focus group stressed and seek their corresponding experiences, opinions, and attitudes on said topics.

In terms of focus group and one-on-one interview data interpretation, I mainly followed the framework from Krueger (1994) and Krueger and Casey (2000, 2014), which was further developed by Rabiee (2004). Altogether, there are eight criteria to guide researchers going through the coding and interpretation process and they are: words, context, internal consistency, frequency, intensity of comments, specificity of responses, extensiveness, and big picture. For example, I paid careful attention to the actual words that my participants used when talking about intercultural engagement experiences and making comments, the frequency they used those words and other words of similar meanings or connotations, the contexts where they used those words and made specific comments, the extent to which those words were related to their cultural backgrounds, how consistent or inconsistent participants were in their responses, the large trends or concepts that emerged from the accumulation of the sharing of the student intercultural engagement experiences, and so on.

### **Quantitative data analysis**

I followed Creswell's (2013) methodology for quantitative data analysis of my survey instrument, which was sent out to all students of the sample study

campus. Major steps in the data analysis are outlined below, while the data analysis and findings are presented in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

Step 1: Report information about the number of members of the sample who did and did not return the survey.

Step 2: Discuss the method by which response bias will be determined.

Step 3: Discuss a plan to provide a descriptive analysis of data for all independent and dependent variables in the study. Indicated relevant means, standard deviations, and ranges of scores.

Step 4: If the proposal contains an instrument with scales or a plan to develop scales, identify the statistical procedure (i.e., factor analysis) for accomplishing this.

Step 5: Identify the statistics and the statistical computer program for testing the major inferential research questions.

Step 6: Present the results in tables or figures and interpret the results from any relevant statistical tests.

**Data Cleaning.** I collected 246 completed survey responses. Fewer than 5 responses displayed to either have contradictory information between answers or had unintelligible responses to open-ended questions. For example, a few respondents indicated that they interacted with peers from other cultural backgrounds on campus in more than one situation, yet later they also indicated that they had “no opportunity” to meet with cultural peers when they were asked to make comments on their intercultural experiences on another question. A few of those who had “no opportunities” to meet with peers from other cultures, reported on the survey that they had made a positive number of intergroup friends (e.g., 10 or more) on campus.

In addition, a couple of respondents just put random words, such as, “Yes”, “Good”, “Hungary”, “That’s right” in the cells for some open-ended questions that asked them to share some general or specific intercultural experiences, opinions or attitudes.

A reasonable explanation of this phenomenon could be that some students were incentivized to complete the survey since compensation was only associated with completed surveys yet in the meantime they did not want to invest their time or effort in the survey, hence they just put random words for those open-ended questions. Alternatively, there could have been a misinterpretation of the survey question. For questions that had a list of selectable answers, some students seemed not to have read the questions very carefully before they selected answers. In general, open-ended questions were mainly used to enrich the understanding of the intercultural experiences on campus beyond respondents’ quantitative answers, thus I did not disregard any completed surveys. Furthermore, to keep the response data intact, I did not make any changes to the data and analyzed as is. I kept all the 246 completed responses in the data analysis.

**Creating Variables.** Analysis of the initial phase of focus groups found that students on campus were distinctive regarding student intercultural engagement mainly from these two aspects: their national identity as either a domestic Chinese or international student, and their academic level, grouped as either first and second year undergraduate students, third and fourth year undergraduate students, and graduate students. Accordingly, and in order to better understand student intercultural engagement experiences in this sample study university from the larger pool of the student body, the survey was structured to identify student respondents

across the students' intercultural experiences, opinions and attitudes, together with their personal information, such as national identity, gender, academic level, subject major and department, as well as previous experiences abroad. The following are the variables associated with the survey.

- (1) Types of student intercultural engagement experiences on campus (e.g., group projects, class discussions, residential life, etc.);
- (2) Number of student intercultural engagement activities participated in the current semester that were facilitated by the university;
- (3) Number of student intercultural engagement activities participated in the current semester that were not facilitated by the university;
- (4) Intensity of student intercultural engagement conversations (e.g., general academic topics, light small talk, deep level topics);
- (5) Primary reason for choosing the university for higher education;
- (6) Whether the respondent self-identifies as an initiator of student intercultural engagement;
- (7) Number of out-group friends made on campus;
- (8) Self-reported level of student intercultural engagement (scale of 1 to 5);
- (9) Intergroup team project descriptions;
- (10) Compare: collaboration with other International students (vs. with Chinese students);
- (11) Student observation on how important competence in English language is to student intercultural engagement (scale of 1 to 5);

- (12) Student observation on how important cultural understanding is to student intercultural engagement (scale of 1 to 5);
- (13) Student observation on how important personality is to student intercultural engagement (scale of 1 to 5);
- (14) Student observation on how important attitude is to student intercultural engagement (scale of 1 to 5);
- (15) Student observation on how important individual mindset is to student intercultural engagement (scale of 1 to 5);
- (16) Student observation on how important having similarities with other cultural groups is to student intercultural engagement (scale of 1 to 5);
- (17) Student observation on how important being proactive in cultural engagement is to student intercultural engagement (scale of 1 to 5);
- (18) Student observation on how important university facilitation is to student intercultural engagement (scale of 1 to 5);
- (19) Student observation on how supportive the sample study university is to student intercultural engagement (scale of 1 to 5); and
- (20) Student sense of belonging towards the university.

**Statistical Procedures and Rationalization.** I conducted both descriptive statistics and inferential statistical analyses to understand the student intercultural engagement phenomenon at the sample study university and particularly to address the guiding research questions of this dissertation. Descriptive statistical analyses are helpful to illuminate how students on campus were being engaged interculturally, and to compare and contrast responses to different survey questions by different groups, such as international and Chinese students, or by the academic level of



students. For example, with the variables I created, I conducted multiple descriptive statistical analyses to compare the percentage differences or similarities between the Chinese students and international students in the types of intercultural experiences participated in, the number of intercultural activities attended on campus, the number of out-group friends, the reasons for selecting the sample study university, the factors students believed were the most important to student intercultural engagement, and so on. Further, I ran descriptive comparisons based on academic level to further analyze student intercultural engagement experiences and shed light on possible reasons for differences between key groups of students. To address the analysis, or specifically, what factors that influence the student intercultural engagement in this sample study university, I adopted inferential statistics, particularly via a multiple linear regression analysis, to study the relationship between the student intercultural engagement level/frequency (the dependent variable) and multiple independent variables, including intercultural group project experiences, presence of an out-group friendship, academic level of the student, perception as being an initiator of intercultural communication, and self-reported level of English language proficiency. These independent variables were derived from analysis of focus groups, during which participating students argued such variables made a difference in students' personal student intercultural engagement level.

The database was constructed using Microsoft Excel, and data analysis leveraged by Excel's standard application plus the 'Data Analysis' package add-on, which enables an array of statistical tests and analyses. Again, data analysis is the focus of Chapter 4, and presents a comprehensive analysis of the survey instrument,

puts forth numerous tables and figures, and offers interpretation of the results from the statistical tests.

### **Qualities and Role of Moderator**

The researcher who also does the focus group interviews is often referred to as moderator in this process (Gibbs, 1997). The role of a moderator is argued to be demanding and challenging, as “moderators will need to possess good interpersonal skills and personal qualities, be good listeners, non-judgmental and adaptable” (Gibbs, 1997, p. 5). Krueger and Casey (2014) contend that an effective moderator is questioner, listener, and guide of focus groups but not a leader, commentator, or critic (Krueger & Casey, 2014).

Krueger and Casey (2014) listed several specific skills or qualities that a moderator should possess in order to promote a successful focus group. Foremost, it is argued that the most important skill is the moderators’ ability to demonstrate respect towards focus group participants while objectively engaging dialogue, as upholding a respectful demeanor can be a major factor to positively influence the focus group (Kruger & Casey, 2014). It is viewed as critical to display a genuine interest in every participant, paying close attention to both oral communication and body language. Like Gibbs (1997), Krueger and Casey (2014) address the importance of open-mindedness and self-discipline to control personal reactions when moderating, so as to not bias responses or obscure the process. The moderator should also have adequate knowledge of the topic and the study purpose to understand what questions and information are the most useful to the study (Kruger & Casey, 2014), and accordingly to articulate questions and follow-ups clearly. Krueger and Casey (2014) warn that rephrasing questions may not be a good strategy

because it may be interpreted differently by participants and ultimately confuse the moderator. According to Krueger and Casey (2014), two essential techniques that a moderator relies upon are “the five-second pause and the probe” (p. 119), which are argued to be very helpful in drawing additional information from group participants. I leveraged these techniques in my focus groups and interviews. For example, after a participant made a comment, I would often pause for a few seconds and probe by asking follow-up questions.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided a detailed description of the research methods and procedures for this doctoral study, including phases of the study, selection of study participants, and procedures of data collection and analyses. It also outlined steps taken in conducting sound research, as well as put forth particular interview questions developed. In the next chapter, data analysis and detailed findings of these procedures will be presented.

## Chapter 4

### **Research Findings**

This chapter details my findings related to the research questions guiding this dissertation. To restate, the purpose of the study is to investigate student intercultural engagement at a Chinese-foreign transnational joint-venture university located in China. Specifically, there are four research questions guiding this study: (1) How are students being engaged interculturally; (2) What does the notion of intercultural engagement mean to the students; (3) How do students view their intercultural engagement experiences; and (4) What are the personal and institutional factors that influence student intercultural engagement?

As Chapter 3 introduced, this sample study employed a mixed method exploratory sequential design, with a series of qualitative and quantitative research conducted in the following order: one week of on-campus observation, four focus group interviews, an online survey with 246 completed responses, and 15 one-on-one interviews. Consistent with Creswell's (2013) advocated methodology for sample study research, the qualitative research from the on-campus observation and focus groups informed the subsequent quantitative research.

This chapter first presents ten key findings from the entirety of research efforts, which I perceived to be the most meaningful or for which data analysis demonstrated to be the most significant to student intercultural engagement. I believe these key findings will assist the reader to gain important perspective before reviewing the more detailed contextual information, research findings and supportive data analysis. Second, this chapter provides an overview of the focus group participants, survey respondents and one-on-one interviewees in terms of

demographics, academic background, and so on. Again, I believe this is important information that will help the reader to better evaluate the findings and contextualize the research. Third, this chapter comprehensively addresses each of the four aforementioned research questions, walking the reader through relevant findings from my observation, focus groups, student survey and one-on-one in-depth interviews.

### **Summary of key research findings**

1. Most students understood the notion of intercultural engagement to mean positive interactions with peers from other countries, including academic collaboration, socializing, and learning about one another's cultures. Higher levels of student intercultural engagement were held to derive from greater frequency and more meaningful interaction with students from different cultures.
2. Chinese and international students broadly have a negative view of their intercultural interaction and engagement on campus—that is, students generally were expecting to have more frequent and more positive intercultural engagement on campus than their actual experience.
3. Chinese students had significantly lower self-reported levels of student intercultural engagement than their international peers.
4. Students claimed that their intercultural interactions on campus have been predominantly limited to collaborative schoolwork or classroom discussions, and to a lesser extent participation in school clubs.

5. Several students commented that intercultural interactions on campus, particularly in academic contexts, were either not positive experiences or resulted in students feeling interculturally disengaged.
6. Students perceived the most important factors to promote student intercultural engagement to be university-facilitated initiatives that bring culturally diverse students together, personal attitude or mindset, and presence of out-groups friends.
7. Students observed the largest barriers to intercultural engagement with peers to be insufficient common language skills and being introverted.
8. Both Chinese students and international students perceived that the university has constructed barriers that keep Chinese and foreign cultural groups separated, such as segregated residential arrangements, distinct orientation processes, and the view that while classes are held in English language almost all of the university events are held in Chinese language and were seen as unwelcoming to international students.
9. The Chinese students describe the transnational university as a global or international university, yet the international students describe the transnational university as fundamentally a Chinese university.
10. In general, Chinese undergraduate students were significantly more satisfied with the transnational university experience than international students.

### **Overview of Focus Group Participants**

Altogether I facilitated four focus groups. As noted in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, each focus group was generally assembled according to academic year

of study on campus. Table 1 shows that 27 students participated in a focus group session, one-third of which were international students.

**Table 1: Demographics and Backgrounds of Focus Group Participants**

Demographics and Backgrounds of Focus Group Participants			
Participants by Academic Year	# Students	Gender	Cultural Background
Year One Undergraduates	7	4 Male, 3 Female	2 International (Europe, Southeast Asia) 5 Chinese
Year Two Undergraduates	6	3 Male, 3 Female	2 International (Africa, Oceania) 4 Chinese
Year 3 & 4 Undergraduates	5	5 Female	0 International 5 Chinese
Graduate Students	9	5 Male, 4 Female	5 international (Europe, N. America, S. America, Other Asia) 4 Chinese

### Overview of Survey Respondents

Altogether, there were 246 completed responses to the online survey that was open to all students of the sample study university, which again is a transnational joint-venture between an established local Chinese university and a well-known Western university. In order to protect the anonymity of the sample study university I will not disclose the total number of students on campus, but with the intention of addressing the potential for nonresponse bias, as outlined by Creswell (2013) and noted in Chapter 3, I will report several facts about the university on a normative basis, or in percentage terms, as a better gauge as to whether the sample represents the broader student body.

It is possible that the students who chose to participate in this survey do not represent the perspectives or experiences of the typical student on campus, and this must be kept in mind while interpreting the findings of my research. That said, based upon my week-long period of observation research on campus, which included observing student interactions in classroom lectures/discussions and in social venues, in combination with qualitative insights gained from the focus groups and in-depth

one-on-one interviews, quantitative analysis of the survey data was broadly consistent with the qualitative findings.

### **Student Demographics**

Table 2 presents a summary of demographic data on participants regarding gender and whether the student was considered a Chinese or international student. A relative comparison to the entire university is provided, which shows that while the university has about a 5% international student population, 9% of survey participants were international. Although specific numbers were not available to me, it is possible that there was a greater proportion of female responses among Chinese students than is reflective of the student body.

**Table 2: Demographic review of survey respondents**

<b>Demographic Review of Survey Respondents</b>			
<b>Survey Respondents</b>	<b>Survey</b>	<b>Survey %</b>	<b>University %</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>246</b>		
<b>Chinese Students</b>	<b>223</b>	<b>91%</b>	<b>95%</b>
Female	156		
Male	67		
<b>International Students</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>5%</b>
Female	12		
Male	11		
Africa	2		
America	2		
Asia (excl. China)	12		
Australia	1		
Europe	4		
Russia	1		
Undisclosed	1		
Note: the University % column shows comparative data for the entire student population of the case study university			

### **Students and Academics**



Table 3 shows that 91% of 246 survey participants were undergraduates, which compares to 94% of the sample study population enrolled in undergraduate programs. Thus, graduate students are slightly overrepresented in the sample.

**Table 3: Review of Survey Respondents by Student Type**

<b>Review of Survey Respondents by Student Type</b>			
<b>Survey Respondents</b>	<b>Survey</b>	<b>Survey %</b>	<b>University %</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>246</b>		
<b>Undergraduate</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>91%</b>	<b>94%</b>
<b>Lower Undergrad (Year 1,2)</b>	<b>179</b>		
Chinese	171	96%	
<b>Upper Undergrad (Year 3,4)</b>	<b>45</b>		
Chinese	38	84%	
<b>Graduate (Masters, PhD)</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>6%</b>
Chinese	14	64%	

The academic majors of students have been grouped into three major categories. Table 4 shows that 48% of survey participants were enrolled in a science and technology program, 43% enrolled in a business program, and 9% enrolled in a humanities, culture or language oriented program. Comparative data for the whole student population was not available to me.

**Table 4: Review of Survey Respondents by Program**

<b>Review of Survey Respondents by Program</b>		
<b>Survey Respondents</b>	<b>Survey</b>	<b>Survey %</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>246</b>	
<b>Business</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>43%</b>
Chinese	95	89%
<b>Language, Culture &amp; Humanities</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>9%</b>
Chinese	20	95%
<b>Science &amp; Technology</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>48%</b>
Chinese	108	92%

### **Overview of One-on-one Interview Participants**

I facilitated in-depth, one-on-one interviews with 15 students, nine at the undergraduate level and six at the graduate level. The selection process for these interviews was detailed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. Table 5 highlights more

information about the demographics and backgrounds of the student participants in this final phase of research.

**Table 5: Demographics and Backgrounds of One-on-One Interview Participants**

Demographics and Backgrounds of One-on-One Interview Participants			
Participants by Academic Year	# Students	Gender	Cultural Background
Undergraduate Students	9	3 Male, 6 Female	5 International (Africa, Oceania, Other Asian) 4 Chinese
Graduate Students	6	2 Male, 4 Female	4 International (N. America, S. America, Europe, Other Asian) 2 Chinese

### **Research Question 1: How are students being engaged interculturally?**

In their own words, students often expressed that they were expecting to have more frequent and more positive intercultural engagement on campus than their actual experience. Mixed methods of research and observation demonstrated that classroom activities were the most frequent means of student intercultural engagement, followed by participation in a school club. There was very limited engagement in other extracurricular events, dining halls, residence facilities or general social situations. This section will look deeply at *how* students are being engaged interculturally on the campus of their transnational university.

### **Related findings from observational research**

Over the course of a one-week period observing students on campus, including sitting in on classroom activities and watching students interact outside, at restaurants and cafes, it was my impression that the campus does not have vibrant intercultural engagement or a high frequency of intercultural interaction, particularly outside of select academic programs or courses that have an intercultural or international focus. Subsequent focus groups and one-on-one interviews would validate this observation, with students claiming that the interactions between Chinese and international students are predominantly limited to collaborative

schoolwork, classroom discussions and school clubs, and oftentimes those interactions left students feeling interculturally disengaged.

Some of the classroom activities I attended had both low educator-student engagement and low intercultural engagement. For example, I attended a two-hour finance-related lecture in an auditorium instructed by a Chinese professor and approximately 100 undergraduate students from multiple departments. I sat toward the back of a large classroom so as to have a good view. During the class, most students were working on their computers, iPads or mobile phones—many were playing games, browsing social media or news, and a minority of students were following course materials while listening to the professor. The professor occasionally asked a question and picked a student to answer it. There was no microphone support and so the interaction was generally hard to follow. This general pattern went on for two hours, with a short intermission.

There were a couple of international students in the class, one sitting in the very front row and the other in the very back row. Although one could argue that a given finance lecture is not an ideal format for intercultural communication, the break time revealed a cultural disconnect. The Chinese students were enthusiastically chatting with one another while one of the international students took a short nap with her head in her arms and the other was quietly working on his computer. There was no sign of even casual greetings between any Chinese student and either of the international students, in class, during break or after class was over.

Another class I observed was called Intercultural Communication, taught by an international professor and attended by a mix of seven undergraduate students, four of which were Chinese and three of which were international students. Each of

the three international students were from different countries. This was a brand new elective class on campus offered to undergraduate students whose academic English is beyond a certain proficiency level. With the professor's encouragement, the students participated in class although students were generally reserved, and interaction predominantly took place between the professor and student rather than among the students.

I also observed one graduate level class that had 30 students altogether, one-third of which were international students. This class had much richer engagement among students, though the classroom discussions were dominated by a smaller group of international students and a smaller group of Chinese students. Among the students that were not participating in the discussion, most of the international students were listening attentively while the majority of the reserved Chinese students were clearly not engaged in the class but focused in an independent activity such as a mobile phone or computer.

Outside of classes, Chinese students and international students largely socialized in separate groups. In a popular café located in the heart of the campus where I ate lunch every day of the week, I observed roughly 19 of 20 groups of people dining in the café were composed of either just international students or just Chinese students, rarely of mixed groups. In most evenings during my stay, I walked through the main residential areas for Chinese and international students. Again, Chinese and international students have segregated housing facilities on campus. Similar to the situation at the café, around the Chinese residence facilities I observed very few international students socializing with Chinese students at the nearby

restaurants, cafes and stores. The same situation was true for the area around the international student residence facilities.

### **Related findings from focus group research**

Many students described the intercultural interaction between Chinese and international students as “limited”, “fleeting”, “sporadic” or “interculturally irrelevant”. There was broad consensus that the cross-group relationships existed principally in the classroom setting. Focus group participants revealed that even in the classroom, engagement was often superficial and sometimes negative, such as reinforcing the negative stereotypes students had prior to interacting. When asked about intercultural activities on campus that happened outside of the classroom, most Chinese students could not recall participating in such activities and further explained that they did not have many opportunities for this kind of engagement. The non-academic intercultural interactions that students raised involved participating in student clubs, general residential life, partaking in a university-sponsored intercultural program, social media, and a “random” interaction, such as helping an out-group peer with translation at a supermarket or playing a spontaneous basketball game at the gym.

**Classroom engagement.** It was the consensus among both Chinese and international students that the most frequent and meaningful levels of intercultural engagement took place in the classroom setting. However, both Chinese students and international students reported that there was not much interaction between cultural groups in class, and that class discussions to a large extent were between teachers and international students. A Chinese graduate student who studied six years in this

university shared his in-class experiences both as a student and as a teaching assistant.

I took Project Management class. The teacher put students from several different departments together. But we were sitting grouped by our department. All the seven students from our Urban Planning Department are Chinese. We sat at the back, looking at all others. The foreign students were sitting quite in front and they answer questions frequently. I could not understand the content. I tried to ask the teacher after class in private, but I could not understand his answer, either. We also don't want to ask our international fellow students for explanation and I don't know why. The seven of us were often searching information online, but we did not ask any other students. It was maybe because of the language barrier, it might also because of the logic difference between the different departments.

I am also teaching assistant to one class this semester. There are 8 students in the class, 7 Chinese and 1 foreign, and the only foreign student always sits in the front row and right by the teacher. He answers every question that the teacher asks in class. When the teacher asks "do you have any questions", he was basically just asking this foreign student and the rest of the class just watch them, in silence. I was sitting at the back, watching all that. Sometimes I wanted to hear some different answers or comments, but I almost never heard.

One first-year undergraduate international student expressed that his interactions with Chinese peers on campus in most cases was not as engaged as he would have liked, and further felt that he rarely had an opportunity to talk to Chinese students despite that the vast majority of his classmates were Chinese. He found them to be shy while speaking in English and they usually tended not to talk to foreigners. He said that in all of his first year of classes that he went to, he only found one Chinese student whose English was fluent while some others just spoke bits and pieces of English. Another international student echoed the difficulties to interact with Chinese students in class, stating the following.

If I speak truthfully, in my class with 100-120 students, I only have three friends. Two of them were my EAP classmates from Year Two, and the third one who is Chinese and really outgoing and friendly. Except for these friends, the rest of the class, they are not even going to say hi to me. Even if I try to

smile to them when I meet with them outside the school, they don't even smile back.

Group-based academic projects were observed to be a central platform among graduate students for intercultural interactions between Chinese students and international students. Graduate students shared extensive stories pertaining to their participation in multicultural groups, which to them seemed to be the most consistent and predictable form of intercultural interaction relative to other types of student intercultural engagement that seemed more sporadic. The most striking point shared was the international students' frustration working with Chinese students because of perceived shortcomings in the Chinese students' English language competency, as well as an overly agreeable attitude in supporting others' arguments, and "undependable work quality" in presentations and report writing. Some international students, usually those from a culture that is between the East and the West also expressed the predicament they were put in to function as a middle person, trying to engage the students from the Eastern culture (e.g., Chinese and Thai students) and the students from the Western culture (e.g., German students). A Brazilian graduate student recalled her story as follows.

It was right at the beginning of the semester and we were assigned to be in a group with people we did not even know. No one knew anyone. My group was quite diverse, two Germans, me, a Chinese and a guy from Thailand. I felt like culturally we were really separate at both sides and I had to be the middle side. For Brazilians, we discuss a lot for group work. Then I had two Germans who just did it. They are efficient. They just go and do it. Then the Chinese and Thai students, they are very okay. I was struggled a lot culturally being in the middle trying to engage the two Asians into the discussion, but in the mean time I had to run to keep up with the two Germans. I told them that we should set up a meeting. They said, "No need. We have already done that part". I was like "No, no, that is not how we work". So there was a lot of cultural clash.

A Chinese graduate student addressed the importance of having an international fellow to join group-based academic projects so that the international student could improve the quality of written reports, which must be completed in English. This statement annoyed some of the international students in the focus group. One of them expressed his observation that Chinese students tended to take the foreign students as the writer of the group work report and directly pointed out the research plagiarism that some Chinese commit, saying, “some Chinese students just copy and paste from, for example, Wikipedia”.

Given the group work collaboration, many international students indirectly expressed the high pressure of working with Chinese students on group projects and that they would not choose Chinese students to work with if they were allowed to select team members themselves. To support that, a Chinese student at present also hinted that an international friend of hers thought the group projects with Chinese students was the most frustrating experience for him on campus. Finally, the Brazilian student resonated with others regarding the frustration working with Chinese students sometimes, yet she also expressed her appreciation of how this forced situation actually became an opportunity and helped her grow her leadership and intercultural skills, which she might not obtain otherwise.

Some Chinese students shared stories of interacting with international faculty and Western-trained Chinese faculty, which they said has been another way to exchange intercultural experiences on campus, but these same students stressed that the exchanges were superficial and rarely involved truly intercultural dialogue. International students had much more positive experiences with foreign professors.



