

STUDY ABROAD

BRIDGING THE EAST-WEST GAP

Canadian students need to go to China, but they need help getting there

BY JOSH DEHAAS Chardaye Bueckert was sitting on a train hurtling toward Beijing after a day spent marvelling at the Ming-era walls of Pingyao when she started thinking about Alberta.

Travelling at up to 250 km/h, the electric train could cover the distance from the Calgary International Airport to her hometown in Medicine Hat in about an hour—a third of what it takes in a car—while emitting far less carbon dioxide. China introduced these high-speed trains 10 years ago; the network now has 19,000 km of track in dozens of provinces and is expected to double that by 2025. During the same period, Beijing expanded its four subway lines to 19 and is expected to multiply that by 2020.

The economic and environmental benefits of China's public investment in low-carbon, time-saving transit seemed so obvious that Bueckert wondered: why isn't Canada building new train lines?

That's the type of question the former Simon Fraser University student society president and aspiring public servant hopes to answer in China as she tackles her master's of management in global affairs degree. She is one of 110 people chosen from dozens of countries for the inaugural class of Schwarzman scholars at Tsinghua University, a school in Beijing that has rocketed up the international rankings. Founded by American philanthropist and businessman Stephen A. Schwarzman, the goal of the program, which some are calling the 21st century's Rhodes Scholarship, is to bridge the gap between east and west.

Bueckert, a finalist for the Rhodes Scholarship at Oxford, had also applied to do a master's of public policy at Cambridge University, but decided to accept the all-expenses-paid Schwarzman program instead. "I think the next generation of leaders need to be globally competent because we're so interconnected," Bueckert said as she paid for her cappuccino in a Beijing shop using the Chinese-developed WeChat phone app. "I recognized I knew very little about China."

Considering it is the world's second-biggest economy and our second-largest trading partner, experts say that lack of knowledge is put-

ting our future at risk. Bueckert is one of the few young Canadians who are going to China to do something about it.

Last year, about 3,585 Canadians were studying in China out of roughly 400,000 foreign students, according to China's ministry of education. While most of the foreigners in China are from Asia, 2014 figures show far more Americans (24,203), French (10,658), Germans (8,193) and Australians (about 5,000) than Canadians.

China doesn't even crack our top 10 study-abroad destinations—unlike Switzerland, Ireland and Grenada—while China is the

second-most-popular choice for Australians and Japanese, fourth for Germans and fifth with Americans, according to the non-profit, New York-based Institute of International Education.

Universities Canada has also noted the trend. They surveyed university administrators in 2014 and found China was the top country they had connections with, even more so than the United Kingdom or the United States, but when asked to assess "relative interest among students," China ranked 17th. Why?

Many are quick to assume Canadian stu-

dents don't go to China because they can't speak the language, but the Universities Canada survey showed higher interest in non-English-speaking places like Japan (ninth), South Korea (11th) and Brazil (12th). The U.K. was first, Australia came second and France was third.

While few programs in China are taught in German or Japanese, Chinese universities offer hundreds of degrees in English, and the number is growing quickly. The Chinese government wants to double the number of international students to 500,000 by 2020, and upping the quality and quan-

Orientation: Bueckert is one of the few young Canadians who've chosen to study in China

tity of English courses is central to the plan.

Of course, classes in introductory Mandarin can help ignite interest in China, which may partially explain why Australians are more likely to go. They're encouraged to take Asian languages in high school, while Canadian school boards mostly offer Spanish and French. Only a few boards, like Edmonton's, have anything on par with what's on offer in Australian schools.

Qian Wang, who directs the Chinese language program at the University of British Columbia's department of Asian studies, says even when interest is sparked among UBC students, there are few incentives for them to stick with it. UBC has offered courses on China since 1948 and now has one of North America's most prominent Asian studies departments, yet only 47 of UBC's 1,072 exchange students went to China last year.

Wang says that's due in part to a lack of financial support. She tried to combat this by launching a 12-week summer immersion program that took 14 students through southwest China in 2015, but she didn't run it again in 2016. "It was a lot of work with no actual funding," she says. While Wang was willing to accept minimal compensation, students had to cover much of the cost, which was more than \$8,000.

