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By

Yumei Li

May 2018

BECOMING EDUCATIONAL RESEARCHERS: STORIES OF ASIAN
INTERNATIONAL DOCTORAL STUDENTS IN THE UNITED STATES

A Dissertation Presented to the
Faculty of the College of Education
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Background: International education, with a purpose to reduce provincial attitudes and to adopt truly international perspectives, promotes global understanding and tackles social injustice around the world. It also exposes international students to different languages and cultures, posing both opportunities and challenges. While doctoral education should prepare the next generation of scholars, little research has touched on the experiences of Asian international doctoral students and how they make meaning of their experiences in order to become educational researchers.

Purpose: To address this gap, this research explored the lived experiences that contributed to the becoming of Asian international doctoral students. The research was aimed to address three questions: 1) What are the academic and social experiences of Asian international doctoral students in the field of education? 2) In what ways do these Asian international doctoral students address challenges they encounter in their doctoral education? 3) How do they conduct their academic research and become educational researchers? **Methods:** Critical narrative inquiry was employed to humanize educational research, with the understanding that research is a responsibility to schools and community and its ultimate goal is improvement of education. Four Asian international students were involved in this joint inquiry. The field texts of this research mainly derived from processes as observations, interviews, conversations and reflective journals. Narrative tools employed to facilitate analysis and interpretation include broadening, burrowing, storying and restorying. **Results:** The stories of four international doctoral students were

unraveled to delve into the miscellaneous that have comprised their lives. There was a constant negotiation between their personal and academic experiences, temporally and spatially. Challenges, aspirations and awareness were interwoven into their lives on the foreign land. **Conclusion:** A critical look at culture, language and power is needed to reexamine the experiences of international doctoral students. Empowerment in doctoral education includes both individual agency and institutional support. International doctoral students are changed by, and bringing changes to, international education with the cultures, languages and experiences they bring with them.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Once Zhuang Zhou dreamed he was a butterfly, a fluttering butterfly. What fun he had, doing as he pleased! He did not know he was Zhou. Suddenly he woke up and found himself to be Zhou. He did not know whether Zhou had dreamed he was a butterfly or a butterfly had dreamed he was Zhou.

Between Zhou and the butterfly there must be some distinction. This is what is meant by the transformation of things.

Master Zhuang

The parable of the butterfly dream as one of the most influential passages by Master Zhuang has invited different interpretations from scholars. While I have no intention to discuss the religious or metaphorical implications of his dream, I could not discard my constant intention to relate it to my present inquiry. My interpretation of the dream as an assumption that we all live in the uncertainties of who we are and who we are becoming, which provides room for my imagination and vision of new possibilities. This imagination which “gives credence to alternative realities” (Greene, 1995) leads to my self-portrait as a prospective cross-cultural educational researcher. It is also this imagination that prompts me to invite other international doctoral students into the joint vision.

My inquiry will start from my own education story, which explains my passions and puzzles about education. As “experience is the starting point and key

term for all social science inquiry” (Clandinnin and Connelly, 1994, p. 425), my own stories of educating and being educated will offer me a resonance with the stories lived by others.

My Personal Educational Story

A story of hope and failure: Learning in China. Farm houses half hidden behind the bamboo woods, a vast area of terraced fields, brooks winding through the mountain, farmers carrying buckets of water on poles across their shoulders, school-aged kids travelling together on the muddy trails to and from the only school in village, these collages constitute the picture of my childhood memories. The loud call “Hello, it’s time to go to school” from those kids clamoring for company on the way to school still ring clearly in my ears. My sister and I were among those kids who walked several miles back-and-forth to school every day. After school, we would usually buy some honeycomb briquettes for fuel and carry them home on our backs. I can still remember our sense of guilt when some briquettes were broken after our long time travelling. The desire to put on more clothes in the harsh winter, our hesitation to buy food at noon in school, together with our loud cry after falling on the muddy road in rainy weather, these have become the frequently quoted fragments in reminiscences of our “miserable old days” in rural China.

While learning in the village school, we were consistently reminded of the wonderful urban life outside and that the only access to it was through hard work.

Ancient poems like “what lies in learning are gold houses, wonderful beauties and abundant food” depicted a captivating vision for our promising future and motivated us to go out from the poor village life. With a lot of illusions of city life, my sister and I could not understand the plot in a TV drama when the actor was talking about living a hard life by eating bread every day. For kids from the rural area, bread was something we didn’t normally eat. Instead, we could only relate it to something urban. “When could we lead such a ‘hard life’”? We looked at each other and laughed out loud. The identity of being peasants’ children in rural China and the imagination of becoming “city-zens” acted as the impetus for our persistence in acquiring knowledge from books and the teachers. Obstacles in reality were a test from heaven of a person’s persistence as Mencius said:

when heaven is about to confer a great responsibility on a man, it will first test his resolution, subject his sinews and bones to hard work, expose his body to hunger, put him to poverty, and place obstacles in the path of his deeds, so as to stimulate his mind, strengthen his nature, and improve wherever he is incompetent (Wu & Lai, 1992, p. 330).

Interpreting hardships as an asset in life and imagining the “fragrance of plum blossoms in harsh winter” encouraged me during my “decade of studying at a cold window”. I was always moved to tears by those stories of people living in hardships and inspired by their persistence. My survival in the national college entrance exam

finally allowed me to leave my rural area and enter a university located in Chengdu, the capital city of Sichuan province in southwest China.

In this sense, education provides students from rural China like me hope and possibilities. However, when I think back of the long line of village kids walking together to school who were also full of hope, I am confronted with the fact that a lot of them stopped their education at the elementary level and became migrant workers when urbanization swept China as the country's economy strengthened with its reform and opening-up policy.