The intercultural interactions between students and professors on campus were stressed with several characteristics. Foremost, both Chinese and international students broadly liked the international professors on campus for their teaching, communication and engagement abilities with course content and with students. Conversely, both international and Chinese students held a generally negative bias against Chinese professors, particularly regarding cultural conflicts and low interactional levels with students that resulted in less engagement with course content.

The international students reported that the foreign educators on campus were what they liked the most about the university because they were seen as more experienced than Chinese educators and more of a “natural fit” in the Western education system, which was supposed to be the model of the transnational university. The international students, especially those in graduate programs, were reported to have had frequent interactions with their professors, particularly those from abroad. Besides that, the international students were very familiar with the Western style classroom culture and were used to being very active in discussions; moreover, the foreign professors were widely held to be more engaging with students and facilitating enriching discussions.

As for the Chinese professors on campus, while most of them were reported to be very knowledgeable, professional and comfortable with working in the Western system, some of them were reported to be awkward and uncomfortable in the classroom from various perspectives. For example, a few of them spoke Chinese in class for a significant amount of time, and were reported to have a hard time articulating important points in English, which resulted in confusion over

instructions, course material, and so on. This was especially frustrating to international students. On a related point, some Chinese professors were reported to have difficulty understanding the students' use of English, and complained that Chinese professors weren't comfortable with debate or fielding unexpected questions from international students. Understandably, the engagement level between the Chinese teachers and international students was perceived to be very low.

The Chinese students stated that they had limited interactions with their international professors, and also had mixed feelings towards them. The Chinese students reported a number of cases of intercultural professor-student interactions, which indicates two divergent perspectives. On the one hand, the Chinese students in general enjoyed and appreciated the foreign professors' warm, positive and encouraging attitudes towards students, which the students thought really helped increase their self-confidence, and which they normally would not obtain from other Chinese professors. One student shared the following story to highlight this point, in which she was amazed at and appreciated how warm, patient, friendly and encouraging an international professor was to her and how that changed her stereotyped understanding of professors in general.

I went to ask him (an international teacher) course assignment problems. I was very nervous to begin with, you know, like normally how Chinese students are nervous in front of teachers. Besides, he does not speak Chinese, which means we were going to have communication barriers. But after I went there, it was to my big surprise, the professor was extremely warm. He asked me to sit down, made me feel very comfortable. He was so nice and warm, listening to my questions, leading me to speak more, and giving his feedback. On my way to his office, I had thought it would probably be done in five minutes and may have some awkwardness during the five minutes. However, we chatted nearly two hours. Later I must have got encouraged and started to talk about my concerns on my professional development plan. The professor also recommended to me many great reference books and schools in UK and US for me to consider for a graduate program. At the end, he asked me to go back to talk to him whenever I need. More surprising was that, the next day,

the professor even emailed me, saying that he had a great conversation with me and asked me to feel free to contact him whenever I want to. I had no idea how to think of it, because you know, you normally don't get this kind of thing from a Chinese teacher.

In this case, the positive communication between the professor and the student seemed to be a typical occurrence under the Western culture, but it became a pleasant surprise to the Chinese student and even re-shaped her perception of higher education. The student felt fully appreciative of the international professor's enthusiastic and supportive attitude towards her.

On the other hand, many felt that the foreign professors' consistently warm, positive and encouraging attitudes did not always link with positive outcomes or culturally created challenges for the Chinese students who found themselves confused and further disappointed at the foreign professors' behaviors. One student shared a story that a foreign faculty member and lead interviewer had shown her what she perceived as an extremely positive gesture during an interview for an on-campus student job, but later rejected her for the position. She was very confused and could not understand why the interviewer was so nice and warm, giving her a lot of compliments at the time of her leaving the interview site, but it turned out that she was rejected. She recalled that she became so excited and happy that very night that she could not fall into sleep. The foreign teacher's enthusiastic eyes, his warm and firm handshake, and his words "you are so excellent" resounded in her mind. She started to agree that she must be excellent to have received all the compliments and her self-confidence started to grow. She was wholeheartedly expecting the job offer but instead she received a letter of rejection. She was still very confused when she was sharing the story to the focus group. She said,

It was so confusing. Were you (referring to the international teacher/interviewer) honestly complimenting me, or just comforting me? It turned out that was just comforting and that was so disappointing. If you don't think I am qualified to get the job, at least do not give me any positive sign and let me figure it out, which would not cause that much harm in my mind. It was disappointing and almost mean.

She said that due to the language barrier, she already felt great pressure when talking with foreign people in general, but now the pressure increased because the positive words and gestures could mean anything or nothing for the foreign people.

Other students in the focus group shared similar stories and mixed feelings. For example, another female student shared that during an oral English examination, most students preferred the foreign educators' sense of encouragement than the Chinese educators' expressionless gestures, but later they found out that the foreign educators' positive gestures did not necessarily indicate a positive grade for them. The consensus among Chinese students was that it was hard to understand how sincere an international professor was being, and many struggled to understand what those enthusiastic smiles and nods really indicated.

**Student clubs.** Student clubs are a major part of the campus life at the sample study university, which has scores of official student clubs and organizations on campus. Outside of the classroom, student clubs was the only other frequently mentioned area on campus that students from different cultural backgrounds were said to interact, though at the same time, both Chinese and international students noted the structure of these groups was a barrier to effective student intercultural engagement and that international students were often discouraged from participating. Although it was reported that almost every Chinese undergraduate participates in student clubs, international students expressed negative feelings towards the student club

management and club events given that most activities were in Chinese. Since student club advertisements and club events were predominantly in Chinese language, international students reported either low awareness of clubs or frustration after attending such activities. It should be pointed out that the sample study university regulates the working language for the entire scope of university activities including the student clubs should be English or bilingual (English and Chinese), but in reality these clubs and their members were consistently described as using Chinese language.

A female international student shared an unpleasant experience when attending a student club event, where she became irritated by the use of Chinese and started yelling at club members on site. She expressed her regret to yell at the Chinese students but again criticized some Chinese students' disrespectfulness to her by continuing to speak Chinese while she was around. For this situation, a Chinese student in the focus group made some explanations from the Chinese perspective.

I know that it is actually really difficult for us, the Chinese students, to engage international students in clubs and club events. There are just so many more Chinese students than international students. When we have events, we mostly send out notices in English. During the events, the majority participants are Chinese students and we naturally talk in Chinese, and when an international student comes in, we try to talk in English, but all in all, it is really hard. It is hard to keep speaking in English. And it is hard to chat in English. It is also weird to speak English with all other Chinese.

Of the students that attended activities of a student club that had multicultural membership, several commented that there was not a lot of cross cultural communication. In other words, although different cultural groups participated in the same school club, there was not much interaction between cultural groups within that shared activity, which appears to be heavily influenced by the predominant use of Chinese language at such clubs.

**Residential life.** Residential arrangement, as the students reported, was a major place that was reported to have isolated the international students from the Chinese students, as the residential compound for the international students and that for the Chinese students were separated and located at the opposite sides of the campus. Thus, there was infrequent student intercultural engagement taking place around students' residential life. A European undergraduate student shared his residential life situation and expressed his preference to live with Chinese students.

Dorm life is a good opportunity for students to get to know each other, but I don't think people are taking that opportunity to do anything. All my Chinese friends live at the other side of the campus, so I went there many times and I saw that life there is much more sociable and lively. Our apartment building is totally different. Our apartment is for 4-6 people to share, but each of us has our own room. So we barely see each other.

This international student expressed his preference to live with his with his Chinese classmates or friends. Another international male student found him in the same situation in terms of roommates. The communication and exchanges between him and his roommates, as this student calculated, was about two to three times a semester when they stumbled across each other in the common room, which are primarily brief greetings such as "Hi", "Hello", or "nonsense" words. When asked why they did not hang out with their current roommates, both students' answers were quite similar. Essentially, their roommates were not from their home nation, attended a different academic program, and had quite different schedules that naturally did not provide any opportunity to draw them together. Therefore, in some cases there was limited intercultural engagement in the residence facilities, even amongst the

international student population. However, the predominant view was articulated by an international graduate student, who expressed that the segregated dormitory life between the Chinese students and the international students was a major reason for her to mainly socialize with foreign students on campus, further stating, “I walk with my friends to school and walk back with them because we all live together; and then we naturally hang out with each other for the after-school life. Plus, the Chinese students’ dormitory is at the other end of the campus”.

**University-sponsored intercultural programs.** Students, particularly international students, reported that the intercultural events or programs that the university hosts are disorganized and that students are not truly engaged. Most international students

shared that on the whole, the university does not do a lot to truly promote the connection or bonding between the international and Chinese student groups on campus. The two most commonly cited intercultural programs were a summer volunteer mission to a foreign country, and a program designed to partner incoming foreign students with a Chinese peer. Again, a common complaint among international students was that Chinese was used heavily during these programs, which impeded the international students’ ability to fully understand the material or caused them to feel like they were not contributing as much as desired.

As the students introduced, the partnership program for incoming international students involved having a Chinese student with at least one full year of experience on campus, to help four international students adjust to life on campus. The Chinese guides were trained for the position, and would be responsible for tasks such as making introductory emails before the international students arrived on campus, provide key information and help prepare them for campus arrival, orientation and

the next steps. After the new students arrive on campus, the Chinese guide was supposed to take initiative to show them around and provide all necessary support and also respond to any requests for support or general questions. Several international students expressed positive experiences with their Chinese guides, but most international students in the focus groups reported a range of negative experiences, typically involving failure to receive any communications, or untimely responses to questions raised, and limited follow through on promises. One international graduate student shared his experience of meeting with his Chinese guide at a party that the university officially hosted as a part of this program.

I went there, and basically was just there, not doing anything, or introduced by anybody to anybody else. My buddy was there, but she was busy with the event. The event was so disorganized, which I am not sure if it was typical. The work language there was English, but it was challenging for me to understand them.

Another female international graduate student said that she went to the same party and exactly the same thing happened to her, except that she did not see her Chinese guide at the party. She said that all she did there was have some food and then left.

Two international students also mentioned that when the university hosts events, such as career workshops, guest presentations or VIP speeches on campus that they do not always have English translation for the international students, which limits engagement. One international student shared her communication with a Career Office staff right before a career event started, about whether there was translation for the event and usually how they decide if there would be translation for a certain event. The staff told her that they typically arrange translation when



international students are known to attend an event. The staff added that since no international students were expected to attend the career event in question there would not be any translation. The international student said she felt hurt and immediately left.

**Social media.** While every Chinese student interviewed reported using social media platforms such as WeChat to communicate with peers, many of the international students expressed their preference to communicate in-person. An international graduate student shared her story in this regard.

A lot of Chinese students ask me questions through WeChat, but don't talk to me. Last semester, we were taking accounting. I had taken accounting before, and was answering questions in class, so many students started to ask me questions through WeChat. It is pretty hard to answer accounting questions on WeChat. So I said, "please come to talk to me if you don't understand it", but people continue to ask me through WeChat and no one really came to talk to me in person. I had no idea who they were because they did not put their real names there; neither did they put their photos there.

Another female international graduate student also expressed her frustrations of Chinese students "overusing" WeChat communications when she perceived it was not necessary to do so.

We had group work. Chinese students would not talk in person, but were very active in discussions on WeChat. Just a few hours, hundreds and hundreds of messages came up. It was frustrating. I don't know why they did not talk in person, since we all were just there.

Chinese students reported increased confidence communicating to foreign students through WeChat because they could take longer to think through a response or phrase a question properly, and when received communications from foreigners, they could use WeChat's translation service to provide an English translation of the message.

### Related findings from survey analysis

Results of the survey analysis broadly confirm findings from the observational and focus group research, and provide additional insights into how students at the transnational university are engaging interculturally with peers. Table 6 depicts the type of student intercultural engagement, if any.

**Table 6: Distribution of Student Intercultural Engagement Experiences between Chinese and International Students on Campus by Type**

Distribution of SIE Experiences on Campus by Type of Interaction						
Type of SIE	International Respondents	% of International	Chinese Respondents	% of Chinese	All Student Respondents	% of Sample
No Intercultural Interaction	1	4%	23	10%	24	10%
Class Project/Discussion	19	83%	124	56%	143	58%
School Club	6	26%	127	57%	133	54%
Global Volunteer Program	2	9%	24	11%	26	11%
Other University Activity	0	0%	33	15%	33	13%
On Campus Dining	1	4%	39	17%	40	16%
Work	0	0%	8	4%	8	3%
Residential Living	13	57%	11	5%	24	10%

It may be surprising that 10 percent of Chinese students (n=23) and 4 percent of international students (n=1) reported having absolutely no intercultural engagement with out-group cultures. For international students, classroom projects and discussions were the predominant forum for interaction with Chinese or cultural out-group peers, followed by residential living. Keep in mind that although Chinese and international students had segregated housing, the international student community on campus was very diverse with over 60 nations represented, thus there is a degree of student intercultural engagement within the broader international student population. For Chinese students, participation in school clubs and classroom projects or discussions were nearly equal forums to have an engagement experience with culturally diverse students. Not surprisingly given the housing arrangements on campus, there was relatively insignificant student intercultural engagement in

residential living situations for Chinese students. Tables 7 and 8 present the data for all students by gender and academic level regardless of international or Chinese background.

**Table 7: Distribution of Student Intercultural Engagement Experiences on between Male and Female Students on Campus by Type**

Distribution of SIE Experiences on Campus by Gender and Type of Interaction				
Type of SIE	Female	% Female	Male	% Male
<b>No Intercultural Interaction</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>13%</b>
Class Project/Discussion	99	59%	44	56%
School Club	85	51%	48	62%
Global Volunteer Program	21	13%	5	6%
Other University Activity	24	14%	9	12%
On Campus Dining	25	15%	15	19%
Work	5	3%	3	4%
Residential Living	14	8%	10	13%

**Table 8: Distribution of student intercultural experiences on campus by academic level and type**

Distribution of SIE Experiences on Campus by Academic Level and Type of Interaction						
	UnderGrad Year 1/2	% of Year 1/2	UnderGrad Year 3/4	% of Year 3/4	Graduate	% of Graduate
<b>No Intercultural Interaction</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0%</b>
Class Project/Discussion	93	52%	30	67%	20	91%
School Club	106	59%	21	47%	6	27%
Global Volunteer Program	22	12%	4	9%	0	0%
Other University Activity	28	16%	5	11%	0	0%
On Campus Dining	32	18%	7	16%	1	5%
Work	6	3%	1	2%	1	5%
Residential Living	14	8%	5	11%	5	23%

Although there does not appear to be a substantial difference in how female and male students engage interculturally according to the aforementioned category of activities, there is a noticeable difference in how students at the sample study university experienced student intercultural engagement according to their academic level. That is, first and second year undergraduates were the most likely to have no intercultural interaction with out-groups compared to more senior undergraduate or graduate students. There was also a progressive student intercultural engagement in

classroom projects and discussions with higher academic levels, shifting from just 52 percent of the sample student population in year one and year two of undergraduate education to 91 percent of the sample student population in graduate school. Conversely, and to echo a point made during focus groups and subsequent one-on-one interviews, there was less student intercultural engagement among international students in non-academic activities among the more senior students. Survey data show 59 percent of first and second year undergraduate respondents had an student intercultural engagement experience at a student club, whereas this proportion drops to 47 percent and 27 percent of respondents for third and fourth year undergraduate students and graduate students, respectively.

As the focus groups made it clear, both Chinese and international students clarified that many of their student intercultural engagement experiences were superficial and of lower depth than they either expected before entering the university or less intense than they wanted to experience. As a result, I included a survey question designed to better understand the intensity of student intercultural engagement experiences that students encountered on campus, with results shown in Table 9 and 10.

**Table 9: Intensity of Student Intercultural Engagement Experiences on Campus by Student Type**

	Intensity of SIE Experiences on Campus by Student Type					
	International Respondents	% of International	Chinese Respondents	% of Chinese	All Student Respondents	% of Sample
<b>High Intensity SIE</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4%</b>
Academic-related	0	0%	6	3%	6	2%
Not Academic-related	0	0%	4	2%	4	2%
<b>Moderate Intensity SIE</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>33%</b>
Academic-related	1	4%	71	32%	72	29%
Not Academic-related	1	4%	9	4%	10	4%
<b>Low Intensity SIE</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>91%</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>60%</b>
Academic-related	13	57%	71	32%	84	34%
Not Academic-related	8	35%	56	25%	64	26%
<b>No Intercultural Interaction</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>23</b>		<b>223</b>		<b>246</b>	

**Table 10: Intensity of Student Intercultural Engagement Experiences on Campus by Academic Level**

	Intensity of SIE Experiences on Campus by Academic Level					
	UnderGrad Year 1/2	% of Year 1/2	UnderGrad Year 3/4	% of Year 3/4	Graduate	% of Graduate
<b>High Intensity SIE</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0%</b>
Academic-related	4	2%	2	4%	0	0%
Not Academic-related	3	2%	1	2%	0	0%
<b>Moderate Intensity SIE</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>27%</b>
Academic-related	56	31%	10	22%	6	27%
Not Academic-related	8	4%	2	4%	0	0%
<b>Low Intensity SIE</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>73%</b>
Academic-related	55	31%	17	38%	12	55%
Not Academic-related	50	28%	10	22%	4	18%
<b>No Intercultural Interaction</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0%</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>179</b>		<b>45</b>		<b>22</b>	

It is clear from the survey findings that Chinese and international students self-identify as having rather superficial or low intensity student intercultural engagement experiences on campus, whether it be in the classroom or outside it. This perception is especially true for international students, as 0 percent reported experiencing high intensity student intercultural engagement and only 9 percent reported experiencing moderate intensity student intercultural engagement on campus. In contrast, 4 percent of Chinese respondents reported having high intensity student intercultural engagement and 36 percent reported having moderate intensity student intercultural engagement on campus.

### **Related findings from one-on-one interviews**

The one-on-one interviews provided an opportunity to further investigate how students engage interculturally at the sample study transnational university joint-venture campus. Two of the strongest findings from the focus groups and the one-on-one interviews were the widespread perception among research participants that (1) student intercultural engagement at the transnational university was mostly limited to

the classroom setting and to a lesser extent student clubs, and that (2) the level of intercultural engagement on campus was viewed as predominantly superficial by both international and Chinese students.

First, I took the opportunity to explore in greater detail how intercultural groups form at the university. Students responded that groups tend to form along four themes. Foremost, people formed national circles when the population of that group was sufficient for such a formation, such as the Chinese, the South Korean, and the Indonesians, and the rest of the international student population tended to identify as part of a general international student group. It was noted that some Chinese students had especially strong bonds with students that shared the same hometown. Secondly, students formed groups based upon their academic major. Third, students gathered around specific student clubs they belonged to, making exchanges and building up friendships. However, as pointed out in the focus group research, the majority of active student club members were Chinese students. Finally, students were said to form groups around their residential life, such as roommates or neighbors. Again, because the housing arrangement separated the Chinese and international students, this was seen as a barrier to student intercultural engagement outside of the classroom context.

With that as context, I took a deeper look at student intercultural engagement in the classroom. While not everyone felt that their level of student intercultural engagement was personally low in the classroom, it was the dominant observation.

Even among those who self-identified as having richer student intercultural engagement in the classroom, admitted their experience wasn't the norm. I will address the perceived factors for this phenomenon in a latter research question, but

for now, a key piece of context is that international students are outnumbered by a margin of 19 to 1 on campus. Several international students said that they felt “lonely” in class as they were the only international student in class and rarely anybody would say hi to them or give them a warm response if they sent out a greeting. One international undergraduate student shared exclaimed, “this semester two exchange students coming from the partner university are in class and I see nobody talk to them either; nobody even cares to ask what their names are”.

In the meantime, the Chinese students reported a similar phenomenon about international students not interacting with the Chinese students. For example, a Chinese undergraduate student reported that the only international student in their class has not said one word in class over the past last two years. He still remembered the first day when they met this international student.

It was the first day of the first semester in school, the international guy came in to the classroom as the last student. He directly walked to the last empty row of the classroom, sitting by himself, and immediately took out a big earphone putting on his head. He was like that for the whole class time and pretty much the rest of the semesters we saw him. He only comes to class five or six times each semester; but surprisingly he never fails his courses. He must have got an effective way of studying.

This kind of disengaged intercultural interaction and participation seemed not to be rare cases or outliers, but somewhat the normal happenings on campus.

For those Chinese and international students who are interacting in some ways, the majority of them shared that their interactions were fundamentally limited to the academic work. A graduate international student shared her personal experiences.

I came here and expected to get to know a lot of people from all different places, but it did not happen that way. I talk a lot with my Chinese classmates, but the talks do not go beyond the classroom. I like the topics of politics and economics, which I often talk about with my other foreign friends. With my Chinese friends, we mostly discuss school, coursework, assignments, exams, and stuff like that.

An undergraduate international student had similar feelings and experiences. She was convinced that her Chinese classmates would not come to her unless they wanted to talk about course assignments with her or wanted help with English. She also shared a story in which a Chinese classmate of hers declined to help her understand how a course problem was solved when she asked for help. She was hurt, did not know how to respond to that situation, and then stopped trying to communicate with the student. She said this was an early experience that caused her to hold a grudge towards the student at first and which progressed naturally towards the entire Chinese student group.

A Chinese student from the Department of Mathematics shared that in their department there was neither any international students nor any foreign professor, so the entire department felt like a typical mathematical department inside a traditional Chinese university. As a Year Two undergraduate student commented, “we honestly rarely see international students on campus unless we go to look for them. They are not at the places we often go to. Very few international students are in our classrooms; very few of them go to the student club events; and our dorms are



separated from theirs.” Comments such as, “we don’t have opportunities to interact with international students” were frequently heard throughout the research phases.

At the same time, a couple international students commented that the Chinese peers were not taking advantage of the opportunities they had to have meaningful interactions with cultural diverse peers. For example, almost all students shared that the student club activities were held in Chinese and that the international students frequently gave feedback that they could not understand what was going on when they were actually at the events. The university regulations were that club events should either be bilingual or conducted in English. It was put forth that if Chinese students were really dissatisfied with student intercultural engagement that they could make an effort to hold club events in English.

Regarding students clubs, an international student who spoke fluent Chinese and successfully formed friendships with Chinese peers, commented on the international students’ frustration regarding club activities.

Every association or club we go to is Chinese. The rule is in English, but when most students are Chinese, they use Chinese. So, there is anger among the international students. I did not go to many; but those I went to, they used Chinese, although they were supposed to use English. Then they ask some international students, “Do you need translation?” It is really frustrating. Is that disrespectful? I know that they are not doing it on purpose.

Another international student confirmed this phenomenon and shared her own personal experience.

There is a gap between Chinese students and international students because of the language barrier. Most clubs are held in Chinese and many international students do not understand. Even some clubs whose language was English, but then when most participants were Chinese, they talk in Chinese. I have a friend, who went to several club activities, but all were in Chinese and she had no idea what was going on. This is very common.

When asked to comment on such issues, one Chinese student was surprised to learn of the frustration expressed by some international students, stating, “I don’t think the international students dislike that we speak Chinese, right? Because they are also studying Chinese I heard. Maybe it is the university that requires them to study Chinese, too?”

Among all the types of potential student intercultural engagement activities on campus, group academic projects were continually described as the most meaningful and dynamic intercultural occurrences on campus for both undergraduate and graduate students. This seemed to show that intercultural interactions were infrequently voluntary but rather arose from required conditions. The sharing of the various group projects indicates the existence of both high and low intensity student intercultural engagement levels. In addition, for the most positive group projects, it was said that intercultural friendship often occurred.

In the graduate programs, particularly the Business School, the international students were reported to be the dominant group for academics in general and group projects particularly. One Chinese graduate student from the Business School said, “as long as there are international students around, there is no room for us to lead.” The teachers often force group arrangements by picking an international student to be the core of a

team and selecting several Chinese students to join the core international student and form a group. The international students mostly expressed their frustration with this arrangement and the actual working process with the Chinese students. They think it is “unfair” because “too much workload” is put in their hands as “80% of the Chinese students are not taking their responsibility” and “their work quality is highly undependable” and “needs a lot of revision”. This pressure becomes “doubled” for the international students who are not native English speakers themselves and have already worried about their own part of the work responsibility.

International students perceived that being “unconfident” and being “afraid of making mistakes” distinguish the Chinese students from the international students in general. At group project meetings, it was reportedly not rare to see a Chinese student speaking Chinese to another Chinese student and letting that student translate his or her ideas to the rest of the group. While this phenomenon was often attributed to lack of English language skills among the Chinese population, one international student argued that some of the Chinese students have very good English skills but just don’t want to work hard when they don’t have to. She commented on one such Chinese student who had studied in an English environment for four years but was not heard speaking English.

One of my classmates is Chinese, who studied in [the partner university of the sample study university] for four years of his undergraduate study and now back to China to a master’s. His writing is really good to me, but I rarely hear him speaking. For group projects, he would speak Chinese to somebody else and that person would speak English to us. I think he speaks English, but he just won’t speak. I don’t want

to judge, and I think that it was his own work that he gave to me as part of our project work, but he just won't speak.

