Summer 8-2023

Chinese International Graduate Student Agency in a Neo-Racism Context: A Narrative Analysis

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Recommended Citation

CHINESE INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENT AGENCY IN A NEO-RACISM

CONTEXT: A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

HIGHER EDUCATION

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY
August 2023

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ABSTRACT

CHINESE INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENT AGENCY IN A NEO-RACISM
CONTEXT: A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

Minghui Hou
Old Dominion University, 2023
Director: Dr. Mitchell R. Williams

The United States is the top destination for Chinese international students, receiving around 372,532 students from China from the academic year 2019 to 2020. The host institutions and countries have benefited from economic gains, diverse cultures, global competence, and human capital. The motivation of recruiting international students is framed in a global imaginary that is embedded in colonialism and neoliberalism. International students are often framed as cash cows and objects. Meanwhile, international students, particularly Chinese international students have been experiencing discrimination, prejudice, and exclusion due to their nationality and culture. The purpose of this narrative inquiry study was to examine and explore six Chinese international graduate students' formal and informal learning experiences and how they enacted agency to respond to those experiences, specifically experiences related to neo-racism. Data collection consisted of three-phase semi-structured interviews and two journal entries. Data were analyzed through broadening, burrowing, restorying, and narrative coding techniques.

Findings of the present study revealed that participants had heterogeneous and multi-dimensional backgrounds, needs, struggles, navigations, and experiences at different stages. Participants experienced acknowledging, understanding, (re)constructing, (un)learning, and (re)defining their identities and contexts in their navigation as human beings. They viewed studying abroad as a learning and growing process and experience, which they have become to

appreciate, learn, and respect different cultures, grow academically and professionally, and enjoy loneliness and independence. Furthermore, participants were discriminated against and stereotyped due to their nationality and culture. Program type added nuances in participants' experiences related to neo-racism. Additionally, US-China geopolitical tensions shifted participants' experiences and interactions with others.

       Implications from the study include promoting professional training for faculty and staff for a positive relationship with international students and understanding the limitations and challenges of being international students. Advisors and professors need training regarding intercultural understanding and specific immigration regulations in order to enhance the experiences of international students. Collaboration among different offices on campus is needed to acknowledge the purpose of recruiting Chinese international students, beyond the obvious economic benefits, and to develop strategic plans for the academic and professional development of Chinese international students as well as their personal well-being.

This dissertation is dedicated to my mom, dad, and younger brother for supporting me, loving

me, and always being there for me.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Embarking on a PhD journey outside my home country was an unexpected surprise for both my family and myself. Although I often felt lonely and homesick, I have come to appreciate the solitude and independence that pushed me to grow. Pursuing a PhD outside of my home country was a surprise to my family and me. Lonely and homesick many times, for sure, but I appreciate the loneliness and independence to push me to grow. This has been a lengthy expedition of exploring my interests, finding a research topic, and completing my dissertation. Along this arduous path, numerous individuals have provided me with guidance, encouragement, support, mentorship, and friendship. To express my gratitude, I offer this heartfelt acknowledgment, knowing that words alone cannot fully convey the depth of my appreciation for their unwavering support.

First and foremost, I must extend my deepest gratitude to my mentor Dr. Chris Glass, my dissertation committee chair Dr. Mitchell Williams, the rest of the dissertation committee members Dr. Laura Smithers and Dr. Tang Tang Heng, and my former advisor Dr. Sharon Stein. I am immensely grateful for the time and support they dedicated to my academic journey. Dr. Stein, in particular, guided me in discovering my interest through numerous conversations and resource sharing. Dr. Glass, your academic and emotional support, guidance, and mentorship have been invaluable throughout my doctoral pursuit. I am grateful for your constant presence, both in mentoring my academic, professional, and personal growth. You have been an exemplary role model, offering me opportunities to engage in your research and aiding in my development as a scholar. The conversations we shared, guided by your wisdom, helped me refine my research topics and approach the theoretical framework in innovative ways. Your

acknowledgment of my struggle as a person, in addition to your perception of me as a scholar, is deeply appreciated. Thank you for your ongoing mentorship during my academia and career. I consider myself incredibly fortunate to have such a remarkable mentor in my life.

To Dr. Mitchell Williams, I am eternally grateful for stepping in as my dissertation chair after Dr. Glass's departure for Boston College (BC). When I first learned of Dr. Glass's move, I was uncertain about the next steps. I sincerely appreciate your willingness to assume the role and guide me through the process. Thank you for the numerous conversations and meetings we had, where we discussed my dissertation and refined its findings. Your thought-provoking questions and constructive feedback have been instrumental in shaping my work. I also want to express my gratitude to Dr. Smithers for her support and guidance regarding methodology and qualitative insights, and to Dr. Heng for providing valuable and critical feedback on my dissertation. Your insights have undoubtedly deepened my thinking and enriched my dissertation.

I would also like to extend my thanks to my mentor, Dr. Charles Mathies, faculty members, and fellow students who supported me throughout this journey. Dr. Mathies, our conversations about my aspirations as an international scholar and the invaluable knowledge beyond classroom learning are truly appreciated. Your unwavering guidance has been a constant source of reassurance. Dr. David Ayers, thank you for the books you sent and for enhancing my qualitative research skills. Your patience and support during our exploration of qualitative techniques have been invaluable. I am grateful for your understanding during challenging times in my personal life. Dr. Heidi Fischer, I appreciate the teaching and research opportunities you provided. I also extend my gratitude to Drs. Dennis Gregory, Shana Pribesh, Felecia Commodore, Kim Bullington, Bill Nuckols, and Tony Perez for the knowledge and skills

imparted through their courses. A special acknowledgment goes to Dr. Bullington for your assistance with APA7th style and Word formatting, and to Dawn for the support.

I would also like to express my appreciation to my cohorts, classmates, and friends who supported me along this journey. I thank Kimberley, Yousef, Melissa, Camisha, Natalie, Emily, and David for all the encouragement, caring, and support. Being an international student, I appreciate Natalie, Yousef, Kimberley, and Melissa's support in my coursework. I also want to thank the six participants of this study for spending time and sharing their experiences and perspectives.

Last but not least, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my beloved mother, father, and younger brother for your unconditional love, care, and support throughout this extensive undertaking. Your unconditional love and the reassurance that I can always count on you have meant the world to me. When I embarked on this journey, I never anticipated studying in the United States for such as prolonged period, and as a result, I missed out on my precious moments with you. Nevertheless, I deeply value your conditional support and understanding in allowing me to pursue my dreams.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Life is a story!

Where shall I begin?

To the excitement, to the unknown, to the dream?

From the plane,

Watch the "sand" in the land.

With roaring expectations,

Finally, I land.

The journey begins,

and continues...

In fall 2014, I said goodbye to my parents and younger brother, left the Xianyang International Airport, and flew to the United States. I was traveling to the United States with a friend who was also a student. My friend and I were separated from each other in Seattle Customs. I got lost in the vast Seattle-Tacoma International Airport. Luckily, I met a kind young lady who could speak Chinese and helped me find my departure gate. Finally, I arrived in Boise, Idaho, and went to the campus where I would begin my studies. I realized that most students were from the United States, and only a few were international at my university.

This was six years ago. As I reflected on my encounters and negotiations with this unknown, newness, and differences, I started to wonder if I was the only one who was homesick,

needed help with my studies, or needed to have friends. What were other Chinese international students' experiences like? How did they encounter cultural negotiation in their experiences?

Scene One (At a restaurant)

"Could you please microwave the salad and make sure the salad does not have cheese?" I asked.

(Frown) "I'm not sure. I need to ask the chef." The waiter answered.

"Hannah, you are such a weirdo to microwave the salad!" My American friend said. (My friend knew I do not eat cheese.)

"Well, I couldn't eat anything cold because I would be sick. Last fall, I was very sick because I drank cold water. The salad is just taken from the fridge, which would be bad for my health." I explained.

"I am sorry. The chef said that we couldn't microwave the salad. Sorry." The waiter replied.

First, I want to address why I cannot eat or drink anything cold. During my first semester in the United States, I decided to adapt to American life by drinking cold water. Two months later, I became very sick. I went to the health center, but they were not helpful at all. I had to return to China to see the doctor during my first summer break. It turned out that I had to take Chinese medicine for two months to recover. From then on, I realized that eating cold food was not good for me. Second, in China, I never eat salad, especially cold as part of a meal. If we wanted to eat vegetables, my mom would cook them. We rarely eat raw vegetables, such as broccoli. Finally, we do not put cheese in a meal. Cheese is not a part of Chinese culture. I find it interesting that many American people like to put cheese in their meals, or even have cheese sticks as a snack. I would rather buy some fresh vegetables and make a tasty dish. Slowly, over

the years, I have learned that something can never change because those are a part of myself as my identity and if I change those parts of me, that could endanger me physically, or mentally.

Scene Two (At my apartment)

"Hannah. Our professor gave us very bad feedback, which made us feel so sad." My roommates said.

"What happened?" I asked.

"Our professors said our writing is so bad. We are graduate students, so we should have advanced writing skills and we should have not be allowed to go to graduate school. She also gave us very low grades." [她说我们的写作水平太差，根本就不该读研究生. Chinese description]

I felt bad about my roommates having negative experiences in their academic life. On the other hand, I felt lucky that I did not select that professor's course. As an international student, I admit that English language skills, not only writing skills, but also reading, comprehension, and speaking skills, are difficult for me. Indeed, Chinese international graduate students have language struggles due to different writing systems (Guan et al., 2012). However, faculty members need to provide guidance and support those students who need language support; it is not acceptable to criticize them without providing guidance.

The above two scenes are only side stories in my life studying in the United States. In the beginning, I thought it was typical because we, as Chinese international students, were *foreigners* or *outsiders* who should not expect the people to understand our *weird* behaviors. I also thought faculty members should understand how hard we were trying to succeed in our academics. Yet, when many Chinese friends and I were discriminated against and stereotyped throughout our lives in the United States, I realized that it is not normal, and we should not keep silent anymore.

Therefore, my role as an insider, observer, and researcher could not be isolated from other storytellers or contexts seeking to understand, re-experience, and retell those stories.

China has been the top exporter of international students to English-speaking countries since 2004 (Valdez, 2015). China sent around 703,500 students to study abroad in 2019 (Ministry of Education, 2020). In the United States, China has remained the largest source of international students with 369,548 students in undergraduate, non-degree, and optional practical training (OPT) programs in 2019 (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2019). According to IIE (2019), 62% of international students receive most of their funds from their family and personal support as well as assistance from home country governments or universities. International students are often framed as numbers, ways of gaining revenues, and cash (Cantwell, 2015; Stein & de Andreotti, 2016). For example, international students contributed $41 billion and created 458,290 jobs for the U.S. economy in the academic year of 2018 to 2019 (NAFSA, 2020). Western higher education connects to Western supremacy and is positioned as a desirable product (Stein & de Andreotti, 2016); international students are framed as cash cows, objects, competitors, threats, and the other (Stein & de Andreotti, 2016). This commercial and Western nature of recruiting international students demonstrates that colonialism and neoliberalism are embedded in international education, which neglects international students as humanized agents who have various needs in their life course (Bamberger et al., 2019; Deuel, 2022; Stein & de Andreotti, 2016). Specifically, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has worsened Chinese international students' experiences and they have faced insults being called *yellow peril* and *Chinese virus* (Shi, 2020).

This study, therefore, examined and explored how Chinese international graduate students enacted their agency in *formal* and *informal* learning experiences while studying in the

United States. Specifically, this study documented, described, and uncovered the tensions, misunderstandings, stereotypes, and struggles related to neo-racism that Chinese international graduate students have encountered and how they used their sense of agency to respond to these issues throughout their learning in U.S. colleges and universities. Through unveiling and examining the negotiation behind those tensions, misunderstandings, stereotypes, and struggles, the study seeks to discover implications for leaders of host institutions to better understand Chinese international students' culture and learning experiences to implement curricular and instructional changes which will create a more equitable and inclusive learning community.

Background of the Study

There have been four primary historical waves of Chinese international students studying in the United States with various rationales and impacts including, but not limited to, economic, political, social, and cultural factors. The first wave was the Chinese Educational Mission from 1872 to 1905, which consisted of approximately 120 students over three decades, the majority of whom did not complete college degrees (Bieler, 1994). The second wave was from 1905-1949, during which the Chinese Student Educational Plan called for the U.S. government to return the indemnity from the Boxer Rebellion to the Chinese government by sending Chinese students to the United States for higher education (Bieler, 1994). In the third wave at the height of the Cold War from 1949-1978, most Chinese students stayed in the United States voluntarily or forcibly. The U.S. government wanted to deprive the Communist party of their expertise (Liu, 2009). The fourth wave began after Deng Xiaoping took over the government and advocated open-door and reform policies in 1978. Chinese students studying in the United States were affected by international relations and reform and modernization (Bi, 2018). These four historical waves will be discussed in detail in chapter two.

There is much research on Chinese international students choosing to study in the United States with the hope of contributing to their home country as well as gaining a quality education, professional growth, social status, and future career opportunities (Bieler, 2015; Han et al., 2015; Yan, 2017; Yan & Berliner, 2011a). China has continued to send the most international students to the United States (IIE, 2019). These students have contributed to the economic benefits, diverse cultures, and human capital (Cantwell, 2015; Chen et al., 2019; Glass & Lee, 2018; Lee et al., 2017). International students are considered cash cows, objects, competitors, threats, and the other (Cantwell, 2015; Hayes, 2019; Pierce et al., 2018). The motivations of international students studying in the United States and recruiting international students are framed in a "global imaginary" that is rooted in colonialism (Stein & de Andreotti, 2016) and neoliberalism (Bamberger et al., 2019). Chinese international students have not received a positive environment since the beginning of the first wave in history despite their economic, cultural, and other contributions. They have been experiencing different discrimination, prejudice, or exclusion due to their national identity and culture (Bieler, 2015).

Neo-racism is defined as racism based on one's skin color, culture, and national origin (Lee, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; Spear, 1999), which could help uncover why Chinese/Asian international students have encountered or suffered more discrimination than European students (Lee, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007). There is a few research that has focused on how international students, as human beings (Stein, 2016), negotiate and respond to tensions, misunderstandings, and struggles with their agency. This study focuses on exploring Chinese international graduate students' experiences and how they negotiate those experiences, specifically experiences related to forms of neo-racism. There are two rationales for this exclusive focus on graduate students. First, graduate students usually need to work as a graduate teaching assistant (GTA) or graduate

research assistant (GRA) to help with living expenses. For the purpose of the study, graduate students' GTA and GRA experiences will be considered as part of formal learning environment because they need to "work" to gain learning experiences in a practical way. Second, compared with undergraduate students, graduates tend to live off campus and arrange their accommodation (Ma, 2020). It is essential to understand their lives outside of the formal learning environment, such as in organizations or communities.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this narrative study was to examine and explore how Chinese international graduate students enacted their agency in narrated formal and informal learning experiences in U.S. higher education institutions. Specifically, this study documented, described, and uncovered the tensions, misunderstandings, and struggles related to neo-racism that Chinese international graduate students have in the process of learning. Additionally, this study explored how they negotiated and navigated those experiences with their agency. Ultimately, this study will discover implications for host institutions bringing curriculum, policy, and instructional changes.

For the purpose of the study, formal learning environment refers to teaching, learning, and assessment activities organized around various content areas, topics, and resources in the classroom; the informal learning environment refers to various activities and practices with their peers, members of the community, campus organizations, professors on and off campus in an unstructured environment (Leask, 2009). These activities and practices are not part of the formal requirements of the program of study, but they are more relevant to personal relationship building and contribute to and/or unveil the negotiation and navigation of their relationship.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide this study:

  1. How do Chinese international graduate students at U.S. higher education institutions

    enact agency in their learning experiences?

      a. How do Chinese international graduate students describe agency in their

      formal and *informal* learning experiences?

      b. How do Chinese international graduate students respond to learning

      experiences related to neo-racism?

Overview of the Study Methodology

This study used narrative inquiry with a constructivist research paradigm, which provided

an in-depth exploration of Chinese international students' negotiation and navigation of their

formal and informal learning experiences in the United States with their agency (Connelly &

Clandinin, 2006). Narrative inquiry as the methodology is a pivotal tool to help researchers

understand individuals' experiences and stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Three phases of

semi-structured interviews were utilized to examine Chinese international graduate students'

informal and formal learning experiences with their sense of agency.

Professional Significance

Despite the attention to the benefits that international students have brought to the United

States and international student enrollment, there is limited empirical research regarding how

Chinese international students enact agency to navigate formal and informal learning experiences

in the United States (Tran & Vu, 2018). This dissertation contributes to the existing literature in

several ways. This study lies in an ethical and humanized perspective to identify Chinese

international students' needs, being, becoming, and transformation. An agency-centered

framework considers students human beings and proactive agents while engaging in navigation

and negotiation in various contexts as well as transformation. This study explores multiple sites of negotiation of learning experiences – both formal and informal. Participants can have an opportunity to identify the important sites of learning because learning happens all the time everywhere and important types of learning happen in informal settings. Formal and informal learning environments shape Chinese international student experiences as a whole in and out of the classroom, which simultaneously defines their negotiation and navigation with their sense of agency during the processes.

Furthermore, the agency framework could interrupt neocolonial and neoliberal patterns of international higher education by acknowledging Chinese international students' needs, struggles, and navigations from an ethical perspective. The narrative inquiry methodology with a social constructivist paradigm allows an in-depth and nuanced understanding of students' stories and narratives. The study provides opportunities for Chinese international students to share their voices relevant to experiences and the reasons behind those experiences.

Finally, the findings from this dissertation will provide insights and implications to help faculty and administrators better understand Chinese international student experiences as well as their needs. It will also aid institutions in making informed decisions for improving services for international students. Understanding cultural differences and forces can shape host institutions to provide cultural training for faculty and administrators as well as construct supportive and inclusive learning environments.

Delimitations

This study focuses on the experiences of Chinese international graduate students studying in U.S. higher education institutions. These Chinese international students will be pursuing master or doctoral degrees at their institutions. International students in the study are individuals

enrolled in educational institutions outside their country of origin (UNESCO, 2023). That means they can have different visa statuses, such as F1, J1, or out-of-status for some reason. Furthermore, to experience American life and learning, they need to pass their "honeymoon" and study at their institutions for at least one semester to have some experience of studying and living in the United States. English will not be the native language for all participants. This study is not meant to explore the general experiences, but rather to examine and explore each participant's unique experiences and how they negotiate and navigate those experiences with their agency.

Operational Definitions of Key Terms

For the purpose of this study, there are several key terms that need to be clarified:

- *Agency* is defined as "an individual or collective capacity to act with "intentionality" in line with "rational" choices and in response to a given circumstances" (Tran & Vu, 2018, p. 4).
- *Formal learning environment* refers to teaching, learning, assessment activities, and modules organized around various content areas, topics, and resources in a classroom environment (Leask, 2009).
- *Informal learning environment* refers to various activities and practices with peers, members of the community, campus organizations, and professors on campus and off campus in an unstructured way.
- *Negotiation* is "a form of power play and always involves what we will a topic– the subject of negotiation" (Herman & Vervaeck, 2009, p. 117).

Chapter Summary

Chinese international students, as the largest source of international students in the United States, have been experiencing an unwelcoming environment. This narrative inquiry

study examined and explored Chinese international graduate students' formal and informal learning experiences and how they enacted agency to navigate those experiences, particularly experiences related to forms of neo-racism in U.S. higher education institutions. The beginning of this chapter described my personal narratives as a Chinese international student. This was followed with a background of the study, the purpose statement, the research question, an overview of methodology, the study's professional significance, and operational definitions were provided to help contextualize their meanings in this study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chinese students, as the largest number of international students in the United States, have experienced and have had to adapt to a different educational system in Anglo-Saxon countries (Heng, 2018; IIE, 2019). Chinese international students have various struggles, such as identity, language, culture, writing, uncertainty, status, safety, etc. (Valdez, 2015; Wu, 2015; Yuan, 2011). In addition, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Chinese students are experiencing a more unwelcoming environment (Hou & Wang, 2021; Wang, 2020).

This chapter began with the history of Chinese international students studying in the United States. Four primary stages with rationales and experiences were reviewed. I then analyzed and synthesized how international students studying in Western countries have been embedded in the structure of racism, particularly how Chinese students experienced different forms of neo-racism. The agency theoretical work adapted from Edwards (2005), Marginson (2014), Sen (1985), Tran and Vu (2018), and Hopwood (2010) guided the study exploring how Chinese international graduate students grow and respond to those experiences.

Four Primary Historical Stages

There have been four primary historical stages of Chinese international students studying in the United States with various rationales and impacts including, but not limited to economic, political, social, and cultural factors. The first stage was the Chinese Educational Mission from 1872 to 1905, which consisted of approximately 120 students over three decades, the majority of whom did not complete college degrees (Bieler, 1994). The second stage was from 1905-1949, during which the Chinese Student Educational Plan called for by the U.S. government to return the indemnity from the Boxer Rebellion to the Chinese government by sending Chinese students

to the United States for higher education (Bieler, 1994). In the third stage, at the height of the Cold War from 1949-1978, the majority of Chinese students stayed in the United States, either voluntarily or forcibly. The U.S. government wanted to deprive the communist party of its expertise (Liu, 2009). The fourth stage began after Deng Xiaoping took over the government and advocated open-door and reform policies in 1978. Chinese students studying in the United States were affected by international relations and reform and modernization (Bi, 2018). Chinese students have experienced different forms of neo-racism in each stage.

Chinese Educational Mission: 1872-1905

The Chinese emperors regarded themselves as the center of the world (*Zhong guo*) before the Han dynasty (202 B.C.), which resulted in a belief that there was no need to learn from other countries (Bieler, 2004). China received delegations from other countries who brought gifts of tribute to the Imperial Chinese Court because of its strong power in the Eastern world. The Qing Imperial Government considered themselves *Tian Chao* -- a *Heavenly Dynasty* (Bieler, 2004). When the Qing government was defeated in the First Opium War by the British (1839-1842), China was forced to open "five southern ports to Western traders, to tolerate the entrance of Protestant missionaries, and to allow extraterritoriality" (Bieler, 2004, p. 3).

Yung Wing was the first Chinese student to study in a preparatory school in the United States in 1847 and graduated from Yale College in 1854 with the support of his American teacher (Worthy, 1965). Yung Wing proposed that the Qing imperial government send young Chinese students to the United States to study Western advanced knowledge and skills, which was sponsored by both Minister Zeng Guofan of the Qing government and his successor Li Hongzhang (Bi, 2018).

Rationale for the United States

The Americans were eager to agree to Yung Wing's requests and accepted Chinese students to "impart western wisdom to the largely un-Christianized Chinese masses" (Litten, 2009, p. 19). Like many Western countries, America believed it was its destiny to spread Christianity and its values to the world (Litten, 2009). Americans held paternalism and believed that Chinese people grew up with the guidance of the Americans (Litten, 2009).

Rationale for Chinese Government and Individuals

After having been trounced in the Opium Wars, the Qing government discussed sending Chinese students to Western countries to learn from their technology so that these students could bring back and distribute Western knowledge and technologies in the military, shipping administration, and manufacturing (Bieler, 2004). This was done despite many conservative officials' opposition, as the most influential official, Zeng Guofan advocated the program as an essential part of the Self-Strengthening Movement (Bieler, 2004).

The Qing government believed a U.S. education was more practical than a European one. The Chinese Educational Mission was initiated in 1872 with the Qing government sending around 120 students to the United States with a goal to "learn about the sciences related to army, navy, mathematics, engineering" (Wang, 1966, p. 78) and to adopt the Western technological specialties. All the students were sponsored by the Qing government would receive official positions upon their return. These students were expected to return to serve the Chinese government after graduation (Bieler, 2004).

During this stage, male Chinese students came to study in the United States with the support of the Qing government, whereas female students came to the United States through private funds (Ling, 1997). The Opium War opened China's door to Western missionaries, which resulted in the establishment of schools, hospitals, and other facilities. Female Chinese students

were not allowed to receive public education in China. However, Christian missionaries built

schools providing female students the opportunity to receive Western education. Many of these

female students were daughters of businessmen, professionals, or Protestant Christians. The first

four recorded Chinese female students received medical degrees from U.S. colleges (Ling,

1997).

Student Experiences

The first thirty Chinese male students, aged ten to fifteen, sailed to the United States in

1872; most were from the Guangdong Province in Southern China. American families opened

their houses to these Chinese students at Yung's request. These students had to adjust to the

different American cultures in various ways. For instance, they felt embarrassed when their host

families hugged and kissed them because they had never been kissed in China (Bieler, 2004).

Students who lacked English proficiency were provided private lessons at home. Some students

were not allowed to eat if they could not remember the name of the food in English. In addition,

the United States was in a period of intense anti-Chinese sentiment and these Chinese students

had to take off their long Chinese gowns and wear American clothes. In addition, they were

discriminated against due to their queues and long braids (Bieler, 2004).

As a new commissioner, Wu Zidong was upset that some Chinese students became

Christians and showed no respect to their elders. He proposed to the Chinese court to recall these

Chinese students. In addition to the changes, the mistreatment and racial discrimination leveled

against Chinese immigrants in the United States was another reason to cease the mission. Due to

an American recession, Chinese laborers became the targets of "racial attacks and mob violence"

(Bieler, 2004, p. 7). The American government did not provide any compensation for the loss of

Chinese life and property. As a consequence, the Chinese Educational Mission ended in 1881

due to the Qing government's concern that the students might lose their Chinese cultural identity (Bieler, 2004) and be mistreated in the United States (Bieler, 2004). Also, the *Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882* prohibited all immigration of Chinese people for a period of 10 years (Calavita, 2000). Few Chinese students were sent to the United States from 1882 to 1905 (Bi, 2008). In this stage, Chinese students in the United States were characterized as relatively young males between the ages of ten and fifteen. Only ten Chinese students refused to return to China and remained in the United States (Bieler, 2004).

Boxer Indemnity Scholarship and the Republic of China: 1905-1949

China paid expensive fines to Japan after the Jiawu War in 1895. Some Chinese believed that the intrusion of foreigners was the prime cause of their suffering (Bi, 2018), leading to the Boxer Rebellion in 1898. During the rebellion, the anti-Christian and anti-Imperialist Boxers (Lutz, 1976) killed foreign missionaries and destroyed their property. Yet, an eight-nation alliance (Britain, France, Germany, Japan, Russia, Italy, Austria, and the United States) defeated the Boxers in 1901 and laid the blame squarely upon the Qing government. The Qing government was forced to sign the Boxer Protocol and had to pay $330 million to fourteen countries, including $25 million to the United States (Hunt, 1972). The Boxer Indemnity Fund was used to send Chinese students to the United States for education under the Chinese Student Educational Plan signed by President Theodore Roosevelt (Bi, 2018). Western education became an alternative to Confucian knowledge after the abolition of the Chinese civil service exam in 1905 (Bieler, 1994). Meanwhile, the U.S. government expected Chinese students to embrace American culture to receive moral, intellectual, political, and commercial benefits (Bieler, 1998, 2004). The Indemnity Program began in 1909 by providing preparatory training and education for Chinese candidates selected through Tsinghua College examinations (Ye, 2002). In addition

to Tsinghua College, some other elite colleges also sent their students to the United States for higher education (Bi, 2018).

In 1927, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education started to control Tsinghua, which was renamed Tsinghua University due to the Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Government) gaining power. Female students were admitted to Tsinghua University for the first time in 1928 and graduating students went to the United States automatically (Li, 1994). In this stage, a total of 17,000 Chinese students came to study in U.S. colleges due to China's Westernization movement and the Boxer Indemnity Fund (Ling, 1997), which lasted until the Chinese Communist Party takeover in 1949 (Bieler, 2004).