Karen McBride, president of the Canadian Bureau for International Education, says it recently surveyed more than 7,000 students about barriers to studying abroad, and more than 70 per cent agreed with the statement: "It requires money that I do not have." That was far higher than the number who worried it would delay graduation (28 per cent) or leave them with credits that don't transfer back to their home university (26 per cent). Those perceived financial obstacles confirm what McBride has long known: "Those who do go are those who can afford to go."

She points out that about a third of German students go abroad during their undergraduate degrees compared to roughly a 10th of Canadians. German students can travel, she says, because they don't have as many bills. Tuition is covered by the state and there's vastly more funding for exchanges. The German Academic Exchange Service (also known as DAAD) spent about \$750 million to send 75,000 Germans abroad and bring nearly 52,000 foreigners to Germany. DAAD is funded by all levels of government.

Canada's federal international scholarship



GETTING STARTED

CANADA LEARNING INITIATIVE IN CHINA (CLIC)

Launched in 2016, the program offers courses in English and French at top Chinese universities. Students can study from four weeks to 12 months, and subjects include archaeology, fine arts, psychology, urban development, entrepreneurship and Mandarin. Nearly all costs are covered by China's ministry of education, which waives application fees and covers tuition for summer courses, accommodation and medical insurance, and provides a monthly stipend of about \$600. The program is currently only available at the University of Alberta, University of Calgary, Université Laval, Université de Montréal, University of Ottawa and Queen's University. The Canadian universities provide funding for airfare and guarantee they will recognize credits earned.

SCHWARZMAN SCHOLARS

This master's degree program, launched with a \$100-million donation from American philanthropist Stephen A. Schwarzman, could be the next Rhodes Scholarship. More than 3,000 people applied to be part of the inaugural class. One hundred and ten students from 32 countries were selected, including three Canadians. Courses are

taught in English at a purpose-built college at Tsinghua, China's most prestigious university. Students can focus on public policy, economics, business or international studies and enjoy guest lecturers, such as CNN journalist Fareed Zakaria. Everything is paid for, including tuition, room and board, travel to and from Beijing, in-country tours, medical insurance, books, laptops—even smartphones.

ONTARIO-JIANGSU STUDENT EXCHANGE

This program sends undergraduate and graduate students from 11 universities in Ontario to 11 universities in its sister province of Jiangsu. Students spend up to two semesters there or complete one of several summer programs. They pay Ontario tuition and receive between \$2,000 and \$3,000 in scholarships to cover costs such as airfare. Many—but not all—credits transfer back. Several courses are available in English.

Check with your school's study abroad office for other scholarships, such as the Irving K. Barber British Columbia Scholarship Society, which provides up to \$10,000 for international study, and the Quebec mobility bursaries, which offer up to \$2,500 per semester. ♦

Tsinghua University



program is piddly in comparison. It had a budget of \$7.1 million last year, which was used to bring 729 foreign students to Canada while sending just 57 Canadians abroad. Provincial programs, like Quebec's student mobility bursaries, help, but the funds are even more limited. "The corporate sector needs to step up and the government needs to step up," says McBride, and she doesn't just mean money. "We need the corporate sector to step up and talk about the importance of this," she says. "Students are very sensitive to those kinds of calls about what will enhance their careers."

Andy Lang, who oversees international programs at Concordia University in Montreal, agrees. "I've heard over the past four or five years employers want more local students to have international experiences," he says. "I think they should be willing to make an investment."

Both McBride and Lang say the United States managed to boost the number of students going to China without relying on a lot of taxpayer's money through the 100,000 Strong initiative announced by Barack Obama in 2009. By 2014, it surpassed its goal to have 100,000 more U.S. students study abroad in China. The Chinese government chipped in with thousands of scholarships, while nonprofits like the Ford Foundation and corporations like Microsoft and Hilton put up millions for travel and awareness campaigns.

Former Canadian ambassador to China David Mulroney says the 100,000 Strong initiative was particularly successful because it was promoted by the President. "One of the things Obama did was give permission," says Mulroney, who is now president of the University of St. Michael's College at the University of Toronto. Students can say to themselves: "I can convince my parents it's the right move because... none other than the President gave me permission to do this." Canadian students aren't hearing this.

