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## NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO CHINESE INTERNATIONAL DOCTORAL STUDENTS' JOURNEY: A STRENGTH-BASED PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

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Aim/Purpose	This narrative inquiry study uses a strength-based approach to study the cross-cultural socialization journey of Chinese international doctoral students at a U.S. Land Grant university. Historically, we thought of socialization as an institutional or group-defined process, but “journey” taps into a rich narrative tradition about individuals, how they relate to others, and the identities that they carry and develop.
Background	To date, research has employed a deficit perspective to study how Chinese students must adapt to their new environment. Instead, my original contribution is using narrative inquiry study to explore cross-cultural socialization and mentoring practices that are consonant with the cultural capital that Chinese international doctoral students bring with them.
Methodology	This qualitative research uses narrative inquiry to capture and understand the experiences of three Chinese international doctoral students at a Land Grant institute in the U.S.
Contribution	This study will be especially important for administrators and faculty striving to create more diverse, supportive, and inclusive academic environments to enhance Chinese international doctoral students' experiences in the U.S. Moreover, this study fills a gap in existing research by using a strength-based lens to provide valuable practical insights for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to support the unique cross-cultural socialization of Chinese international doctoral students.
Findings	Using multiple conversational interviews, artifacts, and vignettes, the study sought to understand the doctoral experience of Chinese international students' experience at an American Land Grant University. The findings suggest that

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	Chinese international doctoral students use cultural capital (aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance) as leverage in this cross-cultural socialization process.
Recommendations for Practitioners	The findings from this study offer insights for practitioners into what institutions and departments might do to support Chinese international doctoral students in their socialization journey. It is vital to support the whole student through understanding their different forms of capital.
Recommendations for Researchers	Future researchers may want to further explore how students experience this process. An important question for future researchers to consider is: do Chinese international doctoral students benefit from multilingual discourse with their peers and from a multi-lingual command of the literature? Also, does the ability to read scholarly publications in both Chinese and English bridge a gap and strengthen professional identity development?
Impact on Society	Significant impact on society includes improved opportunities for cross-cultural learning, international partnerships, and support for positive socialization experiences where diverse students may use their cultural capital as strengths and express new ideas. Moreover, there is also an economic benefit for the institutions and communities that rely on international students' economic contributions.
Future Research	Future research may want to explore how students perceive and experience multilingualism as a benefit in their education; for example, does the ability to read scholarly publications in both Chinese and English bridge a gap and strengthen professional identity development?
Keywords	Chinese international doctoral students, socialization, cultural capital, strength-based perspective, narrative inquiry

## INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

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Language discrimination is a problem that broadly impacts international students and students from linguistically diverse backgrounds (Lee & Rice, 2007). How would you like to be scolded for speaking your native language among friends? Several Chinese international graduate students took to Twitter to make it known the discrimination they experienced. The story went viral and was reported in the *New York Times* (Mervosh, 2019). Thus, this study is a timely account of Chinese international students' experiences. Though Duke University apologized after Assistant Professor Dr. Neely requested Chinese students to stop speaking Chinese on campus and threatened them with loss of future internship opportunities (A. B. Wang, 2019), that alone did not make the problem go away. The lone case reported at Duke University resonated with Chinese students who experienced similar problems at other universities.

Chinese students are the largest international student group in the U.S. at 34.6% in 2020 (Moody, 2020), and their tuition is a major source of revenue for many universities at \$15 billion (Mervosh, 2019; Neuliep, 2020; Swindell, 2020). News such as the Duke University incident spreads quickly on Chinese news and social media (Kuznetsova, 2018) and can negatively impact U.S. higher education institutions' ability to recruit and retain international students. Though the incident was formally reported at only one institution, its resonance with the Chinese student community demonstrates we have a long way to go in creating a supportive campus environment that is culturally attuned to all students.

Dr. Neely's demand that Chinese graduate students not speak Chinese and suppress their identity is an example of a racial microaggression. Racial microaggressions are actions or incidents that communicate racism either intentionally or unintentionally (Sue, 2010). Asking Chinese students to not speak their native language (Klotman, 2019) stems from the deficit view (Heng, 2016). Research

studies (Martínez, 2018; Wright et al., 2017) showed that being bilingual is a strength for diverse learners. Moreover, a second language provides a second lens to understand multiple perspectives, and the more non-Western that language is, the greater the difference and the more there is to be learned (Ning, 2020). This particular narrative challenges the grand narrative that Chinese students need to speak English 100% of the time to be successful in American universities. Rather, there are rich opportunities for Chinese students to use both English and Chinese when talking among themselves (Bialystok, 1999), as it facilitates double consciousness, code switching, and the development of complex identity (Ma, 2020). This aligns with a strength-based understanding of how multilingualism benefits Chinese students' development. Furthermore, Yosso's (2005) work shows that communication experience in more than one language is a form of linguistic capital. Chinese students, like other students of color, may bring multiple languages and communication skills to higher education, including storytelling tradition or communicate via visual art).

## ***PROBLEM STATEMENT***

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To bring it full circle, the Duke University phenomena is just one example of the many challenges that Chinese international doctoral students face in U.S. doctoral programs. Existing research has broadly focused on the language, academic, personal, motivation, and sociocultural stressors of Chinese students' socialization to American higher education (Rawlings & Sue, 2013; Yan & Berliner, 2013). Moreover, extant research conflates Asian students as a homogenous group. Indeed, it is problematic that Asian students who have rich within-group diversity are often viewed as a monolithic group. Research indicates that Chinese international doctoral students must adjust their way of thinking to accommodate the norms of U.S. university academic culture (Heng, 2016). At times, socialization considered simply as assimilation could be inadequate due to these different ways of thinking. One example is that Chinese tend to use circular thinking whereas Westerners tend to use linear thinking, with this circular thinking reflected in both verbal and non-verbal communications (Brazill, 2016).

To date, research has emphasized an assimilation model; that is, how Chinese international doctoral students must adapt to their new environment (Hsieh, 2007; Rawlings & Sue, 2013; Yan, 2017; Y. L. Zhang, 2016). In other words, much of this existing research falls into the traditional deficit perspective of higher education, which emphasizes the deficiencies that Chinese students have when they enter American higher education and the particular skills they need to acquire in order to succeed (Yan & Berliner, 2011; Y. Zhou et al., 2008). To this end, the unique contributions of my narrative inquiry study are to explore cross-cultural socialization and mentoring practices that are consonant with the cultural capital that Chinese international doctoral students bring with them.

To address these gaps in the literature, my research relies on the lens of strength-based socialization to understand: (1) the positive life experiences that Chinese international doctoral students have when entering American higher education; and (2) the strengths that Chinese students bring from their unique culture that benefit their development and foster positive relationships with faculty and non-Chinese peers.

## ***RESEARCH PURPOSE***

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The purpose of this study is to understand Chinese international doctoral students' narratives of how they leverage cultural capital as a strength in socializing to American higher education. Chinese doctoral students engage with American academic culture and use their cultural capital (aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance) as a strength in their socialization experiences (Yosso, 2005). In this study, socialization is operationalized as Chinese international doctoral students relying on their cultural capital as a form of strength to live and study in the U.S. This study intends to fill knowledge gaps by exploring the following research questions:

**Research question 1:** What are the forms of cultural capital that Chinese international doctoral students identify as most salient to their cross-cultural socialization journey?

**Research question 2:** How do Chinese international doctoral students describe the ways their cultural capital shapes their cross-cultural socialization journey?

## ***SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY***

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This research is significant because it explores students' perceptions of cross-cultural socialization and how they can draw on these experiences to maximize their learning. These experiences include interacting with peers and mentors and utilizing a broad set of campus resources. Through these interactions, students gain knowledge, skills, and abilities that help them successfully navigate postsecondary education (Castro, 2018; Le & Gardner, 2010; Weidman et al., 2001). Chinese international doctoral students' socialization is a multifaceted process for three important reasons. First, Chinese experience cross-cultural socialization by living in America. Second, Chinese students also socialize as doctoral students. And third, the different levels of socialization needed when Chinese students socialize to American higher education. This multidimensional process may be more complex than traditional doctoral student socialization as described in the literature. Further, as noted in the Duke University incident, Chinese students may also need to manage microaggressions or feelings of isolation as they navigate the new environment. Findings will be especially important for administrators and faculty striving to create more diverse, supportive, and inclusive academic environments to promote Chinese international doctoral students' experiences in the U.S. (Cotterall, 2013). This study will fill a gap in existing research by using a strength-based lens to provide valuable practical insights for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to support the unique cross-cultural socialization of Chinese international doctoral students.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

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The purpose of this literature review is to: (1) explore Chinese international doctoral students' experiences; and (2) investigate how they express particular qualities (aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance) of Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth framework in their strength-based cross-cultural socialization journey. The terms are defined as:

- **Cultural capital** refers to the particular qualities (aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance) of Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth framework.
- **The strength-based perspective** is a holistic view of people's qualities and strengths, including character, promise, and resources/relationships (Saleebey, 2006). Cultural capital is a form of strength.
- **Cross-cultural socialization** refers to the cross-cultural process of learning to behave in a certain way to gain acceptance within a group we identify with (Howe & Lisi, 2020).