Chinese students in the United States advocated that Chinese women should also be able to study in the United States in 1913. An exam and scholarship system were started to send women to study in the United States in 1914. These female students were supported by families or indemnity funds (Bieler, 2004). Fifty-four female students went to the United States to study pre-medicine, humanities, science, or music. Some pioneering Chinese female students went back to China when they completed their education in the United States and became professionals in China. For example, Chingling Soong served as Sun Yat-sen's secretary to support his revolutionary career after she returned to China with her degree in philosophy at Wesleyan College. Her sister Mayling Soong married Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, President of the Nationalist Republic of China and served as Chiang's secretary and interpreter (Ling, 1997). An increasing number of Chinese female students went to the United States from the 1940s to the early 1950s (Ling 1997).

Rationale for the United States

The United States had been growing in military and economic power around the turn of the century. In particular, the United States competed against Japan for power in the Pacific (Bieler, 1998). The U.S. government, led by President Theodore Roosevelt expected that education could strengthen relationships between China and the United States, raise the U.S. prestige after the *Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882* and the Chinese boycott of 1905, eliminate Sino-American tensions in the future, and limit Japan's power (Bieler, 2004). The United States expected these Chinese students to build friendships between the two countries. Chinese students were thought to bring the best in Chinese culture and life to America and to take back to China the best that America had to offer for the further development of China (Hinnershitz, 2013).

The United States offered to cancel the remaining indemnity as a sign of friendship to a modernized China. The U.S. government believed their education was equal or even better than European education and hoped the Chinese government would select the United States as the destination for studying abroad, hoping to awaken China by "progressive political and social reform" (Bieler, 2004, p. 44). In return, the U.S. government could receive "moral, intellectual and commercial" benefits (p. 44). The negative sides of cultural/power arrogance, political and military extortion, and economic benefits were revealed in this relationship establishment. Moreover, the relationship was based on an unstable political foundation due to the fear of the increasing power of Japan, and both the United States and China sought to manipulate the other for an advantage or leverage against other countries, which resulted in non-interference when Japan expanded into China (Bieler, 1998).

Rationale for Chinese Government and Chinese Individuals

After China was defeated by Japan in 1895 (*War of Jiawu*), the Qing government had to send Chinese students to other foreign countries for study (Bieler, 1998). The Qing government received the Boxer Indemnity Fund to support Chinese students studying abroad as well as to build an alliance with the United States against Japan. Chinese students were expected to learn the secrets of U.S. wealth and power to save China through science. China also expected the returnees to link the tradition and the new China with a Westernized educational system (Wang, 1966). Female students were expected to become better mothers and homemakers, to assist males in becoming greater leaders (Bieler, 1998).

Student Experiences

The Chinese students in this stage were characterized as well-prepared for their life and study in the United States as compared to the Chinese students in the first stage due to the competitive examinations (Bi, 2018). They had English-speaking skills and were involved in activities. Various Chinese student groups established the Chinese Students' Alliance of the United States of America in the fall of 1911 (Bieler, 2004). The families considered studying abroad to bring the families and their ancestors with glory (光宗耀祖) (Bieler, 1998). The parents of these students were very proud when compared to the parents of the first stage students because studying in the United States was a route to power, wealth, and honor. Some students went to the United States to escape the growing Communist control of China and brought with them their family fortunes (Ling, 1997). Once these Chinese students returned to China, they had such an influence on Chinese culture and society by connecting Chinese progressive philosophies and Western ideologies to modernize China (Bi, 2018; Hinnershitz, 2013).

Wang Zhi

Wang Zhi went to Tsinghua University with his father's encouragement. In order to study in the United States, Wang prepared sufficiently by taking the required medical exams, attending lectures to learn to use knives, forks, and napkins and to meet American ladies. Wang Zhi first studied history at the University of Wisconsin. Then, he studied and graduated with a B.A. in history at Norwich Academy in Vermont in 1928. Finally, Wang Zhi decided to study at West Point to make China stronger in the military science field (Bieler, 2004).

One of West Point's traditions was to haze the incoming freshmen, so Wang Zhi was ordered to sing the Chinese national anthem. Wang Zhi asked the group to stand up because he always did so when the American anthem was played. However, Wang Zhi fought against two upperclassmen who refused to rise. Wang Zhi was beaten up. Yet, due to his courage, other upperclassmen agreed not to haze him again (Bieler, 2004).

Zhang Fuliang

On the way to the United States, Zhang Fuliang experienced Western meals and table etiquette for the first time. Zhang described his experience: "the cold raw milk and ice water chilled my stomach and caused my teeth to chatter and butter and cheese were nauseating with a strong odor of the cow" (as cited in Bieler, 2004, p. 96). He had to observe others carefully to learn to use a knife, fork, and napkin. When he arrived in the United States, he realized the cultural differences made it difficult to adjust to the local environment.

Zhang lived in a cheaper dormitory, in which he was not happy, because he did not have freedom to eat outside or escape evening curfews (Bieler, 2004). The Chinese students always believed that they could find friends who were "interested in and well-disposed to China" (Chang, 1909, p. 9); however, they realized that respect to a foreign country was not to be

begged but compelled. American students were interested in social events such as dates and dances, whereas they were not interested in international issues. In addition, Chinese students were more likely to be rejected when looking for apartments due to their nationality. This was also during a period of intense American nationalism and progressivism, which aggravated the situation. To improve his English, Zhang read English literature, newspapers, and magazines daily and always had a dictionary with him (Bieler, 2004).

Monlin Chiang (Jiang Menglin)

Coming from a village, Chiang (1957) believed learning was important to provide more opportunities and build something higher for him, a high official with honor. He received English and Japanese language learning at school. Chiang had to unlearn his English in later years due to the incorrect ways of teaching. He went to Nanyang College to prepare to study in the United States. The Nanyang College followed a Western curriculum utilizing Spencer's principle of education: the intellectual, moral, and physical education. Finally, Chiang sailed to the United States in 1908, which lasted 24 days.

Chiang (1957) recalled in his autoethnography that he seemed partially "blind, deaf, and dumb" (p. 68) due to his lack of English proficiency in the beginning. Chiang had to overcome the obstacles by concentrating, listening to English lectures and conversations, and unlearning his English. Due to the language and nationality, Chiang felt shy and kept silent in the classroom.

> California was not so hospitable a land socially for the Chinese as to make one feel congenial or at ease; I was always overconscious of this, slow to mingle with others and shy when others tried to approach me...This hampered my participation in discussion, both in the classroom and out of it...As a rule I remained mute in class and when a question was put to me responded only by a blush. (p. 69)

However, Chiang's professor seemed to understand his situation as a foreigner and gave him a fair grade due to completing his assignments. Holidays were difficult for him because he had no family in the United States. On Christmas Eve, American families enjoyed the family gathering and dinners, whereas Chiang had to dine alone at a restaurant and walk alone on the street (Chiang, 1957).

It was not easy to build relationships with American students. Most Americans were very conservative and tended not to be involved with Chinese students. Some American students were not willing to sit with Chinese students. There were few American students in Chinese clubs (Bieler, 2004). The American Immigration Act of 1924 (Pub.L. 68-139, 43 Stat. 153) made it even harder to build connections between Americans and Chinese. This Act encouraged Americans to exclude yellow and brown races, which indicated the United States was a "a white man's country" (Shen, 1925, p. 48). One thing to note was that many professors were willing to help and educate Chinese students since they realized that the Chinese students were the best on campus. The majority of Chinese students also admired their American professors, especially after recognizing their professors' role in daily life (Bieler, 2004).

Students were encouraged to adapt to the American learning and living environment at this stage; however, they became marginalized in both countries when they appreciated and integrated two different cultures (Bieler, 2004). Finding a balance between the extreme and contradictory cultures is difficult. Participating in too many events might cause them to lose their Chinese identity despite the necessity to be involved in the community. Also, when they returned to China, their families and neighbors would feel they were Americanized and forgot about their Chinese roots (Bieler, 2004).

People's Republic of China and Cold War: 1949-1978

The People's Republic of China was established in 1949 and began a period of self-isolation from most Western countries in the context of the Cold War and the Chinese Cultural Revolution (Bi, 2018). During this period, many Chinese students who were studying in the United States were forced to stay in America because the U.S. government did not want these students to return to work for the Communist party, which led around 4,000 Chinese students and their families to remain in the United States and become U.S. citizens (Liu, 2009). During that time, studying abroad was restricted in mainland China. Students who studied in the United States were persecuted during the Chinese 1950s Anti-Rightist Campaign and the Cultural Revolution (Bi, 2018). Consequently, they suffered "public humiliation, arbitrary imprisonment, and violent torture" (p. 10).

Rationale for the United States

The Justice Department in the United States allowed Chinese students to work and stay in the United States under criticism from universities and the State Department due to the fierce political situations such as the Korean War and the establishment of the Chinese Communist Party (Litten, 2009). The State Department prohibited Chinese students in engineering or science fields from returning to China and kept "all stranded Chinese on American soil" (p. 57) to end the Sino-American education exchange.

Rationale for Chinese Government and Chinese Individuals

During this stage, studying abroad was restricted because of the Anti-Rightist Campaign (Bi, 2018). Yet, some students from wealthy families found a way to get to the United States. In the late 1940s, Chinese female students went to the United States to inherit their family assets or escape the control of the Communist Party with their family's support. Many Chinese students in

the United States were from Taiwan where the Chinese Nationalist government had retreated

after 1949, and Hong Kong, then a British protectorate. Around 80,000 Chinese students left

Taiwan to study in the United States from 1950-1980 (Liu, 2009). In Ling's (1997) study, Ms.

Y's parents transferred all their assets to the United States and sent Ms. Y and her brothers to

study in the United States after the Communist Party took over in China. At the same time, some

former Chinese officials and diplomats decided to stay in the United States (Ling, 1997).

Student Experiences

The U.S. government officials closely watched Chinese students and scholars at this stage

(Litten, 2009). Qian Xuesen, a jet propulsion expert, was accused of "communist affiliations" (p.

58). The U.S. government arrested Qian Xuesen as a spy, which did not find any evidence of

Qian Xuesen's connections with the Chinese Community Party. This caused him to return to

China to become a renowned researcher who made a significant contribution to China's first

atomic bomb (Litten, 2009).

This study provided historical contexts of international education between the United

States and China. From the historical perspective, Chinese students studying in the United States

have been driven by political, economic, cultural, and technological development (Bi, 2018) and

are rooted in "instrumental national interests" (Stein, 2019, p. 1775). Recruiting Chinese

international students is embedded in the invisible colonial logic by spreading Christianity and

relevant values to the world, eliminating Sino-American tensions, and limiting Japan's and

Communist Party's power. Additionally, the "welcoming" of Chinese international students also

brings neoliberal possibilities for the U.S. government to receive intellectual and commercial

benefits (Bamberger et al., 2019; Bieler, 2004; Stein, 2019). Forms of neo-racism, isolation,

discrimination, and exclusion have happened to Chinese international students since they first

studied in the United States (Bi, 2018; Bieler, 1994; Liu, 2009). Until the contemporary world,

increasing numbers of Chinese students in the United States (IIE, 2019) still experience isolation,

discrimination, and exclusion (Ma, 2020).

The Era of Modernization: 1978-Present

Deng Xiaoping advocated modernization with open-door and reform policies in 1978

after taking over the government (Liu, 2009). The Cult Revolution damaged the Chinese

economy and left China with severe human losses. China desperately needed more well-educated

scholars to achieve modernization. Under these circumstances, Deng Xiaoping advocated

education exchanges and collaborations with institutions in order to change international

relations and the need for reform and modernization (Bi, 2018). Chinese scholars and students

were sent to industrialized countries to study sciences and technologies with the support of the

Chinese government, employers, and their families (Liu, 2005).

1979 was the first time Mainland China sent large numbers of students to study abroad to

learn from Western science and technology since the establishment of the People's Republic of

China (Zweig & Changgui, 1995). Many students returned to China before 1986 to aid in the

development of China; however, the U.S. government allowed Chinese students to apply for

permanent residency after the Tiananmen incident June 4, 1989, which resulted in a decrease in

the number of returning students (Zweig & Changgui, 1995).

In the first several years after 1979, Chinese students studying in the United States

comprised about 50-60 percent of all Chinese students studying abroad (Liu, 2009). Science and

technology programs were regarded as essential to China's modernization. Chinese students

considered studying abroad as "gold gilding (*du jin*)" (Bi, 2018, p. 12). Studying abroad was

highly valued and pursued by the younger Chinese generation. At the same time, institutions in

the United States recruited international students to prepare their students to become global citizens (Hser, 2005).

Rationale for the United States

de Wit (2002) noted four rationales for the internationalization of higher education: political (foreign policy, technical assistance, peace, and mutual understanding), economic, cultural and social rationales, and academic rationales. Educational cooperation was regarded as a pivotal diplomatic investment in political relations among foreign countries. Particularly, educational, academic, and cultural exchanges and cooperation between countries after the Cold War could be "vehicles for the development or preservation of economic and political relations" (de Wit, 2002, p. 85).

China and the United States established diplomatic relations in 1979. Chinese President Deng Xiaoping and American President Jimmy Carter signed a five-year treaty for Sino-U.S. cooperation, including educational exchanges (Ning, 2006). The U.S. government enacted immigration policies to supplement skilled workers. The G.H.W. Bush administration signed the Immigration Act of 1990 (P. L. 101-649, 101 Stat. 4978) to increase the caps of legal immigrants as well as provide more opportunities for Chinese graduates to work in the United States. The U.S. government enacted the Chinese Student Protection Act of 1992 (P. L. 102-404, 106. Stat. 1969) to provide Chinese students to work and apply for permanent residency in the United States after the Tiananmen incident, which brought benefits to the U.S. employment due to the high degrees (Orrenius et al., 2012). Peace and mutual understanding was the primary political rationale for educational exchanges and for attracting international students to study in the United States (de Wit, 2002). International cooperation also played a positive role in international competence and competition, thus on economic development and growth.

Higher education has become commercialized and entrepreneurial focused as a consequence of globalization (Cantwell, 2015; de Wit, 2002). The economic and revenue gain from international students' tuition and other fees has been an important motivation to attract international students (Cantwell, 2015). International students contributed around $41 billion to the U.S. economy in 2018 (NAFSA, 2020). Many Chinese students are supported by their families (Cantwell, 2015).

Internationalization ensures higher education institutions increase and enrich their "awareness and understanding of the new and changing phenomena that affect the political, economic, and cultural-multicultural developments within and among nations" (de Wit, 2002, p. 96). With the increasing number of international students studying in the United States, domestic students can gain knowledge, skills, and cultures from an international perspective, which equips them to become global citizens (Niehaus & Williams, 2015). At the same time, the internationalization of higher education also transforms faculty and staff perspectives and increases their intercultural and global competence.

Rationale for Chinese Government and Chinese Individuals

The Chinese government has encouraged students to study abroad for the purpose of cultural exchanges as well as the development of science and technology since 1978 (Bi, 2018). Deng Xiaoping believed that only technology and education could change China and achieve the reforms need to open the country (Qian, 2017). Studying abroad has been essential to broadening one's horizon, learning from new ideologies, and achieving modernization. A system of funding for Chinese students studying abroad was established, including "state-funded, employer-funded, and self-funded" (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2009, n.p.). The

government sent fifty Chinese students to the United States in December 1978, primarily between 36 and 45 years old (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2009).

In 1979, the number of students studying abroad increased to 1,277 (Qian, 2017). Around 117,300 students and scholars were studying abroad in 2003, among which the majority were self-funded, and about 3,000 were government funded. Meanwhile, approximately 20,000 students and scholars returned to aid in the development of China. The returning students and scholars served as a driving force and a leading role in areas including, but not limited to, science, high-tech industries, education, etc. (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2009).

Push and pull factors are essential in Chinese students' decision to study abroad (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). The United States is the top destination for Chinese students studying abroad due to the high global ranking, institutions' reputation, quality of higher education, personal recommendations, good environment, social links, resources, and career opportunities (Choudaha et al., 2013). Hegarty et al. (2013) found that the primary reasons that Chinese study in the United States was broadening their experiences, improving their professional and financial potential, gaining new insights and outlooks, and controlling their futures. Chinese students tend to be drawn to the United States due to cultural, social, and academic factors (Kondakci, 2011). Studying in a graduate program is also a pathway to receiving permanent residency in the United States (Zhou, 2015). Around 80% of doctoral students from China and India stayed in the United States after graduation in the last decade (Survey of Earned Doctorates, 2012).

Chinese students are pushed to study in the United States to escape the extremely competitive Chinese schooling and *Gaokao* (university entry exam) (Ma, 2020). Students seek to

attend highly-ranked U.S. institutions to fulfill their personal, family, and professional goals. The value of freedom of speech is also a factor that pushes Chinese students to study in the United States (Ma, 2020). Chinese students are pushed by political and other oppression in their home country to seek more freedom in the United States (Altbach, 2004).

Sociocultural Experiences

Chinese international students encounter various stress regarding intercultural interaction and communication with domestic students (Alharbi & Smith, 2018; Hail, 2015; Ma, 2020; Wang & Freed, 2021). Most Chinese students do not have much interaction with domestic students due to seeking protective segregation to find comfort and support from their Chinese peers (Ma, 2020). Protective segregation means "social spaces where students can avoid the dominant party culture and seek comfort and support from one another" (p. 114). Chinese students tend to seek comfort and support due to the exclusion from American networks, albeit involuntarily and reluctantly (Ma, 2020). Furthermore, Hail (2015) notes that domestic students tend to be prejudiced and offensive to Chinese students and current events. Some sensitive political discussions can particularly result in intense hostility between Chinese and American students (Li & Hewitt, 2008). In Hail's (2015) study, some discussions related to China made Chinese students feel upset, annoyed, and even withdrawn from further social interaction with American students. Most participants articulated that the conversation with American students made them feel uncomfortable or angry. One participant remarked:

> An American classmate showed me some news about Tibet. He said the Chinese
> government sent the army to Tibet . . . That experience gave me a deep impression . . . I
> don't like when [Americans] ask me about China. I think it is mostly bad news about my
> country. If they say something that hurts my feelings about my country I will argue with

them. If they show some disgust towards my country, I think I need to explain to them because they have a wrong opinion of my country. (Hail, 2015, p. 315)

Hail (2015) also found that some Chinese students tend not to argue with Americans but encourage them to visit China someday to discover the truth in conflicts.

Furthermore, as a heterogeneous group, Chinese international students' identities are shaped and formed in different contexts and experiences (Glass et al., 2022; Heng, 2018; Ma, 2020; Valdez, 2015). Asian international students struggle with their identity (Kim, 2012; Valdez, 2015) and have new perspectives on China and the United States (Ma, 2020). Ma (2020) found that Chinese students have become more independent and proactive in their daily life while studying in the United States. Compared to the experiences in China, students regain autonomy to make their decisions (Ma, 2020). Chinese international students experienced a transition from cherishing freedom in the United States to renewing their interest and strengthened affinity with Chinese culture and society.

Valdez (2015) used double consciousness to describe Chinese international students' conflict of identities between being Chinese and being Americanized. This double consciousness was created by practical racism, which isolates Chinese international students from class participation (Valdez, 2015). Chinese international students' identity is becoming more hybrid due to the incorporation of experience into their identity (Zhang & Guo, 2015). Food is an essential part of international student identity; it is a representation of their ethnic ties (Brown et al., 2010; Kim, 2001; Locher et al., 2005). The taste of home food can make international students feel safe and is helpful in relieving loneliness (Brown et al., 2010). Chinese international students are also becoming to gain agency and have an appreciation for diversity (Heng, 2017; Parris-Kidd & Barnett, 2011).

Academic Experiences

Chinese students have different academic challenges, such as language/linguistics, writing; their challenges evolve over time (Heng, 2018; Kuo, 2011; Yuan, 2011; Wang & Freed, 2021; Will, 2019; Wu, 2015). Chinese international students have to adjust to a different higher education system when studying in Western universities (Heng, 2018; Li, 2012; Will, 2019). In China, students are taught to respect and closely follow professors' instructions and lectures (Will, 2019). It is disrespectful to interrupt, question, or criticize professors in Chinese classrooms (Li, 2012), which results in a lack of participation from faculty perspectives. However, in Western countries, they need to change their learning habits to develop their critical thinking, challenge their professors, and actively participate in the classroom (Wu, 2015). Heng (2017, 2018) found that Chinese international students enact agency to use different techniques and strategies to overcome academic challenges. They also reach out for help in various ways. Mentorship plays an important role in Chinese international students' academic and professional success (Howlett & Nguyen, 2020; Hou & Jam, 2020; Kezar et al., 2011; Ma, 2020).

One of the primary challenges for Chinese students is the language barrier. Although passing the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or the Graduate Record Exam (GRE), it is still difficult for Chinese students to articulate and express deeper thoughts due to the time of translation and meaning loss during the translation (Will, 2019). In Heng's (2018) study, some participants reported having to change their way of speaking at host institutions. In China, they were taught to be humble and low-key, to collaborate with one another, but not to be individualistic.

Paper writing is another challenge for Chinese international students (Kuo, 2011). Participants reported the challenges in reading textbooks, papers, and lack of terminology while

studying in the United States. In China, students are taught to write narrative essays with a looser format, whereas they need to write argumentative papers with a strict format in the United States. (Heng, 2018). The writing format and structure are new to Chinese students. One participant described it like this:

> …in the US, there's a thesis and there's a structure that works like a branch. And all the details are the sub-branches that grow from the main branch, so it looks like a tree. In China, it's like ivy, it grows in all directions. (p. 27)

Experiences of Forms of Discrimination

Chinese international students also encounter experiences of prejudice, stereotype, and discrimination in host countries compared with international students from Western countries (Guilfoyle & Harryba, 2011; Lee & Rice, 2007; Will, 2016; Yao, 2018; Xie et al., 2021). They are stereotyped as wealthy, hardworking, smart, incompetent in English, introverted, and rude (see Ruble & Zhang, 2013; Xie et al., 2021; Yan & Berliner, 2011b). This has raised attention in the past decades, which Lee and Rice (2007) called neo-racism. Neo-racism is discrimination and prejudice based on one's cultural and national identity (Lee & Rice, 2007). In their study, students from Western countries such as Canada and Europe did not experience discrimination, whereas Asian students experienced considerable discrimination due to their obvious differences in cultures or languages. Yao (2018) found that Chinese international students felt they were outsiders, with many Chinese students experiencing discrimination and isolation in their host institutions due to their nationality and culture:

> One time when I was walking to Main Street from [residence hall]. There is one guy from I think [different residence hall]—he came out, he saw me, and he just shouted, "F***ing Asian people." Just like that. We don't know each other. (p. 94)

In Will's (2019) study, Chinese international students were less likely to be treated seriously by their American classmates during class discussions. Despite Chinese students' desire to work with American peers as a group, American students tend to work with each other due to Chinese students' lack of American cultural knowledge. One Chinese student reported that:

> It's really divided by the race line… They are grouped together…native speaking people. And when we do projects, we have different groups to do projects. Normally, we have people from different background[s]…they inform the same project. And I guess one thing is they have better communication. And the other is they just like people who look like themselves. So for me, when I took class, when we have [had] to form a small group, almost everyone in my group are [was] from China. (pp. 1072-1073)

Neo-racism

Neo-racism is a framework to "explore structural racism in the context of immigration where race, culture, and nationality interact complexly to produce a hierarchy of social positions" (Cantwell & Lee, 2010, p. 497). Neo-racism is deeply rooted in systemic racism and white supremacy (Lee, 2020; Spears, 1999; Stein & de Andreotti, 2016). International students from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East tend to experience more discrimination, verbal assaults, false accusations, and physical violence compared to international students from Western countries, such as European countries, Canada, or Australia (Lee, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; Lee et al., 2017). Asian postdocs tend to be exploited in the market and systematically *not* becoming faculty members, whereas White postdocs are more likely to become faculty members and considered in a faculty trajectory (Cantwell & Lee, 2010). Chinese international students are considered spies for stealing American secrets and intellectual property (Lee, 2020). These

different experiences among international students from different nation-states are evidence of neo-racism (Lee, 2006, 2020).

Racism and Neo-racism

This section addresses the differences, similarities, and nuances between racism and neo-racism. Historically and currently, racism "encompasses a broad range of white-racist dimensions: the racist ideology, attitudes, emotions, habits, actions, and institutions of whites in this society" (Feagin, 2013, p. 2). Racism, based on name, skin color, and religious practices, takes the form of violence, intolerance, exploitation, and humiliation to ensure "intellectual elaborations of the phantasm of prophylaxis or segregation" (Balibar et al., 1991, p. 17). The U.S. government provided 246 million acres of land at a low cost for 1.5 million homesteads exclusively to White Americans. Most of this land was taken from Native Americans. Many rich White families today have received benefits because of past federal giveaways (Feagin, 2013). African Americans were not considered citizens before the end of slavery and were barred from government-provided resources after the Civil War. Due to the labor shortage in the North, many African Americans migrated from the South to work in industrial jobs. Yet, this did not break the Jim Crow pattern; African Americans received less wages and were placed in low-skill and unpleasant jobs compared to White Americans (Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

Lee and Rice (2007) demonstrate that neo-racism is a new racism that is attributable to skin color as well as culture, national origin, and relationships between countries in the context of postcolonial higher education. Neo-racism is based on cultural hierarchies and rationalized differently (Lee, 2020). Balibar et al. (1991) conceptualized neo-racism originally by observing France against foreigners based on cultural differences rather than by race alone. Neo-racism is a racism in the era of decolonization, which is a framework of 'racism without races' (Balibar et

al., 1991). Neo-racism is a racism that the primary theme is not biological heredity but cultural differences (Balibar et al., 1991; Lee & Rice, 2007). Neo-racism takes the forms of feeling discomfortable, verbal insults, direct confrontations, and physical attacks (Lee, 2006). In the United States, international students from Asia, Latin America, and Africa are targeted by neo-racism in the forms of verbal assaults, bullying, false accusations, and even physical violence, which international students from Western countries are not experiencing (Lee & Rice, 2007; Lee, 2020).

Racism is about social hierarchies, constructed on racial categories that regulate access to power and wealth (Spears, 1999). Spears (1999) notes that racism was based on false ideas of biologically based inferiority until the post-World War II period, and neo-racism is subtler that claiming a cultural basis for "what is seen as low achievement by people of color" (p. 2). Neo-racism is still racism because it encourages exclusion "based on the cultural attributes or national origin of the oppressed" (Lee & Rice, 2007, p. 389) in the postcolonial era. Signal words include but are not limited to overlook, discrimination, stereotype, suspicious, verbal/physical insults, exclusion, and threaten.

Attributes of Neo-racism

Neo-racism is embedded in colonialism, which leads to unequal power in political, cultural, and economic distribution and dominance (França et al., 2018; Stein & de Andreotti, 2016; Yang, 2019). This unequal articulation of power is called *coloniality of power*, which is conceptualized as a global hegemonic and hierarchical power due to the White articulation on race, labor, and space based on the benefits of Whites and the need for capital (Andreotti, 2011). Neo-racism rationalizes discrimination against people of color based on culture, which is beyond biological racism (Lee, 2021).

Coloniality of Power in the Postcolonial Era

Neo-racism is rooted in colonialism and white supremacy (Lee, 2021; Stein & de Andreotti, 2016). Neo-racism makes discrimination not criminal but preserves the dominant global imaginary. In this Western dominant global imaginary, Western higher education as a desirable product attracts international students and frames international students as 'cash,' 'competition,' and 'charity' (Stein & de Andreotti, 2016). Neo-racism is not only that international students have experienced on campus but embraces hidden links between the motivations for international student recruitment and international students' experiences. The recruitment is embedded in the dominant global imaginary and racism deeply rooted in White supremacy (Andreotti, 2011; Stein & de Andreotti, 2016; Suspitsyna & Shalka, 2019). In this imaginary, Western countries are at the top of the global hierarchy. This global hierarchy positions Western countries as the desired destination for knowledge producers and non-Western as knowledge consumers (França et al, 2018; Stein & de Andreotti, 2016). This coloniality of power is also closely connected to and influenced by neoliberal values allowing particular countries access (Lee, 2021). U.S. higher education institutions have been increasingly dependent on international student enrollment and the economic benefits they have brought, especially from China and India (LaFleur, 2021).