Besides the English language issues, including spoken and written, as well as report writing, the international students claimed that Chinese students are found to have issues understanding the basic group work structure and procedures in the Western education system. For example, an international student encountered the issue of having to spend extra time explaining to the Chinese group members something that seemed basic and natural to herself.

One time I was working with four Chinese students and I was leading the team. We needed to do presentation. My team was not quite understanding why we needed to put together each part of the slides and practice on it so that we have the smooth group flow of the presentation. So I needed to spend extra time explaining to them around academic presentations until they got it and agreed to practice on it, and possibly make some changes, etc. ... Sometimes I agree that it is quite bothering.

While there were many examples given of negative student intercultural engagement experiences associated with group work, there were also students that commented on having productive group projects with peers from different cultures and that often led to establishing cross-group friendships. For example, one international student went through a very positive group competition with his Chinese classmates and they have become "best friends".

There were several other positive stories shared, mostly involving friendship or positive developments to academic skills, such as improved use of English language.

A female undergraduate student from Indonesia successfully led a group project

joined by both Chinese and Korean classmates. The Chinese teammates have since become her good friends and the Korean classmate was reported to have improved her English a lot. One international student remarked that when she and her close friend, who was also an international student, partnered with two other Chinese students who were always seen studying together, the four of them quickly became friends and started to enjoy the classroom content more.

One international student noted the vast differences in attitude among Chinese students on campus, and theorized that this was a major factor for how student intercultural engagement takes place or doesn't take place at the university. The student has attempted to quantify what she describes as different types of Chinese students on campus and summarize a few of her insights, as follows.

I think the Chinese students' attitudes and behaviors towards the foreign students should be categorized into different groups. One group of students do not like or want to speak English at all, they never speak to foreigners or people different from themselves. They just totally shut out. Sometimes I wonder why this group of students even come to this university for study. There are people that try. If we go out together, if we speak at our normal speed, or talk over each other, they feel intimidated by that. And I think after a little while they stop. Finally there are a small group of Chinese students that often speak with us and hang out with us, and nothing stops them. There are these three groups of people. The third group of people are definitely outgoing. There are about 10% of Chinese students forming this group.

Although the focus of this research question is on how students are engaging interculturally, given the preponderance of negative cross-cultural interactions it is also necessary to explore the reasons why intercultural engagement isn't occurring in

many settings, according to experiences of research participants. Among Chinese students, the reasons they suggested student intercultural engagement was contained to the classroom were as follows: (1) that schoolwork was their top priority and academic projects sometimes required collaboration with international students; (2) they lacked sufficient English skills to be able to talk about many subjects on a deep level, particularly outside of their academic disciplines; (3) they did not see international students that much outside classrooms, in part because of segregated housing arrangements between Chinese and international students; and (4) they did not find themselves enjoying the international students' social lifestyle and therefore did not want to engage with international students outside of class. On a related point, there was an expressed bias among the Chinese undergraduate students that international undergraduate students were not as academically gifted or motivated in some technical subjects such as mathematics and science, and hence Chinese students actively avoided mixing with international students in such subjects.

On the other hand, international students expressed a preference for interacting or collaborating with other international students, in part for cultural reasons, but even more so due to perceptions of weak English language skills among Chinese students. An international student expressed, "I prefer to talk to other international students because of the language. I often learn something from them, just not small talks. I am the only international student in my class and I never hang out with my classmates." This comment may imply that both a lack of common language and also disparate cultural norms may have hindered her from interacting more with students of a Chinese cultural background.

Although international students as a group reported to have had a lot more frequent interactions with other cultural groups relative to Chinese students, these experiences were highly variable. Some international students expressed feeling rather culturally introverted, while others expressed being more outgoing. A third year international undergraduate student shared a personal experience about his dorm life as follows.

I live with three other guys, one from Zimbabwe and two from South Korea. Our dorm life is separate. Apart from the classmate, who is the Zimbabwe guy, I almost do not have any engagement with the other two. I think it is combination of two things. One, none of us made any effort for the engagement. Two, we have our own rooms, bathrooms, etc. we don't need to bump each other at all, except for the five seconds from my door to the front door I happen to see one of them. Even on weekends, we don't hang out at all. I don't know their majors. We are not forced to make such relationships and we don't do it ourselves. How many conversations a week on average with them? I would say one. Just like "hello", or a very short conversation. It is unfortunate, but I am being lazy. I don't want to say that they are being lazy. Maybe they feel that I am not interesting. It needs to be forced. Otherwise it won't be happening because we have our little world in our room.

An international graduate student who identified as otherwise being highly interculturally engaged found her dorm life lacking intercultural interaction. She was a Thai-American and lived with two Thai graduate students and one South Korean undergraduate student. She basically did not have any interaction with the Korean student, and neither did her Thai roommates. She said, "The Korean roommate is very chill and cool when she is with us, but can be very loud when she is with her

Korean friends.” She admitted that their interactions were not as frequent or as meaningful as her interactions with her Western friends. She shared that she was more comfortable with English and her Thai roommates were more comfortable with Thai.

**Research Question 2: What does the notion of student intercultural engagement mean to the Students?**

Most students understood the notion of intercultural engagement to mean positive interactions with peers from other countries, including academic collaboration, socializing, and learning about one another’s cultures. Higher levels of student intercultural engagement were held to derive from greater frequency and more meaningful interaction with students from different cultures.

I did not initially directly ask students to define student intercultural engagement, but rather focused on probing related topics. Further, I did define student intercultural engagement from a scholar’s perspective leading into any of my research, but rather emphasized that my research is interested in understanding how students from different cultural groups interact on the campus of a transnational university in China, including classroom experiences, extracurricular activities and social settings. For example, I often asked students to give me an example of an on-campus intercultural activity or experience that they or somebody else participated in, and I followed up by asking who was engaged in this case, who was not engaged, whether the engagement was perceived as positive or negative, why did the engagement happen, what made the engagement memorable or important, and so on. I may then ask students how we might conceptualize student intercultural engagement. The primary methods to explore this research question were focus



groups and one-on-one interviews. Given that the responses were somewhat unique between Chinese and international students, I have presented the key findings from my research into these two categories of student populations.

### **How Chinese students define student intercultural engagement**

Among the Chinese students, some of them defined student intercultural engagement as simply being in the multicultural university community where they see foreign students and teachers around. Other Chinese students defined an exchange or activity that involves both Chinese students and foreign students/teachers as an intercultural occurrence, with an emphasis on identifying student intercultural engagement as the level of the positivity or successfulness of the occurrence from their perspectives, particularly how they feel about themselves during the process. There were also a few Chinese students who needed others' confirmation on whether an occurrence should be considered intercultural and whether that is an engaged activity. Such conversation was very enlightening to elucidate this research question.

Overall, the Chinese students think they are more interculturally engaged in the sample study university than they would be had they studied at a traditional Chinese university. They frequently compared the resources and opportunities that were unique at the transnational university with what a typical Chinese university would offer, pointing to things such as English as the language of instruction, Western curriculum and degrees, diverse students and faculty coming from across the world as features of their university that support student intercultural engagement. One student pointed out that they see international students around campus on a daily basis and have foreign professors on a daily basis, both of which

are signs of the international and intercultural nature of the sample study university.

That said, several Chinese students admitted they have never had personal interaction with foreign students or educators yet.

Among those who had interactions with foreign students or professors at some point, they defined student intercultural engagement as the degree of positivity of the activities or all other occurrences between themselves (or their friends) and the foreign professors or educators on campus or during university-related international programs. In other words, if an intercultural interaction was perceived as negative, such as reinforcing negative stereotypes or resulting in frustration, this was often perceived among the Chinese students to not count towards intercultural engagement, or to be defined as low student intercultural engagement. For example, one female student shared a “low level of student intercultural engagement” occurrence that she participated, which was joining her international peers and teachers to eat out at a bar.

At the end of last semester, the foreign teacher invited all my class out to a bar to celebrate the completion of our semester. Some Chinese students did not go. I went. I am normally active in classrooms and also occasionally go to the office hours. But after I got there, I regretted. I didn't feel belonging to a bar. I don't enjoy drinking. My teacher and the foreign students were quite happy there; they were talking loud, fast, and over, I understood some but not all. Sometimes they were laugh and I had no idea what they were laughing about. I even had no idea how to ask or if I should ask. It was so embarrassing. I quickly felt pressured, lost, tired and low. I then stopped going with them for things like that.

Another student shared a high-level student intercultural engagement occurrence, which was the office hour visit she paid to a foreign teacher. In that event, the foreign teacher offered warmth, kindness, and encouragement to the Chinese student, and recommended some books and overseas schools for her

consideration of graduate programs, and further sent to her a follow-up email and welcome her future contact. This was a very positive interaction to the student, and opened a new perspective to her of understanding teachers and teacher-student relationship building. In her own words, this one experience causes her to reevaluate her understanding of the role and value of professors and student-professor relationships. This experience was a high level of student intercultural engagement for her.

The individual interviews found that more Chinese students consider student intercultural engagement as a type of college experience automatically taking place on campus since they are going to a multicultural university that is composed of students and teachers from various racial, national and cultural backgrounds. In other words, some students equated student intercultural engagement to their physical presence in the multicultural university community. Several Chinese students confirmed that they are certainly interculturally engaged on campus because they are at a multicultural university every day. This again, to a large degree, was based on how they compare themselves with other local Chinese students in those traditional universities, as one student clearly stated.

When we get out of the campus and especially meet with Chinese students from the traditional Chinese universities, we feel that our college experiences are quite different from them—we feel the marks of our university printed on us. One of my classmates once said that it is easy to tell who goes to [our university] and who goes to our neighbor university. Something about us and them is different. It is clear that we are from a Sino-foreign joint-venture university. We would not be fascinated by a random foreigner on the street because we have foreigners be our fellow students and they are not special from us. But Chinese students from those traditional Chinese universities may feel a different way.

The Chinese students consider student intercultural engagement as part of the general experiences of studying in this multicultural university, which was noticed to

be also related to their academic goals. Most Chinese students reported to choose the sample study university for higher education because of the transnational education model that affords them to gain a diploma from a well-known Western university, to study abroad at the Western university, or to have a means to get into a quality graduate school overseas. Being part of the transnational education model and experiencing the diverse culture campus, the students associate the university more or less with other global universities or Western universities, and disconnect it from the general Chinese university system. They naturally believed that they are interculturally engaged on campus.

Perhaps because of these academic goals, which were prevalent among Chinese focus group and one-on-one interview participants, many students were “just interested in their academic life”, or earning good grades in class or a high grade point average (GPA). One student commented that they tried to work a part-time job on campus, but when she realized a drop in her GPA, she “decided not to work or do anything else, but just study”. Another student explained why the third and fourth years of undergraduate school are much more important in their school life, “because the GPA only counts for these two years, so in the first two years, we take part in all sorts of activities and club life, but in the last two years, we only focus on study.” This observation is apparent from analyzing related survey data presented earlier in this chapter, reference Table 8. Another student explained his positive attitude of this school is related to a high GPA and other educational opportunities that the sample study university can offer to him. “I like this school. I can get education overseas through this platform. It offers us a high GPA; 70 out of 100 equals 3.5 out of 4. So, I would say it is really good academically. The intercultural exchange thing is not

important, what matters to us are applying for graduate schools abroad and career development.” The last student very straightforwardly confirmed the bottom line of their study in this university.

Actually, many of my classmates agreed that lectures and discussions don't necessarily help us get a high score. It is sort of wasting time. We do better by self-studying in our dorm. Our goal is “Shua Fen” (*It is a Chinese term meaning “to refresh a score”. It is used to vividly describe that a student repeatedly takes a test until he or she obtains a high or higher score, just like how we repeatedly “refresh” the computer screen to obtain the most updated result that we want. This newly created phrase has been widely used in the education setting in China by students/test takers*). We do anything that helps us to get a high score. This is how we have got here from our high school, and will surely be how we get to the graduate school. All of us will apply for graduate schools. A high score is the most important to us.

Consequently, it is certainly easier to understand why during the focus group interviews a few students showed their indifferent attitudes towards intercultural participation, and why during the one-one-on interviews a couple students directly questioned the values and benefits of interacting or making friends with international students on campus. In other words, engaging in intercultural experiences with peers was not a priority for these students.

That said, when I probed students as to understanding low or high levels of student intercultural engagement on campus, again they consistently describe higher levels of student intercultural engagement should be more positive or more meaningful interactions, and secondarily should relate to the frequency of engagement experiences. To that end, the survey responses shown in Table 11 revealed many Chinese students are not participating in many activities beyond merely attending a multicultural transnational university. The survey suggests 84 percent of Chinese students have been engaged in less than three student intercultural engagement activities while at the sample study university, compared to 43 percent

for international students. Perhaps equally a stark contrast is that more than one-third of international students have participated in 10 or more student intercultural engagement activities on campus, while only three percent of Chinese students reported the same. That said, as will be described in the next section of this dissertation, international students define student intercultural engagement slightly differently.

**Table 11: Self-Reported Number of Personal Student Intercultural Engagement Activities Participated In**

# of Personal SIE Activities	Self-Reported Number of Personal SIE Activities Participated In					
	International Respondents	% of International	Chinese Respondents	% of Chinese	All Student Respondents	% of Sample
0	3	13%	126	57%	129	52%
1-2	7	30%	61	27%	68	28%
3-5	2	9%	19	9%	21	9%
6-9	3	13%	10	4%	13	5%
10-14	1	4%	4	2%	5	2%
15+	7	30%	3	1%	10	4%
Grand Total	23		223		246	

### **How international students define student intercultural engagement**

For international students, there are some differences between the undergraduate and graduate students regarding how to understand student intercultural engagement based on their personal experiences on campus, which are further differentiated from the Chinese students' comprehension discussed earlier. For international undergraduate students, student intercultural engagement generally refers to the overall experience of their college life, meaning to what degree they perceived to be supported by the university and to what degree they are physically and mentally connected with local students and other international students on campus. For international graduate students, student intercultural engagement refers to the degree of commitment to and learning from interculturally related meaningful exchanges, interactions, and participations both on and beyond campus. Again, and

similar to Chinese students, is the concept of positivity and frequency of intercultural interactions as being associated with higher levels of student intercultural engagement.

Many international undergraduate students reported that they come from a nation that does not have a highly developed higher education system. They chose the university because they desire to obtain a Western education but cannot afford the Western education hosted in those home nations. In the meantime, they see the development opportunities in China as well as the education model that this university offers. In short, a Western education with a Western degree hosted in China with comparatively low cost was the major reason that brought the students to the university. These students either had some previous international education experiences or were exposed to the Western lifestyle. In their sharing, they would like to have overall positive, colorful, and enriching campus experiences for both academics and social life joined by peers from various backgrounds and supported by the university faculty, staff, and administrators on the whole. This was quite different than the Chinese students, who were overwhelmingly focused on academics and did not seem to value social life, particularly as related to socializing with international students.

Most of the international students in the focus groups did not see themselves in that desired college life but in a range of disengaged college life. Some of them felt “lonely”, “isolated”, and “left out”, while others “felt disappointed but were trying to be understanding and staying positive”. There were still others who felt great about the university and that they were being fully engaged at various levels with local students, other international students, teachers and staff, and even the local

community beyond campus.

The international graduate students defined student intercultural engagement as the degree of commitment to and learning from interculturally related meaningful exchanges, interactions, and participations both on and beyond campus. Here “interculturally related” had two meanings for students. On one hand, they believe it means that the participants of an engagement event are from different cultural backgrounds presumably with distinctive mindsets, approaches and perspectives. On the other hand, they believe it means that the event itself is interculturally oriented. The participants invest their time, effort and commitment in to the event and consequently attain some level of learning that is culturally or interculturally meaningful. For example, to many international graduate students, merely having a group of students from differing cultural backgrounds go to watch a football game together should not necessarily be defined as an student intercultural engagement activity, whereas a group of students from differing cultural backgrounds discussing a football game and discussion cultural implications or figuring out how it might be successful in each culture they are from could very well be an student intercultural engagement activity.

The fact that the international graduate students defined student intercultural engagement this way was noticed to be closely related to why they chose to study in this university. Many of these students have personal goals of working in China and/or with the Chinese, and some of them were in the positions of working with the Chinese prior to their studying in the university. So they particularly chose to study in an international education that is hosted in China. They needed to acquire more advanced real-world knowledge that is related to the world as well as to China; they



needed to learn from people from various places and backgrounds and those particularly from China; they needed to form a better understanding about real work with people in different cultures and particularly in China. Some of them reported that their initial enthusiasm of working with the Chinese culture and Chinese people quickly lowered following the frustration coming out of the group projects with Chinese students and general disappointment at the local Chinese students' performance in their programs.

Many of the international undergraduate students came from relatively less developed countries, and they talked about the desire for an excellent quality education somewhere outside of their home countries and that are more financially affordable. They chose this transnational university to a large degree because of the combination of Western education and lower tuition. The perceived importance of the Chinese market was also a factor, especially for those who wanted to work in China after graduation. Many of these students had to take substantial family resources for the education in this university. A few students shared that even the round-trip international airfare can be a considerable savings for their families. These students stated that they want to have a college life worthy of their investment from all aspects and make the most of what the university can offer them.

As Table 12 highlights, it seems that Chinese students and international students that completed my survey had different motivations for studying at the transnational university, and this may be a factor in the level of student intercultural engagement experienced on campus. I will come back to explore this when looking at variables that predict student intercultural engagement later in this chapter.

**Table 12: Primary Reason for Choosing this Transnational University**

	Primary Reason for Choosing this Transnational University					
	International Respondents	% of International	Chinese Respondents	% of Chinese	All Student Respondents	% of Sample
General Diversity	10	43%	56	25%	66	27%
Opportunity to study abroad at the parent university	1	4%	54	24%	55	22%
Earn degree from well-known Western university	6	26%	41	18%	47	19%
Easy admittance	0	0%	42	19%	42	17%
Western education model	1	4%	12	5%	13	5%
Quality of university/major	1	4%	6	3%	7	3%
Failed gaokao	0	0%	5	2%	5	2%
Chinese culture/language	4	17%	0	0%	4	2%
Other	0	0%	4	2%	4	2%
Ability to transfer to overseas university	0	0%	3	1%	3	1%
Grand Total	23		223		246	

Further, and arguably on a related point, Chinese students and international students who completed the survey questionnaire had different experiences with initiating student intercultural engagement on campus, as shown in Table 13. While 24 percent of Chinese respondents reported to not yet having an opportunity to initiate student intercultural engagement, only 26 percent of Chinese respondents reported to initiating student intercultural engagement on campus. This compares to 83 percent of international student respondents viewing themselves as initiators of student intercultural engagement on campus.

**Table 13: Student Perception of being the Initiator of Student Intercultural Engagement on Campus**

Are you an initiator of SIE?	Student Perception of being the Initiator of SIE on Campus					
	International Respondents	% of International	Chinese Respondents	% of Chinese	All Student Respondents	% of Sample
No opportunity to be initiator	0	0%	54	24%	54	22%
No	4	17%	112	50%	116	47%
Yes	19	83%	57	26%	76	31%
Grand Total	23		223		246	

During the one-on-one interviews, I was able to expand upon the international undergraduate students' definition of student intercultural engagement. Essentially, they clarified that student intercultural engagement should have the following interconnected meanings: (1) how much they are committed to the school

life and how the university is being supportive to them; (2) how frequently they are physically and mentally being connected with other students on campus; and (3) how meaningfully these engagement occurrences are integrated into their personal college life experiences. Similar to the Chinese students, they emphasized positive attributes of student intercultural engagement. One difference between the Chinese students is how the international undergraduate students incorporated attitudes towards the university and the extent to which the university was seen as promoting or supporting student intercultural engagement on campus. This seems to indicate that student intercultural engagement is not entirely in a students' control, from these students' perspective. Table 14 shows that overall, the Chinese students and international students have a similar view of student intercultural engagement support from their university.

**Table 14: Student Perception of the Extent of Student Intercultural Engagement Support from the University**

Student Perception of the Extent of SIE Support from the University						
Level of SIE Support	International Respondents	% of International	Chinese Respondents	% of Chinese	All Student Respondents	% of Sample
None	4	17%	13	6%	17	7%
Low	4	17%	71	32%	75	30%
Moderate	11	48%	127	57%	138	56%
High	4	17%	12	5%	16	7%
Grand Total	23		223		246	

For the international graduate students, the understanding of student intercultural engagement remains to be deeply connected with how individuals from different racial, national and cultural backgrounds commit themselves to exchanges and activities that help them grow their cultural understanding and intercultural effectiveness, and in the meantime how their university nurtures both the intellectual community and supports the learning among the differing cultural groups of students.

Further, these graduate students were unique in expressing their interest to establish connections beyond campus with institutions, organizations and various bodies in the Chinese society preferably through the university to enhance their intercultural competence.

### **Research Question 3: How do students view their student intercultural engagement experiences?**

Chinese and international students broadly have a negative view of their intercultural interaction and engagement on campus—that is, students generally were expecting to have more frequent and more positive intercultural engagement on campus than their actual experience. Several students commented that intercultural interactions on campus, particularly in academic contexts, were either not positive experiences or resulted in students feeling interculturally disengaged. Chinese students had significantly lower self-reported levels of student intercultural engagement than their international peers.

#### **Related findings from focus group research**

Within the focus groups, I explored how participating students viewed their student intercultural engagement experiences through two key initial questions: (1) What is the most valuable thing you have experienced in terms of working with people on campus from a culture different from yours? And (2) What is the most frustrating thing you have encountered in terms of working with people on campus from a culture different from yours? I would then ask a series of follow up questions. Tables 15 and 16 below summarize what different students said was the most valuable and most frustrating thing associated with intercultural experiences on campus to date, respectively.

**Table 15: Comment on Most Valuable Intercultural Experience on Campus To****Date**

Student Cultural Background	Comment on Most Valuable Intercultural Experience on Campus To Date
Chinese Students	Increased self confidence (inspired by foreign professors' encouraging style versus Chinese professors' "high pressure" style)
Chinese Students	Obtainment of new experiences under the transnational education model (versus the traditional Chinese education system)
Chinese/International Students	Language improvement (English and Chinese)
International Students	The positive experiences of working with intergroup peers
International Students	Building cross-cultural friendships
International Students	Attitudinal change from ethnocentric to ethnorelative
International Students	Increase in cultural knowledge
International Students	Improvement in intercultural interaction skills

**Table 16: Comment on Most Frustrating Intercultural Experience on Campus****To Date**

Student Cultural Background	Comment on Most Frustrating Intercultural Experience on Campus To Date
Chinese Students	Negative relationship with foreign academic advisor
Chinese Students	Exam cheating determined by international proctor on site (without listening to the student's explanation)
International Students	Language barrier (1. Most Chinese students' English is not good; 2. They tend not to speak English or make exchanges)
International Students	Cultural differences and understanding
International Students	Group work (frustration with language, communication, failing to meet commitments, plagiarism, and misunderstanding project requirements)
International Students	Classroom culture (perception that Chinese students are timid or lack confidence; perception that Chinese professors don't address questions)
International Students	Substantial use of social media to communicate instead of in-person communication ("I don't know why Chinese students don't talk in person")

Broadly speaking, Chinese focus group participants held more positive attitudes towards their university experiences than the typical international student participants. The majority of the Chinese students expressed their positive point of view of the university being internationalized and were happy to study at the university. Specifically, most Chinese students claimed they believe their university was more internationalized than a traditional Chinese institution. At the same time,

they mentioned not engaging in intercultural activities with peers, but that didn't seem to be a driving motivation for them, as already outlined in the analysis of my second research question. International students, however, formed consensus that at its core their transnational university is a Chinese university in terms of culture and operations. For the international students, although they complained about their interaction with the host university in some ways and particularly with the Chinese students, the international students commented that they learned a lot during this process regardless of the experiences being negative or positive.

I have improved both my English and Chinese in the span of two years. Also, cultural understanding. I have come to understand how Chinese students do things, how British people do things (case 1).

To me, it is how to deal with cultures and how to approach people from different cultures, because here we get along with a lot of people. I also understand a bit about how I can change myself so that I can work better with people from other cultures since I cannot change others (case 2).

For me, I understand that things in other cultures are not wrong; they are just different. Once you change from 'wrong' to 'different', it does not affect you much anymore (case 3).

In my case, it is 'flexibility'. We are also Asians, but we speak straight, direct, and we don't hold things. It is a little bit different from other Asian countries. I learned not to push, not to speak too much. Sometimes, I don't want to be silent, but I think it is better to be silent, trying to be flexible. I think I am used to the awkward silence now (case 4).

Besides sharing their attitudes of the everyday life interacting with peer students and other people in the community from a micro perspective, many international students during the focus group interviews talked about why they chose to come to study in the university and that they are still happy about their choice. They recognize the university is trailblazing a new model and appreciate the resources that it can offer to the students, specifically, the combination of Chinese

host environment and the Western model of education with a well-known Western university degree.

The Chinese host environment, as some of the international students pointed out, provides them with abundant opportunities of learning of the Chinese culture and market, establishing relationships and business networks, and obtaining local internships and career prospects. Furthermore, China was seen as a very safe and rapidly developing nation, providing a high level of security and assurance for the international students.