The databases searched were ERIC, PsycInfo, JSTOR, ProQuest, and Google Scholar. Generally, the year restrictions for the literature review are post-2000 because the concepts of socialization and Chinese international doctoral students' experiences in the U.S. have shifted greatly throughout time. Moreover, I selected publications based on impact (number of citations) and relevance to this research. Then, I investigated chains of citations to identify the development of critical work. In this study, Chinese international doctoral students are operationalized as those who are pursuing their PhD degree on the F visa (Ye, 2018). Let us begin by critically reflecting on why we should care about Chinese international doctoral students' journey in the U.S.

## *CHINESE INTERNATIONAL DOCTORAL STUDENTS: WHY SHOULD WE CARE?*

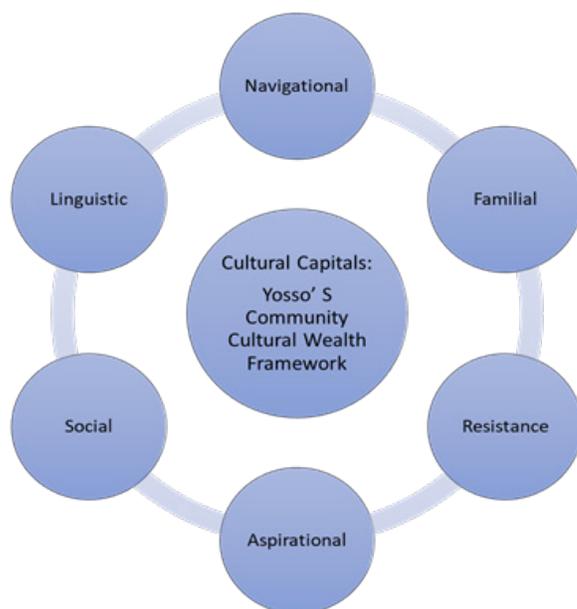
Most doctoral education research uses the socialization framework to explore students' experiences (Weidman et al., 2001). This framework has been criticized for being monolithic and not taking into consideration the context and synergistic relationships between students and their doctoral programs (Gardner 2010). However, socialization is not unidirectional. It is instead an interactive process between faculty, students, and the university environment. Another critique of the socialization literature is that they often neglect individual student differences (Antony, 2002). Current socialization theories about doctoral students may expect students to compartmentalize their cultural identities to successfully assimilate into the new academic culture (Johnson et al., 2017).

Further, student diversity is a growing trend in higher education and universities compete globally for international graduate students (Bagley & Portnoi, 2014). The importance of Chinese students to American higher education is evidenced economically, socially, and culturally. Economically and socially, Chinese nationals make up the largest group of international students in the U.S., about 30% of all foreign students, with about 340,000 in 2018 (Y. Zhou, 2018). Moreover, Chinese international doctoral students are an important source of research labor for many universities (Altbach et al., 2011; Chao et al., 2017; Gong & Huybers, 2015). The increased competition for international graduate students in the global higher education market is evidenced by how U.S. universities struggle to recruit and retain diverse graduate student populations (Altbach et al., 2009). Given the current social and political trends, it is vital for American institutions to help Chinese international doctoral students feel welcome, safe, and supported. Moreover, if American higher education is more supportive of Chinese students, it will benefit the intellectual and cultural diversity of the institution and add value to the local economy. Culturally, prior research (Chen & Ross, 2015; Yuan, 2011) suggested that it is challenging for Chinese international doctoral students to socialize without losing their original identity because their cultural values may be incongruent with the norms and politics of American society. However, I would argue that even if Chinese international students try to socialize, xenophobia and hostilities as a result of American trade policies with China and the current COVID-19 pandemic have led to increased anti-Chinese prejudice, discrimination, and racism (Brownell, 2020). For example, former President Trump's rhetoric referring to the COVID-19 virus as the "Chinese Virus" or "Wuhan Virus" exacerbated this problem (Cho, 2020). Referring to the COVID-19 virus as "Chinese Virus" only increased safety concerns, xenophobia, and discrimination towards Chinese international students.

One important point may be that better relationships between China and the U.S. (superpowers) can come from young Chinese students who positively socialize to American universities and return home. They may see the U.S. not as a threat but more as a partner. For example, historically the U.S. government promoted academic exchanges to create a "mutual understanding" with other countries, as with the explicit goal of the Fulbright Program (Freedman et al., 2019). In turn, American students and faculty who engage with Chinese students can appreciate the intellectual, cultural, and political advantages of working collaboratively rather than competitively to enhance globalization. Moreover, the better the experiences of Chinese international students, the more likely additional Chinese students will attend that university because Chinese tend to define identity through group membership (Ardichvili et al., 2006). As an example of this collectivist drive, the population of Chinese students already enrolled at an institution influences college choice because prospective Chinese students believe that such a population will make them more acceptable (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Furthermore, Chinese doctoral students at American universities are more likely to persist and graduate compared to other international groups, which is why recruitment is important (J. Zhou, 2014).

***THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: YOSSO'S COMMUNITY CULTURAL WEALTH***

The organization of this literature review is guided by Yosso's (2005) six forms of cultural capital (aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance). Chinese international doctoral students face many unique challenges while studying and living in the U.S. (Huang & Klinger, 2006). Major challenges included conquering language barriers and culture shock, socializing with American peers and faculty, adapting to American higher education and culture, and coping with racial microaggression and discrimination (Huang, 2012; Kuo, 2011; Lee & Rice, 2007). Extant research has documented the challenges Chinese students experience as they socialize to American higher education. However, studies have not addressed the strengths that Chinese students bring with them to thrive in American higher education. Yosso's (2005) cultural capital framework can provide a new paradigm shift for how Chinese international doctoral students identify and use various forms of cultural capital as strengths vs. deficits during their socialization process. Chinese students cope with these challenges using the various forms of cultural capital, including aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance (Yosso, 2005). Thus, this study uses Yosso's community cultural wealth framework as shown in Figure 1 to explore how Chinese international doctoral students rely on their cultural capital as strengths to successfully navigate their cross-cultural socialization journey.



**Figure 1. Adapted from Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth framework**

Although Yosso's (2005) framework was originally theorized to study Chicana/Latina undergraduates, it is well suited to study how Chinese international doctoral students can use their cultural capital as strengths for four important reasons. First, these capitals (aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance) are deeply rooted in Chinese culture and shed light on understanding inherent strengths of individuals (Ye & Edwards, 2017). Second, it focuses on the experiential knowledge that Chinese students bring with them or develop in their cross-cultural socialization journey. In other words, this paper employs a strength-based perspective to understand Chinese student's cultural capital as a form of experiential knowledge (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Chinese international doctoral students bring their own funds of knowledge and higher education should honor their cultural experiences and resources as strengths rather than deficits (Kiyama & Rios-Aguilar, 2017). Third, Chinese students cope with challenges using various forms of cultural capital. The six notions of cultural capital grounded in Yosso's (2005) conceptualization of community cultural wealth apply to Chinese international doctoral students and contradict the essentialist view and the misconception that Chinese students are the same as any Asian groups (Ye, 2018). Finally, this paper uses a strength-

based perspective to describe the ways Chinese international doctoral students' cultural capital shape their doctoral socialization journey by exploring the capital and resources that they bring with them or develop through their cross-cultural socialization journey.

One assumption of this study is that Chinese cultural capital can be used by Chinese international doctoral students to help navigate American higher education. Another assumption is that students continue to use their capital as they move through their doctoral journey. Unique to the framework proposed in this study is how Chinese international doctoral students experience American higher education and use their cultural capital as strengths in this cross-cultural socialization process. The following section explains the ways in which Chinese international doctoral students may draw on different forms of their cultural capital to shape their socialization process in American culture. Attention is given to how these forms of capital can provide Chinese students with an emotional and cultural anchor that helps them navigate and overcome challenges presented by the cross-cultural socialization process.

### **Familial**

In 2017, students from Columbia University in New York City were targeted by racist vandals who ripped the name tags bearing their Chinese names off dorm doors (Lim, 2017). This harmed them as Chinese parents imbue their children's names with meaning and their names signify familial capital. Students rely on their familial capital to be successful (Fang & Wang, 2014). To an American, it might seem unacceptable for Chinese students to use their Chinese name, and a small matter for them to choose an English name that is more acceptable (or easier to pronounce) for their American colleagues (Rawls & Duck, 2020).

However, Chinese cultural and familial goals have major influence on Chinese international doctoral students' education trajectories in the U.S. (Crehan, 2017). Students rely on their parents' culture and social capitals, and college choice is highly influenced by their parents "as early as primary school to junior high school" (Chen, 2014, p.8; Fang & Wang, 2014; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Chinese students with high test scores or wealthy families may seek out elite universities. In contrast, those with excellent but not top-level test scores or from families of modest means must settle for less-prestigious state universities in the U.S. (Zhao & Park, 2014).

### **Aspirational**

Chinese students studying in the U.S. have faith in some versions of the American Dream, meaning that through hard work they can achieve success regardless of their social class or birthplace (Leong, 2015; Yang, 2015). Although the American Dream may be a myth, it exerts a powerful influence on Chinese students seeking to study in the U.S. The film *American Dreams in China* identifies challenges to the American dream such as social isolation, visa problems, and financial limitations (Yan & Berliner, 2013). Ballantine et al. (2018) confirm that Chinese students come to U.S. universities to chase the dream of freedom and opportunity. The demand exceeds the opportunity for graduate education in China, and this imbalance is fed by grueling and highly competitive admission processes (Altbach, 2004; Gong & Huybers, 2015; Gu et al., 2010). Despite this faith in the American Dream, new immigration policies and visa requirements diminish these aspirations and the Trump administration has reduced the flow of Chinese international students to the U.S. (Dennis, 2017).