Colonialism is the *darker side* of modernity and a White-centric expansion of knowledge and representation (Andreotti, 2011). International students' experiences in Western countries are influenced or even dominated by the coloniality of power (Stein & de Andreotti, 2016). Quijano (2000) notes:

In the course of the worldwide expansion of colonial domination on the part of the same dominant race (or, from the eighteenth century onward, Europeans), the same criteria of

social classification were imposed on all of the world population. As a result, new

historical and social identities were produced: yellows and olives were added to whites,

Indians, blacks, and mestizos. The racist distribution of new social identities was

combined, as had been done so successfully in Anglo-America, with a racist distribution

of labor and the forms of exploitation of colonial capitalism. This was, above all, through

a quasi-exclusive association of whiteness with wages and, of course, with the high-order

positions in the colonial administration. (p. 537)

The postcolonial perspective draws attention to the uneven power relations from the

Global North to the Global South through the imposition and oppression of language, culture,

values, and the exploitation of people (Zuchowski et al., 2017). Postcolonialism represents not

the end of colonialism but the persistent and ongoing neocolonial and neoliberal relations with

the world order (Suspitsyna & Shalka, 2019). According to Suspitsyna and Shalka (2019), the

United States is postcolonial as dominant in this *new* world order and seeks to "maintain its

political and economic influence globally by reinforcing the superiority of Western civilization

and Western liberal democracy" (p. 289).

Force, Cultural Domination, and Cooptation

Lee and Rice (2007) demonstrate that neo-racism is attributable to skin color as well as

culture, national origin, and relationships between countries in the context of postcolonial higher

education. Neo-racism ties to cultural hierarchies, in which not all international students are

welcomed (Lee, 2020). Spears (1999) defines neo-racism as follows:

Neo-racism rationalizes the subordination of people of color on the basis of culture,

which of course is acquired through acculturation within an ethnic group, while

traditional racism rationalizes it fundamentally in terms of biology. Neo-racism is still

racism in that it functions to maintain racial hierarchies of oppression. Its new ideological

focus on culture has the same function and provides a vast new field to mine for supposed

causes of the lower achievement of groups of color based on dysfunctional attitudes,

values, and orientation. (p. 2)

Underlying neo-racism are notions of cultural or national superiority (Lee, 2006) and a

rationale for marginalizing the *undercommons* (Harney & Moten, 2013). As undercommons,

these particular international students' experiences of discrimination are based on stereotypes

and negative perceptions about their home countries rather than solely the color of their skin

(Lee, 2006).

Exploitation is defined as "a situation, characteristic of all class stratified societies, in

which the labor of members of subordinate classes is expropriated" (Spears, 1999, p. 2) and as

the purpose of racial hierarchies. International students are unfamiliar with their rights in host

countries, which causes this vulnerable population to be exploited illegally for cheap labor by

host countries' businesses (Abrahams, 2018). Colleges' enrollment of more Chinese students

creates a generation of financially exploited youth lacking a supportive, welcoming, and

enriching experience due to a lack of social as well as academic adjustment services (Lee,

2006).

Spears (1999) addresses three mechanisms of repression to enforce an exploitative social

structure: force, cultural domination, and cooptation. Force and cultural domination are the twin

mechanism of repression as a process by which those in power keep themselves in control by

destroying or rendering harmless organizations and ideologies that threaten their power. Cultural

domination refers to "a situation in which members of a subordinated class have to an important

extent accepted the ideology of the ruling class" (p. 17). Pennycook (2017) notes that Western

thought is regarded as superior, which leads to a massive process of cultural and epistemological colonization and privileges one form of culture or knowledge over others. As the language of internationalization, English will certainly lead to a degree of *Westernization* due to language as the most important entry into one's habits of thought (Pennycook, 2017). Those who do not feel comfortable with using English will soon be considered to be lagging behind (Jordão, 2016). On the one hand, Chinese students need to learn English through hard work and diligence since preschool. On the other hand, these non-native English speakers are "colonially engineered as a *deficiency* that can never really be *cured* since it is a birthmark no plastic surgery can delete" (Jordão, 2016, p. 195). Furthermore, studying abroad, Chinese students are expected to and have to bear the sole responsibility to persist, overcome language and cultural barriers, feelings of isolation and loneliness, and different ways of teaching and learning so that they can successfully adapt to the new environment/culture due to the inadequacies within host institutions (Lee, 2006).

The third mechanism as well as a result of cultural domination, cooptation refers to buying off leaders of resistance movements with offers of well-paid jobs or other forms of financial reward or prestige (Spears, 1999). Cooptation produced the mentality of throwing in the towel of resistance and accepting what they are given, which unveils the invisibility of the colonial logic that orients mainstream internationalization and many critical approaches to internationalization (Stein, 2019). Trilokekar (2015) notes that the period from 1945 to 1960 was a Golden Age of international education in the United States and Canada, which describes the shift of internationalization from *aid* during the Cold War era to *trade* in the present. However, this cooptation or aid dominates strategies in internationalization. For instance, Stein (2019) argues that welcoming international students was rooted in an anti-communist purpose that these

students would return to their home countries as vectors of capitalism and of the host country's national economic interests specifically. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, foreign policy attracted Asian students to study in the United States. Asian students studying in the United States are responsible for representing their countries and learning about American life and society to modernize their home countries once they return (Hinnershitz, 2013). On the other hand, the U.S. government expected to gain moral, intellectual, and commercial advantages through the Chinese Student Educational Plan signed by President Roosevelt (Bi, 2018). Also, the aid and cooptation could not prevent Chinese international students from anti-Asian nativism that manifested in various ways, including but not limited to social prejudice, segregation, and laws preventing Asians from owning land and intermarrying with whites (Hinnershitz, 2013). Thus, the aims of cooptation and aid with international students are rooted in the *instrumental national interest* and tend to belie a paternalistic presumption of colonial and neo-racism noblesse aims to transmit Western epistemological supremacy (Lee, 2006; Stein & de Andreotti, 2016; Stein, 2019).

Incidents of Neo-racism

Neo-racism is still racism because it encourages exclusion "based on the cultural attributes or national origin of the oppressed" (Lee & Rice, 2007, p. 389) in the postcolonial era. Neo-racism or national/cultural discrimination exists in various current context, such as travel bans, which restricts individuals from certain Muslim countries from entering the United States (Hou, 2020; Pierce & Meissner, 2017). Cantwell and Lee (2010) explored international postdocs' experiences and career paths through a neo-racism lens. They found that cultural stereotypes impacted international postdocs' career opportunities and professional careers. The structures of the academic job market and career opportunities tend to rely on an individual's country of

origin (Cantwell & Lee, 2010). Their findings demonstrated that postdocs from Asia were likely

to be considered "quiet people who work hard but may not have strong ambitions for career

advancement" (Cantwell & Lee, 2010, p. 505). This cultural stereotype caused a lack of

opportunities for Asians to engage in activities to advance faculty positions (Cantwell & Lee,

2010).

Many international students, particularly from Asian, African, and Middle Eastern

countries, reported that they have encountered unwelcoming, discrimination, insulting jokes and

statements about their accents and country, whereas international students from Europe, Canada,

and Australia are not likely to face any discrimination (Hou & Jam, 2020; Lee, 2006; Marginson

et al., 2010). For example, Asian accents were ridiculed sometimes, whereas European accents

were more accepted and appreciated (Lee, 2006). Lee (2010) also found that international

students from non-Western countries tend to encounter negative experiences, such as biased

treatment from faculty and unacceptance from peers. Another example of neo-racism is that

African student-athletes were considered to lack the desire to pursue academic success (Lee et

al., 2017).

Examples that are more specific and current consist of mistreatment towards

Chinese/Asian students in the United States who have suffered from verbal insults and direct

confrontation, such as "you f***ing dumb gook" (Fang et al., 2020, para.9) and "Chinese Virus"

(Fallows, 2020, para. 1) due to COVID-19. Asian people are considered *model minority* –

hardworking and intelligent at school (Cvencek et al., 2014; Lee & Joo, 2005; Park et al., 2006).

This claim assumes that all Asians are equally intelligent and successful without consideration of

differences in regard to their region of origin, cultural capital, or individual differences (Wu,

2002). Furthermore, this claim makes some Asian people who are not so-called intelligent have

shameful and low self-esteem (Li, 1994). Yao (2018) found that Chinese students experienced "blatant acts of discrimination" and were considered outsiders (p. 92). One participant described that she felt bad when domestic students told her that she needed to improve her English because she studied in the United States (Yao, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

In this study, I explored Chinese graduate international students' experiences related to neo-racism and how they enacted their agency to negotiate those experiences in their formal and informal learning environments. Agency, as an activity rather than passivity, is defined as "an individual or collective capacity to act with "intentionality" in line with "rational" choices and in response to a given circumstance" (Tran & Vu, 2018, p. 4). The individual and relational agency theoretical framework is adapted from Edwards (2005), Marginson (2014), Sen (1985), Tran and Vu (2018), and Hopwood (2010) to understand and explore Chinese international graduate students' experiences in response to and interrupting the racial structure.

There are two types of agency: individual agency and relational agency (Edwards, 2005; Hopwood, 2010; Tran & Vu, 2018). For the study, individual agency involves a capacity for one to act on their behalf to respond to their needs and contexts (Hopwood, 2010; Tran & Vu, 2018). The individual agency includes agency for explicit needs and agency for being, becoming, and transformation. Relational agency involves a capacity to work with others or in a certain context that has to do with people (Edwards, 2011). The relational agency includes agency as struggle, resistance, resilience, and hope and collective agency for negotiation and interruption. Individual agency and relational agency are overlapping and not mutually exclusive (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 *Agency Theoretical Framework*

Agency Theoretical Framework

Individual Agency	Relational Agency
• Agency for explicit needs	• Agency as struggle, resistance, resilience, and hope
• Agency for being, becoming, and transformation	• Collective agency for negotiation and interruption
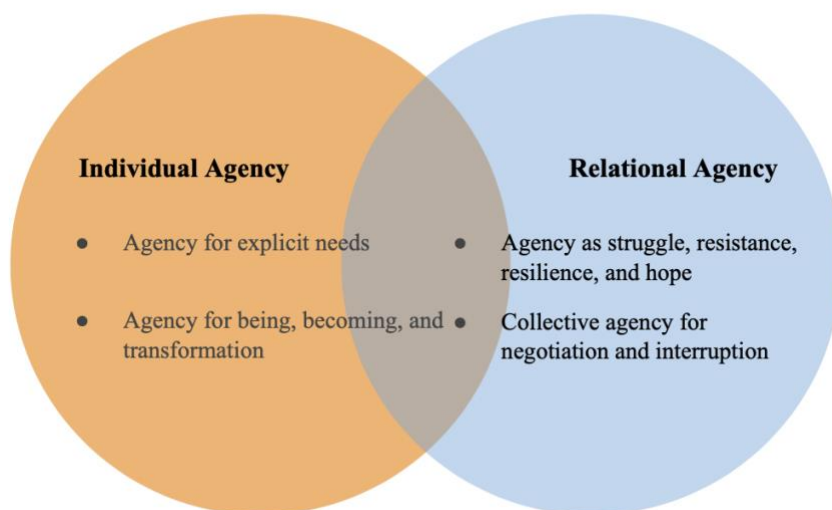
Individual Agency

As two distinctive forms of individual agency, *agency for explicit needs* underscores international students' explicit and particular needs relevant to educational, emotional, financial, social, and other logistical support in response to their formal and informal learning environment (Edwards, 2005; Hopwood, 2010); *agency for being, becoming, and transformation* highlights that international students proactively respond to the context, transform the context, and shape their identity as self-maturity and self-transformation as human beings (Tran & Vu, 2018). The view of individual agency in this study is in line with human needs and identity to agency, which provides a mechanism to construct an individual's life through identifying specific needs and evaluating one's level of satisfaction to shape their identity with the sense of agency (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Biesta et al., 2015; Costanza et al., 2007; Doyal & Gough, 1984).

Agency for Explicit Needs

Adapted from Doyal and Gough (1984) and Costanza et al. (2007), the need is placed into two categories in this study (see Figure 2). The first need (basic needs) is a particular basic need/goal for all human beings (Doyal & Gough, 1984). The basic needs include but are not limited to food, shelter, clothes, security, and freedom (Costanza et al., 2007). For instance, a person needs to stay physically and mentally healthy. The second need (advanced needs) is "*strategies* which are believed to provide successful routes for the achievement of *any* goal – whether these goals are regarded as needs or wants in the first sense" (Doyal & Gough, 1984, p. 11). The advanced needs include but are not limited to education, identity, participation, and spirituality (Costanza et al., 2007). Since needs can be referred to as strategies to achieve goals, it is clear that a way of attaining X is to do Y, then Y is the need (Doyal & Gough, 1984). For instance, a person needs to attend graduate school to further their education or needs to study abroad to further their education. In this case, going to graduate school or studying abroad are their needs. These needs are the advanced needs of humans, which should not be tied to any form of neoliberalism.

Figure 2 *Agency for Explicit Needs*

Agency for Explicit Needs
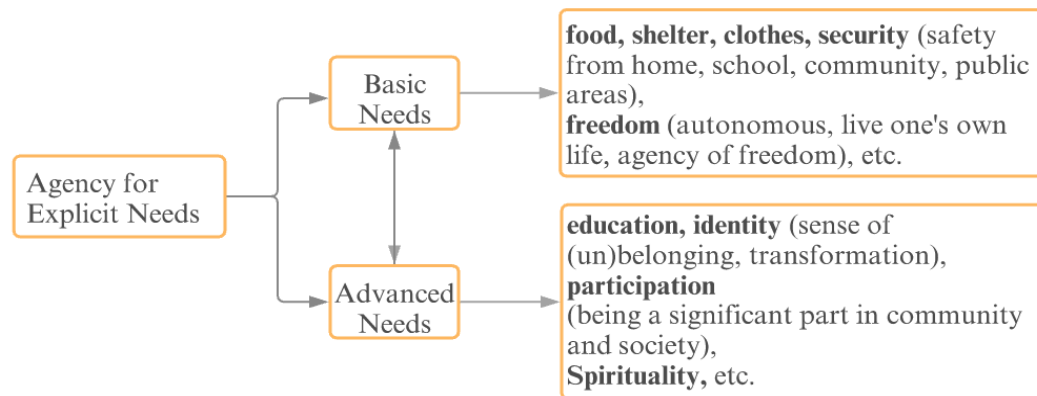
Agency for explicit needs interrupts the thinking (epistemology) of international education as a neoliberal product (Doyal & Gough, 1984; Stein & de Andreotti, 2016). Much research has emphasized the motivation for international students studying abroad, such as enhancing their academic competence, increasing career opportunities, providing language proficiency, etc. (Choudaha, 2017; Maringe & Carter, 2007; Nicholls, 2018; Nilsson & Ripmeester, 2016). This motivation perspective strengthens international higher education as a neoliberal product by emphasizing too much on benefits. Furthermore, Western higher education institutions tend to increase international student recruitment to generate cash and revenues, strengthening international higher education as a neoliberal product (Stein & de Andreotti, 2016). Yet, agency as explicit needs does not put motivation or benefits in the center but puts humans' needs in the center. That is also to say that when people experience little satisfaction with their needs, they would explicitly seek autonomy to achieve their needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Doyal & Gough, 1984).

As an important aspect of human functioning, autonomy concerns one's integration and freedom (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Individuals tend to address their needs with initiative and autonomy. For example, Tran and Vu (2018) found that international students contribute to learning by addressing their needs and constructing their knowledge. International students position themselves as learners who explicitly need explanation and clarification on learning contents, introducing their home culture, and bringing about changes. Agency for explicit needs challenge and interrupt the "deficit model" suggested by Montgomery and McDowell (2009) to describe international students with a negative discourse, such as being quiet, lack of participation, and staying with people from their nationality.

Agency for Being, Becoming, and Transformation

Agency for being, becoming, and transformation is more related to individuals' implicit needs and identity (see Figure 3). Agency for explicit needs and agency for being, becoming, and transformation depend on each other for one's success and maturity (Doyal & Gough, 1984). These two forms of agency are systematic and interwoven (Doyal & Gough, 1984). In this form of agency, individuals, as self-formed agents, proactively cultivate their development in context and transform the context (Marginson, 2014; Sen, 1985; Tran & Vu, 2018). It involves individuals' proactive engagement in their life course (Elder Jr., 1998). In this life course, an individual's life brings about new ways of thinking, navigating, and negotiating their "pattern and dynamic" due to various contexts (Elder Jr., 1998, p. 1).

Figure 3 Agency for Being, Becoming, and Transformation

Agency for Being, Becoming, and Transformation
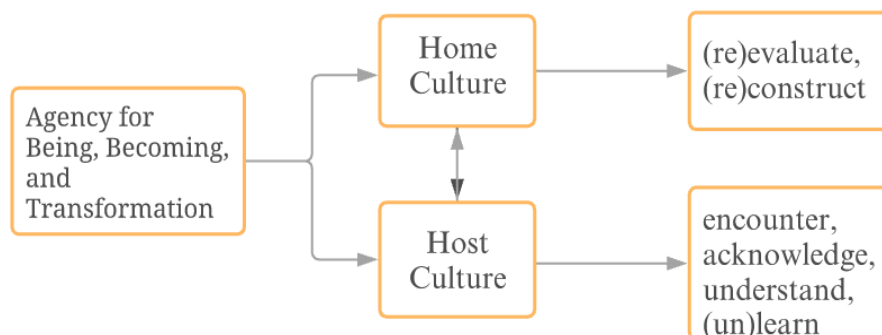
International students cultivate their development and construct their life course (Tran & Vu, 2018). International student agency is defined as

a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its

habitual aspect), but also oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative

possibilities) and toward the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future

projects within the contingencies of the moment). (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 963).

International students have a mix of identities, which are (trans)formed by their past, present, and future (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Tran & Vu, 2018). International student identity is in full complexity and fluidity, which is situated in different times, spaces, and contexts (Marginson, 2014; Torres-Olave & Lee, 2020).

The process of agency for being, becoming, and transformation is how international students encounter, acknowledge, understand, (re)construct, (un)learn, negotiate, and (re)define their contexts and identities in their life course (Sakamoto, 2006). International students' past experiences and home culture shape their being. This being is fluid and flexible, situated in

different states and transnational mobility (Sakamoto, 2006; Tran & Vu, 2018). International

students' becoming is oriented toward their future, which is also influenced by the host

community and the reevaluation of their home country (Tran & Vu, 2018). International students

become valuable members of the host community by actively engaging in community service,

organizations, and other volunteer activities (Tran & Vu, 2018). These activities not only shape

students' becoming but also provide a positive influence on host communities. In addition,

international students' negotiation, particularly cultural negotiation, shapes their becoming.

Through cultural negotiation, international students' being and becoming pave the way for

transformation (Sakamoto, 2006; Tran & Vu, 2018). This transformation includes not only

students' self-transformation but also the transformation of contexts.

Relational Agency

Relational agency involves a collective capacity to ask for or provide support due to

(dis)engagement of actors within various contexts (Edwards, 2005; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998).

The relatedness refers to one's desire to "feel connected to others–to love and care, and to be

loved and cared for" (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 231). Internally, because of the consciousness of

something, agency involves different ways of experiencing things by actors entering

relationships with "persons, places, meanings, and events" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 973).

Externally, agency involves actual interactions with various contexts. As Emirbayer and Mische

(1998) claimed, "agency is always a dialogical process by and through which actors immersed in

temporal passage engage with others within collectively organized contexts of action" (p. 974).

One's agency is not only about an individual's effort but also relates to access resources and

institutional and societal factors (Edwards, 2005; Tran & Vu, 2018). The relational agency

between students and other sectors helps students seek out resources and provide resources for

others within the existing system or structure (Edwards, 2005). The relational agency includes

agency as resistance, resilience, and hope and collective agency for negotiation and interruption.

Agency as Struggle, Resistance, Resilience, and Hope

The form of agency as struggle, resistance, resilience, and hope (see Figure 4) entails

various ways of experiencing the life course within different contexts when agents have to

confront contradictory and emergent problems (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Tran & Vu, 2018).

One's agency always acts toward something, which means actors "enter into relationship with

surrounding persons, places, meaning, and events" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 973).

Relational agency shifts the focus from individuals to joint action and the impact between and

across systems (Edwards, 2005). Social interaction and communication are essential components

of agency as struggle, resistance, resilience, and hope (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998).

Figure 4 Agency as Struggle, Resistance, Resilience, and Hope

Agency as Struggle, Resistance, Resilience, and Hope
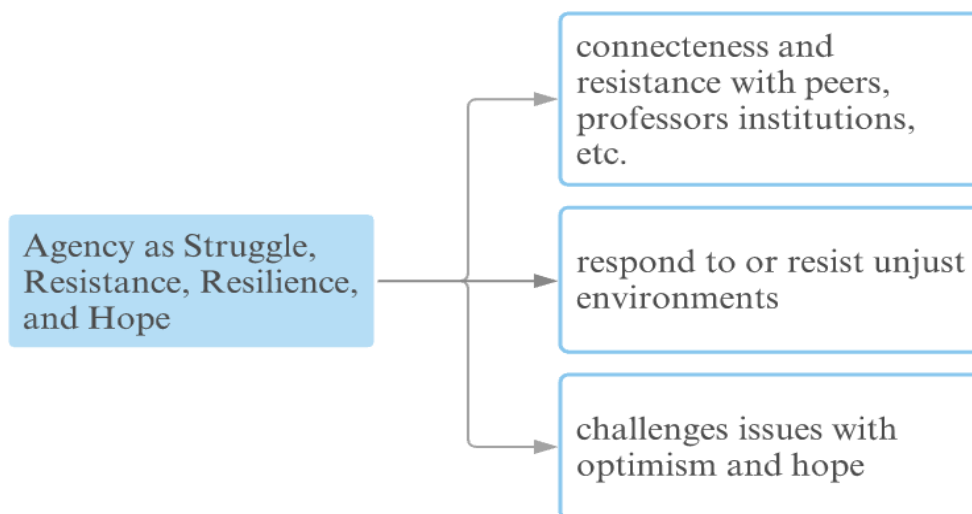
Agency is something that people do to "be *achieved* in and through engagement with

particular temporal-relational contexts-for-action" (Biesta & Tedder, 2007, p. 136). Specifically,

for the study, the form of the agency refers to international students' capacity to *respond to* and *resist* unjust environments and challenging issues with optimism and hope (Tran & Vu, 2018). Furthermore, resilience and hope are important for the form of agency. Resilience refers to one's capacity and ability to respond to challenging situations (Sabouripour & Rosian, 2015). It does not mean individuals passively adapt to difficult situations but respond to hostile situations with initiative, optimism, and hope (Sabouripour & Rosian, 2015). Resilience leads to increasing independence and capacity to support others (Edwards, 2005).

Individuals with this form of agency exhibit connectedness and resistance with peers, professors, and institutions and demonstrate strong involvement in the community (Sabouripour & Rosian, 2015). They present various approaches to exercise agency as struggle, resistance, resilience, and hope (Edwards, 2005; Tran & Vu, 2018). For example, one can present thinking, observing, repositioning, and acting toward the incident (Tran & Vu, 2018). International students with the agency tend to reflect and share their perspectives on any deficits they found or encountered in classrooms and institutions (Nguyet Nguyen & Robertson, 2020).

Collective Agency for Negotiation and Interruption

The relational agency encourages and involves a capacity to seek and offer help from others (Edwards, 2005). Collective agency for negotiation and interruption (see Figure 5), as the development of mutual responsibilities, shifts individual focus to collaboration focus. The form of agency not only requires students to collaborate with one another but also requires collaboration across organizations and communities (Edwards, 2005). Collective agency for negotiation and interruption refers to individuals seeking collective action to negotiate and interrupt systemic and epistemic injustice and inequity. Students spend time and energy

developing friendships with their peers, engaging in organizations, and promoting networks in organizations and the community (Hopwood, 2010).

Figure 5 Collective Agency for Negotiation and Interruption

Collective Agency for Negotiation and Interruption
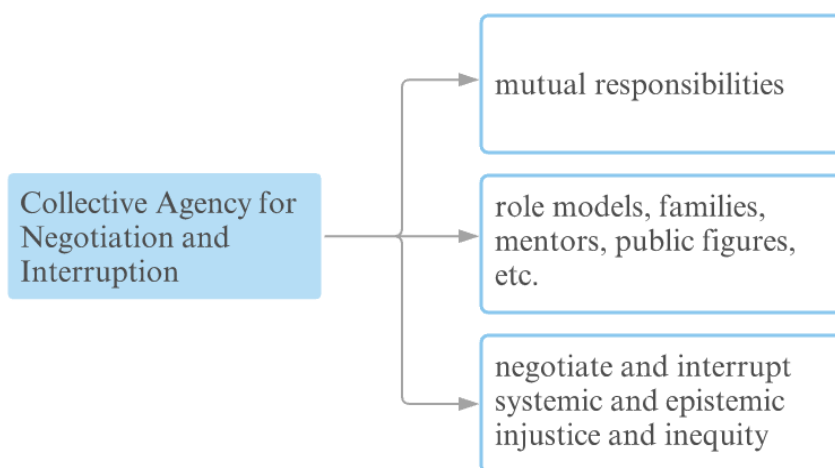
Students demonstrate their agency by using their relationships and connections to seek support in their life course (Hopwood, 2010). With their agency and resilience, individuals tend to prevent themselves from being passive or powerless to connect with others who encountered the same situations to seek support for the collective contestation (Hopwood, 2010; Tran & Vu, 2018). As one develops their relationships, their relationships work back on them (Hopwood, 2010). In addition, role models, like families, mentors, and public figures, are essential in students' development. These role models have featured in students' thoughts, which they like to follow and seek support in their life course (Hopwood, 2010).

Agency indicates the quality of one's engagement with "temporal-relational contexts-for-action" (Biesta & Tedder, 2007, p. 136). Agency underscores that one acts not only in an environment but by *means* of environments, which leads to the fluctuations of the agency. This fluctuation of the agency is also a result of learning that one brings about past experiences to bear on the present and is oriented toward the future (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). The achievement of the agency requires individual efforts and available resources within a particular ecology (Biesta & Tedder, 2007).

Chapter Summary

The literature reviewed in this chapter illustrates the four historical stages of Chinese international students studying in the United States and how (neo)racism and colonialism are embedded in the process. Specifically, it demonstrates the rationales for the U.S. government recruiting Chinese students and the rationales for the Chinese government and students' experiences. In particular, the chapter focuses on examining the racial structure, systemic racism, and colonialism hidden in international education. Additionally, neo-racism underscores that Chinese international students' experiences related to discrimination, isolation, and threats are based on their culture, nationality, and stereotypes. Last, the individual and relational agency theoretical framework is adapted to turn to a different angle in which how Chinese international students act their agency to respond to these experiences.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used for this study is narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) with the constructivist research paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This chapter began with a brief statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the significance of the study. I then laid out the research design and the narrative inquiry as the methodology in detail used for the purpose of the study. Furthermore, I explained how narrative inquiry was used to guide the research and the mechanics of the study, i.e., participant selection, data collection, data analysis, and ethical consideration. Finally, the chapter concluded with a discussion of the limitations and delimitations of the study.

Statement of the Problem

China has remained the top international student-sending country to the United States (IIE, 2019). Chinese international students have contributed to economic benefits, global competence, diverse cultures, and human capital (Cantwell, 2015; Chen et al., 2019; Glass & Lee, 2018; Lee et al., 2017). Yet, the motivation of international students studying in the United States and the recruitment are framed in a global imaginary rooted in colonialism (Stein & de Andreotti, 2016) and neoliberalism (Bamberger et al., 2019). In this global imaginary, Western higher education connects to Western supremacy and is positioned as a desirable product (Stein & de Andreotti, 2016); international students are framed as cash cows, objects, competitors, threats, and the other (Stein & de Andreotti, 2016).