A story of tensions: Teaching as an English teacher. After graduating from college with a Master's degree, I debated whether to become a teacher in my alma mater or to go up north for new possibilities. My desire to go out and grow in a new context won out and brought me from southwest China to Tianjin, a northern municipality. "Are you strong enough for the harsh weather in the north?" The image of my advisor's doubtful look is still vivid in my mind. "I am going to try new possibilities," was my answer. Teaching at a university became a new stage for me to rethink education.

Born in the early 1980s, I was educated in a typical and stereotyped educational context, where teachers were the centerpiece and the role of students was to follow instructions and memorize information. I have met teachers who became furious when they felt their authority questioned. My inner struggle to voice my

thoughts was always drowned in the intimidating stare and sarcastic tones under such circumstances. Meanwhile, I did meet teachers who were quite open to accept challenges from students and tried to explore a new area of knowledge together. However, these challenges were only welcomed if they were from “smart” students. I was wondering what life would be like if children like me had been educated in a more autonomous atmosphere, or if we had been led to think about my passionate interest. However, I could not come up with an answer.

My wondering led me to rethink the meaning of being an educator. What is the role of a teacher? This question has triggered different answers at different historical periods worldwide. A scholar named Han Yu from Tang Dynasty has given his widely acknowledged interpretation of a teacher as one who transmits knowledge, provide skills and dispels confusions. It was also in alignment with what Confucius described his own role of teacher as “transmitter and not a maker, believing in and loving the ancients” (Legge, 1893). This approach to teaching as transmission of knowledge reinforces Chinese students’ appreciation of classical works and assimilation of traditional virtues, together with our admiration for authorities.

When I became a college English teacher after graduation, educational reform was carried out nationwide, and people began to criticize the traditional pedagogy which failed to develop autonomy of students and regarded students as an empty

container waiting to be filled by the teacher. The cry for a role transition from goose feeder to facilitator challenged college English teachers like me to rethink our daily practices. I was also confused between the overall goal of teaching English for students' communicative competence and the university's ranking of class performance through scores in final exams and the passing rate of National College English Test. Meanwhile, my own shallow understanding of western cultures and lack of confidence, both culturally and linguistically, compromised my efforts.

Not wanting my students to experience my previous negative encounter with teachers, I was in a constant search for a better teacher than I was. Nine years after I started teaching, Dr. Cameron White and two other professors from the University of Houston came to my college for a collaborative program. This offered me an opportunity to communicate with them my wish to come abroad for a professional growth. With their encouragement, I made necessary preparation and successfully entered the doctoral program.

Education at this point propelled me to reconsider my role as an educator, and offered me a passage to new vistas of education.

A story of new wondering: Learning in the United States. Excitement and anxiety were the key words when I boarded the flight to the U.S. Not knowing what would await me in the future, I imagined the scene where I was amidst a group of American classmates talking and listening to each other. The excitement of experiencing the culture and getting to know people I have “known” for many years from books and other media filled me with wonder. I would soon stand in the richest power in the world which has a government “of the people, by the people, for the people”, a country where “all men are equal” and are endowed with those unalienable rights as liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, a country that my students and I had learned about, talked about and debated over hundreds of times. This surely seemed to be the time when reality was gradually meeting my imagination.

The desire to know “America” forced me to observe and reflect on my daily encounters. I had practiced a lot in China in order to catch up with my local fellow doctoral students, as media had informed me of their eloquence. Still, I found myself lost in language and culture. There were times when I failed to catch the humor, when I could not feel the anger they had, and times when I remained silent for an entire class.

This situation was typical in our urban education class. When I looked around, I found some other Asian international students in a similar quiet position as I was, some trying to contribute by offering their perspectives, which were seldom

understood as our experiences were unfamiliar to local students. Even when I did some research and had an idea of what was going on, I still could not share their feelings. I was constantly experiencing a debate over “to say or not to say”. The feeling of disconnection and the disappointment of seeing myself falling into the “silent Asian” category urged me to rethink my own possibility to contribute to the field of education as a Chinese doctoral student. The urban education research context prompted me to rethink my own background as a Chinese student and former English teacher in China. Reaching out to other international doctoral students would help to build an intellectual community which communicates struggle, hope and voice to both ourselves and others.

Purpose of This Study

Doctoral learning experience is centered on identity as it ‘is as much about identity formation as it is about knowledge production’ (Green, 2005, p. 153). This transformative experience changes how the doctoral students perceive of their own growth and negotiate their “perceived self” with the surroundings.

Research into doctoral education suggested that the purpose of doctoral learning should be getting prepared to become the next generation of scholars (Gardner & Barnes, 2007) and the key aim of graduate study is the development of research and scholarly skills (Anderson & Swazey, 1998; Boyle & Boice, 1998; Deem & Brehony, 2000; LaPidus, 1998). Having conducted a longitudinal qualitative

research on doctoral education in American universities, Walker (2008) proposed three stages as a framework for doctoral students to negotiate their scholarly identity, namely, the *progressive development* towards increasing independence and responsibility, *integration* across contexts and arenas of scholarly work, and *collaboration* with peers and faculty in each stage of the process.

However, recent research has pointed out the limitation of perceiving doctoral learning as only a process from the entry point through completing the doctorate, and argued that students' personally distinct past experiences of intention, affect and action influence present intentions and aspirations and how individuals will engage in present academic experiences as well as future imagined possibilities (McAlpine, Amundsen, and Jazvac-Martek 2010). This view of identity as identity-trajectory emphasizes the individual's resourcefulness, independence and agency, nesting the academic within the personal and incorporating student's past as well as imagined futures (McAlpine, 2012). Agency is key to identity-trajectory in understanding how doctoral students intentionally enhance their preparedness for desired careers in day-to-day work. It also refers to individuals' motivations, intentions and efforts 'to plan, to construct a way forward given constraints (whether expected or unexpected)' (McAlpine et al., 2014) while recognizing the influence of structural/systematic factors beyond their control. In addition, key to the concept of identity-trajectory is the interweaving of the academic with the personal as well as positive and negative

affect both of which influence agency and commitment to academic work.

