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CHINESE FEMALE GRADUATE STUDENTS ON US CAMPUSES: NEGOTIATING CLASSROOM SILENCE, THE LEFTOVER WOMAN AND THE GOOD WOMAN DISCOURSES

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Abstract

Informed by intersectionality (Collins, 1995, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991, 2000; hooks, 1984, 1989, 2000; McCall, 2005; Mohanty, 1988, 2003; Zerai, 2000) and a postpositivist realist account of identity (Mohanty, 2000; Moya, 2000), this qualitative project explored twenty Chinese female students' experiences with gender and nationality while attending graduate schools in four universities on the East Coast of the US. Challenging the academic discourse that reduced the vast range of experiences to linguistic and cultural accumulation (Kasper, 1997; Klomega, 2006; Lewthwaite, 1997; Misra & Castillo, 2004), this study focused specifically on Chinese women's narratives of negotiating classroom silence, the leftover woman discourse, and the good Chinese woman discourse. For women growing up in China, a country long dominated by patriarchal norms that still define women through motherhood and femininity, attending graduate school in the US not only meant educational achievement, but also offered a chance to advance their careers, and recraft gender roles and boundaries. This study showed that as socially situated complex subjects, Chinese women articulated a wide range of complexities involved in living their lives under different cultural contexts, as well as the multiple ways of living and learning among the complexities. The study has implications for researchers, policy-makers, and educators in the fields of higher education, international education, as well as gender studies.

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SILENCE, THE LEFTOVER WOMAN AND THE GOOD WOMAN DISCOURSES

by

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The number of international students from Mainland China to North America has increased steadily in recent years. In the United States, for instance, there were nearly 254,000 Mainland Chinese students attending colleges and universities in the 2013-2014 academic year, nearly a third of all international students and the largest international student group (Institute of International Education, 2014). In the academic year 2013-2014 at Spring University, the largest proportion of international students came from Mainland China, including 801 undergraduates and 984 graduate students (441 females and 543 males), accounting to 52 percent of all international students representing 127 countries/regions (Office of International Services, 2014). Despite the increasing number, little research is on the fast growing presence of Chinese international students in US higher education. In Fasheh's words, "their existence within American society is peripheral at best" (Fasheh, 1984, p. 318). Among this understudied population, Chinese female graduate students are less known still.

Aspiring for professional and personal advancement, Chinese female graduate students on US campuses are characterized as academic and professional high-achievers, which oftentimes masks the need to study this group (Qin & Lykes, 2006). However, while in the US, they, together with other international students, contribute to American higher education in many ways. Economically, international students bring capital to the campus in the form of tuition and labor. According to *Open Doors 2014: A 15-Year Snapshot* (Institute of International Education, 2014) published by Institute of International Education, international students contribute three times as much to the US economy as

they did 15 years ago, up from $9 billion to $27 billion in tuition, room and board, books, travel and other expenses. Socially, international students' presence diversifies the American higher education landscape. Intellectually, as graduate students, their research and teaching contributes to the academic prestige of their institutions. Other than some preconceptions that Chinese international students are smart, hardworking, and unlikely to complain, the literature has emphasized adjustment issues, such as academic choices, language and cultural barriers, mostly in the fields of second language acquisition and psychology (Cai, 2003; Guan & Dodder, 2001; Wong, 2004).

As outsiders within the US and insiders outside China (Collins, 1986, 2000), Chinese female graduate students have attended educational institutions and experienced social realities both in China and in the US. They occupy a specific position simultaneously crossing both worlds, which allows them to gain specific insights into both societies and continuously re-evaluate their lived experiences in China and in the US. Growing up in a country long dominated by patriarchal norms that define women through motherhood and femininity, even though national policy has proclaimed women's equality (Barlow, 2004; Leung, 2003), pursuing advanced degrees in the US may mean more than mere educational achievement to a Chinese woman. It may offer a chance to advance one's career, to redefine traditional gender roles, and to recraft gender boundaries. In the parameters of Chinese and American cultures, what does it mean to be a Chinese woman? What barriers do Chinese women face and what costs do they have to pay for an advanced degree in the US? How do one's experiences in the US inform one's life trajectory? These are some of the questions my study attempts to address.

In the following sections in this chapter, first, I attempt to provide an overview of what my study is and introduce the research questions that guided my inquiry. Next, I discuss my personal life and academic training that brought me interested in the study. I then examine the theoretical frameworks on identity that informed my study. In an effort to better situate my study, I include a description of the settings where my research took place, the social and political contexts where my participants grew up, as well as significance of the study. I end this Introduction Chapter with an outline of the remaining chapters.

Description of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand how Chinese women negotiate gender and nationality when attending graduate schools in the US. Specifically, my study aims to investigate how meanings of being Chinese and being female are continually (re)negotiated and (re)articulated in locally specific contexts through an examination of their complex negotiations with the issue of classroom silence, the leftover woman discourse and the good woman discourse. This qualitative project assumes that being able to study abroad is a gesture towards Chinese women's liberation. The project also assumes that one's gendered and national identities intersect or are so tightly coupled that they must be studied inclusively (Crenshaw, 2000; hooks, 1989; McCall, 2005).

For the past thirty years, the participants of this study have witnessed China's fast economic growth and alarming social inequalities. As they experience graduate schools in the US where a newly racialized identity of being Chinese is assigned to them, their "Chineseness" immediately becomes a predominant marker of identification as they live

with a gendered and racialized identity as "Chinese women." Informed by intersectionality (Collins, 1995, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991, 2000; hooks, 1984, 1989, 2000; McCall, 2005; Mohanty, 1988, 2003; Zerai, 2000) and a postpositivist realist account of identity (Mohanty, 2000; Moya, 2000), I conducted in-depth interviews with 20 Chinese female graduate students at four northeast US universities over a five-year period (September 2005—April 2010). My study explores their experiences with gender and nationality that are encased within and mediated by social and cultural discourses, the real-life ramifications (Mohanty, 2003) of being Chinese women, their concerns and struggles, as well as their strategies to negotiate their lives.

Research Questions

My interest in studying Chinese female graduate students is certainly informed by my own experiences as a Chinese female graduate student. I wondered about questions such as: What does it mean to be a Chinese woman in different contexts? How do ideas about being Chinese and being female get constructed over time as Chinese women experience graduate schools in the US? How does one's entwined subjectivity based on gender, race, and culture get played out, constituted, and contested in one's own articulation of Chineseness? What are the social, cultural, and political contexts in which identity, experience, and agency are constituted and constrained? What kinds of power relations get involved and uncovered in one's (non)subscription and (non)identification of being a Chinese woman? These questions guided me in selecting and interviewing my first few participants and ultimately helped me in formulating the research questions that informed this study.

My research questions are: How do Chinese female graduate students negotiate the issue of classroom silence while attending schools in the US? How do they maneuver the Chinese leftover woman discourse even when they are physically away from China? How does the Chinese good woman discourse shape their lives as Chinese women pursuing advanced degrees in the US? I organize my data chapters around the three research questions where each chapter aims to address and unpack each research question.

Theoretically, intersectionality (Collins, 1995, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991, 2000; hooks, 1984, 1989, 2000; McCall, 2005; Mohanty, 1988, 2003; Zerai, 2000) and a postpositivist realist account of identity (Mohanty, 2000; Moya, 2000) assist me to explore the research questions, which I discuss further in this chapter in the section on Theoretical Frameworks on Identity. Methodologically, qualitative research enables me to study variations among group members by emphasizing the specific perspectives of individuals who constitute the group (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) of Chinese female graduate students on US campuses. By examining the various narratives that my research participants produced, I look at how they construct meanings about their positions as Chinese women and simultaneously complicate their positions through their negotiations with the issue of classroom silence, the leftover woman discourse, as well as the good woman discourse.

My Interest in the Study

In many ways, this dissertation is both personal and scholarly. My interest in the experiences of Chinese female graduate students attending US graduate schools has arisen from my own personal experience of growing up in China and pursuing a doctorate as a Chinese female graduate student, as well as my academic training in the fields of sociology

and women's studies in the US. As Denzin (1989) said, our "own worlds of experience are the proper subject matter of inquiry" (p. 25). Harding (1987) made a similar assertion to integrate researchers' subjectivity[1] into empirical evidence. Smith (1987) proposed to start an academic inquiry with the researcher's "bodily existence and activity" (Smith, 1987, p. 15).

I was born and raised in an urban middle-class family in China as the only child of two parents who worked as government officials in the fields of broadcast and print media, and health care. Education was highly valued in my immediate and extended family. I am the first and only female to get a bachelor's degree and to study abroad. My family has witnessed the progress China has made towards gender equity (Leung, 2003) and their experiences are reflective of and shaped by China's transformation over the past decades (Mills, 1959). My paternal grandparents enjoyed a privileged social status as wealthy landlords before the founding of People's Republic of China[2] in 1949 under Chairman Mao, but despite their high socio-economic status, only males in their families had had the right to schooling in a pre-1949 China plagued by institutionalized sexism that treated women as the property of men and promoted women's ignorance as a virtue (Zhao & Zhang, 1996). My maternal grandparents' experiences were similar. Both of my grandmothers were uneducated and illiterate, though they learned to read hundreds of words from their male siblings who received systematic education from private tutors. At an early age, both of my grandmothers were forced into arranged marriages based solely on their husbands'

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[1] I use the words "identity" "subjectivity" and "positionality" interchangeably in this study, with specific regard to identity based upon race, gender, class, nationality, age, sexuality, as well as beliefs and behaviors.
[2] The *People's Republic of China* is commonly referred to as China while the *Republic of China* is commonly referred to as Taiwan.

matching social status and they worked as unpaid homemakers throughout most of their lives.

Shortly after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Chairman Mao made a firm commitment to gender equity as reflected in his often-quoted aphorism "women hold up half the sky" (Leung, 2003). Through top-down State-sponsored feminism, the Communist Party created policies and laws to end the oppression of women and worked to liberate women from patriarchal domination and household obligations (Barlow, 2004; Leung, 2003). My mother, born in the early 1950s, reaped some benefits of State-sponsored women's liberation and was able to attend school. But my parents' formal education was disrupted during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s (Leung, 2003). Self-teaching and on-the-job training enabled my parents to become professionals in accounting and hospital administration. As a result of their professional pursuits and advancements, I was raised by my maternal grandparents from infancy through high school, living with my parents only during weekends.[3]

I was born in the late 1970s under China's One-Child Policy. As a girl, my birth deeply disappointed my father's side of the family whose previous landlord status socialized them to deem males as the family's only inheritors. My mother's failure to conceive a boy brought her abusive treatment from her sexist mother-in-law, which triggered my parents' determination to raise me as an equally capable, if not better educated, person as my male cousins. While encouraging me to reach my potential, my parents paradoxically enforced patriarchal norms in raising me. For example, while my

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[3] It is common practice in China for grandparents to assume a primary role in the raising of children, allowing the parents to focus on career advancement. I have come to realize that this practice is frowned upon as mediocre parenting in the US context.

parents were very supportive of my education, they continually urged me to get married and raise children. I was frequently admonished for not plucking my eyebrows or painting my nails. My mother frequently prodded me into visiting her beauty salon to get a facial massage, to take care of my hair and acne-prone skin, and to make me more like a "lady." As I am writing this Introduction Chapter, my mother has served me with this final directive: "You really need to get pregnant. As you're near the end of your dissertation, you don't really have excuses. You're getting old. If you have trouble conceiving naturally, we'll give you the money to do IVF[4]! I want my grandkids."

My father never allowed my mother to learn to drive, explaining that he could always take her anywhere she wanted to go. But twenty years ago, when owning a family car in China was regarded as a luxury, my father taught me how to drive and sent me to apprentice in an auto-repair shop to learn vehicle maintenance procedures such as changing the engine oil and replacing tires. At the same time, my parents decided to send me to a locally reputable restaurant to learn how to cook. My parents raised me to believe that I can do whatever a man can do; yet they expect me to behave in certain gendered ways in conformity with China's patriarchal norms.

Growing up in China as an only child, my life was privileged in many ways. After completion of my undergraduate study in the top-ranked Peking University, I became a volunteer teacher in an impoverished rural school in far-west China for the Chinese Ministry of Education's National Poverty Alleviation Program. A year of teaching crystallized my discomfort with the privilege I had as a college-educated woman who was

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[4] IVF stands for in vitro fertilization procedure, a technique of assisted reproductive technology for treatment of infertility.

able to find meaningful employment through my parents' social networks. Shocked by the alarming urban-rural disparities and high dropout rates of female students where I taught, I decided to study education's possibilities for overcoming inequalities, which led me to my doctoral program in this institution.

After returning from my volunteer service, my academic endeavors have centered on a commitment to the promotion of gender equity and social justice. Upon completing my master's degree in August of 2003, I left China for the first time in my life to further my education at this institution. The Department of Cultural Foundations of Education, my Certificate of Advanced Studies in Women's Studies, and a three-year University Fellowship have offered me a strong academic base and have equipped me with the analytical tools to explore experiences of privilege and marginalization, and enabled me to critically examine social issues in relation to nationality, gender, race, class, sexuality, disability, and other forms of inequality.

While in the US, I have met many Chinese female students who grew up in China's rural areas where they have had to overcome poverty and fight for every educational opportunity they received. Against all odds, many completed college in China and managed to attend graduate school in the US, where they have had to negotiate a gendered and racialized identity as Chinese women. Their experiences have further stimulated my research interest in gender and education. For Chinese women, growing up with a Chinese culture that defines them through motherhood and femininity, studying in the US means more than educational achievement. It offers a chance to advance their careers while redefining traditional gender roles and recrafting gender boundaries. Yet, Chinese women

like me are subjected to a new set of social and cultural norms in the US that inform and shape our choices and strategies in our attempts for professional and personal fulfillment.

In Fall 2005 when taking the course, *Introduction to Qualitative Research*, I conducted a pilot study on Chinese graduate students' experience in the US by interviewing and observing female graduate students from China. I noticed that gender equity, in addition to the predominant cultural and national identity as Chinese, was a popular topic across my conversations with my research participants. My female participants' narratives about gender performance and negotiations resonated with me. I saw many of my own joys, disappointments, achievements, and struggles in their stories.[5] I decided, for my dissertation project, that I would focus on Chinese female graduate students— an often overlooked group in academic discourse—in order to gain a better insight into my own life and to show my growing respect for the genealogies of each of my research subject.

Theoretical Frameworks on Identity

The issue of identity has been conceptualized within different theoretical frameworks in cultural studies, women's studies, literary theories, and sociological fields. Among them, two theoretical frameworks have informed my study: intersectionality and postpositivist realist account of identity. Intersectionality as both a theoretical framework and research methodology primarily in women's studies (Crenshaw, 1991, 2000; McCall, 2005; Zerai, 2000) is built upon the conceptualization of a matrix of domination, which views race, gender, and class as interlocking systems of oppression, such as racism, sexism, hetero-sexism, classism, able-bodyism, capitalism, etc. (Collins, 1995, 2000; hooks, 1984,

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[5] I will further discuss how my subjectivity factored into this research project and shaped the researcher-participant dynamic in Chapter Three Methods and Procedures.

1989, 2000; Mohanty, 1988, 2003). The significance of the intersectional framework lies in that it shifts the focus from a single dimension to the interrelatedness of various forms of oppression and resistance under one overarching system of power and domination (Collins, 1995). Its analytical power offers the possibility of collective action and social transformation to resist systematic oppression and domination (Zerai, 2000)[6].

Intersectionality is particularly useful to the study of "Chinese women" in that its construction in various ways intersects with different identity markers, such as nationality, race, gender, class, sexuality, and etc. Intersectionality is useful to the study of how Chineseness interconnects with gender mainly for two reasons. First, among scholarship concerning overseas Chinese, some tended to theorize identity in general, and Chineseness in particular, as timeless and static, which existed independent of gender, class, nation, race/ethnicity, sexuality, and other realities of experience (Tu, 1991; Wang, 1991). They relied upon an existing discourse of Chineseness which itself was a product of a masculinist hegemonic Chinese culture. In contrast to a simplistic understanding of Chineseness that dismissed the internal heterogeneity among overseas Chinese, an intersectional approach seeks to promote a complex understanding of identity relative to relations of power, which include domination, negotiation, and resistance.

The intersectional framework develops mainly in the interdisciplinary field of women's studies, as a response to the invisibility of race[7] as well as the hypervisibility of

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[6] Intersectionality in its original sense of oppression and domination may not be directly applicable to my work, yet I find it informative in that it has enabled me to understand and analyze my research participants' experiences in an intersectional and multidimensional way.

[7] "The invisibility of race" here means the exclusion of women of color.

race[8] in early feminist movements and scholarship (Crenshaw, 1991, 2000; McCall, 2005; Zerai, 2000). Much of the earliest feminist movement in the U.S. was criticized for being single issue and too white, much of which focused predominantly on educated white middle-class heterosexual women. Issues of race, class, and sexuality became marginalized and the movement failed to represent those who did not fit into a hegemonic discourse of women. Among those left out were women of color, working-class women, women with disabilities, lesbian and bisexual women, some of whom actively resisted a Eurocentric, heteronormative feminist agenda (Collins, 1995, 2000; hooks, 1984, 1989, 2000).

Troubled by the invisibility of women of color and the exclusion of race and racism, scholar-activist bell hooks (1984) wrote in her *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* that she, as a rural black person, never felt herself included in the first feminist books she read (p. 51). Chrystos (1983) expressed disbelief in gender-only approach to feminism. "I no longer believe that feminism is a tool which can eliminate racism—or even promote better understanding between different races and kinds of women" (p. 69). Due to concerted efforts from marginalized women, mostly women of color, the issues of race and racism, together with class and sexuality, were addressed but only as an add-on. Even when women of color were included, they were exoticized, tokenized, stereotyped, and trivialized for the self-serving interests of white feminists. In "An Open Letter to Mary Daly," an attempt to engage Daly in a conversation, Lorde (1984) acutely pointed out some white feminists' appropriation of Black women's experience[9]. Lorde asked Daly:

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[8] "The hypervisibility of race refers to the domination by white women.
[9] Throughout my writing, I use the terms "Black" and "black" interchangeably. I capitalize "Black" to correspond with the texts that I cited, and also to indicate that "Blacks," like Asians and other minorities, consituate a specific cultural group.

Have you read my work, and the work of other Black women, for what it could give you? Or did you hunt through only to find words that would legitimize your chapter on African genital mutilation in the eyes of other black women? … If … it was not Black women you were attempting to reach, in what way did our words illustrate your point for white women? (Lorde, 1984, p. 69)

In her 2006 essay, Ortega also expressed her concern over white women's dominance of feminism. She wrote, "White feminists stand as the guardians of the doors of feminism, while women of color are those who remain homeless in this feminism" (Ortega, 2006, p. 72). Her contention was women of color were relegated to the passenger seat, along for a ride to end an assumingly white patriarchy. However, the problem of exclusion could not be solved simply by taking women of color for a ride along an already established discourse, in that the ways Black women were subjugated to racism and sexism were more nuanced than the mere sum of racism and sexism could possibly address (Crenshaw, 2000).

From the initial invisibility of women of color, dismissal of their concerns, to the later inclusion and appropriation of their experiences, Black women were further marginalized by the very movement that claimed to empower them, and thus the goal of feminism to end sexism, racism, and other forms of oppression became even more difficult to attain (hooks, 1984, 2000). Neither a "gender-only" approach nor an "additive" framework could in any way help to achieve this goal. Both are problematic in that they treat gender and race as mutually exclusive (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 2000; McCall, 2005). The "gender-only" framework tended to privilege white middle-class heterosexual

women's experiences as universal, regardless of differences in class and sexuality among white women, and regardless of the complexity of lives among women of color (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 2000; McCall, 2005). In Crenshaw's (2000) words, it "erases Black women in the conceptualization, identification and remediation of race and sex discrimination by limiting inquiry to the experiences of otherwise-privileged members of the group" (p. 208-209). In this way, Black women were doubly or triply disadvantaged due to simultaneously being Black, being women, and/or being poor. The "additive" framework took race or class as an appendix to gender analysis, while leaving the normalized discourse intact. It could not sufficiently address "the multidimensionality" (Crenshaw, 2000, p. 208) of Black women's experiences any more than the gender-only framework can. What was needed was the development of an inclusive perspective that integrated gender with other systems of inequality based on race, class, sexuality, and nationality but not exclusive of other spheres of inequality. That is what an intersectional framework contributes.

Intersectionality's analytical power helps to visualize and theorize the convergence of different spheres of domination, and in so doing it uncovers the richness and complexities of the lives of those who have been marginalized. This analytical power is visible in Hall's (1990) critique of the notion of essential black subject, Clifford's (1997) embrace of a multiple and hybrid subjectivities of diasporic subjects, and Gilroy's (1993) rejection of African-centered discourses of the black diaspora. As seen from scholarship employing an intersectional framework, neither a one-dimensional race or gender approach could have presented the complexity of lived realties. Only through an inclusive examination of gender, race, culture, and other categories of difference, "*together* or

simultaneously," could researchers "get some sense of the ways these spheres of inequality support each other to maintain the status quo" (Zerai, 2000, p. 185).

In addition, intersectionality is useful to the study of Chineseness and gender, though not in its original sense of oppression and resistance, in that the articulation of Chineseness in various ways intersects with various categories of differences, in both its (re)construction and material consequences (Mohanty, 2000; Moya, 2000). Here an analysis of the dual aspects of identity is conducive to a better understanding of how an intersectional framework challenges and informs the study of identity issues about Chinese women.

Though informative, intersectionality does not adequately address identity as both socially constructed and possessing real-life meanings in specific geopolitical contexts, which is what Moya (2000) and Mohanty's (2000) theorization of a postpositivist realist account of identity in relation to essentialism and postmodernism. According to the critique of essentialist conceptions of identity, essentialism attempts to extract an essential self and reduce the diversity of people's lives into fragmented pieces (Harris, 1990). For example, Harris (1990) rejected the notion of a monolithic "women's experience" or "Black experience" independent of other identity categories such as race, class, and sexuality. Compared with the essentialist tendency to stabilize identity categories as stable, postmodernist position on identity deems all identity categories as arbitrary and fictitious (Mohanty, 2000).

According to Mohanty, both the essentialism of identity politics and the postmodernism's skepticism of identity categories "seriously underread the real epistemic

and political complexities of our social and cultural identities" (Mohanty, 2000, p. 43).

Mohanty (2000) proposed that "identities can be both constructed (socially, linguistically,

theoretically, and so on) and 'real' at the same time" (p. 55). The "constructed" aspect of

identities mean that identities are not predetermined nor fixed. Rather, it is unstable and

contingent upon specific contexts. For example, the national and/or cultural identity of

Chineseness is nothing but a construct, which is meaningful only in relational terms. In

Hall's (1990) words, it is less a matter of "being" than of "becoming" (p. 225). Rather than

grounded in the recovery of a past, such a construct is subject to the continuous play of

history, culture, and power. Grewal (2005) expressed a similar view in her book

Transnational America. She presented "Americanness" as a "changeable, contingent, and

historical" concept that was "shifted by location and place and historical context, as well as

factors such as race, gender, class, nationality, and religion" (Grewal, 2005, p. 8).

Complementarily, the "real" aspect of identity illuminates the real-life repercussions

(Moya, 2000) of being Chinese and being women, for example, in a particular context. Chun

(1996) articulated a similar point in his essay on Chineseness. Chun argued that it is

important

> To articulate the various contexts (of speech or practice) wherein facets of identity
>
> (such as ethnicity) are deemed to be relevant. That is to say, what kinds of contexts
>
> demand that one speak from a position of identity, and what contexts do not? (Chun,
>
> 1996, pp. 134-135)

Emphasis here was on the "locally specific contexts of meaning and power" (p. 131) that

gave rise to either "the potential reality of identities" or "a constant fiction of identities" (p.

130). By articulating the importance of the various contexts, Chun elucidated identity's

real-life meanings and repercussions. What Chun argued is that, though the identity of "a

Chinese woman" was not a given, as a construct, it had significance in daily life under

specific geopolitical contexts. Chun's argument about "reality of identities" and "fiction of

identities" echoed a realist account of identity consisting of both real and constructed

aspects.

Seeking to promote a complicated understanding of Chineseness, Chow (1993,

1998) and Ang (1998, 2001) implicitly employed intersectionality and postpositivist realist

principles of identity. They attempted to de-naturalize the concepts of Chineseness and

woman in a complicated interdisciplinary fashion. Though they did not use

intersectionality in its original sense of oppression and resistance, nor did they use the

exact language of intersectionality, their way of problematizing Chineseness in particular

was inherently intersectional, in that it studied the dynamics among various discourses on

nation-state, power, language, whiteness, transnationalism, ethnicity, race, gender, and

(post)coloniality. As Ang explained,

> The theoretical axiom that Chineseness is not a category with a fixed content—be it
>
> racial, cultural, or geographical—but operates as an open and indeterminate
>
> signifier whose meanings are constantly renegotiated and rearticulated in different
>
> sections of the Chinese diaspora. (Ang, 1998, p. 225)

That is to say, the meaning of being Chinese varies from place to place, from time to time.

For example, being Chinese in China cannot possibly mean the same thing as being Chinese

outside of China. Nor does being Chinese in San Francisco's Chinatown in the 1970s mean

the same as being Chinese on New York City's Wall Street nowadays. There are multiple
different Chinese identities.

In the same vein, Ang continued to argue,

If we are to work on the multiple, complex, overdetermined politics of "being
Chinese" in today's complicated and mixed-up world, and if we are to seize on the
radical theoretical promise of the diasporic perspective, we must not only resist the
convenient and comforting reduction of Chineseness as a seemingly natural and
certain racial essence; we must also be prepared to interrogate the very significance
of the category of Chineseness per se as a predominant marker of identification and
distinction. (Ang, 1998, p. 241)

What Ang implied here was that, in Chow's (1993) words, we had "to *unlearn* that
submission to one's ethnicity such as 'Chineseness' as the ultimate signifier" (Chow, 1993,
p. 25). In that way, we could truly dismantle the "prisonhouse of Chineseness" (Ang, 1998,
p. 241) and embrace the reality of people's lives as constituting and constituted by various
social and political discourses. To summarize Ang and Chow's theorization of Chineseness,
as Ang put it, if people are inescapably Chinese "by descent," they are only sometimes
Chinese "by consent" (Ang, 2001, p. 18); "when and how is a matter of politics" (Ang, 2001,
p. 18). Thus, this is the point of negotiation with and the resistance to assigned,
preconceived, stereotypical, historically-based identities. Ang and Chow's intersectional
studies of Chineseness mirrored the complexity of the empirical world, and challenged the
simplistic tendency to essentialize identity in general, and "Chinese identity" in particular,

which left unequal social structures intact, and in so doing perpetuated inequalities and injustices embedded into the social realities.

Though informative, both intersectionality and a postpositivist realist account of identity focus on the theoretical aspect of being and becoming a Chinese woman, rather than on an empirical aspect. However, empirical studies would not only concretize their theories but also enrich our understandings of the empirical world. My dissertation research is an endeavor in this direction through a qualitative inquiry of Chinese female graduate students' shifting perceptions of being Chinese women in American higher education institutions. I hope that my study will bridge the gap between theoretical and empirical studies regarding identity issues.

The Settings

One of the strengths of this study is the variety of settings that my research participants occupied. Between September 2005 and April 2010, I was able to conduct multiple, in-depth, interviews with 20 Chinese female graduate students from four colleges and universities on the East Coast of the US, including both public and private institutions with different school cultures located within easy driving distance from my location of Syracuse, NY. I conducted the interviews in unoccupied classrooms, private offices, library conference rooms, and private homes. Having conducted interviews in a variety of schools and a range of settings adds a depth to my study. It helps make visible the complexities and varieties of Chinese female graduate students' experiences and shows similarities

particularly as related to gender, race, and culture. What follows is a brief description of the schools that my participants attended. [10]

More than half of my research participants attended either Spring University or Summer University. Located in a small city part of the rust belt (Crandall, 1993), Spring University is a private research institution that enrolls approximately 21,400 students over a wide variety of academic programs, representing all 50 US states and 127 countries/regions. Among the entire student body, more than 4000 are international students, representing 19 percent of the total enrollment. At the undergraduate level, international students make up 11 percent of the study population with 54 percent being females and 46 percent being males. At the graduate level, international students consist of 37 percent of the total number of graduate students, with 43 percent females and 57 percent males. Among the total population of international students both at the undergraduate and graduate levels, the number of international students from Mainland China represents nearly 50 percent, while female Chinese students outnumber male Chinese students at the undergraduate level by 10 percent and male students outnumber female students at the graduate level by 9 percent. Spring University offers undergraduate degrees in over 200 majors in 10 schools and colleges. It also offers master's and doctoral degree programs, together with certificate of advanced study programs.

Summer University, located in a small city known for its liberal spirit, is both private and public. Summer University enrolls more than 21,800 students in 14 colleges and schools, including more than 4300 international students representing 20 percent of the

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[10] Information describing each college and university is from the individual school websites at the time the interview was conducted.

entire study body and 114 countries/regions. At the undergraduate level, international

students make up 10 percent of the student body and 46 percent at the graduate school

level. Among the total population of international students both at the undergraduate and

graduate levels, the number of international students from Mainland China represents

nearly 36 percent, with female Chinese students outnumbering male Chinese students by

15 percent. Summer University offers academic programs dedicated to China and Asian

studies.

Fall University, located in medium-sized rust belt (Crandall, 1993) city, is a top-

ranked public research university in the Northeast that enrolls more than 29,800 students

in 13 different colleges. It offers over 100 bachelor's, 205 master's, 84 doctoral degrees,

and 10 professional areas of study. Fall University does not publish demographic data on

their official website, and their Office of International Student and Service has declined my

request for such data.

Winter College, less than 10 miles outside of a large metropolitan city in the East

Coast, is a private research institution that has a student body of more than 14,000

students, including 9000 undergraduate students and 4500 graduate and professional

students across 8 schools and colleges. Female students make up 54 percent of total

enrollment and male students make up 46 percent. Among approximately 1370

international students making up slightly below 10 percent of the total enrollment, 700 are

undergraduates and 670 are graduate students, representing 53 countries. At the

undergraduate level, international students make up less than 8 percent of the study

population, while at the graduate school level, international students consist of nearly 15

percent of the total number of graduate students. Among the total population of international students both at the undergraduate and graduate levels, the number of international students from Mainland China make up nearly 35 percent, with female Chinese students outnumbering male students by 10 percent at the undergraduate level, and roughly the equal number of female and male Chinese students at the graduate level.

Social and Political Contexts Where Chinese Women Grew Up

As illustrated in the above section on Description of the Study in this chapter, my study started from the assumption that being able to study abroad is a gesture towards Chinese women's liberation, given the long-term State-sponsored patriarchy in China (Barlow, 2004; Leung, 2003). State-sponsored women's movements and national policies have proclaimed women's equality, though legacies of hegemonic patriarchy have penetrated every portion of the society. As Barlow (2004) argued, it would be impossible for Chinese women to pursue overseas education without State feminism and women's movements, which to a large extent, have freed Chinese women from household obligations, granted them seemingly equal education and employment opportunities (Barlow, 2004). Yet, State laws that have addressed women's equality have not combated cultural patriarchy originating from thousands of years of Confucianism (Leung, 2003).

As a systematic and institutionalized social order that lasted for thousands of years, State patriarchy in China has been hard to eradicate. Certain forms of overt male domination such as foot-binding, sale and purchase of women, wife-beating, and female infanticide (Barlow, 2004; Leung, 2003) may be uncommon, but male control and its material and symbolic ramifications of the male norm have infiltrated into every fabric of

the society. This power is more subtle and hard to pin point, yet it is still alive albeit less visible, and more pervasive than overt forms of male domination. In today's China, motherhood and outdated constructions of femininity still define what constitutes a good Chinese woman, as opposed to a leftover woman. This is particularly applicable in Chapter Five and Chapter Six about the discourses on the leftover woman and the good Chinese woman, the two distinct representations of China's patriarchal legacies that my research participants grew up with and negotiate on a daily basis as Chinese graduate students in the US, despite the geographical distance from China.

Leftover woman discourse

Originating from Chinese leftover food, "the leftover woman" is a popular derogatory term Chinese people use to refer to single or unmarried women at a marriageable age, especially women with advanced degrees, considerable income, and over the age of 27 that Chinese society deems marriageable (Fincher, 2014). "Female PhD" is another derogatory label associated with a popular saying in China that categorizes people into three hierarchical species: men, women, and female PhDs. The negative connotation female PhDs carry is that they are a third species, the other, the abnormal, occupying the bottom of the social ladder. Female PhDs and leftover women are mutually constitutive, in that many female PhDs are single at a marriageable age and a considerable number of leftover women have advanced degrees. Some of the Chinese women in my study fall into this group of so-called leftover women, because they are unmarried and pursuing advanced degrees in the US. The different labels that my research participants are associated with reflect the power of Chinese patriarchy and its multiple legacies that classify women as valuable or disposable according to certain judgments about age, beauty, and social class.

Good Chinese woman discourse

In a Chinese society heavily influenced by the twin legacies of feudalism and patriarchy, "a good woman" has traditionally been characterized by abiding by "three obediences" and "four virtues" (Zhao & Zhang, 1996). The three obediences require that a good Chinese woman obey the orders of three men: father, husband, and son at different moments in her life (Zhao & Zhang, 1996). A father dictates the parameters of a good Chinese woman's life before she gets married. After marriage, she is subjected to her husband's authority. If she is widowed, she has to be forever loyal to her husband and accountable to her son.[11] At no stage of a woman's life in this framework is she an emancipated being. Rather, she has to be compliant with different male figures who are expected to head the household at various times of her life.

The four virtues that women must abide by refer to morality, proper speech, modest dress and countenance, and diligent work (Zhao & Zhang, 1996). More specifically, the four virtues admonish women about proper character and conduct: a woman should not distinguish herself in talent or intelligence; she should not outperform others in her skills or cleverness; she should not speak with a sharp tongue, should know what to say, when to say it, and when to remain silent; she should not seek to be outwardly beautiful or ornamented; she should work diligently to serve her husband, educate her kids, respect the elderly, and care for the young; she should be industrious and frugal. An ideal Chinese woman possesses the three obediences and four virtues, which are intended to guide women in society (Zhao & Zhang, 1996). Simply put, Chinese society has defined a

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[11] Widows should not remarry in the traditional Chinese culture, but it is a tradition that is less adhered to nowadays.

desirable woman as a good daughter, obedient and virtuous wife, selfless and hardworking mother.

These precepts for women seem to contradict China's national laws and policies that have proclaimed women's equality[12]. As I wrote above, State-sponsored feminism in China has proclaimed women's equality through national laws and policies (Barlow, 2004; Leung, 2003), but legacies of Chinese patriarchy still linger. Nowadays, the three obediences and four virtues are no longer enforced in China. Rather, it is easy to argue that the three obediences and four virtues are a history of a distant past (Zhao & Zhang, 1996). Many widowed women have chosen to start new relationships or to get remarried, a gesture to break free from the traditional constraints that require them to be forever loyal to their deceased husbands. An increasing number of women have gained access to higher education and employment opportunities approaching parity with men's opportunities. The number of female doctors, engineers, and scientists in China has obviously increased compared to a pre-1949 China. The fact that my research participants were able to advance their academic and professional careers in the US is a convincing testimony of the progress towards women's equality in China. Male control in the form of women's foot-binding practices is in the past (Barlow, 2004). Wife-beating or female infanticide (Barlow, 2004; Leung, 2003) is less common as well.[13]

The above evidence speaks volumes to the progress Chinese society has achieved towards gender equality since the enforcement of State feminism in the form of national laws and policies (Barlow, 2004; Leung, 2003). Yet, State laws and policies that have

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[12] Here is a list of laws on women's rights and equality in Chinese, http://www.china.com.cn/ch-book/funvzhuangkuang/woman3.htm.

[13] An indicator of gender preference is that more Chinese girls are abandoned and up for adoption in China.

legalized women's equality have not effectively contended with cultural patriarchy originating from thousands of years of Confucianism. In today's China, the three obediences and four virtues may no longer define a good Chinese woman (Zhao & Zhang, 1996), but their legacies powered by the Chinese patriarchy have penetrated the fabric of the Chinese society, as revealed through my participants' narratives about their lives in the US.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study lies in positioning Chinese female graduate students and their lived experiences in the center of discussions about international students and higher education in the US context. Different from a vast body of literature that focuses on language and cultural adjustment issues, this study attempts to describe Chinese female graduate students' perceptions of their study abroad experiences by collecting their own stories and examining their own narratives. The study describes their experiences in general, and their experiences with gender and nationality in particular from a social and cultural perspective. It aims to understand and address the ways culture, gender, and race as interlocking systems of power and domination inform Chinese women's academic and professional pursuits.

Outline of the Chapters

Following this Introduction Chapter, Chapter Two examines current literature on Chinese international students in the English-speaking study abroad context. It lays bare the scarcity of academic literature that focuses specifically on the voices of female Chinese international students pursuing advanced degrees in the US. This chapter also indicates the necessity of intersectional studies of the ways gender, culture, and national identity have

jointly informed the lived experiences of Chinese women in their negotiations of professional and personal success.

In Chapter Three, I outline my research methodology and the method of in-depth interviewing employed to collect data for this study. Reflecting on my position in this study as the researcher, I address how the subjectivity of both researchers and participants factored into and shaped the research dynamic, focusing specifically on the strategic use of researcher's self-disclosure in fieldwork. I also address some of the methodological issues during the process of data collection and analysis, including the challenges of producing English text for interviews in which the participants were speaking Mandarin Chinese.

Chapters Four, Five, and Six focus on the themes that emerged from my data. I structure these chapters in a deliberate way to strategically correspond with the prominent overarching themes on Chineseness and gender. In Chapter Four, I examine the issue of classroom silence. I approach classroom silence from a sociological and intersectional perspective with a particular focus on its relevance to the constructed and contested nature of Chineseness. The chapter argues that Chinese female graduate students strategically utilize silence in multiple ways to craft a classroom space where they not only learn academic materials, but also negotiate their social and cultural identities as Chinese and as women. It is my intention to represent the complexities of classroom silence in response to an oftentimes oversimplified and reductionist academic discourse on classroom silence.

As an endeavor to explore how Chinese female graduate students position themselves as Chinese and as women in relation to Chinese patriarchal legacies as they experienced and articulated them, both Chapters Five and Six address the gendered aspect

of the Chinese women's experiences in the US through their complex negotiations with the leftover woman discourse and the good woman discourse — two distinctive representations of the Chinese patriarchal legacies within which my participants are situated. In Chapter Five, I examine a variety of strategies my participants employed to live with and resist the leftover woman discourse and how their negotiating strategies are shaped by, constituted by, and constitutive of the discourse. My research participants illustrated sophisticated ways of navigating this powerful discourse.

Chapter Six scrutinizes the range of ways that my participants employed narrative strategies to maneuver the good Chinese woman discourse. This chapter explores the multiple and sophisticated ways the Chinese women in my study negotiated the competing demands of the good woman discourse and of academic and career advancement.

It is ironic that my study is an attempt to complicate the interconnections of the concepts of Chineseness and gender while at the same time I chose to study the group of students whose primary identity markers are Chinese and female. Not only that, I also chose to address these prominent identity markers separately in each of the data chapters. It may seem that by focusing on students who are labeled as "Chinese" and "female" I endorsed the labels and validated their legitimacy through usage. I acknowledge the racial, cultural and gendered identities of "Chinese" and "female" as social constructs whose meanings are contingent upon specific contexts, and I conveniently borrowed the identity labels of "Chinese" and "female" under which my research participants were admitted into graduate schools in the US. However, I am more interested in unpacking the concepts

through a close examination of real-life ramifications of being and becoming Chinese women in various contexts.

Focusing on the issues of Chineseness and gender respectively in each of the data chapters aligns with the changing contexts where one dimension of the Chinese woman identity is more salient at times than the other. This strategic choice of breaking down the Chinese woman identity into Chineseness and gender is not an indicator that different dimensions of their identities work independently of each other, but to highlight the meaning-making abilities of my participants under discursive contexts and for the convenience of analysis. My intent is not to essentialize their national and cultural identity as Chinese or the gendered experience as women. I acknowledge that all aspects of their identities are interconnected and indispensable from each other in these women's lives.

Chapter Seven summarizes my argument that Chinese female graduate students whose lives are embedded within and mediated by social and cultural discourses are able to cultivate possibilities to redefine traditional gender roles and recraft gender boundaries through strategic engagement and negotiation of social realities in dynamic and complex ways. It examines the limitations and significance of my study, as well as the implications for policy-makers and educators in higher education settings. I conclude the chapter with topics for future exploration.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

A large portion of the academic literature that includes discussions on the experiences of Chinese international students attending colleges or graduate schools abroad focuses on issues of language and cultural adjustments (Baba & Hosoda, 2014; Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Chen, 1999; Furnham & Bochner, 1982; Gonzales, 2004; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, & Van Horn, 2002; Klomega, 2006; Kasper, 1997; Lee, 1997; Lewthwaite, 1997; Li & Gasser, 2005; Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker, & Al-Timimi, 2004; Wong, 2004; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Yi, Lin, & Kishimoto, 2003). These studies have contributed to a growing understanding of the enlarging population of international students in American colleges and universities, the acculturative difficulties they encounter and the specific challenges they work with on a daily basis. Though uncovering some aspects of Chinese international students' experiences in American colleges and universities (Baba & Hosoda, 2014; Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Kasper, 1997; Lee, 1997; Leong & Sedlacek, 1989; Lewthwaite, 1997; Mori, 2000; Pathirage, Morrow, Walpitage, & Skolits, 2014; Poyrazli et al., 2004; Sun & Chen, 1997; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Yi et al., 2003), much of the literature operates from a deficit and a reductionist model (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Liu, 2002; Shi, 2011). Specifically, the focus is on what Chinese students lack linguistically and culturally in the host academic institutions (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Liu, 2002; Shi, 2011). Moreover, much of the literature tends to essentialize international or Chinese students into a homogeneous group, reduce their complicated negotiations with both home and host cultures into adjustment issues (Cheng, 2000; Grimshaw, 2007; Wong, 2004; Zhou, Knoke, & Sakamoto, 2005), ignore the shifting academic and social norms that situate Chinese students' experiences despite the

situatedness of the students as gendered Chinese with diverse social locations and oftentimes complicated intersectional subjectivities (Clark & Gieve, 2006; Ryan & Louie, 2007). Deficit and reductionist tendencies aside (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Liu, 2002; Shi, 2011), little work has centered on the experiences of Chinese female students whose primary identity marker is not only Chinese but also female (Qin & Lykes, 2006). Under the overwhelming government-promoted discourse on leftover woman in China, studying abroad for female students may carry more meanings than for male students.

For my study, I was looking for academic literature that addressed the experiences of Chinese students in post-secondary schools in general, female graduate students in particular, who attended higher education institutions in English-speaking countries, with a particular interest in works that challenged the deficit and reductionist model of analysis. While the vast literature on language and cultural adaptation is important, I argue that Chinese female students and their lived experiences should be placed in the center of discussions about international students and higher education in order to understand and address the ways culture, gender, and race as interlocking systems of power and domination inform their academic and professional success.

In this chapter, I examine the current literature on Chinese international students from various perspectives. First, I will look at the body of literature on adjustment issues facing Chinese international students. This provides an important context to understand the overall schooling experiences of Chinese international students in colleges and universities outside China. Next, I will review some of the literature on the issue of classroom silence which is the overarching issue identified in the existing body of

literature. I am interested in how the issue of silence has been taken up in literature and the conceptual frameworks used to account for the issue of silence. In the third section of this chapter, I will focus on the construction of Chinese international students as complex subjects through an investigation of relevant literature on their lived experiences in the study abroad context. Gender and the leftover woman discourse are my primary foci of this section, which will be followed by a brief conclusion.