### **Linguistic**

High-context cultures communicate in ways that are implicit and rely heavily on context, whereas low-context cultures rely on explicit verbal communication (Neese, 2016). In general, America is a "low-context" culture, whereas Chinese culture is "high-context", and the Chinese language is full of ambiguity. In high-context cultures, understanding of unspoken rules and indirect implicit communication is required. In low-context Western culture, a direct and explicit approach is vital for effective

communication (Brazill, 2016). For example, American-style research and academic writing is unfamiliar to Chinese international doctoral students. Chinese seldom make the subject clear at the beginning of a sentence, and instead leave the audience room for interpretation. This holds true in oral speaking for Chinese as they often speak indirectly. In contrast, English academic writing is more direct with an emphasis on logical reasoning and organization. Chinese international doctoral students must balance their identity so that their thinking patterns conform to American styles (X. Liu et al., 2010). For example, the opportunity for Chinese students to apply their Chinese language and their high-context culture to academic work serves two important functions. One, it may allow Chinese students to think more creatively about their academic work. Two, it can internationalize their academic work and make it more accessible to a broader range of other cultures.

### **Social**

Socialization is a fundamental aspect of graduate education. Students learn about academic expectations and roles and responsibilities of becoming a doctorate through the socialization process. Faculty and student peers are fundamental to this process. For example, faculty are influential in guiding students, including conference presentations and co-authoring publications (Li & Collins, 2018). Moreover, their academic social interactions within the U.S. scholarly culture include their mentoring relationships with advisors as well as peers (Najjar, 2015). Further, Chinese international doctoral students in American higher education encounter a unique socialization process: they may feel isolated, lonely, and stressed in socializing with their American peers. Therefore, they rely heavily on their Chinese peers for academic and emotional support by speaking Chinese with each other, and speaking Chinese is also a form of social bonding (Ye & Edwards, 2017), which at times results in misunderstanding with American faculty and peers (Najjar, 2015; Z. Zhang & Xu, 2007). This is very evident from the Duke University example where students were threatened not to speak or communicate in their native language with their friends. Language is a fund of experiential knowledge because it is integral to cultural identity and bi/multilingualism increases cross-cultural communication (Jandt, 2017). That being said, U.S. faculty and non-Chinese peers can benefit from socializing with Chinese international doctoral students or other international graduate students by learning more about their language and culture to build a “mutual understanding” (Freedman et al., 2019; Trice, 2004). For example, “English Corner” is a common social practice in China, where students and other English learners gather weekly to discuss a book, film, or cultural phenomenon. Further, Chinese language is a vital linguistic and social capital for Chinese international doctoral students to connect and socialize with Chinese peers and navigate the loneliness of studying and living in a foreign land.

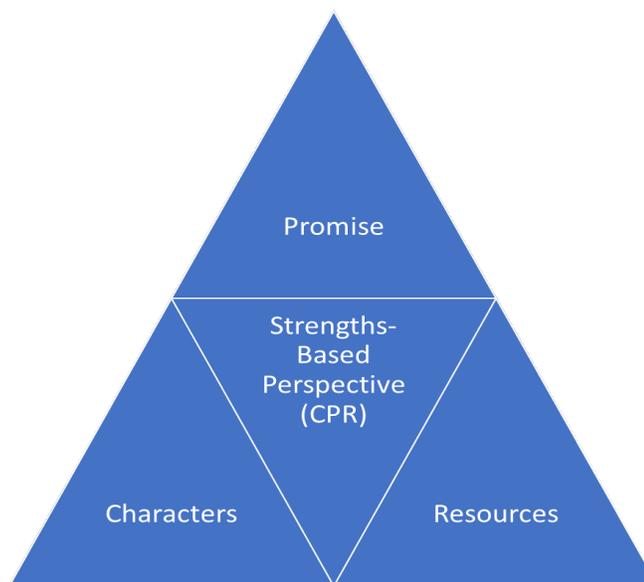
### **Navigational and Resistance**

Bista and Foster (2011) and Yuan (2011) studied how Chinese students navigate social and academic settings in the U.S. Key factors included motivation for learning, professional growth and ability, and frustrations of living and learning in the U.S. Frustrations included communication and language barriers, discrimination, and pressure in balancing academy and employment. Higher education should strive to create an inclusive environment for all students, where they not only feel safe but also feel brave to be who they are (Brazill, 2020). Moreover, Alfattal (2016) developed an 8Ps model of campus climate as an improvement upon the traditional 7Ps model (people, program, place, promotion, price, process, and physical facilities) developed by Kotler and Fox. The 8<sup>th</sup> P is “peace”, which includes motivational, social, emotional support, and a sense of security or safety (Alfattal, 2016). Some Chinese students and their parents perceive the U.S. as unsafe because of lax gun laws, high rates of violence, and Americans' reputation for reckless behavior (Altbach, 2004; Gong & Huybers, 2015; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). For example, referring to the COVID-19 virus as the “China virus” feeds discrimination towards Chinese international students (Cho, 2020) and raised fears that they could be targeted. Therefore, culturally attuned language choice is a powerful way to collectively advocate for and support students of color (Gay, 2018). Creating a supportive campus climate is crucial to recruiting and retaining Chinese students (and other foreign students) and enhancing their experience in the

U.S. Chinese international doctoral students currently enrolled in the U.S. have been able to navigate and resist the challenges to persist in American institutions. An important reason is that their motivational and aspirational strengths help them overcome challenges in reaching their goals (Griner & Sobol, 2014). Embracing the strengths that students bring with them to higher education will make institutions a more diverse, inclusive, and equitable environment and allow Chinese international doctoral students to be successful.

### ***ADDRESSING THE GAP IN THE LITERATURE: STRENGTH-BASED PERSPECTIVE***

This study builds on Yosso's (2005) framework by providing a cross-cultural and strength-based understanding of this socialization process. Often, the deficit perspective was used to criticize minoritized students' home cultures for their lack of success. The strength-based perspective offers a holistic view of individual Chinese international doctoral students' cross-cultural socialization journey. The philosophy of strength-based perspectives was originated by Saleebey (1996). It emerged from social work and clinical counseling by building on the strengths and characters that people or families have instead of the traditional deficit model or trying to mold people into a modernist and hegemonic "one size fits all" approach (Saleebey, 1996; Saleebey, 2013). As shown in Figure 2, Saleebey (2006) argued that the strength-based perspective is a holistic view of people's qualities and strengths, including character, promise, and resources/relationships (CPR). In the case of Chinese international doctoral students, the character and resources that individuals bring and develop throughout their socialization journey will contribute to their promise by utilizing their cultural capital as strengths. It is important to note that the capital may be unique for different Asian groups because of their different cultural backgrounds.



**Figure 2. Adapted from Saleebey's (2006) strength-based perspective**

The strength-based perspective addresses the gaps in the existing literature that Chinese international doctoral students need to succeed in American higher education, rejecting the extreme deficit model that demands full assimilation into U.S. culture and abandoning their cultural capital. Moreover, Yosso's cultural capital and the strength-based approach connect with each other because they both focus on individuals' strengths and unique attributes. For instance, the value of Yosso's cultural capital framework as applied to Chinese international students is that these capitals (*vis-à-vis*, strengths) enable them to develop new knowledge and skills while maintaining their cultural integrity during their socialization journey.

Historically, we thought of socialization as an institutional or group-defined process. “Journey” is a linguistically and culturally relevant choice to describe the socialization process because it implies that it is about individual people, the way they relate to others along the way, and the strengths (cultural capital) that they carry with them. Thus “journey” taps into a rich narrative tradition whether of Western Civilization’s lone hero or the immigrant journey that is so important to American history and society (Nelson, 2005). Importantly, this study uses a narrative approach to understand Chinese students’ stories as they engage in the cross-cultural socialization journey. Chinese students’ cross-cultural socialization journeys include a number of important relationships such as peers and faculty who are part of their stories. Therefore, narrative inquiry is an appropriate approach to study Chinese students’ socialization journey because it is a recursive process to investigate individual and social experiences (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). Also, “journey” is a culturally attuned choice as it aligns with the Chinese narrative tradition such as Journey to the West.

## METHODOLOGY

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The methodology section includes approach to this study, positionality/location statement, site selection (context of the study), sample and sampling procedures, data collection strategies, data analysis strategies, ethical considerations, authenticity, trustworthiness, credibility, and transferability.

### *APPROACH TO THIS STUDY*

This qualitative research uses a narrative inquiry approach to capture and understand the stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Freedman et al., 2019) of three Chinese international doctoral students at a Land Grant institute in the U.S. Narrative approaches can be traced to Dewey (as cited in Savin-Baden & Major, 2013) who believed that life is an educational process whereby people reconstruct experience into meaningful stories which reveal social and cultural contexts (Savin-Baden & Major, 2010; C. C. Wang & Geale, 2015). Further, narrative inquiry is “collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieu” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). Through the participants’ stories and artifacts, personal and human dimensions of experience are captured over time and take into account the relationship between individual experience and cultural context.