While the majority of previous studies have broadly classified international doctoral student experiences as potentially problematic due to increasing differences in academic expectations, English proficiencies, intellectual traditions and educational provisions across cultures, more recent study calls for an emphasis on individual

The process of being and becoming international doctoral student researchers involves their pursuit of professional knowledge and mediation of multiple identities (Barnacle & Mewburn, 2010).

Although these studies might provide readers with useful information on what Asian students experienced during their transition processes in American higher education, much less work, to date, has examined how doctoral students in the field of education negotiate their cultural values in their cultural encounters in American graduate schools and what uniquely and individually academic engagement experiences of these students might look like.

Informal conversations with my friends brought me to an awareness of our different personal stories and similar longing for professional growth. How could we understand other educators or students without first understanding ourselves? This puzzle drove me to explore these “lived experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Dewey, 1938; Husserl, 1970) that contributed to our becoming educational researchers.

My research is aimed to address the three questions:

- 1) What are the academic and social experiences of Asian international doctoral students in the field of education?
- 2) In what ways do these Asian international doctoral students address challenges they encounter in their doctoral education?
- 3) How do they conduct their academic research and become educational researchers?

Significance of Study

I had no plan to research other international doctoral students and myself before I came to the PhD program, as I was originally intending to improve my pedagogical skills and research expertise. However, nearly two years of engagement in this new community, I was constantly reminded of the differences I was confronted with as an international doctoral student, felt more acutely the meaning of “ethnicity” and cultural distance, and found myself deeply interested in how my fellow doctoral students in the field of education experience their transitioning to educational researchers, as these international doctoral students would surely represent the future force to drive educational change in their homeland and bridge the cultural and educational values and perspectives between countries around the world.

As doctoral students in the field of education, we are learning to explore the experiences of other educators by asking them to share, to confess. However, a

researcher who employs a holistic model of research will also be a person who grows, and is empowered by the process of becoming a researcher. That empowerment cannot happen if we, as student researchers, refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging our participants to take risks. It seems to be a must for us emerging researchers to link our own confessional narratives to academic discussions so as to show how experience can illuminate and enhance our understanding of education. An understanding of ourselves through exposing the vulnerability and empowerment in our growth would be a starting point for us to be researchers and human beings wholly present in mind, body, and spirit (hooks, 1994).

The significance of this study for me, as a Chinese international student, also represents my own attempts for understanding the experiences and processes that have informed my perceptions of “self” as a developing educational researcher. It will also enable me to develop a deeper understanding of my experiences through the process of establishing a shared narrative of experience with my peers, and provide “voices from within” (Fishman, 1997) as to the struggles and needs of the international doctoral students in education, and an understanding of how we transform our personal practical knowledge into professional knowledge in our personal curricula (He, 1998). From a practical perspective, it is my hope that findings from this study can provide empirical grounds for understanding how Asian international doctoral students make meaning of their experiences and become

educational researchers. Such an understanding can help advisors and administrators of Asian international doctoral students better facilitate their meaning making process. It is also aimed to help other international doctoral students understand themselves on their doctoral learning journey. In addition, this inquiry will add to the literature on international doctoral students through a holistic understanding of their experiences.

Summary

Looking back on my own story, I am apparently a beneficiary from Chinese education as it enabled me to come out of poverty and constantly pursue personal growth. However, thinking about thousands of my peers education has failed, of my underpaid classmates working hard at the factory assembly lines as migrant workers after failing their entrance exams, I could not help wondering about my own role as a future educational researcher. Being who I was as a teacher and having an opportunity to reflect on my experiences now is actually a great privilege. It also came from my compliance to and survival of the educational system which has advocated for competition between those already disadvantaged students from rural China and deprived many of them the freedom to express their inner voice.

How could I address the inequality in education? How could I empower other educators and students? How could I bridge understanding between different cultural and educational contexts? And most importantly, how could I improve education through my research? These puzzles are a constant reminder for me to search for the

meaning of what I am doing. My passion for education and my belief that education could and should offer everyone an option guides me to my inquiry into the experiences of my own and those of other international doctoral students. I hope this will be a starting point for an educator to search for the real meaning of education.

Key Terms

Asian International doctoral students. An international student is defined as a person who is not a citizen, national, or permanent resident of the United States and is in this country on a student visa, or on a temporary basis, and he or she does not have the legal right to remain in the United States indefinitely (Okahana & Allum, 2015). Based on this definition, the current study will define Asian international doctoral students as international students who come from Asia and are pursuing doctoral degrees in the United States.

Acculturation. “Acculturation is a process of cultural and psychological changes that involve various forms of mutual accommodation, leading to some longer-term psychological and sociocultural adaptations between groups” (Berry, 2005, p. 699). Acculturation happens over a period of time and continues for the length of time the two cultures are in contact with each other. International doctoral students are one of the many groups that are faced with the issue of acculturation and must decide to what extent they will acculturate.

Enculturation. Enculturation is a conscious and an unconscious conditioning

process whereby man, as child and adult, achieves competence in his culture, internalizes his culture and becomes thoroughly enculturated (Hoebel 1954).

Chapter II

International Education and International Students: A Literature Review

Long has been the road and far is my journey;

Up and down, I would go to seek for possibilities.

Qu Yuan

Introduction

Wondering about my own role as a future educational researcher brings me to this chapter, which represents my efforts in understanding previous literature relevant to my research. The privilege to pursue doctoral learning in the U.S. is surely due to my personal encounter with my current advisor and the support from my colleagues, friends and family. It is also connected with the big picture of international education in the context of globalization. In view of this, I would commence my literature review with the broad concept of international education. How educators around the world engage themselves in this global enterprise and interpret the role of education would lay a good rationale for my exploration of the becoming of international education researchers and render me to rethink education as practice of freedom (Freire, 1970). I understand the journey is long, as put by the famous Chinese patriotic poet Qu Yuan about his persistent pursuit for a just world even when he was in adversities. The road to a beautiful world for all has never been smooth, but there are always people who choose to embark on the journey. The international education landscape also presents routes of academic mobility across nations,

especially the migration of students from other countries into the United States.