Academic, Cultural, and Psychological Adjustments: A Reductionist Model and the Construction of the Other

Most empirical studies on the experiences of Chinese students in English-speaking colleges and universities have addressed issues of adjustments in three main areas: 1). Academic adjustments and language acquisition (Kasper, 1997; Lee, 1997; Misra & Castillo, 2004; Mori, 2000; Pathirage et al., 2014; Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker, & Al-Timimi, 2004; Wong, 2004; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Yi, Lin, & Kishimoto, 2003); 2). Socio-cultural adjustments (Baba & Hosoda, 2014; Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Chen, 1999; Church, 1982; Furnham & Bochner, 1982; Gonzales, 2004; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Klomega, 2006; Lewthwaite, 1997; Li & Gasser, 2005; Poyrazli et al., 2004; Yeh & Inose, 2003); and 3). Proposed academic, cultural, and psychological strategies to ease adjustment difficulties (Constantine, Okazaki, & Utsey, 2004; Hwang, Bennett & Beauchemin, 2014; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Misra, Crist, & Burant, 2003; Mitchell, Greenwood, & Guglielmi, 2007; Nilsson, Berkel, Flores, & Lucas, 2004; Sandhu, 1995; Sue, Zane, & Young, 1994; Wehrly, 1996; Yi et al., 2003). A common thread that runs through different studies is that Chinese international students lack certain language and cultural

competences to succeed in the host country. Not intentionally, many studies end up representing a heterogeneous group of Chinese students as a monolithic entity and constructing the Chinese student as the antithesis of the ideal domestic student with such assumed qualities as active, participatory, and competent.

The following is a review of relevant literature with an implicit reductionist deficit model on three areas of studies, academic adjustments, socio-cultural acculturations, and suggestions to facilitate adjustments.

Academic adjustments and language acquisition

The issue of academic adjustments seems to have prevailed majority of the studies on international students (Kasper, 1997; Lee, 1997; Leong & Sedlacek, 1989; Lewthwaite, 1997; Mori, 2000; Pathirage et al., 2014; Poyrazli et al., 2004; Sun & Chen, 1997; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Yi et al., 2003). Among those studies, academic adjustments primarily refer to English language acquisition (Pathirage et al., 2014; Sun & Chen, 1997; Wong, 2004), students' choices of academic concentrations (Cai, 2003), and learning styles (Wong, 2004). For example, Sun and Chen's study (1997) surveyed eight female and two male Chinese students in a mid-size public university in the US in an effort to identify the difficulties Chinese international students encountered during their cultural adaptations. Language difficulty topped the list of difficulties that the study identified.

Another survey study by Yi et al. (2003) revealed a similar academic concern among international students. The study focused on international students, both undergraduate and graduate students, who worked with a university counseling center over a 6-year period (1992-1998). The study identified that undergraduate international students were

primarily concerned about grades, anxiety, and depression, while for graduate

international students, the top three concerns included depression, time management, and

relationships with a romantic partner; the first two associated directly with academic

demands of graduate-level work.

In an effort to evaluate institutional support to international students, another study

(Pathirage et al., 2014) surveyed 21 undergraduate and 60 graduate students in Fall 2011

at a large southeastern research university, regarding the helpfulness of an English as a

Second Language (ESL) course for non-native English-speaking international students.

Majority of the study participants were from China. The authors claimed that academic

oriented ESL courses could be "an effective tool in strengthening the college life of non-

native English speaking students, regardless of their native language and level of study at

the university" (Pathirage et al., 2014, p. 32).

In addition to language difficulties, academic concentration was a topic of interest

among the literature on international students in higher education. In an exploration of

what Chinese and Taiwanese students chose to study when coming to the US for advanced

degrees, Cai (2003) tested the theories regarding economic incentives and gender

differences in students' choices by analyzing data from registry records in a public

university in the Midwest from 1984 to1992. The study concluded that American

universities would continue to attract talented students from China and Taiwan to pursue

advanced degrees in fields that were less interesting to American students but well funded,

such as engineering, and the physical and life sciences. Regarding gender differences, the

study found that women from both China and Taiwan were less likely than men to choose

science- and technology-related fields, but women from China were more likely to choose those fields than women from Taiwan. The author attributed the gender difference between Chinese and Taiwanese women to China's State campaign for gender equality that encouraged Chinese women to study traditionally male-dominant fields.

Language obstacles and academic concentrations aside, learning style was another topic of interest among studies on international students' academic adjustments in the host country. For example, Wong (2004) surveyed 78 first-year to fourth-year Asian undergraduate students at a South Australian university, and interviewed nine of them on their academic difficulties and learning styles. The author identified language and cultural barriers as experienced by the Asian students, as well as their learning styles resulted from "a so-called 'spoon-feeding' or teacher centered style of learning environment" (p. 165) in their home cultures, which hindered their learning in the new environment that promoted student centered learning. The study aimed at enriching the school authorities and personnel's understandings of Asian international students' academic difficulties and helping the students to adjust and succeed.

Socio-cultural adjustments

Along with academic adaptations, issues about intercultural communications and acculturations are central to myriad studies on international students primarily attending America colleges and universities. Relevant studies strive to accomplish two main objectives: to identify cross-cultural adjustment difficulties (Baba & Hosoda, 2014; Furnham & Bochner, 1982; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Klomega, 2006; Li & Gasser, 2005; Lin & Yi, 1997; Parr, Bradley, & Bingi, 1992; Wilton & Constantine, 2003; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Ying,

2005; Ying & Liese, 1994; Zhang & Goodson, 2011), and to examine cross-cultural impacts

on international students (Guan & Dodder, 2001; Huang & Uba, 1991; Qin & Lykes, 2006).

   Identifying cross-cultural adjustment difficulties. Voluminous studies have indicated

that international students experienced feelings of homesickness, estrangement, social

isolation, had a high likelihood of exhibiting adjustment problems in the host country (Baba

& Hosoda, 2014; Furnham & Bochner, 1982; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Klomega, 2006; Li &

Gasser, 2005;). For example, Baba and Hosoda (2014) specified the adjustment difficulties

that international students typically encountered and discussed the role of social support

in smoothing the difficult, sometimes excruciating, adjustment processes. Their study

surveyed 197 international college students in a large state university known for its

ethnical diversity in northern California. The study illustrated that demographic variables,

such as the participant's age, gender, length of stay in the US, and length of college

experience in the US, had little effect on his/her cross-cultural adjustment. However, stress

factors, namely, academic pressure, financial stress, homesickness, perceived

discrimination, social disconnectedness, and especially culture shock, were associated with

difficulties in cross-cultural adjustment. English-language confidence was associated with

easing cross-cultural adjustment. The study also indicated that social support, including

"home country support, local support, and International Studies Office support" (Baba &

Hosoda, 2014, p. 7), was positively related to cross-cultural adjustment, and functioned as a

partial mediator of the stress factors and cross-cultural adjustments.

   Baba and Hosoda's (2014) research findings were consistent with two earlier

studies by Yeh and Inose (2003), and Li and Gasser (2005) respectively. The studies

indicated that international students from Asian countries which valued interdependence and close social and familial connections were more vulnerable to acculturative stress due to American culture's emphasis on independence and individualism. A similar finding in a questionnaire study of 156 male international students in a Canadian university by Chapdelaine and Alexitch (2004) revealed that international students encountered culture shock, especially those students whose countries of origin operated on different sets of values and ideas from the host country. The study also revealed that social interactions with hosts could facilitate international students' cultural adjustments into the host country. None of the above studies engaged the discussions on gender similarities or differences between male and female students.

Examining cross-cultural impacts on international students. A survey study by Guan and Dodder (2001) compared students having cross-cultural contact (such as Chinese students in the US) with students without contact (such as Chinese students in China), and found that cross-cultural contact was associated with value change among Chinese students. Specifically, Chinese students in the US thought that such traditional Chinese values as respecting the seniors and personal connections were less important than those inside China who did not have cross-cultural contact, while Chinese students exposed to the US culture viewed the values of group integration and self-protection as more important than students without exposure. The study took issues like cross-cultural contact and identity formation as quantifiable variables, disembodied from research subjects, which took the risk of objectifying research subjects by losing sight of their perspectives on negotiating cross-cultural contacts and subsequent value change.

An earlier study on sexual practices among Chinese college students in the US (Huang & Uba, 1991) surveyed 332 men and 168 women attending a university in the West Coast. Despite no significant gender difference in approval of premarital sex, the study found that sexual experience was gender-specific: Chinese men were less sexually experienced than Chinese women as indicated in the survey results. The findings were consistent with the American stereotypes of Chinese men as socially and sexually incompetent and the "'positive' stereotypes of Chinese women as man-pleasing, sexy 'Suzie Wongs'" (p. 238) that made them attractive dates. Survey results also indicated that sexual attitudes and experience were directly related to "level of acculturation to American life" (p. 228). Embedded in this interesting study is an assumed heteronormativity that naturalizes and reinforces heterosexual gender norms both in China and in the US.

Proposing suggestions to ease academic, cultural, and psychological Adjustments

Presenting academic, social, and cultural difficulties confronting international students, some studies have proposed suggestions to assist international students' transitions from countries of origin to host countries (Baba & Hosoda, 2014; Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Furnham & Bochner, 1982; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Klomega, 2006; Li & Gasser, 2005; Pritchard & Skinner, 2002; Yang, Wu, Zhu, & Southwell, 2004; Yoon & Portman, 2004), including the utilization of counseling and psychological services (Mau & Jepsen, 1990; Mitchell et al., 2007; Nilsson et al., 2004; Pederson, 1991; Sandhu, 1995; Sue et al., 1994; Yi et al., 2003; Yoo & Skovholt, 2001; Wehrly, 1996).

One strategy included more interactions with the host and local culture (Baba & Hosoda, 2014; Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Li & Gasser, 2005) in order to facilitate effective adjustments and reduce strain levels among international students. The other strategy included making host friends that international students could confide in while studying in a host country (Baba & Hosoda, 2014; Furnham & Bochner, 1982; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Klomega, 2006; Li & Gasser, 2005).

Yang et al. (2004) reported that use of US-based media by international students could be effective to their acculturative struggles. The study tested a hypothesis regarding the relationship between acculturation need, motives to fit in, and media use, where acculturation meant adjustment. Eighty-four Chinese students attending a Midwest research university participated in a survey on the following questions: media use before and after they came to the US, perceived need for acculturation, likelihood of going back to China, motives for viewing US television and typical content viewed, motives for using the Internet and typical content engaged and demographic information. Results indicated that Chinese students' acculturation need was positively correlated with their patterns of using US-based media, and their motives to fit into the US culture was positively correlated with watching US-based TV news programs and using US-based news websites and anonymous online discussion forums.

In addition to stimulating more direct interactions with the local culture and gaining social support in the host country, many studies in the field of psychology reported that utilization of counseling services would facilitate international students' difficulties with adjustments, acculturations, and mental health challenges (Carr, Koyama, & Thiagarajan,

2003; Hwang et al., 2014; Jacob & Greggo, 2001; Mau & Jepsen, 1990). For example, a recent study by Hwang et al. (2014) examined international students' utilization of counseling services at a Midwestern university over a 5-year period (2005-2010). Against the common assumption that acculturative difficulties and related mental health challenges resulting from adjusting to a new environment would lead to an increase in the demand of counseling services, the study yielded the following findings: despite the growing enrollment of international students on campus, the counseling services were underutilized by international students due to possible reasons of associated stigma with mental health issues, insufficient understanding of counseling services and a scarcity of culturally appropriate services; relationship, anxiety, mood, adjustment and learning issues were the top four concerns among international students seeking counseling services; female international students outnumbered male international students in their use of counseling services, consistent with the gender ratio of the international student population; referrals outnumbered self-initiated counseling appointments. The study recommended that international students utilize counseling services to smooth their adjustments to a new culture and also counseling services provide more culturally-appropriate practices to suit the needs of international students.

Summary

A host of studies have concentrated on issues of second language acquisition, academic, social, cultural, and psychological adjustments, which are important to understanding Chinese students' study abroad experience. Yet, by reducing and essentializing the issues confronting Chinese international students merely to adjustments, much of the literature implies such an assimilationist pattern of acculturating Chinese

students into the American social and cultural norms, and exhibits a deficit model of analysis through the representation of Chinese students as lacking language and cultural competence to navigate the host country. In other words, focus of much literature is on what Chinese students need to fit into the dominant culture, rather than how they maneuver the social relations of power on a daily basis.

As such, social, linguistic, and cultural norms in the home country tend to be ignored while those norms in the host country serve as a reference point for international students to measure up to, with institutionalized support from academic and counseling services claiming to assist students with their acculturations into the host culture. Yet, Chinese students' perceptions of their lived experiences rarely get noticed. Even when some studies claim to examine the students' perceived understandings of their adjustment issues (Baba & Hosoda, 2014; Church, 1982; Pathirage et al., 2014; Sun & Chen, 1997; Yi et al., 2003), the studies still reinforce a focus on how to better students' adjustments to match the normalized practices in the host country. These studies tend to deprive individual students' agency, ignore the complex social realities that situate international students, and overlook individual student's negotiating power within the established discourses to make sense of their experiences.

Silence in Chinese Students: Personal Traits, Cultural Attributes?

Continuing the review of relevant literature on Chinese students' study abroad experience, in the following section I will focus on some studies that highlight the issue of classroom silence and attempt to account for it through two different models: a deficit model and a surplus model (Ryan & Louie, 2007). Studies employed a deficit model of

analysis (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Shi, 2011) tended to attribute Chinese students' classroom silence as their lack of language and cultural competency, while studies using a surplus model of analysis (Cheng, 2000; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006; Littlewood, 2000; Liu & Littlewood, 1997) tended to represent Chinese students positively as motivated, willing to learn and adapt. After reviewing both categories of studies, I will then offer critiques of both models of analysis of silence based on reviews of the studies that promoted a more complicated understanding of classroom silence (Clark & Gieve, 2006; Grimshaw, 2007; Ryan & Louie, 2007; Zhou et al., 2005).

Deficit model of analysis

Certain studies drew from the Chinese culture that valued silence as a sign of respect and harmony to account for Chinese students' classroom silence (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Shi, 2011). Those studies also relied on a deficit model that represented Chinese students as linguistically and culturally incompetent. One example of such studies is Shi's (2011) investigation of a group of Chinese graduate students in an MBA program in the US by utilizing the deficit model and offering a cultural deterministic explanation.

Shi examined the issues of English language acquisition and communication difficulties that six male and seven female Chinese students encountered while attending a five-month exchange MBA program in the US. Through interviews and observations, Shi documented "students' language practices and participation patterns" (p. 578) in classrooms and students' culture-enrichment fieldtrips. The study attributed students' silence in group activities "largely to insufficient communicative competence in the target language, inadequate knowledge of the target culture, and limited class participation skills"

(p. 569). The study identified that Chinese students' language and cultural incompetence hindered international students' full participation in meaningful academic and cultural activities "in multicultural academic contexts" (p. 577).

Shi concluded the study by "making recommendations for short-term study abroad programs that may enable international students to communicate more effectively and thereby improve their academic success" (p. 576). Some of the proposed recommendations to host academic institutions and educators included: to increase the effectiveness of admissions screening to better gauge international students' English language skills, to offer international students "an intercultural communication course" which should "include both international students and American students" (p. 586), to help "international students get involved in on-campus student groups and off-campus community activities" (p. 587). Specifically, the study proposed such educational interventions as enhanced orientation programs containing "formal instruction on colloquial speech, idioms, accents, and other varieties of the target language" (p. 587), and an increased understanding of and sensitivity to cultural differences in international students in the host institution.

Noticeable about Shi's study was the attempt to address the issue of students' silence in the classroom setting and beyond by contextualizing silence within the Chinese cultural context that valued silence as a sign of respect and harmony (p. 577). In other words, aligning with the Chinese cultural practice that valued silence and modesty, Shi argued that students in the study used silence to avoid embarrassment due to their perceived language deficiency and cultural incompetence. Despite Shi's claim to examine

the unequal power distribution on a multicultural classroom setting, the author framed silence as a deficiency that Chinese international students needed to overcome in order to acculturate into the host culture. Students' own sense-making of their classroom experience was lost. Deficit model aside, Shi also replied upon a cultural determinist model by attributing silence to Chinese traditional values. What Shi ended up doing was homogenizing the participants' experience with classroom silence, while ignoring the differences among the research participants and failing to interrogate the complex social, cultural, and local contexts that situated silence.

Similarly, in an effort to characterize the Chinese learner, Jin and Cortazzi (2006) traced the Chinese learners' reticence and passivity to Chinese cultural influences, and constructed a monolithic image of the Chinese learner as silent and passive. Built on their observations of what western education appeared to value and what Chinese students were charged with lacking, such as critical and creative thinking and collaborative teamwork, the authors proposed "a participation-based model" (p. 15) of language learning, which centered on the learners' experience and aimed to engage students in active learning of classroom materials.

Echoing Shi (2011) and Jin and Cortazzi's (2006) attempted cultural explanation of silence, Liu (2002) offered a culturally-specific explanation of silence by drawing from theories in the field of communication studies (p. 39). Liu (2002) pointed out that "the speculation that Chinese students are likely to be silent in classrooms could be plainly erroneous and dangerously misleading if the types of social contexts in which silence regularly occurs and the silence is derived from are not taken into consideration" (Liu,

2002, p. 37). Aiming at complicating the studies on silence that relied on linguistic explanations (i.e., inability to speak up in class), Liu (2002) focused on three Chinese students as part of an investigation of Asian students' classroom communication patterns in the US universities. Positioning himself as "an insider of the Chinese culture" (Liu, 2002, p. 38), Liu offered "cultural-specific explanations grounded in a theoretical framework of silence and the face-saving and politeness strategies deeply-rooted in the Chinese context" (2002, p. 38). Specifically, relating Chinese students' silence to their foreign and minority status in the US, Liu situated Chinese students' silent behavior in classrooms within the Chinese culture that endorsed silence as a sign of respect for other people, as well as an indicator of conformity and harmony. In his words,

> Due to their minority status in American classrooms and beyond, Chinese students tend to use silence in class as a shield for self-protection through invisibility, or as an expression to show their conformity and harmony with the majority… [Silence] is not only a sign of respect, conformity and agreement, but also a safety net or a tinted window as he can benefit from others' discussion in class without taking the risk of losing his face…due to his lack of communicative competence, or being seen as disagreeable. (Liu, 2002, p. 48)

Culturally acceptable in the Chinese context, silence in Liu's case study functioned as Chinese students' expression of power, which allowed Chinese students in the powerless situation to process course information at their own pace, to conceal language incompetence and avoid embarrassment due to lack of communicative proficiency. Based upon this finding, Liu proposed the need for a cross-cultural understanding of classroom

participation in relation to culturally specific norms and classroom expectations, rather than framing Chinese students' silence as passivity, lack of preparation, or independent thinking. He concluded with suggestions for Chinese students in the US to develop intercultural identities and to acquire adaptive cultural transformation competence in order to embrace and adapt to the target culture (Liu, 2002). Despite the perceived differences among his three research participants, Liu did not address differences based on gender.

Drawing from Chinese cultural traditions to explain silence, the above studies by Shi (2011) and Jin and Cortazzi's (2006) relied on a deficit model that represented Chinese students as linguistically and culturally inadequate. Liu's study (2002) challenged the deficit model by contextualizing Chinese students' silence in classrooms within the Chinese cultural norms that endorsed silence as an indicator of respect and harmony. What is similar among the three studies is the authors' attempts to account for Chinese students' silent behavior in classrooms through the lens of Chinese traditions that value silence as a sign of conformity and respect.

Surplus model of analysis

In contrast with the deficit model, a surplus model accentuating Chinese students' positive traits behind the perceived silence appeared in a few studies on Chinese students' apparent silence in the context of studying in English-speaking countries (Cheng, 2000; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006; Littlewood, 2000; Liu & Littlewood, 1997). Gu and Schweisfurth's study (2006) was one example that characterized Chinese students in intercultural settings as highly motivational and adaptable. Their study argued that Chinese students' personal

and professional growth in intercultural settings entailed "far more than strengthening their linguistic competence and subject knowledge and adapting to a different teaching and learning approach" (p. 83). Rather, what distinguished Chinese learners were high levels of motivation and willingness to adjust, both of which had cultural origins dating back to Chinese traditions. The study reinforced the image of "'the' Chinese learner as a motivated and adaptable one" (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006, p. 88), while promoting a better understanding of the complexities of the interactions between Chinese learners and their learning contexts.

Additional studies operating on a surplus model of analysis of silence yielded a similar finding as in Gu and Schweisfurth's (2006) study about the positive traits of inquisitiveness and adaptability among Chinese students, but argued against an oversimplified cultural explanation of the traits as predisposed. For example, a survey study by Liu and Littlewood (1997) revealed students' preference for active speech roles in classrooms and group discussions, as well as their positive attitudes toward English, despite dominant findings about East Asian students' apparent reticence to speak. Despite students' expressed desire for an active role in class, Liu and Littlewood (1997) acknowledged the alleged reluctance to speak English and attributed the reticence to students' language incompetence, anxiety from high performance expectations, mismatch between teachers' and students' perceptions of learners' role, all resulting from a previous education exposure that provided Chinese students with "inadequate opportunities to practice spoken English" and "socialized them into adopting passive roles in the classroom" (p. 377). That is to say, Chinese students' exhibited silence was a result of socialization, instead of a pre-set inherited trait of being silent.

This finding about Chinese students' preference for participative and active role was resonated in two additional studies by Littlewood (2000) and Cheng (2000). Both studies examined some preconceptions about Asian students as obedient listeners, reticent and passive learners, while revealing that the stereotypes of Asian students mismatched their preferred active and independent role in classrooms. Specifically, through surveying students in eight East Asian countries and three European countries, Littlewood (2000) suggested that Asian students' alleged passivity was not an inherent disposition, but more a consequence of educational environments available to them. He proposed to avoid cultural stereotyping, to question and revisit the stereotypes and the extent of cultural influences on learning. Cheng (2000) made a similar claim that the observed reticence in some Asian students was not culturally predetermined, but specific to different situations, such as teaching methodologies and language proficiency levels. For instance, Asian students' classroom participations increased with a more student-centered pedagogy and students' increasing language proficiency levels. According to Cheng, to attribute some Asian students' reticence and passivity to their cultural attributes was groundless and detrimental to cross-cultural understandings and communications.

Critiques of the deficit/surplus models and cultural explanations

Studies focusing on the issue of classroom silence in the study abroad context with either the deficit model or the surplus model tended to position Chinese students as culturally predisposed to be quiet, modest, polite, respectful, adaptable, motivated, and desiring to be active, as part of their exposure to multiple aspects of Chinese cultural traditions. In a lot of ways, these studies cited Chinese culture as "a convenient coincidence" (Clark & Gieve, 2006, p. 59), that is, "a convenient explanation for any

observed or actual behavioural trait" (Liu & Littlewoord, 1997, p. 374), as demonstrated in Chinese students in the study abroad context. Specifically, studies undergirded by the deficit model attempted to attribute Chinese students' reticence to their lack of knowledge and skills to succeed in the host country (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Shi, 2011), regardless of their previous academic achievements in China. In those studies, Chinese students were characterized as linguistically and culturally challenged and lack critical thinking (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Shi, 2011), just the antithesis of desirable American students (Clark & Gieve, 2006). This illusory dichotomy underlying these studies contributed to the construction of Chinese students as the other in English-speaking classrooms.

In an effort to refute the deficit representation of Chinese students, some studies attempted to problematize a series of dichotomies implicit in studies operating on the deficit model of analysis, such as Chinese students versus American students, reticent versus participatory, passive versus active (Cheng, 2000; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006; Littlewood, 2000; Liu & Littlewood, 1997). According to those studies, Chinese students demonstrated positive and surplus attributes that actually compensated for their language incompetence if needed. Yet, by over-correcting some misconceptions of Chinese students, oftentimes the studies fell "into the same trap of homogenizing and thus misinterpreting a cultural tradition that is as complex and diverse as any other" (Ryan & Louie, 2007, p. 407). In Ryan and Louie's words, both models failed to "take into account the diversity and complexity of the contemporary social and cultural situatedness of such practices," and "of how they are played out within individual contexts" (2007, p. 405). Moreover, regardless of deficit or surplus models, studies subjecting silence to cultural explanations uncritically treated both home and host cultures of learning as stagnant and timeless (Cheng, 2000;

Wong, 2004), and offered a static view of a group of diverse Chinese learners whose
differences might outweigh their imagined similarities from the assumingly shared Chinese
cultural heritage.

Zhou et al. (2005) offered a similar critique of an oversimplified reductionist
approach present in previous studies on Chinese students' performance in post-secondary
Western/English classrooms that attributed students' silence "to linear, main effects
models of causation in which individual characteristics (e.g. English proficiency and
cultural difference) are conceptualized as determinants of their classroom performance"
(p. 297). According to their study,

> Reducing Chinese students' silence to their individual characteristics fails to capture
> the complex interplay of various contextual elements that contribute to their
> classroom experiences and leaves classroom processes (e.g. interactions between
> Chinese students and their professors as well as peer students) unexamined. (Zhou
> et al., 2005, pp. 297-298)

Seeking specifically to understand the contested nature of the classroom space
(Briskin, 1998, 2000) that situated Chinese students' learning experiences in Canadian
higher education institutions, Zhou et al. (2005) conducted a qualitative study of ten
Chinese graduate students' experience of sharing indigenous knowledge, with particular
attention to power dynamics in classrooms. In the study, Zhou et al. (2005) defined silence
not merely "as an individual decision not to speak" (p. 297). Rather, they understood
silence "as classroom processes in which Chinese students' individual characteristics
interact with classroom context to engender their reluctance to participate, despite

opportunity to do so" (p. 297). As such, their study examined from the students' perspectives "the conditions or the interactive classroom processes that characterize the contexts in which Chinese students make decisions about their participation" (p. 297).

Zhou et al. (2005) suggested that "a variety of factors and processes may inhibit students' inclinations to spontaneously answer or ask questions and to contribute to classroom discussion" (p. 294). Some of the factors contained poor English language skills, unfamiliarity with the host culture and particularly with normalized social, cultural and educational practices, such as different perceptions of pedagogies or different meanings attached with participations in changing cultural contexts. There was more to Chinese students' reticence than the multiplicity of the above factors, especially regarding sharing indigenous/Chinese knowledge in classrooms.

When it came to sharing indigenous knowledge, defined as "an in-depth understanding of indigenous/Chinese realities resulting from one's long-term residence in China" (Zhou et al., 2005, p. 289), several study participants reported their feelings of serving as an entertainer, "like an 'exotic' novelty" (Zhou et al., 2005, p. 301) and being viewed as a representative of Chineseness or Chinese perspective. Research findings indicated that science and engineering students had fewer opportunities to share indigenous knowledge in that Western knowledge dominated content materials and was viewed as authoritative, whereas social sciences and humanities students were exposed to opportunities to share indigenous knowledge since "the relativism of knowledge was assumed to be somewhat accepted" (Zhou et al., 2005, p. 299). In social sciences and humanities classes, what inhibited Chinese students from speaking more in class included

"fear that their sharing may reinforce the essentialization of 'Chineseness' or 'Chinese perspective'" (Zhou et al., 2005, p. 302). The tendency to stay silent was also because they were among a very few non-Western students and found it hard for their voices to get heard in the presence of peers and professors who may have been insensitive to their socio-cultural heritage. As Zhou et al. (2005) put it,

> to some degree, the perceived devaluation of Chinese knowledge from peer students and/or professor resulted in or reinforced these Chinese students' continued silence/reticence in the classroom and engendered reflection on 'indigenous knowledge' in relation to the dominant knowledge of the classroom. (Zhou et al., 2005, pp. 303-304)

Positioning Chinese students' reticence as "a relational reality" (p. 304), Zhou et al. (2005) pointed out that different sets of knowledge did not share equal status in the classroom space that consequently reinforced and reproduced relations of domination and subordination. Thus, reluctance to speak

> can also be understood as a resistance to the hegemonic knowledge systems and pedagogies in the classrooms. It questions the status quo of the asymmetric power relations between different knowledge and problematizes the Eurocentric discourses of legitimated knowledge. (Zhou et al., 2005, p. 304; Dei, 2000, as cited in Zhou et al., 2005, p. 304; Tuhwai Smith, 2002; Kubota & Lehner, 2004).

Zhou et al. (2005) further argued that classroom power dynamics were not only about the reproduction of racial and gender relations, but also about "linguistic and cultural disparity in knowledge production, dissemination and validation" (Zhou et al.,

2005, p. 304). With such a contextualized understanding of Chinese students' reticence, they claimed that "diversity in knowledge and ways of thinking are as integral to inclusive education as diversity in gender, race, or other dimensions of experience" (p. 304). Moreover, recognizing Chinese students' agency and potential to resist the dominant classroom knowledge and power relations, they proposed the concepts of "reciprocal cultural familiarity" and "inclusive knowledge sharing" to call attention to the situatedness of Chinese students' reticence in relation to classroom power dynamics.

Summary

Most of the studies on Chinese students' academic and cultural adjustments in American colleges attribute Chinese students' silence in classroom settings to their limited English language proficiency and lack of cultural familiarity in the host country. Such studies frequently rely on a reductionist deficit model that not only neglects students' agency but also fails to take into account the complexities of the cultural and social contexts that have shaped the issue of classroom silence. This deficit discourse is so pervasive that many Chinese students often internalize the representations of themselves as inadequate, silent, and passive (Ryan & Louie, 2007). In an effort to refute the deficit representation of Chinese students, some studies operating on a surplus model of analysis represent Chinese international students as motivated, adaptable, resilient, and willing to participate in classroom discussions. And yet, with a homogenizing tendency to subject the positive traits in Chinese students within the Confucian cultural heritage, those studies tend to follow a similar cultural explanation pattern that operates in the studies relying on a deficit model of analysis. As some critics point out, both models of analysis end up constructing the Chinese learner as the reduced other (Grimshaw, 2007), while treating both home and host

cultures of learning as stagnant and timeless (Cheng, 2000; Wong, 2004), and overlooking the complex and contested process involving negotiations with their outsider status in the host culture and the reconstructions of their newly acquired identities based on race, culture, and social class (Clark & Gieve, 2006).

In the discussion that follows, I will look at the different representations of Chinese international students as complex subjects situated within the interlocking systems of power and domination, with particular attention to issues of culture, race, and gender. The discussion is by no means exhaustive of the literature about the lived experiences of Chinese international students, but is intended to give a glimpse into their schooling experiences and their accounts of their study abroad experiences.

Construction of Chinese Students as Complex Subjects

The following is a review of some studies that diverted from a reductionist acculturation model or the cultural explanation approach. Rather, these studies attempt to understand international students' experience from the students' perspectives while highlighting their meaning-making abilities in the host country. For example, Fasheh's essay on the model of "diversity in unity" (1984) served as a precursory response to, and a critique of the essentializing reductionist model implicit in many studies on Chinese international students.

Model of "diversity in unity"

Way before the flourishing of research on international students' acculturation to the US culture, Fasheh (1984) accentuated the breadth and depth of the vast experiences attached with foreign students in his article. He claimed,

Foreign students are not empty vessels to be filled with information and theories. Their needs cannot be reduced to technicalities such as housing, English proficiency, and visas. Foreign students belong to rich cultures that often extend thousands of years behind them. They need to be recognized as people whose experience and culture are crucial in building any progress, any understanding, any dialogue. (Fasheh, 1984, p. 317)

Fasheh offered a pointed critique of such discussions that neglected the social and political contexts in foreign students' home countries. Fasheh pointed out that the history of international students studying abroad was "probably as old as higher education itself" (p. 314). However, despite the increasing presence of international students on US campuses, "their existence within American society is peripheral at best" (p. 318). Further, Fasheh critiqued "the western perspective only" (p. 315) embedded in discussions and researches on the international dimension of colleges or universities in the US. He asserted,

Interaction is a basic need that cannot be ignored without a huge loss. This is extremely crucial if we are to preserve diversity within and outside the United States. Moreover, it is crucial if U.S. education is to become more effective and more relevant. (Fasheh, 1984, pp. 317-318)

Towards this goal, Fasheh argued that both the US academicians and foreign students shared the responsibility to foster enriching interactions between foreign students and the host academic community. Collectively, they could attempt to interrupt the assumed centrality and superiority of European experience, and to integrate "internationalism, student migration, intercultural cross fertilization, and exchange of

ideas, perceptives, and values" (p. 315) into discussions on American higher education.

Specifically, Fasheh proposed the concept of "Diversity in unity—not diversity in isolation"

(p. 319) as the model for which people should be striving. "Diversity in unity" meant, in

Fasheh's words, "diversity of experiences and perspectives, and unity of sharing one globe,

one future, and a set of basic problems" (p. 319). To achieve the model, Fasheh concluded

with some specific suggestions, such as to diversify courses and curriculum to reflect

multiple perspectives, to educate American academicians to be recognizant of diverse

cultures, needs, and realities of foreign students.

Consistent with Fasheh's proposed model of "diversity in unity" (1984), the

following is a review of some studies that attempted to address the lived realities of

Chinese international students in post-secondary institutions abroad.

Problematizing the construct of "the Chinese learner"

Clark and Gieve (2006) conducted a textual analysis of the large body of literature

that constructed the Chinese learner as either passive, obedient, and lacking critical

thinking (the deficit model), or possessing the Chinese dispositions of intelligence and hard

work, and valuing active and reflective thinking (the surplus model). The authors argued

against "the large culture" approach to explain the behaviors of individuals by claiming that

the Chinese learner was too complex to reduce to an affiliation with a homogeneous

national culture. They also critiqued the homogenizing tendency to represent the Chinese

learner with lacks and deficits at one end and possessing valued and positive attributes at

the other end while failing to examine "the dynamics of cultural change" and "internal

heterogeneity" among Chinese students, as well as "social and institutional factors in the

learning context" (p. 63). As an alternative to "the large culture" approach, Clark and Gieve stated,

> Rather than attributing a particular identity to "Chinese learner" and ascribe
> cultural characteristics to them as a fixed, reified, homogeneous and homogenized
> group, we might look instead at the identity positions which are available to
> individual learners who happen to be from China, from which they can construct a
> way of being and behaving in the classroom as well as outside it. (Clark & Gieve,
> 2006, p. 63)

What Clark and Gieve proposed was "a small culture approach" based on post-structuralist, critical pedagogy, anthropological and cultural studies that emphasized the concepts of identity, agency, accommodation, resistance, voice, and empowerment (p. 63). For example, with the small culture approach, Clark and Gieve (2006) provided an alternative explanation to consider: that language learning for Chinese students was not a matter of acquiring linguistic skills, but a matter of learning cultural norms in order to participate in academic discourses, as well as a matter of complex and contested process involving negotiations with their outsider status in the host culture and reconstructions of their newly acquired identities based on race, culture, and social class. Given small culture discourse's emphases on differences, individuality, situated identity, and agency, Clark and Gieve (2006) recommended the small cultural approach to studies on Chinese international students. As they explained,

> Research devoted to understanding learners from China, especially in study abroad
> contexts, would do well to get away from explanations and understandings based on

reified, abstracted and frozen conceptions of culture. For one thing, such

generalizations hide as much as they reveal and, in reducing individuals to

inadequately understood group characteristics, approach racial stereotyping. (Clark

& Gieve, 2006, p. 69)

Clark and Gieve articulated the danger of defining individual Chinese students

through their group affiliations with the Chinese culture whose contextualized meanings

oftentimes went unnoticed. Echoing Clark and Gieve (2006), Grimshaw (2007) further

elaborated the inadequacy of the "Chinese learner" construct through participant

observation and ethnographic interviews with college students in China. His ethnographic

study offered empirical evidence supporting his proposal "to abandon the notion of the

'Chinese learner' (singular) and to recognize Chinese students (plural) as complex subjects"

(p. 304). His research findings demonstrated that students asserted their agency in varied

ways. For example, students explained that "withdrawal and refusal to participate verbally

in the lesson was often a form of protest" (Grimshaw, 2007, p 306) against unengaging

lectures. Managing personal space, such as dorms and study space, was another example of

students exercising agency to secure privacy in restricted physical settings.

Moreover, Grimshaw (2007) critiqued the assimilationist and deficit agenda implicit

in studies focusing on language and academic adjustments that Chinese international

students were expected to make in order to succeed in the host country. He contended that

established research seeking to characterize the Chinese learner appeared "to assume that

Chinese students constitute a homogeneous group, embodying the values and behaviours

of a reified national or ethnic culture" (p. 300), and consequently resulted in a monolithic

stereotypical representation of a *reduced other*: passive, uncritical, and over-reliant on the instructor. Similarly, Grimshaw criticized the essentializing tendency to represent Chinese students as the opposite of lacking which referred to positive attributes shaped by Chinese cultural values. He claimed that passive or active learners were nothing but cultural constructs that were relational and context-specific. As such, he proposed a non-essentialist perspective, whereby cultures were dynamically evolving and individuals' identities were contingent upon shifting contexts. Specifically, in order to gain a better understanding of Chinese students, Grimshaw suggested that we should "pay attention to what those students actually do and say," "seek to relate to them first and foremost as people, with all the complexity that entails," and "clarify what capacities they already possess" (p. 308).

Lived experiences of Chinese students on English-speaking campuses

Similar to Grimshaw's (2007) ethnographic study of Chinese students in China, some qualitative studies examined individual students' experiences from their perspectives with a particular emphasis on students' agency. Fong (2004) and Pang and Appleton (2004) were among the few who did this type of work. In a multiple-year longitudinal project, Fong (2004) followed the life course of a cohort of only children born under China's one-child policy, many of whom hoped to attend US colleges and universities. Using in-depth interviews and participant observation, Fong examined how and why Chinese teenagers and young adults perceived that they were more likely than their parents to experience frustrations related to the inequalities between China and developed nations in terms of social, cultural, economic, and political developments, and to negotiate the unequal developments at both a personal and a national level through studying abroad.

Pang and Appleton (2004) conducted in-depth interviews with ten Chinese immigrants in the Phoenix, Arizona metropolitan area, in which the authors identified the role of higher education as an immigration path for Chinese students.

In those studies on the lived experiences of Chinese students (Fong, 2004; Pang & Appleton, 2004), being Chinese seemed to a salient identity marker. Both male and female students participated in the studies. Gender-specific discussions in relation to Chinese students were missing from their data analyses and findings. Given the pervasiveness of discourses on gender both in China and in the host countries, I am more interested in female students' perceptions of their study abroad experiences. The following is a review of a study that particularly addressed the issue of gender.

Good Chinese Woman Discourse: Studies on Female Students

As introduced in Chapter One, a good Chinese woman has traditionally been defined as a good daughter, obedient and virtuous wife, selfless and industrious mother, who possesses three obediences and four virtues (Zhao & Zhang, 1996). In today's China, though the good Chinese woman discourse that centers on the three obediences and four virtues is no longer enforced and State laws and policies have legalized women's equality (Barlow, 2004; Leung, 2003), cultural legacies of patriarchy still linger around, as demonstrated in the State-sponsored promotion of the leftover woman discourse as a direct opposite of the good woman discourse.

Among the literature on Chinese international students, studies specifically on female students or gender issues are very limited. Qin and Lykes' study (2006) is an exception. Informed by social constructionist theory and critical feminist theory, Qin and

Lykes (2006) studied the self-understanding of Chinese female graduate students in the northeastern United States in the 1990s, "as they experienced and re-experienced themselves in developing understandings of culture and self within contexts of change" (p. 184). Not naming the theoretical framework as intersectionality, the authors identified themselves as "critical cultural feminist psychologists" (p. 180) and situated their "study of self at the intersections of culture, class, race, power and gender" (pp. 180-181). One primary factor that shaped the authors' research design was the limited number of research on the fast growing presence of Chinese women in US graduate schools, especially regarding the "transition from their culture of origin to the host culture" (p. 178). The other factor that motivated the research was the authors' own "personal experiences of crossing geographic and cultural borders" (p. 183) as middle-class professionals multiply privileged by ethnicity, social class, or "the power of knowledge in [their] culture of origin" (p. 178).

Through snowball sampling and purposive sampling, Qin and Lykes (2006) recruited 20 Chinese female graduate students, aged 25-39, from both private and public universities in the northeastern United States. For the study participants, the length of residence in the US ranged from 18 to 60 months. Each research participant completed two audio-taped interviews of approximately two hours each. In order to capture "the changes in Chinese female students' self-understanding as they crossed from their culture of origin to the host culture" (p. 192), the authors identified "an overarching basic psychological process" of "reweaving a fragmented web of self" (p. 182), which constituted three evolving sub-processes of understanding the experiences of being women in the country of origin and becoming international female students in the host country.

Among the three sub-processes of understanding the notion of self, "weaving self"
featured the first sub-process, which referred to female students' reflections on their
growing-up experiences and social locations in China. In the authors' words:

> The metaphor "weaving self" captures the processes through which the majority of
> these 20 Chinese women students described family traditions, education and
> cultural values, ways of being and becoming in the web of social relations in which
> they were reared in China. (Qin & Lykes, 2006, p. 185).

Following this process of "weaving self" which took place in China, "fragmenting
self" characterized the second sub-process, which illuminated being women in the Chinese
context and becoming international female graduate students in the US context.
Specifically, the authors examined Chinese female graduate students' narratives of "lived
experiences of social injustice in contemporary Chinese society" (p, 193) "by virtue of being
female as a daily reality" (p. 186), and both exhilarating and marginalizing experiences of
"further fragmentation due to the shifting webs of social relations in the US structured by
differential and unequal race, class, gender and power dynamics" (p. 193). This second sub-
process occurred when Chinese female graduate students found themselves occupying the
in-between space of the two cultures in relation to their insider-without and outsider-
within status in the US (Collins, 1986).

As the last sub-process of understanding the notion of self, "reweaving self"
encompassed "re-examining and re-threading the previously fragmented facets of self to
create a new and expanded web of self in the host culture" (p. 189). With an increasing
awareness of the concept of race as a newly ascribed social identity emergent through their

daily encounters with the host culture, the authors argued that Chinese female graduate

students engaged with "a newly complex and diversified sense of self" (p. 192) that marked

the process of "reweaving self."

Labeling the 20 Chinese female graduate students' changing self-understanding

process as "reweaving a fragmented web of self" (p. 182), the authors strove "to extend

psychological understandings of diversity and individuality while also contributing in some

small way to improving the lives of international women students in US universities" (p.

196). One of their conclusions was of particular interest to me. As they explained,

> Participants' subjectivities as women were thus multiply positioned as Chinese,
>
> poor, female students of color and foreign in the host country. … The shifting senses
>
> of womanhood narrated by the participants confirm that gender operates as a social
>
> construct at the intersection of culture, race, class and power, and that one's identity
>
> is constituted and reconstituted within particular certain historical moments. (Qin &
>
> Lykes, 2006, p. 191)

In the above statement, Qin and Lykes (2006) pointed out that Chinese female graduate

students were positioned intersectionally within the interlocking relations of power, which

informed and constituted their narratives of the female self.

Qin and Lykes' work is informative to my study in many ways, especially regarding

their implied framework of intersectionality and conceptualization of gender as a social

construct. However, my study differs from their work in two main aspects. First, despite

being informative, their study did not explicitly highlight Chinese female graduate students'

agency in the meaning-making process of "crossing multiple geographic, cultural and

psychological borders" (Qin & Lykes, 2006, p. 178), which I attempt to undertake in my study of Chinese female graduate students' complex negotiations with the issue of classroom silence, the leftover woman discourse, and the good woman discourse. I explicitly focus on the various negotiating strategies that my participants articulated and deployed to make sense of their lives. Second, Qin and Lykes collected the interview data in the 1990s, while the majority of my fieldwork took place about a decade later, between 2005 and 2010. During this decade, China, as the home country, had undergone dramatic economic and social transformations, while the United States, as the host country, had witnessed a significant increase in the enrollment of Chinese female graduate students. A disturbing example of China's conspicuous transformation is the increasing prevalence of the leftover woman discourse that discriminates against women on the basis of age and gender, and further reinforces the patriarchal domination of the Chinese society. My study situates the research participants within these newly arising social and cultural contexts both in China and the US in the 21st century and attends to the meaning-making process in locally specific contexts. It is my hope that my study will complement Qin and Lykes' study in the last century by providing an updated and nuanced profile of Chinese women attending graduate schools in the US.