A recurring comment in focus groups was that international students are frustrated at Chinese students' performance on campus and contribution to the international community of scholars. For international students in this university, which are about 5 percent of the student body, they experience intercultural interactions on a daily basis. However, international students confirmed that a key feature of their intercultural engagement experiences on campus is negative, citing little participation of the Chinese students. One international student remarked, "It is interesting that my contact with the Chinese students is minimal; it seems that we are having intercultural exchanges outside the Chinese student community". Another international student from South America echoed that her intercultural contacts were also essentially non-Chinese students, even after she was trying to interact with Chinese students in class, which is primarily the only place that she sees her Chinese classmates. Another international student agreed and thinks that the phenomenon is because the Chinese students tend not to speak English well, so they make little effort to do so unless it is required in class. Another international student stated that although he is from part of the Asian culture, he would prefer to work with other

foreign students because he observed that Chinese students do not contribute much academically and that the international students on campus do a lot more than the Chinese students do.

Parallel to the minimal contact issue, most international students expressed their frustration of the communication issues with Chinese students on campus from various perspectives, which can be seen from the Table 16 at the beginning of this section, including perceived low contribution to group projects, overuse of social media for communication, and language or cultural barriers. Among the issues listed in the table, the international students in the focus group agree that the language barrier was the most serious issue that hindered their communication with the Chinese students. A first year international undergraduate student shared his perspective as follows.

More than 90% of students on this campus are Chinese. Majority of my friends are Chinese and they cannot speak much English, only one of them has exceptionally good English. It is really hard to communicate with them. So language barrier is absolutely the most frustrating thing when communicating with someone from a different culture.

International students weren't just frustrated with the English language skills of Chinese students, but of Chinese educators and general staff of the university. A few Chinese faculty were reported to routinely lecture in Chinese, with a couple students estimating for about one-third of every class period for the two years they were on campus. According to international students, the university often does not supply an English translator for events with Chinese guest speakers, career fairs, and so on, although the students claim this is a requirement of the university. The lack of English language in classrooms or at other university-sponsored events around campus was said to limit student intercultural engagement and the chance for



meaningful intercultural exchange.

In spite of all these barriers of intercultural interaction and participation, it is important to point out that there were international students who expressed their positive attitudes towards the situations they are in and regarding their student intercultural engagement experiences. While agreeing with others on the negative experiences surrounding group projects and language barriers, they noted that the experience provided them with a great opportunity to develop themselves from various perspectives. They reported that their language ability, both English and Chinese, has been improving very rapidly, that they have grown their intercultural and professional skills, and that they have developed their leadership potential as well. Some of these students have already found internships in the local Chinese companies and have thereby extended their intercultural experiences beyond the campus border.

Overall, Chinese students feel positive about their intercultural environment at the university, are proud of it, and generally had a positive affinity for the university. However, when probing deeper conversation, it was clear that Chinese students do not necessarily give much thought of their student intercultural engagement experiences with international students, nor do they hold student intercultural engagement in high esteem.

Many Chinese students during the focus group interviews started with a very positive tone sharing the global and international characteristics of their university, particularly the diversity of students and faculty on campus, the Western curriculum, English being the working language, the high-tech facilities, the pleasant study environment, and practices of many new concepts compared with traditional Chinese

universities, such as individualized schedules for students, ability to switch majors, self-management, and practices on research ethics. These students said they often compared their personal experiences to those of their friends and former classmates that are studying at a traditional Chinese university, and realized the benefits to them of being in a Western educational model with the connections and resources that their transnational university had. Many Chinese students were content to be in a multicultural environment without truly engaging in it. Follow up questions found that the Chinese students generally feel positive to be in a multicultural environment, seeing people from other nations around, and having foreign professors. From the perspective of these Chinese students, intercultural experiences automatically take place just from living in a culturally diverse community.

However, as mentioned numerous times previously, when asked about specific examples of intercultural involvement, many Chinese students reported very limited occurrences. Some of them never had in-person exchanges, conversations or activities with a foreign student on campus, as highlighted in Table 11. Most students assumed having personal intercultural experiences with a foreign teacher occurred simply by sitting in the educator's classroom. Even so, more than one student reported that their departments were dominantly made up of Chinese students and Chinese faculty.

Many Chinese students agreed that the student intercultural engagement would typically not take place unless: (1) the international students make an initiative to get it started—as pointed out in Table 13, (2) the university takes an initiative to integrate the two groups of students, or (3) it is an academic requirement to contact international students (e.g., to complete some schoolwork assignment with the

international students). The Chinese students further shared a number of reasons for not taking initiatives in this process. English language was listed as the number one factor that holds them back. They also expressed various concerns they hold for intercultural interaction particularly with Western peers. After all those concerns, the Chinese students said that they basically just gave up trying to interact with international students on campus. In addition, the Chinese students did not attempt to socialize with international students because “they did not share many interests or life goals”. For example, the Chinese students didn’t find themselves necessarily enjoying sitting in a bar or drinking at a weekend party, which they perceived to be common activities among international students. They shared that their major goals at the university were to attain a degree from the Western partner university through the joint-venture university’s agreement programs and earn a high GPA to help them gain admission to a top graduate school overseas. Therefore, they did not see the value of the student intercultural engagement experiences in their university life, just as one Chinese student at a focus group openly questioned, “What is the value of it in helping us achieve our goals anyway?”. Another student agreed with him and admitted that this student intercultural engagement concept would have never come to her mind without the focus group conversation.

A second year and fourth year undergraduate Chinese student both questioned the value of having intercultural interactions and building cross-group friendships.

We came to the university for study and go to a better university for graduate school after this. Where is there the need for us to go and make friends from other nations? Plus, when you have been too long time on campus with the foreigners, you will not see much difference from them any more (from the Year Four female student).

What would be the benefit of interacting and making friends with international students? I came to this school because it can help me to study abroad at [the sample study university] for a degree. Also this University offers high GPA; with a high GPA I can apply for a top graduate school overseas. So anything that helps me to get a high GPA I will do it. But if I need to make international friends, I would like to make friends with people from [the partner university nation], because I am soon going to [the partner university nation], for my next two years' education and I hope to get to know about their culture (from the Year Two male student).

Academic achievement was found to be truly a very important motivation for the Chinese students that participated in focus groups and one-on-one interviews. As a matter of fact, these Chinese students shared that most of their conversations with other Chinese students, including with their friends or roommates, were generally focused on academics. One student shared her insights into this dynamic, stating, "Our daily life never involves international students. Often several good friends gather and chat. We often talk about how to do better in our academics, preparing for graduate school, getting nice jobs, and having a better future life, etc. But the more we talk, the more lost we feel. No idea how to make it better and how to make all that happen."

### **Related findings from survey analysis**

According to survey data shown in Table 17, 56.5 percent of international student respondents reported having moderate to limited intercultural engagement with Chinese students, which was relatively equivalent to the 53.5 percent of Chinese student respondents that reported having moderate to limited intercultural engagement with international students. However, while only 4.3 percent of

international student respondents reported having virtually no student intercultural engagement with Chinese students, 30.5 percent of Chinese student respondents reported having virtually no student intercultural engagement with international students. Further, as highlighted in the descriptive statistics Table 17, among Chinese students the mode value for self-reported level of student intercultural engagement was 1, which is the lowest possible rating that indicates virtually no intercultural engagement. This compared to a modal value of 3 for international students, suggestive of moderate intercultural engagement on campus.

**Table 17: Descriptive statistics on self-reported student intercultural engagement level**

Self-reported SIE Level* among International Students		Self-reported SIE Level* among Chinese Students	
Mean	3.3	Mean	2.3
Standard Error	0.2	Standard Error	0.1
Median	3	Median	2
Mode	3	Mode	1
Standard Deviation	1.1	Standard Deviation	1.2
Sample Variance	1.2	Sample Variance	1.4
Kurtosis	-0.5	Kurtosis	-0.6
Skewness	-0.1	Skewness	0.5
Range	4	Range	4
Minimum	1	Minimum	1
Maximum	5	Maximum	5
Count of Responses	23	Count of Responses	223

\*SIE level rated on scale of 1-5, where 5 indicates the highest level of SIE

The discrepancy in responses between international and Chinese students may be due to the significantly greater number of Chinese students on campus, which students expressed makes it possible to avoid interaction with international students. This recurrent comment from focus groups was supported by the survey results highlighted in Table 18 that found among Chinese respondents, 28 percent indicated that they have zero out-group friends (i.e., zero friends from a culturally

diverse background), and 76 percent indicated that they have two or fewer out-group friends. In contrast, 100 percent of international students reported having at least one out-group friend, and 91 percent reported to have three or more out-group friends.

**Table 18: Student self-reported number of out-group friends on campus**

Student Self-Reported Number of Out-group Friends on Campus						
# of Out-group Friends	International Respondents	% of International	Chinese Respondents	% of Chinese	All Student Respondents	% of Sample
0	0	0%	63	28%	63	26%
1-2	2	9%	106	48%	108	44%
3-5	3	13%	39	17%	42	17%
6-9	6	26%	8	4%	14	6%
10+	12	52%	7	3%	19	8%
Grand Total	23		223		246	

As noted during the focus groups, it became apparent that Chinese students were more satisfied with their experience on the university campus than international students. Several students even connected positive feelings for the university with student engagement in general. Accordingly, I added a survey question to address this issue with a broader audience. As seen in Table 19, Survey analysis demonstrates that more than twice as many Chinese students than international students fully agree with having a sense of belonging with the university, and conversely, 30 percent of international students somewhat disagree or fully disagree with having a sense of belonging to the university, compared to just 8 percent among the Chinese student sample.

**Table 19: Student perception of having a sense of belonging to the university**

Student Perception of Having a Sense of Belonging to the University						
	International Respondents	% of International	Chinese Respondents	% of Chinese	All Student Respondents	% of Sample
Fully agree	4	17%	81	36%	85	35%
Somewhat agree	12	52%	124	56%	136	55%
Somewhat disagree	3	13%	17	8%	20	8%
Do not agree at all	4	17%	1	0%	5	2%
Grand Total	23		223		246	

Following the focus group feedback, I also created a survey question to better understand the perceived benefits from student intercultural engagement. Table 20

presents the results from the perspective of Chinese student respondents, and Table 21 presents the results from the perspective of international student respondents. The results are broken out by key academic level.

**Table 20: Perceived Benefits of Student Intercultural Engagement among Chinese Students by Academic Level**

Benefits of SIE	Perceived Benefits of SIE among Chinese Students by Academic Level					
	UnderGrad Year 1/2	% of Year 1/2	UnderGrad Year 3/4	% of Year 3/4	Graduate	% of Graduate
Academics	42	23%	4	9%	4	18%
Cultural understanding	136	76%	30	67%	14	64%
English language skills	117	65%	25	56%	10	45%
Friendship	91	51%	17	38%	6	27%
No perceived benefits	5	3%	1	2%	0	0%
No opportunity	23	13%	4	9%	0	0%
Grand Total	179		45		22	

**Table 21: Perceived Benefits of Student Intercultural Engagement among International Students by Academic Level**

Benefits of SIE	Perceived Benefits of SIE among International Students by Academic Level					
	UnderGrad Year 1/2	% of Year 1/2	UnderGrad Year 3/4	% of Year 3/4	Graduate	% of Graduate
Academics	4	50%	3	43%	4	50%
Cultural understanding	6	75%	6	86%	7	88%
Chinese/Communication skills	6	75%	5	71%	7	88%
Friendship	7	88%	6	86%	4	50%
No perceived benefits	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
No opportunity	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Grand Total	8		7		8	

Among Chinese student survey respondents, across academic levels the top three benefits of student intercultural engagement were perceived foremost to be improved cultural understanding, followed by improved English language skills and friendship. The international student respondents had the same three top perceived benefits from student intercultural engagement, except the improvement in language skills was related to Chinese instead of English.

**Related findings from one-on-one interviews**

**Chinese students.** Similar to comments heard in the focus groups, Chinese students in one-on-one interviews had a mostly positive impression of their university, and often equated intercultural engagement to being in the environment of an international or multicultural campus irrespective of actual interactions with cultural diverse students. When asked how they feel about their competence to engage peers from other cultural groups, these students generally hold a positive attitude of their competency attributed to the existence of the intercultural elements on campus, such as the people from other cultures, the foreign languages spoken, the Western teaching styles, and various international and intercultural programs and organizations on campus. The positive attitude is also often strengthened by the Chinese students' perception of how many resources and opportunities that their university can offer them relative to what they imagine would be available at a traditional Chinese university. Many of the Chinese students confided that they did poorly on the national Gaokao test, which is the primary input into getting an admission offer from a Chinese university, so these students were generally happy that this transnational university could still give them an advantage in terms of achieving their academic and career goals.

When I asked students to think of some actual intercultural situations as well as their reactions and feelings during the interviews, most Chinese students shared that they felt pressured when they were in the situations, particularly when they needed to talk to foreigners on campus. They said that their English skills were not sufficient at all and that they were afraid of making mistakes, therefore they were not confident and often felt embarrassed if they could not express themselves as well as



they wanted. Perhaps surprisingly, students did not report being overly bothered by this, citing the following two reasons. First, the Chinese population is dominant on campus, and they still tend to live within their “comfort zone” for most of their academic and social life, therefore the impact of feeling embarrassed around an occasional foreign student doesn’t produce a substantial impact on their overall experience. Second, these Chinese students do not value student intercultural engagement. Virtually all of the Chinese students interviewed said that student intercultural engagement was not relevant to their personal mission or vision, and they do not believe that student intercultural engagement will be part of anything important to their GPAs, graduate school application or future career development, which are perceived as critical to them. Due to that belief, many Chinese students on campus feel indifferent to intercultural activities or exchanges on campus. They also expressed feeling detached while talking about this topic.

**International students.** International undergraduate students in one-on-one interviews had a more nuanced perspective. A few international undergraduate students were quite negative about their student intercultural engagement on campus; they felt separated, disengaged, isolated from other students on campus, particularly from the Chinese student community, and they complained about the university being unsupportive of student intercultural engagement on campus by not enforcing English language requirements for on campus events, clubs and even in classrooms taught by Chinese educators. Students frequently complained about the residential arrangement, which housed international students and Chinese students on opposite sides of campus. Digging deeper into the dissatisfaction, most of the issues seemed to be largely related to the English language issue. For example, most Chinese students

were observed to speak Chinese in and out of class; most clubs were operated in Chinese; many Chinese professors were reported to spend a portion of each class period speaking in Chinese or could not be understood well when speaking in English; university staff predominantly spoke Chinese and could not understand English; some special events on campus were held in Chinese language without support of English translators. The result, in these students' words, was failure to meaningfully engage international students on campus.

On the other end of the spectrum, a few international undergraduate students held a positive view of their student intercultural engagement experiences on campus. They were generally happy about their life on campus and they said that they would like to recommend this university to anybody else who is interested in a Western style education but located in China. They reported that they "take ownership" of the academic life and social life on campus, leading group projects and expanding their cross-group friendship. They have participated in part-time jobs on campus and internships found through the university. While they agreed that the university staff on the whole do not have very good English skills, they reported not to have had issues with the staff, and expressed the importance of patience and trying to use a little Chinese with staff. These students seemed to be generally considerate and understanding and they tended to think from others' perspectives and most importantly they showed high interest of meeting with people from various different cultural backgrounds and learning about cultures and perspectives.

The third group of the international undergraduate students reported a mix of positive and negative student intercultural engagement experiences on campus. These students were only slightly annoyed with the English language shortcomings

of Chinese students, faculty and staff around campus. At the same time, these students tended not to be very interculturally active, and commented that they are more likely to be engaged interculturally if the university is facilitating student intercultural engagement experiences rather than being left to proactive students.

The international graduate students I interviewed were generally positive of their personal student intercultural engagement experiences on campus, although they were largely disappointed at the Chinese students' disengagement and lack of contribution to their classroom and academic community. They reported that engaging in intercultural experiences was a key goal of studying at this transnational university and that they genuinely wanted to meet with culturally diverse students and better understand different perspectives. An international graduate student shared her thoughts of student intercultural engagement from her personal experiences of engaging with a language partner.

I was really engaged with the language partner, not only to learn language, but also making friendships, or generally know more about other cultures, things that I was not aware of. Also it is an effective way for myself to stay out of my comfort zone. It would not be much learning if I always stay within my comfort zone. Jumping out is a challenge, but challenges promote learning.

The international graduate students reported that the biggest frustration to them was the in-class atmosphere, including both teachers and students. They reported the "awkward silence" to be the most disengaged situation and they often found themselves talking and answering questions in order to avoid to be in that awkward silence. They also reported to have Chinese teachers who were expecting exact answers and did not know how to handle unexpected answers from students, which they said was exactly the opposite case of desiring to hear different

perspectives. They also grew to be more flexible and lenient over time regarding the Chinese students' reliance on Chinese language. One student expressed her attitude.

Before I might be mad, although I did not show my anger. But now I think that is easier and more efficient for them to get that agreement from the Chinese side before coming to talk to us. So I am more and more fine with it. I just let them do it, or even encourage them to do more because I also want to practice my Chinese a bit.

In the meantime, these international students reported that they were trying to make as many connections and friends as possible studying in the university, but they felt unfortunate that their relationship with the Chinese students did not go beyond the classroom. One international student said, "I don't feel reached out by the Chinese students, and also did not get warm responses when trying to reach out". Another student was puzzled why it was so hard to make friends with the Chinese students, which she thought should be really easy and simple. She expressed her principle of making friendship didn't seem to work in China, which is, "You just reach out, invite people to go to do the same thing that you do".

A common theme among all international students interviewed was that they feel emotionally disconnected with the Chinese students. Even if they interact with Chinese students in class, they "are not really communicating in any deep level". One international student recalled a conversation with her Chinese classmates about future plans in which she was "deeply dismayed".

One time my Chinese classmates asked me what my plan is for the post-graduate study, I told them that I do not have a plan yet and that I would like to work first for a couple of years before I go back to school for postgraduate study. They were just shocked to hear that. They had no idea why I had that plan. They all were preparing for their GRE test. They asked me, "if you don't do it following your graduation, then where are you going to do it, and when are you going to do it?" they feel that if I don't do it, it will be the end of the world.

Finally, many of the international students reported that the university is not doing a lot to support intercultural engagement on campus. For example, they hope the university can resolve the student dormitory arrangement issue, which not only separates the Chinese and the international students, but also adds financial pressure to the international students who pay reportedly 12 times as much as the Chinese students, although international students were said to have much nicer apartments and fewer roommates. For another example, they wonder why the university would not do anything to resolve the pervasiveness of the Chinese students speaking Chinese on campus, which significantly obstructs the communication effectiveness inside and outside the classroom. Many of the international students agree that the university should raise the admissions standards for the Chinese students, which will be beneficial to the Chinese students, the international students and the university in the long run. There were also students who think that attitudes and effort-making are more important than the language issue, although they also agree that the university should facilitate student intercultural engagement programs to enable the right attitudes and motivate the students' student intercultural engagement level.

**Research question 4: What are the personal and institutional factors influencing student intercultural engagement?**

Students perceived the most important factors to promote student intercultural engagement to be university-facilitated initiatives that bring culturally diverse students together, personal attitude or mindset, and presence of out-groups friends. Students observed the largest barriers to intercultural engagement with peers to be insufficient common language skills, being introverted, and having an “us versus them” mindset. Common traits among students who self-reported as highly

interculturally engaged with peers included having a strong work ethic, being proactive to take advantage of opportunities to enhance one's intercultural communication skills or to lead intercultural activities (academic or social), and having a positive impression of the university.

This last section of Chapter Four first presents related research findings from focus group and one-on-one interviews, and then presents a detailed quantitative analysis of dependent and independent variables using the survey instrument I developed and administered to a mix of international and Chinese students. The result is a statistically relevant assessment of personal and institutional factors that are predictive of higher self-reported levels of student intercultural engagement.

#### **Related findings from focus groups and one-on-one interviews**

To find out the personal and institutional factors that influence the students' perceived level of intercultural engagement, I asked the focus groups three major questions. The first two questions involved identifying strategies to enable effective collaboration with people on campus from different cultural backgrounds and barriers to positive collaboration, and the third question pertained to institutional support of student intercultural engagement in campus. I emphasized students to rely on their personal experiences when answering these questions.

The students' answers to the first two questions are summarized in Table 21, highlighting six factors that impact student intercultural engagement experiences on campus.

**Table 22: Student-identified Personal Factors that Influence Student****Intercultural Engagement Experiences**

Factor	Student-identified Personal Factors that Influence SIE Experiences
Language Skills	Willingness to communicate in English and English language proficiency level
Personality	Personality (e.g., outgoing, respectful, empathetic); personal attitudes or mindset; self motivation; proactivity (being active or proactive or taking initiative)
Cultural Knowledge	Understanding cultural differences between groups of people, and the implications of those cultural differences
Similarities	Ability to emphasize common characteristics among culturally diverse groups
Intermediary	Being a leader of intermediary that can bridge disparate cultural groups
Duration, Frequency and Meaningfulness of Contact	More frequent SIE, longer duration of contact, and more meaningful contact

For the third question, Chinese students generally agreed that the university is supportive of student intercultural engagement but did not provide a lot of detailed information or examples of how, other than to cite the international nature of the campus and the Western education model on a transnational university campus. Among the international students, the graduate students pointed out places that they think the university needs to do better. The students distinguished five institutional factors influencing student intercultural engagement on campus, as summarized in Table 23.

**Table 23: Student-identified Institutional Factors that Influence Student****Intercultural Engagement Experiences**

Factor	Student-identified Institutional Factors that Influence SIE Experiences
Recruitment	Whether there is a sufficient English proficiency requirement as part of the recruitment criteria
University Personnel	Whether there are sufficient personnel resources to support students, particularly regarding the provision of quality faculty and staff
Organization	The extent to which university programs and activities related to SIE are well organized and operated
Programming	Planning, development, execution, monitoring and management of SIE related events and activities on campus
University Leadership	Degree of university leadership support for SIE

In the next section I will expand upon both the personal factors and

institutional factors held to influence student intercultural engagement experiences among participants in my focus groups and one-on-one interviews.

### **Personal Factors**

**Language skills.** Deficiencies in English language resounded as the most recognizable barrier to the student intercultural engagement experiences on campus between students and with teacher and staff. Both Chinese and international students consistently confirmed that the common language skills, particularly the English language skills given the working language of the sample study university, were held by students to be the most critical factor to influence student intercultural engagement on campus. Some Chinese students shared that the university admits Chinese students only based on the Gaokao examination final score (a sum of all the tested courses' scores) and not particularly testing the students' English language proficiency level. A student who had a high English examination score (138/150) from her Gaokao shared her experiences, "I had confidence in my English; but after I came in to this university, I found my English was not enough at all to handle my study or to communicate with English-speaking teachers." An international graduate student, who had taken both TOEFL and the university's internally developed English test for students who did not take TOEFL, shared that the internally developed test was considerably easier than TOEFL.

A recurrent theme in focus group sessions and one-on-one interviews was that the Chinese students, Chinese teachers and Chinese staff on campus were reported to have communication issues to various degrees. An international undergraduate student shared that "many Chinese students on campus do not want to speak English when working with international students, even if it is required for



English. Many international students do not understand Chinese, and some of them are really angry when they hear Chinese students or staff speak Chinese when they are in communication for work”. Tensions have reportedly been so high between international students and Chinese students that international students have shouted at Chinese students to speak in English during on-campus events. International students from all academic backgrounds share similar stories of working on a group project in class, where the Chinese students consult with one another in Chinese privately and then elect a team member to be the English liaison to speak their consensus opinion to the international student in the group.

Chinese students are well aware of the issues. A Year Two undergraduate Chinese student shared his situation: “For me, it is difficulty to chat at the deeper level and also hard for me to form my opinions when I talk to international students in my class. I really want to be engaged in the discussions and say something, but I always find myself just listening.” Several international graduate students I interviewed estimated that only between two percent and ten percent of the Chinese students have sufficient English language skills to be productive contributors to the academic material being discussed in classes. They also mentioned that Chinese students are relatively inactive in class.

**Personal traits.** Personal traits is another important factor that both Chinese and international students identified to impact student intercultural engagement. Major elements of personal traits were held by students to include an individual’s personality, attitude, self-motivation, and level of proactivity.

In terms of personality, some students believe that being open, outgoing and respectful, as well as “being yourself” would promote student intercultural

engagement. A first-year international undergraduate student shared his understanding and experiences of this concept.

Understand they are different from you and don't judge them from your own perspective or your own culture. When people from other cultures do something that is strange to you, do not say "strange" or "bad", do not insult other people, their culture or values. Also be yourself. Don't try too hard to be someone else. "Be yourself and understand others", nothing else.

In addition, an outgoing and confident person was observed by students to take more of an initiative in intercultural interactions or partnerships, while a shy or insecure person was observed to be harder to engage with. Some international graduate students commented that the key difference between the Chinese students and the international students is the lack of self-confidence in Chinese students. They reported that on many occasions, Chinese students could not let their voice be heard, or communicate their opinions, or simply could not speak due to the perceived lack of confidence, which many Chinese students confirmed as well.