This academic mobility exposes international students to different languages and cultures, posing both opportunities and challenges. This leads to my review of acculturation (*learning and enculturation of second or additional culture*) and enculturation (*acquisition of first culture*) (Schumann, 1978; Brown, 1987). This exploration is closely related to my search for who I am and who I am becoming with a concern to the relationship between culture and identity. It is followed by a theoretical framework for the study of doctoral education.

A summary of my understanding will be presented in the end to revisit the rationale for my study and offer a fluid transition to my search for an appropriate research methodology.

International Education

Education for global understanding. The history of education offers many examples of those who believed that the international dimension of human existence should become a conscious part of a person's education.

Scholars have traced the evolution of international education far back to the time of Confucius (551-579 BCE), who traveled with his students from Lu Guo in modern-day China to neighboring countries to teach. According to Welch and Denman (1997), the Sophists of 5th Century Greece later emerged as the first professional peripatetic teachers in the West, with a philosophy of education

predicated on the assumption that “training, argument and education could take place anywhere dependent only on a master and interested students” (p.14).

In the twentieth century, tremendous changes have taken place in a relatively short period of time. Advances in science, technology and engineering have led to greater comfort, increased ease of transportation and communication, and interdependence of countries beyond the borderline, and eroded the sense of distance and isolation of the past. In today’s interdependent global society, no person can be an island, and no nation can exist in isolation. Global warming, wars on terrorism, refugees, nuclear war, any such events that happen in one part of the earth could ripple throughout the entire world and become global realities that impact other peoples and nations. In this context, international education has a role of cultivating in students an enlightened awareness of the changing world in which they live that extends beyond their own nation and their specific national identity, and knowledge of global issues impacting the whole world. To be educated, then, indicates having knowledge from and about places that are beyond our immediate locality and of our relationships to a global reality and an international society.

It is argued that international education as a concept is inclusive, with many interpretations in different contexts (Hayden, 2006). Within the context of higher education scholars also use *internationalization at home* and *cross-border education* to interpret international education as “the process of integrating an international,

intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions, or delivery of higher education” (Knight, 2004). Gutek (2006) states that international education is education that examines educational relationships among peoples of various nation-states, issues that are global in nature, transcending national boundaries and emergent trends that are creating greater interdependency and interrelationships among people as members of a global society.

Allan E. Goodman, CEO and president of the Institute of International Education (IEE), finds at least four meanings attached to the concept of international education: (a) globalization as it refers to teaching and learning differently; (b) global education as it relates to phenomenon of branch campuses which has been growing in scope and visibility; (c) international education in connection with the changing mission statements of colleges and universities, and even whole countries, that aspire to be world-class institutions of higher education and hubs at the center of learning; and (d) academic mobility, focusing on the trends and dynamics driving the circulation of students across national boundaries (Goodman, 2009a).

Although each of the preceding interpretations of international education in higher education differs in expressions, they all describe education in a world context, highlight interdependency among people as members of a global society, and emphasize the need for international education to transcend national borders with the purpose of “education for international understanding” (UNESCO, 1974).

This international understanding, however, does not suffice in having a general knowledge of other nations' cultures as monolithic or embracing a "single story", but challenges each of us to see the diversity and heterogeneity in the "otherness" of the world at large. When Ronald Takaki was explaining to his taxi driver that he had been in the U.S. all his life because his immigrant grandfather came from Japan over 100 years ago, he was provoked to think further by the driver's reply: "I was wondering, because your English is excellent!" (Takaki, 1993, p.1). The homogeneous view of a heterogeneous nation is present, even of a nation of their own.

Scholars with a mind on education across national boundaries have depicted their vision of including international education in the curriculum. In his book *The World as Teacher* (1970), Harold Taylor argued that international education should be the integrating focus of study and activity in departments and colleges of teacher education. He defined education as "the way in which each person become aware of himself and his place in the world at large, and learns how best to conduct himself in it and to contribute to it," and urged schools to turn teacher education programs into genuine laboratories that facilitate dialogues for educators around the world. Likewise, Elise Boulding's book *Building a Global Civic Culture: Education for an Interdependent World* (1988) presented a philosophy for international education that has programmatic goals for shaping a new world history. She envisions a "global

civic culture” as “representing the pattern of how we share a common space, common resources, and common opportunities and manage interdependence in that company of strangers.” These leading researchers helped to lay both good rationale and applicability of international education.

International education, which is aimed to a reduction of provincial attitudes and the adoption of truly international perspectives, should help to open people’s eyes and minds to the realities of the globalized world and awakens them to bring about a world of greater justice, equity, and human rights for all.

Education for social equity. The international community has long achieved near consensus about the importance of equitable access to education, beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, which recognized compulsory elementary education as a universal entitlement (United Nations, 1948). Other international declaration or conventions followed to focus on remediating inequities caused by poverty, gender or race discrimination, particularly the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979) and Convention on the Right of the Child (1989).

However, these international commitments still have a long way to go in addressing the real concern of educational inequity around the globe, as MacPherson (1987) spoke of 500 million children living in poverty in developing countries and the quality of schooling that reached them was questioned. According to Lockheed

(2006), over 100 million children were out of school, with a majority of them being girls and ethnic or language-minority children in poverty. Besides the unequal access to school, children from working-class, poor and minority ethnic families continued to do worse than children from rich and middle-class families on tests and examinations, were more likely to be held back in grade, to drop out of school earlier, and were much less likely to enter college or university (Connell, 1994). Newly emerged challenges such as urbanization, lack of technology and internet are the ongoing themes in education (Cook, Hite, & Epstein, 2004). Thinking about many of those students from rural China who ended up becoming cheap labor in the factory, I related it to similar stories of those disempowered around the world and seemed to have heard a call for all educators or education researchers to bring out their voice. This should also be the reason why international education is important.