China's Leftover Woman Discourse

Among the vast literature on Chinese international students, little focuses on female students and the specific challenges they have to negotiate while studying abroad, even though Chinese students grew up with gender-specific societal expectations and norms in China and live with complicated gendered social relations in the host country. It is my

assumption that being able to study abroad is a gesture of liberation, given the long-term State-sponsored patriarchy in China. State-sponsored women's movements and national policies have proclaimed women's equality (Barlow, 2004; Leung, 2003), though legacies of hegemonic patriarchy are still powerful and have penetrated every aspect of society, and continue to shape gender roles and expectations. The term "leftover woman" is one example of the power of Chinese patriarchal legacies.

Fincher (2014) gave a detailed account of the origins of the term "leftover woman" in her recently published book, *Leftover Women: The Resurgence of Gender Inequality in China*. According to Fincher, the All-China Women's Federation first coined and defined the term "leftover women" in 2007 as single women over the age of 27, after the Chinese State Council decided to strengthen the Population and Family Planning program to address China's sociological issues. One of the key issues was China's unbalanced sex ratio, which resulted from gender preference for males and sex-selective abortions because of the one-child national policy.[14]

To combat the sex ratio imbalance, the Chinese government sponsored a series of campaigns on leftover women in an effort to bully women into getting married for the sake of social stability. The Chinese Ministry of Education, for instance, included the term "leftover women" in its official lexicon in 2007. State media's coverage of leftover women sent out the consistent message to women: hurry up and get married. For example, Xinhua News Agency, the state-run media in China, offered helpful tips such as "seduce but don't pester" and "be persistent but not willful" in a column "Eight Simple Moves to Escape the

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[14] The ratio in 2014 was 121 males to every 100 females (http://www.bloomberg.com/bw/articles/2014-07-31/chinas-girl-births-ratio-improves-as-country-gets-more-educated

Leftover Women Trap"(Fincher, 2014, p. 18). The column stated, "When holding out for a man, if you say he must be rich and brilliant, romantic and hard-working … this is just being willful. Does this kind of perfect man exist? Maybe he does exist, but why on earth would he want to marry you" (Fincher, 2014, p. 19)?[15]

This Xinhua News column bluntly demanded that women stop being so picky and just settle down. To promote "the leftover woman" concept, the All-China Women's Federation blamed unmarried women, and attributed their failure to get married to their educational pursuits and workplace achievements. The Women's Federation stated in a column that ran just after the International Women's Day in March 2011:

> Pretty girls don't need a lot of education to marry into a rich and powerful family, but girls with an average or ugly appearance will find it difficult. These kinds of girls hope to further their education in order to increase their competitiveness. The tragedy is, they don't realize that as women age, they are worth less and less, so by the time they get their M.A. or Ph.D., they are already old, like yellowed pearls. (Fincher, 2012)

Another article in Xinhua News, "Do Leftover Women Really Deserve Our Sympathy?" echoed the same critique of women:

> The main reason many girls become "leftover women" is that their standards for a partner are too high … As long as girls are not too picky, finding a partner should be as easy as blowing away a speck of dust. (Fincher, 2014, p. 16)

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[15] This quote is originally from a document that the Women's Federation posted a few years ago. The Federation took the document down in response to intense criticism.

"China's 'Leftover Women' Unite This Singles Day" (Mu, 2011) was another article on Xinhua News that reported a survey conducted by the All-China Women's Federation. The report stated, "in a survey of 30,000 men, more than 90 percent said women should marry before 27 to avoid becoming unwanted." Ironically, the All-China Women's Federation was established by the Communist Party in 1949 as a feminist agency to safeguard women's rights and interests. In reality, the Federation serves as a strong proponent to mobilize the leftover woman discourse in China while promoting the rhetoric of gender equality which conflicts with the lived experiences of millions of Chinese women, including my study participants.

As Fincher stated,

State media news reports, surveys, columns, cartoons and television shows about "leftover" women are clearly an attempt to stop urban educated women from delaying marriage any further. Most of the messages are variations on the same theme, directed at single, educated, urban women; stop working so hard at your careers; lower your sights and don't be so ambitious; don't be so picky about whom you marry. (Fincher, 2014, pp. 15-16)

The damage from the leftover women media campaign has been tremendous. As Fincher stated, "It has intensified pressure on educated young women to marry and have a child before time runs out for them. This pressure on women to avoid becoming 'leftover' results in extremely damaging economic consequences" (p. 43). Keeping women out of the accumulation of residential real-estate wealth in China is one dire economic consequence of gender inequality as manifested in the leftover woman discourse. Having presented the

depressing realities confronting Chinese women, Fincher ended her book with a slight

sense of optimism and hope rooted in individual women's resistance to the leftover woman

discourse as well as collective resistance from women's activist groups in and outside

China.

In recent years, the leftover woman discourse has gleaned more attention and

critiques from non-Chinese media. For example, Steinfeld (2014) published an article on

International Women's Day in 2014 on CNN.com titled "Women Still Face Great Wall of

Discrimination in China" where she pointedly critiqued the blatant discrimination against

women in workplace in China. Simpson (2013) in "The 'Leftover' Women: China Defines

Official Age for Females Being Left on the Shelf as 27" reported that

> The Communist government ordered its feminist All-China Women's Federation to
>
> use the derogatory term in several stinging articles about the growing number of
>
> educated, professional, urban and single females aged 27-30 who have "failed" to
>
> find a husband and are now deemed "undesirable". (Simpson, 2013)

Fincher (2012) in "China's 'Leftover' Women" pointed out the victim-blame

mentality inherit in China's leftover women campaign: "It's the woman's fault for refusing

to get married, and once she is married, it's the woman's fault if her husband has an affair.

Of course" (Fincher, 2012). Keenlyside (2012) in the article "You Do Not Want To Be a

Single Lady Over 28 in China" illustrated the gloomy reality facing Chinese women, and the

awakening consciousness of some women to safeguard their rights and resist the State-

sponsored leftover women campaign. Magistad (2013) in "China's 'Leftover Women',

Unmarried at 27" focused on some professional Chinese women who defied the gendered norms of getting married by choosing to stay single and sprightly.

Conclusion

As the previous studies have demonstrated, most empirical work on Chinese international students follows some similar trends. First, the majority of the past studies have revealed that international students encountered multiple obstacles in the host country and they had to overcome a series of academic, cultural, social, and psychological difficulties. These studies largely center on the issues of language acquisition and cultural adaptation, which tend to exhibit an implicit assimilationist agenda (Grimshaw, 2007) to facilitate linguistic and cultural adjustments that Chinese students were expected to make in order to succeed in the host country. By framing the studies as helping Chinese international students to gain language and cultural proficiency, studies end up reproducing the deficit model of incompetence and constructing Chinese international students as the other—different from domestic students who are automatically assumed to be culturally fluent due to their insiders' status.

Second, among the studies on issues of adjustments, there seems to be an increasing body of literature which paints a largely passive picture of Chinese students and attributes the apparent silence in Chinese students to language and cultural incompetence. Chinese cultural heritage is cited frequently to explicate the passivity and reticence in Chinese students in the study abroad context. Growing up with the traditional values such as respecting authority and harmony, for instance, Chinese students are characterized as generally quiet in class, diligent, and less likely to complain. A substantial body of literature

shares this tendency to assume a deterministic relationship between the attitudes and practices of individual Chinese students and the assumed characteristics of Chinese national and cultural attributes.

Third, in response to the above two tendencies in the literature, several studies have responded to the reductionist framework and the cultural explanation tendency and have indicated that for Chinese international students, negotiations with a different culture is not confined to language and cultural adjustments, even though they are important. Framing the challenges merely as linguistic and cultural, the critics claim that many studies tend to oversimplify and essentialize a diverse group of Chinese students as culturally predisposed to be reticent and passive, which research has shown to be a groundless myth, rather than a universal truth. Such studies neglected not only the wider social and cultural contexts marked by complex social relations of power that situate the challenges, but also the sometimes harsh and difficult realities of everyday life, and the hard work of performing identities and strategizing options, necessary to achieve academic and professional success in a different cultural context. Therefore, policy recommendations drawn from diagnoses based on language acquisition and cultural adaptations alone cannot be the easy panaceas for all the problems arising from the study abroad experiences. This is particularly true for female Chinese students who are positioned on the margins of multiple cultures and social norms, but little research has investigated the lived experiences of this group of Chinese female students in the study abroad context from their perspectives, specifically around negotiating the issue of classroom silence, the leftover woman discourse and the good woman discourse. This is the type of work that I do in my study.

In summary, little research has looked at Chinese students' perspectives regarding what it means to be gendered Chinese, international, and graduate students in the US, and how the meanings get (re)negotiated in particular contexts. In my dissertation study informed by an intersectionality framework, I specifically look at how Chinese female graduate students negotiated the issue of classroom silence, the leftover woman discourse, as well as the good woman discourse. My study is an attempt to contribute to the contemporary body of literature on Chinese international students as complex subjects multiply situated within the intersectional structures of power and domination, which has implications for policies and practices in internationalizing higher education.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS AND PROCEDURES

My research investigates Chinese female graduate students' experience with gender and nationality in US graduate schools. In particular, informed by intersectionality (Collins, 1995, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991, 2000; hooks, 1984, 1989, 2000; McCall, 2005; Mohanty, 1988, 2003; Zerai, 2000) and postpositivist realist conceptualizations of identity (Mohanty, 2000; Moya, 2000), I look at the meanings of being Chinese and being female in different places and under different circumstances, the various contexts of the meaning-making (Blumer, 1969; Bogdan & Biklen, 2003), as well as the ways in which my research subjects' national and gendered subjectivities unfolded, got constituted and contested in their negotiations with the issue of classroom silence, the leftover woman discourse, and the good woman discourse. Qualitative research enables me to study variations among group members by emphasizing the specific perspectives of individuals who constitute the group (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

This chapter focuses on how my qualitative inquiry of Chinese female graduate students' experiences is designed and executed. First, following the discussion on qualitative research, I discuss a specific qualitative method of narrative inquiry that I employed in my research design and data analysis. Next, I discuss my subjectivity and how my position as the researcher affects the researcher-participant dynamic in this study. After the discussion on my subjectivity, I describe participants' recruitment and the data collection process. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of data analysis and the specific challenges of producing English text of conversations in which the participants were speaking, often informally, in Mandarin Chinese.

Qualitative Research

A number of qualitative research textbooks have defined research as a socially organized experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Bogdan & Taylor, 1984; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Lofland & Lofland, 1995), which seeks to understand the social relations and symbolic worlds of research subjects (Blumer, 1969; Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Lincoln and Denzin (2000) described qualitative research as "many things at the same time" (p. 1048).

> [It is] an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and sometimes counterdisciplinary field. … It is multiparadigmatic in focus. Its practitioners are sensitive to the value of the multimethod approach. They are committed to the naturalistic perspective and to the interpretive understanding of human experience. At the same time, the field is inherently political and shaped by multiple ethical and political allegiances. (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000, p. 1048)

In sum, qualitative research is not a homogeneous entity, though a few classic qualitative research books have characterized qualitative research as naturalistic (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Silverman, 2000), in that what qualitative researchers do is to "study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3).

While qualitative researchers can utilize multiple methods including in-depth interviewing, participant observation, textual analysis, focus groups, case studies, life history, and discourse analysis to understand how research subjects make meaning of their lived experiences, I primarily used in-depth interviewing to get at my participants' perceptions of their experiences. In-depth interviewing allowed me "considerable latitude

to pursue a range of topics" and simultaneously offered the Chinese women "a chance to shape the content of the interview" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, pp. 95-96). I am less interested in the accuracy of the events contained in the participants' narratives (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) than I am in the participants' *interpretations* and *perceptions* of those events. I recognize that there are "multiple ways of understanding lived events" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 23). While taking seriously their narratives and the discourses that situate and inform their narratives, I have worked to authentically represent the perspectives of the Chinese women I interviewed (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Narrative Strategies

Following poststructuralist conceptualizations of narrative as "a performative act" (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006, p. 167), I see narratives as "a multifaceted resource for the understanding of self-construction" (Kraus, 2006, p. 105), and "modes of resistance to existing structures of power" (Squire, Andrews, & Tamboukou, 2008, p. 4), which involve "multiple, disunified subjectivities" (Squire et al., 2008, p. 3) situated within social relations of power. As Squire et al. (2008) reported, "the storyteller does not tell the story, so much as she/he is told by it" (p. 3). That is to say, subjectivity is manifested in narratives, which construct identities. Kraus (2006) echoed the link between narratives and the performative construction of identity. He claimed,

> Whilst on the one hand we find the self-positioning of the teller, he or she is on the other hand positioned by others. Positioning is carried out discursively within communication, but also within narratives, where the teller him- or herself positions the agent with regards to subjective constructions of belonging, the

negotiation of borders and the management of different, multi-layered belongings.

(Kraus, 2006, p. 109)

What Kraus meant is that discursive negotiations of belonging and affiliation were at the heart of a story-teller's narratives.

Narratives are both productive and interactive in that my research participants engaged in the activity of narrating to construct meanings about their positions as Chinese women and simultaneously to negotiate, test, confirm, reject, and qualify their positions by use of "narrative-in-interaction" (Bamberg, 2005, p. 226). In my study, I focus on the negotiations of complex identities through the social production of narratives, by which my research participants accounted for their experiences and constructed their identities, situated within certain social and cultural contexts (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006; Bamberg, 1977, 2005; Georgakopoulou, 2006; Kraus, 2006). I intend to investigate how a particular narrative strategy enabled Chinese women in my study to construct their own identities and subjectivities when they brought up their stories, as well as how they framed their stories in their narratives (Kraus, 2006, p. 109).

My Subjectivity

In qualitative studies, the researcher enters the field with certain knowledge, assumptions, beliefs, values, as well as multiple selves (Peshkin, 1988)— academic, raced, gendered, classed, and aged[16]. Those intersectional selves all constitute various aspects of the researcher's identity. As Harding (1987) explained, "the researcher appears to us not as

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[16] I do not assume that researcher's racial/ethnic/gender/class identity is determined prior to the research experience. Rather, who she/he is only matters in relation to her/his informants in specific contexts. Here identity is taken as real in the sense of its real life repercussions as articulated by postpositivist realists, like S. Mohanty and P. Moya.

an invisible, anonymous voice of authority, but as a real, historical individual with concrete, specific desires and interests" (Harding 1987, p. 9). In relation to those under study, the researcher is frequently located in a position of power and privilege (e.g., man/woman, middle/working class, white/of color, One-Third/Two-Thirds World[17], adult/child, straight/gay, able-bodied/disabled, educated/uneducated[18]). To what extent a researcher conceptualizes her/his positionality and how she/he works with it not only shapes what the researcher is able to (un)learn from the research field, but also how she/he writes up the analysis.

Besides power hierarchies, the researchers' social locations and the participants' reading of those locations also matter. A researcher is not likely to be seen as just a researcher to her/his participants (Bogdan & Biklen 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Rather, a researcher's body is loaded with various identity markers, open to interpretations. Researcher and participants engage in a mutual, though unequal, "power-charged social relation of 'conversation'" (Haraway, 1988, p. 593). They both speak "from somewhere" (Abu-Lughod, 1991) about the experiences that are encased within and mediated by social and political discourses. The situated identities of both researchers and participants get played out, (re)constituted and negotiated through a dynamic and complex collaboration of research.

To call research a collaborative process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Silverman, 2000) is not to say that researchers and informants are egalitarian

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[17] The terms are borrowed from Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003, p. 226). Roughly, they refer to the Western/Third World. For a detailed explanation, see "Under Western eyes" revisited: Feminist solidarity through anticapitalist struggles. In C. T. Mohanty, *Feminism without borders: Decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity* (pp. 221-251). Durham: Duke University Press.

[18] The binary pairs are just for purpose of an example, to demonstrate what I mean by the position of power a researcher occupies. By no means is the list intended to construct identities in dichotomous terms.

partners, nor does it intend to mask the power asymmetries between researchers and informants (Harding, 1987; Smith, 1987; Stanley & Wise, 1979). Rather, since much research has focused on researchers' situatedness (e.g., in terms of who they are in relation to those being studied) with the assumption that informants are the object of research, a collaborative process is to highlight the agency of informants with a full recognition of their ability to negotiate research relations (Best, 2005; Bettie, 2003; DeVault, 1990). That is to say, the collaboration is a way to bring informants to the center who are usually relegated to the periphery (Banks, 2006). In the meantime, the collaboration calls for a vigilant awareness of power dynamics and holds researchers accountable for their (mis-/ab-)use of power (Abu-Lughod, 1991; Haraway, 1988). In addition, the collaboration with active engagement from both researchers and informants seeks to establish an emancipating rather than colonizing research relation (DeVault & Gloss, 2007), in an effort to disrupt dominant discourses of race, gender, class, nationality, etc.

This section is at attempt to address how the researcher's subjectivity has factored into and shaped the research dynamic, focusing specifically on the strategic use of researcher's self-disclosure in fieldwork. As the researcher, I shared with my participants the same primary identity markers of Chinese, female, and graduate student. My participants and I were both insiders living outside of China and outsiders living within the US. The cultural and language proximity between me and my participants helped me establish rapport with my participants, while at the same time it led to methodological issues that I will continue to discuss in subsequent sections on data collection and data analysis in this chapter.

In various ways, a number of feminist theorists and researchers have conceptualized the relevance of their subjectivities to the work they do. For example, Smith (1987) claimed that "feminist sociologist must make her bodily existence and activity a starting point for inquiry" (p. 15). In her work *Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for People*, Smith (2005) started with examples of her life as a single mom, a feminist activist and educator. In Rodirguez's fieldwork (Dunbar, Rodriguez, & Parker, 2002), her proactively self-disclosed experience as a student of color, as well as her personal appreciation of her informant's racialized experience, further cultivated disclosure on her informant's part.

In comparison with Smith's strategic self-disclosure (Smith, 2005), Harding (1987) explicitly asserted that researcher's subjectivity is part of the empirical evidence. She argued that the best feminist analysis

> insists that the inquirer her/himself be placed in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter, thereby recovering the entire research process for scrutiny in the results of research. That is, the class, race, culture, and gender assumptions, beliefs, and behaviors of the researcher her/himself must be placed within the frame of the picture that she/he attempts to paint. (Harding, 1987, p. 9)

Echoing Harding's assertion to integrate subjectivity into empirical data, Stanley and Wise (1979) employed different languages in their talk about the importance of the personal. They explained that "accounts of the personal constitute not only a realm for examination and discussion, but also the subject-matter of feminist theory and thus the basis of feminist political activity" (Stanley & Wise, 1979, p. 360). On a conceptual level,

what is personal to researchers is part of the research experience and should be open to critical scrutiny.

The following is a situated discussion of various ways a researcher's self-disclosed identity shaped and informed fieldwork relations, particularly regarding relationship built within and across gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality lines. When I talk about researcher's identity with regard to age, gender, etc., I situate identity within the postpositivist realist conceptualization (Mohanty, 2000; Moya, 2000) with a specific focus on material consequences. That is to say, I recognize that one's identity within and beyond the research context is neither fixed nor predetermined; rather, it is discursively constructed and fluid (Clifford, 1997; Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 1990; Mohanty, 2000; Moya, 2000). In the meantime, as demonstrated in the following research contexts, identity got materialized and real in the sense that being a Chinese female graduate student researcher had repercussions in my negotiations of research relations with my participants.

Having a family back in China was one of the many things that I shared with my research participants. As international students, we left our families behind and came to attend graduate school in the US. Family seemed like a good topic to break the ice in an interview conversation, since it is the topic that everyone knows something about and can instantly create a sense of intimacy between researchers and participants. My research experience has proven to be different.

Here is an excerpt from a conversation between me and Donghua, a PhD student in Summer University. The conversation started with the help Donghua received from her mother to choose a college major in China. Donghua was very articulate about her parents'

role in her life. In response to my question, "Can you talk more about your mom's role, in relation to your sense of independence?" Donghua started with "I can speak on that." She then elaborated on how her mother helped her pick a college major. However, she suddenly became quiet when I was hoping to hear more about her parents' occupations.

D: Absolutely. I can speak on this. Here is the story. You know, at that time, I was only 17 or 18; as a high school student, I didn't really know what to do with college, like what to do with my degree, my career, or what kind of career path I would pursue. My mom knows better. She helped me with my academic choices. As a young girl, I didn't know as much as my mom did. The only thing I knew was I didn't want to remain in Xi'an, the city I grew up in. I wanted to be away from my parents, away from home. I feel only in that way could I become independent; like really grow up. That thought was crystal clear to me. I wanted to get away, to go to other cities, big or small, like Shanghai, it didn't matter much. I didn't care what to study, or I didn't know much about various academic fields actually. So my mom helped me choose what to major in.

I: Interesting. You just wanted to stay away from Xi'an, from home, whatever. How so? I mean, where did the idea come from?

D: I don't know. I cannot tell you. Some of my friends shared the same thought too. I don't know how I became obsessed over that thought, or when. I only remember that when I was in junior high, one teacher said something like, if you're with your parents, you would never learn to grow up. I cannot recall

the exact words the teacher said, but the message was the same. Like if you go to schools and live with your parents, you're always treated like kids, well sheltered kids, you would never know what the outside world was really like. The only way is to get out, to lead a life on your own, or something like that. What the teacher said resonated with me. I felt I must go to other places. As long as I could stay away from my parents, I didn't care where to go for college or what to study.

You know, my parents are very traditional, especially my mom. She thinks that kids, particularly girls, should not be too far away from parents. Girls should not leave home. So she preferred that I choose colleges within my city. We have good schools in the city of Xi'an, such as Xi'an Jiaotong University. If I had chosen it, I would have had a variety of majors to choose from. Basically, it's like, I could study whatever I wanted if I chose to go to Xi'an Jiaotong University, for my grades were good and my parents had good relationships with the university; my junior and senior high schools are affiliated with the university. That was a familiar university; I knew it very well. In fact, it was too familiar to attract me. That was not something I wanted. I wanted something less familiar. So, I made up my mind to go to college outside my city. I talked with my parents and they respected my decision and helped me choose colleges and majors. It was not that my mom decided for me on what to study. She discussed it with me and my parents listened to my concerns. But after all, they know much better than I do; they are adults. So I followed their advice.

I: I see. Can you tell me a little about your family? Like what do your parents do?

D: Oh. My mom works as an accountant and my dad is an engineer in a design institute. *(silence)* That's it. [O.C.: This was the first time when she became quiet. It raised a red flag, but I wasn't suspecting anything, since my question didn't really ask much. She might be quiet for some reason, though.]

I: I see. What do you see as their role in your life?

D: Hmm, I'd say they are my mentors. They guide me all the way; strict with me, but never harsh. I mean, they are reasonable, and they give me plenty of leeway for my development. Not pushy, or something like that. You know some parents, they've designed a certain path for their kids to follow through, like which way to go, the directions are pre-determined for their kids. Kids don't have a say in their life. My parents are not like that. They help me, advise me, and that's pretty much it. They never force me to do things I don't like. They are not imposing. My parents believe in the Chinese philosophy like, to teach kids in accordance with their aptitudes, or to tailor what do to with a person to her/his abilities. For me, they see me as a hard-worker. I take my studies seriously and they are quite satisfied with my academic performance. So they don't put too much pressure on me; like I have to do certain things or achieve certain grades, or whatever. They are liberal-minded and they give me enough space and autonomy. (Donghua, 12/24/2008, pp. 40-44)

Donghua portrayed her parents as both traditional and liberal. They were traditional in the sense that they thought girls should be physically close to the parents. They were liberal-minded in that they offered her enough space and autonomy to grow. By making up her mind to attend college in a far-away city and further to attend graduate school in the US, Donghua presented herself to me as an independent thinker and decision-maker.

Donghua talked at length, though occasionally she became silent to gather her thoughts. However, in response to my question about her parents' occupation, she was very short and stopped with a brisk sentence, "That's it" (Donghua, 12/24/2008, p. 43) which sent out the message to me that "this is all I will say; nothing else." Since my question did not really probe much, I was not suspecting her reluctance at this point, especially seeing her starting to talk further about her parents' being liberal and traditional at the same time. Up until here, Donghua was very open about her family. However, moments later, she shut down completely, and that caught me off guard.

After hearing the liberal and traditional sides of her parents, I threw out a question without much thinking.

I: You're their only child. What do you see as their expectations of you?

D: No. I have a sister, a younger sister. *(O.C.: She stopped here without further explanation.)*

I: You have a younger sister? I'm a little surprised. I feel for girls of your age, born in the 80s, usually only one child in a family. [O.C.: I was a little shocked hearing that she had a younger sister.]

D: I don't know why I have a little sister. I just have one. The reasons, I don't

know. But I feel good having my sister around, unlike my friends who feel

lonely after school. They have no one to play with at home. Me and my sister,

we are friends and we accompany each other, so that we don't feel lonely.

[O.C.: She started to ramble.]

I: I see. Ok. Anything interesting about your sister? Where is she now?

D: She stays home with my parents. She goes to school in Xi'an. Nothing much

about her. Do you have other questions? [O.C.: She shut down here and

requested to change the topic.]

I: Okay, are you the only person in your family who's doing a PhD? Any other

high academic achievers in your family? (Donghua, 12/24/2008, pp. 44-45)

Even though I expressed surprise at the fact that she was not a singleton, she turned

it off completely and steered the conversation away from the topic by saying, "Nothing

much about her. Do you have other questions?" I had to start a new topic. Reflecting on the

initial awkwardness I experienced during the interview with her, I started to realize where

and how my situatedness came to the picture. I was interested in the fact that Donghua had

a younger sister. To be more exact, I was shocked in finding out that she had a YOUNGER

sister, not an older one.

Donghua and I were close in age, so I assumed that we should be the only child in

the family. The assumed sameness made me ask her the question about her parents'

expectations of her as a single child. Then I was shocked when I discovered that she had a

younger sibling and I was not hiding my surprise at all, or maybe disapproval in her eyes. I

must have made a surprised face indicating that something must be wrong with her family

because she had a younger sibling. The way I reacted sent out the message that having a

younger sister was a big deal. I treated it as problematic.

To me, having a younger sibling WAS an issue—at least something unusual about

Donghua's family. With the one child policy strictly implemented throughout China since

late 1970s, most Chinese families can have only one child[19]. Donhuag's family seemed to be

the exception. In my experience, families with two children of my age are ethnic

minorities[20], have an oldest child that is disabled[21], or have bribed public officials to look

the other way. Nothing too positive came to my mind when I thought of people of my age

having younger siblings. Any or all of those reasons would be sufficient to make her feel

bad or inferior. Did she have some disability? Was she trying to conceal her membership in

an ethnic minority group? Were her parents involved in some illegal business? What were

the other possible what-ifs that I had not even entertained? Any one of those might be a

source of embarrassment or shame to her.

Her reticence disappeared when I asked a different question about what made her

decide to study in the US. "I can talk about that. Very similar, like how I felt before college. I

wanted a change, a different experience" (Donghua, 12/24/2008, p. 46). She continued

with what she thought "a different experience" that study abroad would offer her. She

turned it on and turned it off so quickly. She could be talking rapidly and animatedly and

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[19] Chinese government announced an end to the one child policy effective January 1, 2016. Now couples can have two children.
[20] Under the One-Child Policy, ethnic minorities have always had the privilege to have more than on child.
[21] Waivers may be obtained for families to have a second child if the first is disabled in some way.

then suddenly totally shut down. And seconds later, she was up and running again on a new topic.

Reflecting on the interviewing with Donghua, I realized that the discourse of ethnicity or disability, which was not legible or could not be seen in interviews, became part of my—the researcher, and Donghua's—my participant's own situatedness. As an able-bodied single child living a life in China privileged in so many ways, I find it hard to distinguish ethnic minorities by their language, dress, or other visible markers. I still assume whoever speaks unaccented Mandarin, like Donghua, as of the Han (majority) ethnicity. What I disclosed about myself (single child, one among the privileged few), coupled with what was hidden (Han ethnic majority) may have set myself apart from her, rather than drawing me close to her.

The use of self-disclosure in this sense could be a double-edged sword. It shortened the gulf between the researcher and the subject. It also reminded me of the prejudice and privilege attached with what was disclosed and what was not. Mere self-disclosure was not enough to cultivate the research relationship and careless self-disclosure might have negative effects on this relationship. My experience has taught me to be more cautious of what I reveal and how I reveal it until I get a good handle on who I am talking with. For example, small talk about family can be a strategy to engage the participants. My inexperience led me to believe that talking about family was a natural way to break the ice, but I have since learned that I may have to break the ice *before* conversations about family. It has also taught me the necessity to critically examine the disclosed and hidden identities in relation to broader social and political context that undergirds the development of research relations.

Recruiting Participants

I recruited my participants in the following way. When I first began my pilot study in Fall 2005, I sent out emails to some Chinese female graduate students who were acquaintances of mine and asked them to recommend people who would like to participate in my research. After my research started, I used snow-ball sampling by asking the person I interviewed to connect me with any potential participant. I then sent emails to them asking for permission to interview them on how they made sense of their lives at American universities, as well as the meanings of being Chinese, female, and international students to them. I also emailed the Chinese Students Association's listserv at three additional universities to solicit volunteers. Included in Appendix C is a copy of the approved language by my university's Institutional Review Board that I sent out to potential research participants.

For participants from my university, I usually called them prior to interviews to decide on a place to meet. Typically, I met my participants in an empty classroom or a quiet study room in the library where distractions were minimal. Once I secured participants in other universities through emails and phone calls, I drove my personal vehicle to a location of their choosing—usually inside an academic building on campus within two hours' drive from my location. Five participants invited me to their homes to conduct the interviews. One participant Xixi was working on her dissertation in a different city from her University. She invited me to meet with her at her one-bedroom apartment she occupied with her husband, their two young boys, and Xixi's parents who were visiting from China. Interviewing my participants at their homes offered me an insight into their living space,

and conversations typically started with their apartment hunting experiences and proceeded to their academic choices and specific experiences with gender and nationality in the US.

Participants' Profiles

I would like to take a moment to thank each and every one of my participants again for their willingness to take part in this study. I was able to complete this study only because of their generosity by frankly sharing their stories with me, whether the stories were pleasant or painful. The reflective, analytical, and contemplative way they structured their narratives reinforced my belief that they are "knowledge holders and theorizers-experts of their own worlds" (Collins, 2000, p. 34).

What follows is a brief profile of 20 participants aged from 23 to 36 at the time of the interview. My participants in this study were master's or PhD students in one of four colleges or universities in the northeastern United States. Their programs of study included computers, education, engineering, sciences, arts, media studies, public relations, and finance. All had been in the US for between five months and six years. All identified as straight, some married, one divorced, and some with children. Some self identified as growing up in urban working-class or rural peasants families, while others reported an upper-middle class upbringing in urban areas. In their profiles, all of the names are pseudonyms as are the schools they attended (See also Appendix A). The profiles are listed alphabetically by pseudonyms. [22]

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[22] Each profile created based on student status and description at time of interview.

1. Chen was a 4th-year PhD student at Spring University's Information Science and Technology program. She finished her undergraduate studies in a top university in China before starting her PhD program in the US in the Fall of 2005. At the time of the interview in February 2009, she had been in the US for approximately four years. She got married to a fellow doctoral student from China in the same program one year earlier. Both of them had assistantships from the program that covered tuition and living expenses. Chen was the only child in a middle-class family with both parents working as government officials in southern China. She and her husband purchased a house during their third year at Spring University. Before relocating to another city for her husband's tenure-track faculty position, they lived in the house they purchased and also rented out a room to a fellow Chinese student.[23]

2. Donghua was a first-year doctoral student in material sciences at Summer University at the time of the first interview in December 2008. Upon completion of her undergraduate studies in Shanghai, she started graduate school in the US in Fall 2008. Our first interview was right after her first semester at Summer University in 2008. The follow-up interview was near the end of her second semester in 2009. She was the elder daughter from a family of four. She and her boyfriend graduated from the same university in China and arrived at Summer University at the same time. He was in a doctoral program in computer science at Summer University. Both of them had assistantships that covered tuition and living expenses.

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[23] Most of the women described their socio-economic status in terms of what they identified as their parent(s)' status. They made distinctions between their parents' status and that of their own, or their family if married.

3. Fen was a second-year Master of Public Administration student in finance and fiscal policy at Summer University at the time of the interview in December 2009. Fen came to Summer University in August 2008 immediately after the completion of her undergraduate studies in International Politics in a Shanghai university. Born and raised in metropolitan Shanghai, Fen took a great deal of pride in her status as a Shanghai native. She was an only child. Fen's parents paid her tuition and most of her living expense in the US. Fen worked for an hourly wage as an office assistant at Summer University during school sessions.

4. Hong was a third-year doctoral student in education at Spring University. She was the only child from a middle-class family in a city in southern China and earned a bachelor's degree in English from a Chinese university in 1999. Upon graduation with her bachelor's degree, she worked as a university staff member for one year during which, she married a college classmate who was enrolled in a PhD program in the US. In 2000, Hong reunited with her husband in the US as a spouse on the dependent F-2 visa. Six months after her arrival in the US, she joined a master's program in Education in a university near her husband's school. Upon earning a master's degree in Education, she started a PhD program in Education in the Fall of 2003 at Spring University where she participated in my study. During the graduate school years in the US, both Hong and her husband got teaching and research assistantships that covered tuition and living expenses. She completed her PhD in 6 years and landed a tenure-track faculty job in a well-known university in Southeast Asia.

5. Jia was in her third year in a master's program in creative writing at Spring University at the time of the interview in 2005. Prior to her study at Spring University, she earned a master's degree in the same field from another university in the US. She completed her undergraduate studies in China in the field of engineering and started her graduate studies in the US in a different field—humanities. She was guarded about her family and personal life, so I did not learn much about her parents, except that her father was a college professor in China in the field of natural sciences. Jia graduated from Spring University in 2006 with two master's degrees in linguistics and creative writing. During her graduate studies at Spring University, she worked as a teaching assistant. At the time of this writing, she is a doctoral student in rhetorical studies in an East Coast public university.

6. Lan was a first-year master's student in media studies at Spring University. A Shanghai native, she came to the US in Fall 2008, after the completion of her undergraduate studies in Shanghai, China. While attending college in China, Lan had spent a year in Japan as an exchange student. She was the only child in a family with two working parents. Her parents paid her tuition at Spring University. She worked as a research assistant for her professor for an hourly wage. She had been in the US for approximately five months at the time of the interview.

7. Li was a third-year PhD student in chemistry at Summer University. In September 2005, she completed a college degree in northwest China and attended graduate school in a southern US university. She studied there for two years before accepting a job in a northeastern city. The job lasted only a few months. In the fall of 2007, she started graduate school at Summer University. During her graduate school years in

the US, Li was awarded assistantships that covered tuition and living expenses. Li was the youngest daughter in a family of six from a small, rural area in northwestern China. Her grandparents on both sides were retired college professors. Her father was self-employed in the construction business and her mother stayed at home while assisting the family business. She had two older sisters and a younger brother. Her sisters were four and two years older and her brother was one year younger. By the time of the interview in December 2009, she had been in the US for nearly five years and she had been in a relationship with a South-Asian man for two years.

8. Lifang was a master's student in media studies at Spring University. Upon the completion of her undergraduate studies in journalism from a Chinese university in 2007, she attended Spring University pursuing a master's degree. When I first interviewed her in February 2009, she was in her second year in the program. Lifang was the only child in a family with both parents holding PhDs in natural sciences from universities in China. Her father taught at a four-year college and her mother worked as a research scientist in a government agency. Lifang's grandparents were retired college professors. My first interview with her took place on February 12, 2009; a year and a half into her graduate school. A follow-up interview was conducted on June 7, 2009; four months after the first interview. Her parents paid her tuition and most of her living expenses. She held a research assistantship for an hourly wage.

9. Lili was a fifth-year PhD student in the neuroscience program at Spring University. By the time of the interview, she had been in the US for more than six years, five of which she spent in Spring University. Upon graduating from a college in China, Lili

first came to a small college on the West Coast and studied there for one year before transferring to Spring University. Over the five years at Spring University, Lili received research assistantships covering both her tuition and living expenses. For several years during her graduate study at Spring University, Lili was the only student from China in her program. Her parents divorced when she was young and she had bitter memories towards both of her parents. I have lost touch with her upon her completion of the PhD program, but I heard from a mutual friend that she was able to land a job in the medical field in the US.

10. Ling was a fifth-year doctoral candidate in biology at Spring University when I interviewed her in September 2005. She received bachelor's and master's degrees from a medical school in China before coming to the US in August 2001. Her long-cherished dream was to become an obstetrician/gynecologist. But she realized the near impossibility of achieving her goal in the US because of her foreign status. During her stay at Spring University, Ling lived on teaching or research assistantships that covered tuition and living expenses. Ling was the oldest daughter from a working-class family. Her parents divorced and her mother raised her and her younger brother alone. Ling and her brother were first-generation college graduates in her family. Her mother worked as a factory worker until retirement. Ling credited her mother for her own academic achievements and for those of her brother. She said that she owed her mother a lot for raising and encouraging her and her brother. At the time of the interview, Ling's mother was visiting her in the US. Her mother had already visited her from China a couple of times and each time she

stayed the full six months – the longest time her visa allowed her to stay in the US.

Ling earned her PhD in biology as I was completing this study.

11. Lulu was a first-year doctoral student in the Department of Electronic Engineering and Computer Science at Spring University when I interviewed her. Born and raised in a medium-sized city in northern China, Lulu completed her K-12 education before going to Singapore on a scholarship for her undergraduate studies. She earned a bachelor's degree in computer science from a top university in Singapore, and worked there for two years at a computer company prior to starting her graduate studies at Spring University in August 2003. During her two years at Spring University, she worked as a teaching assistant and her assistantship covered her tuition and living expenses. In the two years, she earned a master's degree, landed a good job, and quit the PhD program into which she had been admitted. For a time, she worked in a high-tech corporation on the West Coast as a program manager; a position largely occupied by men. Later, she enrolled in an MBA program in a top business school and started the transition from an IT expert to the world of business. At the time of this writing, she is working as a consultant for a famous consulting firm in the US and she travels worldwide. Lulu was an only child from a middle-class family with both parents working as government officials. She was a first-generation college graduate in her family.

12. Meijuan was a third-year doctoral student in literacy education at Fall University. She started her graduate school in the US in the fall of 2007, immediately after completing her undergraduate studies in public administration in China. Meijuan was the only child in a middle-class family headed by a single mother. Her parents

divorced when she was young. During her first two years at Fall University, she had a scholarship that granted her free tuition and she relied upon her family for living expenses. Starting from the third year, she worked in a day-care center affiliated with her academic program as a graduate assistant which covered her tuition and offered her a stipend. She was in a relationship with a man from Hong Kong who graduated from Fall University and worked in the financial sector in New York City.

13. Ming was a first-year master's student in linguistics at Spring University. She completed her undergraduate studies in English from a Chinese university and then worked for three years in a media agency before coming to the US. She worked as a teaching assistant during her time at Spring University, independently teaching a course on Mandarin Chinese to American undergraduates. She was the oldest of three children of a working-class family from rural southern China. Her parents were farmers and her two younger sisters graduated from high schools and held low-wage jobs near where she grew up. She was the primary wage earner of the family. She accepted a tenure-track assistant professorship in a public research university in the US upon completion of her PhD in linguistics.

14. Wenjie was a first-year master's student in public relations at Spring University. Wenjie started her graduate studies in the summer of 2008, after earning a bachelor's degree co-granted by a Chinese and a British university. She had spent her first three undergraduate years at a university in her hometown in China and spent her senior year in England as an exchange student. By the time of the interview, she was in her third semester at Spring University. She was the only child from an upper-middle-class family in southern China. Both her parents were

professionals in the field of business and they paid her tuition and living expenses during her college years in China and England. They also covered her tuition and living expenses in the US.

15. Xia was a first-year doctoral student in engineering at Spring University. At the time of this writing, she works as a financial analyst on Wall Street. Xia earned her bachelor's degree in engineering and computer science from a Chinese university and worked for three years in China. In 2002, she married a college classmate who came to the US to study computer science at Spring University a year and a half later. In December 2004, she came to the US as a dependent on the F-2 visa to reunite with her husband. During the first several months in the US, she applied to Spring University's doctoral program in engineering and got admitted with a three-year fellowship. She gave birth to a son in May 2006 and her mother came to visit for several months to take care of the baby. When the son was nearly six months old, the boy travelled with Xia's mother to China and stayed with Xia's parents in China. Xia's husband got a job in the fall of 2006 and quit the PhD program with a master's degree in computer science. Xia stayed in the program until Summer 2007 before she quit and transferred to a financial engineering program in the same city where her husband worked. At the time of this writing, both Xia and her husband work at financial sectors on the East Coast of the US and take care of two boys.

16. Xiaoping was a second-year PhD student in physics at Spring University. Born and raised by two parents who worked on farmland all their lives, Xiaoping described her family as poor. A first-generation college student, she earned her bachelor's and master's degrees in China in engineering in 1999 and 2002 respectively. Upon

graduation, she married and worked as a high school physics teacher for two years before coming to the US for her doctorate in August 2004. A year later, her husband joined her in the US as her dependent on the F-2 visa. One semester after the couple reunited in the US, Xiaoping's husband got admitted into a master's program at Spring University. Thus, his legal status in the US no longer depended on Xiaoping. Both of them had teaching or research assistantships from the University that covered tuition and living expenses. While both were attending the same university, they filed for divorce. But because they had gotten married in China, the divorce process was hard to finalize in US courts and took nearly two years during which, Xiaoping began dating a fellow classmate who was Caucasian with a dual Brazil/US citizenship. Later, Xiaoping got married to her Brazilian-American boyfriend and at the time of this writing they have two baby girls. By the time of the first interview, Xiaoping had been in the US for a year-and-a-half. The follow-up interview took place two months after the first one and a brief phone interview was conducted after she had her first baby girl.

17. Xixi was a sixth-year PhD student in literacy education at Winter College. She completed her undergraduate studies in English in China and worked as a high school English teacher, during which time she married and had a son. Later, she left her son with her parents in China and accompanied her husband in the US for his doctoral work. While in the US as a dependent on an F-2 visa, she applied for graduate schools near his school and got admitted to the education program at Winter College. While attending graduate school, she had a second son and her elder son (born in China) came to the US to reunite with her. During her fifth year in the

doctoral program, she moved to a city where her husband was working as an engineer after finishing his PhD. Though a full-time student, she was physically located six hours away from the intellectual community at Winter College and was trying to complete her dissertation while being a stay-at-home mother. At the time of the interview, Xixi's parents were visiting from China and helped her prepare meals and take care of her two boys in the hope that Xixi would have sufficient time for her dissertation.

18. Yan was a second-year PhD student in geography at Spring University. She finished her undergraduate studies in a top university in China in June 2004. August 2004, she started her graduate school in the US. At the time of the interview, she had been in the US for fourteen months. She worked as a teaching assistant for her program. Both of Yan's parents worked as government officials. During her graduate studies, Yan fell in love with a fellow Chinese man who studied at Spring University and married him in 2008. Upon completing her PhD, she started to teach college in Hong Kong where her husband worked since his graduation from Spring University. At the time of this writing, they have two young children.

19. Ying was a PhD student in engineering and computer science at Spring University. She graduated from a top university in northern China with a bachelor's degree in physics; a discipline still dominated by males. She came to the US for graduate study in the Fall of 2007. She had assistantships that covered tuition and living expenses. She had been in the US for two years and four months by the time of the interview. Ying was the only child from a middle-class family in southern China. Both of her parents were college professors of Chinese Literature. She married a Chinese

classmate enrolled in the same doctoral program. She later completed her PhD and

accepted a job in Silicon Valley.

20. Yujiao was a second-year PhD student in computer science at Summer University.

She earned a Bachelor's degree in engineering from a top university in China in the

summer of 2007. Three months later, she started her PhD study in the US. Both her

undergraduate university and the graduate program she was enrolled in were

largely male dominant. During her graduate study at Summer University, she

worked as a research assistant for her academic advisor. Yujiao was the only child

from a lower-middle class family in southern China.

Data Collection

My primary method of data collection was in-depth and semi-structured interviews.