Chinese international students have encountered various challenges while studying in the United States. Many researchers address the challenges Chinese international students have, including but not limited to language/linguistic barriers, social interactions with American peers,

and isolation and discrimination from peers and the community (Guo & Guo, 2017; Heng, 2017; Will, 2019). There is a lack of research on Chinese students' needs, struggles, being, becoming, and transformation as human beings and how they enact their agency to navigate these experiences, particularly experiences related to neo-racism. Neo-racism "justifies discrimination based on cultural difference or national origin rather than by physical characteristics alone and appeals to "natural" tendencies to preserve group cultural identity" (Lee, 2006, p. 4).

Purpose and Research Questions

The narrative study aimed to examine and explore Chinese international graduate students' formal and informal learning experiences while studying in the United States in a neo-racism context and how they enact their agency to respond to these experiences. In a study of learning environments, researchers often explore the interplay of formal (in-class) and informal (out-of-class) learning environments. For this study, *formal learning environment* refers to teaching, learning, and assessment activities and models organized around various content areas, topics, and resources in the classroom (Leask, 2009). Adopted from Leask (2009), I define *informal learning environment* as the learning environment where international students are involved in various activities and practices with their peers, community members, campus organizations, and professors on campus and off-campus in an unstructured way. To me, these activities and practices are not part of the formal requirements of the degree; however, it is more relevant to personal relationship building, which contributes to or unveils cultural negotiation.

Furthermore, I described and documented tensions, misunderstandings, and struggles that Chinese international students have encountered in their learning. Finally, this study aimed to explore how Chinese international graduate students navigated and negotiated these experiences with their sense of agency. This study builds on the previous studies on Asian international

students experiencing verbal assaults, xenophobia, and physical violence (Lee, 2020; Lee & Rice, 2007; Lee et al., 2017), and it advances the knowledge by exploring how Chinese international students enact their agency on their behalf to navigate learning experiences and experiences of neo-racism (Lee, 2006; Marginson, 2014; Tran & Vu, 2018).

The following research questions will guide this study:

1. How do Chinese international graduate students at U.S. higher education institutions enact their agency in their learning experiences?

    a. How do Chinese international graduate students describe agency in their *formal* and *informal* learning experiences?

    b. How do Chinese international graduate students respond to learning experiences related to neo-racism?

Research Design

This qualitative study utilized a paradigm of constructivism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018) to seek to understand the formal and informal learning experiences of Chinese international students while studying in the United States and how these students navigated their experiences with the sense of agency. The constructivist philosophy claims that learning not only happens in the classroom but also occurs when learners discover and construct knowledge through experimentation and doing (Doğru & Kalender, 2007). Learning is embedded in "realistic and relevant contexts" (Honebein, 1996, p. 11). Constructivists hold that reality is subjective due to the variety of individual perspectives and narratives (Adom et al., 2016). Knowledge is constructed through lived experiences and interactions with one another. At the same time, one is shaped by their lived experiences, which means one cannot separate what they know and who they are (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). As Denzin and Lincoln (2018) claim, researchers need to

participate in the investigation process with participants to ensure knowledge production reflects their reality. The study began with open-ended inquiry to explore individuals' learning experiences and the navigation of these experiences with the sense of agency.

Six Chinese international graduate students were recruited through social media. The research questions were addressed through three phases of interviews. The first interview was focused on Chinese international graduate students' *formal* experiences. The second interview was focused on their *informal* experiences. The third interview was focused on how participants restoried their experiences and perceived their growth. Each phase of the interview was less than 60 minutes. There was a journal entry between every two interviews. Participants could reflect on their interview and add something they might remember later in each journal entry. The interview protocol was developed with a foundation on the individual and relational agency theoretical framework adapted from Edwards (2005), Marginson (2014), Sen (1985), Tran and Vu (2018), and Hopwood (2010) to explore Chinese graduate international students' experiences, experiences of neo-racism, and their actions of the agency.

Research Methodology

Narrative inquiry methodology (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) was used to explore and understand Chinese international graduate students' experiences while studying in U.S. higher education institutions. Narrative inquiry is both a phenomenon and method in that experience is what researchers study, and researchers study it narratively. Narrative thinking is an important form of experience and a way of writing it (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Individuals lead their lives and tell stories of their lives, whereas researchers collect, describe, and write narratives of their stories and experiences. Narrative inquiry as the methodology is an essential tool to help researchers to understand individuals' experiences and think those experiences "beyond the

black box" by living daily lives and constructing stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). Rappaport (1993) notes that "Stories order experience, give coherence and meaning to events and provide a sense of history and of the future" (p. 240).

In this study, Chinese international graduate students were storytellers. Kramp (2004) notes, "stories preserve our memories, prompt our reflections, connect us with our past and present, and assist us to envision our future" (p. 107). I paid attention to Chinese international graduate students' narratives related to formal and informal learning experiences and the role of agency in their negotiating experiences. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) claim "narrative is the best way of representing and understanding experience" (p. 18). Narrative inquiry is a "form of narrative experience" (p. 19). Chinese international graduate students' experiences were what I studied, and I studied them narratively because "narrative thinking is a key form of experience and a key way of writing and thinking about it" (p. 18).

Temporality, people, action, certainty, and context are five tensions for narrative thinking (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Temporality, as a central feature, means that any event has a past, present, and implied future. We think of an event not only at the moment but also "as an expression of something happening over time" (p. 29). People are always in a process of personal change(s), which leads to the importance of narrating individuals in terms of the process. People are considered "embodiments of lived stories" (p. 43). An action is regarded as a narrative sign. For example, a student's performance on a test is a narrative sign of something. In order to understand the narrative interpretation of the sign, teachers need to know the student's learning history. Certainty indicates that "interpretations of events can always be otherwise" (p. 31). That means that there is a tentativeness about an event's meaning with knowing different

possibilities and interpretations. The attitude is to identify one of doing their best under different circumstances.

Context includes the notions of temporal context, spatial context, and context of other people. In the study, there was tension over the narrative histories of Chinese international students studying in the United States and how these histories impacted their narrative stories in the process of their personal changes. Constructivists hold that one does not only adopt information passively from others (formal) but restructures their own information with their experiences under different conditions (informal) (Doğru & Kalender, 2007). Students' navigation and negotiation actions with their agency are interpreted as expressions of formal and informal learning experiences and narrative histories. The conceptualization of formal and informal learning contexts allows me to consider the different roles played in Chinese graduate international students' experiences and narratives. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) claim, "*the person* in context is of prime interest" (p. 32).

These five tensions are important to narrative thinking. The tensions and relevant ways of thinking are not mutually exclusive but overlap with one another (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The five tensions lead to three commonplaces of narrative inquiry space: temporality, sociality, and place, which I used to explore participants' lived experiences and told stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Temporality means events in a past, present, and future continuity. It is essential to situate events in a constant process and temporal transition. Sociality means the relationships between researchers and participants with a personal (e.g., feelings, hopes, desires, reactions, and moral dispositions) and social balance (e.g., existential conditions, environment, surrounding factors, and forces). This commonplace allowed me to focus not only on Chinese international graduate students' thoughts and feelings but also focus on social conditions,

structures, and processes. Place is the "specific concrete, physical, and topological boundaries of place where the inquiry and events take place" (pp. 480-481). In the study, I paid attention to different places where Chinese international graduate students' stories and their negotiation actions happened.

Data Collection Methods

For a narrative inquiry study, data can be in the form of interviews, observations, field notes, and storytelling (Clandinin & Connelly 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom to fully describe and explore participants' experiences. A semi-structured interview was culturally appropriate because it paid attention to participants' voices and stories. Interview transcripts and relationships between researchers and participants became ongoing narrative records (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The researchers and participants were co-constructors of knowledge, understanding, and of interpreting lived experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). During interviews, field notes were taken for participant observation (Clandinin & Connelly 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). These field notes were an active reconstruction of stories rather than a passive recording since I was able to observe facial expressions and body language (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). I used semi-structured interviews with complementary journal entries to explore six Chinese international graduate students' formal and informal learning experiences and how they described their agency to navigate and negotiate with those experiences.

Interview Protocol and Journal Entry

The interview protocols were based on the individual and relational agency theoretical framework adapted from Edwards (2005), Hopwood (2010), and Tran and Vu (2018): agency for explicit needs, agency for being, becoming, and transformation, agency as struggle, resistance,

resilience, and hope, and collective agency for negotiation and interruption in different forms of

neo-racism (Lee, 2006). There were Chinese and English versions of each interview protocol.

Participants chose their preferred language, English or Chinese. Each phase of the interview was

less than 60 minutes. There was a journal entry between every two interviews. In the first journal

entry (see Appendix G for the Chinese version and Appendix I for the English version),

participants were asked to reflect on their first interview and add anything that they might forget

to mention in the interview. In the second journal entry (see Appendix H for the Chinese version

and Appendix J for the English version), participants were asked to reflect on their second

interview and add anything they might forget to mention in the second interview. The questions

in each journal entry were changed based on the first two interviews.

The first interview protocol (see Appendix A for the Chinese version and Appendix D for

the English version) was specifically focused on formal experiences. Interview questions

included general queries on participants' demographic information, such as time coming to the

United States, major, and overall learning experiences. The first interview protocol also invited

participants to answer questions in the form of describing stories. For example, "Could you tell

me a story that you felt you were exploited or treated unfairly by professors or peers?." There

will be prompts following participants' stories. Treating unfairly as a form of neo-racism (Lee &

Rice, 2007), this question reflects participants' agency as explicit needs because students as

human beings have the needs to be treated fairly (Edwards, 2005; Tran & Vu, 2018).

The second interview protocol (see Appendix B for the Chinese version and Appendix E

for the English version) focused on questions about participants' informal learning experiences.

For example, participants were invited to answer the question, "Could you tell me a story that

you felt you were assaulted by others outside of your classroom?." Another example is, "Could

you tell me a story about how you often seek help in response to those experiences?." This question was based on the collective agency for negotiation and interruption to understand students' informal learning experience (Tran & Vu, 2018).

The third interview protocol (see Appendix C for the Chinese version and Appendix F for the English version) focused on how participants would restory their formal and informal learning experiences and how they perceived their growth. This interview protocol was based on the first two interview protocols and journal entries. The interview questions were changed based on the first two interviews and journal entries. Appendix C and F only provided some basic ideas for interview questions. This restorying could help participants reflect and revisit their experiences across time and place (Kim, 2015).

Selection and Recruitment of Participants

Purposeful sampling could allow narrative inquirers to identify and engage with participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) to understand and interpret the lived experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Purposeful sampling was used for the study to select Chinese international graduate students who have studied in the United States for at least six months and for whom English is not their native language. For the purpose of the study, participants could study at different types of institutions, such as liberal arts or research institutions. I used social media, such as WeChat, Twitter, and Facebook, to connect and recruit participants. The use of purposeful sampling allowed me to receive a rich information about the participants on their formal and informal learning experiences because these selected participants could yield a story that "facilitates an understanding of the actions of others and oneself in relation to others" in specified context (Kim, 2015, p. 157).

The recruitment post (see Appendix K) was drafted and sent through social media and networks. In the post, I included the purpose of my study, the requirements for the participants, and my email. Once I began hearing from the students, I began scheduling virtual interviews and provided the consent form (see Appendix L). I am fluent in both English and Chinese, and I let participants choose their preferred language: Chinese or English. Six participants were recruited for the study. Six is a good number for the study because the narrative study aims to examine past, present, and future dimensions of participants' narratives and stories in depth (Kim, 2015). Delving deeply into each participant's stories allowed me a more comprehensive and nuanced exploration of their experiences and narratives. Chinese (see Appendix A, B, and C) and English (see Appendix D, E, and F) interview protocols were both provided. The three phases of interviews were conducted within three weeks. The first phase of the interview was participants' formal learning experiences, and the second one was informal learning experiences. At the end of the first two interviews, I scheduled participants for the second interview and third interview. Also, I provided journal entry guidance to participants at the end of the first two interviews. Participants needed to complete the journey entry before the next interview.

Data Analysis

Narrative analysis is defined by Riessman (2008) as "a family of methods for interpreting texts" (p. 11). Narrative analysis and interpretation work together to analyze data to develop an understanding of the meanings of participants' lives and surroundings (Kim, 2015). Inquirers tend to interpret meanings through the analysis of "plotlines, thematic structures, and social and cultural referents" (Kim, 2015, p. 190). Lieblich et al. (1998) note that narrative inquirers need to include three voices in the process of data analysis. First, researchers need to pay attention and be sensitive to the voice of the narrator, which is represented by the text or recordings. Second,

researchers need to use a relevant theoretical framework to provide concepts and tools to interpret and make sense of the data. I used the agency theoretical framework to guide me in the process of interpreting participants' stories. The process of interpretation requires justification, which leads to the third voice. Researchers need to have self-awareness and "a reflexive monitoring of the act of reading and interpretation" to draw conclusions from the narratives (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 10). Thus, I used the following approaches to analyze the data with NVivo 12: (1) took field texts during the interview and wrote highlights and summary immediately after completing each interview; (2) used broadening, burrowing, and restorying coding to identify what was happening in the data; (3) used narrative coding to feature narrators' voices and stories for interpretation. The data analysis aimed to find patterns and themes of Chinese international graduate students' experiences and experiences related to neo-racism and how they enacted their agency to respond to those experiences.

Field Text and Summary

Composing and reflecting on field texts could help researchers "be able to 'slip in and out' of the experience being studied, slip in and out of intimacy" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 82). Field texts are "inevitably interpretive texts," which could help me uncover participants' responses in certain ways (p. 94). For example, by different facial expressions, I could ask deeper questions related to it. I constructed observational notes during interviews and reflective notes after interviews to record details and some highlights in participants' narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Video or audio recording was used for all the interviews with participants' permission. After each interview, I wrote a summary and reflective memo related to my research questions. I transcribed all the interviews within one week of each individual interview. After the interview, I sent a summary to the participants for member check due to the collaborative nature

of narrative inquiry and the affirming of one's thinking and perceiving (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The language of all the observational notes, reflective memo, and transcription was based on the participants' preferred language. For example, if participants chose to speak Chinese during the interview, the observational notes, reflective notes, and transcriptions would also be in Chinese. Journal entries served for the purpose of complementary.

Broadening, Burrowing, and Restorying

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) demonstrate three analytical tools for narrative inquiry: broadening, burrowing, and restorying. Broadening means that inquirers make a general description or comment about a participant's characteristics, values, and social, cultural, and historical climate (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Kim, 2015). Broadening could help me understand what kind of a person that participant is and what else I know about the participant regarding their circumstances (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Burrowing means focusing on specific details of the data, such as concentrating on the event, paying more attention to participants' feelings, emotions, and how events impact their feelings and lived experiences Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Kim, 2015). Burrowing helped me understand participants' circumstances and how those circumstances were associated with their lived experiences from their point of view (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). This was carefully done by reading and re-reading observational notes, summaries, journal entries, and transcripts to highlight participants' values, feelings, events, circumstances, etc. I used restorying to capture each participant's story while revisiting their experiences across time and space.

Narrative Coding

In narrative inquiry, stories express "a kind of knowledge that uniquely describes human experience in which actions and happenings contribute positively and negatively to attaining

goals and fulfilling purposes" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 8). After broadening, burrowing, and restorying, I used narrative coding from a *literary* perspective to understand "its storied, structured forms, and to potentially create a richer aesthetic through a retelling" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 132). I focused on participants' narratives to form a story structure following Patterson's (2008) six-part Labovian model. These six elements are abstract (*what*), orientation (*who, when, where*), complicating action (*then what*), evaluation (*so what*), result (*finally what*), and coda (a "sign off" of the narrative) (p. 25). This model could help me reconstruct and retell participants' stories (Kim, 2015). These six elements were important to interpretation since they helped me to understand the meanings of participants' lived stories. Restorying participants' experiences helped me value each participant's diverse experiences of studying and living in the United States and how they enacted their agency in response to those experiences. I also focused on the contexts of participants' narratives because "stories operate within society as much as they are about society" (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009, p. 11).

Reflexivity and Positionality

Research is a shared space and process by researchers and participants (England, 1994). As a Chinese international student, I have been studying in the United States for seven years. As an insider, my identity and positionality shaped the research process. I identify as a first-generation Chinese woman who was born and raised in a small town in northern China. With my parents' dream and my dream, I came to the United States for further education in 2014. At my first university, I stepped out of my comfort zone to make American friends by joining clubs and served in the community. Through my interactions and communication with American friends as well as my experience in the community, I realized that I was considered an "outsider" who did

not understand American movies, and jokes and would go back to my home country after my graduation.

I reflected on my identity and experience as a Chinese international student because I understand the importance of my positionality and reflexivity to the relation between me and the participants (Glesne, 2006). As an insider, participants felt comfortable and safe sharing their stories and experiences. The insider perspective helped me build deeper relationships with participants and understand their situations. Although I shared the same nationality background as the participants, we did have more differences than similarities. The participants embraced heterogeneous backgrounds, such as socioeconomic status, family background, and cultural differences due to regional differences. Thus, there were also some nuances regarding our stories and experiences.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Trustworthiness refers to the quality or rigor of a study, which means "researchers can affirm that their findings are faithful to participants' experiences" (Ravitch & Carl, 2019, p. 186). I used the following approaches to verify the trustworthiness and credibility of my findings. First, I used tactics to help ensure honesty in informants by providing opportunities for participants to choose either participate, refuse, or withdraw at any time and share their stories genuinely (Shenton, 2004). One participant withdrew from the second journal entry because he preferred to have conversations in interviews. Second, I used triangulation by collecting different types of data–interviews, field texts, field notes, and summaries (Creswell, 2007). Third, I used member checks by emailing summaries or transcripts to participants after each interview (Kim, 2015; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participants had one week to review them and email it back. The summary could help participants check the interpretation and accuracy of their stories. Member

checking is not member validation but a collaboration with participants to extend and elaborate analysis (Kim, 2015; Loh, 2013). After completing each interview, I wrote a reflexive journal including my immediate thoughts, reactions, observations, and interpretations of each participant's emotions, behaviors, and expressions. The summary and reflexive journal helped me record my thoughts and interpretations of participants' stories (Shenton, 2004). Lastly, I had frequent peer debriefing sessions with my advisor to seek input and feedback as well as discuss the coding process, findings, and my interpretations (Merriam, 2009).

Consideration of Human Subjects

I took the following measures to protect participants' privacy. Before the interview, I informed participants about the background, the purpose of the study, and the potential risk for the study. I minimized the risk by ensuring voluntary participation, providing a pseudonym, and keeping all the information confidential. Participants could decide when to participate, whether to answer questions and withdraw from the study at any time. All the interviews were conducted via Zoom. They could choose to keep their video on or off. I was sensitive to participants' feelings to create an informal conversational setting.

All the data files, such as field texts, highlights, summaries, and recordings, were secured in a password server space at Old Dominion University. Only the Principal Investigator and the Investigators had access to these data files. Pseudonyms were used during data analysis. I prevented the disclosure of any personal information in participants' responses. All the data files will be stored for five years after completing the study. After five years, all the data files will be destroyed. I masked participants' identities, such as university and biographical data during the writing process. Pseudonyms were also provided for all the participants.

Limitations

Narrative inquiry is an essential research methodology to explore and interpret individuals' stories and experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Yet, this study has some limitations. Participants were interviewed when they had studied for at least six months so that they could experience and reflect on their stories. But participants might not be able to tell the whole story due to the limited interview time. Furthermore, participants might avoid some topics or not tell the exact truth for some reason. The findings in this narrative inquiry study do not aim to generalize the experiences of all Chinese international graduate students' experiences, but to explore nuances of these stories and experiences.

Chapter Conclusion

Chapter Three described the methodology used to explore Chinese international graduate students' experiences in their formal and informal learning environments and how they responded to these experiences with their sense of agency. The research question and interview protocols were based on the agency theoretical framework (Edwards, 2005; Hopwood, 2010; Tran & Vu, 2018). This research question will lead to a better understanding of Chinese international graduate students' formal and informal learning experiences studying in the United States. The primary data collection method was three phases of semi-structured interviews.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This narrative study aimed to examine and explore how Chinese international graduate students act their agency in narrated formal and informal learning experiences in U.S. higher education institutions. Specifically, this study documented, described, and uncovered the tensions, misunderstandings, and struggles related to neo-racism that Chinese international graduate students have in the process of learning. Additionally, this study explored how they described agency and negotiated and navigated those experiences with their agency. Ultimately, this study will discover implications for host institutions bringing curriculum, policy, and instructional changes.

With the methodology of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), this chapter details the formal and informal learning experiences of six Chinese international graduate students studying in the United States in a neo-racism context and how they described as well as acted their agency in their lived experience. After three interviews and reading each participant's journal entries, despite some similar experiences, all the participants had various characteristics and values. These characteristics and values formed their identity and shaped their ways of thinking and doing, such as the ways of navigating and negotiating their struggles and challenges with their agency.

This chapter presents the findings and narratives of the six participants. Three semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant. The first two-round interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes, and the third interview lasted about 30 minutes. Between every two interviews, each participant also had the option to write a journal entry based on the previous interview. A four-step narrative and thematic approach was used for data analysis: (1) field texts

during the interview and highlights and summary after each interview; (2) broadening, burrowing, and restorying coding to identify participant's characteristics, values, and what happened in the data; (3) narrative coding to feature narrator's voices and stories for interpretation; (4) finding patterns and themes of participants acting agency in their formal and informal learning environment as well as their experiences related to neo-racism.

This chapter addresses the research questions: How do Chinese international graduate students at U.S. higher education institutions enact their agency in their learning experiences? How do Chinese international graduate students describe agency in their *formal* and *informal* learning experiences? And how do Chinese international graduate students respond to learning experiences related to neo-racism? I first introduced each participant and told their stories following broadening, burrowing, and restorying (Kim, 2015) as well as temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I then explored the patterns and themes of participants' narratives based on the individual and relationship agency theoretical framework (Edwards, 2005; Marginson, 2014; Sen, 1985; Tran & Vu, 2018).

Meet the Participants

One of my tasks as a researcher is to tell stories (James, 2018). In presenting participants' stories and narratives, I examine the three commonplaces of narrative inquiry space: temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The narrative includes characters, values, contexts (social, cultural, and historical contexts), and transformation (Kim, 2015; Lawler, 2002). The stories and narratives are based on a temporal text – "about what has been, what is now, and what is becoming" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 146). The six participants from various backgrounds came to the United States at different times. One participant went to a

private university for education, and the other five went to public universities. They pursued

majors in social science, education, and STEM (see Table 1).

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Region	University Type	Current Program	1st Year in the US
Jason	Male	Eastern China	Public University	Ph.D. Chemistry	2012
Hai	Male	Northern China	Public University	Ph.D. Public Policy and Administration	2019
Jie	Female	Northwest Western China	Private University	Ed.D. in Educational Leadership	2014
Yingcai	Male	Southern China	Public University	Ph.D. Electrical Engineering	2010
Anne	Female	Northwest Western China	Public University	M.S. Human-Computer Interaction Design	2014
Xue	Male	Northern China	Public University	Ph.D. Learning Design Technology	2017

At the writing stage, Jason, Jie, and Anne have graduated from their university; Hai,

Yingcai, and Xue are still in their doctoral program. Jason's advisor was from China who was

more likely to push him to work. Jason's current supervisor is from India who gives him more

work for his employment. Hai's advisor is from the United States and is supportive to his

academics. Jie's advisor and professors were from the United States. They did not understand the

challenges that Jie encountered. Xue transferred to a different institution because of intense

relationship with his previous Chinese advisor. His current Chinese advisor helped him transfer

to his current institution. Yingcai described that his American advisor was not responding his

email often. Anne's American advisor and professors did not understand the limitations and challenges that she experienced as an international student, which caused her to transfer to a different program at her university.

Getting to Know Yingcai

Yingcai came to the United States in 2010. He went to a public institution for B.S. in Electrical Engineering. After completing his undergraduate degree, he worked in a large technology company. Now he is a Ph.D. student in Electrical Engineering at a public research university. He was born in the south of China where things are very underdeveloped and came from very humble beginnings. Yingcai made his decision to study in the United States when he was a high school student despite his humble background. He did not get support from his family, so he had to raise all the funds for himself by applying for scholarships, finding jobs, and borrowing money. He could pursue a Ph.D. degree with saving from a technological company and a five-year fellowship from his school.

Due to his humble background and lack of family support, Yingcai had to work hard and study hard. When he was an undergraduate, he had to do multiple part-time jobs to pay for his tuition and living fees. He described that he had so many assignments and was almost "tired to death" in the first year of his Ph.D. For one of his courses, he had to watch a two-hour-long video before the class, but the class discussion was not related to the video. There were quizzes, assignments, four big projects, and three exams. He also had to take the other two courses. There was no time for him to sleep. In his spare time, he likes to read newspapers and books, listen to YouTubers, and watch videos about successful people.

Reflecting on his experiences in the United States, Yingcai articulated that his past experiences influence what he is doing right now and will continue to influence his future.

Yingcai further described that U.S. and Chinese cultures have influenced and shaped his identity and worldviews. The U.S. culture had a big influence on him in the first two years. Everything was new and appealing to him. He liked to eat sandwiches and pizza, watch football, and hang out with Americans. Yet, Yingcai started to change in his junior year, and he did not want to do those things anymore. Yingcai described that he is more Chinese than ever now. He could not remember the last time he was talking to an American friend because most of them had different interests. Yingcai likes history, science, and conducting research, which he feels those topics most Americans are not knowledgeable about when it comes to their culture. He likes talking to Chinese people "because they're knowledgeable and intelligent…at least…they are humbler when they talk." Yingcai considers himself not tied to American culture. Instead, he is very proud of his Chinese culture and satisfied with his cultural choices. He has learned that in the United States, it is important to self-advocate to be successful. He described himself as "aggressive and confrontational." In his journal entry, he described that he learned to stick up for himself and not take insults from other people.

Getting to Know Hai

Hai came to the United States to pursue Ph.D. in Public Policy and Administration at a public research institution in 2019. He received his bachelor's and master's degrees in China. Hai had a positive attitude toward life. He understood that pursuing a Ph.D. was not easy, but he believed that there was nothing he cannot conquer with his efforts. When asked about his perception of working hard, he said that working hard was a kind of relativity, "When you compare with the person who works harder than you, you are not working hard enough, and vice versa." Working hard was a way to gain respect from others.

Hai's experiences have been shaped by cultural, political, and historical contexts. There is an old Chinese saying, "为他人着想," which means thinking of others with empathy. With this in mind, Hai thought for others in his daily life. Hai lived in an apartment off campus. Sometimes his neighbors hosted parties at night, the music was very loud, and the people walked back and forth with heavy steps. Despite the noisiness, Hai explained that this was not their fault because the wood structure of the apartment could not prevent noise. They did not do this on purpose to force him not to sleep. Hai used the economic term "negative externality" to explain the situation. Compared with his past, Hai described that his horizon "gets expanded." He likes to make friends with people from different countries as well as to learn and respect cultural differences and diversity. Regarding his perceptions of culture and his changes, he articulated,

我觉得来到这之后，我的 horizon gets expanded，得到了扩展，然后也同时通过结识其他国家的朋友，了解了多元的那种文化差异，同时对文化和背景也更加了解和尊重。我认为没有必要就是说哪个文明比较优越，就是说一定要深思熟虑，每个文化每个国家的文明都有好的，有不好的，就是兼收并蓄吧。

[English Translation]

After I came here [the United States], my horizon gets expanded, and I think that I have learned so much about the diversity of different cultures by making friends from other countries that I have a better understanding and respect for these cultures and their backgrounds. I don't think it is legitimate to say which civilization is superior, or rather; [we must] think twice because there are favorable and unfavorable aspects in every culture and every country. It's all about being inclusive.