Critical theoreticians such as Freire and Gramsci have shaped the debate of international education. Paulo Freire, “perhaps the most significant educator in the world during the first half of the century” (Kohl, 1997), is a very important contributor. His *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) underscores the political nature of education and calls for processes, notably “conscientization”—a deliberate examination of our economic and political environment—as a prerequisite to envisaging how knowledge can serve to eliminate oppression and create a just society. Freire reconstructed what it means to be an educator, who possesses the multiple roles

of a learned scholar, community researcher, philosopher, cultural worker and political insurgent. While the work of Paulo Freire was undertaken in the context of education of illiterate adults in the Third World, his methodology and his educational philosophy are as important for other nations as for the dispossessed in Latin America. Their struggle to become free Subjects and to participate in the transformation of their society is similar, in many ways, to the struggle of people worldwide. Gramsci (1992, 1994), exploring the efficacy of persuasion over coercion and the role of education in the establishment of a hegemonic view, has helped us understand the persistence of subordinate social groups in all areas of society. A crucial aspect of Gramsci's thought is the recognition that different classes and groups have their own organic culture and intellectuals. Organic intellectuals, according to Gramsci, are individuals who resist hegemony and help bring their fellow citizens a sense of historical consciousness of themselves and the society. While Gramsci's insights are nationally bounded, his concepts can be expanded to international education as these struggles are becoming increasingly global (Saltman, 2014).

When I read the peasants' doubt about their role in society as they were only peasants (Freire, 1993), I recalled the doubt of my own role as a prospective educational researcher. What can I do since I am only a Chinese international student working for a doctoral degree in the foreign land? "Conscientization" for me, on this stage, led to my awareness of the contribution international students could

make to the fields by first sharing their own challenges and growth. This process, involving their self-empowerment in their being educated and educating, will pave the road for their empowerment of others.

International Students in the United States: Opportunities and Challenges

An overview. Global student mobility, or the migration of students across borders for a higher education, is a burgeoning phenomenon that affects their countries and their academic systems (Rajiaka & Blumenthal, 2010). Most countries now view international academic mobility and educational exchange as critical components for sharing knowledge, building intellectual capital, and remaining competitive in a globalizing world.

The reasons that countries undertake international student recruitment are varied. Two prominent reasons are (1) the belief that the presence of international students improves the quality of education, and (2) the belief that international students contribute to a knowledge society and economy (International Trade Administration, 2016). Policy makers, government agencies and scholars agree that international students are important to the United States in economic, social and cultural aspects. They increasingly recognize the benefit of facilitating a globally-minded society, and of empowering their populations with the best ideas and skills that are provided by leading colleges and universities. In her article on comparative and international education, Stromquist (2005) examines the trajectory of

the Comparative and International Education (CIE) field over the past several decades. By delineating international commitments to education chronically, she highlighted support provided by social foundations to several American universities to create international education programs, incorporating the social sciences in the design of curricula for educational programs and financed the training of a large cadre of American and international graduate students as comparative educators.

The pathways for students and scholars from other countries to enter the United States were created with the support of the government, and pioneering academic institutions and nonprofit organizations, including the Institute of International Education (IIE) that saw the benefit to progress in science, learning, diplomacy and commerce (Goodman & Guitierrez, 2011). In recent years, the large and increasing number of international students studying in the U.S. is contributing to the rapidly changing demographics of U.S. colleges and universities and leading to a community with a multitude of racially and culturally distinct groups (Lee, 2006; Smith, Bowman, & Hsu, 2007; Thomas, 2006). According to Boggs and Irwin (2007), the presence of international students in the campus not only bring excess revenue to the college and local community, but also reduces insularity among students, faculty, staff, and the local community, thereby counteracting provincialism and xenophobia. Enrollment of international students has enriched U.S. higher education spiritually, economically, and culturally (Davis, 2002). Additionally,

international students who are familiar with and understand the democratic ideals advocated in the United States will be more willing to build a channel of communication between U.S. and their home countries, thus benefit U.S. foreign policy and economic relations (Waters, 2006).

International students can serve as powerful catalysts of campus internationalization since they provide most US students with their first contact with another culture. Domestic students, in this sense, could gain a broader perspective of the world through interaction with international students, and develop intercultural communications skills which are critical to a broad-based education. International students provide a mirror through which US-born students can view the world, the United States, and themselves from a very different perspective. The diversity of international students can be an asset to advance learning opportunities for all students (Pandit, 2013).

Currently, 1,078, 882 international students study in the US colleges and universities in the academic year of 2016-17, which has increased by 3.4% over the prior year. Among all these international students, Asia remains the largest sending region, with 61% of all international students coming from China, India, South Korea, Japan, Taiwan and Vietnam (Institute of International Education, 2017). These numbers reflect an unprecedented and significant trend of mobility and migration, as well as an increase in cultural and linguistic diversity within higher education (Kim,

2012).

The reasons why international students come to study in a foreign country are various. Institute of International Education listed motivations for international students to study in the U.S, which include, among others, learning or improving knowledge of a foreign language, interest in foreign culture, history and landscape, getting more practice-oriented education than offered in home country, possibility to build up networks/friendships in an intercultural context , opportunity to develop the personality/become more independent, get a broader/more flexible education than offered in home country and experiencing new ways of thinking and acting in the field of study (IIE, 2016). For all their aspirations, these international students are reported to have experienced or be experiencing challenges in the foreign land.

International doctoral students in the U.S. In recent years, U.S. higher educational institutions have increasingly depended on the enrollment of international graduate students, especially in doctoral programs (Davis, 2002). According to the Open Doors Report (2017), international doctoral students represented approximately 12% of the foreign population.