As Bogdan and Biklen (2003) explained, "qualitative interviews offer the interviewer

considerable latitude to pursue a range of topics and offer the subject a chance to shape the

content of the interview" (pp. 95-96). The data for this project were collected in two stages:

a pilot study and my dissertation research. My pilot study started in Fall 2005 as part of a

research method course I was taking. Between September 2005 and April 2010, I

conducted interviews for my dissertation with 20 Chinese female graduate students at four

northeast US universities. I interviewed my participants twice in Chinese, each lasting

between one to four hours. All of these interviews were recorded and transcribed into

either English or Chinese, which I describe more in the following data analysis section.

When I first began my study, my interview questions were different from the

questions I developed later. Some were simple and straightforward about their experience

in the US graduate schools. Some were more complex. The majority of my questions were open-ended that lent the participants some autonomy to lead the conversation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). For example, I wanted to know how the Chinese women chose which graduate school to attend. I wanted to hear their observations of and thoughts on the demographics of their schools. I wanted to know what vocabulary they used to talk about the gendered and racial make-up of the student and faculty bodies in their programs. I wanted to know how they navigated the settings they chose and how campus culture and academic prestige of the program factored into their experience with the school. Finally, I wanted to know how they defined their academic success and how they strove for it.

After completing several interviews for my pilot study in Fall 2005, I narrowed my research interests and further clarified my research questions centered on issues of classroom silence, experiences with the leftover woman discourse and the good Chinese woman discourse. I designed a list of questions for my first series of interviews aiming to examine my participants' perspectives on how their Chineseness intersected with their gender in specific contexts. I started with the following kinds of open-ended questions: What do you like about studying in the US? When do you feel most Chinese? What is it like to be a woman here, compared with in China? What do you think people notice about you? How do you feel each time you visit China? What are the things you feel strongly about when in China? What career plans do you have? I asked similar versions of the above questions to all of my participants. Those questions were vague enough to enable my participants to craft responses in a broad way, but I also made sure that the questions were intended to get them to talk about their experiences with gender and being Chinese in the US.

As I collected more data during my first round of interviews, I was able to draw upon my previous interviews to prepare questions for the second round. The second round of interviews targeted more at specific topics pertinent to the women's experiences that needed more elaboration and did not get adequately addressed in the first interviews. Typically, prior to the second interview with the same participant, I listened to the recorded interview if the interview was not transcribed, or read over the transcript and field notes to formulate probes and follow-up questions. Below is an example of a follow-up question I prepared upon initial review of the transcript for the first interview I conducted with Lifang at Spring University.

> I got the impression that your life was imbued with tensions and struggles. At different junctions of your life, you were confronted with many choices and you had to make difficult decisions. In your words, "I struggle all the time; every junction of my life, every big moment involves struggles." "You know, I'm a very contradictory person, all the time; the two halves in me are continuously in conflict with each other." For example, what to study at college—sciences or humanities, to keep the secure job with Xinhua or to study abroad, to do media research or to pick up news reporting upon graduation, a rocky career path—to work in China or in the US, and etc. I'd love to hear more. Any tensions or struggles in your life since I met you in February?

Tensions seemed to be a reoccurring theme in Lifang's account of her experience and my objective was to draw out more details about her perspectives. I chose to cite my participant's own words during the first interview, and by doing so I treated my participant "as an expert" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 99) and I hoped to come across as a researcher

who respected what my participants said and made efforts to understand their perspectives on negotiating their lives. I devised a similar list of questions around tensions in a follow-up interview with another participant, Donghua.

> In an early interview, you said that your mom helped you choose your undergraduate major because you think she knew better as an adult. You didn't know what to do with life then. You also said, "the only thing I know for sure was I wanted to get away from Xi'an, from home, to be independent." "What I'm clear about is I want to know the outside world… I want to experience different things." You presented yourself as a decision-maker whose desire is to experience the world. To me, you allowed your mom to decide something that you didn't care about, as long as you're able to move away. You made the decision on your own and acted on it. I see you as a person who knows about your mind. How do you negotiate the tension here? In what ways does it have to do with your being a girl? What difference is particularly interesting to you? What are the different things you want to experience? What kinds of experience would enrich your life? What does it have to do with gender, you being a young college graduate in China and in the US?

Upon initial reading of some data, I realized that tensions and the sense of independence appeared to be an emergent theme in my participants' lives. I was hoping to get them to elaborate on their experiences with decision-making in their lives. I prepared multiple questions and probes, or different wordings of the same question, so that I would be able to raise a version when I noticed the right occasion. Here is another example of a follow-up question that I constructed by quoting my participants with the hope of getting to understand her perspective on her foreign status in the US.

You see yourself as a foreigner in the US. For example, you said, "As a foreigner, it's very difficult to get a journalist job with American publications, like the Associated Press, CNN, ABC News, or some newspapers." You also said, "For a foreigner, studying journalism for only 1 year and then getting a journalist job is very hard in the US." I hear what you say and I'm trying to figure out what you're saying here. I'm just wondering what it feels like to be a foreigner. Do you feel less a foreigner after 2 years of studying at Spring University?

Drawing from early transcripts to generate probes worked effectively for me, as evidenced in the "rich data filled with words that reveal the respondents' perspectives" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 96) I was able to collect during the follow-up interviews. Data analysis and interpretation throughout the data collection and writing process enabled me to come up with targeted probes and develop coding strategies along the way.

Data Analysis

I recorded all my interviews using a digital audio recorder and saved the electronic files on a computer. All but one of the interviews were conducted in Chinese. In order to have interview transcripts in English, I began simultaneously translating and transcribing the interviews in one step but this was overwhelmingly time consuming. After I had translated and transcribed about a third of my audio files into English texts, I realized that finishing the many hours of remaining interviews was not realistic. I outsourced the remaining transcribing to a professional transcriber in China who provided transcripts of the interviews in Chinese. With the Chinese transcripts in hand, I began the job of translating Chinese text into English. As I felt more confident in identifying thematic codes,

I found it unnecessary to have the interviews translated into English before coding. For perhaps half of the interviews, I translated into English only those portions of the interviews that I would cite in my dissertation.

Although hiring a transcriber eased a tremendous part of my workload, it created new challenges. In most cases, the transcriber was able to capture the conversational flow and produce Chinese texts with key words to highlight certain events discussed in interviews, but the transcribed texts were not always identical to the interviews; my participants and I used many English words in our conversations that the transcriber was unable to comprehend. Those words were often left as empty spots in the transcribed texts that I had to fill in later. Fortunately, the transcriber documented in the written texts the exact time in the audio file when she/he lost track of what was being said. This enabled me to easily locate the missing words in the Chinese texts when listening to the audio files.

Converting spoken Chinese into English text presented several challenges. In so doing, I tried to follow proper English grammar while preserving the intent and context of the often-informal manner in which my participants spoke to me. I thought briefly that I might bypass this "lost in translation" aspect of the process by interviewing my participants in English so I attempted one interview in English. Although it saved a lot of translation effort, my participant's vocabulary was limited to frequently used words. Although she was fluent in her everyday communications, she too often resorted to the use of simple words instead of rich descriptive language to respond to my questions. As a result, detailed data were hard to collect from our conversations because they touched only upon general issues like daily activities. Reflecting on the disappointing results of this

interview, I conducted the remaining interviews in Chinese as a way to make my participants feel at ease and focus on articulating their life experiences rather than coming up with unfamiliar language to communicate ideas to me.

In converting spoken Chinese interviews into written English texts, I attempted to preserve the meanings and flavors of the conversations. At the beginning of fieldwork, I attempted to use formal English in my translation and transcription. I rephrased and reorganized the broken Chinese words, fragmented phrases, and incomplete sentences to abide by proper English grammar. This had a tendency to make casual conversations in Chinese sound very formal in the English texts and the translated text lost the dynamics of the interview conversations. Later, I intended to keep the original flavor of the spoken Chinese in my translation, but the English manuscripts were full of grammatical errors and awkward sentences. Then after reviewing a few sets of transcripts with my advisor and upon her advice, I resumed to more formal English sentence structures while trying to capture the tone and manner of informal conversations in Chinese.

Another translation-pertinent issue included the use of pronouns, tenses, voices, punctuation marks, and paragraph breaks. The pronouns in the Chinese language are difficult to translate, in that Chinese speakers do not specify male, female, or non-humans in spoken Chinese. My participants used numerous pronouns during interviews and many times I forgot to ask them to be gender specific and that caused me some trouble in my translation. Similarly, the concept of tense does not exist in Chinese language and it presented a challenge to me when I was uncertain about the time of the event, but had to decide which tense to use: past, present, or future. For example, in the absence of

additional context, "wo zuo le" can be translated in any of the following ways: "I do it," "I did it," "I will do it," "I have done it," "I am doing it," and "I have been doing it." In order to keep the original meaning and context of the message that my participants conveyed to me, I used my best judgment to represent the events in certain time periods. By doing this, I am aware that I may have made errors in choosing which tense to use, and that may distort my interpretation of the data.

In my translated texts, I followed proper grammatical rules for English while trying to keep the original context of informal conversations in Chinese. For instance, the concept of active or passive voice is absent in the Chinese language. I made the strategic decision to translate my participants' words by using active voice when appropriate in the hope of emphasizing their agency. Even for interviews conducted in English, speakers do not declare which punctuation marks to use in their sentences. In my transcriptions and later in my translations, I assigned punctuation marks according to my interpretation of what I heard. I also assigned paragraph breaks based upon my understanding of the conversation. So, the punctuation was mine and paragraph breaks were mine as well, which might mismatch those of my participants should they write down what they meant to say.

Whenever in doubt about pronouns, tenses, and paragraph breaks, I made sure I revisited the saved audio files on my computer and asked for clarification from my participants through emails or phone calls. I also made sure that I wrote down observer's comments (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) in my translated texts, to capture non-verbal messages and record questions for clarification. In addition, I made a conscientious effort to type a one-page research memo within 24 hours of each interview, which typically contained my comments on the interview, what went well, what did not flow as expected, questions for

follow-up interviews, as well as observed patterns and emergent themes. At times when I

was unable to write such a memo, as soon as I could find a private space—inside my car or

in an empty classroom, I used the audio recorder to record my verbal observations and

reflections. Those memos and observer's comments were an integral part of my interview

data and helped me tremendously to sort my data and develop coding themes throughout

the research process.

For example, one concern I encountered when reviewing my initial interview notes

and memos was about my participants' vocabulary (or lack thereof) about race. In

interviews, the term "race" rarely appeared. I read the phenomenon as "race" not being

part of the daily language for most science and engineering students I interviewed. Even so,

"racial talk" or "racist talk" did come up occasionally in my observer's comments and

memos. Many participants shared with me their observations of students sitting and

socializing only with those who looked alike, even though my participants did not use the

same language to verbalize what I saw as a race-based segregation on campus and beyond.

In most cases, "race" to my participants equaled "nationality" and "American" meant

"Caucasian." In my first couple of interviews, I did not inquire further as to what my

participants meant when they used the word "American[24]." Then later on I found that when

my participants referred to people of color, especially African-Americans, they usually

directly mentioned the skin color by uttering the word "black." So it dawned on me the

implied association between "American" and "Caucasian" in their talks. Afterwards, in

similar contexts, I once or twice introduced the term "race" into the interviews, and I ended

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[24] The Chinese word for "American" is *meiguoren*. While my participants used this word occasionally, they more frequently used the word "*laowai*" meaning foreigner. *Laowai* is nearly always used to refer to white people in general and white Americans in particular but almost never to blacks, Hispanics, or Asians of foreign nations.

up dominating the conversation with my explanations on racial relations in the US, rather than listening to what my participants had to say. In retrospect, I found this to be obtrusive. In my later interviews, I worked on my ability to listen by avoiding leading questions or imposing my perspectives. I tried to make sure to get the exact meaning of certain words my participants used, rather than setting myself up as the arbiter of what they meant.

As indicated above, data analysis and interpretation were ongoing aspects of my data collection and continued into my writing stage. Following the advice of my advisor, I shared my research memos with her after each interview with certain key informants. We discussed my field notes and emerging themes on countless occasions. Half way into my interviews, we reviewed and analyzed line-by-line over two semesters' span three sets of the interview transcripts that I translated and transcribed myself from the interviews with two key informants. My advisor guided me through the initial coding of my data, pushed me hard to consider different interpretations of the data, and asked deep questions to help me identify overarching themes embedded in the transcripts. The amount of analysis work that she did with me made analyzing and interpreting my data less daunting and became the bulk of the three data chapters in this dissertation.

Given the fact that both languages appeared in the transcribed texts and the available data coding programs only recognize the English language, I did not employ any data coding software. Instead, relying on my pens, multi-colored post-it notes, and color papers, I used "the cut-up-put-in-folders approach" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 178) which proved to be surprisingly effective, though labor intensive. Prior to the actual paper cutting and posting with the help of scissors and Scotch tapes, the specific work that I undertook to analyze the interview data included reviewing transcribed data on a regular basis, both the

Chinese and the English texts, developing coding categories along the way, as well as

reviewing relevant literature and identifying themes from coding categories based on my

analysis of existing literature and my theoretical training.

For example, here is how I developed a list of emerging codes (see Appendix D)

around classroom experience and moved to the themes of how my participants made sense

of their classroom silence and the meanings they attached to being Chinese and being

women in discursive space of the classroom. I developed and revised codes in different

stages of my research. My primary codes, such as classroom experience, academic life,

social life, experience with gender and being Chinese, were based on my interview

questions in the Appendix B. They emerged from my pilot study and the first few sets of

interviews for my dissertation research. During data collection, some analysis took place. I

assessed which of the questions I brought with me were relevant and which should be

reformulated to direct my research. As I reviewed my interview transcripts, I found certain

words and phrases, such as classroom silence, quiet, compliant with Chinese traditions and

values, as well as my participants' ways of thinking and talking repeated across different

data sets. And then I developed a more focused list of questions on classroom experience.

On my original copy of the transcripts, I color coded the repeated words and phrases, wrote

extensive notes on the margins, and reproduced multiple copies on a copier. As I was

noticing more and more of the same color across my interview transcripts, I was more

convinced that "silence in the classroom setting" was indeed a coding category that I

should focus on.

To aid in the analysis, in cases where three or four codes were closely related, I

clustered the similar codes into a primary code. For example, I grouped the following codes

under one primary code of classroom experience: classroom participation, comparisons between classroom culture in the US and China, English language skills, professors' expectation of me, perceptions of American classmates. I then revisited my transcripts and examined my participants' different accounts of their classroom experience, especially how they structured their narratives. I cut and grouped sections with similar content together into a Manila folder, labeled with the code of "classroom silence." I reread the data in this Manila folder and found a similar pattern: whenever my participants mentioned their class participation, they always referred to their national and cultural identity as Chinese, either to draw from it to justify their behaviors or to refute the quiet Chinese student stereotype. Having reviewed a large body of literature that focused on the issue of language and cultural adjustments, I realized that the amount of work my participants did to account for their classroom experience was more than overcoming language barriers. My theoretical training in the field of women's studies helped me identify my participants' agency and negotiating strategies in their various accounts of their classroom experiences, and that became the theme of my data chapter on the issue of classroom silence.

The progression from coding categories of the leftover women and the good women to the themes of Chinese women's complex negotiating strategies to navigate the discourses followed a similar method and pattern. I did not start the research project with those coding categories in mind, though I knew I was interested in their overall study abroad experiences and their experience with gender and nationality in particular. Instead, the coding categories and themes emerged from my fieldwork and data analysis, as well as from my analysis of existing body of literature on Chinese students in study abroad contexts. It took a lot of planning and organizing to sort through the paper work that I

employed to discover codes and to develop themes, and my home office for nearly two years was like a kindergarten classroom stuffed with color papers and folders. Overall, without the assistance of any data coding software, I found "the cut-up-put-in-folders approach" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 178) effective to help sort through my data. My analysis of the coding categories of classroom silence, the leftover woman discourse, and the good woman discourse was shaped both by my perspective as a researcher and the theoretical positions that I have taken.

Conclusion

The Chapter summarized the design and execution of my qualitative research project on Chinese female graduate students' experience in the US. I discussed the enabling power of qualitative methods to help me understand Chinese women's experiences, my subjectivity and its impact on the collaborative research relations that I sought to establish with my participants, as well as the specific challenges I encountered during the research process. The following three chapters are discussions of the data I have gathered from interviewing 20 participants over a five-year period about their experiences with gender and nationality while studying in US graduate schools. Each chapter addresses a specific topic: classroom silence, the leftover woman discourse, and the good Chinese woman discourse.

CHAPTER FOUR: NEGOTIATING SILENCE IN THE CLASSROOM

US and Chinese educational systems expect different performances from students. That is to say, what is expected of a student differs in the two cultural contexts. Coming out of the Chinese educational system that excessively values grades over the ability to express or to market oneself, students are socialized to respect the authority of the teachers and to remain quiet in classes (Cheng, 2000; Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Liu, 2002; Liu & Littlewood, 1997; Shi, 2011). A student can be really quiet in class and receive high scores on tests, and thus be classified as a high-achiever. In China, students get few awards for being expressive. Instead, being expressive can get a student into trouble. In the US, classroom culture tends to position silence as the opposite of voice (Cheng, 2000; Grimshaw, 2007; Ryan & Louie, 2007; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Teachers often evaluate students through what they say and how much they participate in class activities. Reticence to speak is frequently read as inadequacy or lack of competency (Kasper, 1997; Lee, 1997; Pathirage et al., 2014; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Yi et al., 2003), which differs from a typical image of a quiet high-achiever in China. When Americans associate silence with a Chinese woman, they tend to adopt and fall into the gendered stereotypes and read silence as a lack of agency, being submissive and compliant (Qin & Lykes, 2006).

Classroom Silence Facing My Participants

When Chinese female students attend graduate schools in the US, they must confront the discourse of the quiet Chinese woman that precedes them and may have to negotiate the issue of classroom silence. For Chinese women in my study from the science and engineering programs, courses were primarily composed of lectures, which did not

encourage significant interactions in classes. For them, silence was not a salient issue that

Chinese students had to negotiate in the classroom space. For students in the humanities or

social sciences where discussions occurred regularly in classes, students had to encounter

and negotiate the issue of silence in complicated ways, especially given the long

documented stereotypes of quiet Chinese students (Cheng, 2000; Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Liu,

2002; Liu & Littlewood, 1997; Shi, 2011). In courses where participation was part of the

grade, the issue of silence was more notable. Remaining silent could possibly result in a

poor grade while speaking up could increase a student's final grade. To be silent or to be

vocal seemed to me to be the only choice for students, since the academic culture had

constructed silence in direct opposition to voice (Cheng, 2000; Grimshaw, 2007; Ryan &

Louie, 2007; Yeh & Inose, 2003).

Silence is complex to negotiate and to read (Briskin, 2000). In the specific space of

classrooms, my informants maneuvered silence in multiple ways. Some noticed and

acknowledged their silence and worked to account for it by borrowing from the

conventional discourse of a quiet Chinese woman to interpret their experiences. Some

conformed to what they perceived to be an American way of performing and were

outspoken in classes. Some read silence as a culture or gender-based stereotype, a form of

resistance, a form of laziness, a mixture of all, or none.

This chapter is about Chinese female students' negotiation of silence in American

graduate schools along the East Coast. It seeks to understand how the Chinese female

graduate students in my study negotiated the issues of silence inside classrooms and how

their being and becoming silent constituted and was constituted by their self-identification

as Chinese women. Specifically, in this chapter, I intend to explore different articulations of silence and the multiple ways that Chinese female graduate students negotiated silence in the classroom space.

Embrace and Perform Silence in the Classroom to Overcome Language Barriers

Donghua, a PhD student in the sciences, responded to my interview question on what her classroom experience was like at Spring University.

> For me, you know, Chinese students are quiet. I don't talk much. I don't have questions; I just don't. I understand the content really well. I do my homework. The course is not hard for me, content wise. Language wise, it might be challenging, but no big deal; I'll get over it. I just don't have questions or don't know how to talk. I also feel scared of raising questions in public; not really afraid of asking questions, but don't feel like doing so. I'm new, anyway. I'm not very active, I guess. Those who ask questions are all Americans. They speak very fast. Sometimes without me realizing what was going on, the topic was over. This is usually what happens to me: it takes me a long time to come up with a question; it takes certain amount of time for me to phrase the question, and another maybe ten seconds to polish it on my mind, and by the time when I feel ready to speak out, the class has already moved on to something else. So, from my observation, few international students speak up in class; only American students. (Donghua, 12/24/2008, pp. 15-16)

Self-identifying as one of the quiet Chinese students, Donghua showed a sense of belonging with the Chinese students while setting herself apart from her American classmates who she believed were socialized to ask questions. In the above short paragraph, she shifted the focus of her narrative, as well as the tone of her narrative, several times. Her comment started with "you know" (Donghua, 12/24/2008, p. 15), a gesture to connect with me on the basis of assumed sameness (DeVault, 1990) that both of us were obviously Chinese, therefore I should be able to identify with her experience. Following a generalized claim that "Chinese students are quiet" (Donghua, 12/24/2008, p. 15), she then situated herself as one of them, thus, she should be expected to be no different from them. Implicit in the comment is the logic: you (read: me, the researcher) and I know that Chinese students are like this, I am one of them, therefore, I am quiet; you are also one of them, therefore you should know about my experience. Next, she presented herself as a studious and smart student who was able to keep up with the course. Confident in her ability to overcome the language challenge, she also presented herself as a timid student who was shy to speak up in public. From the initial self-identification as a quiet Chinese student, to the presentation of herself as both smart and shy, Donghua portrayed herself along the stereotypical images of Chinese students in the US. The focus of her narrative was on herself.

When Donghua started to comment on the classroom dynamics, the focus of her narrative shifted from herself to her classmates. She changed her tone from being confident to being critical as she shared with me her struggle in the classroom. She was critical of the American students for speaking too fast to give her little time to process the language and the course materials. Implicit in her comment was the critique that her classmates failed to

accommodate her needs as an international student new to American classrooms. Voicing

out her disappointment that the classroom was not conducive to her learning, she then

zoomed in on herself and shared with me her learning preference in class. Most of the time,

she suggested at first, she did not have questions. Even if she had, she would not feel

comfortable to speak up in class. As she said, it usually took her a long time to come up with

a question. Then it took her a certain amount of time to phrase the question, and even more

to polish the question in her mind. By the time she finally felt ready to speak out, the class

had moved on to something else.

Corresponding with the shift of focus and tone in her narrative, Donghua's account

of her classroom experience followed two trajectories. The first trajectory was along her

own perception of her Chineseness. Observing and reflecting on the classroom dynamics,

Donghua, as indicated in previous studies that replied upon a cultural deterministic

approach to silence (Baba & Hosoda, 2014; Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Shi, 2011), borrowed the

conventional discourse on Chinese students to explain her reticence to speak and

attributed her silence to her being Chinese: "I'm new" and "I'm not very active" (Donghua,

12/24/2008, p. 15). Identifying herself as one of the quiet Chinese students, she positioned

herself as an outsider who was situated within the classroom context looking for ways to

account for her experience. The second trajectory was along her perception of others'

reactions to her Chineseness. She was critical of the American students for not

accommodating her needs. Both trajectories centered on her situatedness as a Chinese

student with some developing knowledge about American classrooms.

Meijuan, a third-year doctoral student in Education at Fall University, made a similar comment regarding her first-semester classroom experience.

> Most of the courses were heavily participatory—not lecture but discussion based. Professors also called on us. I was like, "I can hardly put a sentence together. How can you expect me to talk? All I know is a few words. I don't even know how to phrase a complete sentence. What can I say? What if I made a mistake? What if I made a spectacle of myself?" You know, I could barely open up my mouth. I needed more time to prepare what I had to say. My professors and classmates were very patient with me. I think they understand that I'm a foreigner and that English is not my first language. They are always encouraging. (Meijuan, 4/2/2010, p. 40)

In the above comment, Meijuan reflected upon her initial silence in the classroom. Similar to Donghua, Meijuan attributed her silence to her lack of language skills. Meijuan also talked about the extra amount of time she needed to prepare what she had to say. Both Meijuan and Donghua felt frustrated with their limited English skills in courses that demand a high level of language proficiency. Unlike Donghua, Meijuan never expressed any complaints against her professors or classmates for failing to accommodate her. Rather, she complimented them for their patience with her. Different from Donghua, Meijuan never explicitly mentioned anything about her being Chinese, though she did refer to her foreign status. The way she talked about her being Chinese was through her perception of how people treated her. She thought that her professors and classmates all understood that she was a foreigner—the primary reason behind her lack of English skills that directly led to

her silence. Implicit in her comment was that her silence was acceptable or at least forgivable because of her foreigner status.

Seeing the differences between American students and Chinese students in the classroom, both Donghua and Meijuan did not choose to perform to the American students' way of being students, even though Donghua expressed her willingness to participate but needed more time to do so. Rather, both embraced the differences due to their shared foreign status. Donghua explained:

When I have a question, I'm not in a hurry to voice it. I won't raise it immediately in class. I usually hold it in my mind and then ask the professor after class, or I figure out the answer on my own. This is different from American students. Whenever they have a question, they will raise it right away. It's not that American students talk all the time; not like that. But whenever they have any concerns, they cannot wait to bring them up. (Donghua, 4/24/2009, p. 8)

Donghua noticed and acknowledged the difference between her and her American peers. She also used the difference to justify her own behavior. What she meant was that she was just different. Being quiet had nothing to do with American students' domination of the class. Further, she validated her difference by allying herself with the other international students in class. She said:

Not only me, but also the other international students in my class are like that. One is from Turkey. One is from Korea and the other is from Korea or China—I'm not sure. I feel, unlike American students, the four of us are not willing or able to

respond to what the professor asks; we just listen to whatever the professor has to say. (Donghua, 4/24/2009, p. 8)

To Donghua, English marked the difference between "they"—the American students, and "we"—the international students. It also bonded the international students together, because they all shared the same status, namely, foreigners and non-native speakers of English. To be quiet was the expectation for international students whose first language was not English. With that said, Donghua modified the idea that her being Chinese rendered her different regarding her participation in class. Rather, it was her international student status that marked her different from the American students. She explained:

It's not because I'm Chinese. Back to that course, there are altogether three or four international students in the class. The rest are American. Relatively speaking, international students are slow in our reactions or responses in class, compared with American students. I mean, we can understand what the professor says, but somehow we're reluctant to express ourselves; like, to ask questions or to speak up." (Donghua, 4/24/2009, pp. 7-8)

In a previous statement, Donghua told me that Chinese students were quiet and expected me to understand that fact. But here, she modified the idea that being Chinese was associated with her lack of classroom participation. Rather, from what she could tell, all international students had similar patterns of classroom participation. Using a broader term, "international," she chose to seek comfort and solidarity with the non-American students. Implicit in the choice of the word was the message that she was not alone and she was just like everyone else who was international and foreign. By using the term

"international," she did not have to specify her nationality. Possibly, she would be able to dispel the fear of any possible stereotypical connection between being Chinese and having poor English skills. Despite her denial of the correlation between being Chinese and lack of participation skills, she referred to the stereotype of international students, Chinese students included, to account for her experience. The classroom turned into a site where her being Chinese and foreign was immediately visible to her.

Meijuan attributed her silence to her lack of language skills and acknowledged the help and encouragement she got from her professors and fellow students. She knew that her professors and classmates all understood that she was a foreigner. With that understanding, she thought that they would not hold her silence against her. Nor would they view her silence as being disengaged. Though she was not able to participate as much as her classmates, she was not disengaged. Instead, she took advantage of her being expected to be silent to catch up with her classmates. Becoming a keen observer in the class was her first step to catch up:

> A class discussion touched upon Muslim culture. Following a professor's question, a student goes like this, "I have a Muslim friend, and he is like this or that." The other student goes, "My friend's friend is Muslim too. He doesn't eat pork. He strictly fasts at a fixed time; before sunrise or after sundown; so on and so forth." I was thinking to myself, "The professor didn't ask that. You guys didn't address the question at all." You know, they seem to be very talkative. They seem to be willing to share. Gradually, I've come to realize that what the professor sought was not a single right answer. The professor encouraged the class to share what we knew, however we

could relate to the topic, so that students could benefit from each other's knowledge. I've also come to realize that students say whatever they know, as long as it's relevant to the topic. Sometimes, it's remotely relevant. Sometimes, it's not relevant at all. No matter what, they like to share whatever they know—even if it's a tiny bit. It's part of their culture. They share whatever they feel they know, despite the relevancy or adequacy. However, for me, I had to make sure that I had the right thing to say. Hearing what they said, I was like, "I know this. I know that as well. Why didn't I speak up?" You know, I grew up in Xinjiang (Uyghur Autonomous Region [assumed knowledge shared with me]), so I should know more Muslims as well as their customs. At that time, I was so eager to participate, but they spoke so fast. I couldn't even catch what they said. English slowed me down. I couldn't keep up with the discussion. I mean, I had problems comprehending what they said, not to mention to jumping in to share what I knew. I was so frustrated. But that was only at the beginning of the first semester. (Meijuan, 4/2/2010, pp. 20-21)

Frustrated with her English, Meijuan presented herself to me as a critical and reflective observer who struggled to learn. Based on her observation of her American classmates, she drew a clear picture of her own weakness and strength. Her weakness was that her mastery of English was not as good as her American peers'. Her strength lay in her rich life experience that she could draw from to contribute to class discussion. She made it clear that she was no less knowledgeable than her peers; perhaps more so. What she needed to work on was her English. After the first step of observing what her peers had to say in class discussions, Meijuan moved on to the second step, which was to learn how to say what she wanted to say. Again, the learning process was not easy. Meijuan had to put in

a lot of time and effort on what her American peers took for granted. For instance, she

spent plenty of time on figuring out what the word "wanna" actually meant. She explained:

> The first semester, I was very quiet in class, not because I wanted to be quiet. I was
>
> so eager to participate in discussions, but I just couldn't. I could hardly understand
>
> what was said, not to mention butting into a conversation. But I don't think that my
>
> silence meant a lack of engagement. I was so occupied with figuring out what they
>
> said. I had to learn how they made a remark first. To give you an example, I noticed
>
> that a couple of students usually began their talk with "I just wanna say" or
>
> something similar. It took me several classes to figure out what that was. I heard it
>
> again and again, something like, "I just wanna…" or "I just wanna point out," things
>
> like that. That looked to me like a mantra. The American students usually started
>
> their talk with something like that. But I didn't know what that was exactly. They
>
> said it way too fast. I was full of curiosity. I said to myself, "I have to figure out what
>
> that is. What the hell could that be?" So, whenever a student said something similar,
>
> I penciled it down. Each time I got a different version of that mantra. I remember I
>
> murmured to myself repeatedly what they said: "I just wanna say;" "I just wanna
>
> add." Finally, it dawned on me. "Oh boy. It must be 'I just wanna say.' It's the word
>
> 'wanna' that got me;" they didn't say "want to." They said that to start a
>
> conversation. You know, my whole attention was on figuring out the phrase, to the
>
> extent that I got distracted and I paid less attention to the content of that course.
>
> (Meijuan, 4/2/2010, p. 43)

Eventually, to her great satisfaction, Meijuan found out that "wanna" actually meant "want to." As a foreigner, she felt the urgency to improve her English. The first step she took was to observe what the other students had to say in class and try to figure out their speech patterns. With all kinds of guessing and thinking in her mind, she appeared to be silent, but as she said, silence did not mean a lack of engagement. Rather, the kind of work she was involved with entailed lots of listening, guessing, speculating, interpreting, researching, and putting words into contexts, which all constituted what Meijuan called "the first step of learning the cultural rule of speaking" (Meijuan, 4/2/2010, p. 40). The accomplishment of this first step caused Meijuan to neglect the content knowledge. It also demanded her to bear with her classmate's misunderstanding of her. The following provided more evidence of her engagement in the class at the expense of the course's content and her classmates' misunderstanding of her.

> I was very tense in class. I couldn't give myself a break for a single second. I had to attend to every single word uttered in class. Whenever I came across a new word, I jotted it down in a notebook, or tried to look it up in the digital dictionary I brought with me. Later, a friend who now TAs with me, who was in the same class with me during the first semester two years ago, said, "you were very rude the first semester when both of us were in the same class. You text-messaged all the time!" I was like, "What are you talking about? Text-messaging? No, I didn't." She goes, "Yeah. You did. Almost the entire class." It occurred to me that she mistook my digital dictionary as a cell-phone. She thought I was text-messaging while I was actually looking up words in the cell-phone-shaped dictionary. I was like, "Hilarious! I was totally wronged!" (Meijuan, 4/2/2010, p. 39)

Looking up words in the portable dictionary was mistaken as text-messaging. Meijuan's classmate deemed her as a rude Chinese who did not know how to be a student in class. All the work Meijuan did silently may not match up to the standard behavior of a good student in an American classroom, but it showed her serious engagement and strong desire to learn. To a great extent, her silence enabled her to be a keen observer and learner in class. She learned a lot by being silent. Here is another example to illustrate how she benefited from silence.

> I kept a notepad. I brought it with me to class; almost everywhere I went. Each time when I heard some new words or set phrases, I wrote them down in my book. After class, I looked up the words and tried to incorporate them in my talk. To give you another example, I heard a lot of people say something like "IN-ter-rest-ing." I was like, "What is that? What could that be?" Countless times I murmured the sound to myself. I was like a maniac. Yet, I couldn't figure it out. That bothered me a lot. I was so frustrated. Then, all of a sudden, it occurred to me that what I heard was "interesting"—different from how I usually pronounce it. Problem solved! (Meijuan, 4/2/2010, p. 44)

Meijuan felt stuck with what seemed an unfamiliar way to pronounce the word "interesting." After a long period of frustration and contemplation, she eventually solved the mystery. She felt triumphant in her discovery. Meijuan made full use of the quiet Chinese student expectation to her advantage. When her classmates talked, she was quietly studying their talk, language patterns, and choice of words. Being a quiet observer worked to her advantage, in that she had the chance to analyze what her peers would say and how

she could eventually become a part of the classroom conversation. She was not merely an observer; she acted on what she observed by integrating what she learned in her performance as a student. She shared with me that she was pleased at her change from being quiet to being participatory. She stated:

> The first semester I was pretty quiet. I struggled a lot with schoolwork. English was a huge difficulty for me; both listening and talking. I worked really hard to pick up my English. It was like, I put in too much time and effort, to the extent that I ignored my academic work. Maybe "ignore" is not the right word. I should say: I didn't focus on my academic work as much as I probably should have. But with English in my way, I just couldn't. I had to kill one thing at a time. I think my professors all acknowledged my hard work. They can see my change from being a quiet girl to an active participant in class. I didn't do that to impress my professors. I just thought I should work hard to catch up. After all, I'm here to learn. Overcoming the language barrier could tremendously help me with my learning. I just feel I should learn how to talk in class and I should participate, but not out of the concern that the professor would grade me or something like that. (Meijuan, 4/2/2010, p. 47)

To Meijuan, working hard was the expectation that she had for herself. Due to language difficulty, she was silent at the beginning of her graduate school life. But she did not allow language-triggered silence to affect her learning. Rather, she utilized silence to her advantage. While she appeared to be silent, her mind was anything but idle. She also recognized the importance of class participation to accelerate her learning. She developed learning strategies and language skills to navigate her way through class. Throughout the

learning process, Meijuan was conscious of what she thought of as her language deficiency associated with her foreigner status. Her awareness of herself as a Chinese in an American classroom rested primarily on her awareness of the need to improve her language skills and to participate in class discussions.

The primary reason behind Donghua and Meijuan's silence seemed to be a lack of confidence and actual competency in their language skills. Both used silence to cover up the language barrier they initially encountered. Both made it clear that silence did not mean a lack of engagement in class. Instead, they both acknowledged that silence provided an opportunity to learn and presented themselves as intelligent students who took advantage of silence to accelerate their learning, though sometimes they were far less participatory or participatory in a different way than their American peers, as measured by traditional US standards of classroom participation.

Employ Silence to Represent Smartness

Similar to Donghua and Meijuan who used silence to learn and minimize language barriers, Yan, a social sciences PhD student at Spring University, commented on her English skills. But she went a step further:

Some American students are more egocentric than us. For example, when a professor wants to reschedule a class, some of them would respond very quickly. Like, I have something else to do on that day; can't make the class on that day, at that time, etc. They have all kinds of excuses or objections. They just consider themselves and want to make themselves comfortable. They don't think of others. I'm usually quiet. I think, overall, English is not my native language. I'm still learning

how to communicate in English. I'm quiet most of the time. Chinese students are like

this. Unlike the American students, I actually don't have much to say in class. (Yan,

10/7/2005, p. 15)

Setting herself apart from the American students, Yan portrayed herself as one of the

Chinese students who were known as quiet, flexible, and compliant (Baba & Hosoda, 2014;

Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004). Her observation could be challenged for generalizability,

but what was important was her awareness of the immediate visibility of her being Chinese

in the classroom, as evidenced by the distinction she made in the above quotation between

"egocentric" American students and "quiet" Chinese students. What was also important was

that she saw her quietness as one of the stereotypical attributes of Chinese students whose

first language was not English. She was quiet because she was one of the Chinese students

and she had internalized that Chinese students were usually quiet (Ryan & Liuie, 2007). In

response to my question on her classroom experience, Yan echoed Donghua and Meijuan

with regard to the quiet Chinese student discourse. Additionally, Yan furthered the

discourse by bringing up the following perspective to understand the issue of silence:

You know, Chinese are known for being quiet and professors know that. I, because

my English is not that … I mean, I'm not a native speaker. In class, I tend to be silent,

not because I'm shy. I mean, I've told my professors not to worry about me, in terms

of my silence. They don't have to worry that I'm being too quiet in class, or they

would embarrass me if they call on me. I talk when I feel I have something to say.

You know, at times, I'm just quiet. At other times, I'm just too lazy to finish my work.

If I didn't finish my reading prior to class, of course I wouldn't have much to talk

about. So, I actually don't have much to say. But, to talk or not to talk, I'm okay. (Yan,

10/7/2005, p. 14)

In the above statement, aside from English being a second language, Yan listed another

reason for her silence: she did not have the work habit to finish the reading before class. In

other words, insufficient preparation prior to class was occasionally the reason for her

silence in class.

I should have further probed what she meant by "to talk or not to talk, I'm okay"

(Yan, 10/7/2005, p. 14). Could she have meant that she felt satisfied with her silence in

class? Or could she have meant that her professors let her pass with what seemed to be a

lack of participation? Maybe a little bit of both. Either way, Yan made her professors aware

of the fact that she as a Chinese student was quiet. Especially with the additional

reassurance from Yan, the professors would not expect her to speak up. Therefore, she

would be off the hook, leaving the professors with the conviction that Yan's quietness was a

result of her English difficulties, instead of any sort of accusation of her for insufficient

preparation. Even when Yan had not finished the assigned reading before class, she would

get away without speaking up in class, since Chinese students had a reputation of being

quiet. Her professors would never find out the exact reason for her silence. In Yan's case,

she not only used the silent Chinese student discourse to cover up her language deficiency,

she also took advantage of the discourse to mask her occasional laziness.

As seen from the above analysis, in different situations, Yan attributed her silence to

different reasons: difficulties with English, being Chinese, and insufficient preparation. To

explicate her silence resulting from language difficulties, she drew from the discourse of a

quiet Chinese student, though sometimes her silence was due to insufficient preparation.

Despite the various reasons behind her silence, performing silence allowed Yan to get by

with occasional lack of preparation that would have otherwise been necessary, since she

was unlikely to be called out because she was often silent and had openly discussed her

silence with her professors. Regardless of the connection between her silence and her

being Chinese, Yan used the quiet Chinese student discourse as a mask to create a space

where she did not have to work as hard to prepare for class as she might have. She believed

that she benefited from the discourse, but she failed to recognize that she lost a potentially

valuable opportunity to engage the readings and the class to learn and grow together with

her classmates. In this sense, she contributed to marginalizing herself and hindering her

learning rather than what she believed as the beneficiary of the discourse.

Yan was not alone in the use of silence as a defensive strategy for herself in the

classroom. Echoing Yan's use of silence to cover up her lack of preparation, Hong, an

Education PhD student at Spring University, found a way to benefit from the quiet Chinese

student discourse, but not without struggles or consequences. In the following statement,

Hong commented on how she came to realize that she could easily get away with being

silent in class. Hong explained:

> Most Chinese students are quiet and hard-working. Our professors know that. So,
>
> they don't expect us to speak up in the way most American students do. They know
>
> we're a bunch of hard workers. I guess, they don't hold our silence against us; like,
>
> they don't penalize us for being silent in class—at least not as severely as they
>
> penalize American students for lack of participation. I mean, they don't apply the

same standard to gauge American students' class participation to Chinese students. I

used to try to finish the assigned reading, so that I could be prepared for discussion.

But even if I finished the reading, I still found it hard to butt into conversations. So, I

was quiet most of the time. I was like that my first semester. I took my studies very

seriously. Once, I even burst into tears in class because I didn't finish the assigned

book. Students in my class were required to finish a whole book within a week! That

was too much! So unrealistic; it was nearly impossible for me to finish the reading. I

also had other courses that were equally demanding. But anyway, I was unable to

finish the book. I know I wouldn't finish it. So, I just ignored it. I didn't do the

reading, anyway. In class when my turn came, I had nothing to say. I got caught right

on the spot for not doing the reading. I was so nervous. I admitted to the class that I

was unable to finish the reading. I felt so guilty and tears started to roll down my

cheeks. Later, a lot of times I found myself unable to finish all the reading and I

couldn't come up with anything to say in class. So, I had to be quiet. Yet, I got by

easily; I mean, without being caught. Once or twice, I wasn't prepared at all, so I was

quiet throughout the class. Again, I got away with it. Later, I mean now, I don't feel

so bad for not completing the reading. (Hong, 9/26/2007, p. 14)

As Hong said, she started as one of the "quiet and hard-working" (Hong, 9/26/2007,

p. 14) Chinese students. Overwhelmed with the workload, she struggled to juggle multiple

courses in a semester. Had she known different ways of reading, such as scanning a book

instead of close-reading it, her struggles would have eased up a bit. Had she approached

her professor for help, her struggles would have lessened as well. Either hypothesis

required a certain level of familiarity with the academic culture, which Hong did not have at

that time. She wound up not being able to finish required readings before coming to class. Caught on the spot, she burst into tears out of a sense of guilt from not doing the work.

Here, Hong presented herself as an industrious student who took her school work seriously, but things started to change when Hong realized that whether to complete the reading or not did not reduce her difficulty to join a conversation in class, mainly because of her status as an English language learner and a slow reader. Furthermore, the class was not structured in the way that was easy for her to participate. According to Hong, deeply rooted in the minds of some American professors was the image of the quiet and industrious Chinese student. With that image in mind, being silent in class would not necessarily reflect negatively on the engagement of a student, because everyone would expect a Chinese student to be quiet. Rather, fitting into the image could actually help Chinese students like her to get by without making the required efforts to finish the homework. Here, Hong pointed out a way to benefit from the expectation on Chinese students at the expense of keeping herself marginalized.