In this study, narrative inquiry empowers Chinese international doctoral students to share stories and helps gain a more fluid, complex and detailed understanding of the issue within a global context (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Ye, 2018). Moreover, narrative inquiry allows me to co-construct meanings with Chinese students as an insider (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Specifically, there are five important reasons for using narrative inquiry to understand Chinese international doctoral students’ cross-cultural socialization journey. First, narrative inquiry aligns with my social constructionism perspective, allowing me to co-construct stories with participants through interactions, dialogue, and collaboration. Reality and knowledge are developed from inquiry and shaped by relationships between experience and context as well as relationships between researchers and participants (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). Furthermore, knowledge developed from narrative inquiry is textured by particularity and incompleteness, leading less to generalizations and certainties, and more to alternative possibilities (Clandinin & Murphy, as cited in Clandinin & Huber, 2010). Second, narrative stories shed light on individual identity and how people see themselves. Third, narrative inquiry is best when capturing the detailed stories or experience of a small number of individuals (usually ranging from one to three) whose stories might otherwise not be heard (Savin-Baden & Major, 2010). Fourth, narrative inquiry allows the researcher to spend considerable time with each participant and collect multiple types of data, including stories triggered by artifacts, that result in thick descriptions. Finally, a culturally relevant reason for using the narrative approach is that it relates to Chinese culture’s penchant for storytelling and valuing of circular relationships (*guān xì* 关系). Even though we can translate “*guān xì* 关系” as “relationship” in English, the circular and reciprocal nature of the Chinese “relationship” might not be understandable to Westerners without the cultural context. In

other words, as opposed to the American sense of tit-for-tat, the Chinese notion of “*guān xi* 关系” implies obligations that transcend the immediate relationship, extending to a wider circle of family, friends, and colleagues (Brazill, 2016).

### ***POSITIONALITY AND SELF-LOCATION STATEMENT***

This study brings a strength-based perspective (Hammond & Zimmerman, 2012) to empower Chinese international students in challenging the power system and using cultural capital as strengths in higher education. My knowledge in this research area is shaped by my personal and professional experiences. Sharing our positionality helps develop a relationship with the audience. Thus, in this section, I reflect upon my Chinese cultural heritage and explain how my cultural identity influences the way I experience the world. My identity as a Chinese doctoral student and first-generation college student is relevant to my commitment to social justice issues and cross-cultural socialization experiences. I have lived in the U.S. for almost a decade, which I learned could be a “melting pot” (assimilation, i.e., giving up one’s heritage culture and adopt the dominant culture’s values to fit in) or a “salad bowl” (cultural pluralism, i.e., retain unique cultural identity while navigating the mainstream culture) (Howe & Lisi, 2020; S. Liu et al., 2014).

The “salad bowl” analogy was first published by Kallen to stress cultural pluralism, meaning the salad ingredients retain unique characteristics without blending into one homogenous culture (Jandt, 2017). Cultural pluralism is when minorities are empowered to maintain their cultural values without assimilation to the dominant society (Jandt, 2017). The “salad bowl” analogy aligns with the strength-based perspective that cultural heritage is an asset, as contrasted with the “melting pot” deficit model requiring individuals to assimilate (Gallagher & Lippard, 2014). I self-identify as a Chinese American woman living in the “salad bowl” because I maintain my Chinese identity while navigating American culture and higher education. Personally, I rely on my Chinese cultural capital as strengths and that is why I challenge the deficit perspective and push back on the hegemonic structures deeply rooted in higher education.

I rely on the social constructionism paradigm and a cross-cultural/multicultural lens to frame my research on how participants construct shared meaning through their unique experiences and social interactions. This study aims to understand how Chinese international doctoral students used their personal and cultural strengths in the socialization experiences within American higher education. I have no personal connection with the participants, but we share a deep cultural connection given my insider role as a Chinese American. As an insider (a Mainland Chinese native), I am well-suited to provide insights into the phenomenon, such as my deep understanding of Chinese language, cultural values, and ability to establish trust with participants. For example, I negotiated my research agendas with research participants through designing, translating, and conducting in-depth interviews and collecting artifacts that are sensitive to their experiences.

### ***SITE SELECTION (CONTEXT FOR THE STUDY)***

I selected the research site because of ease of access and the university’s Land Grant mission to support students from diverse populations. Most Chinese students prefer living in larger cities; however, the study site is in a small city in the northern Rocky Mountain region. The university has only 17 Asian international graduate students and 4 Chinese international doctoral students. I conducted narrative inquiry conversational interviews with the participants who are Chinese international students pursuing a doctoral degree in various disciplines. Further, this institution is well suited to study Yosso’s capital because, being in a small city with low cultural diversity and few opportunities to interact with other Chinese, students may need to rely more on their capital and require more individual strengths to be successful.

The context for the study includes both distal and proximal factors (Seale et al., 2006). Distal factors depend on culture, socio-economic status, political, or social structures and proximal factors include

interactional settings or sequences. The distal factors for this study are derived from current globalization trends, including the changing cultural, economic, educational, political, and social environment (Bound & Turner, 2010; Ye, 2018). Distal factors also included internationalization in higher education, including institutions' use of proactive strategies to recruit international students. When it comes to teaching, research, and services, this includes mobilization of students, faculty, and staff as well as internationalization of curriculum, dual and joint programs, and offshore campuses (Li & Collins, 2018; Ye, 2018). The proximal factor is that the study is situated at University A, an R1 school in the Rocky Mountains. University A is developing international exchange programs such as study abroad programs, the Fulbright Teaching Excellence and Achievement program, exchange student and scholar programs, and efforts to recruit international students. Moreover, the current global competition for international graduate students may require that U.S. institutions make their environments more inviting to potential international students. This may have greater implications for Chinese international doctoral students given the current trade policies between the U.S. and China, which may communicate an inhospitable environment for Chinese students pursuing education in the U.S.

**SAMPLE AND SAMPLING PROCEDURES**

I used a snow-ball technique and a purposive sampling strategy (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to recruit three Chinese international doctoral students as participants through referral. My rationale for this approach was due to the limited number of Chinese international doctoral students at the research site. This study did not include any international exchange students, Post-docs, or exchange scholars who are not obtaining a PhD degree. Further, I chose three participants as a culturally attuned decision. The study site has four Chinese international doctoral students but since “four” (“*sì* 四”) is the unluckiest number in Chinese numerology because it is pronounced similar to the Chinese word for “death” (“*sǐ* 死”) (Sotheby, 2018), I selected three participants from Mainland China who met the selection criteria, excluding one from Taiwan due to cultural and language differences. In contrast, three is a lucky number in Chinese culture, and the character “*zhōng* 众” in Chinese makes up from three people, which means “three is a crowd or a large number of people” (Sun, 2016). Listening to three stories allowed me to gain greater insights into their experiences which resulted in stories with greater complexity. Table 1 summarizes the key characteristics of the study participants. The sample was comprised of two females and one male from a cross section of disciplines with two students in a STEM field, and one in education. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, I assigned aliases based on Chinese last names preferred by the participants but having no relationship to their real names.

**Table 1. Demographic characteristics of study participants**

NO.	PARTICIPANT PSEUDONYMS	SEX	YEARS OF STUDY	PROJECTED GRADUATION	DEPARTMENT
1	Li	F	1st	2023	Education
2	Ma	M	3rd	2021	Engineering
3	Zhang	F	2nd	2022	Engineering

**DATA COLLECTION STRATEGIES**

Following institutional review board approval, I conducted narrative inquiry semi-structured conversational interviews with three Chinese international doctoral students to understand their cross-cultural socialization experiences. In my experience, even Chinese scholars who specialize in English language studies prefer answering questions in Chinese instead of English. I provided participants a choice of which language to conduct the interview in and they preferred sharing their stories in Chi-

nese. Hence, I translated interview questions from English to Chinese. After data collection, I translated the transcriptions to English for American audiences focusing on the context and meanings vs. word-for-word translation (Brazill, 2016). As shown in Table 2, each interview lasted approximately 120-150 mins with repeated follow-up interview conversations that lasted another 120-150 mins each. I included the interview protocol in the appendix.

The longer interview time allowed me to collect in-depth data to explore the complexity, multifaceted, and evolving participants' experiences and rich narratives (Savin-Baden & Majors, 2013). Importantly, I asked each participant to bring an artifact that represents who they are and their doctoral experiences. Artifacts are objects that facilitate participants in telling stories (Keats, 2009). As a native speaker and an insider, I am aware of building a trusting relationship with participants and understanding their stories fully (Ye, 2018). In sum, the two approaches prompted individuals to share stories and experiences.

**Table 2. Narrative conversational interview**

NO.	PARTICIPANT PSEUDONYMS	ORIGINAL INTERVIEW (Hours)	FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW (Hours)	TOTAL INTERVIEW (Hours)
1	Li	2.5	2.5	5.0
2	Ma	2.5	2.0	4.5
3	Zhang	3.0	2.5	5.5

### ***DATA ANALYSIS STRATEGIES***

I recorded the interviews with permission from the participants. Also, I memoed and jotted reflective notes. Afterwards, I transcribed and translated the interviews. The initial process relied on first and second cycle coding (Saldaña, 2016) by using a codebook to manage and organize the data, reduce codes into themes, develop interpretations, and visualize the data with concept maps and stories. First cycle coding included identification of priori codes (a form of deductive analysis). I integrated participant conversations about their artifacts into the analysis and identified how the interview excerpts/rich quotations reflected Yosso's six forms of cultural capital (aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance). Then, second cycle coding was used to identify open codes with patterns (a form of inductive analysis), for example the metanarrative of how Chinese international doctoral students rely on each capital as strengths.