Doctoral education provides the labor force for top positions in the higher education faculty and administration and for the investigation of scientific research studies (Bair & Haworth, 2004; Haworth, 1996). It is also directly related to national prosperity, as is pointed out by Nerad, Trzyna, and Heggelund (2008):

Doctoral education is seen as playing a crucial role in the production of knowledge and doctorate holders are viewed as a primary source of innovation, research and development capacity and as workers able to perform well in complex, knowledge-intensive situations. Consequently, governments around the world have begun to expand doctoral training capacity and critically evaluate existing doctoral education. (p. 5)

However, notes many people who go into a doctoral program of study have a difficult transition as they experience increased feelings of insecurity, high levels of stress and anxiety, and decreased self-esteem (Heng-Yu Ku et al., 2008). The stress experienced by international students in graduate programs is substantial and real (Moffett, 2006). For international doctoral students their transition to western university culture is usually more challenging than that of their local counterparts. Adjustment problems that they come across while in a new country and an unfamiliar culture (Pederson, 1995) as well as lack of support networks may exacerbate issues related to their early experiences in the research community.

While researchers suggest that the purpose of doctoral learning should be get prepared to become the next generation of scholars (Walker, 2008), few research has touched on international doctoral education experience (Gardner & Barnes, 2007). According to Al-Sharideh and Goe (1989), international students in the United States often encounter difficulties in adjusting to their new cultural environment. They

come to the classroom with different worldviews, different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and varying strategies for learning. In addition, they vary widely in academic ability, motivation, prior educational experience, and English language proficiency (Kim, 2012). The “adverse cultural know-how and less than adequate competence in language skills” (Hellsten, 2004, p.10) might work together to make their academic transition a particular painful experience.

Using an interpretive phenomenological method, Zhang (2016) collected qualitative data from in-depth focus group interviews with ten doctoral students from mainland China. The findings of this study informed higher education educators and practitioners about unique challenges faced by international Chinese doctoral students concerning their language barrier, difficulty in forming new friendships with local students and balance between school work and social life. Likewise, Mukminin and McMahan (2013) used the same research method to explore the lived experience of academic engagement of twelve doctoral students attending an American graduate school and identified five major themes including academic workload, unfamiliarity with classroom dynamics, unfamiliarity with the nature of relationships between faculty and student, personal conflicts with and unfair treatment from professors, and linguistic barriers. Analyzing questionnaire responses from 207 international students in the U.S., Wang (2009) introduced the concept of resilience into the study of adjustment of international graduate students at U.S. universities and the findings

indicated a great effect of resilience on their adjustment. Using a phenomenological method, Le et. al (2016) explored the experiences of seven female international graduate students in the U.S. and the findings revealed that these participants perceived their experience as a positive, life-changing and transformative experience.

Current research indicates that the translation of international diversity into global understanding and intercultural learning demands meaningful interactions and mutual efforts between international students and domestic students and the professors. American students report reluctance to engage with international students, partly because of nervousness about their ability to be understood due to linguistic and cultural differences (Pandit & Alderman, 2004).

While international students generally faced challenges while studying abroad, Asian students, compared with their European counterparts, experience more acculturative stress due to the striking difference between Eastern and Western cultures and languages (Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker, & Al-Timimi, 2004; Yan & Berliner, 2013). Once in the U.S., Asian students are also usually held to Asian stereotypes, such as obedience, quietness, and non-assertiveness (Lin & Yi, 1997) by their non-Asian counterparts. Such social stereotypes can also be linked to how individuals view themselves, and “inevitably [see] the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, story lines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which

they are positioned” (Davies & Harre, 1990, p. 46)

To deeply understand the experiences of Asian international doctoral students in the field of education, I would examine the theoretical frameworks of doctoral learning, and discuss how I would base my research on these frameworks.

Theoretical Framework for Doctoral Learning

Socialization to the academy. A central component to understanding the life and experiences of the doctoral student is socialization. Within the context of higher education, socialization has been defined as, “a process through which an individual becomes part of a group, organization, or community” (Austin, 2002, p. 96). The concept of socialization as it relates to doctoral education and the students’ role in it is best understood through the lens of organizational socialization (Gardner & Pilar, 2010). Van Maanen and Schein (1979) described organizational socialization as “the process by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role” (p. 211).

Organizational socialization typically occurs through two major stages. The initial phase is generally referred to as anticipatory socialization, and often begins before the individual makes the decision to join the organization as he or she learns about the organization through the recruitment and selection process (Tierney & Rhoads, 1994). After successfully gaining entrance to the organization, the individual enters the role continuance stage of socialization, which consists of the

time when the individual experiences the socialization processes that will ultimately influence the decision to remain in the organization, and allowing the individual to adopt the values, attitudes, and beliefs of its culture (Tierney & Rhoads, 1994).

Socialization of an individual occurs through experiences with various processes, traditions, relationships, and rules that govern the culture of the particular organization, be they formal or informal (Sherlock & Morris, 1967; Tierney, 1997 ; Van Maanen, 1978). In regard to professional socialization, or preparation for a particular professional role, an individual will learn through observation of others and through his or her own experience over time with policies, procedures, and traditions (Sherlock & Morris, 1967). This process comprises a student's day to day experiences of both structured and unstructured activities in the institution. As a whole, these experiences of day to life in the academy contribute to the development of role identity and commitment to the field or profession.

Golde (1998) described the process of graduate school socialization as one "in which a newcomer is made a member of a community – in the case of graduate students, the community of an academic department in a particular discipline." She continued, "The socialization of graduate students is an unusual double socialization. New students are simultaneously directly socialized into the role of graduate student and are given preparatory socialization into graduate student life and the future career" (p. 56). Tierney and Bensimon (1996) further elaborated on how the socialization

process functions for all newcomers in academe: “The beliefs one holds about the academy inevitably frame how one acts in a postsecondary institution” (p. 5). It is this understanding of how to act, what role is to be played, and how that role relates to others that is an inherent part of the socialization process for graduate students.