US-China geopolitical tensions have influenced Hai's experience in the United States. Hai described that he was from "the enemy country" from the American's perspective. The countries' relationships will affect personal relationships. Hai noted that sometimes he felt "怪怪的" (weird). He further explained the weirdness,

在课堂上或者是其他时候，跟别人聊关于 China 的，他们聊到 China 反正又不说中国好，在你心里你能觉得不怪吗? 特别是当你身处到一个就是很多人以你的国家以你的祖国为敌的一个环境里。他们聊到你的国家，肯定大概率不会说你这国家有多好，都是从一种负面的角度去聊。

[English Translation]

When people are talking about China in or after class, they usually speak ill of China. Don't you feel weird, especially when you are in an environment where many people feel hostile to your country? When they talk about your country, they probably won't talk about how great your country is, but in a negative way.

Despite US-China geopolitical tensions and the weirdness, Hai made friends within his department and supported one another. Hai also appreciated his advisor's support and guidance. Regarding his identity and sense of belonging, Hai noted that a sense of belonging is the cognition of one's identity. Similar characteristics are important to one's sense of belonging. Hai described that he had a deeper sense of belonging to his university, but not the United States. These past two years have helped Hai's growth, including 学术 (academic), 见识 (horizon), and 为人处事 (ways of being and doing). For example, due to certain historical incidents, Hai did not like Japan, but when he met Japanese students, he changed his mind and could get along well with Japanese students.

Getting to Know Anne

From a middle-class family in Northern China with a passion for Graphic Design, Anne came to the United States in 2014 to seek B.A. in Graphic Design. After graduating, she went to a public research institution for M.S. in Human-Computer Interaction Design. In China, Anne never left her family to live on her own. Traveling to the United States was the first time Anne left her family. She described that studying and living abroad is like "历练" (practice and experience), seeing different cultures, and meeting different people.

Anne has a unique and positive perspective on life. For example, when asked whether she had ever been overlooked, she described that she did not consider it to be a slight, but "单纯的不和" (just not getting along). Anne believed that overlook was based on a person who needed attention or support from another person; if another person did not provide any response, the person would feel overlooked. Anne noted that she was looking for a person who had the same worldview regardless of cultural differences, so she did not consider it an overlook but the way to manage her own life and how to make it better. In her previous university, Anne recalled that she was frequently "forgotten" by her American roommates. She said "她们也不是不友善，她们只是想不起来有个你," which means that they are friendly, but they just do not remember you. When Anne's American roommates went to the grocery with their friends, they never ask her if she needed to go with them although Anne did not have a car. Anne likes self-reflection, so she thought the reason they did not take her as she did not ask for help. Therefore, Anne considered it "双向的一种差错" (mistakes from mutual sides).

Anne was very shy in high school, but she decided to walk out of her comfort zone to make American friends when she arrived in the United States. She described sarcastically that her conversations with American students in the first semester were very awkward. The

conversations only include three topics: What's your name? Where are you from? And what's your major?. After the three questions, she did not know what to ask. Despite the awkwardness, Anne insisted on having conversations with others, reflect their conversations, and "研究脑回路" (She began to consider how American thinks). From her conversations and interactions with one of her American friends, Anne learned that she had to see the true meaning behind the conversations due to cultural differences:

> 比如说在国内的说话, 你要是觉得这东西不错, 就肯定说还行吧, 还不错, 挺好. 但你要敢在美国说 pretty good, 人家绝对觉得你对他有什么意见. 人家要问你 how was it, 你要说"pretty good,"那你一定是挺不满意的, 是非常勉强的.

> [English Translation]

> For example, if you think something is good in China, you will say it's ok, not bad, or pretty good. But if you say something is pretty good in the US, other people will think you had some problem with them. If other people ask you "How was it," you said, "Pretty good," then you must be not satisfied and very reluctant.

The past experiences have shaped Anne's being and doing in different stages. Anne described that she had different needs regarding language, communications, relationship building, and career. Anne needed language support the most in her first semester to have conversations with people and understand the lecture. She recalled that she was more likely to make some language and grammar mistakes in the first semester. For example, she wanted to say *subway* but said *underground* instead, or she pronounced *grandma* and *grammar* the same. In graduate school, Anne did not have many language difficulties, but she liked to study and reflect on how people's brain works, why they said things in a certain way, and why sometimes the things she said would cause misunderstandings. Despite Anne coming from a middle-class

family, she needs to find part-time jobs and graduate assistant positions to pay for her tuition and living fees.

Reflecting on her identity, Anne described her identity as "留学生" (a student studying abroad) is never changed. The things that have been changed are her thinking and doing. In the beginning, as a "liu xue sheng," Anne needed to adjust to the environment. Yet, Anne started to realize that she needed to experience things fully and fight for her rights and career. Based on different experiences, she could seek or extend something new. For example, Anne advocated herself through an e-portfolio, resume, and cover letter to get a graduate teaching assistant position. Furthermore, beyond her obligations, she provided suggestions on changing classroom structure and assignments, which led her to become an instructor at her university.

The past and present experiences shape Anne's expectations of the future and future experiences. Anne decided to go back to China, but she did not think going back to China was going home. She explained that if you think going back to China is like going home, you will subconsciously think everything is going to be easier, but it is not the case. Instead, Anne described going back to China as going abroad for a second time. Going back to China is a place of change for her. Anne needs to go through "unlearn and relearn processes" in this *place*.

Getting to Know Xue

Xue, who is from a rural area in Northern China came to the United States in 2017 to pursue EdD in Learning Design Technology. Due to the lack of support from his advisor, Xue had to transfer to another public institution to pursue a Ph.D. in Learning Design Technology. Coming from a small town, Xue had to travel about 100 miles to go to middle school. Since then, he has learned to be independent, do laundry, and live by himself. This also helped him have a

smooth transition to the United States. Xue described himself as an independent, self-learner, and hard worker.

Meanwhile, Xue also has various struggles in his academic journey, especially the COVID-19 has worsened his struggles. He described three primary struggles in his academic life: losing social connections with his peers and professors, the knowledge gap in his schoolwork and GA work, and mutual push from his advisor and himself. Confronted with these struggles and challenges, Xue chose to watch some comedy shows and run outdoors. He also asked for school counseling for help when he felt depressed about his academic life.

The same with Hai, Xue also has a positive attitude toward life. Xue values the opportunity that he can study in the United States and work as a graduate assistant. Learning new things and self-improvement made him happy and satisfied. Furthermore, past experiences impacted Xue to have low expectations of his university. He felt satisfied with the opportunities to access the school library and recreational center. In his current university, Xue believed the role of students is valued. He further stated that,

> 学校的主体是学生，学生的角色非常重要。每个学校都有 student center building，然后像这样一些还有专门的学生社团，这些组织学生的声音是能被听到的，然后他们是会对学校的政策产生很大的影响。另一方面不管是在 student center 还是 rec center，好多地方都是学生在服务，因为都是学生在服务，所以那个距离感会很小。

> [English Translation]

> The main body of the university is students, who play an important role. Every university has a student center building and some student societies and clubs. The voices of these organizations can be heard, and they have a big influence on university decision-making.

Moreover, the student center or recreation center is served by students, so you don't feel a sense of distance or disconnection because students are serving.

Xue's values and low expectations shape his sense of belonging in the university. He felt he belonged at his current university because university offices showed respect and professionalism and provided resources to help him solve problems. For example, he described, "I am respected when I communicated with some departments…The international officers are very friendly to help me solve problems." On the other hand, Xue identified himself as a foreigner and has a low sense of belonging in the United States. Reflecting on his past and present, Xue described himself as enjoying being alone and enduring hardship. His communication skills have been improved in interactions with people from different cultures and backgrounds. Affected by past experiences in China and the present in the United States, Xue moved beyond himself into his future and shifted his paths to where he is going and how he can get there from where he was in the past and is at present. He stated, "不求大富大贵，只求受人尊重，有尊严就好" (I do not pursue being rich, but to be respected by others with dignity).

Getting to Know Jason

Jason came from Eastern China, where he received his M.S. in Chemistry Education in 2012. In the same year, he went to a public research institution to pursue Ph.D. in Chemistry in the United States. Now Jason is in a post-doc position at his OPT (Optional Practical Training). Since college, Jason knew he would study in the United States, so he spent much time learning English. Jason values learning and knowledge. He described himself as 谦逊 (humble), 认真 (diligent), and 努力 (hardworking). Being an international student, Jason must work really hard to have more publications and achievements to find a sponsored job and get a green card.

Working with a Chinese supervisor, Jason was pushed and had to push himself to work even harder. Despite the push from his supervisor, Jason has a thoughtful heart and understands his supervisor has more pressure because he must have more publications and apply for funding. On the other hand, Jason also appreciated the busyness and stress because he can produce beneficial results:

一般就是活儿相对多一些，但是呢, good things 是文章比较多，有十几篇文章，这个也算是比较 benefit 的，你干完活以后就没有东西了。关键就看你自己是怎么 take on 这个 job, effort, 和 task 的东西了。

[English Translation]

Often, there is a lot of work to do. However, the good thing is that I can have more articles, more than ten articles, which is very beneficial. As soon as the work is done, there is nothing to do. The key thing is how you perceive to take on the job, effort, and task.

Jason has various struggles and needs at different stages. He described himself as being shy in the first semester. Although he needed support, Jason did not ask professors for help. It was not easy for him to survive in the first semester. Jason recalled, "就自己硬着头皮自己往前冲，可能算是完成了任务，但现在回来看可以做得更好, 但是你没办法。第一个学期能 survive 就不错了" (I just pushed myself through to complete the task; however, I think I can do better now. I was helpless at that time. It was good enough that I could survive in the first semester). Jason also worked as a graduate teaching assistant (GTA) in his first year. Knowing some English, he had to spend time learning the English terminology of the chemical instruments. The first year was very tough for Jason. As a GTA, he had to learn by himself, teach students, and complete his school at the same time. Due to a lack of transportation, Jason spent

most of his time studying and staying in the lab. Finally, Jason bought a car in 2017, but he described his car as a "摆设" (decoration) because he did not have free time to do things he liked. He recalled,

老板可能比较 push 的话，我就其他什么事都做不了，比如说谈个恋爱啊，逛一个 mall 啊。周六周日想去玩一玩啊，去 out of state 的地方啊。我整个在 XX 呆了这么久，我看海就只看了 3 次，简直是 unbelievable. 我当时 mall 在哪都不知道，后来 17 年的时候也有车了，基本上车就放着跟摆设一样，因为天天就做实验。所以说没满足的就是希望自己能有多一点的 free time，能多有一些自己的生活。因为我科研的确是很辛苦，没办法。

[English Translation]

If the supervisor is very pushed, I can't do anything else, such as dating, going to a mall, going out on weekends, or going out of state. I have stayed in XX for a long time, but I only went to the beach three times, which was unbelievable. I even had no clue where the mall was. I had a car in 2017, but my car was a decoration for me because I was busy with lab work every day. I wish I could have a bit freer time so that I could have my own life. Doing scientific research is very exhausting, but there is no other way around it.

Reflecting on his identity, Jason considered himself a humble, diligent, and well-rounded person who had experienced cultural shock, cultural conflict, and cultural changes. From an underdeveloped area in China, Jason felt shocked when he drank water from the water fountain, and he did not need to ask for professors' approval to go to the restroom in the United States. Jason stated that he had been Americanized in some ways and must make certain changes if he wanted to stay in the United States; however, he was closer to the Chinese regarding network and diet. Jason has transitioned from half-independent to fully independent in his journey. His

past experiences at universities in China and the United States have strengthened his

independence in the present and his expectations for the future.

Getting to Know Jie

From Western China, Jie came to the United States to pursue M.Ed. in Curriculum and

Instruction at a Christian university in 2014. Jie worked for one year after graduation, then went

to a private institution to pursue Ed.D. in Educational Leadership. Now she is working in the K-

12 setting. Jie's experiences have been shaped by her characteristics, cultural and political

contexts. Her identity has been changed from dependent to fully independent, impatient to

patient, 玻璃心 (a fragile heart) to 平常心 (a calming heart).

Not from an English, religious, or educational background, Jie had many struggles in her

master's program. Jie did not think she was a hard worker despite studying around 2 am and

getting up at 5 am to work during her master's program. She described that she was super tired

and had no energy to go out on weekends. At the beginning of each class, professors would read

bible verses or bible stories, which Jie could not understand, and felt isolated from that

environment. Not from an English major background, Jie had difficulties understanding the

textbooks, which caused spending much more time looking up words in the dictionary. Jie

described herself as 爱面子 (loving face). Although she needed help, Jie never asked her peers

for help because she did not want other people to think she was not good at English. On the other

hand, asking for help in English was difficult.

After the first semester, Jie was really depressed. She had insomnia and did not want to

talk to anyone. Without support from their family, Jie was super sad because her parents could

not understand her situation. After a few months, Jie decided to change and not give up. She

recalled,

我有长达 3 个月吃不下饭，然后就是失眠，白天没有精力，不想跟人说话，恐惧社交。每天只想呆在房间里。那将近 4 个月我记得我经常就跟爸妈打电话，每次打就不停的哭。然后每天早上打工，自己在厕所里就开始坐在马桶上哭，精神接近崩溃边缘上。后来我长期这样，我父母也不知道该怎么帮我。我爸生气地对我说这样闹他也受不了，在美国呆不下去就滚回来。一开始我很伤心也很难过和生气，因为我觉的我父母完全不能理解我的处境，但是我后来仔细想了想，自己不能就这么沉沦下去，被现实打败，自己要对得起自己，毕竟是自己选择要来美国念书的，我下定决心要改变自己，要不然真的就要滚回家了。所以说就这么咬牙坚持下来了。

[English Translation]

I had trouble eating for up to three months, followed by insomnia, with no energy during the data, no desire to talk to people, and a fear of socializing. I just wanted to stay in my room every day. For almost four months, I remember I called my parents a lot, crying every time. Every morning when I worked part-time, I started to sit on the toilet and cry, and I was on the verge of a mental breakdown. Then I was like this for a long time, and even my parents didn't know how to help me. My father got angry, telling me that he couldn't stand it and that if I couldn't stay in America, I should come back [to China]. At first, I was very sad and angry, because I felt that my parents could not understand my situation at all, but then I thought about it carefully, I could not just give up and be defeated by reality, and I had to be able to stand up to myself. After all, it was my own choice to come to the US to study. Therefore, I was determined to change myself, or I would really have to go back home. So that's how I gritted my teeth and persevered.

Jie had different needs in her doctorate program. She felt less pressure and had no difficulty understanding lectures. Due to the lack of experience in higher education, Jie did not know how to work on her assignments in her first year, but she improved in her second and third years. She asked professors and colleagues to provide her with suggestions and resources. The biggest challenge was that Jie did not receive sufficient support from her dissertation advisor. She recalled that there were only five times that she met her advisor including her dissertation defense. Jie described,

她都没怎么帮我，因为她太忙，我有一段时间找她找得挺勤的，你知道她跟我说什么吗？她跟我说，你要知道啊，我有两个孩子，还有一份全职工作。你想她这话意思就是你找我太勤啦，有啥事儿自己解决吧。所以...我找了 writing center，然后他们帮我理了理研究问题。

[English Translation]

[As a matter of fact,] she didn't even help me much because she was too busy. Once in a while, I asked too frequently for her help, and you know what she said to me? She told me that she had two kids, and a full-time job. You can easily figure out what she meant: I asked too frequently for her help. Therefore, I should map out everything by myself. So…I went to the writing center instead, and they helped me sort out my research questions.

Reflecting on her experiences and identity, Jie's upbringing, environment, and social connections helped her become more independent and mature in the United States. She liked to hang out with friends before, but now she enjoys being alone and pursues inner peace and self-reflection. The biggest obstacle is that Jie needs to break and rebuild her confidence because of studying and living in an unfamiliar country. All the things she learned in China have become

not important in the United States. Experiencing self-doubt, breaking, (re) building, and loss, Jie still needs to find a balance between being American and/or being Chinese. Jie articulated,

> 有时候会质疑自己，觉得是不是因为自己的英语真的不够那么的好，或者是自己会觉得是外国人，从别的国家来的，总是带着一种异文化的格格不入感。就会有这种自我否定的感觉。这些年我觉得好了很多，几乎没有再那样质疑过自己了，因为我自己要正视自己，自己要记住自己是谁，从哪里来，未来又要怎么走下去。因为在美国呆久了，有时候会迷失自己，会反复问自己我自己到底要成为一个怎么样的人？是不是我变得更美国化才会变得更快乐更成功？我现在在找到一种平衡，就是怎么样在足够美国化的情况下保留着自己本身的文化特质，做到一个既美国人又中国人的个体。

[English Translation]

Sometimes, I question myself and wonder if it's because my English is not really good enough, or if I feel like I'm a foreigner, from another country, always carrying a sense of alienation from other cultures. That's how the feelings of self-denial emerge. Over the years, I feel much better, and I don't question myself like that anymore because I have to face myself and remember who I am, where I came from, and how I want to go on in the future. I've been in America for a long time, sometimes, I would feel lost and ask myself over and over again what kind of person I want to be. Would I be happier and more successful if I became more American? Now I am trying to find a balance, that is, how to be American enough while retaining my own cultural traits, to be an individual who is both American and Chinese.

What is Agency?

Participants described multiple meanings and practices of the agency. Some participants described the importance of the direction of lived experience, while others expressed the power dynamics in the agency. The meaning of agency was defined with three essential components and emphases: indispensable learning during growth; changes by contexts and personal needs; and creating linkages across lived experiences.

Agency played an important role in participants' lived experiences. Anne articulated, "Agency is an indispensable learning component during your growth, which is unrelated to whether you study abroad or not." She further explained that agency is a process of learning to be proactive and independent. Studying abroad stimulated her to take control of her life and take autonomous actions since her families were not with her. She noted,

> 事来了，你说你解决不解决，你不解决没人给你解决，那你就自己去解决。给解决出经验了，后来有啥问题就提前主动去解决…我觉得这个东西就是年纪到了，你要步入社会了，就一定会经历的一个过程。

> [English Translation]

> When you meet certain problems, you need to solve the issues because nobody is going to solve them for you. The more problems you solve, the more experience you become. Later, you will solve other problems proactively and in advance… I think [agency] is a process that you must experience when you are at a certain age or going into society.

In this process, participants learned to take the initiative to act on things proactively. At the same time, Anne learned to enact her agency from her instructor. She recalled that her instructor invited her to have coffee and helped her express herself after the PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). Yingcai gave an example that he enacted his agency. "When the opportunities are

presented, I make sure that I reach out and grab them right away, no matter is internships or job opportunities."

Additionally, the agency is changed by contexts and personal needs. As a well-rounded person, Jason was more outgoing and social with people from China or other countries but would be shy to talk with "big figures." Anne noted that due to cultural differences between China and the United States, it might be easier to "raise problems if you enact your agency inappropriately in China." She emphasized that students of different ages from China, the older students like graduate students had a better understanding of their needs, which led them to enact their agency to pursue their needs. One's agency was also shaped by the extent of the institution's support. Anne articulated that her previous university deactivated all the international programs. Although international students advocated for their rights and needs, it did not make any difference. Jie provided a textbook definition of agency.

> [Agency]是自己的主观能动性。当个人遇到一些不乐观的情况的时候，自己如何运用独立灵活积极的态度去迎难而上主动去解决问题。比如如何保持一个积极的心态？如何调节自己的情绪？如何在混乱的环境当中抓住机会，迎接挑战？如何在一个有很多不确定因素的条件下，能够继续坚持着做自己？这是一个人在混乱环境的一个自主调节的能力。

> [English Translation]

> [Agency] is one's subjective initiative. When individuals encounter negative situations, they can solve problems with autonomous, proactive, independent, flexible, and positive attitudes. For example, how to keep a positive attitude, how to adjust one's emotions, how to catch opportunities and face challenges in an unstable and complex environment,

and how to continue being herself despite the uncertainties. It [Agency] is the ability to have self-determination in a messy environment.

Last, the agency created linkages across lived experiences, in which past experiences shaped experiences today and future. Hai defined agency as a dynamic change in mentality. Past experiences guided Hai to remind or help other students when they were treated unfairly. Xue's experiences in China and the United States drove him to make future decisions. Jason articulated that one's personality, background, and knowledge shaped one's agency. "It is easier to have conversations when we are in the same field." When power hierarchy was embedded in individual lived experiences, individuals would act agency differently. Jason shared a story that happened to his colleagues.

同事 A 和同事 B 吐槽今天这个实验好多呀, 我们都做不完东西了。10 点钟我们还有那个 Telephone interview。然后两个人当着面就在那儿说啊 so busy 什么乱七八糟的。然后啊, I don't have time, 但是 director 一进来以后呢, 其中一个人就立刻变脸了啊, 说 I have time and I can join, 弄得另一个人就很尴尬。那个人就先看了一下那个人一眼。然后就看了 director 说, 哦, 好吧, 我也参加了。

[English Translation]
Colleagues A and B are complaining that they need to work on lots of labs, and they couldn't finish. They have a telephone interview at 10 am and are very busy and messy. One person said, "I don't have time." But when the director came in, she immediately said, "I have time and I can join," which made the other person awkward and said yes to the director too.

Explicit Needs at Different Stages

Individual agency involves a capacity to act on one's behalf to acknowledge and respond to needs in various contexts. Agency for explicit needs foregrounds international students' explicit and specific needs related to education, emotion, finance, and so forth. The agency for explicit needs is revealed in the participants' narratives in different areas including but not limited to education, finance, transportation, mental health, language, and culture.

Language, Terminology, and Culture

These participants reported different linguistic and cultural needs at different stages despite being graduate students due to their backgrounds. Chinese students have studied English in elementary school, but that does not mean they will not have any language needs while studying in the United States. Although Yingcai and Jason were not English majors, they spent much time learning English since high school because they decided to study in the United States. Yingcai described himself as speaking English very fluently before he came to the United States because he was determined to not be only a regular international student but to become a leader. Yingcai improved his English by watching American TV shows. He recalled,

> I actually watched all four seasons of Prison Break five times over. I downloaded the
> movie and every time then I paused the video and repeated what they said then wrote
> down the unfamiliar words so I could look them up and memorize them. I did that for all
> the seasons and five times, right? Once I finished, I was able to speak more naturally,
> right? So, for a long-time people thought I was not from China, that I was an Asian-
> American.

Jason chose to live with a couple who spoke English when he arrived in the United States to ensure his full immersion in the English environment. Even so, Jason still had a difficult time

speaking the terminology of chemical equipment in English in his first year. He described, "I know some English in China and know how to say in Chinese the names of chemical equipment, but I don't know how to say them in English." At the same time, as Graduate Teaching Assistant, Jason needed to teach students in a General Chemistry Lab class, so he had to learn by himself, teach students, and complete his schoolwork. Jason described his first year as "very tough."

Unlike Jason and Yingcai, both Anne and Jie needed to articulate themselves in English, understand lectures, and complete their assignments at different stages. Anne stated that she hoped to express herself clearly and not cause any misunderstanding. Despite the language challenges, Anne took the initiative to talk with American students in her free time. She described her awkward conversations with American students in her first year at her university, in which the conversation would only include three topics, that is, "What's your name? What's your major? Where are you from?" When Anne had no difficulty conversing with American students, she studied the logic and reasoning behind those conversations, such as what kind of conversations would cause misunderstanding, how culture plays a role in conversations, etc. Jie also had language problems regarding writing. Yet, the more important thing is that she needed an outsider to help her realize her writing needs to be improved and help her. She recalled that

> 那时候对自己有种不切实际的自信，觉得自己英语没问题，而且最可怕的是，周围人还没有人来提醒我，没有人来纠正我的语法错误。所以整个人环绕在一种迷之般的自信，觉得也许我的英语还过得去，后来[我的朋友]帮我改一篇文章，每一句都有好多错误，然后我才意识到自己的英文不好。

[English Translation]

At that time, I felt very confident in myself and thought my English was good. What made it worse was that nobody would remind me of that, not even mentioning my

grammar mistakes. Therefore, I was surrounded by blinded confidence and thought my

English was good enough. Later, [my friend] edited my paper, and it turned out that there

were many mistakes in every sentence. From then I started to realize my English was not

good.

Jie worked very hard on her schoolwork. Since Jie was not from an English or Education

background, she stayed up very late to work on her readings and assignments in her master's

program. Jie described herself as a person who valued "face" and lacked the confidence to speak

English, so she rarely asked other students for help. Nevertheless, Jie had not many difficulties in

her schoolwork due to her long time in an English environment, and she became more confident

and agentic in asking others for help.

Through analyzing the differences between American education and Chinese education,

Xue had challenges with language, class mode, and cultural differences. In China, students show

dedication and commitment to class through listening to professors' lectures, but in the United

States, students need to actively participate and engage in readings and discussions throughout

the class. Unlike Anne and Jie, Xue could understand the language but had difficulty catching

the pace of the class. It became burdensome to process all the information in English in three

hours. After three months of learning and practicing, Xue became comfortable with the three-

hour-long class. He could also effectively participate in the classroom by providing his

perspectives and questions. Yingcai articulated the differences in promoting one's achievements

between China and America. In China, students do not need to write an essay for promotion,

rather "in the right place and good things can happen to you." It is different in the United States.

You need to be an ace at your stuff, not just doing what you're supposed to do, but also

you have to make a case for yourself. You have to write the essays, you have to go on

stage and explain things to the panelists, talk about your ideas and your innovations, and

promote your achievements.

After acknowledging the differences, Yingcai read newspapers and books extensively and

watched videos about successful people. He learned to self-advocate because he considered self-

advocate the most important skill in the United States.

Academic Needs

Participants were optimistic when confronted with different academic challenges and

took action to conquer those challenges. Yingcai had a difficult time memorizing things,

particularly equations. He described himself as having very bad short-term and long-term

memory, so he took a course in memory to improve his short- and long-term memory. In

addition, Yingcai recalled that he used speed-reading software for one month to become a fast

reader. By the time he finished it, he was the fastest reader among his peers, and he could read

1,500 words per minute. Due to his efficiency, Yingcai could also spend extra time serving the

community. Although Hang's grant applications and conference proposals were rejected a few

times, Hai regarded it as a process to help him learn from the rejection and become stronger in

the field. He noted that "there is nothing I can't overcome" and "everything is going to be well."

Yet, for the resources from the department, Hai hoped that international students could get equal

opportunities and resources as domestic students. Like Hai, Xue also had a positive attitude

toward rejection and considered it a learning and growing opportunity.

Jie and Anne had more nuances regarding their academic needs. In her doctoral program,

Jie asked the guidance from her dissertation advisor for her dissertation, but due to the multiple

roles of her advisor, Jie could not receive support from her. Jie recalled that after reaching out for

help a few times, her advisor noted how busy she was and was unable to have more time to help

Jie. Jie felt frustrated, but she requested support from the Writing Center to help her with the dissertation. She expressed her appreciation for the Writing Center for helping her with research questions and the problem statement. Due to the lack of intercultural understanding, Anne's professors did not understand Anne's needs related to academics, which caused Anne to transfer from her favorite program to the Human-Computer Interaction Design program. Anne could not receive the promised Graduate Assistantship from her department, so she had to pay for her tuition alone. To pursue her favorite program, she had to spend money to enhance the projects she made. Nevertheless, she could not afford it for a long time, which resulted in a low grade in her course. Anne recalled,

> Because I didn't have funding, I couldn't make the projects most finely. Otherwise, it would cost me a few hundred dollars. My professors just didn't consider it my final project for my class. She said to me that I was very unprofessional. I reflected on what she said, and I agree that I am unprofessional, but I am learning from being unprofessional to becoming professional. Later I explained to her that I didn't have funding, but she said that I should withdraw from the program to work for a year and then come back to school. I am an international student, and how can I work for a year and then come back to school?

Anne received a C at the end of that class, which caused her to transfer to another program. She said, "no matter how much I love [Program Name], I couldn't keep studying it anymore." In her current program, Anne did her utmost to improve her GPA. When a Graduate Teaching Assistant opportunity came, Anne took the initiative to send her art projects, resume, and cover letter to the professor even though the professor did not ask for a cover letter. In

addition, out of her duties, Anne provided suggestions regarding assignments and course structure, which led Anne to become an adjunct faculty at her school.