Throughout the coding process, deductive coding was applied to understand the individual and common stories from the participants as what and how they rely on the six forms of capital in their cross-cultural socialization journey. Also, I used advanced analytical techniques such as RITES (read, interrogate, thematize, expand, and summarize) (Savin-Baden & Majors, 2013) for interpreting the narratives. Further, I relied on "plugging in" to include cultural insights and the strengths of the participants in the meaning making process (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013). As a result of plugging one context into another, I translated and interpreted how the participants narrated their stories, i.e. how they used Chinese characters and metaphors to enrich their intercultural stories and to generate new perspectives about their cross-cultural experience. Further, the concept of "thinking on the threshold" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013; Stopford, 2020) also guided my process of understanding the meanings of the artifacts. For example, I embraced uncertainty of the data analysis process and problematized how the various forms of cultural capital (aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance) in Yosso's community cultural wealth theory functioned in Chinese international doctoral students' socialization process.

### ***ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS: STORIED THINKING***

This study was IRB approved. However, narrative inquiry raises ethical considerations that move beyond the IRB process to empathic listening and suspending disbelief (Clandinin & Murphy, as cited

in Clandinin & Huber, 2010). Narrative inquirers should do research with and for participants, not on participants. I embraced relational responsibility during the inquiry process, such as honoring participants' narrative authority, openness to multiple voices, and considering the audience (Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin & Huber, 2010).

### ***ACHIEVING AUTHENTICITY, TRUSTWORTHINESS, CREDIBILITY, AND TRANSFERABILITY***

I used several strategies to ensure the quality and integrity of the data. Credibility was addressed in developing the interview questions by seeking feedback from Chinese international doctoral students who were not part of the study. This feedback allowed me to improve the comprehensibility of the interview questions within a manageable time frame (Brazill, 2016). Furthermore, Creswell (2018) suggested using peer debriefing, seeking participant's feedback, clarifying researcher bias or engaging in reflexivity for validation. Therefore, I ensured validity and authenticity through clear communication of my research purpose, paradigmatic assumptions, and positionality. Moreover, I addressed authenticity through my own ethos as a Chinese graduate student and using the students' native language to conduct the interviews. The reflexive process allowed me to identify my advantages, inherent values, and experiences as an insider to provide greater insight into the phenomenon.

Throughout the manuscript, I used inter-subjective reflections (researchers and participants co-involved in the meaning making process) to engage in reflexivity (Savin-Baden & Majors, 2010). Also, this reflexivity process allowed appreciation for various perspectives through collecting narrative stories shaped by participants' experiences (Corlett & Mavin, 2018). Moreover, I ensured trustworthiness through several steps. First, I had a Chinese and an American qualitative researcher review the transcripts, translations, and codebook. Second, I triangulated data by using different data sources (artifacts and interviews), kept a reflexive journal and took notes during the data collection process, and conducted member checking by providing interview transcriptions and translations to participants for validity and accuracy check (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Lastly, I had participants review the narrative stories and the manuscript to make sure the stories accurately represent them. It is important to capture their multiple forms of capital within the stories because individual's narratives are multidimensional. As a limitation, these stories are temporarily limited as the participants may continue to develop over time.

## **FINDINGS**

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The three participants are from different disciplines and in different years of their doctoral journey. They explained how aspects of their cultural capital inspired them to persist in their graduate work. The findings include personal stories and the narratives from Chinese international doctoral students that challenge the deficit model and highlight how they use cultural strengths to navigate their doctoral journey. They identified cultural capital as the most salient strength and described the ways this capital shaped their cross-cultural socialization journey. The stories emerged from the narratives through conversational interviews conducted in Chinese as requested by the interviewees. Additionally, participants brought artifacts to the interview that represented their doctoral experiences. This was a way to prompt stories and help paint a fuller picture of how their cultural capital shaped their journey. The findings were presented by each participant's vignette to capture individual experiences. For each vignette, I first discussed their artifacts and how they represent their doctoral journey. Then, I described each participant's story and how each capital helped them navigate their cross-cultural socialization.

## *LI'S VIGNETTE: AS THE TWIG IS BENT, SO GROWS THE TREE (水到渠成)*

### **Li's artifact**

Li brought a Chinese teapot (Figure 3) to represent the importance of her aspirational and navigational capital during her doctoral experience. She described her PhD life as a roller coaster with its ups and downs. For example, she drinks tea when she is stressed as well as to celebrate success. Li said that making tea represents enjoying and trusting the process and slowing down during her doctoral journey. She wanted to take time to learn instead of rushing it as she did with her MA experience in China. Li describes her artifact in this way:

Although it's an artifact, it represents a state of mind and a quiet atmosphere. When you are particularly upset and distressed, you may not be suitable to make a decision at that time. Instead, you need to sit quietly by yourself, listen to traditional Chinese music, and drink tea; and then you think about these decisions. Sometimes, I think the most difficult part is having to choose. So, when you calm down and list the pros and cons of various choices, it will become clear. During the most distressed and the most difficult time is exactly when the tea and the quietness is most needed.

Worth mentioning, the American cultural code for coffee is profoundly different from the Chinese cultural code for tea. One cannot simply plug tea in as a substitute for coffee from an American cultural perspective. In China, drinking tea is both an inward way of showing gratitude for life and an outward way of socializing with others.



**Figure 3. Li's artifact: Chinese teapot**

### **Li's aspirational capital**

Li is a 39-year-old female from Inner Mongolia, a relatively rural province in north-central China known for its vast prairie grasslands and forested mountains. She is a first year PhD student. Her hobbies are taking walks and, when her family visits her, traveling around the U.S. In her words, her choice to take the PhD in America was a “*shuǐ dào qú chéng* 水到渠成” (“as the twig is bent, so grows the tree”) process, meaning that her early experiences sent her down this path. For example, to understand more about U.S. education and culture in China, she took her BA in English Education and MA in Curriculum and Instruction in Education. She explained that U.S. education focuses on applying theory to practice, which would complement her Chinese education, which focuses more on theory. She pointed out that her PhD courses, such as Educational Statistics and Math Assessment, are very useful for her future teaching profession. In China, she was a primary school teacher but after coming to America and teaching at a university in Tennessee, she wanted to become a better teacher and experience the U.S. educational culture and system.

Using her aspirational capital, she is now currently studying and pursuing her doctorate at an American Land Grant university. She said that “American classrooms are more flexible and have more freedom compared to China”. She and her son are drawn to learning about American K-12 education. After almost finishing her work teaching Mandarin Chinese at a U.S. university with a Confucius Institute, a Chinese government funded educational organization promoting Chinese language and culture, she decided to go to a new place but wished to continue pursuing her PhD. She chose University A because of a faculty member’s connection, who continues to be her advisor. Coming from Inner Mongolia in Northern China, she is used to the cold weather and snow, and feels comfortable in wide open spaces. Before applying to the PhD program, she was accepted as a MA student for a year even though she obtained another MA from China. As a professional goal, she explained that “I wanted to share what I learned about the U.S. education system and comparative education with educators in China. Moreover, I learned that I enjoyed conducting research and teaching.” Li’s professional background as a teacher provided her a sense of place in the U.S. For example, Li’s aspiration to pursue her degree at University A was rooted in her intrinsic desire to learn more about how the American educational system differs from the Chinese system, to be a better teacher, and to share her American educational experiences with other teachers in China. This is mainly because China seeks to create world-class teaching and research, and there is a great hunger to reform education by incorporating American pedagogy that promotes critical inquiry and creativity, as opposed to traditional Confucian pedagogy (Deardorff et al., 2012). Each of these aspirations were strengths in which Li relied on in her educational journey.

### **Li’s linguistic capital**

Before coming to the U.S., English was only a teaching tool for Li – she of course did not conduct her daily life in English. During her PhD, English became important for daily study, research, and social life. Furthermore, Li explained that “in the first semester, I met a good teacher, who helped me improve my English writing. The English language is a hurdle for me, as it is vital in completing my doctoral degree.” In Li’s first semester, she relied on her Chinese linguistic capital to read English peer-review journal articles by translating meanings. She shared her learning process with me, “I was nervous and discouraged in the beginning; however, it takes time to learn English language styles and academic writing; I often look up translated vocabulary in Chinese to better understand the English concepts.” Translating to Chinese allowed her to gain a better understanding of the English concept through connecting to a familiar context. The interaction between Chinese and English languages provided a more robust understanding of concepts and thinking from multiple perspectives. In other words, Li conceptualized her linguistic capital as a strength because the particular advantage of using the translation process helped expand her total knowledge in a dialectical way.

### **Li’s familial capital**

Family is Li’s most important capital in navigating American higher education. Without her familial capital, she would not have the support to study in the U.S. For example, Li explained that:

My husband supported and motivated me to pursue a PhD. He is a lawyer and currently a Law PhD student in China who encourages me to learn new things and develop new ideas. He is my mentor because he inspires me to achieve my dreams and never give up. He helps with my family and comes to visit me from China. It is common for Chinese married couples to live apart for extended periods of time because of school or employment. I felt closer with my husband despite the long distance. We video chat daily via Chinese social media WeChat. Without WeChat, I would not survive. My family is proud of me for overcoming obstacles during the PhD.

Furthermore, Li shared that she was having a tough time with her PhD because her father was diagnosed with colon cancer and she had a baby in the U.S. during the COVID-19 pandemic. Her priority is her family, especially her precious newborn and her older son who attends third grade at a local

school. The strength she derived from her family enabled her to overcome some of the challenges of cross-cultural socialization as well as the challenges of doctoral work. For a woman such as Li who comes to study in the U.S. and brings her children along, there is no easy distinction between cross-cultural socialization and the challenges of doctoral work because her success as a graduate student hinges on taking care of her family.