Closely related to the lack of self-confidence was the Chinese students' tremendous fear of making mistakes when speaking English, which many international students observed and almost all the Chinese students agreed with. Some Chinese students theorized that it was because of the societal pressure and particularly the peer pressure carried by the Chinese culture and particularly among the young people. One student expressed the following:

Whenever a classmate opens his mouth and starts to speak the first English word, everybody else is immediately rating this student's English in their mind. Further, they cannot help but place the peers in that group in terms of their English capability. If you are bad, everybody knows, you are *bad*. Thus, if you are really bad, how can you be confident? It can only be embarrassing. And you don't want to be embarrassed. Everyone needs to save their face.

Personal attitudes and mindset toward intercultural contact were also cited to

be essential to impact student intercultural engagement. Participants in the focus groups and the one-on-one interviewees largely agreed that personal attitudes signify how much people would like to participate in intercultural interaction, collaboration, and learning, which they believe relates to various mindsets, such as how much people value intercultural contact, how people see their own culture in comparison with other cultures (i.e., ethnocentrism vs. ethnorelativism), or how people see themselves in the intercultural experiences (e.g., superior, inferior, or equal status). Essentially, personal attitudes were held to explain to a large degree the willingness of engaging oneself interculturally.

For example, some Chinese students observed that Western students on campus generally looked down upon the Chinese culture in general and did not consider working with the Chinese people. On the contrary, another Chinese student reported to be highly engaged in working with international peers despite using limited English language ability in combination with body language. This student claimed to be genuinely passionate about meeting with people from other cultures, sharing perspectives and learning things that are potentially very different from his normal lifestyle and environment.

A few Chinese and international students believed that stereotyping and ethnocentrism would hinder student intercultural engagement and become barriers to positive collaboration between different cultural groups. A European graduate student shared his experiences with several Chinese classmates in a group project in which he described how his original ethnocentric view prevented him from asking the group for ideas, but rather preferred to forcefully strategize all the project steps and proactively planned each part for his teammates and even prepared presentation

scripts for each of them. He did this because in his mind he was correct and he did not need to check in with other members who he perceived had poor English skills and substandard academic capability. However, as he gracefully admitted his mistake and his apology, he shared that it is dangerous to be so ethnocentric.

Furthermore, being proactive or taking initiative seemed to be a common characteristic with students self-reporting high student intercultural engagement students. An international student introduced that the several Chinese peers that he made friendships with had very different backgrounds and personalities, and were quite average Chinese students regarding their English language skills and pre-intercultural experiences, however, were all seen as “taking initiative” during the process of working with him and developing friendship with him. The willingness of being active or proactive was considered by students to be a key to student intercultural engagement, particularly in cross-cultural group projects. Conversely, being shy or reserved was seen as hindering student intercultural engagement.

**Cultural knowledge.** The students, citing their personal experiences, stressed the importance of understanding one’s own culture and others’ culture when engaging peers from out-group cultures. They reported that it is even more important to understand that every culture is different and not to judge others using one’s own cultural norms and values. Some students also mentioned that sensitive topics, such as particular political topics impacting people from certain nations or cultures should also be avoided at such intercultural exchanges. They shared their personal experiences of how discussing sensitive political topics ruined their conversations and gathering with peers from differing cultures.

**Similarities.** An international graduate student reported successfully leading

her multicultural team project, and cited one of her major strategies to engage her out-group members is to tell them that she is not that different from them, or rather, she is quite similar to them. She may point out, for example, that English language is not her first language either. Students claimed that when out-group members in the same community see that they share your status in some critical areas, they tend to “let their guard down”, reduce negative feelings and are more willing to form positive relationships.

**Intermediary.** Several students believed that an intermediary was vital to promote student intercultural engagement and successful group work collaboration. During the focus group interviews, three female international students at different times shared how they naturally became an intermediary in their respective groups to bring together the Western and Eastern peers toward fulfillment of their group project. These students were from Brazil, Kazakhstan and Indonesia, and the students exclaimed that being in a culture between the East and West enabled them to be in a unique spot to bridge some of the common cultural differences that existed on campus between the Western and Chinese students. They each shared stories of getting very diverse members to come and sit at the same table so that they are able to discuss their common goal, assign their roles, and work on whatever issue they may have during the process. These cases indicated that a cultural intermediary can be successful in bringing a multicultural group into harmony and steering members toward common goals.

**Duration and frequency of contact.** Most students, both the Chinese and international, believed that time duration and frequency of contact is crucial to promote truly engaged intercultural exchanges, to develop intercultural relationships

and to form cross-group friendships. Students pointed out that this should include time and experiences outside of the classroom, which was held to be important to making intercultural friendships. Many students agreed that time and frequency of contact is a primary factor to advance their student intercultural engagement on campus, and in fact, many students conceptualized greater student intercultural engagement to mean greater frequency of positive or meaningful student intercultural engagement.

### **Institutional Factors**

Students identified several institutional factors that impact student intercultural engagement on campus, as shown in Table 22. Students in the focus groups tended to emphasize three areas: (1) the organization of university's intercultural programs and activities, (2) the planning, development, execution, monitoring and management of student intercultural engagement related events and activities on campus, and (3) the support of university leadership for student intercultural engagement. The one-on-one interviews confirmed these three institutional factors, yet students went further to theorize that sufficiency of personnel resources to operate a global university was critical, and further, that a common language requirements must be held to a sufficient standard as to ensure all students have the skills to engage in intercultural communication. Interviewees stressed that the lack of adequate English language requirement at the university was a serious barrier to student intercultural engagement.

**Recruitment requirements.** Given that a high percentage of Chinese students on campus were observed and reported to lack sufficient English language skills allowing them work effectively in both academic and social situations with

various groups of internal stakeholders, both international students and Chinese students agreed that the university needs to enroll Chinese students with good English skills so that the Chinese students and international students can be on a similar status from the language and/or academic perspective, which was seen as critical for the intergroup collaboration on schoolwork and on other extracurricular activities. However, as many of the Chinese students shared, the university so far does not have any English language requirement in terms of Chinese student recruitment.

**University personnel resources.** A perceived lack of an adequate scale of high quality university resources was another factor suggested to negatively impact student intercultural engagement on campus of the sample study university. The need for personnel resources was emphasized across multiple areas. For example, students claimed there were Chinese professors on campus who had insufficient English language ability, which resulted in them either speaking a lot of Chinese in class to communicate with the majority of students whose first language is Chinese or ignoring international students in class. One Chinese educator was reported multiple times to the university for violating the university's English language requirement, but still remained in his academic position according to the students. According to interviewees, the majority of the university staff members are Chinese and their English language proficiency level was generally viewed as insufficient for academic communication, although the university has language requirements for its staff as well. Additionally, students pointed out that some on campus meetings were held in Chinese language without an interpreter for international students, which was both against university policy and also limited the engagement of international students.

In addition, while the university's international student services office primarily helps international students with logistic issues, it was said that there was no university office officially set up to deal with intercultural engagement or multiculturalism issues. All these issues reported to exist in the university were seen to have impacted the student intercultural engagement level to various degrees.

**Organization of intercultural programs and activities.** A lot of university programs and activities related to developing intercultural contact and relationships were reported to be disorganized and in Chinese language, and hence failed to engage the international students on campus. Students commented that if student intercultural engagement would be markedly higher if university student clubs, the friendship program for incoming intentional students, career services meetings, campus workshops, and other cultural activities were better organized and executed. For example, the university sometimes hosted cultural activities to enhance international students' understanding and interests of the Chinese culture, which was seen as a great idea to both Chinese and international students, yet it was noticed that the announcements of such events were buried in the middle of a lengthy email that contained multiple messages and thus missed by many students. Although some students reported that they had student representatives in each academic cluster who function as a liaison between the university and the students and collect information, requests, and suggestions from the students and send to specific university officials in the academic clusters for solutions, they commented that these are all academically related, such as class presentations, online portal issues, and so on.

**Programming of student intercultural engagement on campus.**

Participants in focus groups and in one-on-one interviews made it clear that there



was no official management, advising, monitoring, and promotion of student intercultural engagement on campus, which to students makes the development of student intercultural engagement experiences either substandard or not possible. Several students reported their perception that the office that designs intercultural activities is either “not staffed by quality professionals” or “does not value diversity that much”. A few international students reported that there is no place on campus to promote the general wellbeing of the international students, and that the activities on campus more reflect a traditional Chinese culture than a truly multicultural campus.

A first-year international undergraduate student has been disappointed with the intercultural events planned on campus, stating, “[the university] is not inspiring enough to involve international students to engage in intercultural exchanges and activities. Most clubs are struggled in getting international students to participate and nobody could provide help.” Many international students expressed similar feedback, one of which is reported below.

For international students, [the international student services office] is the only place that we go to, but except for logistics, registration, visa, etc. they don't do anything else. The most important thing for us is student life on campus, but they do not care about our life. In the meantime, the office staff are busy too. [the international student services office] staff is busy and do not have time to take care of us, but the school thinks that the international students have got [the international student services office] to take care of them (us) and also we have got student union. But nobody is really checking how these are going. Sometimes, students report or request something to the university, the university does not have any feedback to the students.

Some of them cited this as an example to show that the university at its core is a Chinese university and not a global university.

**University leadership.** University leadership support was identified by the students to play a decisive part in promoting the campus student intercultural

engagement. Many international students pointed out that the university leadership is in a position to correct all or most of the places and situations on campus that were hindering student intercultural engagement on campus, such as providing sufficient personnel resources, ensuring courses are taught in English, and even promoting student intercultural engagement in the culture of the university. Students made the point that if the majority of Chinese students enrolled in this university continued to have relatively poor English proficiency and if most of them continued to speak Chinese in situations university policy is to speak in English, the intercultural exchange and the general student engagement situations would remain. This was viewed by international students as harming both international and Chinese students, as well as the university reputation. In the same vein, students suggested that if the university leadership continued to hire staff and administrators whose communications skills were not sufficient to communicate with both Chinese and international students (in English), the consequence on student intercultural engagement would be the same. Similarly, the implementation of university programs, meetings and other activities that would promote student intercultural engagement on campus require university leadership to finance them and prioritize them.

Some students called this factor “the institutional mindset”. They suggested the identity of the university can either support or hinder student intercultural engagement on campus. Some students, particularly international students, believe the university needs to do more to reach the standards of a global university. A Chinese student who claimed to work for the university’s recruitment efforts in China said that there was no marketing material on diversity, international students,

or global learning, but rather the emphasis for prospective Chinese students was the ability to earn a degree from a well-known overseas university, study-abroad opportunities, the potential to earn a high undergraduate GPA, and internships and future career development. This student commented that he was not surprised by this because what the university advertised to Chinese students was what he understood them to be looking for. This student, in agreement with several peers, questioned the benefits of intercultural participation and out-group friendships.

In summary, according to students, student intercultural engagement programs at the university are underdeveloped, student intercultural engagement implementation appears disorganized, and the university's leadership does not seem to be supportive actions to remedy student intercultural engagement shortcomings on campus. Additionally, a limited proportion of the student body were seen by both Chinese and international students as having sufficient English language skills to participate meaningfully in an English language academic environment, and personnel resources in the university were seen to be insufficient to ensure effective communication with both Chinese and international students. It seems that many of the aforementioned factors are interconnected across multiple dynamics.

### **Quantitative analysis of survey data: predictive model for student intercultural engagement**

Based upon investigation into the four key research questions guiding this dissertation, this final section of Chapter Four is dedicated to exploring a predictive model for self-reported level of student intercultural engagement, as determined through a multiple linear regression (MLR) analysis of survey responses.

The quantitative model defined below uses self-reported student intercultural

engagement level as the dependent variable, and incorporates six independent variables that emphasize the factors that students perceived to impact student intercultural engagement at the sample study university, to the extent possible to examine through survey data. The six independent variables are summarized below, are also detailed in Chapter Three of this dissertation.

- Academic level—defined as the year a student was enrolled in at the time of taking the survey. Three classifications were made: first and second year undergraduates, third and fourth year undergraduates, and graduate students (dummy variable with graduate students as the residual category).
- Cross-cultural group project experience—defined as students having participated in at least one academic group experience at the university where the team was multicultural.
- Chinese students—students who have grown up in China, reside in China, speak Chinese as their first language and likely hold Chinese citizenship; in other words, they are not international students on campus.
- Initiator—defined as a student viewing themselves as an initiator of student intercultural communication.
- English language skills—defined as students perceiving themselves as having ‘sufficient’ English language skills to engage in a full range of academic and social activities on campus.
- ‘Diversity’ as a primary reason for selecting the university—defined as students who self-reported that ‘diversity’ was a primary reason

they chose the university, over other factors such as cost of tuition, Western education model, study abroad opportunities, easy admissions requirements, and so on.

As highlighted in Table 24, the Adjusted R Square results of the MLR suggest that 28.4% of the variance in self-reported student intercultural engagement level/student intercultural engagement frequency among students is explainable by the independent variables.

**Table 24: Initial MLR Model on Factors Influencing student intercultural engagement of the Case Study University**

<b>Regression Statistics</b>	
Multiple R	0.552
R Square	0.304
Adjusted R Square	0.284
Standard Error	1.017
Observations	246

<b>ANOVA</b>					
	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance F</i>
Regression	7	107.797	15.400	14.884	0.000
Residual	238	246.236	1.035		
Total	245	354.033			

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>
Intercept	1.174	0.360	3.256	0.001	0.464	1.884
Chinese Students	0.153	0.264	0.580	0.562	-0.366	0.672
Year 1/2 Undergraduate	-0.685	0.254	-2.698	0.007	-1.185	-0.185
Year 3/4 Undergraduate	-0.795	0.278	-2.865	0.005	-1.342	-0.249
Cross-cultural Group Project Experience	0.474	0.140	3.393	0.001	0.199	0.749
Perceive Self as Initiator	0.522	0.158	3.305	0.001	0.211	0.832
Sufficient Personal English Skills	0.749	0.166	4.525	0.000	0.423	1.076
Diversity's is Reason for Selecting University	0.191	0.152	1.257	0.210	-0.108	0.490

Since the  $p\text{-value} = 0.000 < .05 = \alpha$ , we conclude that the regression model is a significantly good fit; in other words, there is no possibility of getting a correlation this high (.552) assuming that the null hypothesis is true.

Note that the  $p$ -values for all the coefficients, with the exception of the coefficients for “Chinese students” and “diversity as the reason for selecting the university”, are smaller than 0.05. This means that the independent variables are all

statistically significant aside from “Chinese students” and “diversity as the reason for selecting the university”, for which we cannot reject the hypothesis that it is zero and is also confirmed from the fact that zero lies in the interval between the lower 95% and upper 95% confidence interval for the respective coefficient. Thus, I have eliminated the “Chinese students” and “diversity as the reason for selecting the university” independent variables, and reran the model as shown in Table 25.

**Table 25: Revised MLR Model of Factors Influencing Student Intercultural Engagement**

<b>Regression Statistics</b>	
Multiple R	0.547
R Square	0.299
Adjusted R Square	0.285
Standard Error	1.017
Observations	246

<b>ANOVA</b>					
	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance F</i>
Regression	5	105.948	21.190	20.499	0.000
Residual	240	248.084	1.034		
Total	245	354.033			

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>
Intercept	1.306	0.277	4.714	0.000	0.761	1.852
Year 1/2 Undergraduate	-0.626	0.248	-2.524	0.012	-1.115	-0.137
Year 3/4 Undergraduate	-0.716	0.271	-2.643	0.009	-1.249	-0.182
Cross-cultural Group Project Experience	0.486	0.139	3.495	0.001	0.212	0.760
Perceive Self as Initiator	0.532	0.153	3.472	0.001	0.230	0.833
Sufficient Personal English Skills	0.714	0.156	4.566	0.000	0.406	1.022

Having made this adjustment, all coefficients are now statistically significant. First, we see that Adjusted R Square results is 28.5%, which is very similar to the Adjusted R Square value of 28.4% that we obtained from the larger model (Table 24). This supports the fact whether students are Chinese or international and whether diversity as the reason for selecting the university was not contributing much to the model and can be dropped.

The regression equation from the model is as follows:

student intercultural engagement Level/Frequency = 1.306 + (-0.626 x Year 1/2

Undergraduate) + (-0.716 x Year 3/4 Undergraduate) + (0.486 x Cross-cultural Group Project Experience) + (0.532 x Perceive Self as Initiator) + (0.714 x Sufficient Personal English Skills)

The model indicates that sufficient English language skills have the largest influence on student intercultural engagement level/frequency than any of the other independent variables. This confirms the most frequent observation among focus group and one-on-one interview participants, who claimed that English language was a significant barrier to student intercultural engagement at the sample study university, both in classrooms and around campus in social settings.

The model also indicates that being in graduate school is significantly predictive of greater student intercultural engagement level/frequency than being an undergraduate student. This is not surprising to me given how many more graduate students reported needing to engage in group projects compared to undergraduate school requirements, that there is a greater proportion of international students in the graduate school at the sample university, and that graduate students seemed to have a greater sense of cultural maturity when discussing student intercultural engagement relative to undergraduate students during focus group and one-on-one interviews. Similarly, experience in a multicultural group project was predictive of higher student intercultural engagement level/frequency. Perceiving oneself to be an 'initiator' of intercultural interactions with peers was also predictive of having greater student intercultural engagement among survey respondents.

In Chapter Five of this dissertation, I will draw major conclusions from this research and offer recommendations to the sample study university to improve student intercultural engagement on campus, as well as provide recommendations for

future research.



### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The emergence of transnational joint venture universities provides a new model of education internationalization where the stakes are high and where the opportunities to study the under-researched field of student intercultural engagement are multidimensional and compelling. Since the mission statements of these transnational universities often involve language about cultivating global citizens and equipping students with the knowledge and intercultural skills needed to thrive as leaders and operators in a globalized marketplace, and considering that these joint venture universities blend disparate cultures and diverse student populations, the importance of student intercultural engagement becomes profound.

While it may be assumed and expected that students in these transnational institutions will gain the necessary intercultural skills and global perspectives through engagement with students from diverse cultures, a dearth of both quantitative and qualitative research in this area demonstrates that much remains to be learned about the nature and consequences of student intercultural engagement. The purpose of my study is to investigate student intercultural engagement at a Chinese joint-venture transnational university located in China. It seeks to discover the extent to which student intercultural engagement is occurring, examine the circumstances and conditions in which student intercultural engagement occurs, explore the challenges and perceived values of student intercultural engagement, and identify institutional and personal factors influencing student intercultural engagement. I applied a mixed-method exploratory sequential research design, first involving on campus and classroom-based observations, followed by four focus

group interviews with 28 students, an online survey completed by 246 students, and finally 15 one-on-one interviews to explore student intercultural engagement topics in depth.

The findings of my research study from the current transnational joint-venture university in China are found to be highly consistent with Phan's (2017) study findings of student experiences in other Asian transnational education settings, such as in Vietnam and Thailand. In Phan's (2017) investigation, almost all the transnational programs and institutions adopt English as the medium of instruction, which is a necessary element to attract international students, as well as an indication to show how special, pioneering and engaged the institutions are in their institutional internationalization particularly compared with other local traditional universities. This characteristic of TNE universities likely is attractive to domestic students who want the experience of a global, Westernized university. For some of these transnational institutions, merely having English as the language of instruction is evidence of institutional internationalization. In her interviews with local and international students, Phan (2017) found that local students participating in transnational education models generally have insufficient English skills to succeed academically or even to converse with diverse student populations. For example, Phan (2017) observed that Chinese students often sit silently in classes and tend not to speak English with their international peers on campus, which in turn resulted in tremendously negative feedback from international students, including anger, disappointment, and frustration. Such language issues, as Phan (2017) pointed out, are not only with local students, but also with local faculty and staff, who expressed their frustration at their own inability of teaching course subjects in English.

Although Phan (2017) stated that TNE institutions or programs in Asia could be characterized by mediocrity, she identified individual students attending such TNE programs who are highly engaged in their academic and extra-curricular life in the community and even in the host country—she determined that the most critical enabler of such engagement is appropriate English language skills. Consistent with my study of the TNE context, Phan (2017) found that English plays a dominant role in the TNE operations with multi-layer connotative significances: it helps TNE institutions to commercialize their undertakings and functions as the official tool of communication; it determines the degree of communication, engagement and connectedness between cultural groups on campuses; and it defines the Asia-Western, the local-international, and the majority-minority status dynamics from the racial, ethnic, social, cultural and linguistic perspectives.

Although my research was conducted at a single TNE setting in China, Phan's (2017) findings on student intercultural engagement at TNE from other Asian countries contributed to the relative generalizability of the findings beyond the immediate research site, which are critically valuable insights unfolded from the following aspects. Foremost, successful student intercultural engagement appears to require a critical mass of students that share common language skills that are sufficient for deep academic dialogue. Among both the Chinese and international students that participated in my research, substandard English skills was perceived to be the top barrier to student intercultural engagement on the campus which mandates English be used as the official language of instruction. These observations were confirmed by my MLR analysis, which indicated that sufficient English language skills had the largest predictive influence on self-reported student intercultural

engagement level/frequency relative to any of the other independent variables in the model. This finding suggests that transnational universities that value student intercultural engagement should ensure admission standards require all students to have sufficient, academic-level competency in the language of instruction on campus.

Another important insight is that student intercultural engagement is viewed as an inherently positive paradigm by higher education students, who recognize the value that cross-cultural exchange of ideas and viewpoints can have on expanding one's own perspective and the collective consciousness of a student population. Even when students at the sample study university perceived negative interactions with cultural out-group members, particularly in an academic setting, they tended not to blame a cultural group for the perceived problem, but rather students blamed the university for failing to recruit students with adequate English language skills, for hiring professors with insufficient facilitation skills, or for segregating the residences of Chinese and international students; and only on occasion did students blame the attitudes of select individuals. Students want to learn about other cultural perspectives, and as my research demonstrated, they recognize the benefits of student intercultural engagement beyond academic learning, to include cultural understanding, enhancement of English language skills, and friendship.

Importantly, student intercultural engagement does not "just happen". Transnational universities should not assume student intercultural engagement materializes merely by having an international campus. In fact, a particularly critical and related observation from many international students was that the sample study university principally reflected a traditional Chinese culture, and not the Western

culture the educational model was supposed to be established upon. Student participants in my focus groups and individual interviews frequently mentioned that they expected to have more intercultural interaction than they had experienced on campus, and this was not always for a lack of opportunity. Students claimed cultural diversity could be seen daily on campus, in classrooms, in dining halls, in student clubs, at social events, and so on. While some students were proactive to take initiative to reach out to a cultural out-group peer, many did not identify as “initiators”, which was a statistically significant predictor of self-reported student intercultural engagement level/frequency in my MLR model. For many students, their only student intercultural engagement came from academic requirements given by professors, which were viewed by the majority of sampled students as the biggest source of student intercultural engagement on campus and the most meaningful source of student intercultural engagement on campus. For them, group projects with multicultural teams forced deeper discussions to take place than interacting with out-group peers in social settings around campus.

The good news for transnational universities is that student intercultural engagement appears to be manageable and dynamic. Universities that value student intercultural engagement will successfully promote it by integrating intercultural engagement into their campus culture and into their classroom curriculum, and will support it by ensuring admitted students, campus personnel and faculty have the qualifications and language competencies necessary to make an student intercultural engagement-oriented campus thrive.

Based on the findings detailed in Chapter Four of this dissertation, this chapter provides discussion on the implications of those findings, as well as offers

my conclusions and recommendations both for transnational universities and future research.

### **Unique implications of student intercultural engagement on distinct student groups**

The findings from Chapter 4 show that students in this joint-venture transnational university can be categorized into several distinct groups due to their different goals, academic backgrounds and student intercultural engagement experiences on campus. The primary objective of Chinese undergraduate students was to earn high GPAs to advance their objective of getting into a high-ranking graduate school. Almost none of these students had overseas experiences, their English language levels were generally low to moderate, and they were all acclimated to a traditional Chinese education model. On the other hand, many international graduate students have specific reasons to study at the sample study university that related to building a career in China or leveraging their experience in China with the labor market in their home countries. Collectively, they had stronger English skills and were already familiar with the arrangement of course work that was much more project based and required significantly more teamwork, which were often made up of multicultural peers. Many of these students seemed to have a greater sense of intercultural maturity.

The distinct groups of students on campus have different goals, speak different native languages, and come from different racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Thus, there are multiple student circles on campus in various identities. Each group has different needs and motivations in terms of student intercultural engagement, and fostering student intercultural engagement among these groups will

likely require some degree of targeted programs or incentives that the institution cannot universally apply to the student body.

### **New challenges of student intercultural engagement in the transnational institution**

In the emerging model of education internationalization as presented by the sample study university, all students are experiencing some degree of cultural adaptation. Connotatively, the distinctiveness of the “domestic students” and “international students” on campus are not as how we traditionally see them, particularly not from the Western multicultural campus context. Language issues and cultural difficulties for all the students make it challenging to be engaged interculturally. There is a stark imbalance in the ratio between the international students and the Chinese students on campus, the latter of which make up 95 percent of the student body. That is, 95 percent of incoming undergraduate students are not likely familiar with the Western model of higher education they will be immersed in over the next four years. Further, the sample study university, like all joint venture transnational campuses in China, are not established universities with decades of research accomplishments, a track record of producing top scholars or business leaders, or multi-million dollar endowments. Understandably, their admissions standards and tuition levels must be balanced with student interest to attend a new university. Many of the Chinese students at the sample study university admitted to performing poorly on the national college entrance examination, or the Gaokao, and many international students admitted attending the university particularly for a well-known Western university degree and affordable tuition. Together, all of these dynamics provide a more challenging environment for student intercultural

engagement than a typical well-known research university in the United States, United Kingdom or Europe. This is something that needs special attention from the leadership teams of these institutions.