Jason shared a course that he had to take in the first semester, which was unfair for international students. Although as an orientation class in his program, the course required writing a proposal, which was difficult for international students because "I have to adjust to American life, teach classes, and take other classes." He further explained that "I only received a B in this course, which lowered my GPA. For international students, if our GPA is lower than 3.0, we will lose funding. I think this course would be fairer if it were a pass/fail class." Jason shared his experience and perspectives with her professors after graduation to change the curriculum so it would be fairer for international students.

Xue noted that he had an intense relationship with previous advisors, but he did not know the reason, which caused him to feel confused and stressed and had to transfer to a different university. He recalled that his advisor withdrew funding and asked him to graduate in a shorter time, which he was told differently before he enrolled in the program. Furthermore, Xue's advisor said she would not write a recommendation letter for his job seeking. Without knowing what caused the intense relationship for sure, Xue reflected that his advisor probably did not think he worked hard enough. With all the confusion and questions, Xue chose to transfer to another university to pursue his doctoral degree.

Status Limitations and Financial Needs

Due to international student status limitations, participants had to work very hard to have more publications, attend more conferences, and apply for more grants if they wanted to find a job in the United States after graduation. Confronted with status limitations, participants described that they felt nothing could be done to change that. Instead, having a positive attitude

and balanced life could help them ease their frustrations and struggles. Jason recalled that he did not get the H1B lottery, but luckily, his application for an O1 visa was approved. He described that,

我妈也能看出来，我明显的很沮丧啊，也很难受。我妈妈就帮我做点好吃的，就安慰我说点宽心的话，我自己也调整心情，反正挺难受的。我 19 年时都瘦到了 75 公斤，反正压力挺大的，然后做实验，包括我 opt 和 post doc，整个所有的东西都压在我身上。

[English Translation]

My mom could tell that I was very frustrated and upset. My mom cooked some yummy food and comforted me, and I adjusted my emotions and feelings. It was upsetting, indeed. I lost weight to 75 kg in 2019 because of pressure from labs, OPT, post-doc, and the loss of lottery.

During her OPT period, Anne sought jobs both from the United States and China because she had to leave the United States if she did not find a job within three months. Luckily, Anne received a job offer from a Chinese university.

At the same time, four participants reported financial struggles. Compared to domestic students, international students lack job opportunities due to visa regulations. Anne shared that "international students who hold F-1 visas can only apply for lower-wage jobs on campus compared to American students. Anne and Jie shared that their hourly wage was $7.25, and a cleaning job was their sole option at their institutions. Anne stated that domestic students' hourly wages could reach $15; they could receive $20 per hour for certain jobs. Confronted with legal unequalness, international students are at a disadvantage. Jie had to get up at 5 am for work despite the lowest wage because she had no other options. She said that "As long as I could make

money, that's fine. I could only do this job due to my status." Yingcai had to work multiple jobs to pay for his tuition and living expenses. He worked as a consultant for a Chinese education company, taught English classes, and delivered pizza. Yingcai described the financial struggle as the biggest challenge for him.

Mental Health Support

Immigration regulations, academic difficulties, and living challenges caused participants to experience stress, loss of sleep, fear, uncertainty, and depression, which might cause mental health disorders, which might cause mental health disorders. Jie was never involved in any religion in China. Since she studied in a Christian institution to pursue her master's degree, at the beginning of each class, professors would read Bible verses or stories to ask about students' reflections and thoughts, which Jie felt stressed about and had difficulty understanding the Bible. She even felt doubtful and isolated from the religious environment. Furthermore, Jie also experienced a difficult time digesting lectures since all the educational theories were new to her. Despite various difficulties in her life, Jie spent more time reading books and working on assignments. She also started to attend an intercultural church to experience the religious culture and atmosphere. Additionally, Jie made an alternative plan to apply for a doctoral program because she could not find a sponsored job in time due to immigration regulations.

The high standards of advisor and self and the COVID-19 pandemic increased Xue and Jason's stress levels. Both of them claimed that their Chinese advisors were "very push," which caused them to "push" themselves as well. Having an intense relationship with his previous advisor, Xue was "forced" to complete his doctoral program in advance; otherwise, he would lose all the funding. Furthermore, his previous advisor noted that she would not be a recommender for his career seeking, which caused him anxiety, fear, and uncertainty. After

communicating with another professor, Xue decided to transfer to another institution to pursue his doctoral program. Jason felt he did not have a personal life because his life was full of labs, reports, and papers. He recalled that he only went to the beach twice despite the close distance between two years. Confronted with different stresses, Xue and Jason liked outdoor activities to relieve their stresses, such as running and playing soccer. Additionally, they would communicate with current Chinese advisors if they felt too much pressure. Xue would also ask the counseling center for help, while Jason preferred to ask his family for mental support.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted participants' physical and mental health. Participants chose to limit their social activities because they feared getting viruses and/or whether others were comfortable being with them. For example, Xue said he never asked others to hang out or have dinner during the COVID-19 pandemic because he was unsure if others were comfortable with it. Social isolation caused participants anxiety, so they were excited that they could see friends, classmates, and professors after prolonged social isolation.

Struggle, Resistance, Resilience, and Hope

Relationships with Faculty

Participants described that they were respectful to and had a professional relationship with their professors. This respect came from cultural hierarchy and different educational systems, which made it difficult to build personal relationships with professors. Xue articulated that his traditional culture valued "长幼尊卑" (The elder is superior to the young). He further articulated that

> 作为中国人，我相信你跟我类似的认识，可能我们很多时候会觉得叫别人 doctor 更能体现我们对他的尊重，而不是非常的不习惯地去叫他的名字...我跟大部分老师关系都很好，但是你要说真正做到有很好的私人关系的不多，在美国目前还没有。

[English Translation]

As Chinese, I believe you have similar thoughts. We often call our professors Dr. XX to show our respect, rather than calling their names…I have good relationships with most of my professors, but not many professors with good personal relationships. At least, I have no good personal relationships with professors in the US.

Three participants stated that their advisors invited them to have dinner at their home sometime, but they still felt a sense of distance from their advisors. Xue recalled that "you could feel she only wants to keep the relationship in a professional setting." Jason described that his advisor expected him to work in the lab most of the time during the day, and their communication was only about work. When he felt too stressed and unfairly treated by his supervisor, he would email his supervisor to explain himself and ask for his understanding.

Additionally, five participants stated there was a lack of communication or misunderstanding among their advisors and/or professors. Anne lost her funding and favorite program because of her professors' lack of cultural understanding. Anne recalled that because she did not get the funding the department promised, she did not have enough money to design delicate art projects, which led her professors to label her as "unprofessional" and give her a C for the final grade. Rather than keep silent, Anne took the initiative and explained to her professors that she did not have funding to refine her projects. Furthermore, she articulated that pursuing the program was transforming her to be professional from unprofessional as a student. Due to a lack of understanding of immigration regulations, Anne's professor suggested that Anne withdraw from the program and work for a year. In the end, Anne chose to leave her favorite program and transfer to another program having funding.

Jie understood she needed guidance on her dissertation, so she contacted her advisor for help. Yet, her advisor asked her to figure it out by herself in that she was busy with multiple jobs talking with her a few times. To complete the dissertation and graduate on time, Jie then contacted Writing Center to structure her research questions. In a similar vein, Yingcai also had a lack of communication with his advisor. Reflecting on the struggles, Yingcai described that he was seeking an academic mentor because his current advisor did not respond to his emails. Yingcai has a unique understanding of seeking mentors:

> You know, in college you don't often meet someone who is really out of your league. Most are sort of your peers and we're all doing the same thing at the same time. So, I was looking for a mentor that's really successful in business, academia, or religion, so that is pretty hard to come by. So, I always have one or two mentors, I have XX, and he's my mentor now. I have an academic advisor who doesn't respond to my emails very. So, when it comes to mentorship you have to be patient right, just wait, and see.

Unlike Yingcai or Jie, Jason described his advisor as "very pushy" and always gave him a heavy workload. Jason had to explain the situation in a long email when his advisor acted not "reasonably."

Struggle, Resistance, Resilience, and Hope in Neo-racism Context

Nationality and Culture

All the participants described that they worked very hard due to academic/resource challenges, immigration regulations, and high expectations from professors. At the same time, they had positive attitudes and hope for what they have done. Xue stated that he felt good about the heavy workload from his supervisors because he could learn new things and improve himself. He further said that he valued the opportunity of studying in the United States and

wanted to catch every opportunity. Similar to Xue, although Jason was expected to work on many projects, he understood that his supervisor might be more tired than him. He felt satisfied that he could get more publications after his hard work. Jason further articulated that immigration regulations make international students study hard because they need more publications and achievements than American students if they want to find a job and stay in the United States. "There is nothing we can do about it."

Participants noted feelings of discrimination, stereotype, hostility, and systemic injustice related to their nationality and culture. These incidents occurred in formal and informal environments when participants interacted with peers, professors, and the community. Part of the participants' experiences was affected by geopolitical tensions. Some participants provided incidents of explicit acts of stereotype, discrimination, or hostility because of their nationality. Majoring in Public Policy and Administration, Hai had to confront various stereotyped speeches against China and/or non-democratic countries. He recalled that his professor expressed his stereotype against China and all other non-democratic countries:

> 当时香港游行，老师就说中国政府反民主，对抗议之人比较 brutal 之类的。他还表示自己对香港没能实现民主化的不满。老师们比较喜欢西方民主制度，他们希望不光是中国，并且希望世界上所有的非民主国家最后都变成民主国家。

> [English Translation]

> During the Hong Kong protest, my professor said that the Chinese government was anti-democracy and very brutal to protestors. He also expressed his dissatisfaction with the non-democracy in Hong Kong. My professors prefer Western democracy, and they hope not only China but also all non-democratic countries can become democratic countries someday.

Although Hai felt uncomfortable with the professor's expression, Hai did not argue against his professor because "China is not a democratic country by definition." In Hai's mind, the definition of "democracy" is defined by Western countries, and China is a different system, so it was meaningless to argue with his professor. Yet, when peers slandered China, Hai would fight back against their statements with evidence. He shared that his Turkish friend was hostile to China because his friend believed the Chinese government committed genocide against the Uyghur people in Xinjiang. His friend further provided a false claim on China's GDP, which led Hai to provide World Bank data on the GDP to fight back. Hai explained that providing the World Bank data could be convincing, but it also helped his friend not make the same mistake in the future.

US-China geopolitical tensions also impacted participants' relationships with others and how he was viewed by others. Hai felt "weird" when his professors and/or classmates talked about China in that their conversations were always related to the negative sides of China. He articulated that,

> 我觉得反正中美关系不好，反正怎么说呢？都会或多或少有影响，尤其是对中国的影响。你想想,你是一个从中国来的，在美国人的角度，你是一个从敌国来的，虽然说，我觉得我身边大家都挺好，但是有时候也会觉得有点怪怪的。我觉的其实还是中美关系这种类国家国与国之间的关系如果搞得不好的话，还是确实会对这个 personal relationship 的事情还是会有一些影响的。
>
> [English Translation]
>
> I think the fraying US-China relations will have an impact to some extent, especially on Chinese students. Think about this. You are from China, which means you are from an enemy country from the American perspective. Although I feel the people around me are

nice, I just feel weird sometimes. I think the negative relationship between US and China will have some impacts on personal relationships.

His nationality impacted Yingcai's relationship with his manager. As an Asian, Yingcai's manager accused the Chinese of stealing intellectual property rights. Yingcai understood his manager's anger towards Chinese communists, but he could not accept that he constantly attacked his nationality. Although being fairly treated at the company, Yingcai described his manager as "letting his guard down and like just start talking shit" when they went outside.

The neo-racist stereotype of China also happened to Jie. One of Jie's American students asked her why China set 365 Degree Action cameras everywhere and whether the government wanted to monitor people. Jie felt uncomfortable answering the question. She understood that his American friend believed Chinese people had no freedom because of the monitoring from the Chinese government. Despite this, Jie processed her thoughts and explained that

任何一件事都有好的一面也有不利的一面，虽然在他看来这是侵犯人权，但是这件事情从令一方面来说，也能够保证每个公民的安全。在美国很多地方都没有摄像头监控，导致有的人被谋杀迫害了，会因为证据不足无法立案破案，*(这同样是对人民权利的一种侵犯)*。据我所知，这个事情是存在的，因为我住的小区里每一个路口都一边都有一个 365°摄像头。的确这也许会让人觉得生活在被监控的状态，但是从另一个层面来讲这样也可以保障人身的安全，尤其是在午夜后。

[English Translation]

Every coin has two sides. On the one hand, the Chinese government is violating human rights. On the other hand, it is protecting every citizen's safety. In the US, there is no camera surveillance in many places, which causes [the police] couldn't put on record and solve the case due to lack of evidence. (This is also a human rights violation). As far as I

know, camera surveillance does exist in China. There is a 365-degree camera on every

street in my community. Indeed, this might cause people to feel living under surveillance,

but it can also protect people's safety, especially after midnight.

Anne also shared an unpleasant experience regarding her nationality. With certain expectations,

some people asked her whether she knew many people were in Xinjiang's concentration camps.

Anne could only smile and suggested they visit China someday to experience the real China

because she did not want to argue with them.

Stereotypes of Asian/Chinese characteristics

Many participants described feelings of stereotypes about their characteristics, which

were rooted in racial discrimination. Although sometimes participants considered stereotypes as

a joke, these incidents emerged in various contexts affecting students' interactions with others.

For example, Jason noted a few times that he was stereotyped as hard-working and model

Chinese at his school and company. His colleagues were surprised when they learned Jason was

social and well-rounded. Anne also experienced a similar situation where Chinese students were

considered obedient and hard-working. Despite racial stereotypes, Jason and Anne both

understood the issue that this was a "mutual understanding" for supervisors and themselves.

Based on their mutual understanding, their supervisors trusted them regarding their academic and

work performance.

Yingcai described feelings of discrimination and stereotypes when he was on a

missionary trip with American students. He felt very offended when his co-worker posted on

social media, "Today I lived like a Chinese: spitted and pooped on the street and didn't use

deodorant." Rather than keeping silent, Yingcai felt very unhappy and enacted his agency by

saying,

Of course, because Asian doesn't have an odor, we don't need it. When you go to New York, people would also spit and poop on the street. It is everywhere. You are on a missionary trip and doing missionary work for God, so you need to pay attention to your words and behaviors.

Additionally, the stereotypes particularly happened to Asian women. They faced various stereotypes in their professional and personal life. As a modern woman, Anne recalled that she was doubted that she should never study abroad since females should stay home and educate their children in their community while studying in the United States. One of her Japanese female friends felt offended that White males often liked talking with her about Japanese animation and sexy beauty. Yingcai shared that he responded in a social media post saying Asian women were also stereotyped as bad drivers. Jie had been asked a few times whether she was Japanese or Korean. Every time, she used humorous ways to react to those assumptions.

Forms of neo-racism not only happened among White to international students of color but also among students of color with different races. Jason articulated that his Indian supervisor held higher expectations and demands of him compared to his American colleagues. In Jie's class, most Black students wanted to be "cool and popular." The Black students who had good grades and worked hard would be called "nerd" and be isolated from other Black students. Hang articulated that "racism is multi-directional, which happens not only White and non-White but also in different races and groups of people with the same race." For example, some people in China would consider Chinese students studying in the United States as "汉奸" (traitor).

Collective Agency for Negotiation and Interruption

Relational agency involves a collective capacity to ask for or provide support due to (dis)engagement of actors within various contexts (Edwards, 2005; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998).

The study found evidence that participants enacted collective agency for negotiation and interruption to seek support in their life. Participants' experiences were affected by the proportion of Asian and Chinese international students in their department or program. Anne recalled that Chinese international students enacted their agency to create a comfortable environment.

> 我的老师在自己的办公室挂着 Free Hong Kong 的海报，然后上着网课，就在后面挂着，特明显。稍后我一个加州的同学，那个女孩儿就直接给那个老师写了封很长的邮件，然后征求我们带大家一起签名，就给老师说，你这样中国大陆学生非常的不舒服。
>
> [English Translation]
>
> My professor hung a Free Hong Kong poster at the back of her office. It was very noticeable since it was an online class. Later, a student from California wrote a very long email to the professor and organized all of us to sign it as well as express the uncomfortableness for Chinese mainland students.

The situation provoked students' resistance, and the agency of the act would create separation among Chinese mainland students and uncomfortableness. Furthermore, Anne described that the large proportion of Chinese international students at her university might affect the professor's decision to remove the poster. She articulated that Chinese international students could protect their rights because the ratio of Chinese, Indian, and American students was 1:1:1, which could ensure equality in certain rights. She further recalled a story that her American friend added Chinese friends with WeChat (a Chinese social media) because, living with three Chinese roommates, if he forgot the room key, he had to contact his Chinese roommates via WeChat for help. Anne concluded it was a phenomenon that the minority obey the majority.

In the same vein, Yingcai described a similar story that happened on his campus. In response to Stop Asian Hate, the university emailed the students to fight for the Asian population and underlined the human rights of Hong Kong and Xinjiang, which caused students to feel uncomfortable. Students thought the email would create separation among Asian populations. Therefore, Asian students enacted their rights and agency to ask the university to express their apology and retract the email. Yingcai further explained that international students had a large proportion in the engineering and science field, with 30% Chinese international students, whereas American students were a minority in the science field.

All participants described that they needed and sought support from others in their life. It was almost impossible to live without help from others because international students had no families with them. Jason described that teamwork and supporting networks were the keys to success in his company. Xue also shared the same perspective regarding the importance of teamwork and support while working on projects. From working with his American colleagues, Xue understood that American students would also feel anxiety, just like Chinese students. Although he tended to listen more during group meetings, Xue noted that he was the one who always came up with the key ideas and directions. This speaks against the notion that some international students are passive (Zhu & Bresnahan, 2018). They would seek support from professors if they met any difficulties. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Chinese international students from Hai's university started a self-help group to support one another and share information. Having studied in the United States for a few years, Anne understood the importance of seeking help. Anne articulated that "it was important to seek help while studying abroad. If you don't ask, nobody will help." In a foreign country, Anne did not know what to do after her car was tolled. Yet, she proactively shared her situation with one of her American group

members. As a result, her American classmate drove her to get her car. Seeking and receiving support were also related to the value of programs. Anne described that her program valued "empathy," so students were friendly to provide support. When Anne needed to move, she reached out to the students in her program through social media to help her move. Four male students quickly responded and helped her move in two days.

The participants could demonstrate their agency by using their relationships and connections to seek support in their life. They prevented from being passive to connecting with others to solve problems and negotiation in various situations. Friends and colleagues were the figures whom they tended to seek support from in response to certain life needs, such as moving and safety. Yet, to negotiate unfair application of academic and national policies, the institutional and national environment needs to better support international students. Indeed, there is a lack of proactive involvement of institutions in the collective agency.

Being, Becoming, and Transformation

Participants displayed their agency for being, becoming, and transformation by cultivating their development within various contexts and transforming the contexts. Agency for being, becoming, and transformation involves individuals encountering, acknowledging, understanding, (re)constructing, (un)learning, negotiating, and (re)defining their identities and contexts in their life (Sakamoto, 2006). Despite cultivating and constructing their development, being a *liuxuesheng* (a student who study abroad) and foreigner never changes. Their roles range from students, employees, and foreigners; their characteristics range from loneliness, helplessness, industriousness, meticulousness, constructive, and resilience.

International Student as a Status

International students work very hard. Participants' being international students, a *liuxuesheng*, and a foreigner significantly shaped their activities and experiences while studying in the United States. Being international students meant they had to work hard to succeed in their academics and have more opportunities. Being international students also meant they had to work even harder to find and work for an organization willing to sponsor their work visa despite unfair treatment. Jason described himself as a hard-working, positive, humble, and well-rounded person. These characteristics helped him earn the trust of his supervisor, but at the same time, he was unfairly treated due to his status and characteristics.

> 有一个下午，我的 director 需要我分析一个数据，然后第二天要。说完，他 4 点钟就回家了。我就简单的吃了个晚饭就一直做那个数据。第二天早上我把数据给他了。如果是美国人，他根本不敢说这样的话，美国人一般 5 点就走了。
>
> [English Translation]
>
> My director asked me to work on data in the afternoon and needed it the second day, and then he went home around 4 pm. So, I just had a simple dinner and came back to work really late. I gave him the data the next morning. If I were an American, he wouldn't ask something like that because American people usually go home at 5 pm.

Jason further explained that this was related to one's status, and "it would become better when I received the Green Card." He chose to immerse himself in the American environment by living with English-speaking roommates, listening to American songs, and watching American movies.

Being an international student also meant their doings are shaped by their status being an international student and immigration regulations. Participants needed to plan in advance for the future because once their international student status expired, they needed to return to China.

This status affected not only their future but also their present. Jie had to pursue a doctoral degree because her previous organization did not sponsor her H1B visa as promised. Otherwise, she would lose her international student status and must return to China. Although Anne found an adjunct faculty position, she chose to work in higher education in China because the adjunct position did not provide an H1B visa sponsorship. The international student status also limited students' financial situations. A lack of funding could cause changes in the plan of study. Anne could not withdraw from her program for a year to make money to support her financial needs, as her professor suggested because of legal restrictions concerning international students with F1 status who must be enrolled as full-time students. She did not have funding to refine her art projects, which caused a low grade in her course. Xue had to transfer to another institution that provided Graduate Assistantship because his previous advisor did not have funding for him. In his current institution, Xue had to graduate in three years in his Ph.D. program because the department had a low budget to support graduate students.

Who am I?

Although all participants emphasized their growth and changes, they identified themselves as Chinese and Asian. Participants had their understanding of identity. Jie claimed identity was related to one's original country, being, and culture. She used three questions to connect to identity, "who am I? Where do I come from? What is my cultural background?" She articulated that she would always be from China and as an Asian no matter what would happen in the future. Anne noted identity as a self-cognition and being different roles in various contexts. Her identity as "liuxuesheng" never changed despite all the changes in different stages. Anne claimed that her growth was embedded in her identity, and the growth happened everywhere.

我觉得我其实始终如一，只是更坚信了自己的想法。就比如说你刚出国的时候，你可能会觉得我是个留学生，我要努力去适应。然后过着过着你可能就会觉得我还是个是个留学生，然后有些事情是需要去努力的。然后在过着就是留学生可以做这些这些这些事情，那要把这些事情要充分的体验到，对吧，开心该开心的。这东西都要体验到，不留遗憾就好。

[English Translation]

I think I am always the same, just believe in myself more. It's like when you came to the US at the beginning, you would think I am a liuxuesheng and I need to adjust to the environment. After a while, you would think I am still a liuxuesheng, but you need to work hard for certain things. After a while, then you realize being a liuxuesheng, you could do these things. You want to have a rich and happy experience without any regrets.

Experiencing and learning things in different stages were important to Anne in her identity development. Hai also identified himself as Chinese and Asian. He would never change his nationality. Jason identified himself as a humble and hard-working Chinese. Xue identified himself as a human being that wanted to live in a society that respects and values human rights.

Agency for being, becoming, and transformation involves the participants' active engagement to construct their life and find balance in-betweenness by immersing and learning new environments and unlearning and reevaluating their home culture. Yingcai shared stories from immersing American culture, reevaluating American and Chinese culture, and embracing Chinese culture. He recalled,

when I first came to the US, for the first two years, I think the American culture actually had a pretty big impact on me. I was eating sandwiches or pizza; you know watching football and these kinds of things. Everything was new and appealing. You know, people

were nice, and I was mostly hanging out with Americans. But at the start of my junior

year, things changed, and I didn't want to do these things anymore. I think now I'm more

Chinese than ever.

Yingcai further shared that it was difficult for him to have a long-term relationship with

American friends due to the lack of the same interests. Yingcai and his wife invited American

friends for dinner but never became real friends. He shared his perspective on making American

friends, "Chinese folks are trying too hard to win over American friends, like making exotic

foods and all kinds of stuff. The Americans pretend to be amazed, but they are never true friends

in that regard." Now, Yingcai did not consider himself tied to American culture, but being

Chinese and "proud of my Chinese culture."

Anne identified herself as a "liuxuesheng" and experienced a process from adaptation to

familiarity and expansion in this new environment. Anne pushed herself to have conversations

with American students despite the awkwardness. Rather than quitting from the awkwardness,

Anne reflected on the interactions with American students and constructed her ways of thinking

and doing. From interacting with different departments at her current university, Anne became

familiar with the roles of various offices and saved her time when she needed support from

certain offices. Furthermore, the familiarity of the community helped Anne grow and "expand"

for her becoming. Anne received her Graduate Teaching Assistantship by expanding and

advocating for herself. She also took the initiative to restructure assignments and curriculum,

which left a positive impression on her professor.

The participants' life experiences brought about new ways of thinking and doing due to

the context. Simultaneously, this thinking and doing also shaped the context. Studying in the

United States helped Xue rethink the purpose of his doctoral study. For him, the doctoral study

was a training process in which professors were the trainers to help trainees to grow academically and professionally. Studying in the United States improved Xue's perseverance and independence. He described that studying abroad helped him enjoy the loneliness. More importantly, he reevaluated loneliness as a good thing that helped his mental growth and tenacity. Similarly, Anne noted that she grew in many areas because she had to learn to do things independently. Anne considered learning as growing and put all the learning into practice. She further shared that she had to apply for university, move to the university, book hotels, and search for apartments and cars all by herself because she had no family in the United States. All this learning equipped her to succeed in the future. Anne said the length of time in the United States also shapes growth and learning. Students who stay longer in the United States will have more lived experiences. Additionally, going back to China was not going home for Anne in that she needed to unlearn American culture and relearn Chinese culture in daily life and professional settings.

> 我现在的最主要的感觉就是,那你回来不要抱着一种回家的态度，觉得事情变简单了，比出国简单了的心态，回来哪有那么简单呀！你在外头形成的习惯，你回来不都得改吗？我现在回来，我也在改我的生活中，改我的饮食习惯。在一天一顿饭尽量按三顿吃，其实我现在我也还是调不过来，我说最近还在努力调整就是对，所以就我觉得这些东西都是要努力的，这个东西不是说什么回家了就更容易了，绝对不是。

> [English Translation]
>
> Now, I don't feel come back to China is coming back home because coming back to China won't make things easier. It has never been easy coming back to China. You have to change all the habits you learned in the US. I am still changing my living habits and

diet. I need to change from eating one meal to three meals, and I still need to work harder

to adjust myself. Therefore, I think all these things I need to work hard for. Going home

won't make it easy, and it never will.

Not only did living habits Anne need to unlearn and relearn, but she also needed to do the same

in interactions in a professional setting.

因为你一旦抱着回家想法，你就会觉得回去一定什么事情都会变得更简单一点，人

际可能会变得更简单。打交道可能会更容易，你是只要不是在自己家门口工作,你

会认识谁呀？然后你跟上司打交道，你以前本来就是职场小白，你到哪儿你不得学

会跟上司打交道，你还是得现学呀。你不可能完全说是啊，因为是汉语了，我就会

了。而且美国给你教的那一套能用吗？嗯，那肯定不能拿来跟上司打交道呀。所以

说这就是文化的不同和语言的不同，说白了他就是需要学习的.

[English Translation]

Once you consider going back to China as going back home, you would think everything

would be easier: Interactions would become easier, and working with people would

become easier. Unless you work in your neighborhood, you will not know anybody.

Also, you need to learn to interact with your supervisor since you are a beginner in the

workplace. The fact that you can speak Chinese doesn't mean you know how to interact

with the supervisor. Additionally, can you use the way of interaction you learned in the

US? Of course not. These are cultural differences and language differences. You need to

learn all the differences.

Jie and Jason both described that they have become well-rounded, versatile, and more

mature. Regarding the interactions with different people, Jie would choose the way that made

other people feel comfortable. For example, for the person who grew up or stayed for a long time

in the United States, Jie would choose the American ways of interaction; for the person who

stayed for a short period, particularly from China, she would use the Chinese way of interaction.

Jie also became more independent and liked to solve the problem on her own first. Jason chose to

be humorous while interacting with American colleagues, but not in China. In his hometown, if

he behaved humorously, his neighbor would think he liked to "逞能" (show off).