Stewart & Dottolo (2004) focus on social identities to understand the process of academic socialization in students who have “subordinate identities,” i.e., students from social groups that traditionally have been underrepresented in higher education. They found that students from *all* groups experience graduate school as a transforming process that involves what Tierney and Rhoads call “investiture” and “divestiture” (1994). That is, not only are students internalizing “appropriate values, attitudes, and beliefs associated with their intended professions” (Twale and Stein, 2001, p. 8, in Stewart & Dottolo), they are also undergoing a process of “stripping away those personal characteristics seen as incompatible with the organizational ethos” (Tierney and Rhoads, 1994, p. 29, in Stewart & Dottolo). Other research supports their findings, showing that even though academics gain confidence and a sense of belongingness in their field, it often comes at a cost, especially for individuals who occupy more subordinate social locations than their colleagues.

Underlying the research findings, and others like it, are the modernist assumptions (Tierney, 1997) that socialization is both a one-way process and a process by which a newcomer is molded by one monolithic professional and/or

institutional culture. Many have begun to question the view of the socialization process which sees the doctoral education as only one-directional. New ways of viewing the socialization process include consideration of how the individual doctoral students can also influence and change the organization. Scholars have suggested, alternatively, that socialization should be a dialectical process “through which newcomers bring perspectives, values, and ideas that interact with expectations within the organization” (Austin & McDaniels, 2006, p. 401).

The one-sided view of socialization propels researchers to use identity as the framework for understanding doctoral education. By describing doctoral learning as a process of identity construction, researchers began to put the focus on experience, viewing the doctorate as situated within earlier experiences and intentions, and future imagined careers.

Identity trajectories.

Aimed to explore identity from the perspective of agency, McAlpine and Amundsen (2009), explained the development through time of graduate students and emerging academics through intellectual, institutional, and network strands. Focused on the emergence of doctoral students into researcher identity, this notion of identity trajectory examines doctoral student cultivation of agency and the experience they then face as emergent academics. According to McAlpine (2011), this notion emphasizes the integration of past-present-future in the experience of academic work,

and the individual's desire to enact intentions and hopes over time. Present intentions, affect, and actions are influenced by the past and will in turn influence the future.

In a longitudinal qualitative research conducted with 60 participants from two universities in Canada and two in the UK, in order to examine doctoral students, post-PhD researcher and new lecturer experience situated in an international literature, McAlpine et. al. (2014) demonstrated how the construct of 'identity-trajectory' which links a narrative approach with identity construction contributes to understanding how early career academics learn through experience and navigate their journeys.

Identity-trajectory recognizes that learning and identity are intimately linked—learning is embodied in the whole person and incorporates the past in the present (and thus the academic within the personal). So this view emphasizes the learning processes that emerge from a multitude of contexts, both past and present, not just through doing work but also importantly from reflection on work—learning what Clandinin and Connelly (1990) have called personal practical knowledge, or what Schon (1983) has called knowing-in-practice. In the meantime, imagination plays a pivotal role in making sense of the processes of identity formation as it transcends our time and space and creates new images of the world and ourselves. The imagination of the wood through looking at a tree leads us to negotiate our identity as researchers and to cast our eyes on both the local and the global issues.

As identity has become a focus of doctoral learning, I would further examine this concept and how it is interwoven with culture and language. According to Crossley and Jarvis (2000), international education increasingly recognizes the cultural dimension of education, particularly its efforts to understand distinctions and similarities between cultures in the western and eastern parts of the world. Drawing on Gramsci's concept of organic culture (1971), I would examine the literature on acculturation and enculturation, and how they are relevant to identity negotiation of international doctoral students in the United States.

Culture, Language and Identity

The concept of culture. Culture study derives from social and cultural anthropology, which aims to provide a comprehensive description of the way of life of a society (Stem, 1992). Despite a century of efforts to define culture adequately, there was in the early 1990s no agreement regarding its nature (Apte, 1994). The following extract from Avruch (1998) provides an historical perspective to some of the ways in which the term has been interpreted:

Much of the difficulty [of understanding the concept of culture] stems from the different usages of the term as it was increasingly employed in the nineteenth century. Broadly speaking, it was used in three ways. First, as exemplified in Matthew Arnolds' *Culture and Anarchy* (1867), culture referred to special intellectual or artistic endeavors or products, what today we might call "high culture" as opposed

to “popular culture” (or “folkways” in an earlier usage). By this definition, only a portion – typically a small one – of any social group “has” culture. This sense of culture is more closely related to aesthetics than to social science.

Partly in reaction to this usage, the second, as pioneered by Edward Tylor in *Primitive Culture* (1870), referred to a quality possessed by all people in all social groups, who nevertheless could be arrayed on a development (evolutionary) continuum (in Lewis Henry Morgan’s scheme) from “savagery” through “barbarism” to “civilization”. Tylor’s definition of culture is “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society”. In contrast to Arnold’s view, all folks “have” culture, which they acquire by virtue of membership in some social group – society. And a whole grab bag of things, from knowledge to habits to capabilities, makes up culture. His definition became the foundational one for anthropology and partly explains why Kroeber and Kluckhohn found definitional fecundity by the early 1950s. The extreme inclusivity of Tylor’s definition stayed with anthropology a long time. But the greatest legacy of Tylor’s definition lay in his “complex whole” formulation. This was accepted even by those later anthropologists who forcefully rejected his evolutionism. They took it to mean that cultures were wholes – integrated systems. Although this assertion has great heuristic value, it also simplifies the world considerably.