In the sample study university, both the Chinese students and international students experience some level of “culture shock”. The Chinese students are first and foremost shocked by the Western curriculum and structure, ways of teaching and learning, relationships between students and academic staff, independence and time management, and many other nuances that the Western education model is characterized by, and on the top of that, the most obviously one, the English language of instruction. The culture shock and ensuing frustration can be experienced on a daily basis. For the international students, the culture shock while sojourning has been well documented by numerous researchers (Dee & Henkin, 1999; Kudo, Volet, & Whitsed, 2017; Ozturgut & Murphy, 2009; Wan, 2001; Yoon, 2013), as they confront adjustment issues (Senyshyn, Warford, & Zhan, 2000) and psychological stressors caused by the combination of culture shock and adjustment issues (Lin & Yi, 1997). Within the international student body, it is important to notice that there are a large percentage of students who are not native English speakers, either. My investigation shows that they have issues in academics and other adaptation issues that international students typically encounter, although on the whole are shown to have significantly high or even fluent English skills. All of these groups of students are trying to adjust to a novel academic life and the socio-cultural life on campus.

Due to the Western education system and culture implanted into the transnational university and English set up as the language of instruction and



working language for all activities on campus, the Chinese students, as well as the Chinese faculty and administrative staff members, all experience challenges in various levels from academics to extracurricular activities, which are well documented in Chapter Four of this dissertation. It should be noted that the English language issues experienced by the Chinese students on campus are not any different from the their Chinese compatriots studying in Western nations (Hsieh, 2007) and not any different from the general non-native English speaking students decades ago (Aubrey, 1991; Tompson & Tompson, 1996). These researchers found that the most daunting issue of adjustment for international students was the lack of confidence in their English language skills, which was exactly how several international graduate students in my study described their Chinese peers, commenting that lack of confidence is the key difference between the Chinese students and the international students. These findings may lead to a reasonable indication that it is not the external environment that plays an important role in hindering the non-native English speaking students' overcoming of their language deficiencies. In the meantime, extant research also finds that English language skills are highly and positively associated with academic situations (Wan, Chapman, & Biggs, 1992). All these point to one suggestion that the university needs to make some strategic changes to rectify the situation.

### **Chinese students' intercultural engagement attitudes and implications for the transnational university**

In terms of how students feel about their student intercultural engagement experiences, the international students are generally “frustrated” and “disappointed”, while the Chinese students are generally “unsatisfied” and also “indifferent”. The

Chinese students' indifference towards student intercultural engagement on campus was self-reported to be mostly related to their university goals and motivation. For the Chinese students, academics, placement issues, and future life were the most important concerns for them, which is demonstrated in my study and by other research (Lin & Yi, 1997; Wan, 2001). Therefore, they tend not to have significant motivation to care much about student intercultural engagement and they rarely take initiative in student intercultural engagement, as quantitative and qualitative analysis both confirmed.

With this understanding, and considering that there were not many mechanisms to force intercultural engagement in the undergraduate classroom, it is understandable that the Chinese undergraduate students in the present study did not perceive a significant impact from intercultural engagement with peers on campus. The very small number of international students scattered in the undergraduate programs and the relatively few class discussions or group projects left many Chinese students relating that they "did not have opportunities to interact with international students". However, in the graduate programs, the Chinese students clearly had more student intercultural engagement experiences and recognized a greater impact from intercultural contact. This was attributed to a large proportion of international students at the graduate level and that the typical classroom format was centered around a lot of group projects, consistent with the Western educational model. Despite being the numerical majority, Chinese graduate students seemed more like their Chinese peers who study at universities in Western nations, experiencing the frustration and anxiety associated with communication issues, cultural adaptation, confidence issues, as well as academic concerns, such as anxiety

over writing skills, presentation issues, and fear of making mistakes. These attitudes naturally hinder student intercultural engagement, as students with such apprehensions are less likely to voice opinions in class or to be proactive in group tasks.

This situation is likely true at many transnational universities that import a Western or developed higher education model into a less developed or Eastern nation. University leadership would be wise to understand that student intercultural engagement does not “just happen”, and that a lot can be done to improve intercultural communication on campus, not only by taking steps to ensure there is a broad mix of domestic and international students and to ensure admitted students have adequate academic communication skills in a shared language, but by also incorporating student intercultural engagement into the culture of the university and by integrating student intercultural engagement experiences into the fabric of course curriculum, even at the undergraduate level.

**The cultural groups’ perceived status in student intercultural engagement is dynamic**

In the present sample study Chinese-foreign joint-venture transnational University, the student intercultural engagement level was found to be low and negative in general, especially as measured against students expectations prior to studying on campus. The Chinese students and international students were generally segregated on campus. Student groups tended to “stick to themselves”, with most Chinese sticking together in class and social situations, and most international students first forming bonds to peers from their home nation and generally to all international students as there was not typically a large student body from one

foreign country. Such national bonding and general domestic-international student divide was noticeable on campus has been observed by many scholarly investigations taking place over the past four decades (Brown, 2009; Kudo, Volet, & Whitsed, 2017; Klineberg & Hull, 1979; Sovic, 2009).

However, the typical domestic/majority group and the international/minority group dynamics commonly observed in the traditional Western multicultural research campus or university classrooms are not consistent with findings from my study in this transnational university context. Although the majority of the students on campus were domestic Chinese, they perceived themselves to be marginalized when they were in the intercultural settings, such as in class discussions and working in group projects, particularly in the graduate programs. This is the opposite of essentially the entire body of research on these dynamics at traditional multicultural research universities in Western nations (Church, 1982; Marginson & Sawir, 2011; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Yoon, 2013). At the sample study university, the international students were seen to take lead in almost all the academic areas and the Chinese students take more passive roles, “watching”, “following”, and “being directed on what to do and how to do things”. The international students frequently use the word “frustrating” or “most painful university experience” to describe the collaborative relationship with the Chinese students. In their own words, many of the Chinese students I interviewed said they “lost their voices”, leaving only a very small portion of Chinese students who were actively collaborating with international students academically, or even socially. In the traditional student mobility field, “international students” are typically portrayed as a group of non-native English speaking students who are lonely, isolated, marginalized, and have difficulty

adapting themselves into the majority student community and the host culture (Abelmann & Kang, 2014; Boekestijn, 1988; Chen, 2003; David, 1969; Flowerdew, 1998; Foot, 2009; Foster & Stapleton, 2012; Jones, 1999; Liu & Littlewood, 1997; Sarkodie-mensah, 1998; Sherry & Chui, 2010; Ozbay, 1993; Yoon, 2013). Nevertheless, in the present study of the transnational education setting, the domestic Chinese students as a majority group clearly fit more into the traditionally typical “international students” category and the international students in the current study, particularly those Western students, are more or less in the traditional domestic students’ position. Hence the typical connotations of the traditional “domestic students” and “international students” are fading away in the newer model/stage of the education internationalization taking place at these transnational universities, and this has tremendous implications on the university and faculty.

The aforementioned majority/minority group status change in the transnational context is just a surface impression; an in-depth analysis of the student intercultural engagement experiences in the institution indicates that the majority/minority group status is negotiable for specific sub-settings of the transnational university community based on various variables, such as the language being used, the number of students, the context of the setting, and so on. For example, most student clubs were managed, led, and organized by Chinese students who used Chinese language throughout the process, which incidentally was reported to be against the university regulations that require English language to be used at all events, classes and clubs on campus whenever international students are involved. In this case, international students were marginalized and disengaged in this venue. It did not appear that the Chinese students tried to exclude international students, and

many remarked that they desired to have more international students join them and make clubs or other activities more international and multicultural, but it was the conditions that the Chinese students are in. That is, the English language barrier was significant for a large proportion of Chinese students. Class discussions and group projects, which were heavily used in the graduate programs, saw the majority status group represented by the international students, particularly those with the strongest English language skills. This classroom dynamic and broader status issues led many students to describe an “us versus them” mindset. It is important to point out that while Chinese students may have taken the role of dominant status in many social and extracurricular activities on campus, most students’ motivations were driven on the academic side, where international students were perceived to have higher status.

Such being the case, we see that in the transnational education, as an emerging model of higher education internationalization, there are many new features and characteristics appearing in the community of learning that will impact all the learners and stakeholders. It is especially important for the faculty to be aware of such nuances, and provide appropriate interventions to help students from different cultural groups with their academic and socio-cultural experiences. For example, steps should be taken by faculty to make sure student groups do not feel marginalized on campus, and the university should consider setting stricter standards for minimum English language proficiency as part of the admissions requirements, and/or work to develop English language course for incoming undergraduates to quickly develop their English language skills to an academic level expected at any respected Western university.

### **The immense power of language in the transnational education setting**

Throughout the three phases of data collection as shown in Chapter Four, comments, complaints and frustrations focus on the common language barrier, specifically on the Chinese students' perceived inadequacy of English language skills. This criticism was repeated over and over again, not only by the international students but also by the Chinese students. Language use is a context-dependent social practice regarding its ownership and users' attitude (Morita, 2004; Norton, 2000). In my study, language reveals to be the most important vehicle to define the degree of connectedness between the cultural groups and to determine the level of student intercultural engagement on campus, as confirmed by MLR analysis. It is evident that in most cases, when there is no common language sufficiency there is no or limited student intercultural engagement occurring. In the meantime, language is a tool of status in the university, where the language used seemed to indicate to students who should take ownership of the setting.

Upon comparing my sample study university and other studies of language issues and the student experiences on multicultural campuses, I recognize the adoption of an official language in a way deconstructs the traditional meaning of the majority and minority in the education internationalization field. On the traditional Western multicultural campus located in Western nations, the international students as the minorities are often found to be or self-report to be marginalized, isolated, discriminated or disempowered partly due to their inadequacy of English which is predominantly the official and native language of the majority students (Hanassab, 2006; Welikala & Watkins, 2008). However, in the newer phase of transnational education internationalization, more and more transnational campuses are set up in a

nation or region where English is not the native speaking or official language of that society. As presented by the current sample study transnational university, the students from the host nation usually are the majority group from the number perspective and they are minority from the sociolinguistic point of view (Martin & Nakayama, 2012). In this context, who is taking lead and which language is being used are dependent on the cultural groups' power balance.

Therefore, language in this context actually signifies status and negotiation of power. Sometimes simply because one cultural group far outnumbers another cultural group, the official language is being pushed away from the discussion table and instead the majority people's language is being used, which is seen in many cases of the present study university between the Chinese students and the international students. For example, on the sample study university several Chinese professors taught a portion of class in Chinese and/or allowed discussions to be held in Chinese, which left any international students to be or feel ignored. Also, in the student club events, the use of Chinese language was predominant and resulted in many international students effectively disengaged and disconnected with student club life. As reported in Chapter Four, one international student even yelled at her Chinese peers to stop speaking in Chinese at a student club she attended, which apparently wasn't a successful tactic.

In the meantime, in many other typically academic-oriented settings of the university, the situation was the opposite. The native English speakers or other international students who have a good command of English easily held the language ownership and took leadership positions. When they have the voice, they reportedly take the lead in class discussions and direct students, or they decide class goals,



delegate on group projects, and so on. Those Chinese students, due to their inadequate English language proficiency, often see themselves as inferior to the international students in terms of academics. The lower-status mindset divided them further away from the group collaborations. In addition, as a lot of cases show in the present study, the more they talk, the bigger gap is created between the student groups since the Chinese students often did not have sufficient language skills. This is also an ironic finding, because as widely reported in academic literature, exposure to cultural out-groups tends to reduce stereotypes and prejudices (Allport, 1954; Hewstone & Swart, 2011; Pettigrew, 1998), not entrench them.

Many international students, particularly the graduate students, shared that in many cases they had no idea whether the Chinese peers truly understood what was going on, making comments such as, “They said that they got it or nodded to show that they got it, but they seemed not to really have got it or sometimes it was clear that they just didn’t get it”. From the Chinese students’ perspective, a lot of them reported constantly trying to negotiate their membership in the English dominant settings, but frequently failed, as articulated by comments such as, “I always wanted to join the discussion or say something, but ended up I always have to just sit there and listen to others”.

The English language proficiency issue has been well documented by researchers on the traditional Western multicultural campuses as a major barrier for international students to their transition, adaption, integration and learning (Andrade, 2006; Benzie, 2010; Berman & Cheng, 2001; Cheng, Myles & Curtis, 2004; Dunworth & Briguglio, 2010; Kim, 2012; Tsuda, 1986; Yeh & Inose, 2003). What is different in the current study is that the language issues are not confined to a small

percentage of international students, but are reflective of the majority—95 percent—of the student population who are domestic Chinese students that have learned English as a second language. Most students whose English proficiency is inadequate choose to avoid contact with people who speak English on campus, which impacts essentially the whole university culture and learning encounters and shapes the university's social communication and academic atmosphere. Furthermore, it dilutes the university's cohesiveness and potentially will impact its long-term reputation and viability.

Finally, all the language users of the learning community in the ideal situation should have a sense of comfort and confidence in the language that they are using for communication; otherwise issues such as language abuse and disempowerment would happen (Hsieh, 2007; Yoon, 2013), as were shown in multiple cases of my current study. In the sample study university, language use is largely unbalanced, and even a large number of Chinese faculty and Chinese staff on campus were said to hinder intercultural engagement and academic engagement in general. Transnational universities may benefit tremendously from employing bilingual (e.g., fluent in Chinese and English languages) staff and faculty to serve as ambassadors to unite culturally disparate students groups and educational customs and norms, as well as develop and implement language courses or cultural interventions to help all students with cultural transition. Of course, as previously stated, there is only so much that can be done for students' student intercultural engagement if common language skills among the student body are wide ranging in terms of proficiency level.

### **Intergroup contact, prejudice, and friendship in group projects**

In my study, research participants consistently and widely viewed participation in multicultural academic group projects to be among the most frequent and the most meaningful student intercultural engagement activities on campus, which aligns well with intergroup contact theory regarding the proposed primal conditions to generate reduced prejudice or improved social relations (Allport, 1954; Hewstone & Swart, 2011; Pettigrew, 1998). However, my research findings did not support the contact and prejudice diminution relationship in most cases, though there were a few students who reported working in group projects where the outcomes support the theory.

The multicultural student group projects that students described can be characterized with all the four constructive conditions that Allport (1954) proposed in which contact would reduce prejudice and improve social relationships, as documented in Chapter Two. Specifically, the students are of equal status in the university and in the group projects; the students are in cooperation, rather than in competition, to work together in a group project that entails everybody's contribution; the students have common goals which are to complete the project assignment upon the deadline and obtain a good score possible as the essential goal, and potentially some other goals such as building up more learning skills. Finally, the group project is certainly supported by the institution and particularly by the course faculty (Allport, 1954).

Under these conditions, feedback from the majority of the students' multicultural group project experiences does not support the intergroup contact hypothesis; that is, in most cases the prejudice was not reduced, the social relations

were not improved, and the students felt frustrated, painful, and many of the international students particularly expressed their preference not to work with the Chinese students in the future if they could choose group members themselves for projects. That said, there was a minority of students in my research sample that reported positive intercultural collaboration and some of them thereby formed cross-group friendships, which incidentally was a statistically significant predictor of students' self-reported student intercultural engagement level/frequency from my MLR analysis.

Analysis of the majority of student group project experiences found that in cross-cultural contact situations, especially when common language barriers exist during the contact, the primal conditions are important but only function as building up the basic facilitating role, and what is outstanding is the contact process and out-group members' attitudes, behaviors, and affective ties presented during the process. In the meantime, the similarity/distance of the cultures also influences the relationship.

For the unsupportive cases, outstanding negative features were found to be, (1) communication issues due to the common language barrier, (2) affective disconnection due to language issues, and cultural differences and biases, (3) being agreeable and not defending one's opinions for some members, (4) low effort or irresponsibility by some members, (5) low quality of the project work parts done by some members, and (6) too much workload burden as well as emotional frustration caused to some other members. Usually two or more features work together to reinforce the stereotyped prejudice toward the Chinese students. When such patterns were found to be in multiple intergroup projects, the stereotyped prejudices were

even more intensified. The international students often gathered and spent time talking about the Chinese students' behaviors in group projects, strategizing how to deal with such situations in the future as well as find out who in the Chinese student group was easier to work with.

For those few minority of reported student experiences that were supportive of Allport's (1954) theory, outstanding positive features were found to be, (1) individual effort on the communication side, (2) spending time together socializing outside the immediate project setting, and (3) mutual effort to do one's part of assignment and preferably to produce quality work. Noticeably, making effort from all parties is very important to a successful group project as well as to improved out-group relations. In one case, a first-year undergraduate student from Europe developed a set of key words and phrases to help his Chinese group members with the communication for their group project. He spent time training them on academic language, forcing them to speak up in English, and also tried to speak some Chinese which became a positive connection between him and his Chinese group members. He also took the lead taking the group to social settings several times during the project duration, which became a platform for the members to reveal themselves more personally as well as to get to know others in the group. During the process, as the student commented, being patient, open-minded and tolerant are critically important. In another case, a Chinese student reported not to speak a word throughout the group project, but she was shown to be responsible for her part of work and submitted her portion of the group assignment to the other team members' satisfaction. The international students in her group liked her and a positive

relationship was built up between them. Work ethic seems to be a factor to produce a positive intergroup relationship for group projects.

Out-group friendships were established from a few positive cross-cultural group projects in the present study. The most important factor, on top of the aforementioned positive features, was found to be moving beyond the group project and expanding the development space. For example, the aforementioned European student became a close friend of his Chinese peers in the middle of their group projects. Sharing social experiences, spending study-time together, and helping each other's academics become the part that take them from a successfully-collaborating group to friends. In another case, two international and two Chinese students became "best friends" while working on a group project together and were referred to by their classmates as the "Model Friends 4". The fact that these relationships were surprising to enough students as to get a special social label is further indicative of how uncommon they are on campus of the sample study university.

Students theorized that successful cross-cultural friendships required not only a common language, but also personal attributes of being patient, tolerant and avoiding being ethnocentric. But in terms of the academic group projects specifically, responsibility and work ethic were found to be fundamental.

Given the predominant negative atmosphere of the multicultural group project collaboration at the sample study university, it seems to be necessary to conduct some intervention strategies and change the dynamic of the intergroup collaboration. The educators of the institution need make a concerted effort to improve the student intercultural engagement situation on campus. For example, some training and simulation sessions can be provided to teach the students from different cultural

groups topics along with how to effectively work on group projects. Students need to understand the essential process and flow of working in group project, which can be basic or common sense for students from some cultures and can be new for some others. Teachers who all have been trained under the Western education system cannot assume that all the students in this transnational university understand the Western learning styles. In addition, cases of successful intergroup collaborations and cases of the opposite can be provided to the students so that they have a better pre-understanding of what would presumably help them make both psychological and practical preparation for a successful collaboration. Professors and intercultural professionals in the university can offer some practical tips, strategies and recommendations, or preferably facilitate some favorable settings to enable both a positive group project and improved social relations to students from different cultures. Professors may even encourage positive student intercultural engagement from rotating group leaders, in other words, not always letting international students lead group projects, which both Chinese students and international students reported is the case in virtually 100 percent of the cases for graduate programs.

### **Major intercultural attitudes on campus and their implications**

Intercultural attitude is found to be another critical factor to impact the student intercultural engagement level on campus and it is indicated from several different perspectives. There are positive intercultural attitudes that promote student intercultural engagement and there are negative ones that prohibit student intercultural engagement. The positive intercultural attitude appearing in in this sample study repeatedly relates to what I call intercultural considerateness. There are three key negative intercultural attitudes, the first of which is exhibited in some

Chinese students' minority mentality, the second of which is the ethnocentric mindset, particularly among the Western students, and the third of which is the "why do I need student intercultural engagement" attitude which was held by a majority of the Chinese students in this study. All these negative attitudes do not only hinder student intercultural engagement on campus but also contribute to increasing the prejudice between different cultures.

I use intercultural considerateness to basically summarize the considerate personality trait and intercultural skills that some of the university students possess while working with peers from different cultures to help promote student intercultural engagement. Cultural considerateness has been proved to promote student intercultural engagement in my study particularly from group projects that involved students from different cultures. Cultural considerateness involves both personality and intercultural skills, and is usually possessed by an individual that has had personal exposure of differing cultural backgrounds and understands how each culture works and how people under each culture might feel. It could also exist in individuals who come from a culture that is in the middle of the two other involved distant cultures, or simply any individual that has cultural awareness and knowledge as well as the considerate and empathetic personality. These individuals often function as an intermediary trying to coordinate and pull together members from other different cultural backgrounds, help them form the cultural understanding and promote student intercultural engagement.

In Chapter Four, many international students from the focus groups, the individual in-depth interviews and the open-ended questions of the survey questionnaire demonstrated that intercultural considerateness played an instrumental



part in both completing their academic projects and promoting student intercultural engagement; in some cases, cross-group friendships were established out of the process. The key of the cultural considerateness, based on my analysis, is to understand the out-group members' situations and mindset and try to find out appropriate coping strategies. Patience in the process is very important, as discussed earlier in this chapter. For example, a Brazilian student who understood that many Chinese students were shy, unconfident, and particularly in fear of making mistakes publicly, so she let them understand that English was not her first language either and shared with them her personal stories of making embarrassing English mistakes. She basically communicated the messages that say, "I am not that different from you; we are similar. I can do it now; you will be able to do it soon, too, if you get out of your comfort zone and challenge yourself." One international student showed his patience in developing key English phrases and sentences and teaching his Chinese teammates in order to work collaboratively on their group project—he won respect, appreciation and trust and they have since become friends. An undergraduate student showed her patience and also her empathy of Chinese peers regarding their English issues, saying, "It is *my* responsibility to try to understand them, because we cannot change the situation in which they are for their English capability". When her Chinese teammates were arguing with each other in English, she made an effort to stay patient and encouraging, for which, she shared, "Almost all the time they spoke Chinese in school. That was pretty much the only opportunity for them to speak some English; I just let them do it, occasionally jump in, and help them stay on the right track." They have also reportedly become close friends.

Intercultural considerateness proves to be a great virtue playing a vital role in the intercultural world to promote the student intercultural engagement level.

Opposite to intercultural considerateness, there are negative intercultural attitudes or mindsets that lower the student intercultural engagement level or even block student intercultural engagement on the campus.

The Chinese students on campus are undoubtedly the majority group by number yet some of them have what might be described as a minority mentality regarding contact with their Western peers in the community. Chinese students openly discussed perceptions that Western students probably felt racially superior to Chinese students, and some confirmed this bias with what Chinese students observed to be some Western students' ethnocentric points of view. Such being the case, many of these Chinese students chose to avoid contact with the Western peers in order to prevent further unnecessary complications. In addition, the insufficient English language skill issue would potentially worsen the situation if the Chinese student were to "lose face" during an encounter in English where the Chinese student couldn't express himself or herself well. It is clear that in this case the Chinese students are not putting themselves in the equal status with the Western peers; they tend to surrender to a perceived social pressure and in a way have devaluated themselves, despite being the majority on campus. This kind of attitude prohibits the intergroup contact and hence the intergroup prejudice would not be reduced or could be potentially enlarged.

Another attitude that demotes student intercultural engagement on campus is the mindset that holds, "since student intercultural engagement is not going to improve my GPA or increase my chance of applying for a top graduate school

overseas, why should I engage myself”, which seemed to dominate most Chinese students’ minds that I interviewed on the sample study university. This may be understood as the opposite of the “global attitudes” or “global perspectives” that some scholars argue to be indispensable for an internationalized institution and all of its internal stakeholders including students (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Elkin & Devjee 2003; Knight, 1994, 2004, 2014). The intercultural dimension and global dimension have been recognized as the major elements for the new internationalization model (Knight, 2004) but are being challenged and resisted by the Chinese students in this transnational university who clearly are not ready to position themselves in the global education and the near future global workforce platform.

The ethnocentrism held by some of the Western students on campus equally effectively prevents or diminishes the contact with people from other cultures and particularly the Chinese students and the local Chinese culture. Similar to how Bennett’s (1993) six-stage developmental model of intercultural sensitivity shows, some of these students, particularly from Western nations, showed their indifference to have contact with the local Chinese peers and in the meantime complained about the Chinese ways from various aspects. They live in a Chinese culture with a majority of Chinese people on campus and in the surrounding community, yet the university segregates Chinese and international students housing, which does little to help with the reducing contact-prejudice relationship. Potentially, they may enlarge the gaps between the cultural groups because of the negative aspects that the out-group members perceive. While some of the international students on campus were observed to show their ethnocentric opinions and refuse the contact with the people from other cultures, a few Western students shared their attitude change from

ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism as a result of frequent contact with Chinese peers by taking classes together and working on group projects. The student attitude change also demonstrates that increased frequency of contact and true understanding of the out-group members can diminish cultural prejudice.

