



**FROM COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE
TO THE EMERGENCE OF THIRDNESS:**

**VOICES, IDENTITIES, AND SUBJECT POSITIONS OF
CHINESE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN THE U.S.**

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Goal of the Study

- To understand the ways in which Chinese international students in the U.S. talk about their transnational experiences in addition to their implications for interpreting the students' identity (re)construction processes at the interstices of varied languages, cultures, relations, and expectations
 - *To explore how Chinese international students reflect on the nature and affordances of their multilingual/multicultural repertoire within and across contexts*
 - *To explore how Chinese international students negotiate, appropriate, or even transform certain relations and expectations that constitute our traditional understanding of international students in general*

Theoretical Background

- The Notion of Communities of Practice (COP)
 - Genesis (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Lave, 1991; Lave, 1993; Wenger, 1998)
 - ❖ Situated Learning
 - ❖ Legitimate Peripheral Participation
 - Implications: Teaching, Learning, & Socialization
 - ❖ Immigrant Populations (e.g., Cervatiuc, 2009; García & Bartlett, 2007; Menard-Warwick, 2005; Norton, 2012; Sfard & Prusak, 2005)
 - ❖ International Students (e.g., Halic, Greenberg, & Paulus, 2009; Hsieh, 2006; Kim, 2011; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009; Morita, 2004)

What's Missing?

Theoretical Background

- Thirdness: Towards A Borderline Discourse (Kramersch, 2009)
 - Heteroglossia
 - Historicity
 - Performativity
- Metaphor Analysis of Beliefs (Gibbs, 1998, 1999; Kramersch, 2003)

Viewed from a discursive constructionist standpoint, “*metaphor ceases to be mere stylistic ornamentation, and becomes instead a bridge between contextually contingent, changing and often conflictual subjective experiences and their expression, communication and enactment through language*” (Kramersch, 2003, p. 125).

Data Corpus and Methodology

- 15 undergraduate Chinese international students enrolled in a large public university in the U.S.
 - 6 male students and 9 female students
 - 6 freshmen, 8 sophomores, and 1 junior transfer
 - Applied Math, Computer Science, Economics, Math, Philosophy, Physics, Psychology, Sociology, Statistics, and Political Science
- A combination of qualitative interview methods (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014; Lambert, & Loiselle, 2008)
 - 3 Semi-structured Focus Group Interviews (between September and October, 2017)
 - 8 Semi-structured Individual Interviews (between October and November, 2017)

Data Corpus and Methodology

Participant's Pseudonym	Gender	Year	Major	Prior Living/Learning Experiences in English-speaking Countries
Chen	Female	Freshman	CS	<6 months
Li	Female	Freshman	Psychology	<6 months
Ma	Male	Freshman	Sociology	<6 months
Wang	Female	Freshman	Applied Math	<6 months
Xu	Female	Freshman	CS	<6 months
Song	Female	Freshman	Psychology	>2 years
Hao	Male	Sophomore	Math & CS	<6 months
Wei	Male	Sophomore	Math & Physics	<6 months

Data Corpus and Methodology

Participant's Pseudonym	Gender	Year	Major	Prior Living/Learning Experiences in English-speaking Countries
Wu	Female	Sophomore	Statistics	<6 months
Zhang	Male	Sophomore	Math & Economics	<6 months
Zhou	Female	Sophomore	Psychology	<6 months
Tian	Male	Sophomore	Philosophy	<1 year
Liu	Female	Sophomore	Psychology	<2 years
Pan	Male	Sophomore	Psychology & Math	<2 years
Cheng	Female	Junior	Political Science	>2 years

Prelude: A Metaphorical Interpretation of English

An example from Wang: English as a Plant?

“English is like a plant that I’ve been growing. I observe it on a daily basis...you know...like...how does it look different today? Oh...maybe its leaves are curling inward...so you can discover new things every day...you can tell its changes every day” (Wang, Freshman).

“It just came to my mind that we had once talked about a relevant question about Chinese and English in our dorm. So...when we speak in English, we tend to describe things in a more direct way, but the associated feelings may not be real. Like...I don’t have that kind of special feelings when I say “I love you” in English. But when you say it in Chinese, it is like a real commitment” (Wang, Freshman).

The Analysis

- Theme 1: The Subject-in-Process: Sedimentation → To re-signify one's embodied memories
 - Ma's Story: "I am from Shanghai, China"
 - Liu's Story: "It feels Chinese"
 - Wang's Story: "Liberating my true self"
- Theme 2: The Subject-in-Process: Pivoting → To re-position oneself vis-à-vis varied subjective stances
 - Tian's Story: "Cultivating a bystander's viewpoint"
 - Pan's Story: "Having my feet in two boats"

Theme 1: The Subject-in-Process: Sedimentation

■ Ma's Story: "I'm from Shanghai, China"

Shanghainese (Before): *"I would say that it was a very inaccurate symbol, because it cannot define who I am as a person. I mean, given I also didn't have a good grasp of Shanghainese. When I was in Shanghai, I remembered that when I talked to native Shanghainese speakers, especially those belonged to the older generation, they told me that I spoke broken Shanghainese."*

Shanghainese (After): *"As for Shanghainese, I would say that it has become a sweet memory, since I don't often use it nowadays, except when joking around with my Shanghainese friends who are either here or back in China...But there are some differences. I mean, when I was in Shanghai, although I identified myself as a Shanghainese, and I was proud of it, sometimes I felt that I was not a real Shanghainese, or at least not a hundred percent Shanghainese, I mean, I could not even speak satisfactory Shanghainese. So...anyway, now in the U.S., if someone asks me where I am from, I would say "Shanghai, China", also in a proud way. So I think this sense of pride hasn't changed. But I can talk about it with more ease and confidence"*.