Though she believed that her professors would not penalize Chinese students for lack of participation in the same way as they would penalize American students, she understood that silence in class would carry the stigma of lack of engagement, which would negatively impact students' participation grade. With that in mind, Hong tried different strategies to participate as much as she could. Her strategies started with her observation of the classroom dynamics. What Hong learned through observation in class was that American students shared the unspoken understanding that silence would cause trouble, and they felt pressured to speak up, no matter whether they came prepared or not. Hong

noticed that when they were not well prepared, they would still have to figure out a way to participate. The following was Hong's view of her classmates' efforts:

> American students are talkative, no matter whether or not they know what they're talking about. They can just talk. You know, they appear to be so confident. They make themselves sound like they've done the readings and they're all prepared, and all the stuff. But their talk can be totally irrelevant to the reading or study materials. Sometimes I cannot help thinking that they didn't do the reading at all. The more I hear their talk, the more convinced I become that they just didn't do the reading. The more they talk, the further away they get from the topic. I feel some Americans rely on the rest of the class to do the reading for them, to summarize the reading for them. Or, they know how to steer the conversation into areas that they know a little bit about. (Hong, 9/26/2007, p. 15)

Quiet as she was in class, Hong learned a great deal about and from her American classmates regarding how to navigate a discussion, with or without preparation. To rely on the rest of the class to summarize the reading and to steer conversations into certain areas were the two tips she collected. Building upon her observation and analysis of how American students participated in class, Hong started to develop her own knack for class participation which rested on the effective use of the silence discourse associated with Chinese students. Hong explained:

> I've started to wise up. If I don't do the reading, I would weigh in earlier on. I mean, I find something to say in the beginning, so that I finish my turn to speak up and get off the hook. Or, I wait and wait, listening to what the other students have to say. I

pick on one or two cues from their talks and start from there. Either way, I'm easily

off the hook and won't be caught not doing the assigned reading. Anyway, we're

quiet and they know that we're quiet. Sometimes the readings are just way too

much—impossible and unrealistic to finish. I doubt that the American students

could finish it all. Other times, the readings are just not that interesting. If I can get

by, why do I have to do the readings anyway? But, if I can't be silent all the time, I've

got to say something and sound smart on a little something. (Hong, 9/26/2007, p.

15)

To weigh in early and to follow up on a few items in question enabled Hong to

participate in class discussions when she felt ill prepared. Similar to the previous informant

Yan who used silence to cover up her inadequate preparation for class, Hong put the

silence discourse to her advantage when she felt she was not confident in her language

skills, not well prepared, or just not ready to speak out. Moreover, Hong extended the

benefit from the discourse by taking the opportunity to be silent to observe the classroom

dynamics and to learn about different ways of participation in class discussions. What was

explicit in Hong's comments was that she thought she benefited from the discourse on

quiet Chinese students. She believed that silent or participatory, she would not be in

trouble, since being silent was the expectation her professors held towards many Chinese

students like her. Also, she could put on a similar act to participate and to perform her

smartness as a student—things she learned from her American classmates. However, what

was invisible to Hong was the difference between the classroom participation performance

that she mimicked and the quality learning that was encouraged and promoted in the

classroom. Instead of benefiting from her silence and performative participation, this strategy may have actually diminished her learning.

Situating themselves within the silent Chinese student discourse, Hong and Yan resembled each other in their negotiation of the discourse. Both were able to manipulate the discourse to their perceived advantage. Hong and Yan drew from the discourse to account for and work to explain the differences they noticed between them and the American students. In this aspect, Hong and Yan echoed Donghua and Meijuan in that they all accrued concrete understandings of the classroom culture that were meaningful to them (Banks, 2006). They also embraced the silent Chinese student discourse and simultaneously performed in similar ways as their American classmates to what was expected of them in the classroom space where their being Chinese became increasingly visible and beneficial to them to cope with classroom situations.

Summary

In coming up with coping strategies to maneuver the classroom space, the above four Chinese students in my study have demonstrated their agency to embrace and manipulate the discourse on silent Chinese students. Donghua self identified as one of the quiet, smart, shy, and sometimes critical Chinese students new to the American classroom culture. Meijuan presented herself as a critical and reflective observer who was eager to learn the English language in order to catch up with her classmates but at the expense of being mistaken as rude and less serious. Yan and Hong each believed that they benefited from the silence discourse through the cultivation of a space in class, to get away without doing assignments or honing participation skills. As outsiders situated within the American

classroom, my informants relied upon their perceptions of the participatory American classroom culture and referred to the silent Chinese students discourse to make sense of their experiences. Fitting into the silent discourse would not only exempt them from students' responsibilities that American professors anticipate students to fulfill, but also foster a sense of identification with and belonging to the Chinese community. Furthermore, embracing and performing silence in the classroom enabled them to mask their language inadequacy so that they would have sufficient time to process the language and course materials, to become more fluent with classroom norms, and to develop into more sophisticated graduate students.

What they believed the enabling benefit from the occasion to be silent and from embracing the discourse did not come without costs or consequences. First, the discourse had already positioned my informants at the margins of the classroom. The marginalizing power of the discourse lay in the fact that it was always a point of entry for my informants to account for their experiences with silence (Ryan & Louie, 2007). That is to say, rather than challenging or questioning the discourse, they drew from it to make sense of their classroom experience and to come up with strategies to navigate the classroom space. As enabling as these strategies may have been, these strategies may have been damaging in that they tended to further marginalize my informants by encouraging them to take a back seat in the class, instead of seeking an equally participatory position as their American counterparts. Holding onto the silence discourse, the American professors and students do a disservice to the Chinese students, often in the name of respecting the differences that Chinese students exhibit in the classroom. What ends up happening is that Chinese students who embrace the silence discourse, together with their professors and classmates,

co-create Chinese students' othered experience in the classroom (Grimshaw, 2007), which is not conducive to a positive or enriching learning experience for all.

Deliberate Silence in the Classroom to Challenge the Discourse

In the same space of the American classroom where the Chinese identity is constructed on the basis of difference rather than assumed sameness, Lifang, a Chinese student in a master's program in Redwood College housed within Spring University, experienced a different kind of silence. She explained:

> I express my thoughts. No matter how great my ideas are, they just don't care. Well, they don't say they don't care; they would say, "Well, I hear you." and that's it. They don't really work to understand my points or engage in my thoughts. They would go on with their own discussion or train of thought. I don't know whether all Americans in this university are like that, or what; maybe or maybe not. But in Redwood, things are worse. Redwood people are extremely self-centered. They only attend to things of their own interest, like, things American; America is the center of the world, or something. Like, you know, everything is so US-centered. They're so full of themselves. They care about nothing but themselves. (Lifang, 2/12/2009, p. 19)

Similar to Donghua, Meijuan, Yan, and Hong, Lifang sensed her silence as a Chinese student in the classroom. Different from Donghua, Meijuan, Yan, and Hong's interpretations, Lifang saw herself voiceless not because she was naturally a quiet Chinese, but because she was made voiceless by others. Rather than buying into the stereotypical image of a quiet Chinese student, she deemed herself vocal yet voiceless in the classroom.

She criticized the American students for shutting her down and their inability to listen to her. Her claim that American students did not care could be challenged for generalizability, yet what was important was that Lifang felt invisibility imposed upon her in the same space where Donghua, Meijuan, Yan, and Hong deliberately performed to be invisible for various reasons.

Lifang's deprivation of voice started during her first semester at Spring University in a course on diversity. Upon entering the classroom, she was shocked with the diverse composition of the student body and felt the right to speak up as Chinese and as female:

> When I got to know the class, I found out, "Oh, my god. The classroom is full of gays and lesbians." For women, they talked about gender and feminism; for gays and lesbians, they talked about sexuality. I was the only international student in the class. No one talked about nationality, global issues; No one. All they talked about were gender, sexuality, and such. I was like, "regarding diversity issues, I have the right to speak up, like, I'm Chinese, I'm a woman." But you know… they were not interested in what I said. I didn't know whether they heard anything of what I said; they just didn't listen. (Lifang, 2/12/2009, p. 31)

The moment when she entered the classroom, Lifang experienced a different kind of diversity—different from her definition along the line of culture, race, gender, and nationality, which seemingly distinguished her from most of her classmates. What she read as marking her different from the majority of the class: culture, race, gender, and nationality, carried a particular meaning to her in the classroom setting where differently raced (White) and differently cultured (American) students were the privileged majority.

What marked her gay and lesbian classmates different from the heterosexual majority remained insignificant and irrelevant to her and thus to her definition of diversity because she was one of the privileged heterosexual majority. As she implied, her expanded views around diversity neither counted in the classroom, nor was it viewed as significant.

In a class of mostly white American students, the Chinese woman identity suddenly became very noticeable to her in that that identity made her a minority and automatically a symbol of diversity. Positioning herself as the embodiment of diversity—"I'm Chinese" and "I'm a woman" (Lifang, 2/12/2009, p. 31), she transplanted her situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988) gained in China about diversity to an American classroom. Seeing gays and lesbians in class did not make her rethink her own situatedness as a straight person or to reconsider her defintion of diversity. Rather, she approached diversity from an assumed fixed position of being a straight Chinese woman while resisting new interpretations.

As the only international student in class, Lifang felt the urge to be the representative of all because of her marked minority status as Chinese (Lifang, 2/12/2009, p. 31). When she sensed that her ideas were not welcomed in the way she desired, she felt brushed off. This was evident in what happened in the same diversity course at the end of the semester. During a class towards the end of the semester, Lifang's professor asked the class to submit proposals to a diversity committee on diversifying Redwood College of Media Studies. Throughout the semester, Lifang's experience was that the class seldom talked about cultural diversity. Even if the class touched upon it, it was within the framework of American culture, not culture in a global context. Upon hearing the discussion topic, she felt that she had the right to speak up because for the whole semester

she had been tolerant of other students' domination of the class and the issue of lack of diversity:

> The class was divided into groups of four or five. I was grouped together with a gay student—a Canadian; I later got to know that he was Canadian. Anyway, he was super-talkative; like, he talked even more than the professor; he dominated each class, whining about the program, blah blah blah. I sensed that he had some harsh feelings towards the program. He kept on saying, "When I was a kid, I liked to play with baby dolls, while my brother liked to play with cars and toy guns. I just didn't." The gay guy could drag on and on, to bore the entire class to death. I was like, "I paid $3000 for this course, just to listen to you? Why do I have to sit here and listen to you talking nonsense? It's my turn to speak up, finally!" (Lifang, 2/12/2009, pp. 32-33)

Finally, at the end of the semester, the right opportunity seemed to present itself for Lifang to have her voice heard. Once again, she felt dismissed. Among the proposals to address diversity at Redwood College, Lifang deemed most of them to be "too superficial" (Lifang, 2/12/2009, p. 33). For example, an American student proposed to make a diversity course compulsory for all the students in the program. Another American student proposed to set up separate demonstration rooms for each country to showcase different cultures. For instance, in room China, symbols of China or Chinese culture would be on display, such as China vases, bamboo fans, dragons, and pandas. Room Canada and room Caribbean would display things specific to their cultural heritage (Lifang, 2/12/2009, p. 33). Neither

the idea of a compulsory course nor the idea of demonstration rooms sounded appealing to Lifang. She commented:

> High school kids here have similar things like the display rooms. It seemed as if hitting up that room meant your visiting China and getting to know China. I was like, "That's how you propose to solve diversity issues at Redwood College?" So superficial! So shallow! (Lifang, 2/12/2009, p. 33)

None of the proposed ideas impressed Lifang. To her, what her classmates did was to dilute the vast complexities of a diverse culture into an exhibition room. The proposals reinforced her preconceptions of American students' ignorance to and lack of understanding of other cultures. She did not miss any opportunity to criticize her peers. She made a similar criticism of an American student's inquiry about China's emperors in her boyfriend's class.

Lifang's boyfriend was Chinese by nationality, attending a different program within the same college. After his presentation on China to a class of mostly American students, some of his classmates approached him inquiring whether there was currently an emperor in China. They seemed to be very surprised to hear the answer that China did not have an emperor any longer. Lifang was so furious at American students' lack of knowledge about China. She commented:

> You know, stupid, ignorant bunch of people. Redwood is one of the best, if not the best, media studies schools in the US; some famous anchor-persons are graduates of the Redwood. Redwood students should be brilliant, but their ignorance is shocking. I'm like, "How could they get into Redwood?" Just think of it, they are going to work for American media; they are the future media persons. I cannot help wondering,

you know, many TV celebrities and folks are Redwood alumni, it's not surprising to

me at all that the US media does this or that; they know little about China; so biased

against China. You know, it's not difficult to imagine why they're ignorant, biased,

they're just like that, they just don't know. (Lifang, 2/12/2009, p. 20)

To Lifang, the fact that several American graduate students did not know there was no

longer an emperor in China (Lifang, 2/12/2009, p. 20) was revealing to her about the

mismatch between the reputation of her program and the perceived quality of the students

enrolled. It made her question the intelligence of her classmates. Hearing the proposals in

her diversity course only solidified her previously held conceptions of American students.

Critical of her classmates' proposals, Lifang thought what they talked about was off

the point. Instead, what Lifang proposed was to have some media platform like a magazine

or newspaper dedicated to international students on campus, so that her primary identity

as an international student could be represented. To her, diversity was a serious issue

within her college, as well as Spring University at large. In her words:

All are white. Few blacks in my program. I'm getting used to it—a predominantly

white school, after all. Obviously, Redwood has diversity problems, whether it

admits or not. Absolutely, it's a huge problem. But what can I say? Can I report it?

What to get from reporting? Meaningless! (Lifang, 2/12/2009, p. 28)

Lifang noticed the racial exclusion of people of color in her program and largely at Spring

University, but she felt powerless to help solve the problem. What she could do, in the

"predominantly white school" (Lifang, 2/12/2009, p. 28) was to utilize her experience and

expertise to make a difference. Based on her experience of being an international student

whose voice was ignored, she saw herself as a diversity advocate to make international

students like her more visible on and off campus, to voice out the thoughts and concerns of

international students, and to build a bridge connecting American and international

students. She proposed to start up a magazine—different from the existing one on campus

that was focused on popular culture in Asia. Her proposed magazine did not have to be

published weekly or monthly. What was important was that the existence of the magazine,

at least one publication per semester. The proposed magazine could cover issues like what

life was like for an international student, what American students looked like in the eyes of

students of foreign nationals and vice versa, as well as other articles.

Lifang shared what she thought was a great proposal with her group members in

class, but her proposal was not well received. This was how she described her group's

response to her proposal.

> The Canadian gay guy in my group was like, "Ok, uh-huh, hmm, I hear you." And that
>
> was it. And then he said, "Go back to my point." So the discussion resumed to his
>
> previous focus, nothing to do with my proposal. (Lifang, 2/12/2009, p. 28)

"I hear you" could mean "I hear you and I'm with you." But apparently that was not how

Lifang interpreted what her Canadian group member said in response to her proposal.

Lifang revealed further details to drive home that "I hear you" actually meant "I hear you

and I dismiss you."

Near the end of the discussion, the group would vote for the top three proposals and

report to the class. In her group report, Lifang found out that her ideas were not mentioned

at all. She recalled that she raised four or five "great points—far better than what the rest of

the group did" (Lifang, 2/12/2009, p. 28). She believed that the group representative should have mentioned at least one or two points she brought up during the group discussion, if not all the points she raised. However, to her surprise and disappointment, the group representative mentioned nothing from her proposal. "None!" she said, "Simply, 'I hear you.' And that was all I got. None of my ideas were represented in the group report" (Lifang, 2/12/2009, p. 28). Lifang continued,

> That struck me the most—simply "I hear you." Like, they heard nothing. They just
> didn't listen; what I said was totally disregarded even if it was correct. Small things
> like that have occurred in other classes as well. They really didn't listen. (Lifang,
> 2/12/2009, p. 28)

Still frustrated and angry, Lifang placed the blame on her mostly white classmates, both Canadian and American, for their unwillingness and inability to hear her.

Lifang's account of her marginalized experience in the diversity course raised a couple of issues. First, she made a general claim that her classmates just did not listen, and thus presented herself to me as the victim who was shut down in class. Even though she thought she was the embodiment of diversity for being Chinese and being female (Lifang, 2/12/2009, p. 31), which made her more legitimate to speak to issues of diversity, or lack thereof in such a white school as Redwood, the American students were too self-centered to notice her and her embodied diversity. She assumed that she had the right to speak up, but sadly no one took her seriously. This was her first accusation of being brushed off. She did not stop there. Lifang further explained why her classmates did not impress her. She believed they hardly listened to anything. Not only that, she felt they were not as smart as

her in coming up with brilliant things to say in class. She found their lack of knowledge about China staggering and their tokenized proposals to solve diversity issues simplistic. Different from her classmates, she believed that she was the smarter student, vocal but voiceless.

Lifang's intersectional subjectivity as a Chinese woman played out in her articulation of her experience of being othered in the classroom. The fact that she was Chinese and she was a woman led her into the assumed right to speak up, in that she saw herself as representing cultural and gender diversity while refusing to value other forms of diversity such as race and sexuality. Different from the stereotypical image of a quiet Chinese woman, Lifang actively participated in class discussions. However, she was still voiceless because her classmates brushed her off. The intersectional subjectivity as a gendered Chinese also shaped the strategies she used to bring more visibility to her presence in class. The first couple of times when she felt she was not heard, she thought that might have to do with her soft voice. She said, "I thought to myself, 'Maybe my voice is too soft. I'm soft-spoken. They are unable to hear me'" (Lifang, 2/12/2009, p. 35). She spoke louder in an effort to overcome her quiet voice, but raising her voice did not seem to make her louder. Instead, she was still experiencing a silence imposed by her classmates.

Vocal but silenced during her first semester, Lifang was still trying her best to participate in class. During her second semester, a small incident in her discussion group changed the way she participated in class. Lifang took a course on TV research offered within Redwood but in a different department. According to her, her home department was more research oriented while the department from which she took the TV course focused

less on research which she regarded superior and more on TV production which seemed less important to her. In that class, most students came from the TV department including a Chinese male student, and she felt she was better-trained in research. She felt more confident with her ability to do research, not only because her home department had a heavy research focus, but also because she was no longer new to Redwood College. Again, she did not think that her classmates were as well prepared as her:

> I felt I was well informed and equipped. However, the other Chinese student in my class had no clue what research was like. The rest of the class was just like him—no clue what research was, because they were TV production people. They didn't know what media research was about; just clueless. I told them how to do things. (Lifang, 2/12/2009, p. 34)

Explicit in this comment was her conviction that she was once again the smart and competent student who knew a great deal while her classmates were clueless. Given that, she chose to take up a self-assigned role of a leader and teacher (Lifang, 2/12/2009, p. 34). But things did not unfold in the way she had hoped. During a class discussion, she was grouped together with the Chinese male student and a black male student. According to Lifang, as clueless as the Chinese man, the black male student "totally missed the point" (Lifang, 2/12/2009, p. 34). Whenever they were off, Lifang said that she had to bring them back to what she thought research was about. "'No, that's wrong. It's not like what you said.' See, each time I had to tell them" (Lifang, 2/12/2009, p. 34). Lifang shared with me what it was like for her to guide the group discussion. She continued to accuse her group members for being feeble-minded:

What they said was pointless, but they still went on as if they didn't hear what I told them. Then, our group reported to the class and the black student went on with what he thought was correct; the professor would say, "Oh, not quite right. It's not the case." The black student was like, "Oh, okay…let me see what I can do." I didn't think he cared at all. I felt black people didn't care, like, they were carefree. Each time when I talked with this black guy, I didn't know whether he heard me or not. He just didn't listen. He still insisted on what he thought was right, which to me was completely wrong. (Lifang, 2/12/2009, pp. 34-35)

By Lifang's standard, none of her group members were very smart. What was worse, they were not attentive either. They did not know as much about research as what Lifang thought she did and they did not listen to her or follow her lead. Neither the Chinese male student nor the black male student in her group valued her input. When voicing her frustration with her group members, Lifang referred to their racial identities to distinguish one from the other. She perceived that her identity markers as international, Chinese, and female were less valued than other markers like male, gay, lesbian, or black in her class. She ascribed negative racial stereotypes to the black male in her group. The motivation for Lifang to racially label her group members was open to interpretation, but what was important was how she constructed her status as a silenced victim and a stellar student in the group, which ultimately foreshadowed her later strategy to resist being silenced by quitting the group and undertaking the group project alone.

Frustrated with her group members yet hopeful, she raised her voice. She tried to engage them a couple of times, but in vain. She could not put up with them any longer. As she said:

> Later, I got so fed up and I told myself, "Whatever, I don't have to care. Why bother? It's their problem. Why do I have to care?" I was so sick of it. No matter what, they just didn't listen. I wanted to get my own work done. I didn't want to deal with it. So I ended up working alone on a group project. (Lifang, 2/12/2009, p. 35)

Lifang was tired of failing to be heard and failing to shine in class. Each time, she perceived that her classmates, white, black, American, Canadian, Chinese, straight, and gay, deprived her of the opportunity to lead and shine, no matter how hard she tried. Now after two semesters, she had already identified that the problem resided in her classmates, not her. She had learned to loosen up:

> I mean, I could care less, whether you hear me or not. Now, it really doesn't matter to me. If you don't care about me, I don't have to care about you. When I first came to Redwood, I did care—I cared a lot—like, I cared about what the others had to say, and if I felt they didn't care about me or my ideas, I would feel hurt or upset. However, later on, I've grown to realize that Redwood is a place where no one cares about each other—who cares? That's Redwood; I'm used to it. Anyway, I've told them that what they did was wrong; if they didn't correct their mistake, they had a problem; I mean the black guy in my TV research class; it was not like once or twice—throughout the whole semester—I tried, but he just didn't care. At the end of

the semester, it seemed that he came to realize a bit that I was indeed right and I did

know how to do research; still he didn't care. (Lifang, 2/12/2009, p. 51)

After two semesters, she resigned herself to the silence that had been externally

imposed upon her. She was convinced more than ever that her initial conception that she

was smart and her classmates were not was indeed correct. With that realization came the

time for her to contrive something new to survive and thrive at Redwood—to work alone

on a group project. By working alone, she did not have to be vocal. Nor did she have to raise

her voice, or care whether anyone heard her or not. By choosing to work alone, she chose

to be independent and to be silent.

To recap Lifang's experience with silence in the classroom, she was a very vocal

student at the beginning of the first semester. When she sensed that no one heard her, she

felt frustrated but she remained vocal and raised the volume of her voice, in the hope that

she could be heard. She went above and beyond to participate in class discussions and to

engage her classmates in group work. Yet, she perceived that no one took her seriously. She

experienced silence, though she did not choose to be silent. Later, she made a deliberate

decision; she resolved to be silent herself by working alone on a group project. By doing

that, she used silence as a way to resist, yet reinforce American students' domination of the

classroom. Silence to Lifang was a strategic choice to protest against being dismissed, to

mark and maintain her territory.

Silence was also a strategic choice to Lan, another first-year Master's student at

Spring University's Redwood College of Media Studies, but Lan did not utilize silence

simply to protest. Lan's reason for her selective silence in class was more complicated. As

she put it, she did not want to be viewed as "China's specimen" (Lan, 12/10/2009, p. 22).

What she meant was that any Chinese person labeled as the representative of China was

expected to share indigenous knowledge and to behave in certain ways under the gaze of

others, mostly Americans in the school context (Zhou et al., 2005). Conscious of the

possibility that the American professors and students would see her through the lens of

Asian or Chinese stereotypes, Lan was extremely careful about whether and when to speak

up in class. She explained:

> Americans would see us in a particular way. I mean, being Chinese, we obviously
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> have this Chinese appearance. People immediately notice that in us. It's highly likely
>
> that they would project whatever they know about China or Chinese people on us.
>
> Of course, this may simply be my speculation, since I can't really prove it. However, I
>
> do suspect that they stereotype us. It's understandable if they do that. But I feel that
>
> stereotypes can be dispelled. (Lan, 12/10/2009, p. 22)

Recognizing the immediate visibility of her Chineseness, Lan shared a speculation of

the stereotypical ways through which Americans in her class would possibly perceive her.

Ironically, her speculation had the effect of essentializing American students as having

racial- and gender stereotypes of her. Despite the messages her physical appearance sent

out, she preferred not to be seen as the embodiment of China. To prevent herself from

being seen like that, she avoided the possibility of being read as a representative or

mouthpiece for China. She explained how she managed to position herself in relation to her

American peers:

I deliberately avoid being seen like that. I mean, I don't think Chinese students

should assume the position of China's specimen, that is, whenever there's any

discussion about China and China's issues, we have to jump in, like, "in China, things

are blah blah blah." In that way, we treat us as the representative or mouthpiece of

China—Chinese specimen, the specimen of China, or something similar; like, we

have to argue with those Americans and try to convince them what we know or

believe. That's not me. I avoid doing that on purpose. I don't allow myself to follow

that direction. (Lan, 12/10/2009, p. 22)

Lan did not want to associate herself in any way with the "Chinese specimen" (Lan,

12/10/2009, p. 22) to bear the burden of sharing indigenous knowledge about her home

country (Zhou et al., 2005). Implicit in her comment was that she hoped to dismantle the

stereotypical images, such as China's mouthpiece, that she was expected to match. She

shared with me her ways of negotiating the image of the "Chinese specimen" (Lan,

12/10/2009, p. 22):

This is what I do: when the class discussion is about the US, though I don't know

much about American culture and I can be totally off the point, I still try to

participate as much as I can; like to say one or two things. However, when it comes

to China, I don't allow myself to get over-excited or emotional. It's unnecessary to

prove who's right and who's wrong, because that's not the point. The class doesn't

have to reach a common consensus. I mean, I'm not their research object. I don't

have to be defensive. I don't want to be seen as only knowledgeable regarding things

related to China; like, because I'm from China I should know this or that. I know

more than what they assume I know. I have other expertise. (Lan, 12/10/2009, p. 22)

Lan made it clear that she was more than merely a Chinese student, that is, she knew more than what her class expected her to know. To demonstrate her competency as a student, she would "say one or two things" " (Lan, 12/10/2009, p. 22) when the class discussion pertained to American issues, though she considered herself as an outsider. Lan wanted to be seen as vocal when the class did not expect her to be vocal. She stayed alert and silent, when China's issues were brought up, even though she believed that everyone else in her class would have loved to get the insider's perspective that she alone could provide. One of the reasons behind her highly selective moments of loquacity and silence was that she rejected being seen as "Chinese specimen"(Lan, 12/10/2009, p. 22). Moreover, she refused to conform to the expectations and assumptions of her as a Chinese student. Rather, she wanted to define who she was instead of being defined.

The declaration in the above quotation that "I'm not their research object" " (Lan, 12/10/2009, p. 22) divulged Lan's desire to become and be valued as an equally participating subject—the status that she had to earn, in that her identity of being Chinese did not grant her the same status that she believed the race and culture of her classmates bestowed upon them. She may not know much about a topic in question, but she felt compelled to talk. One strategy for her to claim her subject status in class was to say something even when the topic was unfamiliar to her. Another strategy was to be selectively silent. To Lan, when and how to speak depended on and connected with the classroom dynamics. Here is an example to illustrate her selectiveness.

Once, the class talked about Barbie culture. You know, girls and women desire to be like the American Barbie dolls. Cultural icons like Barbie tell us a great deal about who we are, who we want to be, as well as our desires and fears. People all over the world—whites, blacks, or yellows—all idolize Barbie, her shapes, sizes, and various body parts. On Barbie's 50th birthday, the world's biggest Barbie store opened in Shanghai. I'm a Shanghai native. I feel like I should say something. Like, Chinese dolls don't resemble Barbies, etc. However, I don't see myself simply as a reporter or an interpreter of Barbie culture in China. Like, if you ask me whether this is or isn't the case in China, I explain to you what I know. That's not enough. My whole value doesn't lie in the fact that I'm merely a reporter or an interpreter. So, after I shared what I knew about Barbie dolls in China, I went on saying, "Given that the US is such an economic and cultural power in the world, the opening of the store in China is to export American values and ideologies through Barbie." Well, I was yet to say that it was virtually a manifestation of cultural imperialism by introducing Barbie to China's markets. Of course I didn't say that. What I said was something like this, "I feel Barbie as a symbol of American culture has infiltrated and transmitted certain values and ideologies to China." In this way, I didn't make myself an interpreter of everything about China. I just shared what I knew. I feel the need to explain what I know about Barbies in China, because some American students didn't know that Barbie opened a store in China. (Lan, 12/10/2009, pp. 22-23)

Lan shared with the class what she knew about the Barbie culture in China, while withholding her critique of the US for what she saw as a new form of cultural imperialism. When the class could use her expertise on China, she was both vocal and silent. She was

vocal when she saw the need to inform the class of the newly opened Barbie store in China. She continued to share part of her analysis of the prevalent Barbie culture in China and kept the other part to herself. She was afraid that her cultural imperialism criticism would make her classmates perceive her as "Chinese specimen"(Lan, 12/10/2009, p. 22). In a way, she was silent in her criticism of the US.

Lan attempted to portray herself as a competent student who knew how to contribute to class discussions and was knowledgeable about more than China, though her identity marked her different from her classmates. Her self-representation served her well in that it effectively helped her avoid being read as the representative of China. It also enabled her to get along with her classmates rather than alienating her from the rest of the class.

Summary

In comparison to Lifang who was vocal but made voiceless, Lan came across as shrewd and sophisticated. She knew when and how to retire from class discussion and when and how to speak out. She resolved to be silent with her critique of the US for fear of being equated as "Chinese specimen" (Lan, 12/10/2009, p. 22). In Lifang's case, she did not have much reservation to share with the class whatever she knew, but her input was not welcomed and she was alienated. Yet, she insisted on being vocal until being shut down and then she decided to silence herself in protest of being dismissed. What was similar in both Lifang and Lan's experience of classroom silence was that the classroom space made them feel Chinese in relation to the majority American students. Furthermore, they reinforced

their Chineseness by deliberately silencing themselves at different occasions in the classroom.

Conclusion

The above analysis has indicated that classroom is a contested site and classroom silence is complicated to read and to negotiate (Briskin, 1998, 2000). Learning as a socially situated process is not just a matter of acquiring language skills which are culturally valued ways of participating in academic discourse, but a complex and contested process involving constructing, de/re-constructing of identities. Facing the same issue of classroom silence, my informants offered different accounts of their experiences and strategically employed silence in multiple ways. For example, some of my participants ascribed to a position of being and/or becoming a Chinese woman to account for their experiences in the American classroom. Both Donghua and Meijuan saw themselves as foreigners new to the American education. In class, they perceived themselves behind their classmates because they were too busy processing the language. Rather than striving to live up to the cultural norm of speaking up in class, they located themselves as quiet Chinese women and embraced the difference they noticed between them and the American students. They used silence to cover up the language barrier they initially encountered in the US. They made it clear that silence did not mean a lack of engagement in class. Instead, they presented themselves as industrial students who took schoolwork seriously, though they were participatory in a different way than the verbal participations of American students. Some informants took advantage of the silent Chinese student discourse to create a quiet space for them to accelerate their learning and to perform their smartness. They observed the classroom

dynamics, analyzed their classmates' speech patterns, and worked to pick up their language skills. Yan and Hong's experiences also indicated a specific way to manipulate the quiet Chinese student discourse to cover up their occasional insufficient preparations for class.

Other accounts of the negotiations of classroom silence included utilizing silence to protest being dismissed, as well as employing silence to challenge and reject the quiet Chinese student discourse. In Lifang's case, she turned from a vocal student to a silent and silenced student. The change indicated that she did not identify herself as a quiet Chinese woman but her fellow students made her a quiet Chinese woman by shutting her down and dismissing her. She felt brushed off and then stopped talking to protest not being listened to. In Lan's case, ever since the beginning of her graduate school career in the US, Lan was aware of her located identity as Chinese. She refused to be typecast into a quiet Chinese student or "Chinese specimen" (Lan, 12/10/2009, p. 22) in her words. She was both vocal and silent. When and how to her was a matter of choice and context.

Though framing the issue of classroom silence differently, my informants all subscribed to their shared Chinese woman identity to make sense of their specific situations. If all of them are inescapably Chinese "by descent," they are only sometimes Chinese "by consent" (Ang, 2001). This is particularly visible regarding my informants' coping strategies to contribute to class discussions. This is also noticeable in my informants' denial of being valued merely as China's representative. As Ang put it, "When and how is a matter of politics" (2001, p. 18). That is to say, certain contexts demand that the Chinese women I interviewed speak from a position they chose to identify with and/or

disassociate from, and their choices also shaped and constituted the (un)marked identity of being and becoming Chinese in the classroom space where racial, gender, and cultural hierarchy gets constructed, contested, and perpetuated, and where resistance and social transformation take place.

CHAPTER FIVE: NEGOTIATING THE LEFTOVER WOMAN DISCOURSE

Unmarried women are categorized by age into different groups. Roughly, women aged 25 to 27 belong to "struggling leftover fighters" — meaning they're as perseverant on the marriage market as fighters in the battlefield and they still have the energy and hope to find husbands. Women aged 28 to 31 are called "doomed leftovers" — meaning their chances of finding the right men to marry them are pretty slim. Women aged 32 to 36 belong to "failed leftovers." And women over 36 are "forever leftovers" — meaning they would never be able to get married. It's really sad and rude, but unfortunately, this seems to be the tough reality women have to face in China. (Wenjie, 1/15/2009, p. 18)

In the above quotation, Wenjie, a Master's student at Spring University, introduced a hierarchical categorization of Chinese women over the age of 25 and what she understood as "the leftover woman" reality in China where she grew up. During the course of my research, Wenjie was not the only person who made references to the leftover woman discourse which I see as one distinctive representation of various cultural legacies of Chinese patriarchy.

When talking about social realities Chinese women face in China, many Chinese women in my study referred to the term "shengnu[25]" and what the label meant to them. They outlined the ways the ubiquity of the term affected and informed their lives. Some also critiqued the circulation of the term. "Shengnu" has multiple meanings—one of them

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[25] Shengnu is 剩女 in Chinese.

being "saintly women" or "female saints" but the term as it is written in this context means "leftover women" or "old maids."

As stated in Chapter One, although State-sponsored feminism in China has legalized women's rights and equality in national laws, legacies of Chinese patriarchy in various cultural strands are still powerful and continue to shape gender roles and expectations. The leftover woman discourse is one representation of the multiple legacies that point toward heteronormativity (Warner, 1991) and social conformity. Focusing on what my research participants referred to as the leftover woman phenomenon, this chapter investigates the evolving meanings that my research participants attached with being Chinese and being women, through an examination of how my research participants articulated the leftover woman discourse and their complex ways of navigating the discourse. In an effort to understand how my research participants experienced gender in the US in relation to how they experienced gender in China, I examine the multiple ways they made sense of their lived experiences as encased within and conditioned by the leftover woman discourse, as well as their complex negotiations with the various reinforcing components of the leftover woman discourse.

Discriminatory Dating Market in China: Single Women's Accounts and Critiques of the Leftover Woman Discourse

Among the single women in my study directly subjugated to the leftover woman discourse, Ying, a PhD student in a traditionally male dominant discipline of engineering at Spring University, gave a vivid account of the dating situation facing her female friends in China. According to Ying, discriminatory on the basis of age and appearance, the marriage

market was difficult for women in general, and women with college education or advanced degrees in particular. She reported,

> I feel less pressured in the US. As I've told you before, the dating market in China is not friendly to women like me, who are well educated and over the age of 25. Most of my girlfriends in China have shared with me their worries about becoming leftover and looking for Mr. Right. On a recent visit to China, I met a girlfriend of mine a couple of times. Each time, I heard her complaining to me about how hard it was to find a serious boyfriend. She's in her mid-twenties, and she's still single. Her parents are worried so much about her being leftover and they've gone above and beyond to look for a boyfriend for her. They have asked their friends to keep an eye on possible dates for their daughter. Whenever they tell their friends that their daughter is over 25, their friends' first reaction is that she should find someone who's around 30 years old or even older. It's quite bizarre. My girlfriend is pretty. She just graduated from college and she has a decent job. But somehow, she hasn't had much luck with boyfriends. Men of her age would like to date younger girls and men over the age of 30 are most likely married already, or sexually confused. She's dated several men and she's demoralized by the men's lack of quality. She told me that one guy talked about prenuptial arrangements between them on the first date. Another didn't even offer to buy her a drink after a whole day's activities. On a recent date, she was shocked by what the man said, "It's a real bargain dating a woman like you, because women of your age are on sale on the dating market." What the man said is pretty much the reality in China. Even though he has a point, it's so cruel and uncomfortable to hear. (Ying, 12/1/2009, p. 56)

The above dispiriting narrative of Ying's girlfriend's dating experience in China was a reflection of the power of the leftover woman discourse that had shaped daily lives of people of all ages and genders. Emphasizing age, the leftover woman discourse solidified heteronormativity and social conformity, as indicated in Ying's female friend's dating experience, as well as the responses from her family and friends in China. To further explain the leftover woman phenomenon, Ying continued with another Chinese woman's experience on the dating market in China.

> My mom is a university professor and her colleague has a daughter who's a couple of years older than me. The daughter recently got her master's degree in China and landed a job teaching English in college—a pretty good job. My mom attempted to hook her up with a guy who was a doctor. My mom thought they would be compatible. You know what? After the first date, the guy wasn't happy with the girl. He thought her eyes were too small [slanted single eyelids]. I'm like, what the heck?! I was speechless. Having small eyes doesn't make her a defective woman! How could that be a weakness? The girl teaches college English. Her job is secure and well respected. Her social status is pretty high. She's from a nice middle-class family. Besides, as a college professor, she has summers and winters off. That would have made her an ideal mom to take care of kids. But, anyway, I just don't get what the guy was thinking about. Anyway, my mom told me that the girl was seeing a prison guard who retired from the army years ago. The guy is not well educated. As a matter of fact, he only has a high school diploma, while the girl has a master's degree. But what can I say? They seem to be into each other. (Ying, 12/1/2009, pp. 56-57)

Aside from age, appearance was another factor that worked against women in China (Fincher, 2014). Ying presented another depressing example of a Chinese woman in China whose value was reduced to a list of variables, such as age, beauty, education, and social status—the same checklist that she would reciprocally employ to assess a potential date (Constable, 2003). Implicit in the account was that heterosexuality got construed as the only sexual orientation and middle-class lifestyles got celebrated and desired time and again, but neither was visible to Ying as the daughter of university professors who was pursuing an advanced degree in the US. What was visible to her were the broadened choices, including marital status and potential partners, availed in the US not only by her gendered identity as a woman, but as a Chinese woman living in the US.

> I feel, for us who live in the States, we have more choices. I mean, I don't feel
> pressured; well, somewhat, but not that much. As a last resort, remaining single is
> an option. No one would give me grief. In the worst situation, dating a foreigner
> [non-Chinese] is possible; actually, relatively easier than it is in China. He doesn't
> have to be Chinese. I'm just saying. I mean, I won't date anyone who is NOT Chinese
> [emphasis hers]. I'm only into Chinese guys. I'm just saying that the option is
> available to us. (Ying, 12/1/2009, p. 57)

Positioning herself as one of the Chinese women living in the US, Ying identified an advantage she felt over her female friends in China, i.e., "more choices" (Ying, 12/1/2009, p. 57) available to her for relationship status and male partners. Her national and cultural identity as Chinese became hypervisible to her in the US where she was different from the majority. She perceived that the salient identity marker as Chinese would enable her to

enjoy more choices when it came to relationships, which she normalized as heterosexual between males and females.

Despite more choices, Ying consciously narrowed her field of potential dating and spousal partners to Chinese men only. Only when Chinese men were hard to find, would she consider non-Chinese men. "Foreigner" to her meant non-Chinese. She explained that she was into Chinese men only, because "American guys were not serious about relationships and therefore out of consideration" (Ying, 12/1/2009, p. 57). Her impression of foreigners including but not limited to American men was based upon stereotypes, and came off as over-generalized criticisms. Because of her stereotypical preconceptions of foreigners, she had a strong preference for Chinese men for relationships.

There seemed to be an obvious contradiction between what Ying saw in Chinese men in China as sexist, and what she associated with Chinese men in the US. All of a sudden, Chinese men in the US transformed into her ideal dating partners. It was understandable that the assumed sameness on the basis of national and cultural origins connected her with her fellow Chinese while setting her apart from Americans or "foreigners." But what distinguished Chinese men in the US from Chinese men in China? Ying attributed the difference in Chinese men in the US as opposed to Chinese men in China as that the former "learned to treat women better in the American society that values women" (Ying, 12/1/2009, p. 58). I wish I could have probed her further on what she saw as the difference between Chinese men in China and Chinese men in the US, as well as how Chinese men in the US learned to treat women better. Yet, what was important in her articulation was the salience she attached to her primary identity marker of being Chinese.

Ying's multi-layered accounts of the dating realities facing Chinese women involved several interlocking constituents in the Chinese society that jointly represented and reinforced the leftover woman discourse. Concerned parents and single women of marriageable age were some examples that embodied and solidified the leftover woman discourse. Parents worried about their daughters' marketability and they did not want to see their unmarried daughters turning into old maids. Therefore, concerned parents set their daughters up on blind dates, employed matchmakers, and mobilized all the resources they have in order to find husbands for their daughters, in the hope that their daughters would marry young before their market value dropped too low. In so doing, the parents contributed to the normalization of the leftover woman discourse on an individual level.

The regulating leftover woman discourse embedded in the Chinese society also shaped the choices my research participants and their female friends adopted to negotiate their lives. Contrary to the saying that with age comes wisdom, my informants understood that age worked against them, and their female friends' experience in China had testified to the sad reality again and again.

Summary

Upsetting yet real, youth and beauty seemed to be what the male-dominant Chinese society valued in a woman (Fincher, 2014). Realizing the overwhelmingly debilitating power of the mutually reinforcing patriarchal forces on the female population in China, Ying, together with her Chinese female friends, tended to employ a pragmatic view on dating and relationships. In her narrative about the compatibility between her girlfriends and their male counterparts, Ying used such criteria as height and weight, salary and

education to compare and contrast whether the men and the women would match up.

These seemingly objective criteria resembled the criteria of women's age and appearance

valued in the leftover woman discourse, in that they reduce both men and women into

market values that could be increased, decreased, and traded upon (Constable, 2003). In

this aspect, Ying and the women in her stories contributed to the regulating power of the

leftover woman discourse, which they, together with their family, constantly negotiated

and contested. One negotiating strategy included living in the US, which enabled some of

my participants to enjoy more choices regarding dating and marital status, as well as to

keep distant from the power of the discourse, even though both men and women were

caught up in the discourse, despite their geographical locations. The following is an

expanded exploration of a distancing strategy that allowed my participants to enjoy more

autonomy as Chinese women in the US.

Distancing Strategy: Stay in the US and Defy Parental Reinforcement of the Discourse

Pressure from parents is huge; I mean, huge! Each time when I'm on the phone with

them, they only talk about two things. One, "Are you taking good care of yourself?

You have to eat well, rest well, and stay healthy." Two, "When are you getting

married? You're pretty old. You don't want to be a leftover woman. You should

prioritize marrying yourself off. It's getting harder and harder as you get older and

older." I would have to avoid having such conversations with them; like, to change

topics or to interrupt them. Parents are not the worst, because they kinda

understand our situation; like, we've been at school for decades; we're doing PhDs;

schoolwork is heavy; we don't have much time to date, or things like that. But, relatives don't understand. They think we're having a great time in the US. They think life is better in the US. They ask my parents about me, whether I'm done with school, whether I'm married, whether I have kids, or whether I have a job. My parents tell them that I'm still at school, no job, no kids. They would say, "Oh, she's no longer young. How come she's still at school? So-and-so is a couple of years younger than her and has already gotten married and had kids." You know, you CAN'T [emphasis hers] reason with them. They nag my parents about me being leftover and my parents in turn nag me. I know they all care about me. They mean well, but, they end up pressuring me so much. (Li, 12/5/2009, p. 3)

Li was a doctoral student in the sciences at Summer University. She was commenting on the pressure she experienced from her home in China. Parents and relatives cared about her wellbeing, which was contingent on her marital status. Living far from home, she still felt the parental surveillance projected her way. Delivered in the name of care, the parental surveillance functioned in a way to coerce her to follow the established gendered norms. She, like many in my study, read the intense surveillance, analyzed it, and figured out ways to work with it. As Li stated in the above quotation, shying away from conversations on marriage seemed to help her tentatively deflect parental surveillance— one of the multiple manifestations and reinforcements of Chinese patriarchal legacies.

Li was not alone in living with the parental reinforcement of the leftover woman discourse. Among the Chinese women I interviewed, Lan's experience spoke volumes to the intense parental surveillance in China and her defying strategy to navigate through it.

Before Lan travelled to the US for graduate school, still being single in China after college made her doting parents and relatives worry about her inability to find boyfriends. Her relatives set her up on a blind date with a Chinese man who worked as a governmental official in her hometown of Shanghai. Lan's parents and relatives were pleased with the quality of the man and thought that he matched with Lan in a lot of ways, such as, educational credentials and family backgrounds. Out of family pressure, Lan went on several arranged dates with this man and she thought he was a decent person. Though impressed with his qualities and credentials, she was not attracted to him. Further, Lan thought their life trajectories were incompatible because she had resolved to go to graduate school in the US for at least three years while the man would have to keep his civil servant job in Shanghai. Making a man she was not attracted to wait years for her did not sound appealing to Lan. Despite her parents' strong objection, Lan ended the relationship shortly after she got admitted into Spring University in the US.