Mulroney thinks Prime Minister Justin Trudeau should have spoken out during his September trip to China or subsequent meetings in Ottawa with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang.

It's especially frustrating to some considering a potentially game-changing program was written into the leaders' joint statement after Li's visit: the Canada Learning Initiative in China program (CLIC).

Cen Huang, the University of Alberta's assistant vice-president (international) who helped develop CLIC with China's ministry of education, says the two-year pilot program ticks every box. Students can study in

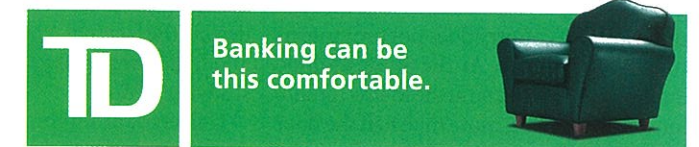
Heading south? We make it easier to pack a U.S. based TD Bank account.



Apply from Canada before you go.

Whether it's transferring money, withdrawing cash, or paying U.S. bills, a U.S. based TD Bank account at TD Bank, America's Most Convenient Bank, helps make it easier to bank across the border. Just one more way we make banking more comfortable.

Apply in-branch or at
td.com/crossborder



Banking can be
this comfortable.

© The TD logo and other trade-marks are the property of The Toronto-Dominion Bank.



Chinese dreams: The inaugural class of 110 Schwarzman scholars, including three Canadians, studies at a purpose-built college at Tsinghua University

English at top Chinese universities, with China covering tuition for summer courses, accommodation, insurance and a monthly stipend, while the Canadian universities involved provide grants for airfare and promise to approve the credits. Students can earn one credit over 12 weeks in the summer or spend an entire year. More than 160 students are expected to go in 2016, and 500 in 2017. Huang hopes to see CLIC renewed and ramped up to 2,000 Canadians annually by 2020, but so far, only six of 15 Canadian universities invited to take part have gotten involved: Alberta, Calgary, Laval, Montréal, Ottawa and Queen's. And there's little awareness of the program. It's tricky to get the word out on CLIC's \$60,000 annual administration budget. Advertising at events like the Study and Go Abroad Fair, which charges \$10,995 to set up a booth in seven Canadian cities, is certainly out of reach.

Part of the problem is that although China spends heavily on cultural exchange through education, the country does not promote its study opportunities. At the Study and Go Abroad Fair's recent stop at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre, more than half the floor space was taken up by recruiters from the U.K. and U.S. There were also officials from national governments in Australia, France,

Germany, New Zealand, Ireland, Sweden, the Netherlands and South Korea, but no one was pushing China.

Roommates Zoha Tanveer and Sandleen Azam were there, chatting with the representatives and sipping banana-flavoured juice handed out by the South Koreans in goody bags that also include ramen noodles and calligraphy-covered scarves. The fourth-year University of Toronto students have already studied abroad—Tanveer in South Korea and Azam in Italy—and both are planning to leave for graduate school.

Tanveer was there to learn more about Korean grad programs, but left considering Asian studies at the University of London. Azam had been thinking about teaching in Thailand, but is now leaning toward an M.B.A. at IE Business School in Madrid.

While money's a concern for both, a bigger issue is safety. As Muslim women, both feel vulnerable in foreign lands. Azam's family and friends have warned her to avoid Asia, but are fine with Europe—despite the fact that Azam's iPhone, passport and wallet were pickpocketed while she was studying in Rome.

University of Toronto political science professor Lynette Ong says safety concerns show how Canadians are misinformed about Asia. "There's a much higher chance of getting

mugged in London or Washington than in Shanghai, Beijing or any Chinese city," says the China specialist.

Ong is among those who believe Canada will miss out if we don't start sending more Canadians to China. "If we want to negotiate a free-trade deal, we have to speak the language and understand the markets, and there are not sufficient people in Canada to do that."

Ong is intrigued by CLIC, but isn't sure Canada will ever have its own 100,000 Strong, and the reason is political. "It is difficult for the government to implement a program nationwide," she says. "The reality [is] there's a constituency out there, a real vocal group of people, who are apprehensive of any engagement with China." Canadians are rightly concerned about human-rights abuses, but she says the best way to challenge China is by building people-to-people connections, like those that Bueckert is creating over breakfasts with China's future leaders at Tsinghua.