It is important for the university leadership and professional staff to be aware of the major mindsets and intercultural attitudes that are held by the students from different cultural groups, and make necessary measures to help the students with their positive attitudinal change and behavioral change. Setting up meaningful and effective cultural workshops and events on the regular and irregular bases on campus can help shorten the cultural distance, promote the cultural awareness and knowledge, and enhance the intercultural skills. It is also beneficial to recognize those culturally considerate individuals on campus and collaborate with them on some projects to promote student intercultural engagement on campus.

### **Findings supported by recent studies of transnational education in China**

My findings are echoed and supported by other scholarly investigations of the student experiences in the realm of Chinese-foreign transnational education. Zhuang and Tang (2012) examined the gap between what should happen and what actually happens in the transnational education, with a focus on the barriers of language and culture, by surveying and interviewing 38 program managers from 10 Chinese-United Kingdom transnational education providers located in 5 large cities of China. The researchers have several key findings in the areas of student recruitment, language of learning and teaching, and culture of learning and teaching and program management. They found that the admissions requirement is very low and there is no English entry requirement in general (Zhuang & Tang, 2012). A few high-ranking

institutions set up minimum IELTS English proficiency score to be 5.0 and less competitive institutions at 4.5, but at the time of admissions, they tended to admit students lower than the cut-off score or students who did not have an IELTS score due to fierce competition or the national educational system limitation for those institutions recruiting within the National College Entrance Examination quota system (Zhuang & Tang, 2012). Further, although English was supposed to be the language of instruction and course materials, for most institutions this was reported not to be the case in reality, and as a result students had difficulties understanding the content, digesting the readings, and conducting in-class discussions (Zhuang & Tang, 2012). Similarly, due to the hardship of recruiting all English-native teachers, most of the institutions have to hire a big portion of Chinese teachers and some of them also have difficulty delivering content fully in English (Zhuang & Tang, 2012). These language difficulties were also found in studies of other similar educational programs (Chiu, 2009; Harzing & Feely, 2008; Jill, 2008; QAA, 2006).

From the cultural perspective, Zhuang and Tang (2012) find that the switch from the teacher-centered traditional Chinese education system to the student-centered UK education system has created enormous impact in all the stakeholders of the institutions, particularly the Chinese students and the academic staff. One of the investigated institutions reported that when they first started, a large number of students failed in their first year and resulted in their parents protesting in the university who could not believe that their children could fail. Similarly, nearly 80 percent of all the respondents in their investigation indicated that the academic staff in their institutions were confronted with one or more of the following cultural difficulties: “not knowing the British HE system well”, “difficulties in understanding

some of the course contents”, “dealing with cultural differences on the course”, or “lack of teaching resources” (p. 228). All these findings suggest that it is vitally important for these institutions to strategize on how to help the students with their learning transition and academic success, otherwise it would easily lead to underperformance and dissatisfaction.

### **A global university cultivating global citizens?**

The joint-venture transnational sample study university is established as a global education center and envisions itself to cultivate global citizens as its most important mission. Legally, it is a Chinese university and mainly follows the Chinese government recruitment quota system to recruit the majority of its students. That means, the university recruits students based on their Gaokao scores. Outside the Gaokao quota system, the University currently recruits a very small percentage of Chinese students through the institution’s independent review system. For both methods, the university does not set English language as a part of the recruitment requirement, which is probably due to the fierce competition and necessary to recruit students to what is an unestablished university, despite its joint venture partner being well known.

Besides the English language issue, many Chinese students entering this University are not ready for a global university education, or in other words, they are not a good fit for a global education. Compared to Chinese high school graduates who go directly abroad for college and who likely feel some degree of urgency and necessity to change to adapt to the host university environment and learn how to live within the host nation culture, Chinese students at the sample study university have little such sense of urgency to adapt or change, as many Chinese interviewees

expressed directly. While they may fancy the Western style education they are in, feel proud and a bit privileged compared with their domestic peers who are in the traditional Chinese education system, and are excited about going abroad for education down the road, they don't tend to realize that their position entails them to make some internal changes to fit in this global University and future global workforce. Many of the Chinese students have little experience working with people from other cultures and don't know how to show their responsibility, respect, and empathy with people from other cultures in general. Many of them choose to communicate through social media (e.g., WeChat) when they are physically with each other; some of them do not make a self-introduction before asking international students to help with coursework problems, and cannot tell when international students may find their actions annoying. Some Chinese students were reported to laugh at or mock international students when speaking Chinese poorly, and then keep silent or reserved when it is their turn to speak English in a group project meeting.

Academic staff are another major part of such a transnational education provision. The international faculty of the university are generally preferred among all students, but particularly the international students. However, the sustainable commitment of international faculty can be an issue due to various reasons and many transnational education providers have to hire local academic staff; actually the quality faculty retention issue has been predicted to be the most challenging issue in the transnational education (Hayhoe & Pan, 2015). The challenges with localized academic staff are usually in terms of language ability, command of the Western curriculum and student-centered andragogy as well as the cultural factors.

Finally, the institutional leadership as the steersman for the university's direction is the most important part for all the institutional development including student intercultural engagement. While the Chinese students are generally happy to receive a Western degree and guaranteed opportunities for further studying abroad, many international students hold their strong opinion that the university is not supportive of student intercultural engagement or the student experiences of international students in general. Many university activities or student events are held in Chinese and not to the international students' satisfaction; there is no effective management organization in the university to do some down-to-earth monitoring and trying to improving the situation.

Ideally, in a global university the leadership should advocate for all the students, faculty and staff to commit themselves to the intercultural engagement and contribution to the global learning community so that it can strengthen the university's value proposition and long-term reputation. However, the current situation leaves an impression that there are other undisclosed objectives taking priority over its mission to cultivate global citizens. The university leadership would likely be well served to ensure students on campus are happy with their experiences, to ensure that admitted students have the language ability to be successful and participatory in class, and to instill in the culture of the university and its curriculum a commitment to promoting student intercultural engagement through skilled faculty and methods that require true intercultural cooperation to take place.

### **Limitations**

One of the limitations of the study is that the research largely depended on the students' self-reported perspectives on the topic from a sample of the student



population. While the focus groups, the one-on-one in-depth interviews and the online survey were broadly consistent, it is possible that the common experiences of students don't reflect the experiences of research participants, due to a number of factors such as selection bias and nonresponse bias. For example, it is possible that more students with negative perspectives on student intercultural engagement and negative impressions of the university wanted to participate in my research as a means to have their voice heard. Sample size is another potential limitation. While maintaining the anonymity of the university I cannot disclose total student enrollment, the fact is that I interviewed and survey a fraction of the entire student body.

Another limitation involves quantitative data collection. Particularly, the dependent variable as the self-reported frequency of intercultural interaction may not be fully capturing the student intercultural engagement level, although it was how students broadly defined student intercultural engagement from my focus groups and one-on-one interviews; students further noted that student intercultural engagement frequency should be indicative of engagement. As self-reported data, it may also not be accurate. My working definition of student intercultural engagement is more nuanced than the frequency of student intercultural engagement experiences.

The final key limitation is that the research was only conducted with one particular institution, therefore caution needs to be used when generalizing findings and recommendations for other Chinese-foreign joint-venture transnational universities located in China, or applying the findings, conclusions and recommendations to the broader transnational education situation. The Chinese-foreign joint-venture transnational universities located in China have to follow

certain legal and administrative regulations regarding fundamental principles, yet from the operational aspects, they can be quite different from one another. For example, the English language barrier was overwhelmingly presented in the sample study university, which may or may not be the case for other institutions. In addition, the difference in the ratio between Chinese students and international students, the ratio of international faculty, the campus culture among many others can be varied and likely present substantial influence on student intercultural engagement and the factors that promote and hinder it.

### **Recommendations**

As is seen from this sample study university and also examined by other researchers, intercultural interaction does not automatically happen on campus and the students from differing cultural backgrounds are not automatically engaging themselves (De Vita, 2007; Leask & Carroll, 2011; Wright & Slander, 2003). A study conducted by the UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA, 2004, as cited in Leask & Carroll, 2011) found that two thirds of the international students say that they have not made any British friends and some of them report that they have not made a single British friend after three years of studying in United Kingdom. Student intercultural engagement needs intervention in many transnational universities. In fact, the Australian council for Educational Research administered a large-scale study on student engagement with half of the total number of universities in Australia and New Zealand and the results suggest that the university experience is ineffective in increasing intercultural interaction and engagement over time without intervention (Crawford & Bethell, 2012).

In order to improve the student intercultural engagement on the sample study campus, the university needs to take deliberate and strategic actions to help all students on campus, Chinese or international, to jump out of their comfort zone and enter the challenging but rewarding intercultural interaction and engagement. Specifically, I propose the following recommendations: (1) to raise student admissions requirement; (2) to increase international student ratio; (3) to develop joint induction programs for new Chinese students and international students combined; (4) to create an intercultural peer mentoring program; (5) to organize more cross-cultural group projects; (6) to train academic staff on professional development for intercultural engagement; and (7) to establish a Global Engagement Center.

### **Recommendation 1: Increase student admissions requirements**

The Chinese students' English proficiency skills were observed and self-reported to be a prevailing issue to negatively impact the students' learning experiences and outcomes, the University's student intercultural engagement, and the University vision and reputation. Without any monitoring system for the Chinese students' English proficiency level, the university will have to continue to recruit Chinese students with various levels of English skills, which will perpetuate the conflicts with the international students. Therefore, raising student admissions requirement and particularly the English part seems to be a pressing issue. To clarify, this should not be only applied to the Chinese students, but to all applicants to ensure that students have the English language skills necessary to be successful in an academically challenging institution of higher education.

Currently, the university reportedly does not have any English criteria for admissions. I investigated other Chinese-foreign joint-venture transnational universities and found that different universities have different English criteria for admitting the Chinese students although they also admit students through China's National College Entrance Examination (in Chinese, *Gaokao*) system (purposefully no sources disclosed to keep the anonymity). That is to say, if the university leadership believes raising the student admission requirement is a smart decision and is determined to do so, there are probably ways to do to take actions. If not, I offer an alternative recommendation, which would be to test admitted students for their English proficiency, and place students with substandard English skills into remedial programs during their first year of study on campus that can as quickly as possible catch them up to the academic standards necessary to be successful, besides their EAP classes offered currently to all the Chinese students and some international students on campus.

### **Recommendation 2: Increase international student ratio**

At five percent of the student body, international students are a small minority on campus. To provide more students on campus with the opportunities of intercultural interaction, participation, and exchanges, it is important for the university to reshape the student ratio between the Chinese and international students. Many Chinese students and particularly the undergraduate students reported not to have any opportunity to interact with international students on campus. This strategic step may require increased promotion for students abroad, but would likely be worth the effort if quality students can be found. Scholarships and

internship/career development programs may be some effective motivators to induce high caliber students from around the world to join the transnational campus.

**Recommendation 3: Develop joint induction programs for new Chinese and international students**

According to the students, there are not many university-sponsored programs on campus that are effectively introducing diverse cultural groups on campus nor are encouraging and facilitating their intercultural interaction and engagement. The current orientation process seems to positively viewed in terms of helping students with logistics as well as getting students acquainted with school life, but orientation programs are segregated for Chinese and international students. The message is clear to students from the very beginning: the different groups of students on campus are treated differently. While there may be some practical reasons to have Chinese language dominate some orientation materials for Chinese students and vice-versa, there should be many opportunities for induction programs to bring students together for fun, socializing and general “getting to know you” activities. The cross-group events and activities should be designed with specific tasks, implemented with a knowledgeable guide and monitor, and ensure specific goals are met in order to promote the best outcomes and continual improvement of orientations.

Some research indicates that early university experiences are particularly important for developing students’ necessary social skills and willingness to engage in group work with people from other cultures (Summers & Volet, 2008).

Multicultural induction programs can be redesigned to not only orient the new Chinese and international students to campus, but also promote their student intercultural engagement from the very beginning.

**Recommendation 4: Create an intercultural peer mentoring program**

Most Chinese students on campus perceived that they do not have an opportunity to interact with culturally diverse students on campus because they have limited or no international classmates or roommates, and there are not many other activities on campus that draw them together. In reality, many students also lack the social skills to approach cultural out-group peers in an outgoing fashion. The university should make student intercultural engagement facilitations more approachable and available to students, just as Leask and Carroll (2011) found that promoting student intercultural interaction and engagement requires institutions to intervene and link the students' university goals with said interventions.

That means, a forced invention has to enter to stir the water and make student intercultural engagement a part of campus culture. A mentoring program can be created to help improve students' cultural level and intercultural skills. The mentors can be composed of current students and alumni (academic staff are also welcome) who are interculturally passionate and experienced. Instead of one-on-one mentoring, I recommend mentoring take place with groups of students with at least some cultural diversity represented. Ideally two mentors from different cultures could co-facilitate or take turns facilitating group sessions. The mentoring program can be semi-structured, with a required number of meetings or activities (e.g., once every two weeks, once a month) per semester and linked to students' intercultural learning goals. For example, all the students involved in the program can be issued one credit and the students earn the credit as long as they are committed to the participation and have had some personal learning. The number of students per group would largely be dependent on the number of mentors available, but it is likely the most successful

groups would have 10 to 12 students, providing sufficient mix of opinions and learning opportunities. Perhaps successful students that have graduated through the program could go on to serve as mentors. These programs and groups can be formed during the aforementioned induction or orientation process.

Notably, this would be a great way to involve alumni, and their contributions should also be recognized. Training sessions should be designed and developed as well for mentors to ensure consistency. There should also be a place set up for the mentors to go meet, which may vary from casual settings at a dining hall to more structure learning environments such as a classroom.

This intercultural paired-up mentoring program recommendation is inspired by a successful institutional intervention done by the University of South Australia investigated by Leask (2009). It was a modified mentoring program, which the university calls 'Business Mates', as part of the informal curriculum designed sought to improve the students' international and intercultural skills and knowledge. The modification was that the mentors were required to work in pairs rather than individually and with groups of students, rather than individual students. Further, the mentors of each group were 'mixed pairs' deliberately matched for diversity between domestic and international students. It was a full semester program involving a range of welcome activities during the orientation and social activities throughout the semester. The mentors and mentees involved in the previous mentoring program and those involved in the modified one answered the same institution-wide survey questions in different years. A direct comparison found that those involved in the modified program, both mentors and mentees, indicated consistently over two years that their involvement had made them more likely to choose to work in class with

people from a different cultural background to their own and to socialize with people from a different cultural background to their own. Institutional interventions do work. It is important to provide sufficient time for cross-cultural members to learn how to work together. Other research in this area has found that six months might be a minimum amount of time necessary for diverse groups to learn to work effectively for mentoring type programs (Summers & Volet, 2008). I recommend the mentoring programs should be designed for at least one semester and preferably for one year in length.

#### **Recommendation 5: Organize more cross-cultural group projects**

Cross-cultural group projects at the sample study university were demonstrated to be the most dynamic platform for intercultural interaction and collaboration between or among cultural student groups to take place. Students learn from their experiences about other cultures and how to work with people from other cultures, even from those disappointing and frustrating occurrences. They also have to participate in them. A lot of Chinese students would not have worked or interacted with their international peers in their classes had they not worked with them on group projects. Compared with other activities, the cross-cultural group activities were observed to be working better at the sample study university because there is a specific task and a common goal for the group members and they have to personally collaborate to complete the task in order to achieve their group goal which is the identical to their personal goal.

The cross-cultural group projects can be in-class discussion tasks, course projects, interdisciplinary research projects or university-wide projects, workshops, or competitions. The nature of the projects can be both academic and non-academic,



yet they need to be preferably a part of the university requirements or curriculum, and preferably related to their learning goals so that the students will value the projects.

To promote the intercultural interaction and collaboration, a certain percentage of the grades should be given to the time and effort that the students invest in the group discussions and collaboration. The efficacy of peer review and ratings should also be considered. The entire university needs to set up a standard group project work flow and grading protocol with the emphasis and guidance on cross-culture group collaboration so that all the group projects can be worked with based on the essential template, which provides basic training for the students involved in group projects and familiar expectations. Recognition at departmental, college, and university level can be awarded for some annual group projects or competitions to commend top cross-culture group collaborators for their learning and contribution to the global intellectual community. This will help to engrain student intercultural engagement into the culture of the university.

**Recommendation 6: Professional development about intercultural engagement for academic staff**

In this study, I did not interview or survey non-student stakeholders of the university so that I am not officially aware of the academic staff's situations in terms of their intercultural awareness, knowledge, skills or attitudes and practices in the transnational university. Yet, through analysis of the students' sharing of their personal experiences with and observations of the teachers and staff in the university, I would like to recommend that the university establish and conduct a long-term professional training and development of its workforce so that the academic staff on

the whole can advance the transnational university culture and further support and guide the students of differing cultural groups on campus. All faculty should have sufficient skills in academic English, and should not be permitted to routinely hold portions of class in Chinese language.

The professional development of the academic staff on intercultural engagement is highly imperative and valuable; in addition, the development plan should be ongoing and on a long-term basis. The training and development may cover myriad topics, such as the understanding of the Western and partner curriculum, the understanding of the partner nation's culture, the internationalized curriculum design fit in the localized context, the classroom teaching methods and engagement facilitation for multicultural students, and the understanding of professionalism in the global context, among other potentially important topics. The university should launch such a teaching and professional training center to train and develop its own academic staff; it should also function as a professional learning center for the university, working with other institutions and organizations in the region and throughout the world to co-promote the professional academic staff in the transnational and other global institutions.

**Recommendation 7: Establish a global engagement center**

Finally, it is necessary to establish a Global Engagement Center (GEC) on campus to promote interaction and engagement among students of all cultures and help develop a culturally enriching learning environment through the university and the local community. The Center can be used to manage, facilitate, direct, advise, train and promote all activities and aspects that are related to international students, scholars and academic staff and all multicultural affairs. The current development of

student intercultural engagement related programs and resources can be all put underneath the GEC, as can the recommended strategies and programs advocated in this dissertation. The Center should also conduct cultural training programs for all the university internal stakeholders.

In a word, GEC can become the university-wide central unit supporting the entire community's international, intercultural, and global exchanges. It can partner with other departments, offices, and programs to co-develop student intercultural engagement on campus, such as the student clubs, alumni office, and so on. I highly recommend that this Center create various valuable programs, events and activities for the Chinese students and international students to make exchanges and collaborate with each other and through which to improve their cultural awareness, understanding and intercultural skills. It will also be a great symbol of the university and its commitment to creating globally competent citizens.

### **Future research suggestions**

This study only focuses on the students' self-reported experiences with their intercultural interaction and collaboration in this specific sample study university. Although I have obtained an in-depth understanding of student intercultural engagement through the student perspectives in this particular university, and I believe valuable exploratory research has been laid out in this dissertation that will serve future studies that will strengthen the understanding of student intercultural engagement in the setting of transnational education. Below are my key suggestions for future research.

Foremost, this study can be expanded to also investigate the university faculty, staff and leadership to find out their perspectives on and impact on student

intercultural engagement. For example, the ways in which educators look at classroom dynamics between cultural groups of students might bring in a new angle to analyze the in-class intercultural interactions, or offer insights into practical solutions to improve student intercultural engagement for universities that value this competency. As another example, interviewing faculty and staff who oversee student clubs, career services, and other university events and administrative work would help increase the understanding of the different student intercultural engagement occurrences. Interviewing recruitment and admissions offices would be valuable to understand how much the university can control in terms of its recruitment of different types of students, what can be done to ensure adequate language standards among students, and to align the student body with institutional priorities and financial limitations. Interviewing university leadership and having access to their partnership documents would likely prove to be very insightful in terms of understanding the university structure and relationships in the joint venture, and the role and authority granted to the local government, which in China is typically substantial in terms of permissible content, curriculum, and what faculty are allowed to discuss in classrooms.

Second, longitudinal studies of student intercultural engagement as students progress through the university could be insightful into how students experience with intercultural communication and engagement impact learning, satisfaction, preparedness, and so on. These studies can be run on both the joint venture campus and the Western university campus in the home nation. In that case, the understanding of the personal and institutional factors impacting student intercultural engagement would be presumably advanced, and in the meantime, the understanding

of a Western multicultural campus life compared with its overseas branch campus life, or the understanding of a traditional internationalization compared with the newer model of internationalization (i.e., transnational education) can be documented for identical universities.

Third, the current student intercultural engagement study can also be expanded to include multiple Chinese-foreign joint-venture transnational universities. It would be fascinating to learn how similar or different the student experiences and student intercultural engagement levels are from each of the institutions. It would also be very interesting to see whether language proficiency issues in other transnational universities are prevalent in universities that have established minimum English admissions criteria. Additionally, are there patterns of the transnational education depending on the national partnerships (e.g., Chinese-American, Chinese-British, Chinese-Australian, Chinese-Russian) and how different are they? How are the educational qualities of these institutions and this type of education in China? To what degree are these institutions driven by financial benefits? What are the real goals of these institutions and how would that impact their students' intercultural engagement on campuses?

Fourth, future research can investigate how to effectively enhance student intercultural engagement from the institutional perspective. This research can focus on exploring the successful programs and interventions that those Chinese-foreign transnational institutions have established and examine the common characteristics that made the difference and improved the student intercultural engagement level on campus. Or the researcher can set up some intervention programs with several campuses hopefully and conduct a longitudinal study. This type of study could be

relatively easy to quantify, adding another dimension of reliability and generalizability to the research.

Finally, future research can be done to develop an student intercultural engagement model that fits student-learning experiences in the Chinese-foreign transnational education system and further expands to other transnational education models as well. This study can be based on the first four proposed studies and other scholarly work of the intercultural engagement topic in the transnational education context. Hopefully it can find out the commonly developed stages of student intercultural engagement level growth and how interventions work to make it happen effectively. It also needs to understand how individuals' intercultural competency plays a role in this student intercultural engagement developmental model or whether and how the student intercultural engagement developmental model links with the developmental model of the intercultural competency.

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## Appendix A

**Recruitment Letter to Focus Group Participants****(In English and Chinese)**

Dear Students,

My name is Wanling Qu, a doctoral candidate of the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, and I am conducting research for my dissertation at XXX (with your university's approval). I would sincerely appreciate your participation in one or more aspect of my research study, which will first involve a student focus group, and subsequently involve a widely distributed electronic survey and a few individual interviews for follow up.

As a brief background, the purpose of my dissertation is to determine factors that influence student intercultural engagement in the setting of joint-venture transnational universities in China. Student intercultural engagement essentially represents the amount of time and effort students devote to interactions and activities with people from different cultural backgrounds and related learning outcomes.

As part of XXX, you continually experience interactions with peers, faculty and staff on campus from different cultures, and I would like to hear from you about how you have engaged in such intercultural experiences and activities, and how you perceive and evaluate such interactions.

For the first phase of my research, I would like to invite several small groups of 4-6 students with diverse backgrounds to share their experiences and perceptions of things related to student intercultural engagement. The session will last about 60-90 minutes, and I will compensate you with a 100-RMB voucher to your campus coffee shop to show my appreciation for your time and candid feedback. I will also serve coffee during the session, which will take place in a comfortable location such as a group work room in one of your campus buildings. Please note that if you are an undergraduate student, your focus group will all be undergraduate students; and similarly, if you are a postgraduate student, your group will all be graduate students.

If you would like to support and participate in my research, please respond to this email at your earliest convenience. In your response, please address the following questions that will help me to place you in the proper focus group.

1. What is your first language? \_\_\_\_\_

2. What is your nationality? \_\_\_\_\_

3. What is your major? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Are you a male or female student? \_\_\_\_\_

5. Are you a graduate or undergraduate student? \_\_\_\_\_
6. How many years have you been studying on XXX campus \_\_\_\_\_
7. Besides China and the country you are from, how many countries have you stayed for at least two weeks? \_\_\_\_\_

I will select students for the focus groups based on first responses, as well as diversity criteria consistent with my research objectives. Ideally, I would like to meet with up to 25 students in around 5 different focus groups. You are encouraged to respond to this email as soon as possible, and preferably by Monday, April 10<sup>th</sup>, or as soon as possible, and I will follow up with all respondents to this email to confirm next steps. The focus groups are planned in the week of April 10<sup>th</sup>.

Thank you very much for your support and I look forward to hearing from you.