Family pressure to find a husband did not stop after Lan left China for graduate school in the US. The assumed loneliness about life in the US had intensified her family's worry about her being single and becoming leftover. According to Lan, her maternal grandmother was persistent in her urge for Lan to find a boyfriend.

> My grandma lives with my parents. She's been pretty persistent in her nagging that I should get a boyfriend. I love her. I'm not picking on her. But, ever since I was in college, she has urged me to find a boyfriend and get married. She thinks I'm old and I'm not getting younger. At 23, I think I'm okay. But she said, "Oh, you're turning 24. If you cannot get a boyfriend now, it's gonna be harder for you after you turn 25.

Women older than 25 are unlikely to find men who would marry them." Such is my

grandma. She worries too much. I could care less what she thinks, since I'm living so

far away from her. However, she nags me frequently. Like, every time when I call

home or video chat with her, she brings it up. It's like, every week or every other

week. You hear the same thing again and again. It's kinda tiring; the same message

with the same wording and the same tone. It's not pleasant to my ear. (Lan,

12/10/2009, p. 51)

Geographical distance between Lan and her family seemed to have decreased the

frequency of parental disapproval in Lan's life. Yet, parental disapproval may have actually

intensified due to the perceived reality that Lan had to start an independent life in the US

where she had nobody to take care of her. Torn between her love for and her frustration

with her grandmother whose life was marked by patriarchal legacies in China, Lan figured

out a tactic to still communicate with her family while managing to dismiss their

disapproval of her single status.

What can I do? The nagging has more or less become a burden. I'm not happy with

her, but what can I do? I cannot lecture my grandma about women's autonomy or

women's rights, can I? Well, sometimes I just let her go on and on. Whatever she

says comes in one ear and goes out the other. At times when I'm in a good mood, I

tease my grandma. For instance, my grandma asked me why I was still single. I

would say, "Grandma, nobody likes me. I'm not pretty enough." You know, even

though I was just teasing her—I can't have a conversation with her on women's

independence—she took it seriously. She would say, "That's not true. Let me tell you

something. So-and-so got married last month. She didn't do as well as you at school; she's not as smart as you; she's shorter than you; her skin's darker than yours; she found someone to marry her; why can't you?" You know, my grandma is just like that.

At times, I just can't take it. I mean, like, it becomes a burden; I get so annoyed; I just dismiss her. Whatever she has to say, I let her say it without really listening. Or, I subtly change the subject. I ask her questions to show my care. Like, "What did you do today, grandma?" "What did you have for lunch?" "Did you watch such-and-such a show?" It really works. I mean, she would stop nagging me. She would begin to tell me how her day went or what she did yesterday. So, I'm off the hook, not all the time though. She usually gets back to where she left off. (Lan, 12/10/2009, p. 52)

Annoyed yet caring, Lan shared with me her frustrations with her grandmother and her strategies to dismiss the normalized gendered expectations of her as reinforced by her grandmother. Lan's strategies to work with her family's embodiment of the leftover woman discourse included the following three: dismissing what her grandmother had to say, making fun of herself, and leading the conversation so that her grandmother would not have a chance to nag her about getting married. Temporarily diverting the parental surveillance, these dismissing strategies had limited power, in that the strategies allowed Lan to choose when to be under the surveillance and how to orchestra the surveillance, yet never offered her the chance to eliminate it.

As opposed to her life in China when she felt bombarded with the reinforcing parental surveillance on a daily basis, Lan pointed out the benefit of living in the US. She

said, "As a matter of fact, the best part of living in the US—well, among many other things—is that I can easily shrug off the pressure" (Lan, 12/10/2009, p. 53). Lan made it explicit that the power of the patriarchal reinforcement from her family was still paralyzing, yet at least living in the US offered her some sense of control over when and how she would subject herself to her family's personification of Chinese patriarchal norms.

Strategies such as ending an arranged relationship and changing the subject of a conversation seemed to have worked well for Lan to divert parental and societal reinforcement of the leftover woman discourse. However, there was only so much that Lan was capable of doing to defy the reinforcement. Lan gave me an analytical account of her understanding of the power of Chinese patriarchy, as well as her vulnerability as a Chinese woman positioned at the intersection of numerous interconnected constituents of the leftover woman discourse.

> I understand where my grandma is coming from. In her generation, women were defined through marriage. This is still somewhat true in today's China. The saying goes like this: Excellence in your career is not as important as finding the right husband. This is still how our society [China] values women. We have to manage a successful marriage. Otherwise, no matter how successful we are career-wise, we'll always be considered failures. I don't buy this, but my family does and I can't reason with them. They're the ones who have to live with the reality in China. It's still the Chinese tradition that education and career don't mean as much to a woman as marriage. For example, the goal of getting an education or having a job is to find the

right husband. What you do with education or career is to increase your

marriageability so that you can find a better man.

Nowadays, the situation is pretty much the same. Marriage is still one of the primary

markers of success in a Chinese woman's life. It's the system that chains women

down. A few friends of mine in China are still subjugated to such a system. For

instance, I have a classmate. She studies medicine [as an undergrad]. She'll graduate

from the medical school next year as an undergrad. Now she's thinking about

whether to go to graduate school, but she's not sure. What sounds ridiculous to me

is what makes her hesitate to apply to graduate school. She's worried that after

several years of graduate study she won't be able to find a man to marry her. She

said that she would be in her late twenties after graduate school and it would be

hard for her to get married and have kids because of her age. The future after

graduate school looks dismal to her. She's under the pressure to start her family

right after college. I'm like, "Gee. You're still young. You haven't got a boyfriend yet.

How come you're worried about getting old, getting married or having kids?"

Another friend of mine is in a similar dilemma. She was my roommate in college and

she's been working on her PhD in Germany. But her parents and relatives gave her a

hard time. They don't seem to understand her decision to become a female PhD.

They don't get it why a woman enjoys doing scholarly research. They think doing

research is a man's job; basic college education is enough for a woman; for the rest

of her life, she should just have a stable job and raise her kid. You know, my

girlfriend told me that she found it hard to communicate with her family. But anyway, she went to Germany and she seems to like it there.

For me, I feel lucky. At least I don't have to convince my parents to allow me to go to graduate school or even to become a PhD some day. But other families are not the same as mine. After all, female PhD is a negative term in China.

Marriage is not a necessity for me. I mean, I'm okay with or without it. I don't feel inferior. I don't feel like I'm a loser, if I can't find the right man to marry. I don't feel I have to get married before a certain age. Like, getting married is not a task that I have to accomplish and cross off my to-do list. Marriage is a plus to me, but I don't need it to define me. So, I'm fine. I won't rush into a marriage simply because my grandma urges me to get married; I don't think I can do it. I'd rather stay single than to get married to some random guy. I'd rather bear my grandma's nagging than to rush into a life-long commitment. After all, independence is important to me. I mean, I can't do something simply because I'm expected to do it by a certain age.

Nonetheless, it's really hard to tell. Who knows how long I can resist the nagging or the pressure. Maybe very soon, I'd have to give in. I'm not confident in how long I can resist the pressure from my family. For the time being, I think I'm fine. (Lan, 12/10/2009, pp. 52-55)

The above account demonstrated that situated at the intersection of multiple constituents and reinforcers of countless patriarchal legacies from family, peers, and society, Lan was both strong and weak, assertive and vulnerable, optimistic and pessimistic, conforming and resisting. It also showed Lan's deep understanding of her

family's thought on women's destiny and the feudalistic legacies passed on from her

grandmother's generation to contemporary China where marriage was still valued as "the

primary marker" (Lan, 12/10/2009, p. 53) of a woman's success. Lan's analysis of her

grandmother's and her friends' situations, as well as her views on marriage presented her

as a sophisticated person well-grounded in the social realities she was part of. The analysis

also presented her both as a resister and a follower, even though she defined herself in

more resisting terms.

Not against the idea of getting married or marriage as an institution perpetuating

the patriarchal culture, what Lan resisted was a prescribed road map that dictated the

directions and the stops along her life's track. Getting married was not an inherited task

that she thought she had to accomplish in order to cross off her to-do list. Rather, Lan

wanted to retain control over whether and when to get married, as well as whom to marry.

Not defining her existence through marriage, Lan indicated her defiance of the patriarchal

norm as exemplified in her family and friends. Yet, despite her resistance against the family

and societal pressure to get married, she seemed to entertain the possibility of getting

married, even though in doing so, she would not only abide by the patriarchal norms, but

also contribute to the normalization of gendered expectations for Chinese women and end

up furthering and perpetuating the patriarchal structure in China—the exact culprit that

made her feel constrained and stranded in her life. Conforming and resisting, Lan came

across as being more realistic. In her words,

> Anyone who's against social norms would have to be ready to pay a price. The price
>
> I have to pay is to tolerate my family's nonstop nagging. This is my choice. Upon

balancing my gains and losses, I'm quite okay with it. My gain is that I get to live a

life of my own choosing. (Lan, 12/10/2009, p. 56)

Lan recognized that her resistance against the gendered norms did not come without a

cost. Fully aware of the penalty for non-conformists, Lan evaluated the price she had to pay,

which was to tolerate her family's endless nagging (Lan, 12/10/2009, p. 56), and resolved

to lead a life that deviated from the established Chinese social norms prescribed for

Chinese women.

Summary

As discussed in this section, my informants' strategies to maneuver the leftover

woman discourse as embodied in their respective families included geographically

distancing themselves from their families by living in the US and defying their family's

reinforcement of patriarchal legacies, as well as self-mockery and switching conversation

subjects. The primary distancing strategy, coupled with self-mockery and conversation

control, allowed Chinese women in my study to achieve to a great extent the much-desired

freedom to construct their lives still regulated and shaped by patriarchal structures in the

Chinese society.

The following discussion of my informants' experience with purchasing skin-care

products and applying make-up spoke to their newly gained freedom in their physical

location of the US and their continual negotiations with patriarchal representations. It also

reflected the power of the leftover woman discourse that had conditioned my informants'

lives and shaped their participation in perpetuating the discourse.

Resistant and Compliant: Purchasing Skin-care Products and Applying Make-up

In China, when I stop by some cosmetics counter in a mall, the sales-people always made me feel that I am not beautiful enough. They would say, "Oh, my. Your skin is pretty dark. You're freckled. You're pimpled and you have liver spots." What they do is that they always remind me that my skin has pimples, my eyes are puffy and have dark circles, my skin looks dull, etc. They made me believe that my skin is problematic and their products would fix my problem and make me a desirable woman. In the US, the salesperson tries as hard as Chinese salespeson to sell their products. But they do it differently. For example, this is my experience with Estee Lauder representatives in the Mall. They made me feel that I am already wonderful being who I am and their products would make me more wonderful. The other day, I was looking for some eye cream for myself and I stopped by at Estee Lauder and Lancôme booths. The salesgirls complimented me on how smooth my skin texture was. "Oh, my God! You are so pretty. What do you do to your skin to make it so smooth?" They then asked for my needs. They evaluated my skin type and then recommended several products. They also asked me to try some samples on the back of my hands. They made me feel that their product would smooth out my puffy eyes, but without it, I'm not a defective woman. You see, in China, the cosmetics people don't hide their disproval of me, "Oh, this part is so ugly. You have to use our product to conceal it. Otherwise, no one would look at you." We're from a culture that tells us what's wrong with us. In China, shopping for skincare products would

make you feel like a flawed person while in the US you feel the purchase of a product

would make you better, but without it you're still a beautiful person. (Lan,

12/10/2009, p. 59)

Lan experienced the cosmetics counters in both countries dramatically

differently. She recognized the different sales strategies each group adopted. According to

her, American salesgirls at the Estee Lauder counter tried to attract would-be customers by

flattering them. Then later, they might pitch that they had something that might help to

make her even more beautiful, whereas in China, the salesgirls called out to would-be

customers that their skin needed help and their products could prevent them from looking

so bad. Lan's narrative followed a comparative pattern: she started out telling me the

humiliating experience in China and used China as a reference point to highlight the

favorable treatment she received in the US.

Sales strategies aside, Lan pointed out a deeper issue behind what she noticed when

purchasing beauty products in two countries. The deeper issue was more cultural than

mere marketing strategies. One group of salespersons tried to sell a product by pointing

out how badly it was needed by women who were accustomed not only to direct language

and scolding, but also to a constant regulation from society. The other group was trying to

sell a product by establishing a relationship with women accustomed to being flattered,

valued, and respected. Lan came across as critical of the Chinese salespersons' being critical

of her while in favor of American salespersons' compliments.

From being seen as a flawed woman to being seen as a pretty woman, from being

the problem to be fixed to being a valued individual striving to look good, the difference to

Lan was welcome. She much preferred to be flattered by strangers than to be criticized or judged by them. She felt like she was already well familiar with flaws in her appearance and did not need to be reminded of them publicly. Moreover, to her, being flattered or scolded was an indicator of the different societies' attitudes towards women. In a society that was less critical of women, she felt a strong sense of self-confidence and liberation in being who she was—a feeling that she seldom had before she came to the US.

Following the same comparative narrative pattern, Lan continued to tell me how she felt about being a woman within and outside the US. Before coming to the US for graduate school, Lan lived in Japan for a year as an exchange student. To give me another example to illustrate the differences she felt as a woman in different cultures, she talked about her experience in Japan.

> You know, if you think China is pretty strict for women, like, society dictates what women should wear, how women should look, etc., wait until you go to Japan. Japan is even worse. I had to put on make-up even when I attended classes; not the easy or quick type of make-up. It has to be delicate, like, foundations, eye lashes, eyebrows, eye liners, lips, you name it. Japanese women spend lots of time on make-up. It's hard for me to imagine why a woman's appearance is so important. It's unbelievable in Japan. Like, every woman wears make-up; old and young, tall and short, pretty and ugly. They think it's an issue of respect or disrespect if women don't wear make-up in public. In this regard, China is much better. (Lan, 12/10/2009, p. 60)

Similar to the issue of public scolding or public compliments, for Lan, the issue of make-up was another indicator of society's attitude towards women. She interpreted the

"unbelievable" make-up phenomenon in Japan as Japan's strict regulations of female bodies. In this aspect, she thought that women in China were less strictly regulated than they were in Japan. But in Lan's view, both countries fell behind the US regarding women's autonomy. Lan continued,

> The US is *much much* better [emphasis hers.]; there's almost no such a thing as women having to wear make-up in public. Rules that tell women what to do are almost nonexistent. For example, oftentimes you see Chinese magazines or newspapers offering beauty tips for women. They go like this: if your calves are fat, don't wear skirts, especially short skirts that are shorter than your knees. You should wear pants or long skirts that cover your fat calves. Like, if your head is big or your face is too fat or too round, let two strands of hair fall on each side of your face to conceal part of the face, so that your face would look smaller. The message is that they constantly remind you of the flaws in your body. Of course, no one is perfect in this world. No one wants to be reminded of their flawed bodies all the time.

> In the US, I feel different. The culture is not like in China or in Japan. I see large women everywhere here. By Chinese standards, these women are way overweight. I see women with freckles or wrinkles on their faces. So what? They still wear dresses, skirts, shorts, or whatever. They're confident. They don't seem to care that their legs are short and fat, their bodies are big, their faces are huge, butts are too wide, boobs are too big or too small. Usually nobody cares. Even if some people care,

so what? Those large women still appear to be confident. They could care less about what other people think of them. I think this is a good way to live a life.

In China, people—acquaintances or strangers—keep telling me that I'm not pretty enough. For instance, whenever I lower my head like this, a double chin appears here. That's quite normal. You know, unless you're tiny; I mean, unless your face is tiny or skinny, you would have a double chin anyway. Right? No one can do anything about it. I'm like, when I lower my chin, I feel like everyone would remind me of my double chin; like, I'm really fat and ugly or something like that. (Lan, 12/10/2009, pp. 63-64)

What Lan was telling me was that when it came to enforcing gendered norms of femininity, she felt women in China and Japan were under tight scrutiny for their appearance while women in the US were free from societal rules and regulations. In other words, she felt she was under the scrutiny all the time in Japan, somewhat less so in China, and not so much in the US. Even so, during the interview with me, she showed up with light make-up: some foundation, accentuated eyebrows, and glossy lipstick. Her critique of rigid femininity norms in Japan and China did not make her less compliant with them. Rather, she said that putting on make-up was routinized ever since she was an exchange student in Japan, and in the US, she still kept the habit of wearing make-up. She explained to me,

Wearing make-up has been my habit. Unlike the days when I was in Japan, I felt propelled to put on make-up whenever I went out. Nowadays, it has become a routine. I like my make-up to be light; that is, I wanna look polished but not overdone. Like what I did today: I just put on some eye shadow and a thin layer of

foundation. Not very dramatic, I hope. I also colored my eyebrows. You know, my

eyebrows are so light. They look plain if left undone. I mean, my whole face would

look pale and plain if I didn't highlight my eyebrows. I would look silly. So, I often

choose to color them, to brighten up my whole face. But I want them to look natural,

not fake or something. If I'm in Shanghai or Japan, I may slightly overdo my

eyebrows, but I don't overdo them here in the US. Here, the simpler, the better.

However, in Shanghai—such a fashion center where women compete to look

polished, I feel the need to do more work; like, to pluck, shape, groom, and color my

eyebrows. I enjoy the easy work here in the States. Light make-up can improve the

look of my whole face. I feel I care enough to put on make-up, but the local people

here don't really do much make-up, or they don't feel pressured to do it. (Lan,

12/10/2009, p. 48)

Applying make-up became routinized for Lan. However, different from putting on

make-up in Japan or in China, putting on make-up in the US had transformed into a

pleasure. Lan accounted at least two reasons for the change. First, unlike the amount of

work involved in Japan or Shanghai, the work here in the US was considerably less. With

only a minimum amount of work, she could achieve a more polished look and that had

made the make-up work more enjoyable. Additionally, rather than feeling pressured to

look better, she embraced the work to look better in order to enjoy a more improved look

for herself. She felt relieved because in the US she no longer felt compelled to adhere to the

dictates of society. Lan's perception of "the easy work" (Lan, 12/10/2009, p. 48) for women

in the US might not align with a cultural insider's perceptions. Being an outsider situated

within the US, she might not be culturally sophisticated enough to read the gendered

markers of femininity in the US, but that did not invalidate her perception of increased

autonomy and lessened restriction she experienced in the US.

Summary

Engaging in the femininity-affirming practices of purchasing high-end skincare

products and wearing make-up, while enjoying being a woman with the newly gained

freedom in the US, Lan was not alone among female Chinese graduate students in the study

who experienced greater degrees of freedom in the US. Some of my informants verbalized

their critiques and executed their resistance against patriarchal legacies that originated

from China and continued to shape their lives in the US. Yet, they involved themselves in

various conforming activities reflective of the patriarchal norms in the US where they

perceived to be less rigid gendered norms to conform to.

Confirming to Gender Norms: Married Women's Accounts and Critiques of the Leftover Woman Discourse

As one distinctive representation of Chinese patriarchy, the leftover woman

discourse speaks primarily through single women of a marriageable age (Fincher, 2014),

however, the power of the leftover woman discourse resides in that it not only affects

single women's lives, but also shapes the lives of married women whose husbands might

leave for younger-looking women. Chen, a doctoral student at Spring University, married

without children, made the following comments that vividly described her perception of

the leftover woman discourse.

Several of my friends in China have told me the same thing [being called leftover women]. In China, women over 30 years old are deteriorating year by year in their market value. Women over 40 are rushing towards the trash can. Hearing this, I was heartbroken. I felt so upset for my female peers and for a would-be-piece-of trash like myself. Fortunately, long before I was marked down on sale, I found my buyer and I don't have to compete with the numerous leftover single women out there. (Chen, 2/20/2009, p. 16)

Chen adopted an ironic tone to talk about her own experience while sympathizing with her single female friends in China. She married a Chinese man she fell in love with while both of them were studying in the same program at Spring University. She felt fortunate for marrying herself off before she got too old. Switching back and forth between irony and relief, she expressed her anger over the leftover woman phenomenon.

You've got to wonder what men are thinking about. When it comes to the presumed superiority of men over women, nobody beats China. Women over the age of 36 haven't bothered anyone, but somehow that's how they're treated [as leftovers]. In the US, I've never seen women in their late 30s or 40s being treated like that. Forty-year-olds are still attractive and captivating in the US, whereas in China, this age group has become a social problem that needs to be solved. Hmmm, in China, a 40-year-old woman is like a piece of trash, while a 40-year-old man is like a piece of treasure. There's not that much biological difference between a man and a woman. Why is it that the fate of a man differs so much from the fate of a woman in China? (Chen, 2/20/2009, p. 18)

Moving from sympathizing with her female friends in China who were put down as leftovers, in the above example, Chen started to critique what she saw as the root cause of the problem—a heteronormative male-dominant Chinese society. To Chen, a male-dominant Chinese society restricted women and privileged men more than any other country. She cited the US in particular as an example to highlight the different and favorable situations accompanying women.

Echoing Chen's critique of Chinese patriarchy, another informant, Xixi, a doctoral student from Winter College, shared her experiences with gender both in China and in the US from the perspective of a woman married to her Chinese high-school sweetheart, and a mother raising two young children in the US.

Ever since I had kids, I've experienced how women are treated differently in the two countries. Here in the US, I'm a proud mom wherever I go, and wherever I go with my kids people make things easy for me. Both men and women hold doors open for me and my kids. They smile at my kids and say nice things about them; like, "They're so cute." "Your kids are so adorable; they're gorgeous." As a mom, I feel respected and full of self-esteem. I feel it's a personal habit for Americans to respect women. It's also an inherent part of their culture. (Xixi, 11/12/2009, p. 40)

Xixi felt proud and respected as a woman with children in the US. She attributed the female-friendly environment in the US to individual American traits and to the US culture as a whole. Setting up her experience in the US as a reference, she described what she went through in China.

In China, things are dramatically different. I feel like a country hick going with trepidation into a big city. Those who I pass by look so impatient with me, maybe because my kids and I walk too slowly or my kids are too loud. The occasional kind greetings I get are from fellow moms with kids.

In China, here's what I saw: Strong, healthy men compete with women and children for empty seats on the bus; indifferent men in the crowded subway refuse to give up seats to pregnant women or moms holding kids. Once, on the train, a young mom with a kid was trying to reach for her luggage in the overhead compartment. Sitting near her was a group of neat-looking men playing cards in a circle. No one stood up to help the mom who had difficulty reaching for her luggage. No one even asked whether she needed help. Rather, it was another WOMAN [emphasis hers] nearby who couldn't stand the indifferent men and helped her get the luggage.

Such is China. Growing up in such an environment, men are so blind to women. More precisely, they only pay attention to young and sexy women. Women in their 30s and 40s, or older are no longer beautiful in men's eyes. Even worse, women over 30 are looked down upon as trash or would-be trash. Oftentimes Chinese men think that old women block their views of the young and the beautiful.

You know, I'm not sure whether you've noticed Chinese online forums or chat rooms. The number of complaints from women is overwhelming—on the Internet, radio shows, on TV, and in newspapers and magazines. It's just unbelievable. Despite the government's claim to protect the rights of women and children, regardless of the women's organizations claiming to safeguard women's rights, like

All-China Women's Federation, women as a group are still vulnerable at home and are discriminated against in society. (Xixi, 11/12/2009, p. 41)

Xixi's account of her experience as a woman in China was demoralizing, yet revealing on at least two aspects. First, it disclosed her shifting positionality and its associated social status in China and in the US. In her description of a country-hick experience as an intimidated woman in her home country China, she implied her denigration of rural China where she was part of the dominant urban cohort belittling people from the countryside. Yet, as a privileged urban person, her gendered identity as a woman made her feel intimidated in her home country that she deemed hostile to women. In the US where her dominant status no longer existed and she became a member of the racial and cultural minority, rather than feeling intimidated or marginalized as a country-hick, she felt taken care of as a woman and a minority, largely due to her perception of the American cultural tendency to care for women.

Second, Xixi's account of her experience with gender in China communicated to me her pointed critique and sharp analysis of patriarchal structures in China. Xixi specifically indicated that China's problem was largely caused by men who grew up indifferent to women's needs and interests. She also hinted that the problem lay not only in individual people, but in society and the social system that indoctrinated everyone to follow its implicit rules. Situating gender-based discrimination in China within individual men and the system, Xixi further analyzed how girls and women in China tended to contribute to their own vulnerable situations. Xixi explained,

So, what happens in China nowadays is that women try to take advantage of their

youth and beauty at an early age. They get married or establish their careers at an

early age. Otherwise, they would be labeled as "on sale." On one side of a crammed

street is a throng of beautiful women with revealing clothes displaying their figures.

On the other side is a cluster of rich men gazing enjoyably at the spectacular view of

women. China looks like a huge market that does business in human bodies. As long

as there are buyers, there are sellers. As long as there are sellers, there are buyers—

equally greedy. What's visible or invisible—age, beauty, body, power, wealth,

status—all are commodities that can be purchased and sold. Women can ask for a

better price only when they're still young; definitely not when they start to age.

(Xixi, 11/12/2009, p. 41)

The above comments presented a picture of women posing for men's attention and

pleasure in China: younger-looking girls taking advantage of their youth and beauty to

marry themselves off to their potential buyers on the Chinese market that exchanges

human bodies for pleasure and power. Xixi believed that women in China became

socialized to utilize their youth and beauty while men were the driving force behind

women's behaviors. Critical of China's reality that stranded both men and women, Xixi used

business language to describe what she saw as a market-driven China where everything

was reduced to its market value, including beauty, body, and social status.

Xixi's language about the market value may not be as figurative as we might assume.

Upon marriage, parents of the bride in China receive dowry, primarily in the form of

money, from the parents of the groom. An old Chinese saying compares married women as

spilled water, meaning that the woman exits her family to become an added member of her husband's family in a similar way as buying and paying for a piece of property. As a single woman ages, her market value (largely the money a man's family would pay to "purchase" her) decreases and her parents would receive less and less with each passing year.

Xixi continued with her perception of the commodification of women in a market-driven China where patriarchy co-existed with capitalism. Her comment conveyed a sense of fatalism about change.

> Deeply rooted in Chinese people's minds is the idea that 30-year-old women are bargains and 40-year-old women are already junk. Starting as early as their late 20s, single women are already "unattractive." Those married women who get married young to well-established husbands are no better off than single women, because their husbands are likely to fall into the seductive traps of younger-looking women. Reality is cruel and prospects are dim. As Chinese women, the destiny to turn into junk is inevitable. (Xixi, 11/12/2009, p. 45)

Xixi's comment revealed her perspective on age-based discrimination against women in China that had become so pervasive that women's market value started to drop as early as their late 20s. She also hinted that women competed with each other to take advantage of their beauty and thus participated in shaping and perpetuating the leftover woman discourse. What was also revealing was that she believed that if a woman got married early, her husband would treat her badly; if she married late, she could not find a high quality mate. Yet, she felt resigned to this dichotomy because it was the rule of the game.

In response to my question "What's it like to be a woman in the US?" Xixi stated,

I've never been to other countries besides China and the US. In the US, as long as

you're a woman, men open doors for you and make things easy for you; old or

young, it makes no difference. It doesn't matter what the color of your skin is—

blondes or yellow skin with black hair. It doesn't matter what size you are—skinny

or big. It doesn't matter where you're from—England or Uganda. As long as you're a

woman, men are always there to open and hold doors for you. It just feels so good

when you see a gentleman signaling, "Ladies first." Don't think I'm a vain woman,

but it just makes me happy. I think I understand why Chinese women have a

stronger preference to remain in the US than Chinese men do [after completing

graduate school]. Here, in the US I can feel the heart-felt care and respect for

women. For example, in the movie *Titanic*, all women and children went first into

the lifeboats; they were the priorities over men. The recent case of the forced

landing of the US Air flight on the Hudson River proved once more that women and

kids are prioritized over men. (Xixi, 11/12/2009, p. 41)

In sharp contrast with Xixi's insightful critique of the patriarchal norms in the

Chinese society, Xixi's account of her experience with gender in the US forcefully delivered

her perception of the US as a race-blind society accommodating for women of all ages,

sizes, or nationalities. Xixi presented herself as a reliable communicator through citing

multiple sources to validate her perception. Xixi started with the favorable treatment she

received in the US and attributed Americans' respect for women to their personal and

cultural values.

To further illustrate how American society valued women, Xixi cited such cultural rituals as ladies first and men opening doors for women as examples of feminism that represented equality between men and women, while in the US context these rituals were oftentimes associated with male power and privilege and were used as opposites of feminism (Frye, 1983). Xixi also referenced such artistic representations like the Hollywood movie *Titanic,* as well as real life emergencies like the Hudson River landing of the US Air Flight to further substantiate her perception of an equal American society where she experienced "the heart-felt care and respect for women" (Xixi, 11/12/2009, p. 41).

As indicated in the above quotation, what shaped Xixi's romanticized perception of an equitable American society where skin color did not matter included Xixi's daily experience, or lack thereof, with the social realities in the US, US media's representations of women's situations, as well as Xixi's limited yet increasing familiarity with gendered relations in the US as a result of her newly adopted foreign and minority status. Regardless, her life as a woman and mother in the US was much easier and much better than her life in China where she felt "like a country hick going with trepidation into a big city" (Xixi, 11/12/2009, p. 41).

Demoralized by the discriminatory Chinese society and informed by practices she perceived to be women-friendly in the US, Xixi proposed self-help tactics to combat the cruel reality and dim prospect for Chinese women like her.

Don't get discouraged. Don't get upset. There're billions of us who are still living a life like fighters. Fighting the fight may not be worthwhile, but at least we can live a decent life. Even though we're junk, we're useful junk and we'll shine. No matter

how much money we spend on plastic surgeries to tighten up our bodies, our bodies won't be as tight as young girls'. No matter how hard we try to tone up our skin, our skin won't be as delicate as young girls'. No matter how much effort we put forth to get our bodies in shape, they won't be as well-proportioned as young girls'. It's futile. The time and effort we spend in beauty salons, on clothes, hair and body, could have been better spent on our family and kids. Taking care of our family and kids takes precedence over beautifying ourselves to measure up to younger-looking women. Sleep well. Dream well. Read widely. Listen to music. Build up the peace of mind. That's all that it takes to make us look beautiful.

It's really no one's fault. Our society is like this. Even our parents think that women should be the ones serving the family, taking care of husbands and kids, prioritizing their interests over ours. How can we expect others to think differently and take women seriously? We're not God, anyway. So it's okay if no one worships us. As long as I have my kids who think that I'm beautiful, it's all worthwhile. (Xixi, 11/12/2009, pp. 42-43)

Cynicism, resignation, and contradiction marked Xixi's reference to the leftover woman discourse originated in China but still powerful in the US. She expressed her cynicism by mocking herself as a piece of junk, devalued by the society but valuable to her family. She would like to be a piece of useful junk by fulfilling her obligations as a mother and wife to her family. Her family in the US with her husband and children was an empowering source, to which she turned to seek peace of mind and strength.

Not personally invested in how Chinese society treated women, Xixi still felt the powerful impact of the leftover woman discourse on both men and women who got caught up in the system. Consequently, she stopped her attempts to pinpoint the specific culprits of a patriarchal China by resigning to the patriarchal nature of China. Taking an individualistic and fatalistic approach seemed to be easy for her in an effort to reduce the potential debilitating impact of Chinese patriarchy on her and her family. To Xixi, living in the US with her husband and children was a deliberate choice to effectively defy the power of Chinese patriarchy and its embodiment of the leftover woman discourse in China.

Missing from Xixi's multiple accounts of the leftover woman discourse was her own participation in perpetuating the discourse through conforming to a traditionally prescribed track for women. As a married woman raising children in the US, the leftover woman discourse did not directly speak to her. Yet, she demonstrated her understandings of the ubiquity of the discourse that subjected both men and women, single or married. By choosing to conform to gendered social norms, she reaped the benefits of not being labeled as leftover through securing a marriage and performing as a caretaker to her family. Her multiple-layered accounts of her negotiation with Chinese patriarchal legacies and their specific manifestation of the leftover woman discourse worked for her in that they enabled her to reconcile her internal emotional needs to be treated equally and the external discriminatory realities in China.

Summary

The proceeding section is about how the leftover woman discourse as one distinctive representation of Chinese patriarchal legacies played out in my informants' lives

through the lens of two married Chinese women. Chen and Xixi's comparative accounts of

their experiences with gender in China and in the US offered us a peek into the power of the

leftover woman discourse that not only impacted single Chinese women of a marriageable

age, but also married women and everyone else who were caught up in the Chinese society

and played along. For my informants who were married, conforming to traditional gender

norms functioned as an effective strategy to minimize the discourse's debilitating affect on

their lives. Though the leftover woman discourse did not speak directly to them, it shaped

and animated their pointed critiques against it, as well as their choices to subscribe to the

established patriarchal norms, which in turn constituted and perpetuated the discourse.

Conclusion

In an effort to address how my research participants experienced gender in the US

in relation to how they experienced gender in China, this chapter focused on their

negotiations with one distinctive representation of Chinese patriarchal legacies—the

leftover woman discourse. I identified the multiple ways that the discourse with its various

manifestations unfolded, got constructed and contested in my participants' daily lives.

Heteronormativity (Warner, 1991) was embedded both in the leftover woman discourse

and my participants' nuanced negotiating strategies with the discourse.

As their narratives indicated, Chinese women in my study negotiated the pervasive

leftover woman discourse in a variety of ways, which were marked by pain and anguish, as

well as wisdom and sophistication. First, some resisted the discourse by the very fact that

they were single at a marriageable age and pursuing advanced degrees in the US, despite

the overwhelming pressure from their family and relatives in China to abide by reified

gender norms. Gender was a salient identity marker to my informants as evidenced in their varied accounts of their experiences with the leftover woman discourse that originated in China and continued to shape and constitute their lives in the US.

Second, for many of my participants, living in the US seemed to have offered a liberating strategy to distance them from the regulating and debilitating leftover woman discourse and its many mutually reinforcing manifestations in China. They perceived that their national and cultural identity as Chinese provided them with more choices for relationships and life partners in the US where their Chineseness became a primary marker of identification, as opposed to being female in the Chinese society where gender was more visible. Physically away from China, my participants perceived that women were not regulated in the same way in the US as they were in China, even though the leftover woman discourse still spoke to them through its multiple intertwined constituents, such as family members, friends, and social norms.

Third, many of my informants employed another distancing strategy to navigate their lives through the leftover woman discourse by subscribing to patriarchal gender norms through getting married and engaging in femininity-affirming practices such as applying make-up, which in turn constituted and reinscribed the discourse. Gender conformity was a less painful strategy to defy the power of the leftover woman discourse, but the effect could be tentative in that these women's lives still depended on their husbands who might leave for younger-looking women in the patriarchal Chinese society.

Other strategies to negotiate the leftover woman discourse included self-mockery about the decreasing market value of women, switching conversation subjects, as well as

resorting to self-help tactics, such as building a peace of mind, sleeping well, and reading

widely. Through the multiple strategies that my informants utilized to navigate through the

leftover woman discourse, Chinese women in my study presented themselves as both

compliant with and resistant against the discourse that conditioned their lives and was

constituted and contested by their maneuvering endeavors and negotiating strategies.

CHAPTER SIX: NEGOTIATING THE GOOD WOMAN DISCOURSE

Focusing on another representation of patriarchal legacies in China—the good woman discourse, this chapter continues the discussion on how my participants experienced gender in the US in relation to how they experienced gender in China. Shifting geographical and social contexts have, in many ways, shaped my informants' understandings and enactments of the notion of "a good Chinese woman." As illustrated in the Introduction Chapter, the good Chinese woman discourse itself has reflected China's evolving social realities over the past decades (Zhao & Zhang, 1996). Some aspects of the good woman discourse have modified, but others have remained the same. For example, an old Chinese saying defines a virtuous woman as a woman who lacks talent. Nowadays, many urban Chinese women choose to get higher education or even advanced degrees in order to be strong candidates on the increasingly competitive job market. In some remote rural areas in China, the old saying is still alive and daughters are still considered property to sell to their future husbands' families. Despite the changes, motherhood and femininity, to a great extent, still define what a good Chinese woman is.

Growing up in China—a country that has long been dominated by patriarchal norms, my research participants were socialized to live up to the good woman precepts represented by the three obediences and four virtues (Zhao & Zhang, 1996), though their academic and professional accomplishments oftentimes ran counter to those admonitions. On the one hand, they desired to be good women complying with the pervasive and powerful discourse that dictated gender roles and expectations. On the other hand, they strove to succeed as graduate students and as future scientists, professionals, and

businesswomen. The different social locations that they each occupied in China may have facilitated or hindered their pursuits of the two desires to various extents, but making these seemingly incompatible desires co-existent demanded a series of complex negotiations involving both compliance and resistance.

In this chapter, I intend to explore the concept of "a good woman" in relation to Chinese patriarchy and its different representations and ramifications in the daily lives of Chinese women attending US graduate schools. In accounting for their experiences with the good woman discourse, the Chinese women in my study developed and employed similar narrative strategies and that is the focus of the current chapter. The use of narrative strategies allowed my participants to recount their experiences in sophisticated ways not only to help them make sense of their experiences, but also to reconcile the competing demands of the good woman discourse and personal and professional excellence. The narrative work they did was central to the (re)construction of their subjectivity as gendered Chinese, which was manifested in their respective narratives. Looking at the range of ways of using narrative strategies is a tool for me to understand how my research participants sorted through their complex experiences navigating the good woman discourse as well as how they lived and learned among the complexities. I divide the chapter by the multiple ways that my research participants utilized narrative strategies to account for their experiences.

Self-claimed Good Woman: Paying Rhetorical Homage to Others While Minimizing Herself

Xia, a graduate student in Spring University's Engineering program at the time of the interview and a current financial analyst on Wall Street, defined herself as subscribing to the traditional discourse of a good woman. She claimed that she was always known as a good girl, who followed her father's lead in her life and later her husband's. Yet, Xia's educational choices and career trajectories were anything but traditional or conformist. Rather, her life path exemplified the transformation from the object of patriarchal domination to a subject of action. Xia used ways of being seen as a follower to account for her own advancement and her compliance with femininity required in a good woman, so that she did not come off as aggressive or threatening. Presenting herself as a good woman, she used this way of talking to reconcile both obedience and independence, which enabled her to advance herself and to maintain a family and a career.

Born and raised in a single-child military family, Xia completed her bachelor's and master's degrees in engineering at a prestigious university in China. Upon graduation, Xia married her college classmate, Gangxiao. Before Gangxiao came to the US for graduate school, both Gangxiao and Xia landed high-paying jobs in China as computer engineers. Five months into Gangxiao's graduate school in the US, Xia followed him to the US "as a dependent" (Xia, 10/29/2005, p. 3).

> I was his dependent for nearly half a year, cooking, cleaning, taking care of him and getting used to the surroundings… I applied to graduate school at Spring University and got admitted to the PhD program in electrical engineering. Now here I am. It's

only the beginning of our journey, and I don't know whether I can survive it or not

[with my pregnancy]. (Xia, 10/29/2005, pp. 3-4)

During the first six months in the US, Xia was on an F-2 visa, dependent on her

husband's F-1 student visa. The US Immigration Laws prohibit F-2 visa holders from

seeking employment or education while in the US, thus Xia, as she described in the

beginning of her statement, was doing housekeeping work while her husband went to

school. At the time of our interview, she had just found out that she was pregnant, in the

middle of her first semester in the PhD program in electrical engineering.

During our interview, Xia centered her narratives on two male figures in her life: her

father and her husband. Xia started with the central role of her father in her life growing up

as the only child in a military family in China. Then she switched the narrative focus from

her father to the role of her husband in her married life as a wife and expectant mother.

Though the focus of her narratives switched from one person to another, her narrative

followed a similar pattern. That is, she accounted for her accomplishments in a way that

minimized her own effort and agency while highlighting the importance of other people in

her life: I am insignificant while other people are so important.

A good daughter: Following dad's lead

Below was Xia's initial endeavor to attribute her accomplishments to her parents,

her father in particular, and to reduce herself to a mere follower. In response to my self-

introduction request, Xia began with her parents' stories. Xia presented to me that women

usually followed men's lead in order to maintain the stability and advancement of the

family. She structured her narratives around the importance of her father in the lives of her and her mother.

> My family, a nuclear family with three people; just like your family. One characteristic that distinguishes my family is that we moved all over China—almost. Because of my Dad's work, he is a test pilot in the Air Force and the work requires him to move every several years from one place to another, and my family moves together wherever he goes.

> My mom, you know, my dad's work demanded constant compulsory change of work sites. One family member has to move, and in order to sustain the family, other members have to make a compromise. My mom first worked in a textile mill, and as my dad's dependent, she was assigned certain job by the national Air Force at the place where my dad worked. She followed my dad all the way. For example, while my dad worked to test flights in Shangxi Province, my mom worked in a local factory producing transportation aircraft for civil use.

> You know, in China, the factory is affiliated with the national Air Force that assigns its soldiers to test locally produced aircrafts. In the factory, my mom was asked to take care of the Workers' Recreation Center, clean the Center, attend to the books, exercise and recreational equipment, as well as serve workers. Not serious work. The Army simply assigned her to any vacancy not requiring special training or skills. Then my dad went to Hainan, and my mom decided to retire, in her forties, because it's hard for the Air Force to look for any suitable work for her as she got older. Since

retirement, she has been a stay-at-home wife and mom taking good care of my dad and me. (Xia, 10/29/2005, p. 5)

Xia conceptually characterized the specific feature of her family: "a nuclear family" with her father in the military and her mother as a care-taker. She also provided me with the historical and social contexts to better understand the mobile nature of her family. She situated her family status within the social reality in China that valued man's work as "serious" and rendered woman's work as "not serious." She continued to contextualize her mother's life.

My mom's hometown is in Hebei Province and her mom was a senior leader during the Red Army period[26]. By then, my mom's family was an influential family (meaning upper-middle class, high social status) and the family could only let her marry a man who shared similar high social status. You know, people thought army men are good, with stable jobs and secure welfares from the State, decent salary as well. Girls are lucky if they could find an army man to marry. But my mom's family wasn't quite satisfied with her relationship with my dad, because they thought my dad was from a humble family, in the poor countryside, with 8 children. My dad is the oldest child in his family who is supposed to shoulder the responsibility to look after his parents and younger siblings. So my mom's family thought he wouldn't be able to take great care of my mom and they wouldn't live a happy life. The only thing good about my dad is that he is from the Army. But my mom was so determined to be with my dad despite her family's objection; no matter what! And later they got

[26] The Red Army, also known as Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army, or the Chinese Red Army, was a group army under the command of the Communist Party of China, during the first half of the 1900s.

married and moved to Hubei Province where my dad still served the Army and my mom worked in a textile factory. (Xia, 10/29/2005, p. 5)

Xia laid out her parents' respective family origins: her mother was from a privileged family and her father was from a humble background but working in the military had transformed him to an elite social status. She presented her mother as an independent woman pursuing true love despite parental objections, and her father as a responsible man, looking out for his family and siblings.

> While working in the textile factory, my mom thought she had a talent doing business. You know, in the 70s in China, people still preferred working for State-owned enterprises to doing business on their own. But my mom was an exception. The factory she worked for asked for employees' help to sell cloth to the public, because the factory experienced difficulty selling out what it produced and had to mobilize its workers to use their social connections to do business for the factory. My mom rented a small kiosk at the market and sold cloth and other textiles. She did pretty well, actually. Her business was prosperous for several years.

> It was in the mid-80s. And then my dad had to move to another place and my mom had to give up her business to move with my dad. They used to live in a town, a small city actually. But the new place was in the remote countryside with many, many migrant workers. You know, the Army sets up their military factories and testing centers usually in remote, hidden areas, and hires migrant workers instead of locals to do the testing and manufacturing of military products. My mom's new job was working for a Service Center for Seniors in the Amy. Her responsibilities

included cleaning, keeping books and magazines in order, and other maintenance work.