Theme 1: The Subject-in-Process: Sedimentation

■ Liu's Story: "It feels Chinese"

Mandarin (Before): *"Because when I was in China, I felt myself inferior. I had first entered an art school in Jinan, and then transferred to an international school in Qingdao. As a result, I didn't receive (E) **traditional** Chinese education. I didn't understand literary Chinese, and I felt that my language use was always quite informal. **So..I thought I was not very Chinese you know**, because I mean, language carried culture, but I felt that I could not even express myself clearly in that language".*

Mandarin (After): *"Honestly, I don't have many Chinese friends here. But when I go to Chinatown with my English-speaking friends, I read the street signs to them, they are amazed by my Mandarin and I am so happy about that. So you know, **I feel very proud when I use Mandarin here....**Let's see, so, I also have a lot of Chinese calligraphy paintings in my room. I brought them with me from China. Some of them were made by my best friend, and the rest were made by my grandpa. **So whenever I enter my room, I always have a strong feeling that it is different from anywhere else. It feels Chinese"**.*

Theme 1: The Subject-in-Process: Sedimentation

■ Wang's Story: Liberating my true self

W: I mean, Chinese identity is a part of myself, so what got liberated as a result of my travelling to the U.S. was not my Chinese identity, but my true self. As for my (E) true self, it involved both my Chinese identity, and an awareness of (E) free soul existing in the U.S.

P: PY: What does Chinese identity mean to you?

W: I would say...some indelible imprints left on me by my (E) background and (E) culture.

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PY: Then how would you describe your living and learning experiences in the U.S. vis-à-vis this metal ball? Do you think those experiences have added some other layers of paint to the ball?

W: Well, no, actually I think those experiences have contributed to removing some layers of paint that previously covered the ball. So now we can see its original color. Because in the past, you needed to cover yourself with some layers of paint, for the purpose of (E) self-protection. And now, you've started to peel off those layers of paint, and you know, you just feel like you start breathing”.

Theme 2: The Subject-in-Process: Pivoting

- Tian's Story: "Cultivating a bystander's viewpoint"

"...Because those kinds of experiences have opened up a wide range of possibilities for me in terms of my future life trajectory. I mean, so if I want, I can stay in the U.S. after I get my degree, but I can also go to Europe or go back to China. Well, I am not sure if it is the correct way to understand the concept of sense of belonging. But if a strong sense of belonging means that I have to spend my entire life in China, I think the experiences as an international student in the U.S. have made me become less likely to echo with that entailment. Another thing is that as you've got to know more about China while studying abroad, I don't think it necessarily means that you will (E) identify more with this country. I mean, but they do prompt you to look at things from a more objective perspective. That's usually the case when you look at things from a distance... So for me, I really think I am looking at things happening in China, like President Xi's 3.5 hour speech before the 19th CPC National Congress, from a bystander's viewpoint".

Theme 2: The Subject-in-Process: Pivoting

■ Tian's Story: "Cultivating a bystander's viewpoint"

"Well, I think for things happening in the U.S., I am kind of like a passer-by, you know, just to look at things around, because I find it interesting to do so. And then I pass by... But for things happening in China, I think they involve some affective accompaniment. Like...so the summer break after my graduation from high school in Beijing, you know, right before my travelling to the U.S., I went to visit the place where I had lived before my kindergarten years. So I was born and raised in Beijing, but we once moved to another district when I started my kindergarten. So I had literally no memory of that place, and I didn't know what it looked like nowadays. I just wanted to go there and take a look at it. You know, that's the kind of feelings I've had when looking at things happening in China as an international student in another country. It's like visiting a place where you lived when you were very young. You don't live there anymore, and you don't know its current conditions. So like, you may wonder, Oh, what has happened to that particular building (in that place) over these years? And you just want to go there and to see what it looks like.. I've never thought about it before. But it just comes to my mind that these two kinds of feelings are extremely similar. But if you ask me, would going back to take look at that place tend to have any influence on my current life? I don't think so. I mean, but you just really want to go there and take a look at that place".

Theme 2: The Subject-in-Process: Pivoting

■ Pan's Story: "Having my feet in two boats"

P: So....Ok, you can think of me like a slug, before I came to the U.S., I had been glued to a board, which represented Mandarin and Chinese culture. You know, just like a slug, who had tried to reach out a little bit to explore the world, but had nonetheless been glued to that board. After I came to the U.S. and developed this belief of English as my second mother tongue, I felt that English became another board, which served to extract me from the previous board. I think now I am able to float above these two boards and to view the world in a more comprehensive way. So English does give me a boost. But of course, it is not the language per se, but because of its status as a global language, in addition to the cultural experiences I've had in the U.S., so multiple factors have been involved in this process. Also, as for the "Chinese" board in particular, it doesn't get vague or incomplete, I mean, what I want to say is that this process allows me to consider my (E) self-identity from a different angle.

PY: So would you say that you are not on either of those boards?

P: (laughter) I think you can say that. But I mean, I think you can also say that I'm actually on both of them. Like what we say in Chinese, "I've stepped my feet into two boats".

Discussion & Reflection

- A post-structuralist view of the interplay between language, culture, and identity

“...[1)]identities are formed in the linguistic performance rather than pre-given...[2)]subjectivities are called into being and sedimented over time through regulated language acts...[and 3)] language use is an act of identity that calls that language into being” (Pennycook, 2004, p. 17).

- A new metaphor for thinking and talking about international students
 - By paraphrasing Blommaert’s (2010) argument, this exploratory study aims to foreground that the socialization process of international students indexes a tremendously complex web of individuals, contexts, discourses, and tempo-spatial scales connected by material and symbolic ties in often unpredictable ways.

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