Wanling Qu  
EdD candidate  
Organizational Leadership and Policy Development  
College of Education and Human Development  
University of Minnesota  
Email: wanling@umn.edu

亲爱的同学，

你好！

我叫屈婉玲，是美国明尼苏达大学的一名学生，目前正在撰写我的博士论文。我已经过你们大学伦理委员会的批准，到你们校园做相关研究。我真诚邀请你参与我的论文研究。该研究涉及三个阶段，第一个阶段是与少数同学的团体访谈、第二个阶段请所有同学参与网上调查问卷、第三个阶段则与个别同学进行深入面谈。

简单说来，我的论文旨在探讨中外合作模式下的跨国大学影响学生跨文化参与的因素问题。我所研究的学生跨文化参与，主要是指在大学校园中，学生主动寻求、发起、或者积极参与与不同文化背景下的学生或其他个人（团体）之间进行的持续性的、互动性的交流。

作为XXX大学的学生，你们持续地在进行与不同文化下的人（你们的老师和其他同学）进行学术和非学术的各种活动，或者有机会进行这样的参与。我希望了解你们是如何经历、感受、理解、和评价这些活动及其相关方面的。

在我的论文收集数据的第一个阶段，我希望邀请到一些不同文化背景和经历的同学，每组大概4-6人，进行小组式的团体访谈，分享交流你们关于跨文化参与的问题。每个访谈小组大概60-90分钟的时间。为感谢你们付出的时间和对我研究的支持，我将对每一位完整参与团体访谈的同学赠送一张校园咖啡券（价值100元人民币），我也会在访谈中为大家提供咖啡。访谈将在校园内一个较为舒适的环境下进行，如某幢楼里的集体学习或者讨论的房间。请知悉，如果你是本科学生，你的访谈小组成员也都会是本科生；同理，如果你是研究生，你的小组成员也会跟你一样。

如果你愿意参与我的研究活动，烦请尽快回函。请在你的回函中，回答以下几个小问题：

- 你的母语是什么？
- 你的国籍是什么？
- 你的专业是什么？
- 你是男生还是女生？
- 你是研究生还是本科生？
- 你在XXX学习几年了？
- 除了中国和你自己的国家，你还在几个国家待过2周或者更长的时间？

我会按照给我回信的先后顺序，以及我与研究目标相匹配的多样性原则来邀请团体访谈的同学。如果可能的话，我希望最好能够跟多达25位同学（大约分成5组）进行交流。感兴趣的同学最好能够尽量在四月10日以前回复我，或者越早越好。然后我会给所有邀请的同学们发信确认下一步。访谈时间基本定于四月10号的那一周，也就是下周。



非常感谢你的支持。期待你的回复。

屈婉玲  
教育学博士候选人  
组织领导与政策发展系  
教育与人类发展学院  
明尼苏达大学  
邮箱: [wanling@umn.edu](mailto:wanling@umn.edu)

## Appendix B

**Invitation Email for Survey Participation****(In English and Chinese)**

Dear Student,

As you may know, my name is Wanling Qu, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Minnesota that is conducting my dissertation research about XXX University.

I am writing today to invite all of you to participate in a survey questionnaire about your experiences at XXX University. I greatly value your input and hope that each of you can lend about 20 minutes to complete the online survey. Thank you!

As a small token of my appreciation, 10 participants who submit a complete survey will be drawn at random for a 100-RMB gift card per person to your campus coffee shop. I will announce the awards after the survey closes.

To refresh your memory, the purpose of my study is to determine factors that influence student intercultural engagement, specifically in the setting of Sino-foreign joint-venture transnational universities. Student intercultural engagement represents the amount of time and effort students devote to interactions and activities with people from different cultural backgrounds that are linked to desired outcomes of promoting intercultural competency.

Please follow this URL: <https://sojump.com/jq/14023097.aspx> and complete it by May 19. You can also work on it through WeChat by scanning the QR code below.



Please note that your participation in this study is voluntary and confidential. This research has been approved by the University of Minnesota's Institutional Research Board and that of XXX University.

Thank you very much for your time and support! Please let me know if you have further questions.

Sincerely,

Wanling Qu  
EdD candidate  
College of Education and Human Development  
University of Minnesota  
Email: wanling@umn.edu

亲爱的同学，

你们也许还记得，我叫屈婉玲，是明尼苏达大学的一名博士生，在做关于你们大学相关课题的博士论文研究。

今天，我写信邀请你们参与一项网上问卷调查，分享你们在 XXX 大学的一些经历、感受和想法。这是我研究的第二个也是最后一个阶段，恳请你们每一位同学帮我完成我的问卷调查，大概会占用你们 20 分钟。

我非常感谢和重视你们的分享。为表示感谢，我将在所有提交完整问卷调查的同学中随机抽取 10 位同学，赠与每位同学 100 元的咖啡券。在线问卷调查链接关闭时，就会宣布获赠事宜。

你们也许还有一点印象，我的论文旨在探讨中美合作模式下的跨国大学影响学生跨文化参与的因素问题。我所研究的学生跨文化参与，大致来讲，是指在大学校园中，学生主动寻求、发起、或者积极参与与不同文化背景下的学生或其他个人（团体）之间进行的持续性的、互动性的交流，也指学生个人如何利用这样的环境来提升自己的成长。

请点击打开在线问卷调查链接：<https://sojump.com/jq/14023097.aspx>，并在 5 月 19 日之前完成并提交问卷调查表。你也可以扫描下面的微信二维码，进行操作。



请知悉，本次在线问卷调查的参与是志愿的行为，你的个人邮件地址不会外漏，只用于确认随机抽取获奖的同学。另外，本研究是在获得明尼苏达大学和 XXX 大学的官方同意后进行的。

非常感谢你们的时间和支支持！如果有问题，请随时邮件联系我。

屈婉玲  
教育学博士候选人  
组织领导与政策发展系  
教育与人类发展学院  
明尼苏达大学  
邮箱：[wanling@umn.edu](mailto:wanling@umn.edu)

## Appendix C

**Invitation Email for Individual In-Depth Interviews****(English and Chinese)**

Dear student,

Thank you again for participating in the survey questionnaire about student intercultural engagement. I am writing to invite you for a follow-up individual interview because you indicated that you would be willing to be included.

The individual in-depth interview is the final step of the study and will last about 90-120 minutes. As a small token of my appreciation, I would like to pay you 200 RMB (approximately US\$30) to show my appreciation for your time and feedback. Thank you!

To refresh your memory, the purpose of my study is to determine factors that influence student intercultural engagement, specifically in the setting of Chinese-foreign joint-venture transnational universities. Student intercultural engagement represents the amount of time and effort students devote to interactions and activities with people from different cultural backgrounds that are linked to desired outcomes of promoting intercultural competency.

Please indicate whether you are still interested in this participation and if you do, what days and time would work the best for you among the dates and times listed below. In the meantime, please be aware that your participation in this study is voluntary and confidential. In addition, this research has been approved by the University of Minnesota's Institutional Research Board and that of XXX University.

Thank you very much for your time and support!

Wanling Qu  
EdD candidate  
Organizational Leadership and Policy Development  
College of Education and Human Development  
University of Minnesota  
Email: wanling@umn.edu

亲爱的同学，

再次感谢你参与我的论文研究网上问卷调查，分享你在 XXX 大学的一些经历、感受和想法。你在问卷调查中表示愿意参加随后的个人采访，继续分享本话题的，因此我今天跟你写信，邀请您参加个人采访。

个人采访是我研究的最后一个阶段，估计会占用你 90-120 分钟的时间，非常感谢和重视你们的分享。作为感谢，每位受访者会领取到价值 200 元人民币的咖啡券。

为帮助你回忆，我的论文旨在探讨中外合作模式下的跨国大学影响学生跨文化参与的因素问题。我所研究的学生跨文化参与，大致来讲，是指在大学校园中，学生主动寻求、发起、或者积极参与与不同文化背景下的学生或其他个人（团体）之间进行的持续性的、互动性的交流，也指学生个人如何利用这样的环境来提升自己的成长。

请告知你是否仍然对此次采访活动感兴趣；并请告知下面列出的哪个日期和时间最适合你的安排。请知悉，本次个人采访的参与是志愿的行为，也不会触及到个人信息和隐私。另外，本研究是在获得明尼苏达大学和 XXX 大学的官方同意后进行的。

非常感谢你的时间和支持！

屈婉玲  
教育学博士候选人  
组织领导与政策发展系  
教育与人类发展学院  
明尼苏达大学  
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## Appendix D

### Consent Statement

#### Student Intercultural Engagement in Transnational Higher Education: A Single Site Sample of Chinese Transnational Universities Located in China

You are invited to be in a research study on student intercultural engagement in a transnational university setting. You have been identified as an eligible participant because you are a student in XXX University, which is the researcher's sample study university.

This study is being conducted by Wanling Qu, an EdD candidate at the Department of Organizational and Leadership Development, University of Minnesota (United States). The researcher would like you to read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study (contact information is provided below).

#### **Background Information**

The purpose of this study is to determine factors that influence student intercultural engagement in a Chinese-foreign joint-venture transnational university located in China.

#### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, you may be asked to participate in a focus group interview (60-90 minutes) and an in-depth individual interview (90-120 minutes) on your experience at XXX. You will also be asked to take a survey (15-20 minutes) on your experience at XXX.

#### **Risks and Benefits of being in the Study**

The study involves minimal risk, as a participant can choose to answer survey questions or focus group questions out of his or her free will. Potentially, some participants might feel reserved not to share as much as others, or feel a bit uncomfortable or annoyed by somebody else's comments.

By taking part in this study, you may contribute to emerging knowledge about student intercultural engagement, which would further help institutional and national leadership on policy-making and program design to enhance student intercultural engagement.

#### **Compensation:**

Participants will receive 100 RMB (equivalent of 15 USD) campus coffee voucher for participating in the focus groups. Participants will receive 200 RMB (equivalent of 30 USD) campus coffee voucher for participating in the in-depth individual interview.

10 participants that submit a completed survey will be randomly selected to receive an award of 100 RMB (equivalent to 15 USD) campus coffee voucher from the pool of all participants that complete the survey. A random number generator will be used to facilitate this award process ethically.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. If the researcher publishes research involving the focus groups or surveys, it will not include any information that will make it possible to identify any participant.

An audio recording will be made during focus groups interviews and will be stored securely on a device that will only be accessible to the researcher. The recordings will be deleted completely after they are transcribed and the transcriptions will be encrypted and never disclosed to any party.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the XXX University (or the University of Minnesota). If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question without consequence. If you want to withdraw from the study, the only outcome will be forfeiture of any remuneration.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher conducting this study is Wanling Qu. If you have questions, **you are encouraged** to contact Wanling Qu through email ([wanling@umn.edu](mailto:wanling@umn.edu)). You can also contact Wanling's academic advisor, Dr. Michael Paige through email ([rpaig@umn.edu](mailto:rpaig@umn.edu)).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line. The email of the Line is [irb@umn.edu](mailto:irb@umn.edu), the phone number is (+1) 612- 625-1650, and the address is D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455, United States.

If you also wish to contact a local professional for questions or concerns, please email (removed for the confidential purpose).

*It is suggested that you keep the consent form for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

## Appendix E

**Focus Group Interview Questions**

<i>Item</i>	<i>Focus Group Questions</i>	<i>Research Questions Addressed</i>
1	<p>Tell me about some intercultural interactions or activities that you have had on this campus?</p> <p>你在学校都有哪些交流或者活动是与其他国家的人或者不同文化下的人进行的? 请举一些例子。</p>	No. 1
2	<p>Please give me an example of an on-campus intercultural activity that you, or somebody else, were really engaged in (when, where, what, how and why).</p> <p>在你们校园内进行的跨文化交流活动中, 有没有一些活动, 你是真正全身心的投入到了这种跨文化活动中。如果有, 请举一个这样的例子。你自己的例子, 或者其他人的例子都行。我想知道这是个什么活动, 什么时间、在哪里进行的、如何进行的、以及为什么会进行这个活动。</p>	No. 2
3	<p>Please give me an example of an on-campus intercultural activity that you, or somebody else, were not engaged in (when, where, what, how and why).</p> <p>那校园里是否也有一些涉及到跨文化的交流活动, 相反, 同学们并不投入? 能举这样的一个例子吗? 这是个什么活动, 什么时间、在哪里进行的、如何进行的、以及为什么会有这个活动。</p>	No. 2
4	<p>What is the most valuable thing you have experienced in terms of working with people on campus from a culture different from yours?</p> <p>从你自己的经历来看, 你觉得与校园里不同文化下的人(如老师、同学、学校工作人员等)一起共事, 最大的价值或者收获是什么呢?</p>	No. 3
5	<p>What is the most frustrating thing you have encountered in terms of working with people on campus from a culture different from yours?</p> <p>在你与校园里不同文化下的人(如老师、同学、学校工作人员等)一起共事的过程中, 你经历过的最让你沮丧的、或者最有挑战性的, 是哪方面的事情?</p>	No. 3
6	<p>In your experience, what strategies or approaches have you found that enable you to collaborate effectively with people on campus from different cultural backgrounds in either academic or social activities?</p> <p>在你与校园里不同文化下的人(如老师、同学、学校工作人员等)一起共事的过程中, 不管是学习学术方面的</p>	No. 4



	活动，还是社交活动，你是否找到了一些好的方法或者策略来使得你和与你不同文化的人更有效地合作？这些方法或者策略是什么呢？	
7	<p><b>Have you recognized any factors or attitudes that have been a barrier to positive collaboration when working with people on campus from different cultural backgrounds?</b></p> <p>在你与校园里不同文化下的人（如老师、同学、学校工作人员等）一起共事的过程中，你觉得哪些因素或者态度会负面地影响跨文化交流与协作？</p>	No. 4
8	<p><b>According to your experience, how supportive is your university, including faculty and staff, in terms of promoting students from different cultures to work together? Can you give some specific examples?</b></p> <p>从你的校园生活经历来看，你们大学，包括领导、教授以及其他工作人员，在促进学生的跨文化交流与协作方面，有着怎么样的支持？能举一些实际的例子吗？</p>	No. 4

## Appendix F

## Online Survey Questionnaire

## Student Intercultural Engagement Survey “校园跨文化投入”调研

1. Select the student designation that is the most appropriate for you. 下面哪一项符合你?

- I am a 1st-year undergraduate student 我是本科一年级学生
- I am a 2nd-year undergraduate student 我是本科二年级学生
- I am a 3rd-year undergraduate student 我是本科三年级学生
- I am a 4th-Year undergraduate student 我是本科四年级学生
- I am a Master-Level student 我是硕士研究生
- I am a Doctoral student 我是博士研究生
- None of the above (Please specify) 其他 (请说明) \_\_\_\_\_

2. What is your gender? 你的性别:

- Male 男
- Female 女

3. What geo-cultural background best describes you? 你来自哪个国家、地区?

- Chinese 中国
- East Asian (but not Chinese) 东亚 (中国除外)
- Southeast Asian 东南亚
- South Asian 南亚
- Central Asian 中亚
- American 美洲
- African 非洲
- European 欧洲
- Other (please specify) 其他 (请说明) \_\_\_\_\_

4. What department or school are you in? 你是那个学院或者系部?

\_\_\_\_\_

5. What is your major? 你是哪个专业的?

\_\_\_\_\_

6. How many times have you been abroad for the purpose of study, exchanges, internships, or other educational experience? 你因为留学、实习、做交换生、或者其他学习或者个人发展的机会出国了多少次?

- 0 一次也没有
- 1-2 1 到 2 次

- 3-5 3 到 5 次
- 6 or more 6 次及以上

7. Which statement below best describes why you chose this University for study? 下面哪一项是你当初决定选读的首要原因?

- I chose this University for study because it is a global university and there would be students from different countries on campus. 因为是国际大学，会有来自不同国家文化的学生。
- I chose this University for study because I can get the partner university degree with cheaper tuition. 因为可以拿到国外合作大学的学位，费用也更好。
- I chose this University for study because it was easier to gain admitted vs. other universities I considered. 因为相对于我申请的其他大学，录取更容易一些。
- I chose this University for study because I would have the opportunity to study at the University of Liverpool for two years. 因为我能通过本校出国继续上学。
- Other (please specify) 其他（请说明） \_\_\_\_\_

8. What is your email address (if you would like to be considered for the award drawing)? 请填写你的邮件地址（做咖啡券抽奖用；不是必填项目）

\_\_\_\_\_

Part II: Frequency and nature of student intercultural engagement 校园跨文化投入的频率和特点

9. Which of the following best describes your classmates? 下面哪一项最接近跟你一起上课的班级的情况?

- I have never had a classmate who is from another country. 我从来没有过外国同学。
- I have had a few classmates who are from other countries. 我有过少数几个外国同学。
- I have had many classmates who are from other countries. 我有很多外国同学。
- All my classmates are from other countries. 我所有的同学都是外国人。

10. Select all settings or situations where you have interacted with peers from other cultures while you are studying on campus. 在学习生活的过程中，在下面哪些情况下你与外国同学有过接触、交流、或者共事?

- Group project 团队项目（作业）
- Roommates 室友
- Activities organized by the Student Union 学生会组织的活动
- Activities organized by student clubs 学生社团活动
- Other types of university activities 大学组织的其他活动

- Job-related work (e.g., research labs, teaching assistant, internships)工作方面的（例如：实验室、助教、实习等）
- Dining hall or campus coffee shop, etc.食堂、咖啡馆等
- Extracurricular activities (e.g., playing a sports game)课外活动（如共同参加体育运动等）
- Global volunteer activities (e.g., AIESEC, Rotary, etc.)国际志愿者活动
- Other (Anything else, please add)其他（请说明） \_\_\_\_\_

11. In this semester, how many group projects have you worked on in total?本学期，你一共有多少个团队项目（作业）？

- 0/一个也没有
- 1-2/ 1 到 2 个
- 3-5/ 3 到 5 个
- 6-9/ 6 到 9 个
- 0 or more/ 1 0 个及以上

12. Among the above-mentioned group projects you worked on, for how many of them did you work with peers from a country or countries different from yours?在上面谈到的团队项目（作业），有几次是有外国同学参与你们组的？

\_\_\_\_\_

13. In this semester, how many times have you participated in activities organized by the university to promote student intercultural experiences and learning?本学期，你参加了多少次组织的促进校园跨文化交流和经历的活动？

- 0 一次也没有
- 1-2 1 到 2 次
- 3-5 3 到 5 次
- 6-9 6 到 9 次
- 10 or more 1 0 次及以上

15. In this semester, how many times have you interacted with peers from other countries for activities organized by yourselves (e.g., shopping, eating out or having coffee, hiking, playing a sports game, studying, etc.)?本学期，除了官方或者团体组织的活动之外，你自己跟外国同学有过多少次互动，比如逛街、一起就餐、喝咖啡、郊游爬山、打球、学习等？

- 0 一次也没有
- 1-2 1 到 2 次
- 3-5 3 到 5 次
- 6-9 6 到 9 次
- 10-14 1 0 到 1 4 次
- 15 or more 1 5 次及以上

For Chinese students : how often do you interact with international students on campus?对的中国学生：你常常多久与国际学生有交流互动？

- Extremely often 时常都有
- Very often 常常

- Moderately often 较少
- Slightly often 很少
- Not at all often 不太有

18. For international students: how often do you interact with Chinese students on campus?

- Extremely often
- Very often
- Moderately often
- Slightly often
- Not at all often

19. For international students: how often do you interact with other international students on campus?

- Extremely often
- Very often
- Moderately often
- Slightly often
- Not at all often

20. In general, which of the following describes the type of conversations you have with peers from cultures different than your own? (Select all that apply) 一般来说，你跟国际学生交流时，话题常常是哪些方面的？（多选）

- Academic-related conversations (e.g., class assignments, team projects, homework discussions, etc.) 跟学习学术相关的（如，作业、小组项目、家庭作业等）
- Light social or “small talk” conversations (e.g., weather, school life, weekend plans, faculty, and other topics generally considered more fun and less politically sensitive or serious) 一些轻松的日常话题（如天气、校园生活、周末计划、聊到老师同学、或者其他有趣的话题）
- In-depth conversations or debate (e.g., political or sociocultural issues, international issues, personal aspirations, etc.) 深入的讨论或者辩论（如政治、社会文化等话题、国际社会话题、或者提升个人思想感悟等话
- Other (please specify) 其他（请说明） \_\_\_\_\_

21. How many friends have you made with peers from cultures different from your own? 你有多少朋友是国际学生？

- 0/一个都没有
- 1-2/ 1 到 2 个
- 3-5/ 3 到 5 个
- 6-9/ 6 到 9 个
- 10 or more/ 10 个以及更多

Part III: Student Intercultural Engagement Experiences 校园跨文化投入经历

23. When you have an opportunity to work with peers from other cultural backgrounds, are you usually the person who initiates the dialogue? 当你有机会与外国学生共事时，你往往会是首先发起人、或者引领的那个人吗？

- Yes 是的
- No 不是
- I did not have such an opportunity.我没有过跟外国学生共事的机会。

24. For Chinese students: which of the following descriptions apply to your situations while working on group projects with peers from cultures different from your own? (Select all that apply) 对中国学生：关于小组活动或者团队项目等，下面哪些描述符合你的情况（多选）？

- It is hard for me to keep speaking English, so I often find myself speaking Chinese even if there are international students around who do not speak Chinese.一直说英语对我来说很难，所以我发现自己常常说中文，即便旁边有听不懂中文的外国学生。
- It is hard for me to form my own opinion or elaborate my point of views to my group members when I speak English.当我说英文的时候，我很难发表自己的观点，或者我常常难以形成自己的观点。
- I often follow other group members' ideas and suggestions in the group work.我常常在团队活动中跟随人家的观点或者建议。
- I tend to rely on my international fellow student to be the writer of our group project.如果我们的作业要写东西的话，我倾向于让国际学生来做执笔或者修改。
- I am frustrated because sometimes I really don't understand my international fellow students.有时候我很沮丧因为真的不知道国际学生是什么意思。
- I don't have the above issues as my English language skills and cultural understanding are quite advanced.我的英语语言能力和跨文化方面的意识都不错，所以基本没有上面提到的任何问题。
- I am frustrated because some international student members either do not take their responsibility, or just a bad job on their part.我比较沮丧因为我们小组的国际学生要么不负责任，要么做出来的东西质量差。
- I am happy with my international fellow students on group projects as they are very nice and even try to speak some Chinese so that I can understand.我们小组的国际学生往往都很好，他们甚至还试着说汉语，以便让我更好的理解他们。
- I feel generally satisfied with my international peers because each of us took our own responsibility and we finish our projects.我对于国际学生是满意的，我们各自都负责任，一起完成我们的团队作业。
- This question does not apply to me since I never have had a group project with my international peers.在，我从来没有跟国际学生一起做团队项目或者作业的机会。
- Other comments (please specify)其他（请说明） \_\_\_\_\_

25. For international students: which of the following descriptions apply to your situations while working on group projects with Chinese fellow students? (Select all that apply)

- I find that my Chinese peers often want us international student to be the writer of our group project.
- I am frustrated because most of my Chinese partners either do not take their responsibility, or just a bad job on their part.
- I am frustrated because Chinese students in my group either do not speak much English and we often have communication issues.
- I am frustrated because many of my Chinese group members are quite okay with any opinions that members bring about.
- I feel generally satisfied with my Chinese peers because each of us took our own responsibility and we finish our projects.
- This question does not apply to me since I never have had a group project with Chinese fellows.
- Other comments? (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

27. On a scale of 1 (extremely low regard) to 5 (extremely high regard), how would you rate the university's Buddy Program that is aimed to support the international students on campus? 从 1（评价最低）到 5（评价最高），你如何评价大学创立的帮助国际学生的“伙伴项目”？

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

31. For Chinese students: What do you value in working with international students? 对于你来说，跟国际学生交流共事的价值有哪些？

- I have improved my English language skills.我提高了英语能力。
- I have improved my academics in general.提高了我的学习学术能力。
- I have improved my cultural understanding.提高了我的文化理解。
- I have improved my skills of communicating or working with people from other cultures.提高了我跟其他国际文化的人的交流能力。
- I have obtained friendship with peers from other countries on campus.我跟国际学生建立了友谊。
- I have not improved much although I did work with peers from other countries.我没有多大提高。
- It does not apply to me as I have not had a chance to work with fellow students from another culture/country.我还没有跟国际学生交流的机会。

33. For international students: What do you value in working with peers from different cultures?

- I have improved my Chinese language skills.
- I have improved my academics in general.
- I have improved my cultural understanding.

- I have improved my skills of communicating or working with people from other cultures.
- I have obtained friendship with peers from other countries on campus.
- I have not improved much although I did work with peers from other countries.
- It does not apply to me as I have not had a chance to work with fellow students from another culture/country.

35. Think of all the positive experiences you've had with peers from other countries at the University, what factors have you found to influence positive experience the most? Please share your top three factors. 总结你和国际学生之间发生的各种良好的互动经历，你觉得影响这种积极良好的经历的主要因素有哪些？请分享最主要的三大因素。

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36. Think of all the negative experiences you've had with peers from other countries at the University, what factors have you found to influence the negative experience the most? Please share your top three factors. 总结你在和国际学生之间发生的各种不那么积极的一些互动经历，你觉得影响这种经历的主要因素有哪些？请分享最主要的三大因素。

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37. To what extent do you agree with the statement: "Overall, my university does a good job in promoting student intercultural engagement on campus?" "总的来说，我们大学对于促进学生的跨文化投入方面做得不错"。这个说法，你同意吗？

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39. How would you evaluate the statement: "I feel a sense of belonging to the University". 你下面这种认同感的说法，"我感到自己是大学的一部分"，有什么看法

- Fully agree 完全同意
- Somewhat agree 较为同意
- Somewhat disagree 不太同意
- Do not agree at all 根本不同意

40. Please feel free to make any comments on student intercultural engagement on campus. 对于校园里的学生跨文化投入问题，请分享你的任何其他经历、观察、感受、态度、建议或者点评。谢谢！

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