International Trade Minister Chrystia Freeland—a Harvard graduate who was also a Rhodes Scholar—agrees that "people-to-people ties" with China are essential. But while she has publicly praised 100,000 Strong, she won't say whether Canada is planning its own version. The CLIC program could be it, but right now almost no one seems to know it exists. ♣

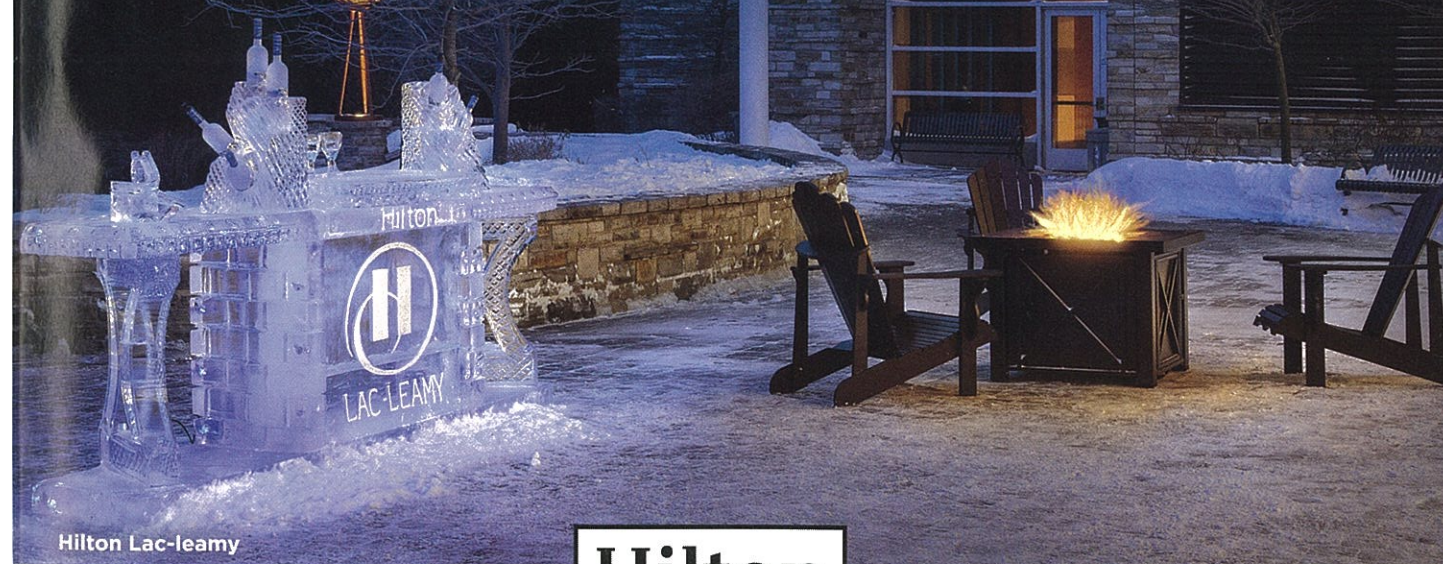
Josh Dehaas is a 2016-17 Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada Media Fellow

'We need the corporate sector to step up. Students are very sensitive to what will enhance their careers.'

WHY PAY MORE ON OTHER TRAVEL SITES?

GET THE LOWEST PRICE ONLY AT **HILTON.COM**

STOP CLICKING AROUND



Hilton

Hilton
HOTELS & RESORTS

W
WALDORF
ASTORIA
HOTELS & RESORTS

CONRAD
HOTELS & RESORTS™

canopy
BY HILTON

CURIO
A COLLECTION BY HILTON™

DOUBLETREE
BY HILTON™

E
EMBASSY
SUITES
BY HILTON™

Hilton Garden Inn

Hampton
BY HILTON

tru
BY HILTON

HOMEWOOD SUITES
BY HILTON™

HOME2
SUITES BY HILTON™

Hilton Grand Vacations

HILTON HHONORS

Must be a Hilton HHonors Member. © 2016 Hilton Worldwide