Then later my dad ended his military service and was sent to work in an airline company in Northeast China and then he moved to Southern China because the Airliner established a new site there. That was in my high school years and my mom was in her forties. (Xia, 10/29/2005, pp. 5-6)

Focusing on her mother's complementary job in the military, Xia highlighted her mother's talent as a business woman. Though secondary to her father's real job, the job her mother did was anything but secondary, in the sense of her mother's achievement. Despite the talent as a successful businesswoman, Xia's mother had to give up her business to follow her husband in order to maintain the integrity of the family. Xia further explained the rationale behind her parents' choices and the impact on her.

My dad changed his worksite very often and the whole family moved with him. To maintain the entirety of the family, we had to do that. But I don't think women must follow men. However, in the specific case of my family, my dad's work is much more important in terms of having a bright future and making more contributions to the family. He's the key figure in the family. But, wait, it's hard to tell. I mean, if my mom didn't stop doing the textile business in order to accompany my dad, she might have become a more successful businesswoman. Who knows? But there're no what-ifs here.

Anyway, my dad was serving in the Army and we moved with him whenever needed. It's not a big deal; I mean who follows whom. I remember my dad told me

when I was about to marry Gangxiao. My dad said something like this: for a couple

one has to be ready to make some compromise to avoid family separation; when the

critical moment comes, especially for a girl, she shouldn't feel bad if she has to

compromise for the family so that the family can stay together. (Xia, 10/29/2005, p.

6)

Xia presented an obvious contradiction in her depiction of her parents' constant

relocations due to the military nature of her father's work. On the one hand, she did not

believe theoretically that women had to subject their interests to serve men. It all

depended on whose work was more important and who had a brighter future. On the other

hand, both Xia and her parents exemplified the importance of men's work and the

subordinary nature of women's work (Hochshild, 1989), through their strategic choices of

following their husbands around.

After introducing her family origin, Xia switched the topic from her parents to

herself growing up in the military family spearheaded by her father. Similar to her

depiction of her mother as her father's follower, she presented herself as a mere follower:

she was a good daughter by doing whatever was expected of her. Learning to play musical

instruments and to swim were some examples.

We lived in the Army [when I was young]. Musical instrument training classes were

offered for the Army men's children and my family expected me to learn something.

I didn't really enjoy it. My family saw I had nothing to do when I was little, and they

sent me to learn to play musical instruments. I was kind of forced.

As to drawing, that was out of my own self-interest. I love drawing and I was good at drawing. I was my drawing instructor's favorite in school. I didn't go out of my way to learn to draw. I just liked it. My drawings were shown in some exhibitions. That was during my junior or senior high. My school was a partner school with a school in Japan and students exchanged their drawings to express their friendship. I remembered I won some prize and I appeared on TV programs. That was my first time on TV!

Oh, swimming. I was forced to learn how to swim when I was young. My dad thought it was good for me and urged me to learn to swim. I was scared of my dad, a little bit. You know, he always looked like a military man. His military manner was scary. I didn't dare to cry. As a matter of fact, my dad didn't allow me to cry. He wanted me to be strong. It is not like here in the US, where girls are nurtured in the family like princesses. The more I cried, the more punishment I received. He warned me verbally, "if you cry any more, I'll beat you!" He was not always like that. He's a patient man, though. I think his military manner was due to his training in the Air Force. When he taught me how to swim, he showed patience in the beginning. As time went by, he lost his patience with me because I cried a lot and I was afraid of being in the swimming pool. My dad was fed up with me and just left me alone in the water. Strangely, I learned to swim myself.

My dad never allowed me to oversleep or get up late in the morning. I was never allowed to sleep in. My dad required me to go to bed early and get up early. He asked me to form good habits. I appreciate that. Even now, I get up early in the

morning and seldom sleep in. Unlike my husband who always stays up late at night

and gets up near lunchtime, I have a good and healthy habit. I think, for a kid, it's

good for him/her to form certain good habits at an early age, which benefits

him/her all life.

My back was slightly bent when I was young, not straight enough. I used to have my

head lowered all the time. My dad didn't like it and demanded that I stand against

the wall or lean against a tall pole so as to make my back straight and my head up.

(Xia, 10/29/2005, pp. 7-8)

Crucial to Xia's childhood experience was the role of her father. He demanded that

she learn to play musical instruments and have swimming lessons. Except for drawing

which Xia was intrinsically motivated to learn, she did not necessarily enjoy the activities

that her family encouraged her to do, but she did them anyway, and sought pleasure in

drawing. She presented herself as a mere conformist, yet she found ways to entertain

herself, though conforming to her parents' wishes. Rather than fretting about her strict

upbringing, she seemed to be appreciative of it and thankful of her father for helping her

with developing good life habits. She also credited her father for her outstanding

performance in math and science.

I've always been good at math, and I attribute my excellence in math to my dad. He

was strict with me and encouraged me to do extra work by myself. He emphasized

education a lot. I remember during summer holidays, he urged me to finish my

summer school assignments early on and then HE (emphasis hers) assigned me to

read his old school math books. My dad thinks math is indeed useful. He's a math

person himself and he wants me to excel in math too. There're only math or science books at my parents' home; no books on humanities or social sciences. (Xia, 10/29/2005, p. 9)

Xia's father saw the importance of math and science in his life and managed to make Xia see science as useful. Xia credited other people, her father this time, for her own excellence, while minimizing her own efforts to learn and thrive. Xia further explained to me the driving forces that made her father who he was and what made her who she was.

My dad is so independent. He's the oldest child in his family and he took good care of his younger siblings. He joined the Army at age 15 and he sent remittances back home every month. His family had nothing. My aunt—my dad's little sister—was arranged to get married in her childhood in order to lessen the economic burden of her own family, and she was raised in her husband's family as a girl-wife. My grandma, my dad's mom, was a girl-wife too, married to my grandpa as a kid and was brought up in his family instead of her own. I never saw my grandpa. He died before I was born. My grandma remained a poor widow with eight children. My dad's family is really poor and offered him nothing. He had to rely on himself, totally. He's the oldest in the family of eight kids and he tries his utmost to support the whole family. He believes in self-reliance. And also, he thinks one has to at least master a skill or have some expertise in order to make a living. In my family, he stresses science, especially math and physics, rather than liberal arts education, and that is why I'm good at science and poor in creative writing and critical thinking. (Xia, 10/29/2005, p. 10)

Xia's articulation followed a certain pattern. She usually summed up her story in a leading sentence in response to my questions or probes and then expanded from there by filling me in with more details. For example, she started off with the concept of "a nuclear family" (Xia, 10/29/2005, p. 5) and then explained the gendered divisions of labor in her family. The above statement offered another example of Xia's speech pattern. Following the overall statement that "My dad is so independent" (Xia, 10/29/2005, p. 10), she delineated the historical context that shaped her father's personality and temperament, especially his tough side.

> Oh, no matter what I do, I must... "Don't cry, don't act like a spoiled child, be strong, be organized." He never speaks to me softly. He seldom shows his gentleness. It's always like he issues orders in front of me. "You, do this, don't do that. Stop crying. Swim, keep going. I'll let you go and you keep swimming yourself. Don't stop. You this, and you that, blablabla..." I feel this is him, not friendly, sometimes even ferocious, but that's him and his way of showing love and care. His temper has been less hot these years. (Xia, 10/29/2005, pp. 9-10)

> My dad is rarely home and he makes business trips quite often [as a commercial airline pilot upon his military discharge]. I'm not as close to my dad as I am to my mom. When I was young, I saw my dad maybe once a week and not much communication passed between my dad and me. As I later on grew up, things haven't changed much and I still don't feel emotionally close to him. He's always busy with work. (Xia, 10/29/2005, p. 10)

Xia constructed her father as an emotionless, impatient, yet influential person in her life, who showed his love and care to his family through his unfriendliness and ferocity. The explicit contradiction of being emotionless and loving in Xia's presentation of her father seemed to be unproblematic to Xia. She attributed the way her father was to his growing-up experience as the oldest child obligated to take care of his entire family. Compared to the represented masculine image of her father, Xia pictured her mother with a much softer tone.

> My mom and I [while I'm in the US] talk a lot over the phone about cooking, meals, her own life, her real estate business, buying, renting, and selling houses, making decorations, and etc. She also urged me to get pregnant and she wants me to have many kids since I'm here in the US and China doesn't permit us to have more than one child. At least three, my mom prefers. One will stay with her, one will go to my husband's parents, and one will live with my husband and me. My mom was so overjoyed to know that I'm pregnant and she's planning to fly over to the US to take care of me and my baby next year, and then take the baby with her back to China, as our current situation won't allow us to raise the kid by ourselves. I'm a student and my husband will get a job, hopefully. Besides, it's cheaper to raise a kid in China than it is here, and it's more convenient for them to raise the child because they have time and resources. (Xia, 10/29/2005, p. 10)

As opposed to the masculine representation of her father (self-reliant and emotionless), Xia represented her mother as the embodiment of traditional femininity. In Xia's eyes, what career meant to her father was equivalent to what home and cooking

meant to her mother. Her depictions of her parents were strictly along the binary constructions of masculinity and femininity, while her own educational endeavors, together with her career and life trajectories, seemed to have revealed a well-integrated combination of both masculine and feminine traits as respectively demonstrated in her parents. Yet, Xia minimized her own efforts and attributed her achievements to her parents and her husband, as illustrated in the next section.

A good wife: Following her husband

Presenting herself as a good daughter enabled Xia to achieve both obedience and pleasure while growing up with her parents. Similarly, presenting herself as a good wife also enabled her to accomplish both compliance and individual success, which in turn enabled her to maintain a family and a career. Echoing her presentation of her mother as a follower of her father, Xia presented herself as a follower of her husband. She used ways of being seen as a follower to account for her academic and professional accomplishments, as well as to preserve the cohesion of the family as a married woman. She followed her father's advice that for the stability of the family one member had to compromise. Not only did Xia compromise in order to keep her own family together, she also credited her husband for her choices and subsequent achievements, similar to how she credited her father while diminishing her efforts and struggles.

Xia came to the US as her husband's dependent on an F-2 visa. She wanted to go to graduate school within driving distance from her husband who was then a doctoral student in the engineering school. Implied in this plan was her desire to be a good wife to accompany her husband while pursing her academic interest. She also had an alternative

plan, which was to raise a baby. In case the first plan of attending graduate school fell

through, she would have the option to be a good mother. Xia's plans centered on the

demands inherent in the good Chinese woman discourse. She applied to nearby schools

and worked on getting pregnant while adjusting to a new life in the US. Six months after her

arrival in the US, she got accepted on a University Fellowship into the same program that

her husband attended.

A year later, while the couple was still working on their PhDs, Xia gave birth to a

baby boy and Gangxiao landed a job in a metropolitan city five hours' away from Xia.

Gangxiao earned a master's degree as partial completion of the PhD program and jumped

at the job in the IT industry. He moved to the city, leaving Xia and a new-born baby behind.

For Xia, taking care of a new-born alone while working on her PhD was not easy. Even

though her husband planned on driving back every other weekend to visit, it was still tough

for Xia as a first-time mother and PhD student. None of the difficulties were unanticipated.

They had already made accommodations to effectively address their difficulties. Xia

delivered the baby right after her summer break started, so she did not have to skip school.

Xia's mother travelled from China to stay with Xia and to take care of the new-born. In Xia's

words, "everything unfolded as planned" (Xia, 10/29/2005, p. 11).

Life seemed to be uneventful as Gangxiao worked in the IT section of the finance

industry and Xia worked on her PhD while looking after her son in a place five hours' away

from her husband. Xia's mother stayed with Xia and her son for almost six months and then

took the baby back to China so that Xia could focus on her PhD. It may not sound sensible to

American ears, but as I stated in Chapter One, the practice of grandparents raising

grandchildren is very common in China, and Xia was simply complying with the societal norm by staying close to her husband while pursing academic advancement.

While working alone on her PhD away from her husband and son, Xia started to look for possibilities to move closer to her husband's urban environment and to get a degree leading to a high-paying job on Wall Street. She applied to a few master's programs in the field of financial engineering and she got accepted into a top-notch university geographically closer to her husband. Xia then quit the fully-funded PhD program and transferred to the self-financed master's program. After one and a half years of hard work, Xia completed her master's degree and not surprisingly landed a job as a financial analyst on Wall Street. Reflecting on her decision to quit her PhD fellowship and to self-fund her master's program, Xia in later phone conversations with me shared that her husband encouraged her to receive a degree that she was instructed was worth massive career dollar benefits. Xia explained,

> I wasn't a big fan of research anyway. I'm glad I did it [what Gangxiao suggested regarding transferring to a Master's program] and I'm happy with where I am at now. The family's together and we're financially secure. What we have now is pretty much a result of my husband's vision for life. (Xia, phone interview, 10/10/2007)

Similar to how she credited her father for her academic success and healthy life habits, Xia credited her entrepreneur-spirited husband for his vision and guidance while downplaying her own efforts and contributions to the stability and prosperity of her own family. In response to my question of her role in the family, she immediately said: "a docile wife" (Xia, 10/29/2005, p. 22). Xia further explained,

My family is very democratic. We have a division of labor. My husband has the final

say on big issues and I decide on small issues such as what to cook and eat. I usually

cook and he washes the dishes. Since my pregnancy, he has taken over almost all the

housework. I'm the key person in my family to be well protected. I trust my

husband. He's thoughtful. He has taste and good judgment. I rely on him to make

important decisions for our family.

For example, coming to the US for graduate school, he made that decision and I

followed him. You know, we just bought a new SUV and it was his decision as well.

At first I thought it was a little expensive and we might want to buy a used car. But

in the long run, concerning safety issues, maintenance trouble with a second-hand

car, our parents' visit of us, the newborn baby, etc. I think he's right in getting an

entirely new SUV, though expensive.

He is a good husband. When we go shopping for clothes, I usually ask for his advice

how something fits me or whether to buy it or not. He's the only one I consult and I

care about his views. If I really like something, I'll purchase it. But if I'm not sure, I

usually ask him to make the decision for me. You know, when I wear something

new, he's my first audience, and almost the only one. We go to school together and

go home together. Oh, taking care of our parents, they actually don't need us

currently. It's they who worry about us. So, that's not a concern for us. Anyway, I feel

pretty much satisfied with my family life. (Xia, 10/29/2005, pp. 22-23)

Xia presented to me that following the man's lead was crucial to the maintenance of

a democratic family. Following the same logic pattern as in her previous accounts of her

parents, Xia began with an overarching characteristic of her family—"democratic," and then attempted to help me understand what she meant with specific examples. Though democratic, there was still the distinction between big and small issues in her family. Her husband was in charge of big things such as studying in the US and purchasing a new vehicle, thus was the decision-maker in the family. She got to decide on such small things as household chores that were traditionally labeled as caretakers' work (Hochshild, 1989). The examples she cited corresponded with the traditionally gendered division of labor within a household (Hochshild, 1989). The examples also contradicted what democracy meant. Implied in her examples was an unequal distribution of power in her family she described as "democratic," where gender roles got portrayed and reinforced in the way that normalized masculinity as residing in men and femininity in women. She voluntarily adopted the role of "a docile wife" and positioned her visionary husband as head of the household. In doing so, Xia was able to accomplish both compliance and success, and to secure both family and career.

Xia appeared content to embrace the patriarchal structure at her home and her parents' home. She defined her husband as "good" (Xia, 10/29/2005, p. 23) who assisted her with decision-making. Central to her life as a child and now as an adult was the role of male family members whose opinions she valued and followed. When she was describing the scene of her shopping for clothes together with her husband, she was full of appreciation for her husband's companionship and input. She used the world "audience" (Xia, 10/29/2005, p. 23) to describe her husband and her implied intent to please the "audience" came across vividly. Rather than feeling objectified or regulated by the male

audience as represented by her husband (Mulvey, 2003), Xia chose to utilize the audience to work for her, as well as to please the audience.

Through positioning her husband as her audience and subjecting herself to his opinions, Xia came across as a follower. But as demonstrated in the following examples, she presented herself as more than a follower; she was able to formulate her own thoughts and ideas, on things that did not matter much to her family's stability and wellbeing though. She made the following remarks when commenting on college students on her campus.

Their [American undergraduate students] dresses are funny. Most girls prefer to wear low-cut jeans, showing their stomach or butt almost. People feel too confident about their physical figures. No matter what they look like, I mean their physical figure, people like to wear tight clothes, showing several layers of fat around the stomach, like a muffin top. I admire their confidence and courage. They just wear whatever they like. They usually dress casually. In the summer, you know, girls like to wear quite revealing clothes. I don't feel that's something. It's just natural [for them]. I accept what they wear, but I won't choose clothes of their style.

My own clothes are not too tight, not revealing at all. Comfort is my primary concern. I have some fashion sense, but I'm not after fashion trends. I know I'm gonna get fatter and fatter with the growth of the baby in my belly. I was told I probably would gain 10 pounds of weight after the delivery of the baby. But I have confidence to lose the weight. I don't like to be overweight. In order to keep fit, I will exercise a lot and pay attention to my diet. I don't mind putting on more weight

now, since it's natural for a pregnant woman to gain weight. I just hope I won't feel

too uncomfortable. (Xia, 10/29/2005, pp. 21-22)

Through observing clothing features of other people, Xia presented herself as more

than a follower. She was capable of projecting her own judgments upon her surroundings.

Her above comments not only indicated her informed choices of what to wear and not to

wear, but also revealed an internalized regulating reference that shaped her clothing

choices and her observations of the clothing choices that American female students made.

She desired to be physically fit and pretty, to dress appropriately and conservatively, as

well as to possess the femininity-affirming features associated with her perceptions of a

good Chinese woman.

Claiming herself to be docile, a compliant follower desirous of feminine features, Xia

paid rhetorical homage to her husband. She used being seen as a follower to fulfill her

compliance with femininity and the expectations of a good married woman, without

surrendering her intelligence or independence. Portraying herself as relying on her

husband was rewarding to her in that she was able to reconcile the demands from both

family and career without coming across as threatening or aggressive.

A good student: Minority status and American diversity

Aside from leaderships and visions provided by her father and her husband in Xia's

representation of her life, Xia also attributed her excellence to her minority status as a

Chinese woman in the US society that highly values diversity. Xia's understanding of

diversity encompassed several aspects with regard to the representations of race, gender,

and disability. One example of her perceived diversity was the number of international

students in her academic program at Spring University where both race and gender became visible to her.

> Most of the students in the engineering program are from India and China. Well, what I know only applies to graduate school. I have no idea what it's like as undergraduates. Yes, the majority are foreign or international students. Few Americans. I remember on the first registration day, the majority of the students I met were Indians. Within my grade, I don't know anyone who's American. Almost half Indians and half Chinese. It's an engineering school, after all. Americans don't care about it, as far as I know. Fewer attend graduate schools. Indians, Chinese, other students from Asia, Turkey, North Korea. Um, most are Indians. In terms of gender, I would say, maybe men outnumber women. (Xia, 10/29/2005, p. 11)

It was not surprising to Xia that international students dominated engineering schools at the graduate level. While oftentimes she was stereotyped as a smart Asian student, she stereotyped those who stereotyped her as well. Her initial reason for the lack of American students at engineering schools at the graduate level was that "Americans don't care about it" (Xia, 10/29/2005, p. 11). Further, she explained,

> As I've said, Indians and Chinese [are the majority in my program]. Occasionally, rarely though, I meet students from other countries. Previously I thought American students didn't like math and the math education in the US is not good, because few people like it. People here do what interests them and what they like. They are not like us who have to do math, no matter whether we like it or not. I have several

American classmates in the math class who're doing well. I think they do what they

like and they're good at what they like. (Xia, 10/29/2005, p. 12)

Aside from indifference to math or sciences, according to Xia, another reason for the

shortage of American students in engineering schools was that interests factored into

American students' choices, and that was what set Chinese students apart from American

students. Xia presented Chinese students including herself as externally motivated by

parents or teachers while American students as self-motivated.

In addition to the overgeneralized interpretation of race or nationality as

manifested in her program, Xia also shared with me her acute observations and analyses

about gender representation, as part of her perception of American diversity.

You know what, my program cares about the gender thing and pays special

attention to female engineers. Once, I received two emails from the department, or

the university, inviting female students and faculty to a meeting to talk about

anything related to women. I don't care about it, so I didn't go. Maybe because

female engineers are the minority, compared with the majority male engineer

students and faculty. I didn't want to attend, anyway.

You know, there's an old Chinese saying. It goes like this, "the scarcer it is, the more

valuable it becomes." Women are the minorities in engineering schools, so we're

more valued, I guess, and I hope. I don't anticipate people to have lowered

expectations on me, simply because I'm a woman. I feel men and women, um, I don't

know. Let me think for a while. I don't know what to say. With respect to academic

achievements, I think men are better than women, generally. Probably, um, no. Or

the same? I don't know. Um, um, the same. I don't know. It's hard to tell. (Xia, 10/29/2005, p. 16)

Xia recognized the unequal number between females and males, faculty and students alike in her academic discipline. She also recognized the efforts her program put in to promote gender equality. She hoped for gender equality, yet she stayed aloof from her university-initiated efforts for gender equality. As she said, she simply did not care enough to partake. As she was marching proudly through her graduate career, she seemed to enjoy being female in a male-dominant field. She viewed her minority status as a plus to enable her to move forward as evidenced in the example below.

My husband told me that there's no female tenured faculty in his program, which is computer science, and he thinks the current female faculty member who's up for tenure is sure to get it, no matter how her research is. Indeed, there're fewer women engineers in this field.

Gangxiao said in the US people do things following the principle of diversity. There's no tenured female faculty in his program and there must be some. That's why he doesn't think the current female candidate would undergo any difficulty to get tenure. She'll definitely get it! Gangxiao strongly believes so. Not only because she's qualified—yes, she's qualified—but also because they need to have female faculty on tenure track to show the diverse faculty population. I also think even if she were a little weak in her scholarly qualifications, she would still be promoted to tenure, because she's needed. (Xia, 10/29/2005, p. 16)

Xia deemed her husband Gangxiao as a reliable source of information. Drawing from his views of diversity, Xia attached statistical significance with diversity. In her eyes, the equal number of males and females in academia meant the achievement of diversity (Turner, 2002; Turner & Myers, 2000). Not only that, she reduced diversity to tokenism which meant a tokenized representation of marginalized population (Turner, 2002; Turner & Myers, 2000). She further explained what diversity meant to her.

> Having diversity is absolutely better than not having diversity, whatsoever. You know, on campus, you can see various kinds of people. People with different skin colors, different dresses, people with disproportionably huge backpacks, cool guys, arrogant people, just all kinds, a mixture of everything. Have you ever met a short, stocky person—a dwarf—on campus? I was shocked when I first met him. How could he come to the university? Here's the diversity factor functioning in the American society. Everyone has opportunities. Even like the dwarf, he can attend the university. It won't surprise you to see anyone or anything you could never think of or imagine. In China, you would never witness such a phenomenal diversity. I mean people everywhere in China are the same, the same skin color, just the same. But here, things are so diverse. (Xia, 10/29/2005, p. 18)

In the above statement, Xia expanded her definition of diversity from the category of gender to the categories of race, body type, disability, disposition, and beyond, while remaining oblivious to diversity in her home country of China where she enjoyed her elite social status as a college-educated engineer from an upper-middle class upbringing. To Xia, what constituted diversity was a mere list of different categories. Xia was not alone in her

understanding of diversity, and the commonly-held myth of diversity might give female faculty at her university an edge in promotion and tenure. She cited one example to illustrate the advantage she felt as a minority woman in one of her classes full of men.

> This is my personal experience this semester, which is kind of funny. I have one course where I'm the only female student in the class. The male professor is extremely kind to me. He's always encouraging me, no matter how well I do in that class. I missed his class twice, due to prenatal checkups and I didn't tell the professor that I'm pregnant. He emailed me asking whether the work was too heavy for me, how I felt in his class. He also told me that I was welcome to go talk with him anytime. He treated me pretty well. I feel I'm special. (Xia, 10/29/2005, p. 17)

Xia enjoyed being the only woman in her class because she felt she received more favors and attention from her male peers and professors. That was also the reason why she felt more valued as a woman. She also connected being a woman with having more opportunities, as illustrated in her perception of the tenure-seeking female professor's experience, as well as her own academic and professional journey. She credited Americans' promotion of diversity for facilitating her advancement both personally and academically.

Summary

Always known as a good woman, Xia defined herself as subscribing to and speaking from the traditional discourse of a good Chinese woman. She presented herself as following the lead of her father and now her husband. In her narratives, she structured both her parents' family and her own family in the way that centered on the men's careers in the family. Her parents' family was a mirror of her own family and her husband was a mirror of

her father. Xia understood what she needed to advance her education and career goals. She made the rhetorical gestures that her father and husband were the driving force behind her achievements, though she accomplished both personally and professionally, as much as her father and her husband, if not more.

In Xia's narratives, she accounted for her achievement through her parents and her husband, in a way that removed her from any struggles or endeavors. She credited the US society for valuing diversity that supported minorities' advancements. She downplayed her agency in learning to swim and draw, studying electrical engineering and subsequent financial engineering, earning a bachelor's degree in China and a master's degree in the US, as well as landing a high-paying job on Wall Street. Paying rhetorical homage to her father, her husband, and the US society enabled her to reconcile both compliance and independence, the competing demands from both family and career. Though her academic and professional successes flied counter to the traditional expectations of a Chinese woman, she framed herself as a mere follower guided by her father and her husband, and a beneficiary of the US society that values diversity.

Enabling Power of Non-compliant Relationships to Reconcile Compliance and Independence

The second approach of developing a narrative strategy to navigate the good woman discourse involved two participants: Xiaoping and Li. Both of their narratives included endeavors to subvert certain aspects of the established discourse through seeking non-conforming relationships that subsequently offered them more benefits including achieving personal and academic success and better conforming to certain aspects of the

discourse. In Xiaoping's case, divorcing her Chinese husband and remarrying her Caucasian classmate made her a bad woman in her parents' eyes, yet she was able to acquire, through resisting certain demands of the good woman discourse, a happy family and a promising career without losing her freedom or happiness. Further, she was better able to fulfill the good daughter obligation than ever before. In Li's case, dating across racial lines jeopardized her relationship with her parents, but she managed to reconcile with her parents while maintaining her relationship. Both participants' narratives demonstrated that failure and success should not be seen as a dichotomy that exclude each other. Rather, failure to be a good woman resulting from non-conformity offered my informants many benefits including success in better conforming with certain aspects of the good woman discourse, such as performing filial duties as good daughters.

Xiaoping's divorce and remarriage

At the time of my first interview with Xiaoping, she was a doctoral student studying physics at Spring University and married in China to her first husband—a high-school classmate named Kang. Two years into her marriage, she came to the US alone for graduate studies while Kang worked in China. A year later after Xiaoping arrived in the US, her husband joined her as a spouse—her dependent on the F-2 visa. And this dependent status was a calamity that pulled the couple apart rather than, as most people expected, drawing them together.

Initially, Kang came to the US on an F-2 visa, dependent on Xiaoping's F-1 student visa, and both of them lived on Xiaoping's teaching assistantship stipend from her academic program. F-2 visa holders are F-1 visa holders' dependents and the US Immigration laws

prohibit F-2 visa holders from either attending school or seeking employment in the US. Later, Kang applied for graduate school and got admitted to the same university with a graduate assistantship. Thus, he was able to change his visa status from F-2—symbolizing dependent status, to F-1—meaning student visa and independence.

Most Chinese couples in the US graduate schools are in the science or engineering programs, where men arrive in the US first to start graduate school and later welcome their dependent wives to reunite with them. Different from this normative trend among the Chinese community, Xiaoping was the first in her family to come to the US and Kang followed Xiaoping as her dependent. For many Chinese students and their families, Xiaoping and Kang's journey to the US seemed to present Xiaoping as the head of the family and her husband as a tagalong. I brought this up during my initial interview with Xiaoping when she was still married with Kang. She shared some insights into her troubled life as a married woman.

> He [Kang] cares too much [about his F-2 status]! And that makes me uncomfortable. I'm uncomfortable not because of his F-2 dependent status; like, I'm the head of the family. I'm uncomfortable because it bothers him being an F-2! It's a taboo topic for him. He doesn't want anyone to know that he used to be an F-2. He doesn't like to mention anything about me in front of people. He doesn't introduce me to his friends. Neither does he take me to parties he attends. Maybe because if I were with him, people would naturally ask questions like, "Oh, your wife is here, what does she do? Does she study or stay at home?" He has to say, "She started Spring University one year earlier than me, and she is in the science program." Then, it's logical for people

to conclude that he was/is an F-2, which would shame him. He never takes me anywhere. I used to care, but not any more.

Well, he always thought he was better than an F-2. "I've changed to F-1 status," said he, "and I'm now an F-1 student." He doesn't want people to know that he used to be an F-2—my dependent, legally and financially, which he feels ashamed of, I guess.

I remember last Sunday evening he was invited to a party hosted by his classmates. I didn't feel well. I had a fever. I asked him whether he could stay at home with me. He didn't and I felt heartbroken. It was MY classmate [emphasis hers], the guy from Pakistan, who came to visit me and took care of me. I called the Pakistani guy telling him I didn't feel well and then he came. He also called the Health Center who recommended some medicine according to his description of my symptoms. Then, my classmate went out to a pharmacy and bought me the recommended medicine and some orange juice. Kang didn't come back home until early in the morning. I felt so dizzy that I didn't talk with him. Around 7 o'clock in the morning, his alarm clock buzzed and he got up. I felt annoyed, and I asked him what he was up to. He told me he was gonna attend a five-hour drivers course before he could take the road test. I said to him, "You are my only family here. I don't expect you to take good care of me, but now I feel very ill, why can't you stay home and accompany me for a while? You're not by my side and I feel bad." He responded, "It'd worsen your illness if you felt bad." Finally, he stayed and we chatted. He told me that his classmate who hosted the party last night didn't know that I was in the US with him. I felt strange and asked him why his classmate didn't know of my existence. You know, I had told Kang

before he left for the party that he should tell his friends about his wife's illness and then excuse himself from the party early. Kang told me he couldn't make up an excuse not to attend the party and so he had to be there. He also told me once when he was asked whether his wife was here with him, he didn't respond promptly and his silence was interpreted as his wife was far away in China and he was alone in the US. Kang didn't correct them at that time. That's why his friends didn't know that he had a wife here and he couldn't excuse himself by saying his wife was under the weather. The girlfriend of his classmate's brother gave him a ride back home that night and according to Kang, the girl said things like, "I can't imagine how hard it's to be alone here. Whenever you miss home or feel lonely, just give us a call." Kang told me that he had no way to correct people's misunderstanding that his wife was away in China, since almost everyone knows he was here alone. [She was chuckling bitterly!]

I don't know. Maybe the F-2 thing is so heavy on him that he wants to get rid of it completely. He doesn't need his wife to take him to the US or to grant him the F-2 status in order to stay in the US. I really don't know, and I could do nothing. (Xiaoping, 10/7/2005, pp. 20-21)

In the quotations above, Xiaoping opened up to me about what she perceived as a troubled relationship with her husband. She thought that Kang viewed the F-2 status as a shame because he perceived it as legal and financial dependence on her. Growing up in China, the couple was socialized into the heterosexual gendered norms of a dominant man and a submissive woman. Xiaoping offered her own analysis.

There's the sense of pride in any Chinese man. You know, Kang is no exception. They're from a culture that tells them they've got to be better than women. I know Kang was not ready to be treated as my dependent. In hindsight, I might have delayed my start of graduate school in the US, just to be with him and get him ready to go to the States together with me. In China, I was busy with putting my application materials together and I might have ignored him during that time. During my first year in the US, I was busy with adjusting and schoolwork, I might have neglected him. I guess I could have done less damage to my marriage. But who knows? It's all speculation. My life just can't be replayed.

Anyway, when he was left alone in China, he started to see other girls, pretending he was single and available. I've told you that he never let anyone know about my existence in the US. He's too proud to tell people that A WOMAN [emphasis hers] brought him over to the US, as opposed to coming over on his own efforts. He can't stand my excellence. He would have to prove that he's equally capable, if not more so. As soon as he got admitted to Spring University, he just couldn't wait for one more day to change his visa status from F-2 to F-1. He also got a GAship from his program. So, we waited till things settled down for him before kicking off the long and slow divorce process. (Xiaoping, 12/2/2005, p. 12)

A little fatalistic, Xiaoping positioned Kang as one of the many Chinese men who were by-products of the male-dominant Chinese culture. Rather than blaming Kang for cheating on her while they were geographically apart, she speculated whether or not she could have saved her marriage by better conforming to gendered roles in China. Full of self

blame, she exempted Kang from his conduct and treated the gendered discourse in China as unproblematic and even normative. What was implied in Xiaoping's speculation was a standard way to be a good wife—the weak wife followed the strong husband wherever he was, not the reverse. The way Xiaoping analyzed her troubled marriage presented her as a traditional Chinese woman who recognized and acted within the gendered boundaries. However, her later actions contradicted her words and challenged the gender norms that she clearly understood.

Xiaoping made it clear that Kang, as well as other Chinese men, "can't stand my [her] excellence" (Xiaoping, 12/2/2005, p. 12). Having waited for things to settle down for her husband, she came to the resolution to divorce Kang and started to date her Caucasian-American classmate who "knows how to respect a strong woman" (Xiaoping, 12/2/2005, p. 12). A year later, Xiaoping got remarried to this Caucasian man. Since then, her immigration status changed from F-1 student to permanent residence due to marriage, which consequently granted her more employment opportunities. Later, Xiaoping completed her PhD, landed a job and purchased her first house in the same city. At the time of this writing, she was a working mother with two bi-racial girls—half Chinese and half Caucasian.

In accounting for her experiences, Xiaoping mentioned multiple times her parents' reactions to her choices. Her parents were not happy with how Xiaoping's first marriage fell apart and how her life unfolded in the US, because they, like many other Chinese parents, understood divorce as a shame to the family. In their view, as Xiaoping implied, only morally corrupted women sought divorce (Zhao & Zhang, 1996). Even though they were upset with her divorce and were not excited about her second marriage to a non-

Chinese, they recognized that Xiaoping was better off in the US. They reasoned that

marrying a non-Chinese and raising a family in the US were the best out of few choices

available for their daughter. According to Xiaoping, her parents and relatives were afraid

that no Chinese men would be interested in marrying a divorced leftover woman like

herself. As Xiaoping reported,

> I was concealing my divorce from my parents for a while. But I needed the official
>
> documents from my parents to finalize the divorce because we got married in China.
>
> Once they found out, my parents were very annoyed; I think they were ashamed of
>
> me. In my neighborhood in the countryside where everyone knows everyone else,
>
> it's really a face-losing thing for my parents that their daughter got divorced. They
>
> and their neighbors feel that there must be something wrong with me who's unable
>
> to please my husband. My mom once scolded me, "How could you do that? How
>
> could you take marriage so lightly? No virtuous woman would do it. Now who do
>
> you think would marry a second-hand woman like you? You're even worse than a
>
> leftover woman! You'd better stay in the US. I don't think you can find a Chinese man
>
> who's willing to marry you!" (Xiaoping, 10/7/2005, p. 39)

With ideal men in Xiaoping's own age bracket few and far between in China, women like

Xiaoping had to look to a different market: younger men and/or non-Chinese men. Both

Xiaoping and her parents understood that, as a divorced female scientist, Xiaoping had a

better chance of success in the US—a country they believed valued equality and hard work.

Not only was Xiaoping's life better in the US, Xiaoping made her parents' lives better.

Living in the US also enabled Xiaoping to better fulfill her obligations as a daughter to her

parents. During her doctoral program, each month she sent part of her teaching

assistantship stipend to her aging parents who lived in the village in China where she grew

up. Her parents raised chickens to make a living and paid for her college back in China.

Education enabled Xiaoping to leave the poverty that still plagued her parents and much of

the rural population in China. Xiaoping was financially independent due to the

assistantship her graduate program provided then. Now, she worked in an engineering

company close to the school that granted her degree. As an only child, she felt obliged to

support her aging parents. She also sponsored her parents to live with her in the US a

couple of times since she became a mother, during which period her parents' attitude

toward her second marriage started to change. Xiaoping reported,

> My parents have come a long way. Initially, they were ashamed of me; I guess, they
>
> were more worried about me as a divorced single woman that no man would want
>
> to marry me. They lived in the small village their entire life and they knew nothing
>
> about foreigners, except for what they saw on TV or what their neighbors told them.
>
> But they had this belief that America is a fair country where anyone can make it.
>
> When I had my baby girl, my husband and I invited them over to stay with us and to
>
> take care of the baby. We bought the air tickets for them and financially provided for
>
> them; it's really my husband who was working and I lived on my student stipend. I
>
> guess they saw how happy I was with my life and how my husband took care of me
>
> and our daughter, and they stopped giving me grief about my divorce. Nowadays,
>
> though they're unable to communicate with my husband [because of language
>
> barriers], they cook nice meals for us, and they help us with laundry and household
>
> chores. (Xiaoping, phone interview, 4/20/2010)

Even though initially the parents were not impressed with Xiaoping's second marriage, they were strong believers in the myth of meritocracy in the US and it did not take long for them to come to terms with Xiaoping and her second husband, especially since they spent some time in the US helping care for their granddaughters.

Like so many Chinese parents who have internalized the good woman discourse and spoken through it, Xiaoping presented her parents as pragmatic and tolerant regarding her life choices. Still not keen about Xiaoping's divorce and remarriage, her parents appeared to be happy with the fact that Xiaoping finally settled down with a family and children, earned her PhD, and was able to financially take care of them. To them, Xiaoping made it in the US; she was not a bad daughter, despite her unconventional life trajectory.

Li's gender performance and interracial relationship

Li delivered an account of how she failed to conform to the demands embedded in the good Chinese woman discourse, as if she was outside of the discourse. Yet, she presented an acute understanding of the discourse's pervasive impact on her relationship with her parents. Constructing herself as a strong woman in China where she believed she was able to navigate within the discourse and exit from it when it suited her, she found herself modifying her gendered behaviors in the US where she had to confront her minority status as a female graduate student from China. Li's struggles were connected with her upper-middle class upbringing in China and later in the US with the loss of her privileged social status. Rhetorically, Li emphasized her failures to subscribe to gender norms, yet she presented herself as working to achieve compliance.

By the time of our interview, Li had been in the US for five years and in the third year of her doctoral program at Summer University. Defining herself as a tomboy, Li offered a vivid account of her growing-up experience with two older sisters and a younger brother[27], which centered on the concept of gender but removed herself from the good Chinese woman discourse. She described herself as strong and able to minimize the effects of the discourse on her life. Her elite family origin in many ways shaped her narrative account of her experiences. Li grew up in a family with two generations of professionals. Both her paternal and maternal grandparents were college professors while her parents worked as business owners whose secondary education was interrupted during China's Cultural Revolution. She was raised primarily by her paternal grandparents, together with her siblings, because her parents were busy with their business.

> My grandparents brought me up as a boy. My two older sisters are very girly and my younger brother and I are close in age. So I got to hang out with my brother. I have a hot temper like my brother's—bad temper I should say, maybe because my grandparents raised us as boys who were allowed to climb trees and just to run wild. Up till college, I had never grown long hair, or worn a skirt—I was just like my brother, especially regarding my temper; even nowadays I'm still like that, like, I'm careless and hot-tempered. You know, appearance is deceiving; I appear to be very mild and pleasant, but actually I'm very stubborn and not good at expressing my feelings—later my boyfriend somewhat changed me though. (Li, 12/5/2009, p. 8)

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[27] China's One-Child Policy was implemented in late 1970s and was not strictly enforced until the 1980s. It is not unusual for people born in the 1970s to have older siblings.

Li identified the contradiction between her biological gender and her socialization process. She referenced such femininity-affirming practices as growing long hair, wearing skirts and developing mild temperament to highlight her perception of herself as different from the established gender norms; she was the opposite, who was known to be assertive and independent. She further illustrated her difference.

> Before coming to the US, I was NOT the kind of girly girl—I had never ever been a girly girl. … At home I was a sensible kid; like, when my older sisters had some issues they would come to me and discuss with me. At school, I was very assertive; like, I had a strong personality. I had a younger brother who was very similar to me in terms of personality. We traveled alone as teenagers. Oh, actually, at age 14 and 13, that was the first time for me; I traveled alone as young as I was 13; like um, with only a backpack and I was wandering around at the airport. In my family, females dominate in numbers; I mean, three girls and one boy. Though, I'm very family-oriented, like, I want to get married early and have kids and such. I want to attract a man to my life and we can help each other and build a life together. (Li, 12/5/2009, p. 26)

Growing up, she identified more with her younger brother while acting as a consultant to her sisters. She positioned herself as a strong competent woman who resisted socially sanctioned traits of women, despite her desire to get married and raise a family. Implied in her self-portrayal was her demonstrated ability to resist the shackles of the good woman discourse, coupled with her desired freedom to choose a lifestyle unencumbered by the restrictions of the discourse. Her elite social location equipped her with enough human

and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2011) that enabled her to distance herself from the good woman discourse, to the extent that she thought she could be outside of it, though her narrative elucidated how that discourse spoke through her. This was also apparent in Li's narrative of her college experience in China.

> In my class of 48 students, only 5 were females. I behaved like a boy—not a typical girly girl. Like, my classmates all thought that I was assertive and strong—very manly type of girl. For example, I was never afraid of bugs, unlike some girls who screamed at the sight of bugs. I was very handy, good at fixing things, like, light bulbs or toilet. I lived in the school dorm. When other students had some problems with their dorm toilets, they would shout out at me in the hallway, like, "Li, come and fix the toilet."
>
> During military training in the summer, some girl-students were terrified by the sight of insects. Like, a girl burst into tears when a worm crawled into her bed and she screamed at me for help. The insects didn't bother me; no big deal to me. I could use my hands to capture one or two, like, caterpillars or beetles. I was not afraid of grabbing a spider and throwing it away. The impression I left upon my classmates was that I could handle everything. (Li, 12/5/2009, p. 28)

Strong and competent, Li presented herself as the opposite of her female classmates. Doing so, she constructed an oppositional binary that girls performed gender either as girly girls or tomboys. Girly girls were more likely to ask for help and get assistance with things like changing broken lights bulbs, fixing toilet, or removing bugs, because they were girly and thus weak. However, Li portrayed herself as nothing like that. Her ability to change

broken bulbs, fix toilet, and capture insects all spoke to her desire to lead and shine—a trait she deemed manly and distinguished herself from the rest of her female classmates. In Li's narratives about her own life she continuously removed herself from the constraints of the discourse, yet she recognized the presence of the discourse of gender on other people's lives. In other words, she perceived that she was different and she was a leader.

Once Li moved to the US, her relationship with her parents was fraught with tensions. The tensions exacerbated at the beginning of her relationship with a South-Asian man in the US. Seeing a South-Asian man from Sri Lanka put Li in a tough spot in relation to her parents and relatives back in China who thought that she was dating a black man.