The participants' lived experiences and narratives demonstrated their strong engagement

with the community. Their agentic behaviors and actions contributed to the community by

volunteering. Yingcai, Jie, and Anne become active and important members in their community.

Yingcai joined the missionary trip to share the Gospel in (State Name). He also took the

initiative to respond to stereotypes of his American team member. Jie and Anne volunteered to

teach Chinese culture and language in their community.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

As the largest source of international students studying in the United States, China sent around 703,500 students to study abroad in 2019 (Ministry of Education, 2020). The United States is the top destination for Chinese international students, receiving about 372,532 students from China from the academic year 2019 to 2020 (Open Doors, 2021). The host institutions and countries have benefited from economic gains, diverse cultures, and human capital (Lee et al., 2017). The motivations of international students studying in the United States and their recruitment are framed in a *global imaginary* rooted in colonialism (Stein & de Andreotti, 2016) and neoliberalism (Bamberger et al., 2019). In this global imaginary, Western higher education connects to Western supremacy and is positioned as a desirable product (Stein & de Andreotti, 2016); international students are often framed as cash cows, objects, competitors, threats, and the other (Stein & de Andreotti, 2016). Particularly, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has worsened Chinese international students' experiences, and they have faced such pejoratives as *yellow peril* and the *Chinese virus* (Shi, 2020).

Research on Chinese international students choosing to study in the United States shows that they do so with the goal of either contributing to their home country, gaining a quality education, increasing social status, or expanding future career opportunities (Han et al., 2015; Yan & Berliner, 2011b). These studies focus on the motivation of Chinese international students studying in the United States. Yet, there is a lack of research on Chinese students' needs, struggles, being, becoming, and transformation as human beings while studying in the United States. Historically, Chinese international students have faced a challenging environment despite their economic and cultural contributions. They have experienced discrimination, prejudice, and

exclusion due to their national identity and culture (Bieler, 2015). This narrative study addresses the research gap and centers on Chinese international students' voices and needs to explore how they describe and enact their agency in formal and informal learning environments while studying in U.S. higher education institutions.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

This narrative study aimed to examine and explore how Chinese international graduate students enacted their agency in narrated formal and informal learning experiences in U.S. higher education institutions. Specifically, this study documented, described, and uncovered the tensions, misunderstandings, and struggles related to neo-racism that Chinese international graduate students have in the process of learning. Additionally, this study explored how they negotiated and navigated those experiences with their agency. Ultimately, this study will discover implications for host institutions bringing curriculum, policy, and instructional changes.

For the purpose of the study, formal learning environment refers to teaching, learning, and assessment activities organized around various content areas, topics, and resources in the classroom; the informal learning environment refers to various activities and practices with their peers, members of the community, campus organizations, professors on and off campus in an unstructured environment (Leask, 2009). These activities and practices are not part of the formal requirements of the program of study, but they are more relevant to personal relationship building and contribute to and/or unveil the negotiation and navigation of their relationship.

The following research questions guide this study:

1. How do Chinese international graduate students at U.S. higher education institutions enact agency in their learning experiences?

    a. How do Chinese international graduate students describe agency in their *formal* and *informal* learning experiences?

b.   How do Chinese international graduate students respond to learning experiences related to neo-racism?

Summary of the Methodology

This narrative inquiry study with a constructivist research paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018) explored six Chinese international graduate students' formal and informal learning experiences while studying in the United States and how they enacted agency to respond to those experiences. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit six participants through social media, such as WeChat, Facebook, and Twitter. All the participants had studied in the United States for at least six months, and English is not their native language. I used temporality, sociality, and place to explore participants' lived experiences and stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

The primary data collection method for the study was three-phase in-depth semi-structured interviews and two-phase journal entries. Each of the first two-phase interviews lasted approximately 45-60 minutes, with one to two weeks between interviews; the third-phase interview lasted about 30 minutes. All six participants were interviewed three times; five completed the two journal entries. The interview protocols were based on the individual and relational agency theoretical framework. Chinese and English versions of the interview protocol and journal entries were provided. One participant preferred English for the interview. The first-phase interview focused on participants' background information and formal learning experiences; the second-phase interview focused on participants' informal learning experiences; the third-phase interview focused on participants' restorying their formal and informal learning experiences and perception of their growth. During interviews, field notes were taken to demonstrate participants' emotions and facial and/or verbal expressions.

I collaborated with participants via member-checking by sending them the summary and highlights of each interview. I transcribed interviews, took field texts during the interview, wrote

highlights and summaries after each interview, coded the text in three rounds with NVivo 12, and identified patterns and themes addressing research questions. Narrative analysis and interpretation work together to analyze data to develop an understanding of the meanings of participants' lives and surroundings (Kim, 2015). In the first round of coding, I used broadening, burrowing, and restorying coding to identify what was happening in the data (Kim, 2015). In the second round of coding, I used narrative coding to feature narrators' voices and stories for interpretation. In the third round of coding, I returned to the first two rounds of coding and each transcript to find patterns and themes to address research questions. Last, I used journal entries for the purpose of complementary data.

Summary of Major Findings

The study was guided by the individual and relational agency theoretical framework adapted from Edwards (2005), Marginson (2014), Sen (1985), Tran and Vu (2018), and Hopwood (2010). Participants described multiple meanings and practices of the agency. Three important components of agency are indispensable learning during growth, changes by contexts and personal needs, and creating linkages across lived experiences.

Participants shared their stories in their formal and informal learning environments and how they enacted agency in various contexts. All the participants had unique characteristics and stories and grew in different ways. For example, Yingcai describes himself as an "aggressive and confrontational" person who does not take insults from others and advocates for himself to succeed; Hai is an empathetic person and has a positive attitude toward life; Anne likes walking out of her comfort zone and reflecting on interactions with others. Four themes were identified following the theoretical framework: (1) explicit needs at different stages, (2) struggle, resistance, resilience, and hope, (3) collective agency for negotiation and interruption, and (4) being, becoming, and transformation.

As a form of individual agency, explicit needs at different stages includes sub-themes: (1) language, terminology, and culture, (2) academic needs, (3) status limitations and financial needs, and (4) mental health support. All the participants noted different linguistic and cultural needs at various stages. Yingcai and Jason spent much time learning English since high school because they decided to study in the United States. Yingcai did not have difficulty speaking English in the United States; he spent more time experiencing American culture intentionally and purposefully. As a Chemistry major, despite his English fluency, Jason had difficulty speaking the terminology of chemical equipment in English in his first school year. Anne shared that her goal was to express herself clearly and not cause misunderstandings in interactions with American students in her first year. Jie needed support in her writing and comprehension. Participants were optimistic and took specific actions when confronted with various academic challenges. For example, Yingcai took an extra course to improve his memory. Hai learned from rejections and improved himself afterward. Confronting with status limitations, participants chose different pathways for their future with a positive attitude and a balanced life.

Struggle, resistance, resilience, and hope includes sub-themes relationships with faculty and struggle, resistance, resilience, and hope in a neo-racism context. Participants had a respectful and professional relationship with their professors and advisors. The cultural differences and hierarchies made it hard to build personal relationships. Participants felt discriminated against and stereotyped due to their nationality, culture, and certain characteristics. Discrimination was not only prevalent among Chinese students but also among students of color from different races and nationalities. The current geopolitical tensions between the United States and China have strengthened cases of discrimination and stereotype. All the participants worked very hard to overcome not only academic challenges but also had to tend with immigration regulations and expectations from professors. Despite all this, they held positive

attitudes and strove not only to learn new things but improve themselves. Each participant encountered discrimination, stereotyping, and hostility in different ways in their formal and informal learning environments. For example, Hai confronted several stereotyped speeches against his native country of China, regarding China as a non-democratic country. Yingcai's manager accused Chinese people of stealing intellectual property, which made Yingcai feel very uncomfortable. Additionally, the participants encountered stereotypes in different ways. Jason was considered to be a hard-working and model Chinese student and employee. This invisible label brought certain "benefits" to him, such as earning him the trust of his colleagues while simultaneously forcing him to perform even harder to meet the uncharacteristically high expectations.

Participants demonstrate their collective agency for negotiation and interruption by fighting for their rights and seeking collective support. To create a comfortable learning environment, students proactively communicated with faculty and administrators to get rid of Free Hong Kong poster and retract the email that caused separation among Chinese students. Participants acknowledged the importance of supporting networks and relationships in their lived experiences in the United States and enacted their agency to ask for support. As Anne claimed, "It was important to seek help while studying abroad. If you don't ask, nobody will help." Surprisingly, the proportion of international students makes a difference in whether students' voices are getting heard or valued. Anne and Yingcai addressed that a large number of Chinese students in their universities made it easier for their voices to be heard.

Participants described their being, becoming, and transformation by cultivating their development and growth in different contexts. In this process, they acknowledged, understood, (re)constructed, (un)learned, and (re)defined their identities and contexts. Their identities were shifted as various role changes in their life, such as being a *liuxuesheng*, employee, and

foreigner. Being an *international student* meant they must work very hard for opportunities, resources, and status safety. Due to status limitations, students had to accept a minimum wage and unfair treatment in their limited employment. Furthermore, they needed to plan in advance for their graduation because they had to find a job related to their program in 90 days; otherwise, they would need to return to China. All the participants identified themselves as Chinese and Asian. Being Chinese in the United States needs participants to construct their life and find a balance in-betweenness by immersing and learning new environments and unlearning and reevaluating their home environment. Participants have become more independent, open-minded, and versatile regarding their changes.

Findings Related to the Literature

The findings of this study show that Chinese international students have struggles and various needs related to academic, language, and intercultural communication, which supports the findings of Alharbi and Smith (2018), Hail (2015), Heng (2018), Kuo (2011), Wang and Freed (2021), and Will (2019). Participants came from different institution types, family backgrounds, and socioeconomic statuses, which attributed to their nuanced lived experiences and narratives. From a low socioeconomic status family background, Yingcai raised all the funds by himself by applying for scholarships, finding jobs, and borrowing money. His past experiences equipped him to advocate for himself for opportunities and resources. Jie encountered struggles in her master's program because she was from a non-English and non-religious background. Hai described himself as from "an enemy country," which affected his relationships with American peers. Studying in the United States was the first time Anne left her parents. She described studying abroad as "practice and experience" to see different cultures and meet different people. From a rural area, Xue described himself as an independent, self-learner, and hard worker. Knowing his future of studying abroad, Jason started to improve his English

skills in China. He did not have difficulty communicating with Americans but spent more time learning the English names of all chemical equipment. These four themes are not separate from each other but interconnected and interwoven with each other.

Heterogeneity of Chinese International Students as Human Beings

Participants' different socioeconomic backgrounds and needs demonstrate they are heterogeneous with various needs, multifaceted identities, and experiences at different stages, interrupting the neocolonial and neoliberal mentalities that international students are cash cows and inferior (Glass et al., 2022; Heng, 2018). Out of six participants, two participants were from a rural area; the majority of participants had struggles with their financial situations. This reflects that not all Chinese international students are wealthy (Xie et al., 2021). On the contrary, in this study, participants demonstrated various levels of financial needs. Yingcai raised all the funds for his tuition and living fees by applying for scholarships, working multiple jobs, and borrowing money from relatives and friends because he was from an underdeveloped area. Anne had a difficult time paying for her tuition and working on class projects because she did not get funding from her department, which indirectly caused her to transfer to a different program. Xue transferred to a different university because his previous advisor did not provide enough funding. Despite the lowest wage, Jie chose to work on campus as a cleaning job to pay for her living expenses.

All the participants demonstrated various needs at different stages, such as language, culture, academics, freedom, and health. This speaks to the nuanced experiences of Chinese international students' needs and/or challenges that evolve over time (Heng, 2018; Wu, 2015). Also, participants' experiences vary in different years of study, the field of study, and academics (Heng, 2020; Ma, 2020). In the first semester, Anne tried her best to have conversations with American peers. With the awkwardness, she started to reflect on their communications and

observe the facial expressions of American peers to help her understand the implicit meanings of specific conversations later. Yingcai immersed himself in American culture by hanging out with Americans, watching football, and eating American food in his first two years, but he left his American social circle in his junior year and reembraced the Chinese culture.

Despite the participants learning English in China, they encountered nuanced experiences regarding language and culture. Specifically, their academic background, institution types, and program shaped their experiences. Yingcai and Jason spent extra time learning English in high school to prepare to study in the United States. For Yingcai, he was determined to become a leader, not just a regular international student. The mentorship was critical to him. Jason did not have any difficulty in communication but needed time to learn the English names of chemical equipment in the first semester. Unlike Jason and Yingcai, coming from a non-education and non-religious background, it was difficult for Jie to study education in a religious institution. Xue did not have language difficulties but needed to catch the pace of each class since every class was a few hours in length, which was very different from class mode in China. Yingcai learned to advocate for himself in his academic journey in order to access resources and opportunities. Echoing Heng (2018), Li (2012), Wu (2015), and Will (2019)'s research, these findings reveal that Chinese international students experienced a process of changing their learning habits and ways of doing.

Forms of Neo-racism

The findings of the present study confirm previous research on Asian/Chinese international students experiencing forms of neo-racism in the United States (Guilfoyle & Harryba, 2011; Lee, 2006, 2020; Lee et al., 2017; Lee & Rice, 2007; Will, 2016; Yao, 2018; Xie et al., 2021). Chinese international students are stereotyped as hardworking (Ruble & Zhang,

2013), but the foundation of this stereotype is academic and systemic injustice. All the participants worked very hard because of academic/resource challenges, immigration regulations, and/or high expectations from professors. For example, Hai shared that he hoped his department could provide equal resources for international students so that they could be treated the same way as domestic students; Jie and Anne had to get up super early to work in a cleaning job with a minimum wage because they could not work off campus with their student status. Jason had to work extra hours frequently compared with his American colleagues because he needed the H1B working visa sponsorship.

Specifically, participants' feelings of discrimination, stereotype, hostility, and systemic injustice related to their nationality and culture speak to the existing research on neo-racism (see Lee, 2006, 2020; Lee et al., 2017; Lee & Rice, 2007) that ties to cultural and national hierarchies. Hai confronted stereotyped speeches against China and non-democratic countries, which confirms Pennycook's (2017) study that Western culture is superior and leads to cultural and epistemological colonization. The manager's hostility and attacks on Yingcai's nationality made Yingcai very uncomfortable. When Anne faced uncomfortable situations, rather than arguing with her community, Anne chose to invite them to visit China. This echoes Hail's (2015) study on Chinese students asking Americans to discover the truth by experiencing life in China.

In previous research, international students from Asian countries reported they have encountered insulting jokes and statements about their accents and/or attributes (Hou & Jam, 2020; Lee, 2006; Marginson et al., 2010). Lee (2006) found that Asian accents were ridiculed sometimes, whereas European accents were more welcomed. Asian people are stereotyped as a model minority (Cvencek et al., 2014; Lee & Joo, 2005; Park et al., 2006). The findings of the present study demonstrated participants' feelings of stereotypes about their characteristics. For example, his school and company stereotyped Jason as hard-working and model Chinese.

Yingcai was offended when his co-worker said Chinese people as "spitted and pooped on the street and didn't use deodorant."

Being Agentic and Proactive

Confronted with different challenges, participants used various techniques to conquer those challenges. Yingcai took a course in memory to improve his short- and long-term memory. Hai learned from his rejections to enhance his research. Without receiving help from her advisor, Jie decided to contact the writing center for help with her dissertation. Anne proactively advocated for herself to get the opportunity as a Graduate Teaching Assistant. These findings from the present study contradict previous research that Asian or Chinese international students are quiet and passive (Cantwell & Lee, 2010; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009). Participants being agentic and proactive supports Heng's (2018; 2020) study that Chinese international students exhibit agency and resourcefulness to overcome challenges. Specifically, participants made decisions regarding their academic and life situations in advance to avoid dilemmas and conundrums. Jason applied for both H1B and O1 visas to ensure his valid status in the United States. After communicating with her supervisor, Jie decided to apply for a doctoral program in her OPT so that she could have valid international student status despite the "promise" from her supervisor to sponsor her H1B visa.

Multifaceted Being, Becoming, and Transformation

Despite all the participants identifying themselves as Chinese and Asian, American culture played an important role in their identification. Various contexts and experiences shape participants' being, becoming, and transformation. Studying in the United States improved Anne's confidence and independence. She enjoyed learning and experiencing different things, which provided her with a positive attitude toward life. Interaction with her social networks

helped her "expand" for her becoming. Jie also became more independent because she needed to make decisions by herself in the United States. Xue learned to enjoy the loneliness and to be persistent. The findings of the present study align with Ma's (2020) research that Chinese international students become more independent, autonomous, and proactive in their lived experiences. Furthermore, participants become more versatile, diverse, open-minded, and well-rounded. Participants would choose different ways of interacting to make people feel comfortable. For example, Jason chose to be humorous when he interacted with American colleagues. Hai learned to make friends with Japanese international students despite the history between China and Japan.

Participants actively engaged in their identity development and tried to find balance in-betweenness by immersing, (un)learning, and (re)evaluating environments. For example, by immersing himself in American culture, Yingcai claimed he preferred and was proud of Chinese culture. The process of navigating American culture and reevaluating Chinese culture supports Valdez's (2015) description of double consciousness that Chinese international students experience a conflict of identities of being Chinese and being Americanized. Furthermore, the findings expand the notion of double consciousness that Chinese international students can intentionally choose to be Chinese, Americanized, or both. For example, Jason chose to act in humorous ways when interacting with American people but not with his Chinese family.

Finally, food is an indispensable part of participants' identities. Chinese food means comfort and home. Without receiving the H1B lottery, Jason's mom made Chinese food to comfort him. After having American food for a certain time, Xue preferred Chinese food now more than ever. This echoes the findings that food is an integral part in international student identity (Brown et al., 2010; Kim, 2001; Locher et al., 2005).

Unanticipated Findings

Not all participants were familiar with the concept of agency, but they enacted agency in their life course. After providing a brief introduction to the agency, participants described their meanings and practices of the agency. Three components identified in the findings of the present study are included in the meaning of agency: indispensable learning during growth; changes by contexts and personal needs; and creating linkages across lived experiences. The three components expand Tran and Vu's (2018) definition of agency by emphasizing the learning process, the importance of contexts and needs, and implicit connections and interactions in one's past, present, and future experiences. Agency is not static but a dynamic change in mentality within times, spaces, and contexts. On the one hand, power hierarchy shapes how individuals enact their agency *intentionally*. Participants responded differently and intentionally to their professors and supervisors than their peers. Despite the uncomfortableness, Yingcai did not argue against his manager but kept his distance from him. On the other hand, the length of studying in the United States shapes participants enacting agency *unintentionally, indirectly,* and *subconsciously*. The longer the time participants study in the United States, the more experiences and deeper reflections they will have on their experiences, identities, and cultures (Heng, 2019).

Neo-racism is not a new phenomenon. Chinese students have encountered different forms of neo-racism since the first stage of studying in the United States. Specifically, in the present stage, Chinese students studying in the United States experienced stereotypical discrimination, exclusion, and hostility not only based on their skin color but more on their characteristics, culture, and national origin. Their international student status, academic program type, and the proportion of international students were also sources of hostility. For example, on a missionary trip, Yingcai's American peer posted on social media, "Today I lived like a Chinese: spitted and pooped on the street and didn't use deodorant." Jason was stereotyped as hard-working and model Chinese, but this "hardworking" is impacted by his international student status. Jason

needed to work hard without considering being exploited to have more opportunities and get an H1B work sponsorship.

Due to US-China geopolitical tensions, the type of academic program also shaped participants' experiences in different ways. Majoring in Public Policy and Administration, Hai encountered nuanced experiences compared with other participants. He confronted a few stereotyped speeches against China and/or non-democratic countries in formal learning environments. His professor claimed his preference for Western democracy and hoped all non-democratic countries could become democratic countries. Hai felt very uncomfortable and weird that all the conversations related to China were negative. He believed the negative relationships between China and the United States would impact his relationships with American peers and professors. With certain expectations, Jie and Anne were asked uncomfortable questions regarding the 365-degree camera in China and concentration camps in Xinjiang.

Furthermore, female participants experienced neo-racism in different ways in informal settings. Anne was told by her religious community that, as a woman, she should stay at home in China and educate her children. Anne's Japanese female friend felt offended that White males liked talking about Japanese animation and sexy beauty, although she was not interested in animation. Asian females' driving skills were more likely to be targeted. In addition, participants expressed that neo-racism not only happened among the White to international students of color but also among students of color with different races. Jason's Indian supervisor had higher expectations and demands of him compared to his American colleagues. Participants also experienced discrimination from their home country. Hai expressed that some people in China considered Chinese students studying in the United States as traitors. The present study unpacks various forms of neo-racism following different attributes (see Table 2).

Table 2

Unpacking Forms of Neo-racism

Forms of Neo-racism	Description	Examples
Microaggressions	Subtle and/or unintentional acts or comments that convey derogatory message.	Are you from Japan (Jie)?
Cultural stereotyping	Generalizing and assigning fixed characteristics to individuals based on their culture.	Chinese students were considered obedient, overly studious, and socially awkward (Anne & Jason).
Nationality stereotyping	Generalization and attribution of fixed characteristics or behaviors based on nationality or country of origin.	"not only China but also all non-democratic countries should become democratic countries someday" (Hai); Chinese people have no freedom (Jie).
Gender stereotyping	Generalizing fixed characteristics or expectations to certain gender and culture	Females should not study abroad but stay at home to educate kids (Anne).
Online racism	The manifestation of racism through online platforms, such as verbal insults and hate speech.	Social media post, "Today I lived like a Chinese, spitted and pooped on the street and didn't use deodorant" (Yingcai).
Exclusion	Denying certain racial groups access to resources, opportunities, etc.	No scholarship for master international students (Jie).
Isolation	Overlooking, separating, or isolating individuals.	Frequently "forgotten" by American roommates (Anne).
Verbal harassment	The use of derogatory and offensive language and verbal attacks about one's nationality, language, culture, etc.	Chinese steal intellectual property rights (Yingcai). Chinese students who study in the United States are called "汉奸" (traitor).

Beyond encountering forms of neo-racism, participants had primary struggles regarding international student status, professional relationships, and personal relationships with professors/advisors/supervisors. All the participants expressed that they needed to work hard due to the limitations of international student status. Anne and Jie got up very early in the morning to do a cleaning job with a minimum wage on campus because they did not have other options. Jason was expected and asked to work extra hours in his company. Five participants described either their advisors/professors as very busy and irresponsive or having an intense relationship. Further, professors were not aware of the limitations of international students due to immigration regulations. In China, professors are more accessible, whereas students need to make appointments to meet professors in the United States. The relationships with professors/advisors/supervisors were only in a professional setting.

Discussion

Through investigating six Chinese international graduate students' narratives in their formal and informal learning environments, the study revealed that they have heterogeneous and multi-dimensional backgrounds, needs, struggles, navigations, and experiences at various stages. One main takeaway from the study is that Chinese international graduate students enact their agency to experience acknowledging, understanding, (re)constructing, (un)learning, and (re)defining their identities and contexts in these navigations and negotiations as human beings. They identified themselves as international students, employees, and foreigners who navigate situations of loneliness, helplessness, hard-working, positivity, and resilience. Participants viewed studying in the United States as a learning and growing experience; this experience brought up new ways of thinking and doing to "expand" their horizons and becoming. They became to appreciate, learn, and respect diverse cultures, self-advocate, grow academically and professionally, and enjoy loneliness and independence. This speaks to Elder Jr.'s (1998) notion

that an individual's life brings about new ways of thinking, navigating, and negotiating their "pattern and dynamic" (p. 1).

Furthermore, forms of neo-racism are deeply embedded in Chinese international graduate students' navigation and negotiation. Participants were more discriminated against or stereotyped due to their nationality and cultural background. Xue and Jason were expected to work a heavy load by their advisors and supervisors. Jason's supervisor identified himself as a model minority. Of note is that participants appreciated the heavy workload as long as they could learn from all the assignments and projects. Additionally, US-China geopolitical tensions shifted participants' relationships with others. Hai felt uncomfortable and weird when his professors and peers always spoke negatively about China. Neo-racism not only happened among White to international students of color but also among students of color with races in formal and informal learning environments. Program types and the proportion of international students shaped the nuanced experiences of participants. Hai tended to encounter more negative speeches about China in classrooms due to majoring in Public Policy and Administration, whereas the rest participants tended to encounter negative assumptions about China. International students' voices were more likely to be heard if there were a large number of international students at universities. For example, at Xue and Anne's university, Asian international students' voices were valued because of the large number of Asian international students.

Another takeaway is that Chinese international graduate students are agentic and proactive in overcoming various challenges and forms of neo-racism in their formal and informal learning environments. For example, participants noted they spent extra time and took extra courses to improve their English and memories. The study demonstrates a counter-narrative that Chinese international students are passive. Participants sought support from different circles. Like Jie, when her advisor was irresponsive, she sought help from the Writing Center with her

dissertation. Participants also enacted collective agency for negotiation and interruption in their experiences. Chinese international students in Anne's class enacted their agency to ask their professor to take off the Free Hong Kong poster because the poster would cause isolation among Chinese students.

Findings from the study also indicate that there is a lack of communication and understanding between Chinese international graduate students and their advisors. Five participants hoped their advisor could meet or talk with them more often and provide an appropriate workload. Yingcai and Jie had to figure out things by themselves because of their advisors' irresponsibility. Anne transferred to another program because her professors did not understand the limitations of international student status and did not provide timely support. Xue transferred to another university because of the unknown intense relationship with his advisor.

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Implications for Practice

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The present study offers several implications for higher education practice. By first recognizing Chinese international graduate students' multi-dimensional identities, needs, challenges, and resilience as human beings, leaders in higher education institutions could uncover and interrupt the neocolonial and neoliberal practices that consider Chinese international students being passive, cash cows and should adapt to the host country (Glass et al., 2022; Hayes, 2019). The findings of the present study reveal that despite participants having many struggles in their lives, they used their own approaches and networks to overcome those struggles. In different learning processes, they enacted agency to seek support and resources as well as transform identities and contexts. Yet, that does not mean they do not need support from institutions. Indeed, Hai shared that he hoped institutions could provide more resources and opportunities for international students.

Second, by understanding the lack of communication and misunderstanding between professors and students, this study calls for leaders of higher education institutions to promote professional training for faculty and staff for a positive relationship to understand the limitations and challenges of being international students, especially immigration regulations. Particularly, training on intercultural communication and immigration regulations for advisors and faculty members is essential for international students. The relationship with advisors is important to international graduate students since the relationship would impact students' funding, dissertation success, and careers (Nguyen, 2013; Rice et al. 2009). Only one participant said his advisor was helpful with his academics; five participants indicated that either their advisors ignored their emails, or they had a poor relationship with their advisor. Advisors could allocate their time to their international advisees to understand their unique needs and struggles as international students and provide appropriate support. Those who lead training sessions at universities should collaborate with the international student office to have a basic understanding of the limitations of being an international student status. If so, advisors should provide support in advance so that international students do not need to transfer to another program with funding, like Anne. Additionally, faculty and staff at higher education institutions could be aware not to have political discussions that might cause estrangement among students. The staff at the career center also needs to collaborate with the international student office to provide more opportunities and resources for international students' careers. Due to immigration regulations for international students, staff members in the career center need to work with the international student office to understand the limitations of being international student when international students are seeking jobs. For example, staff members in the career center need to have knowledge of OPT and H1B to provide relevant working resources and negotiating skills for international students.

Implications for Policy

The study offers several implications for institutional policy and national policy. First, the heterogeneity of Chinese international students can guide institutions to understand their experiences and needs and help the admission office to have a strategic plan to acknowledge the purpose of recruiting Chinese international students and not only align it with economic benefits (Yao, 2014). If international student recruitment matters only for budget projection, higher education institutions would reproduce the neoliberal mentality and neglect the ethical needs of international students as human beings. Second, due to the lack of knowledge of specific immigration regulations and intercultural competence, different offices can benefit from collaborating with one another and having relevant training to help Chinese international students transition to learning environments and succeed in academics and careers. For example, school counseling professionals could have intentional training on intercultural competence and work with the international student office to understand the unique situations Chinese international students are in so that they could better understand and support Chinese international students. Third, the curriculum can benefit from bringing non-Western perspectives and focusing on a culture of internationalization and intercultural interaction (Leask, 2013); this way, professors would not stereotypical against all non-democratic countries.