### **Li's social capital**

Li described how her relationship with faculty members and her advisor has deepened over time. One story she shared with me was:

My advisor inspires me with new ideas, and I enjoy following through on these projects. For example, I designed a comparative math education research project between China and the U.S. I found cultural identity is an important factor, such as, in developing math story problems, where Chinese students selected mooncakes while American students selected muffins.

Li appreciated her relationship with her advisor, even though they have different personalities with diverse communication and working styles, they have cultivated a reciprocal mentoring relationship. Furthermore, Li explained her loneliness as a doctoral student in a small city in the Rocky Mountains:

When working at another university, my American colleagues were more friendly, and they took us hiking and took part in children's birthday parties. I felt that they were very socially active. However, after coming here as a student, the foreigners I met were mostly neighbors and people at school who seemed very busy with their own work.

Li expressed feelings of alienation because her close friends in China were so far away. However, she was able to develop new social relationships with individuals in the community and the lab to help her feel less isolated. She was also able to continue to connect with her friends at home, share her research interests with them, and gain fresh insights on her research from them.

### **Li's navigational and resistance capital**

Li often reflected on her cultural identity as a strength in navigating her doctoral journey. For instance, she approached assignments from a global perspective. Her multicultural experiences positively inform her research interest in comparing math instruction in China and the U.S. She shared with me that navigational capital is the second most salient capital during her PhD. After her PhD journey, she expects that navigational capital will be less salient because, "I am almost 40 and my life trajectory will be more stable after graduation." Li shared that even though resistance is the least salient capital during her PhD journey because there are many things she has no control over, such as COVID-19 or President Trump's threat to ban WeChat. However, she relied on the navigational capital as a strength to overcome these challenges by keeping in touch with those that she would like to deepen her relationship with despite the fact that she is an introvert. Turning now from Li's journey, we consider the very different case of someone whose life revolves around his laboratory research.

### ***MA'S VIGNETTE: MY AMERICAN DREAM PULLS ME LIKE A MAGNET (磁铁)***

#### **Ma's artifact**

Unlike Li, Ma said he could not distinguish different kinds of tea regardless of how expensive they are. He brought a magnet (Figure 4) as his artifact to represent his first impression with the university's Magnetic Resonance Laboratory. The lab served as a bridge for Ma to become a professional scientist. Ma described that "the magnet represents my aspirational capital because that is what attracts me to study in the U.S., and the future I am being pulled to." Furthermore, Ma specified that:

I like the assessment system in the U.S. that includes formative and summative assessments. So, I can reflect on what I learned. Each formative assessment is like a small milestone. I was lucky to enjoy group work with my lab teams, where we shared responsibilities during my undergraduate degree. In the U.S., we take fewer courses compared to China, but it requires more time researching to deepen my understanding of the subject matter.

Ma's reflection of formative assessments indicated his understanding of the PhD education trajectory in the U.S. as a journey and that he appreciates the opportunity to experience a different educational system.



**Figure 4. Ma's artifact: magnet**

### **Ma's aspirational capital**

Ma, a 29-year-old PhD student in the Department of Chemical and Biological Engineering from Hubei, has a different story compared to Li. He took his BS in Chemical and Biological Engineering and continues his PhD without a MS degree because of differences in the fields. His American dream is to work hard to take the PhD and advance his expertise in his field. Ma's passion and love for his major inspired him to pursue the PhD and he dreamt of being a scientist.

### **Ma's familial capital**

Ma also described his family as his biggest supporters, economically and emotionally. During his BS, his parents paid the tuition fees. For the PhD, he supports himself financially with GRA positions. Moreover, Ma expressed gratitude for his aunt:

My aunt is a local staff member [at the university where he studies] and she mentors me through my PhD. When I first arrived, she taught me many things, including how to use a phone card and how to buy a car. When she told me that you need to recruit interview participants, I immediately agreed even though I am very busy.

Ma's dependence on his familial capital shows that Chinese students honor their mentors and family elders, and generally do what they are told. Ma's aunt occupies the role of a family elder with experience regarding his challenges, and so she serves as a form of familial capital by providing insights and advice in helping him navigate life in the U.S.

### Ma's linguistic capital

Ma shared that he often had to code switch back and forth between Chinese and English when reading scholarly articles. Ma used his native language as a linguistic capital to help him construct new scientific knowledge as a PhD scholar and future scientist. In this sense, it is not just a linear translation process between Chinese and English language, but a dialectical process that forges new kinds of understanding. For example, he mentioned that numbers are very difficult for him to translate because Chinese language is a symbolic language and the numbers have meanings that are associated with Chinese characters. In contrast, the English spelling of numbers, when translated to Chinese, does not connote extra-mathematical meaning. This is an example of how Chinese and English language can be incongruent at times and cause difficulty for cross-cultural communication. However, the struggles with English language did not stop Ma' from his doctoral study as he shared about using his Chinese linguistic background as a strength to better his English, "I began to understand the technical terminologies and how to operate the lab equipment once I understood the meanings in Chinese."

### Ma's social capital

His relationship with faculty and committee members are professional. His relationship with his advisors/chair is described as "*yì shī yì yǒu* 亦师亦友" ("teachers and friends"). This concept is important in the context of Chinese culture because students often interact with their professors not just in the classroom but also outside of academia, building strong rapport. For example, Ma's advisor invited students from the lab for dinners and end of semester parties. Ma reflected that sharing food with his advisor helps build friendships that are long-lasting even after his doctoral journey. Food is such an important symbol in Chinese culture as Ma shared that:

For Chinese friends, we get together to share food because doing a PhD is lonely. In China, we visit friends and chat with colleagues. Here, everyone is busy, and you need appointments to talk with them. I do not have much time for socializing; however, I hang out with American peers from my lab and join their birthday parties.

In contrast, Ma met most of his U.S. friends during his undergraduate years through the lab and group projects. Also, due to his international student identity, he avoided political topics. Instead, he has a strong bond with local Chinese friends as they share food and support each other in their American journey.

### Ma's navigational and resistance capital

Photography is his hobby and he was able to use this hobby as a strength to help him navigate and understand the cross-cultural differences between Chinese and American cultures. For example, Ma noted that:

In China, we are allowed to take pictures with children without permission. One time, I did not know about the privacy restrictions in the U.S. that I needed a parent's permission to take pictures with their kids, and I got in trouble. So, I learned that I need to be more cautious and be aware of the cultural differences.

Ma gave another example of how a cultural difference negatively impacted his doctoral study – not being able to take a nap after lunch. In China, students and faculty at all levels take a break between noon and 2 pm to eat and nap. Ma further elaborated that "I was very tired after lunch, so I often fell asleep when the professors were lecturing. One time I took a nap at a quiet place on campus and someone came to play piano and woke me up." He did not know how to explain such cultural differences to American students and faculty. Both examples that Ma shared help describe U.S. vs Chinese social and academic culture differences. In China, taking pictures with kids shows care for children and taking naps (napping after lunch) is also a cultural capital/strength whereas these were cultural deficits/weaknesses in the U.S.

Moreover, socialization in America can make for challenges when back in China. For example, after becoming used to a locale with fewer people, Ma felt uncomfortable when returning to China where people crowd together and do not queue. Furthermore, Ma stated “I have to observe many times about the U.S. culture to learn the differences. For example, I learned to hold the door open for other people.” Living in a heavily Caucasian small city in the Western U.S., Ma misses Chinese people “*rén qì* 人气” (“the crowd”) and Chinese food, and he would like to return to China after graduation.

Also, Ma described the first two years of his doctoral journey as mostly just coursework combined with initial research steps. During the process, he learned to be an independent researcher under the direction of his supervisor. He often proposed what he would like to do and used the feedback to improve his experiment. Now he is in his third year and passed the comprehensive exam, so he can focus on dissertation research. Ma’s goal for scholarly identity is to publish at least three peer-reviewed papers. Navigational and resistance capital allows Ma to be successful as a doctoral candidate and build his professional identity as a scientist.

### *ZHANG’S VIGNETTE: EVERY GRAIN OF RICE (民以食为天)*

#### **Zhang’s artifact**

Zhang’s artifact is Sichuan Peppercorn (Figure 5), which represents her love for Chinese food and cooking since these mouth-numbing peppercorns are an essential ingredient. She describes that “When I first came here, American people viewed me as Chinese even though I cooked American food to fit in. Now, I realized that I love cooking Chinese food and it represents who I am.” Indeed, this artifact of cooking with Sichuan Peppercorn in traditional Chinese food for her family signifies her familial capital. When she cooks for Chinese friends and colleagues in the U.S. it provides her with a sense of belonging and social capital. When asked how much American faculty and peers know about Chinese culture and language, she described Americans as very interested in Chinese food, especially dumplings, stir-fry, and fried rice. Zhang shared that:

It seems like Americans do not know much about Chinese culture. I often shared some Chinese festival traditions with Americans to bridge the cultural differences. For example, in Chinese, last name comes before first name, and when I made mistakes saying English names, I would explain the cultural difference, so I was not misunderstood by others as being rude.



**Figure 5. Zhang’s artifact: Sichuan peppercorns**

Additionally, Zhang brought another artifact, a U.S. one-dollar bill, folded like a tiny Qing dynasty jacket (Figure 6). She received it as a gift from her parents and has carried it with her since middle school as an aspiration. The intertwining of the Chinese and American cultures represented in this artifact created a sense of “*yuán fēn*缘分” (“Chinese concept of fate”). Though she did not intentionally plan her journey to the U.S., this artifact made her feel this sense of “*yuán fēn*缘分”, her destiny to come and study in the U.S., had begun long ago.