> They [My parents] support me, generally speaking. Like, if I'm happy, they're cool with it. I guess they understand that they can't control what I do. But initially, my parents gave me a hard time regarding my boyfriend. When I showed them via the Internet a picture of my boyfriend, they looked annoyed and reacted strongly. Like curious visitors staring at an exotic animal in the zoo with equal doses of horror, fear and fascination, they were like: "Hell, no. How come his skin is so black?" You know, he's dark-skinned, but he's not THAT black [emphasis hers]. You know what Indian or Sri Lankan people look like. My parents also had a problem with his nationality. He's from Sri Lanka, a small country plagued by decades of civil war. For my parents, his skin color and national origin were two hot buttons. For a long time, my parents were not happy with me. (Li, 12/5/2009, p. 33)

Li was upfront with me when she responded to my question about the change she was undergoing in the US. Before she brought up her relationship with a Sri Lankan man,

she foregrounded her overall relationship with her parents. Her parents came across as supportive and understanding, despite her non-conforming gendered behaviors in China and her choice to leave home for the US, yet her parents badgered her regarding her relationship. Li continued,

> Once, my mom was so agitated. I remember that was over a year ago. I was talking with my mom over the phone. All of a sudden, my mom got very upset, and said, "I chatted with my neighbors and they said that you were dating A BLACK GUY [emphasis hers]. How can you date a black guy? Your kids would be black too. Haven't you thought about that?" I was like, "Mom, I've told you many times. HE'S NOT BLACK [emphasis hers]. Why do you trust your neighbors, but not me? Why do you have to listen to their gossip? Why didn't you get it that he's not black? I can't talk with you anymore." I blew my mom off on the phone. I didn't call home for a month or so. For quite a while, I didn't have any contact with them. I was upset. I didn't really want to talk with them. So, I waited for a month or so before I called home again. This time, my mom picked up the phone. The moment she heard my voice, she burst into tears. She said, "I'm sorry. I understand that life is not easy in the US. You're all by yourself. It's really good that you have someone beside you to look out for you. As long as you're happy with him and he cherishes you and takes good care of you, we're happy. That's all we care about." Blah, blah, blah. Funny that my mom apologized to me. Ever since then, the topic has died down a bit between us. (Li, 12/5/2009, p. 38)

Parental control was a manifestation of Chinese patriarchal legacies that travelled with Li even when she was geographically far from home. Li made it clear that overall her parents were supportive and caring. She believed that it was her boyfriend's race and nationality that drew a disapproving reaction from her parents, but it never occurred to her that her parents could be racist. In Li's account, her parents' disapproval was largely due to their mis-equation of dark-skinned men with black men whom they held prejudices against. Faced with her parents' strong objection stemming from racist prejudices, Li asserted her own power over her parents by cutting all contact with them. Her boycotting protest transformed her parents' response from disapproval to worry, and resulted in an apology from her mother.

The reconciliation between Li and her parents came in the form of an apology from the parents and Li described it as "funny" (Li, 12/5/2009, p. 38). Upon further probe, Li explained that she did not remember getting apologies from her parents often. Rather, it was she who apologized most of the time when things went wrong. Parents' apologies were really not part of the normative top-down relationship she was familiar with in her life and thus came across as "funny."

Aside from the strategy of boycotting, Li took another pro-active approach to resisting the parental objection. This time, she softened her strategies a little bit in her attempt to understand her parents first and then seek their understanding. Li stated,

> After all, it's a long process. I mean, I don't expect to get my parents' acceptance or approval overnight regarding my boyfriend and me. Even in the US, I got surprised or disapproval looks from Americans I meet on the street. Some even came with

hostility. I mean, the message I got clearly from those people is the familiar adage, "stick with your own kind." So, I don't really blame my parents. My parents haven't known any foreigner in their entire life. They don't speak any English. So, I totally understand their frustration with my relationship with a dark-skinned foreigner. But I need them to understand that we love each other, skin color or national origin is no big deal. You know, it's easier for Chinese parents to accept an American son-in-law. A Sri Lankan is a totally different case. (Li, 12/5/2009, p. 40)

Li demonstrated a tremendous amount of understating for her parents' disapproving and accusatory reaction. Rather than confronting her parents' deeply-rooted racial prejudice, she attempted to excuse them from their racist comments and behaviors. She framed the racism manifested in her parents as their lack of understanding of or familiarity with foreigners. Furthermore, she indicated that her parents measured the value of individuals against the power and privilege, or lack thereof, of the individuals' national origin. For example, Li's parents would be more receptive to a white, American man because they perceived the United States as a powerful and wealthy nation state and thereof its citizens automatically enjoyed the power attached with their national origin. Li also understood that her parents equated Americans with being white, and being white to being good for no apparent reason. In light of her analysis of her parents, Li chose to position herself as an enabling bridge to connect her parents with her boyfriend and to increase the understanding between the two parties.

I still work with my parents to smooth things out. For example, I told them stories about how my boyfriend helped me out. He drove me all the way to NYC from South

Carolina, rented an apartment for me, solved my lease problem with the previous landlord, helped me pack and move all the way to Summer University, and so on. Like, I don't feel lonely when I'm with him. I guess it's comforting for my parents to know that he's able to take care of me. Of course, they still give me grief. Like, they question me, "Why don't you look for a Chinese boyfriend, so that we can communicate with him." "Why don't you date an American [meaning: Caucasian]?" "Why him—a dark-skinned South-Asian guy?" Despite that, my parents have come a long way. Actually, they feel hopeless to change my decision [to be with my boyfriend], and now, I think they feel happy for me.

Also, I told my parents that my boyfriend loved China and Chinese food. He even learned to cook one or two dishes. He also started to learn Chinese—simple greeting words or words about food. What I need to do is to put my parents' minds at ease that he's gonna get along with them once he visits China. Then my parents would feel, "Okay. Good. He's the get-along-type of guy." As a plus, his educational background definitely helped him a lot to get my parents' approval. He got a PhD in the US. He's well educated, and he's gonna be a professional someday in the well-paid and well-respected medical field. My parents understand all those things.

Anyway, what I can do is whenever I get a chance, I ask my boyfriend to talk with my parents over the phone or web-camera. My boyfriend is a charmer. He tries to speak Chinese with my parents and they seem to be pleased; amused, rather. Like, they see him once or twice a month via the Internet and they hear him speaking ridiculous but cute Chinese. I didn't force him to study Chinese. I know it's a hard language. I

personally dislike to study languages. It's taken me forever to study English and I'm

not a big fan of studying any languages other than the native tongue. My boyfriend is

quite the opposite. He's very enthusiastic. He's working hard on his Chinese. He

dreams of showing off his Chinese and surprising my relatives when he visits China.

I also share with my parents the nitty gritty details of our life. Sometimes, I tell them

stories about the nice things my boyfriend does for me, how much he cares about

me, etc. Of course, what I tell them is quite selective, just to set their minds at ease

that he treats me well. I guess every parent would be happy to know that their

daughter will be in good hands for the rest of her life. (Li, 12/5/2009, pp. 40-41)

In the quotation above, Li showed a deep understanding of her parents who were

prejudiced against non-Chinese in general, and against dark-skinned, non-Americans in

particular. They assumed that because their daughter was Chinese, she should naturally

date a Chinese man, or at least someone who was American (read: white) since she was in

the US. Li understood that her parents' worries about cultural and language barriers made

it difficult for them to support her relationship with her boyfriend. Based upon her analysis

of her parents, Li strategized to work patiently to dispel her parents' disapproval. Selective

self-disclosing was one strategy she adopted to relate to her parents. Inviting her parents to

get to know more about her boyfriend was another. Making her boyfriend's effort to learn

Chinese language visible to her parents also helped to impress her parents. Functioning as

a bridge between her parents and her boyfriend, Li effectively transformed herself from the

object of parental disproval to a subject of communication and action.

Summary

Filial obedience was a significant component of the good woman discourse (Zhao & Zhang, 1996). Both Xiaoping and Li managed to achieve the filial obedience without sacrificing independence. Both compliance and resistance characterized Xiaoping and Li's negotiating strategies with their respective parents. What made Xiaoping and Li resisters was that they both chose not to comply with the prescribed track of a good woman with regards to marriage and relationships. Rather, their evolving relationships involved divorce, remarriage, and inter-racial dating, all against their parents' approval and Chinese social norms. Due to their non-conforming behaviors such as divorcing and dating across racial lines, at certain points in their lives, they were viewed as disappointments or even shameful in their parents' eyes. But they did not give up on what they believed worthy of pursuing. They elected to work with their parents' and societal disapproval and they constructed themselves in their narratives as resisters against the demands of the traditional discourse.

Nonetheless, neither Xiaoping nor Li halted their efforts to comply with the demands of the good woman discourse. In Xiaoping's case, she demonstrated her compliance with filial obedience by financially and emotionally taking care of her parents. Li managed to ease her parents' concerns and finally come to terms with her parents. As their narratives revealed, they resisted certain demands of the discourse, and through doing so, they succeeded in securing loving relationships and achieving filial obligations. In a way, they benefited from their failure and resistance, which opened up more choices for them and enabled them to reconcile the seemingly incompatible compliance and independence. The women's narratives presented failure and success not as a dichotomy

that excluded each other, but as complementary to each other. They also demonstrated the different layers of complexities constituting their lives as well as their learning and growing processes involved in composing their lives.

Conclusion

The Chinese women in my study came from different social locations in China. Their education and work experiences differed from each other. Their marital status varied from being single, in a relationship, married, divorced, to being remarried. They had different academic interests in the US and their perceptions of their US experiences might not resemble each other. Yet, despite the vast differences in their lives, their development and use of narrative strategies allowed them to make sense of their complicated experiences with negotiating the good Chinese woman discourse, as well as enabled them to reach a similar reconciliation between compliance with the discourse and personal and professional accomplishments. In other words, they developed and employed narrative strategies to account for their negotiations with the good woman discourse, and to communicate a range of complexities involved in living their lives informed by the discourse. As their narratives illustrated, gender was so central to their lives, as well as to the practices and strategies they employed to survive and thrive in changing social and cultural contexts.

My informants employed a range of ways to use the narrative strategies to make sense of their experiences with the good woman discourse. Through paying rhetorical homage to her father and husband, Xia was able to not only accomplish compliance entailed in the good Chinese woman discourse, but also to resist the discourse through

achieving personal and professional success prohibited in the discourse. Through making rhetorical gestures, Xia presented herself as a compliant follower and credited her academic and professional success to the prominent male figures around her while minimizing her own endeavors. In so doing, Xia was able to reconcile the two traditionally incompatible goals in her life and to simultaneously accomplish obedience and individual success.

Another narrative strategy was marked by the tension between alternating compliance and resistance, between conforming desires to abide by the good woman discourse, and non-conforming relationships that challenged the discourse. Specifically, both Xiaoping and Li accounted for their failures to comply with the discourse through non-compliant relationships, but they presented their failures as enabling them to better comply with certain constituents of the discourse, such as fulfilling filial obligations. In other words, they resisted certain demands of the good woman discourse through divorcing and forming inter-racial relationships, which in turn opened up more choices for them and benefited them in many ways. They were able to choose their own romantic partnerships and the careers they enjoyed. They were able to reconcile compliance with the good Chinese woman discourse and freedom from its restrictions. Xiaoping and Li's narrative strategies made it possible for them to account for their resistance against some demands of the discourse and their compliance with other demands of the discourse such as being good daughters and caring for their aging parents. Striving to accomplish the good woman status characterized the Chinese women's different ways of employing narrative strategies to account for their lives.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

Through interviews with twenty Chinese female graduate students at four universities along the East Coast of the US, I gained insights into the complexities of their lives. For my research participants who grew up in a patriarchal China that still defines women through motherhood and femininity, studying in the US offered a chance to reflect on their experiences in a different cultural setting and renegotiate gender roles and boundaries. The way that Chinese women in my study discussed their experiences with gender and nationality was dynamic and complex. As narrators, my research participants described both the range of complexities involved in living their lives under different cultural contexts as well as how they lived with the complexities and learned from their experiences (Banks, 2006; Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992; White, 1980).

In the following sections, I review the significant findings from each of the data chapters. Then I discuss limitations and significance of my study, as well as possible implications for policy-makers and educators. I end with suggestions for future studies.

General Findings

Informed by intersectionality (Collins, 1995, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991, 2000; hooks, 1984, 1989, 2000; McCall, 2005; Mohanty, 1988, 2003; Zerai, 2000) and a postpositivist realist account of identity (Mohanty, 2000; Moya, 2000), this qualitative project explored Chinese female students' experience with gender and nationality while attending graduate schools in four universities on the East Coast of the US. Situated within the academic discourse that tends to reduce the lived experiences of Chinese female students to language acquisition and cultural accumulation (Kasper, 1997; Klomega, 2006; Lewthwaite, 1997;

Misra & Castillo, 2004), the study explored different layers of complexities involved in their articulations and negotiations of their experiences with gender and nationality, and highlighted Chinese female graduate students' resilience and strategies in their negotiations of the multiple discourses that not only regulated and constituted their lives, but also were constituted and challenged by their complicated and well-informed negotiations.

Born and raised in China, my research subjects encountered a different kind of social reality in the US, where their status as Chinese, as Asian minorities, as women, and as foreigners was more complicated than their status as Chinese women in their home country. Many found themselves for the first time in their lives as minorities marked by race, culture, language, and nationality, and situated within different social contexts and gendered relations. Physically located in the US, my informants lived with the co-existing contradictory status—both well-esteemed and marginalized.

Their well-esteemed status was connected with the fact that they had completed college in China and were pursuing advanced degrees in the US. Chinese female graduate students in the US were considered elites in China not only because of their academic achievements, but also because of their potential high socio-economic status transformed through their educational advancements. What is more, the admission into American universities for advanced studies magnified their excellence. Compared with the majority of Chinese women with lower academic achievement or literacy (Barlow, 2004), my research subjects had been highly educated towards advanced degrees, especially PhDs granted by American universities. In a society that values overseas experience, this

particular group of women, who were able to travel to study in the US—something that was completely unimaginable before the liberation of women from the long-time oppression in the patriarchal Chinese society (Barlow, 2004; Leung, 2003)—enjoyed certain well-esteemed status in China.

Aside from their esteemed status, my informants were doubly marginalized both in China and in the US. Their marginal status in China was largely due to the same characteristics that rendered them respect, such as college education in China and advanced degrees from the US. In the male-dominant Chinese society, only as a result of State feminism and women's liberation, have women achieved seemingly equal status as men (Barlow, 2004; Leung, 2003). It is generally believed that the more a woman achieves, the harder it is for her to get married and secure a family, in that she is stereotyped as an obstacle or a threat to her husband's authority at home and therefore a danger to the stability of the family. In this sense, a woman's education is a source of insecurity for the men in their lives who are socialized to take dominant roles at home. If a woman chooses to remain single or unmarried, she would face tremendous pressure from her immediate family and society, because society expects that women of a certain age to be married. Unmarried women in their late 20s or early 30s are pitied as leftovers in contemporary China (Fincher, 2014), and my informants fell into this age range. If their advanced degrees and overseas experience afforded them esteem in China, their advanced degrees and overseas experience coupled with their age also marginalized them because Chinese society deems them too erudite to keep a family and too old to be attractive.

To complicate things further, while living in the US as academic migrants, my research participants found their status transforming from "native," "insider," and "majority" to "foreigner," "outsider," and "minority." Moreover, they found themselves facing another set of admonitions around traditional femininity that was similar to but not identical to the Chinese version characterized by the three obediences and four virtues (Zhao & Zhang, 1996). The Chinese women's status as foreigners and cultural outsiders may contribute to how they read the US versions of gendered relations and racial politics (Omi & Winant, 1986) in different ways.

For example, the Chinese women in my study may not see the underlying assumption of women's frailty behind the common cultural ritual of men holding doors for women as a possible form of male chauvinism (Frye, 1983). Rather, they may consider women as the beneficiaries of the practice and read it as a welcome gesture of men taking care of women. The door opening ritual may be open to multiple interpretations even in the US. My research participants may not have the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2011) to interpret gender-specific practices in the US, and their foreign status complicated the good Chinese woman discourse they lived with in the US. Not only did they have to navigate the seemingly incompatible desires between a good woman and an accomplished woman, they also had to maneuver the gendered relations specific to the US context.

As insiders-without and outsiders-within (Collins, 1986) having experienced educational and social realities in both China and the US, Chinese female graduate students in my study worked diligently to make sense of their multiple identity markers and maneuvered their lives shaped by the matrix of power relations (Crenshaw, 1991, 2000;

McCall, 2005) in complicated ways. They also delivered dynamic and complicated accounts of their experiences particularly with the issue of classroom silence, the leftover woman discourse, and the good Chinese woman discourse, as illustrated in each of three data chapters.

Chapter Four describes my participants' experience with classroom silence and the multiple ways they utilized silence to cultivate a learning environment while negotiating their primary identity marker as Chinese. I argue that silence is a complex issue that my research participants experienced and utilized strategically to negotiate the classroom space where racial, gendered, and cultural hierarchy is constructed, contested, and perpetuated. For instance, self-identifying as quiet Chinese students new to the American academic culture, some participants used silence to craft a learning space in classrooms through observing the classroom dynamics, analyzing the speech patterns of their fellow students, picking up their English language skills, and demonstrating their engagement with the class in a non-vocal way. Some participants used silence to cover up their occasional insufficient preparation for class, while others utilized silence to protest being dismissed as evidenced in the evolving strategies that Lifang adopted from being vocal, to being silenced, to silencing herself. Refusing to be stereotyped as a quiet Chinese woman or a "Chinese specimen"(Lan, 12/10/2009, p. 22), Lan chose to be both vocal and silent, aligning with the changing contexts of the classroom. Through highlighting my participants' detailed narratives and strategies to navigate classroom silence, I documented the range of complexities involved in negotiating the issue of classroom silence and captured my participants' multi-faceted ways of living with and learning from classroom silence.

Chapters Five and Six each focus on my participants' experience with gender through an exploration of their negotiations with the two salient representations of Chinese patriarchal legacies: the leftover woman discourse and the good Chinese woman discourse. Specifically, Chapter Five investigates the sophisticated ways that my participants lived with the leftover woman discourse that shaped and constituted their lives, as well as the multiple strategies they employed to contest, resist, and constitute the discourse. Some Chinese women chose to remain single at a marriageable age as a strategy to resist the debilitating power of the leftover woman discourse and its varied constituents. Some Chinese women distanced themselves from the discourse by living in the US where gendered relations were less regulated in their perceptions and their self-identification as Chinese women would afford them more choices for relationships and lifestyles. Aside from contesting the leftover woman discourse, my participants also engaged in gender conformity through getting married and femininity-affirming practices, such as applying make-up, growing long hair, and wearing skirts. Their engagement with the gender conforming activities served as another distancing strategy to minimize the debilitating impact of the leftover woman discourse on their lives. Nonetheless, my participants found themselves subjected to the leftover woman discourse and combating it as a part of their daily lives.

As a continual discussion of the Chinese women's experience with gender, Chapter Six looks at the range of ways the Chinese women employed narrative strategies to account for their experience with the good Chinese woman discourse. For example, through paying rhetorical homage to the male figures and minimizing her own efforts, Xia was able to achieve compliance demanded in the good woman discourse while simultaneously

resisting the discourse through accomplishing personal and professional success. Forming non-compliant relationships through divorce, remarriage, or inter-racial dating enabled some Chinese women to satisfy certain demands of the good woman discourse while exerting autonomy over their personal and professional lives. Despite the differences among my research participants with regards to family backgrounds, social locations, relationship status, academic interests and paths, the range of narrative strategies they used allowed them to reach a similar reconciliation between compliance with the discourse and resistance against it. My participants' narratives about their varied experiences with the good woman discourse demonstrated the broad spectrum of complexities inherent in living with the discourse and in their negotiating strategies.

The findings in this dissertation are not meant to be generalizable; they are not stories shared among all Chinese women attending graduate schools in the US. Neither do the findings recount the entire life experiences of each participant. Rather, the narratives of the Chinese female graduate students provide an opportunity through which to understand this group. This focus on Chinese women's voices and the complexities of their narratives challenges the academic discourses that reduce their vast range of experiences to linguistic and cultural adjustment issues while dismissing the agency of Chinese women (Kasper, 1997; Klomega, 2006; Lewthwaite, 1997; Misra & Castillo, 2004). That is not to say that the women are free of social relations of power but rather to assert that there are multiple ways, as articulated and exemplified in the daily lives of the Chinese women, to strategically negotiate multiple flows of power as socially situated beings.

To present the findings of this dissertation in China would not be easy in that the discourses on silent Chinese students, the leftover woman, and the good woman are less visible but more pervasive inside China. These discourses are far more visible to the Chinese women in my study from the outside once they have an alternate set of expectations in a foreign culture. In China, women are not only subjected to the gendered discourses, but also participants of the discourses through embracing and/or resisting the discourses. Moreover, the difficulty to present the findings of this dissertation in China is due to the heterogeneity among Chinese women in China and the complex social realities that situate Chinese women. Compared with college-educated women, majority of Chinese women live in the countryside with basic literacy skills. Differences among women across socio-economic statuses, education levels, and life experiences present potential difficulties for Chinese women to access and comprehend the findings of the project. I intend to translate and publish sections of this dissertation, if not the whole piece into Chinese, to make it accessible to more people in China. I hope that the project would contribute to the ongoing women's consciousness-raising movements in achieving gender equality in China.

Limitations of the Study

My study has at least three limitations: lack of information on my participants' formative-year environments in China, insufficient engagement with the issue of social class, and lack of exploration into issues to sexual identity. First, I could not get a close examination of my informants' formative-year environments, such as their families and schools back in China, which may limit my understandings of their genealogies. This posed challenges to me when I intended to historically and socially locate their perspectives on

their experiences with classroom silence and gendered relations. I worked to minimize this limitation by reaching out to participants from a variety of academic programs and with disparate relationship statuses, and strove to gather more detailed narratives about their experiences in China with regard to family and schooling.

The second limitation of this study is insufficient engagement with the issue of social class, as an integral part of the intersectional identity as Chinese women. My work is more focused on the national and gendered identities of being Chinese and being women in different cultural contexts, and less on social class as a marked identity (Bettie, 2003). However, social class is sometimes a salient marker of my participants' self-identification and has shaped in significant ways their growing-up experiences in China, their choices of academic fields and career tracks, as well as their perceptions of what it means to be a good daughter and a good woman. When my participants shared their family backgrounds with me, some identified the social-economic status of their parents and stated how higher education enabled them to rise to the middle class status. For example, as discussed in Chapter Six on Negotiating the Good Woman Discourse, Xiaoping described her parents as "poor" who raised chickens on farmland to make a living. As the only daughter, she felt obligated to send a portion of her Teaching Assistantship stipend back to China to support her parents and to provide for her parents during their stay with her in the US, as part of the filial obligations to her parents as defined in the good Chinese woman discourse. Without the Teaching Assistantship from her graduate program, attending graduate school in the US would have been impossible for Xiaoping. Yet, for other Chinese women in my study like Lifang and Lan whose parents paid for their graduate school tuition in the US, fulfilling the filial obligations as daughters did not entail financially supporting their

parents. Rather, it may have involved ending their single status and developing

relationships with men who were able to match their families' social economic status. As

the above examples indicate, the issue of social class is referenced in my participants'

accounts of their experiences with gender and nationality in the US, sometimes less visible

but always present. I acknowledge that the lack of attention to it is a limitation of this study

and I would propose a future study to examine social class as an identity marker and how it

shapes Chinese women graduate students' experiences in the US and intersects with the

gendered and national dimensions of their self identifications.

A third limitation of this study is the lack of exploration into issues of sexual

identity. Heteronormativity is one of the assumptions undergirding this study. While the

narratives of my participants sometimes returned to themes of love and marriage, they did

not overtly address sexuality on either institutional or individual levels. None of the

participants of this study self-identified as non-heterosexual. It would be meaningful to

examine how a self-identified lesbian woman would negotiate the leftover woman

discourse and what the good Chinese woman discourse would mean to a self-identified

transgendered woman. It would be a mistake to ignore the existence of the LGBT

population among the Chinese community and to generalize from the lived experiences of

my participants to Chinese women with different sexual identifications.

Significance of the Study

The significance of my research lies in the following three aspects: scholarship,

theory, and methodology. First and foremost, my research focuses on Chinese female

graduate students who have experienced educational institutions and social realties in both

China and the US. Their articulations of and complex negotiations with gender and nationality in different cultural contexts constitute and contribute to the ongoing studies on women and other underrepresented populations in the fields of women's studies and ethnic studies. Despite their different social locations, relationship statuses, academic and career paths, the narratives my participants constructed about their growing-up experiences, the obstacles they identified to achieve their goals, and the strategies they deployed to accomplish academic and professional success constitute the ongoing women's solidarity building across various kinds of differences, based on race, gender, or social class. My participants' struggles and negotiating strategies can be a source of empowerment for women and other minorities in their pursuits of equal rights and professional and personal fulfillment.

In addition, as part of the larger conversation on the internationalization efforts of US higher education (Altbach & Knight, 2007), my study attempts to enrich scholarship on international students in US higher education settings. Moving beyond the issues of language and cultural acquisition confronting international students, my study aims to offer a more nuanced picture of international students' perspectives on their lived experiences in the study abroad context and to deepen and enrich the current body of literature through representing international students, specifically Chinese women, as complex subjects multiply situated within the intersectional social and cultural contexts.

Second, from a theoretical perspective, my research contributes to nuanced conceptualizations of identity as my study holds onto both constructed and real aspects of being female and being Chinese in tension with each other. Furthermore, my study extends

the intersectionality framework beyond its original matrix of domination and resistance (Crenshaw, 1991, 2000; McCall, 2005) as it explores how different identity markers of Chineseness and gender crosscut with one another through my participants' narratives of their experience with gender and nationality. My study also helps to concretize the intersectionality framework through an empirical study that reflects the complexities of the empirical world.

Finally, with regard to methodology, my study contributes to the literature on the difficulties and processes of conducting qualitative research while keeping researcher's subjectivity into consideration in the mutual but unequal "power-charged social relation of 'conversation'" (Haraway, 1988, p. 593). In particular, my study addresses how researcher's disclosed identity facilitated the interview process but also complicated research relations in ways that revealed researcher's prejudice and privilege through careless self-disclosure in ways that were not conducive to the cultivation of emancipating research relations. For example, my self-disclosure of a single child helped me establish rapport with some participants who shared the same singleton status with me. It also created barriers with one participant who had a younger sibling but refused to talk more about her sibling upon realizing the prejudice I held toward families with more than one child.

My study also enriches the understandings and practices of the qualitative method of in-depth interviewing in bi-lingual research settings. Mandarin Chinese was the primary language I used to conduct the interviews with my participants, but the completed written report must be crafted in English, which posed a number of challenges and required

constant decision-making at different stages of the dissertation production process. For example, what language should I use to transcribe the interview data? While transcribing the interviews conducted in Chinese, should I at the same time translate from Chinese to English since I would need English texts to include in my writing? How should I convert spoken Chinese into written English text while preserving the intent and context of the often-informal manner in which my participants spoke with me? Those are some of the issues I addressed in Chapter Three on Methods and Procedures, which will hopefully contribute to and inform qualitative research practices in bi-lingual settings.

Implications

Over the past decade, US campuses have seen a dramatic increase in international students from China, both graduate and undergraduate. In "The China Conundrum" published on The New York Times, Bartlett and Fischer (2011) detailed some disturbing concerns regarding the increasing number of international students from China, such as fabrication of college application materials, students' limited English language proficiency and unfortunate violation of university rules and policies, as well as lack of programs and services among US colleges and universities to advise and engage the Chinese students. With a growing tendency from American colleges and universities to expand their international student body by actively recruiting in China, the authors claimed that these students were often underprepared linguistically and culturally for success in American colleges and universities.

Recently, The Chronicle of Higher Education published Fischer's (2015) article entitled "The Chinese Mother's American Dream," which offered a peek into the massive

number of Chinese families sending students to US for college. Hoping to promote a better

understanding of the Chinese students, the author focused on the parents who worked

tirelessly to send their children to the US and dreamed of fulfilling their own aspirations

vicariously through the lives of their sons and daughters. Rather than reducing them to

anonymous contributors of tuition dollars, the article positioned Chinese students and

their families as real and historical individuals with hopes, dreams, fears, and frustrations.

The above two articles are reflective of the opportunities and challenges associated

with the increasing presence of Chinese students on US campuses. Often, literature

indicates that these students struggle with adjusting to the academic culture in the US

(Kasper, 1997; Klomega, 2006; Lewthwaite, 1997; Misra & Castillo, 2004). My study's

findings suggest that it is not merely linguistic challenges that face them; many feel the

pressure to learn and perform a series of newly acquired cultural norms in order to "fit in"

while holding onto certain values specific to the old country; exposure to a different culture

in the US has enabled many to revisit their past experiences in China and shaped their

perceptions of their current lives in the US. The challenge for colleges and universities in

the US is to provide meaningful, practical, and culturally sensitive services to meet this

growing challenge.

Specifically, this study's findings on Chinese students' perceptions of being

international, Chinese, and women have implications for researchers, educators, policy-

makers, and practitioners in areas of pedagogy, transnational women's movements, local

policy, and beyond. For example, as this study reveals, silence is more complex than earlier

studies have indicated. The stereotype of the quiet Chinese student is a gross

oversimplification that fails to account for the myriad of reasons that Chinese students either choose silence or have silence forced upon them. This study shows that classrooms are contested space where different voices compete with each other. It provides a nuanced picture of Chinese students' classroom experience that would be useful to educators, advisors, and administrators in engaging this growing population and promoting positive classroom experience for all.

Pedagogically, my study has implications for faculty and staff interested in securing inclusion in education and internationalization of US higher education. Some participants in my study indicated that course materials were hard for them to relate to and oftentimes they lost interest or motivation to complete required readings before class. Incorporating diverse cultures and perspectives in teaching materials and disrupting the Euro-centric curricula in higher education institutions might better engage students in and outside classrooms. Understanding the genealogies of Chinese students would enable faculty and staff members to not only help students ground their own interpretations of knowledge in their own diverse lived experiences, but also to formulate liberating and culturally-specific advising and pedagogical practices to assist Chinese students in their academic and professional endeavors.

Furthermore, part of the implications of the study is to train faculty and staff members during professional development workshops or orientations to understand the daily realities of Chinese and international students and the cultural legacies they inherit from their home countries. As my study indicates, language acquisition and cultural accumulation in the host country are only one aspect of Chinese students' struggles. A

significant portion of their struggles in any host country have deep roots in the old country where they are perceived very differently than they are here. In the specific case of Chinese female international students, familial expectations on daughters extend to the US and dictate the actions, attitudes, psyches, and strategies of Chinese women in the US. My study also indicates that Chinese female graduate students are multifaceted and are motivated by more than academic and financial achievement. Some are motivated to resist or to conform to Chinese patriarchal legacies as manifested in discourses on the good woman and the leftover woman that have shaped their perceptions of gendered relations both in China and in the US. Many have to confront and negotiate gendered roles and boundaries as dictated in the Chinese discourses. Moreover, many know that when they return to China, they may find it difficult to fit in, being labeled as too old or too educated to be of value to a culture that is still governed by patriarchal norms. These and likely other cultural realities from their home country place additional burdens on these women who already struggle with adjusting to a different academic setting. Having a fuller picture of Chinese women's lives in the US and the challenges that await them upon returning home to China (if they so choose) can only help educators, advisors, and administrators to better serve this growing population on US campuses. Specifically, with an unconditional commitment to the students' progress and a flexibility that is able to respond to the situatedness of each student's path as a learner, educators and administrators can work on understanding the students' own sense-making processes and strategies, listen to what they say about their concerns and struggles, and offer academic and career guidance and support accordingly.

Another implication of the study is in relation to transnational women's community building. As I mentioned in the previous section on Significance of the Study, the obstacles

to achieve gender equality and the strategies to negotiate gendered relations of power as articulated by my research participants are part of the ongoing women's movements on a transnational level. Chinese women's negotiating strategies to accomplish academic and professional success can inform and empower women and other minorities across the global in their pursuits of gender equality and social justice.

At the local and institutional level, university office of international services or local international education agencies may organize panel discussions and hold workshops on international students' experience on US campuses and invite guest speakers who have done research in pertinent areas to facilitate discussions. Similar discussions are aimed at promoting communications between the international student population and the local community. They also strive to hear and understand international students' voices and perspectives on their experiences, as well as identify areas of concern and make policy adjustments to better service the population.

Lastly, the general principles, if not the specific findings of this study, could be applied to the study and understanding of other minority groups, such as English-language learners, refugee communities, and immigrant population. With a conscientious effort to focus on individual voices and perspectives, practitioners and policy-makers can understand what struggles beyond language acquisition confront individuals from these groups and formulate programs and policies accordingly to advocate for individuals while preserving their agency.

Future Studies

Because of the intersectional nature of this research, this research report could serve as an entry point for several follow-up studies. First, I would like to expand the study into the professional workforce and into the undergraduate years. While the issues of silence, the leftover woman and the good woman might not have the same potency as they did for Chinese female graduate students in the US, some of these themes would likely apply to both the professional workspace and the undergraduate population, as some women choose to establish their careers upon receiving their advanced degrees in the US and a growing number of Chinese high-school students choose to attend colleges or universities in the US.

Specifically, I would like to follow a subset of the women in this study for further study. Many of these women have remained in the US and have landed careers in the academic and professional fields. How do they negotiate silence and voice in professional settings? How do they negotiate the good woman discourse in the workforce and in their personal relationships? To what extend do the discourses on the good woman and the leftover woman still speak through them, compared to when they are graduate students many of whom are just beginning their careers and their families?

Further, the dramatic increase in the number of Chinese undergraduates studying in the US and the unique sets of challenges before them in the academic institutions they attend make the study of this group ever more urgent. I would like to focus on how Chinese female undergraduates, who became adults in the US but grew up in China, navigate the racial identities and gendered relations. A study of parental influences on Chinese female

undergraduate students is also worthy of future investigation, as majority of them are singletons under China's One Child Policy and parents tend to re-live their lives through the lives of their children.

Another area of future study is on the issue of social class. Compared with the majority of my study participants whose lives depended on graduate schools' assistantships, more and more affluent Chinese parents can afford to send their children to US colleges, universities, and graduate schools, with the hope of providing a better education for their children. Some Chinese students distinguish themselves through designer clothes and bags, luxury vehicles, and lavish lifestyles. Some can be easily spotted on campus with Moncler jackets, Chanel earrings, Burberry trench coats, Louis Vuitton bags, Salvatore Ferragamo shoes, and Omega watches. Social class seems to be a salient identity marker that divides the Chinese students from the rest of the student body. I would like to focus on the group of Chinese students that self-fund their study in the US to understand their perceptions of social class, among other identity categories.

Lastly, while heteronormativity is one of the assumptions undergirding this study, I am fully aware of the existence of the LGBT population among the Chinese community in the US. I would like to engage in a study on the challenges that confront self-identified Chinese lesbian, bi-sexual, or queer women in the US and how in a heteronormative world, they negotiate their lives, conditioned by the leftover woman and good Chinese woman discourses and informed by the newly gained understandings of gendered relations in the US.

Conclusion

In this Conclusion Chapter, I reviewed some significant findings in my study and pointed out three areas of limitation that this study could have been improved on. I also discussed the contributions that I hope my study would make to scholarship on women and minority studies, to literature on international students and higher education, to identity theories, as well as to qualitative methods. Further, I discussed the implications of my study in relation to higher education in the US context, and envisioned future studies for which my work can serve as an entry point.

In this dissertation study, I looked at how Chinese women negotiated the issue of classroom silence, the leftover woman and the good woman discourses while attending graduate schools in the US. The Chinese female graduate students I interviewed for my study travelled different paths to get to their respective graduate schools. Some started graduate school right after college in China while others worked for a few years before enrolling in a graduate program in the US. Some reunited with their husbands in the US as spouses and later got admitted into graduate programs. Additionally, the Chinese female graduate students had different academic backgrounds, different family situations and socio-economic statuses back in China. They had different interests and professional goals in life. Despite the vast differences among them, their constructions and interpretations of their stories were at times similar. What they shared was the hard and often invisible work of navigating systems of power and domination both in China and in the US that some saw as ill-designed to value who they were as human beings with a particular gender and culture. They shared strategies, knowledge, resources, relationships, pains, and frustrations

that accompanied their negotiations of obstacles on their way to accomplishing their goals.

They also shared a desire to succeed and live a happy life in whatever program they

studied or school they attended. It is my hope that as the interpreter of their narratives I

have accurately represented their ideas and perspectives in my analysis, rather than in any

way reproducing "discursive colonization" (Mohanty, 1991, as cited in DeVault & Gloss,

2007, p. 176) in my attempt to represent them.

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC TABLE
(Listed Alphabetically by Pseudonym)

Name	School	Degree Program		Length of Stay	Relationship Status
Chen	Spring University	Information Sciences	PhD	4th year	Married
Donghua	Summer University	Material Sciences	PhD	1st year	In a relationship
Fen	Summer University	Finance	MPA	2nd year	Single
Hong	Spring University	Education	PhD	3rd year	Married
Jia	Spring University	Creative Writing	MA	3rd year	Single
Lan	Spring University	Media Studies	MA	1st year	Single
Li	Summer University	Chemistry	PhD	3rd year	In a relationship
Lifang	Spring University	Media Studies	MA	2nd year	In a relationship
Lili	Spring University	Neuroscience	PhD	5th year	Single
Ling	Spring University	Biology	PhD	5th year	Single
Lulu	Spring University	Computer Science	MS	1st year	Single
Meijuan	Fall University	Literacy Education	PhD	3rd year	In a relationship
Ming	Spring University	Linguistics	MA	1st year	Single
Wenjie	Spring University	Public Relations	MA	1st year	Single
Xia	Spring University	Engineering	PhD	1st year	Married
Xiaoping	Spring University	Physics	PhD	2nd year	Married, divorced, remarried
Xixi	Winter College	Literacy Education	PhD	6th year	Married
Yan	Spring University	Geography	PhD	2nd Year	In a relationship
Ying	Spring University	Engineering	PhD	2nd year	Single
Yujiao	Summer University	Computer Science	PhD	2nd year	Single

APPENDIX B: DISSERTATION INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Introductions

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself.
2. Tell me about your education experience in China.
3. Tell me something about your family back in China.
4. How did you choose your graduate school in the US?
5. How did you develop an interest in your academic field?
6. What drove your desire to study in the US?

Independence

1. Regarding your decision to pursue an advanced degree in the US, I see you as a person who knows your mind and acts on it. How do you see yourself? Any examples in your life that speaks to your independence?
2. Coming to the US is a sign of independence to me. I read it that way. How do you read it? What's attractive to you about studying in the US?
3. How does being independent relate to your being a young woman?

Academic Life

1. Describe your program of study?
2. What's attractive to you about your program?
3. How do you fund your study in the US?
4. What has been the best/worst experience in graduate school so far?
5. Any struggles in your graduate school life?
6. What are the obstacles you have faced in your life?
7. What is the campus culture like here?
8. What is your classroom experience like?
9. How do you study here?
10. Tell me about your TA experience. What kinds of interactions with undergraduates in your class? What do you notice about them? What do think how your undergraduate students read you?
11. What does it mean to be a good student in the US? What makes a person smart?
12. What is your future plan after earning your degree?
13. What does it mean to you "to be successful" and "to make it" in the US?

Being International and Being Chinese

1. What are the differences between your life here in the US and your life in China?
2. What are the things you have noticed that are different here than in China?
3. What are the differences you have noticed in you so far?
4. How much work is it for you to adjust to what you see as the normal way of life here?
5. I see myself as a foreigner in the US. Actually the longer I stay in the US, the more foreign I feel. How do you see yourself? What does it feel like to be a foreigner?

6. Do you feel less a foreigner after a number of years of study here?
7. When do you experience yourself as Chinese? Describe a moment when you feel different from people around you.
8. How is it being Chinese visible to you in the classroom space? In social interactions?
9. What does it mean to be an international student here?
10. Are there parts of you that you want to hold onto?
11. What is your experience like visiting China during school breaks?
12. What are the things you feel strongly about when you return home for a visit?
13. Describe the kinds of things that cause you to think about your national or cultural identity.

Gender

1. How is it being a woman in the US in relation to being a woman in China?
2. What does it mean to be a female student in your program of study?
3. What does it mean to be a good daughter?
4. What does it mean to be a good woman?
5. What are your parents' expectations of you?
6. What does it mean to date here?
7. Can you describe your relationship?
8. How much are you satisfied with your relationship? How do you understand a boyfriend's role in your life? How have things changed with your relationship since you came to study in the US?
9. How do you experience being a woman here as opposed to being a woman in China?

Social Life

1. What is your social life like? Who do you hang out with? How have you made friends here and with whom?
2. What are the things that make you feel Americans can or cannot be your friends? Examples?
3. What are your relations with your classmates like?
4. How do you experience the way people eat here?
5. How do you notice the way people dress here?
6. What do you think people notice about you?
7. How do you dress every day? Where do you shop for clothes?
8. What does it mean to go shopping here?
9. What TV programs do you watch here?
10. How much attention do you give to news coverage about China? How do you feel about the media's representation of China?
11. China does have problems. How would you address them? How much of your reaction is haunted by China's past? What does it mean to be positioned so that you have to talk back?
12. What kinds of websites do you frequent? What kinds of news do you care most about?

APPENDIX C: IRB-APPROVED EMAIL TO RECRUIT PARTICIPANTS

Dear All,

My name is Yuan Zhang, and I am a female graduate student at Cultural Foundations of Education at Syracuse University. I came to SU in Fall 2003, upon getting my MA degree in Beijing, China. Currently I am working on my dissertation research about Chinese female students' experiences in northeast American universities.

I am emailing to invite you to participate in my research that I am conducting for my dissertation. In question-answer format, I will try to provide you the essential information about my research.

What is the research question the study will answer?

How do female students from China make sense of their lives here at American universities, and what does it mean to be Chinese, female, and international students at SU and other northeast American universities?

Who is welcome to participate and what do participants need to do?

Anyone who is Chinese, female, and a graduate student at SU, as well as other northeast American universities, is welcome to participate. Participants need to be willing to talk about their experiences as Chinese, women, students, both in China and in the US.

When will the interviews take place?

The interviews will take place at your convenience during May 2006--April 2007.

How much time will it take to participate?

The time will vary depending on how much time participants choose to commit and how much they would like to talk. In general, I anticipate each interview will last approximately 1 hour, and you will be interviewed at least twice. I will respect your time and concerns.

How will participants benefit from this study?

Participation in this study will give participants the opportunity to reflect on their past experiences and current lives. It will allow researchers, university personnel, and anyone interested in education for social justice, the opportunity to gain insights into the lives of Chinese female students.

Is this study confidential?

Absolutely! Neither your name nor the name of your program/university will be used. I will substitute pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

Can a participant withdraw from the research project?

Although it is helpful that participants continue once they have begun, they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

How does someone become a participant?

If you would be willing to participate in this study, please contact me at 315-XXX-XXXX, or yzhang18@syr.edu. When you call or email, please tell me both your name and your contact information.

Thank you so much for helping me conduct my dissertation research. Your participation will be very important to me!

Sincerely,

Yuan Zhang

APPENDIX D: CODING CATEGORIES

Below is a list of codes (*italics*) that I found useful in the writing of this dissertation. They are gathered under themes, which are in turn gathered under the topic of **Classroom Experiences** and **Experience with Gender**.

Classroom Experiences
Comparisons between US and China
Classroom culture
Interaction with professors
Interactions with peers
Classroom Participation
I am quiet
I am smart
I am isolated
We (Chinese) are quiet
They (Americans) are vocal
They (Americans) are thoughtless
Professor's Expectations/Stereotypes of me as Chinese
Quiet
Smart
Hardworking
Others' Expectation of me as Chinese
Poor English
TA experience
Interactions with undergraduates
American study skills
American math skills
Other Codes
Chinese traditions
Stereotypes
Being Smart (meaning of being smart)
Similarities / differences in pedagogy between China and US
Campus / classroom culture

Experience with gender
Schooling experience
Pick college majors
Reasons for picking a particular graduate school
Parents' role in decision-making
Academic interests
Career interests
Plans after graduation
Relationship with advisors / mentors in the US
Perceptions of graduate program and campus culture

Chineseness
Family background: parents' occupations, growing up experience
Visit China
Food preference
Experience with American / ethnic food
Grocery shopping
Cooking / dietary habits
Observations of Americans' eating habits
Changes during the course of stay in the US
Feelings of being Chinese / foreign

Gender
Growing up in China as a girl
Job-hunting experience in China
Shopping for clothes and skin care products in the US
Dating experience in China / US
How to dress and perceptions of how people dress here
Hair cut / style and applying make-up
Examples of a good girl / daughter

Social life and friendship
Who are your friends?
Definitions of friends / friendship
Friendships patterned along racial lines
Relationships with American students and fellow international students
Frequency and ways of communicating with folks in China

China-US politics / tensions and how they get played out in daily lives
US media's coverage of China
TV programs watched
Internet browsing
News sources

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