From a national level, acknowledging and valuing the diverse benefits that Chinese international students can bring to the United States is essential to policymakers. At the same time, Chinese students should not be scapegoats or victims of geopolitical tensions. The U.S. government could alter immigration policy for Chinese international graduate students, such as extending OPT length and easing the pathways for permanent residency. Leaders of higher education institutions and relevant professional organizations could advocate for national

policies which will encourage institutions of higher education to recruit, welcome, and support the success of Chinese international graduate students.

Implications for Theory

This study adapted the individual and relational agency theoretical framework from Edwards (2005), Marginson (2014), Sen (1985), Tran and Vu (2018), and Hopwood (2010). The theory is very US-centric, based on one's capacity to work individually and/or collaboratively intentionally in a particular context. Five participants did not understand the concept of agency from a sociological perspective. To better understand the Chinese international student body, the theory can be expanded by adding the following components. Agency is one's "主观能动性" (subjective initiative). It is an indispensable learning component in one's growth and identity development. One's experiences can shape their agency: The more experiences they have, the more independent and proactive they become. Second, agency is changed by contexts and personal needs and shaped by power dynamics. Students can respond in certain ways to specific contexts. For example, Jason chose to be humorous when talking with American colleagues but not with his Chinese family. Last, agency is a dynamic change in mentality that creates linkages across lived experiences. Individuals' past experiences would shape their present experiences and envision their future experiences. These past, present, and future experiences are not separate but connected in some ways.

Further Reflection

In this section, I focus on further reflections on how my findings speak and critique to agency theoretical framework and neo-racism concept. The present study examined and explored Chinese international graduate students' formal and informal learning experiences and how they describe and enact agency responses to those experiences, especially experiences related to neo-racism. While research on agency needs to consider individual and relational components is

important to one's experiences (Edwards, 2005; Marginson, 2014; Sen, 1985; Tran & Vu, 2018; & Hopwood,2010), the present study introduces the description of agency, types of agency, and attributes of agency from non-Western perspectives.

Agency is an ongoing learning capacity that an individual engages and navigates the environments, including but not limited to personal, cultural, social, political, and economic backgrounds. The ongoing learning capacity is shaped by the micro and macro contexts within the past and present and oriented towards the future. In this context, micro context refers to the personal environment or specific social interactions that shape one's beliefs, values, practices, and experiences, such as family background, personality, knowledge, socioeconomic status, needs, cultural norms, etc. The macro context refers to different structures, systems, and institutions, such as cultural norms, social structure, political context, socioeconomic conditions at the societal level. The micro and macro contexts are in reciprocal and interdependent relationships.

Agency is categorized as the following types of agency: individual agency, relational agency, structured agency, culturally-embedded agency, power-embedded agency, intersectional agency, and transformative agency. Individual agency underscores one's capacity to act on their behalf to respond to their needs and contexts (Hopwood, 2010). It acknowledges and highlights one's needs as human beings, such as food, security, freedom, health, education, etc. (Costanza et al., 2007). Chinese international graduate students have different needs, including but not limited to linguistic, financial, academic, and mental health at various stages. They act in different ways to respond to those needs. For example, Anne chose to step out of her comfort zone to initiate conversations with American peers to improve her English and understand American culture. Individual agency provides a mechanism to construct one's life by identifying

and meeting various needs (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Biesta et al., 2015; Costanza et al., 2007; Tran & Vu, 2018).

Structured agency acknowledges that agency operates within various structural constraints, which is overlooked in traditional agency. While individuals have the capability to make choices, these choices are shaped and limited by broader social, economic, and political structures. Chinese students' options are limited by their immigration status as international student. Being an international student means that they have limited resources and opportunities in spite of working very hard. As international students, they also need to plan in advance for the future for a valid immigration status. Within these constraints, Chinese international students have no power to change immigration regulations, but they choose to have a positive attitude and balanced life. Due to US-China geopolitical tensions, Chinese international students use their own ways to navigate and respond to stereotypes, hostility, and discrimination. This relates to needs-response agency where students respond to specific needs or challenges in a foreign country (Tran & Vu, 2018).

Culturally-embedded agency acknowledges the cultural variations in how agency is understood and exercised. Agency is shaped by one's cultural norms, values, and expectations. Chinese international students come from cultural hierarchies and different education systems, which makes it difficult to build personal relationships with professors in the United States. At the same time, they also feel a sense of distance from their professors and choose to respect their professors. Furthermore, Chinese students draw upon cultural values and practices to cope with neo-racism. For example, Anne provided explanations from both sides of why there are 365-degree cameras in the community in China to her American peers. Within a new culture, Chinese international students actively construct their life and find in-betweenness by immersing and

(un)learning new environments and relearning their home culture. Culturally-embedded agency brings new ways of thinking, navigating, and negotiating for personal and professional development in a new cultural context (Elder Jr., 1998; Tran & Vu, 2018).

Power-embedded agency emphasizes the power relation and hierarchy shapes individual understanding and practicing agency. For example, Yingcai chose to stop hanging out with his manager because his manager was "letting his guard down and like just start talking shit." As "foreigners," Chinese international students do not have the power to change the unfair immigration regulations, but choose to work hard with a positive attitude and live a balanced life. Despite a lower hierarchy, Chinese students chose to collaborate with one another to resist the separation practices that their professors would cause. Power-embedded agency relates to the agency as struggle resistance, where students resist and challenge unfair treatment or oppression individually or collectively.

Intersectional agency recognizes that agency is shaped by intersecting social categories like race, nationality, socioeconomic status, gender, academic program types, etc. Chinese international students' experiences of neo-racism might intersect with different aspects of their identity, gender, and academic program types. For example, majoring in Public Policy and Administration, Hai tends to encounter stereotypical speeches in his formal learning environment compared to other Chinese international students. Female Chinese international students tend to experience forms of neo-racism in their informal learning environment.

Transformative agency emphasizes the capacity of individuals to challenge and change the structures that constrain them and underscores the potential of agency not just to adapt to structures but to transform them. Chinese international students navigate and resist forms of racism directly and collectively, like educating others about Chinese culture and collaborating

with other Chinese students to fight for their rights. For example, Anne's Chinese classmate organized all of the Chinese students in her program to ask their professor to remove the Free Hong Kong poster at her office. At the same time, individuals also have a deeper understanding of their identity and cultivate their personal and professional development (Marginson, 2014; Sen, 1985; Tran & Vu, 2018). Transformative agency is related to Tran and Vu's (2018) agency for becoming and collective agency for contestation, which involve striving for personal growth and transformation as well as collective efforts to challenge oppressive structures.

Regarding different types of Chinese international student agency, through the lens of the traditional agency framework, the present study highlights students' capacity to act on their behalf to respond to their needs, resist struggles, and transform themselves and the contexts (Edwards, 2005; Hopwood, 2010; Tran & Vu, 2018). The study also critiques the traditional agency in different ways by acknowledging and underscoring that agency operates within structural constraints. Furthermore, cultural variations, power hierarchy, and intersecting social categories shape one's understanding and practices of agency. While these six types of agency in this study are not mutually exclusive, some attributes are connected or influenced by each other. For instance, the structured agency acknowledges that agency operates within structural constraints; individuals' choices are shaped and limited by power hierarchies.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of the present study may inspire several potential directions for future research. First, more studies should focus on how Chinese international graduate students' lived experiences and career experiences and how they enact agency to respond to those experiences since US-China geopolitical tensions have more impacted them as compared to undergraduate students.

Second, the understanding of the nuanced experiences of Chinese international graduate students could be enhanced through a longitudinal study. This longitudinal study could examine the intersecting differences in students' gender, program types, socioeconomic status, years of studying in the United States, etc. The current study interviewed six participants; having a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of each participant's narrative is important. For future research, a mixed-methods longitudinal study should be conducted for more robust research so that the quantitative study would examine the extent to which different factors shape Chinese international graduate students' identities and experiences.

Last but not least, future research could include the perspectives of faculty and domestic students regarding their experiences working with Chinese international graduate students. The following research questions could be examined in future research: What are the faculty's perspectives on challenges when teaching Chinese international graduate students? What are faculty and domestic students' perspectives when interacting with Chinese international graduate students? This type of examination would be helpful to Chinese students in their understanding on how faculty members and students perceive the opportunities and experiences of working with Chinese students.

Conclusion

Chinese international students have studied in the United States since 1872, and they have done so for a variety of reasons. They have been expected to adapt to the host culture and experience different forms of neo-racism. For example, the first wave of Chinese international students studying in the United States was discriminated against because of their queues and long braids; they had to take off their long Chinese gowns and wear American clothes (Bieler, 2004). Modern Chinese international students are stereotyped as wealthy, hardworking, and smart, but incompetent in English (Ruble & Zhang, 2013; Xie et al., 2021). They need more academic

support in their experiences in the United States. Beyond examining Chinese international students' experiences studying in the United States, this study explored how Chinese international graduate students enacted agency in narrated formal and informal learning experiences and how they navigated and responded to those experiences.

The study highlights Chinese international graduate students' explicit needs and implicit being, becoming, and transformation in their life course. Students have various needs, including but not limited to education, finance, transportation, mental health, and culture. Through struggling, negotiating, and resisting, students (un)learn, (re)construct, and (re)define their identities and contexts. Rather than being passive, Chinese international graduate students proactively seek support collectively for negotiation and interruption.

Leaders of higher education institutions need to shift their thinking from their neocolonial and neoliberal perspectives to recognize Chinese international students as scholars and human beings. Institutional leaders need to acknowledge the unique challenges for Chinese international graduate students and provide strategic plans for different offices' collaboration to support their transition to the United States for their academic and career success. For example, providing academic and career mentors with knowledge of international student status could help international students navigate various academic and career challenges. It is important to acknowledge that the transformation of Chinese international students will also transform the environment in which they and future Chinese international students learn.

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APPENDIX A - Interview Protocol #1 – Chinese (formal)

访谈#1- 与课堂相关的经历

个人背景信息

● 你能介绍一下你的学术背景吗？（什么时候来美国的，专业等等）

故事分享

1. 你可以分享一个你如何参与课堂的故事经历吗？

2. 你可以分享一个你认为教授或同学对你有刻板印象的经历吗？

   a. 你的感受是什么？你又是如何应对的？

3. 你可以分享一个你认为你被教授或同学忽视的经历吗？

   a. 你的感受是什么？你又是如何应对的？

4. 你可以分享一个你认为你被教授或同学歧视的经历吗？

   a. 你的感受是什么？你又是如何应对的？

5. 你可以分享一个你被教授或同学骚扰的经历吗？

   a. 你的感受是什么？你又是如何应对的？

6. 你可以分享一个你被教授或同学怀疑的经历吗？

   a. 你的感受是什么？你又是如何应对的？

7. 你可以分享一个你被教授或同学压榨的经历吗？

   a. 你的感受是什么？你又是如何应对的？

8. 你可以分享一件发生在课堂里记忆深刻的事吗？

APPENDIX B - Interview Protocol #2 – Chinese (informal)

访谈#2-课堂外的经历

上次我们聊了一些关于课程专业相关的问题，这次我们来聊一下课外的经历。

- 你上次大概分享了这些内容，你还有什么想添加的吗？

现在，让我们来聊下你课外的生活和经历。

1. 你可以分享一个你在小组作业的经历吗？

    a. 是否有任何紧张的气氛呢？你是如何应对的？

2. 你可以分享一个课外你认为他人对你有刻板印象的经历吗？

    a. 你的感受是什么？你又是如何应对的？

3. 你可以分享一个课外你认为你被他人忽视的经历吗？

    a. 你的感受是什么？你又是如何应对的？

4. 你可以分享一个课外你认为你被他人歧视的经历吗？

    a. 你的感受是什么？你又是如何应对的？

5. 你可以分享一个课外你被他人骚扰的经历吗？

    a. 你的感受是什么？你又是如何应对的？

6. 你可以分享一个课外你被他人怀疑的经历吗？

    a. 你的感受是什么？你又是如何应对的？

7. 你可以分享一个你曾寻求帮助来应对那些事情的经历吗？你一般寻求帮助的对象是谁呢？

8. 你可以分享一个课外你被他人压榨的经历吗？

    a. 你的感受是什么？你又是如何应对的？

9. 你可以分享一件课外记忆深刻的事吗？

APPENDIX C - Interview Protocol #3 – Chinese (Restorying)

访谈 #3 – 复述和反思

1. 你可以分享你来美国之后，发现美国和你想象中不一样的地方 **？**

    a. 这些不同是如何影响你的思维方式和做事方式的 **？**

2. 你可以复述并且反思下对于前两次访谈中你所提到的经历，你采取何种方式来应

    对 **？** 为何是那种方式呢 **？**

3. 通过在美国的学习和生活，你是如何看待自己的成长的 **？**

4. 还有其他需要补充的吗 **？**

APPENDIX D - Interview Protocol #1 – English (formal)

Interview # 1 – Classroom Experiences

Demographic Information

- Could you please describe your academic background? (When came to the US, programs, etc.)

Stories Sharing

1. Could you tell me a story about how you participated in the classroom?

2. Could you tell me a story that you felt you were stereotyped by professors or peers?

   a. How did you feel and respond to it?

3. Could you tell me a story that you felt you were overlooked by professors or peers?

   a. How did you feel and respond to it?

4. Could you tell me a story that you felt you were discriminated against by professors or peers?

   a. How did you feel and respond to it?

5. Could you tell me a story that you felt you were assaulted by professors or peers?

   a. How did you feel and respond to it?

6. Could you tell me a story that you felt you were considered suspicious by professors or peers?

   a. How did you feel and respond to it?

7. Could you tell me a story that you felt you were exploited or treated unfairly by professors or peers?

   a. How did you feel and respond to it?

8. Could you tell me a memorable story that happened to you in the classroom?

APPENDIX E - Interview Protocol #2 – English (informal)

Interview #2 Outside of Classroom

We talked about some experiences related to your class or program last time, and now we are going to talk about experiences related outside of your class.

- Here is what you shared in the last interview...Do you have anything else that you want to share?

Now, let's talk about the experiences related to outside of your class.

1. Could you tell me a story that you worked on in a group project?

    a. Any tensions? How did you respond to it?

2. Could you tell me a story that you felt you were stereotyped by others outside of your classroom?

    a. How did you feel and respond to it?

3. Could you tell me a story that you felt you were overlooked by others outside of your classroom?

    a. How did you feel and respond to it?

4. Could you tell me a story that you felt you were discriminated against by others outside of your classroom?

    a. How did you feel and respond to it?

5. Could you tell me a story that you felt you were assaulted by others outside of your classroom?

    a. How did you feel and respond to it?

6. Could you tell me a story that you felt you were considered suspicious by others outside of your classroom?

a. How did you feel and respond to it?

7. Could you tell me a story about how you often seek help and/or from whom you seek help in response to those experiences?

8. Could you tell me a story that you felt you were exploited or treated unfairly by others outside of your classroom?

a. How did you feel and respond to it?

9. Could you tell me a memorable story that happened to you outside of your classroom?

APPENDIX F - Interview Protocol #3 – Restorying (English)

Interview #3 – Restorying and Reflection

1. Could you tell me a story that you felt the US was very different from your imagination after you arrived in the US?

    a. How do those differences impact your ways of thinking or doing things?

2. Could you restory and reflect what approach you would take to respond to the experiences you described in the first two interviews and why?

3. How do you perceive your personal growth while studying and living in the US?

4. Is there anything else you would like to add or share?

APPENDIX G - Journal Entry #1 – Chinese

非常感谢你继续参与这个研究。这个问卷旨在帮助你反思关于你专业学习的一些经历和课堂经历，并且也会帮助你将来回味在美国学习的时光。

请尽力回答以下问题。你可以用英文或者中文来回答，你也可以用任何你喜欢的形式来回答（比如以段落或者诗词的形式）。更重要的是，如果你可以具体举例或分享一些具体的故事，则会非常帮助我更好的认识你并理解你的经历。请在下次访谈之前把你的反馈发给我。如果有些问题你不方便回答，你可以跳过。

我非常感激你真诚的分享你的故事和经历。期望更多的认识你。

万分感激

明慧

姓名：   日期：
（请在每个问题后记录你的答案。如果你需要更多位置，你可以敲击 enter 键。）
1. 上次访谈后，你有任何需要补充的地方吗？（例如，访谈后你突然记起的任何信息，这个访谈是如何帮助你自我反思的，等等。）
2. 在美国读书，你感觉如何？（例如，你的教授或同学如何看待你，任何和教授或同学的社交状况，如何准备你的学业，等等。）
3. 请反思并分享你在美学习过程中或课堂中，一次让你感到不舒服的经历。

4.　你是如何应对那种不舒服的经历的？为何采取那种方式呢？
5.　新冠曾被一些人称为"中国病毒"。你有何感触？你又是如何被影响的？

APPENDIX H - Journal Entry #2 – Chinese

非常感谢你继续参与这个研究。这个问卷旨在帮助你反思关于课外或专业以外的一些经历，并且也会帮助你将来回味在美国学习的时光。

请尽力回答以下问题。你可以用英文或者中文来回答，你也可以用任何你喜欢的形式来回答 （比如以段落或者诗词的形式）。更重要的是，如果你可以具体举例或分享一些具体的故事，则会非常帮助我更好的认识你并理解你的经历。请在下次访谈之前把你的反馈发给我。如果有些问题你不方便回答，你可以跳过。

我非常感激你真诚的分享你的故事和经历。期望更多的认识你。

万分感激

明慧

姓名：   日期：
（请在每个问题后记录你的答案。如果你需要更多位置，你可以敲击 enter 键。）
1. 上次访谈后，你有任何需要补充的地方吗？（例如，访谈后你突然记起的任何信息，这个访谈是如何帮助你自我反思的，等等。）
2. 请分享下你课外的一些经历。 （例如，在社团组织，或所在的社区，等等。）
3. 请反思并分享你在课外的生活中，一次让你感到不舒服的经历。

4. 你是如何应对那种不舒服的经历的？为何采取那种方式呢？
5. 自从在美国学习，你是如何看待自己的成长的？

APPENDIX I - Journal Entry #1 – English

Thank you so much for your continuing participation in the study. This journey entry aims to provide you the opportunity to reflect on your *learning experiences related to your program and classroom experiences*. It will also help you reflect on yourself and look back on the future.

Please answer the questions below as best as you can. You may choose to write in English or Chinese, and in any format that you prefer (e.g. paragraphs, poems, etc.). Most importantly, if you could provide examples or stories to be more specific, that would be super helpful for me to understand your thoughts. Please return your journal entry to me before your next interview. If you don't feel comfortable to share, you can skip the question to move to the next question.

I truly appreciate your time, honesty, and sincere sharing of your stories and feelings. Looking forward to getting to know you better.

Very gratefully,

Hannah

Name: **Date:**
(Please type your answers in the space directly below each question. You can hit the enter key to increase the space if you need.)
1. What are some things or thoughts that you want to add after the interview (e.g. anything you remember after the interview, how the interview helped you reflect, etc.)?

2. Could you share your feelings about being a student in the US? (e.g., your thoughts on how professors or peers look at you, any social interactions with professors or peers, how you prepare for your academic, etc.)

3. Could you reflect and share a story that you felt **uncomfortable** in your classroom or in your learning environment since studying in the US?

4. What did you do to respond to the uncomfortableness? Why did you respond in that way?

5. COVID-19 was called "Chinese Virus" before by some people. What are your feelings and thoughts about that? How does that impact yourself?S?

APPENDIX J - Journal Entry #2 – English

Thank you so much for your continuing participation in the study. This journey entry aims to

provide you the opportunity to reflect on your learning experiences *outside of your program and*

outside of classroom experiences. It will also help you reflect on yourself and look back on the

future.

Please answer the questions below as best as you can. You may choose to write in English or

Chinese, and in any format that you prefer (e.g. paragraphs, poems, etc.). Most importantly, if

you could provide examples or stories to be more specific, that would be super helpful for me to

understand your thoughts. Please return your journal entry to me before your next interview. If

you don't feel comfortable to share, you can skip the question to move to the next question.

I truly appreciate your time, honesty, and sincere sharing of your stories and feelings. Looking

forward to getting to know you better.

Very gratefully,

Hannah

Name: Date:
(Please type your answers in the space directly below each question. You can hit the enter key to increase the space if you need.)
1. What are some things or thoughts that you want to add after the second interview (e.g. anything you remember after the interview, how the interview helped you reflect, etc.)?

2. Could you tell me how you feel about your experiences outside of the classroom? (e.g. in organization, community, etc.)

3. Could you reflect and share a story that you felt **uncomfortable** outside of your classroom since studying in the US?

4. What did you do to respond to the uncomfortableness? Why did you respond in that way?

5. Could you reflect and share your thoughts on how you have changed since studying in the US?

APPENDIX K – Recruitment Post

Hi,

I am Minghui Hou, a PhD candidate in the higher education program at Old Dominion University. This post is to invite you to participate in my doctoral dissertation to explore Chinese international graduate students' experiences in the US.

Your participation would involve interviews and journal entries (less than 60 minutes for each interview). The interview will be conducted via Zoom, and you can choose Chinese or English for the interview questions. Your privacy is very important to me. I will treat all the notes and transcripts with the utmost confidentiality. Only I will have access to your identity. Your university name and other identifiable information will be masked. Pseudonyms will be provided. You will also receive a $20 Amazon gift card for your contributions.

In order to participate in the study, you need to study in the United States for at least six months, you need to be older than 18 years old, your nationality needs to be Chinese, and English will NOT be your native language. If you are interested in participating in the study, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach me via email mhou009@odu.edu or my WeChat ID: 2676067351 for any questions.

APPENDIX L – Consent Form

Dear Participant:

The purpose of this form is to provide you with more information on the research and a consent form to convey that your participation is voluntary, to explain the risks and benefits of participation, and to empower you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to ask the researchers any questions you may have.

Study Title: *Chinese International Graduate Student Agency in a Neo-racism Context: A Narrative Analysis*

Primary Investigator: Mitchell R. Williams, PhD, Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership, College of Education and Professional Studies.

Contact Information: mrwillia@odu.edu, 757-683-4344

1. PURPOSE OF RESEARCH:

As a Chinese international graduate student, you are being asked to participate in the study exploring Chinese graduate students' formal and informal learning experiences while studying in the United States. Your participation will contribute to the knowledge of the international education community to let Chinese international students' voices be heard and for an inclusive community establishment.

2. WHAT YOU WILL DO:

There are three phases of interviews. Each interview will last less than 60 minutes. The interview will be conducted in an informal, conversational manner in a virtual setting via Zoom with open-ended questions that allow you to talk about your experience candidly. You may agree to be

digitally recorded, or you may choose not to be digitally recorded during our conversations.

There will be a journal entry between each two interviews. In the journal entry, you will be

invited to answer a few questions.

3. RISKS AND BENEFITS:

While participating in this study, you will encounter minimal risks, including the potential

inconvenience of scheduling the interview and/or the possibility of anxiety or unpleasant

experiences during the interview. The researcher will minimize these risks at your convenience.

The benefits of participating in the study include the opportunity to reflect upon, articulate, and

discuss your experience as a Chinese international student. The interview, as a result, may lead to

a deeper understanding of your own development and growth as a Chinese international student.

4. PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY:

Everything you say will remain confidential. Your confidentiality will be protected to the

maximum extent allowable by law. Any direct identification information, including your name,

will be removed from data when responses are analyzed. Any signed informed consent forms,

the interview recruitment letters, and other materials will be kept in secure password-protected

server space. The data will be accessible only to the researchers associated with this study and

the Institutional Review Board. During analysis, numeric codes will be assigned to your

information so that your name is not associated with the data files.

During dissemination, findings will be reported by theme (aggregating the data) or by

pseudonym (assigning a fake name). The results of this study may be published or presented at

professional meetings, but the identities of all research participants will remain confidential.

Special care will be taken to mask markers of identity (e.g., school and biographical data).

Although every attempt will be made to keep your identity private, some distinguishing responses that you share and other comments may reflect your identity.

All data will be stored for five years after the project closes. Five years after the conclusion of the study, the data (consent forms, digital audio files, transcripts, my notes, documents related) will be destroyed.

5. YOUR RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE, SAY NO, OR WITHDRAW:

Your participation is completely voluntary. You can decide not to participate in the interview, not to answer any questions, and you may withdraw at any time with no negative consequences. Your decision will not change any present or future relationships with me, the faculty, the administrators, and the university as a whole.

6. COSTS AND COMPENSATION FOR BEING IN THE STUDY:

You will receive a $20 Amazon gift card for participating in this study.

7. CONTACT INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS:

If you have any questions later on, then the researchers should be able to answer them; please contact the researcher Dr. Mitchell Williams at mrwillia@odu.edu

If at any time you feel pressured to participate, or if you have any questions about your rights or this form, then you should call Dr. John Baaki, Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee for the Darden College of Education) at 757 683 5491, or the Old Dominion University Office of Research, at 757 683 3460.

8. DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT.

By signing below, you are indicating your voluntary participation in this study and acknowledge that you may: 1) choose not to participate in the study; 2) refuse to answer certain questions; and 3) discontinue your participation at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You are saying that you have read this form or have had it read to you, that you are satisfied that you understand this form, the research study, and its risks and benefits.

Signature_____Date_____

Name (Printed)_____

In addition, your signature below means that you voluntarily agree to allow your responses to be digitally recorded.

Signature_____Date_____

9. INVESTIGATOR'S STATEMENT

I certify that I have explained to this subject the nature and purpose of this research, including benefits, risks, costs, and any experimental procedures. I have described the rights and protections afforded to human subjects and have done nothing to pressure, coerce, or falsely entice this subject into participating. I am aware of my obligations under state and federal laws, and promise compliance. I have answered the subject's questions and have encouraged the student to ask additional questions at any time during the course of this study. I have witnessed the above signature(s) on this consent form.

Signature_____Date_____

Name (Printed)_____

VITA

Minghui Hou

EDUCATION

Old Dominion University (Norfolk, Virginia)
Ph.D., Higher Education
Dissertation: Chinese International Graduate Student Agency in a Neo-racism Context: A Narrative Analysis

Northwest Nazarene University (Nampa, Idaho)
M.Ed., Curriculum, Instruction, and Innovation

Xi'an Eurasia University (Shaanxi, China)
B.A., English

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Program Coordinator   2019 - 2021
Old Dominion University

Graduate Teaching and Research Assistant   2021 - present
Old Dominion University

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Glass, C. R., Heng T. T., & **Hou, M.** (2022). Intersections of identity and status in international students' perceptions of culturally engaging campus environments. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 89,* 19-29. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2022.05.003

Hou, M., Cruz, N., Glass, C. R., & Lee, S. (2021). Transnational postgraduates: Navigating academic trajectories in the globalized university. International Studies of Sociology in Education. https://doi.org/10.1080/09620214.2020.1853590

Hou, M., & Jam, A. (2020). International education equity for doctoral students: Duoethnographic reflections from China and Cameroon. *International Journal of Doctoral Students, 15,* 759-786. https://doi.org/10.28945/4673

SELECTED PRESENTATIONS

Hou, M. (2023, February). *Chinese International Graduate Students' Racial Dynamics During the US-China Geopolitical Tensions.* Comparative & International Education Society (CIES) Conference, Washington, D.C.

Hou, M. (2022, November). *International Education as Soft Power: Chinese International Students' Experience Under US-China Geopolitical Tensions.* Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) Annual Conference, Las Vegas, NV.

Hou, M., Cruz, N., & Ichikawa, A. (2022, April). *Exploring the Journey of International Students' Identity Development in Transnational Spaces Through Narratology.* Comparative & International Education Society (CIES) Conference. Minneapolis, MN. (Selected as highlighted session)