**Figure 6. Zhang’s artifact: \$1**

### **Zhang’s aspirational capital**

After her BS, 31-year-old Zhang, came to study in the U.S. because she had worked with her PhD advisor as a Lab Technician in China. In the lab, Zhang worked with two other Chinese friends who are post-docs. She enjoyed hiking on the mountain near campus, which created a sense of belonging to this place. She was proud of herself for learning how to drive and obtaining her driver’s license, a rare achievement for her generation in China. Zhang shared that her personality became more outgoing because of moving to a new environment and she was inspired to make new friends. In other words, Zhang brings aspirational capital with her as a strength that helped her become more extroverted and emboldened her to try new things.

### **Zhang’s familial capital**

Zhang explained Chinese parents do not want their children to be far away because children are expected to care for them in their old age (women typically retire at 50 or 55, men at 60). Additionally, Zhang shared that her parents do not understand what she is researching for her PhD, but they care deeply about her. In Zhang’s words, “my family supports me wholeheartedly. Zhang’s familial capital support translated to personal strength for her doctoral journey as she shared that she is getting a PhD degree not only for her own professional development but for her family. She wanted her parents to be proud of her and that is the biggest motivation for her. Our relationship has deepened after coming to the U.S. I miss them more because of the distance.” For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, she called her parents daily via WeChat video to see how they were doing. She normally called every few months before COVID-19. Zhang unpacked how her familial capital is a strength because she was able to develop stronger bonds with her family even though, or perhaps because, she is far away. Further, she saw this as a source of strength as she appreciated her parents for their financial and emotional support all these years, which helped her to be able to pursue higher education in China and now the U.S.

### **Zhang linguistic capital**

She shared a story about language difficulty during her doctoral process, “It took a month for me to understand the lectures and readings. American slang and idioms are still difficult for me.” Reading and understanding English journal articles were especially difficult. However, Zhang continues to practice her reading and writing skills in academic English and she also learned from translating English vocabulary to Chinese to better understand the meanings of the concepts. For example, when given an assignment, she often visualizes how Chinese vs. American thinking patterns and linguistic differences might influence teaching and learning. Technical and scientific terms are more understandable in English once she knows what they mean in Chinese. In this sense, Chinese language serves as a strength for Zhang as it allowed her to think about her knowledge application in different contexts, perhaps this interactive linguistic conversion helped her develop more creative understanding, unique knowledge application, and problem-solving skills. In other words, this dialectical process of going back and forth between Chinese and English enlarges understanding of complex ideas.

### **Zhang's social capital**

Zhang's mentor is a postdoc Chinese friend who conducts similar research, and Zhang followed her friend's path. Her friend mentored her academically and supported her emotionally. Also, Zhang interacts with non-Chinese peers, including international students, in her lab and local church. Zhang shared that in the U.S. it requires more time to cultivate social relationships; however, she makes friends easily with Chinese. She explained that “when I first came here, I was overly friendly, and it seemed strange for Americans.” She gets together to eat Chinese dinners with her Chinese friends in the same university, so they feel less isolated. Of note was how Zhang shares her cultural capital (Chinese food) with non-Chinese peers as a way to connect with them and share her culture as noted in her vignette.

### **Zhang's navigational and resistance capital**

Zhang shared that how other people perceived her Chinese culture sometimes negatively impacts her doctoral journey. For example, she stated that “stereotypes towards Chinese students such as being good at math and the model minority have negatively influenced me when I encountered difficulty in math. I was afraid to ask questions, but I also did not want to be viewed as a passive learner.”

Despite these challenges, Zhang noted that she was able to navigate and resist during her doctoral journey because she wanted her research to positively influence people's lives and the environment. Another example that Zhang shared was:

In Chinese culture, I was taught to be humble and always admit I have room to grow even when I know something well. I followed the Chinese cultural norms of “actions speak louder than words” and told my professors and peers that I needed to learn more about a certain subject area. However, my American peers appeared to know everything confidently and spoke up in classes even though they did not fully understand something. They could talk for hours when presenting work still in progress while I could not because of my cultural identity, which values less talk and more action. After a while, I learned that if I kept telling people that I did not know enough, they would show less respect for my professional identity. I am still trying to find the balance between the two cultures.

In this example above, Zhang's reliance on action as opposed to words was her strength despite the culture differences and stereotypes. Following graduation, Zhang would like to do a postdoc, become a professor, or conduct research for a company. Being closer to Chinese culture, language, and family are important for her career trajectory.

### ***METANARRATIVE OF CHINESE INTERNATIONAL DOCTORAL STUDENTS***

A metanarrative helps link these multi-layered stories through shared meanings. As a metanarrative, the participants view the various forms of capital as strengths vs. deficits in their doctoral journey, for example, familial, aspirational, and navigational. Even though English is still a challenge for them professionally, they are able to improve their English skills through the meaning-making process of connecting to their Chinese language. More importantly, these capitals help shape the journey of cross-cultural socialization through the context of studying as Chinese international doctoral students.

This narrative inquiry used artifacts and vignettes to understand Chinese international doctoral students' socialization to American higher education. The findings included three important strengths from the vignettes, showing how Chinese doctoral students use their capital as leverage in the cross-cultural socialization process of American higher education. These forms of cultural capital (aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance) are important for how Chinese international doctoral students interact with each other, mentors, peers, and institutional environments. One, Chinese linguistic capital was used to cultivate stronger relationships with family and friends, thus creating a home away from home with other Chinese. Two, throughout their doctoral journey familial capital became less prominent in the students' socialization process and had little effect on their identity as Chinese international doctoral students; however, at the beginning it was an important source of inspiration and support. Third, personal artifacts such as a teapot, a Sichuan peppercorn, and a magnet helped prompt stories that further developed levels of abstraction and complexity for how they understand their recognition of their strengths.

Building on Yosso's (2005) framework for Chinese international doctoral students, these cultural capitals (aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance) are not isolated. Instead, these capitals overlap with each other to create a sense of synergy. Familial and aspirational capitals interacted with each other as strengths for Chinese students to be successful. For instance, in the artifacts, students shared that their aspiration for their doctoral journey comes from their family support. Their family members inspire them to study in the U.S. and continue to empower them. Moreover, social and linguistic capitals interacted with each other to explain Chinese international doctoral students' cross-cultural experience using their strengths. For example, students shared that speaking Chinese as a linguistic capital facilitates social bonding with their local Chinese friends, helping them to feel less isolated, develop a sense of belongings, and to enhance their cross-cultural socialization journey. The findings suggest that Chinese language and translation help the interactive conversion of knowledge and understanding. As I pointed out in the introduction, being multilingual served as a strength for Chinese students because it allowed them to "think" cross-culturally and apply what they are learning to multiple cultural settings. This new way of thinking, that is going back and forth between Chinese and English, challenges the dominant narrative that all Chinese graduate students should only speak English if they want to succeed at studying in the U.S. Our participants' stories and artifacts suggested that being bilingual or multilingual allows them to apply the knowledge in different contexts which may not have occurred if they did not go through the iterative process.

## **DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The discussion section includes how the findings address the research questions and previous literature, future research, implications and recommendations, delimitations and limitations, and conclusions.

### ***CONNECTIONS TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND PREVIOUS LITERATURE***

The purpose of this study was to answer the following two research questions: (1) what are the forms of cultural capital that Chinese international doctoral students identify as most salient to their cross-

cultural socialization journey? And, (2) how do Chinese international doctoral students describe the ways their cultural capital shapes their cross-cultural socialization journey? My research is significant in the field of higher education because the findings in this study provide readers a nuanced understanding as to how Chinese students use cultural capital as a strength to socialize to American higher education.

This study demonstrated how Chinese students used various forms of cultural capital individually and synergistically to support their cross-cultural socialization. The participants used several mechanisms to create a home away from home. One, they all identified cultural artifacts that provided comfort personally and academically in their educational journey. Two, their linguistic capital, i.e., intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in two languages (Brazill, 2019; Yosso, 2005), provides a new lens to understand complex concepts in English. Specifically, linguistic capital provides Chinese students' a sense of social support through communicating with their family and peers during their academic journey. Three, Chinese students rely on aspirational capital, i.e. the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future (Yosso, 2005) to help them persist and complete their doctoral programs. Fourth, familial capital, i.e., cultural knowledge nurtured through their extended family and community network (Yosso, 2005), is a form of strength that helps Chinese students feel a sense of belonging in the U.S.

The common themes that emerged from my findings highlight how Chinese international doctoral students express Yosso's (2005) cultural wealth model as strengths in their socialization experiences. Chinese international doctoral students described the way their cultural capital – including aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance – shaped their social interactions with peers, faculty, and staff. First, the aspiration of Chinese international doctoral students to study in the U.S. was driven by the international reputation of American higher education. All the participants were drawn to American higher education because of a Chinese culture that highly values education, and they chose a U.S. program based on its structure of discipline, challenging curriculum, and rankings that indicated quality. Second, linguistic capital is an important strength that Chinese international doctoral students used to connect with their Chinese peers for emotional support and communicate with their American peers for their academic success. Thus, the findings challenge the deficiency perspective evident in the case study of Dr. Megan Neely's misplaced concern about Chinese students using their mother language outside class. In contrast, Chinese linguistic capital interacts with social capital to reduce loneliness by creating a social environment that is similar to home. Also, it is an important way for them to process their academic understanding through translation and to exchange ideas and build relationships with Chinese peers. Therefore, Chinese linguistic capital served as a strength in their doctoral socialization journey. Third, family members and friends served as mentors for Chinese international doctoral students because of the deep connection and relational trust built through shared experiences and common understanding of Chinese culture. Fourth, social capital was reflected in Chinese international doctoral students' effort to interact and build relationships with both white and non-white faculty and students.

Findings from this study relate to the literature and make an original contribution to higher education in four important ways. First, as described from the common themes above, my findings supported how the aspirational, linguistic, familiar, and social capital elements of the community cultural wealth conceptual model (Yosso, 2005) apply to Chinese international students. Chinese international students' stories align with these elements of capital and they become strengths for their cross-cultural socialization. Second, navigational and resistance capitals may differ for Chinese international doctoral students compared to other students of color. Yosso's (2005) work on navigational and resistance cultural capital focused on critical race theory and how Chicana/Latina and African American students are able to use these two forms of capital to fight against racism and educational inequity in higher education. However, the Chinese international students that I interviewed were raised in China, a culture that regards navigational and resistance capitals as charged political terms. They did not want to talk about issues related to racism, discrimination, or President Trump's anti-China

rhetoric or his xenophobic behaviors. In China, discussion of political and ideological issues is forbidden (Zhao, 2008) and enforced through self-censorship. However, participants expressed that not talking about political issues in the U.S. is also a strength because they are able to let go of things that they cannot control. Third, Chinese international doctoral students' socialization journey should not be viewed as homogenous because they have unique individual identities and experiences (Ye, 2018). For instance, in my findings, different students used specific capitals differently, which shows the within-group diversity among individual Chinese students. For Li, familial capital means having a supportive husband in China who is able to provide strong financial support for the family so she can focus on her education. For Ma, familial capital means having his aunt close to help guide him with the non-academic side of studying in the U.S. For Zhang, familial capital means having parents in China who are proud of her achievements as a Chinese woman who studies abroad. Lastly, the findings extend our understanding of the stereotype that Chinese students have limited interactions with American faculty and peers. My study shows that Chinese doctoral students interact with their professors and peers both academically and socially (for example, sharing meals together). This is interesting in light of a frequent criticism of Chinese students, that they socialize only with other Chinese or isolate themselves and do not engage with Americans or American culture (Yan & Berliner, 2013).

### ***IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS***

Significant implications include improved opportunities for cross-cultural learning, international partnerships in university settings, and support for positive socialization experiences where students may use their cultural capital as strengths (Ye, 2018). Prior research suggests that Chinese students attend American higher education to “break” from the Chinese system of learning. My study showed that one important reason that Chinese students pursued their American degrees was so that they could share their knowledge with educators in China. Therefore, the goal for them was not to break from the Chinese system of learning but rather to use their American education to enhance the Chinese educational system. In this sense, it is not a matter of Chinese vs. American educational systems; instead, it is a matter of synthesizing the two systems in a way that results in a new and improved form of higher education.

International doctoral student mobility contributes to American universities with many international doctoral students from diverse cultures taking their PhD in the U.S, with their tuition revenue and research productivity further strengthening American universities (King & Raghuram, 2013; J. Zhou, 2015). Yan and Berliner (2009) showed that Chinese students have listening, speaking, and writing challenges (or deficits) in American higher education. The unique findings in my study, however, show that these challenges also serve as strengths for students. Moreover, positive socialization experiences increase academic confidence and feelings of cultural congruity (Gloria et al., 2005). Thus, Chinese international doctoral students and other diverse learners will benefit from culturally sensitive peer and faculty mentors. As Merriam and Bierema (2013) pointed out, faculty should consider the identity of Chinese and other learners from non-Western cultures and not expect them to acculturate immediately to the Western way of learning. This again challenges the dominant narrative expressed by Dr. Neely, where she assumed that everyone must speak English in order to succeed. Thus, understanding the unique socialization needs will help tailor social activities and inclusive learning environments for Chinese international doctoral students.

Universities can create a climate that celebrates Chinese students' aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance capital through strength-based socialization and mentoring practices (Felder et al., 2014). The study has three important practical recommendations. First, studying individual experience with narrative inquiry advanced knowledge of educational research through challenging the deficit perspective and giving voices to three Chinese international doctoral students on their doctoral journey. Second, the findings indicated that Chinese international doctoral students'

cultural capital are grounded in their socialization experience. Third, by sharing the stories from Chinese international doctoral students, it calls for specific recommendations to help Chinese international doctoral students find a sense of belonging in their socialization process. The findings from this study offer insights into what institutions and departments might do to support Chinese international doctoral students in their socialization journey. It is vital to support the whole student through Chinese international doctoral students' different forms of capital.

In sum, this study provides important insights for how Chinese international doctoral students experience American higher education. This study can guide development of strength-based socialization practices that are consonant with Chinese international doctoral students' cultural and social background. Given the current political, economic, and social relationships between the U.S. and China, these findings have important implications for faculty and administrators in creating a more diverse, supportive, and inclusive academic environment. Moreover, there is also an economic benefit to the institution and community as Chinese international doctoral students pay higher tuition and contribute to the local economies.

### ***FUTURE RESEARCH***

New questions emerged from the findings in light of Dr. Neely's criticism that Chinese international doctoral students need to speak English among their Chinese peers. One strength of my findings is that it emphasized how Chinese students think, read, and learn through linguistic conversion between Chinese and English language. This emphasizes how being multilingual can be a strength. Future research may want to explore how students perceive and experience this process as a benefit to their education. An important question for future researchers to consider is that do Chinese international doctoral students benefit from multilingual discourse with their peers and from a multilingual command of the literature? Also, does the ability to read scholarly publications in both Chinese and English bridge a gap and strengthen professional identity development?

### ***DELIMITATIONS AND LIMITATIONS***

This research addresses Chinese international doctoral students' socialization experiences to better understand the role of cultural capital as strengths and how higher education can better serve them. The research is delimited to three Chinese international doctoral students' cross-cultural socialization experiences. Another delimitation is that this study did not include International exchange students, Post-docs, or exchange scholars who are not taking a PhD degree. One limitation of this study is that, like any qualitative research inquiries, the findings are not meant to be generalizable. Instead, they create in-depth conversations with individuals and thick descriptions to better understand their experiences.

### **CONCLUSION**

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This narrative inquiry study introduced a strength-based perspective for how Chinese international doctoral students engage in cross-cultural socialization. This strength-based socialization included aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance capital that Chinese international doctoral students bring to their cross-cultural socialization journey, and investigates how they interact with mentor, peer, and institution environments. I presented an example about Chinese graduate students who held Duke University accountable for discriminatory practices. This incident is just one specific example of a more widespread problem, along with many of the discriminations, xenophobia, hate crimes against Chinese international students that altogether have created a national urgency. Institutions must ensure their students have inclusive, supportive, and welcoming campus climates, cultures, and environments.

Through Chinese international doctoral students' narrative stories, stakeholders should appreciate the dynamic aspects of Chinese international doctoral students' cultural capital and recognize that they are not a homogenous group. Most importantly, the three Chinese international doctoral students

used many aspects of their cultural identities as strengths to support their doctoral journey. As faculty and administrators, we should encourage Chinese international doctoral students to embrace their cultural capital as strengths and not punish them for it. For example, from a strength-based cross-cultural socialization perspective, being multilingual is beneficial for Chinese students' scholarly identity development and helps them with the meaning-making process of academic English reading and writing.

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## APPENDIX: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

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### Pre-work: Identity Artifacts

- Select and bring to the interview a small object you believe best represents you and your doctoral experience.

### During the Interview: Identity Artifacts

- Why and how did you choose this object/artifact to represent you and your doctoral experience?

### Rapport Building with Chinese International Doctoral Students

- Tell me a little bit about your background?
  - Where are you from?
  - What hobbies do you have in your free time?
  - What does the role of your cultural identity play in the doctoral process?
- Tell me about your journey to graduate school?
  - Why did you choose graduate school?
  - Why did you choose your major?
  - Why did you choose this university?

### Aspirational Capital Questions

- Can you tell me about you and your overall experience in the U.S. and the university? What are the best or worse parts of your doctoral journey?
- What do you wish to gain from your doctoral studies for your personal and professional development? Has it changed over time and how?
- What or who motivates you to pursue your doctoral program?

### **Social Capital Questions**

- What have your interactions and relationships been like with your
  - Faculty
  - Chair/Advisor
  - Committee members
  - Friends
  - Family members
- Have these relationships changed over time? How and why? How do the above support your doctoral journey? Besides your advisor, is there anyone else who supports or mentors you?
- What have your interactions been like with your peers, including Chinese and non-Chinese peers?

### **Familial Capital Questions**

- What is the role of your family in your academic experiences?

### **Linguistic Capital Questions**

- What role does your culture of origin play in your graduate school experience?
- In what ways, does your linguistic background play in your graduate school experience?
- How much does your faculty and peers understand and take an interest in your Chinese culture and language background? How much do they know about your culture and language?

### **Navigational Capital Questions**

- What internal and external barriers do you encounter towards your degree completion and how do you navigate the barriers?
- What are your plans for after graduate school?
  - Role of family and culture in these plans?
  - Is geographic location important?
- What advice would you give to a new Chinese international doctoral student?

### **Resistance Capital Questions**

- What is it like being a student at this university?
  - Your program
  - Campus resources (how do you interact)
  - International clubs (did you join any)

### **Closing Remarks**

- Is there anything else related to your doctoral experience that you would like to tell me about?

## AUTHOR

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