The third and last usage of culture developed in anthropology in the twentieth-century work of Franz Boas and his students. As Tylor reacted to Arnold to establish a scientific (rather than aesthetic) basis for culture, so Boas (1940) reacted against Tylor and other social evolutionists. Whereas the evolutionists stressed the universal character of a single culture, with different societies arrayed from savage to civilized, Boas emphasized the uniqueness of the many and varied cultures of different peoples or societies. Moreover he dismissed the value judgments he found inherent in both the Arnoldian and Tylolean views of culture; for Boas, one should never differentiate high from low culture, and one ought not to differentially valorize cultures as savage or civilized.

Under the growing influence of the social sciences, in particular anthropology and sociology, the emphasis on culture studies shifted from an anthropological perspective to the “way of life” or “life-style” of a target group. This concept might refer to “typical behavior in daily situations, i.e. personal relationships, family life, value systems, philosophies, in fact the whole of the shared social fabric that makes up a society” (Stem, 1992: 207). According to Hall (1997), culture is a set of social practice that is produced and exchanged in various ways, such as personal and social interaction, everyday rituals, identities, narratives and rules.

In my study, culture that penetrated the experiences of international doctoral students would inclusively embody high and low culture, the whole of the shared

fabric that make up the society. In this sense, I also adopted William Sewell Jr.'s theories of culture, i.e., dialectically interrelated practices and schema, experienced as patterns that have thin coherence and interrelated contradictions (Sewell, 2005).

This interactiveness feature of culture is also in accord with Jonathan Turner's idea that social life is lived simultaneously at the macro, meso, and micro levels (Turner, 2002). Culture is experienced as patterns and contradictions. When international students are experiencing a different culture, culture shock will inevitably occur.

Culture shock, acculturation and enculturation. Experiences in a new culture may result in *culture shock*, which is defined as the stress and conflict that occur when individuals come in contact with different cultures (Winkelman, 1994).

The first recognized definition of this notion originates from the 1950s when anthropologist, Kalervo Oberg (1954) first coined the term. He understood culture shock to be a negative period encompassing a form of mental illness due to feelings of anxiety, hastened by difficulties in coping with new cultures and mourning for lost familiar signs and symbols (Church, 1982; Zapf, 1991). The cues may be construed as customs, gestures, facial expressions or words which unconsciously form part of one's culture, along with language (Brein and David, 1971). It happens especially when individuals are totally immersed in the new culture, as is usually the case with international students. Adaptation to the local culture, through understanding and accommodation, not necessarily assimilation, is necessary to deal with the culture

shock.

In response to cultural shock, individuals must become acculturated to their new surroundings. “Acculturation is a process of cultural and psychological changes that involve various forms of mutual accommodation, leading to some longer-term psychological and sociocultural adaptations between groups” (Berry, 2005, p. 699). Acculturation happens over a period of time and continues for the length of time the two cultures are in contact with each other. International students are one of the many groups that are faced with the issue of acculturation and must decide to what extent they will acculturate. Berry (1980, 1997) created a model of acculturation that describes the extent to which sojourners preserve their own cultural identity as compared to the extent they take on the cultural identity of the host country. The acculturation model includes different processes: assimilation, integration, selective acculturation, marginalization, and separation.

Assimilation is a process where sojourners adopt the host culture and abandon their own culture (Berry, 1980, 1997; Ward, 2008). At the opposite end of the scale is separation, where sojourners do not adopt the host country culture, but rather maintain their original cultural identity. Marginalization involves minimal interest in or adoption of the host country culture and little or no contact with host society members. Integration, the opposite of marginalization, involves maintaining personal cultural values while acquiring host cultural values as well. Selective

acculturation fits between marginalization and integration, where the sojourners only adopt selective host culture values (Berry, 1980, 1997; Ward, 2008).

However, the integration model will only be successful if the host culture is open to cultural diversity (Berry 2005, 2006). Multicultural ideology is now more fully accepted, and integration has become the most desirable model in many countries (Koopmans & Statham, 1999).

Recently, however, a bilinear model of acculturation has come into favor, given its greater ecological validity. According to the bilinear model, adherence to one's culture of origin (referred to as enculturation) occurs along one continuum, and adherence to a second culture (referred to as acculturation) occurs along another, distinct continuum (Kim, 2007). Enculturation is a conscious and an unconscious conditioning process whereby man, as child and adult, achieves competence in his culture, internalizes his culture and becomes thoroughly enculturated (Hoebel 1954).

According to this framework, an increase in adherence to one culture does not necessarily lead to a decrease in adherence to another. Empirical tests have demonstrated the superiority of bilinear models of acculturation over unilinear models (Miller, 2007; Ryder et al., 2000). In addition to linearity, scholars have also examined the domain-specific nature of acculturation and enculturation and concluded that these processes occur across broad behavioral and values domains. Behavioral domains include language and communication (e.g., one's preference and

ability to read, write, and speak), social interactions (e.g., understanding social norms, protocols and institutions, family and peer relationships), and daily living habits (e.g., preferences for food, entertainment, recreational activities, health practices, and customs); values domains include belief systems, worldviews, and political ideology (Kim, 2007; Miller, 2010).

In regard to educational experiences of international students in the U.S., I would encompass both acculturation and enculturation as the mutual processes as they navigate their journey of doctoral learning.

The concept of identity. Stuart Hall (1992) has argued that various developments within twentieth-century social thought have forced an attention of identity. The fundamental paradox of identity is inherent in the term itself. From the Latin root “idem”, meaning “the same”, the term nevertheless implies both similarity and difference. It is something we uniquely possess that distinguishes us from other people while also implies a relationship with a broader collective or social group of some kind. There is always a tension between uniqueness and sense of belonging in the concept of “who I am”.

This emergence of considering identity in groupness was fueled in part by the writings of Erik Erikson (1968), especially through his writings in the 1950s and 1960s which put identity development (and identity ‘crisis’) in the spotlight, in the sense that identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something

assumed to be stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty.

Erikson (1956) focused identity as an individual phenomenon developing in social contexts. He coined the term *identity crisis*, introducing the notion that the social, cultural, and historical context is the ground in which individual identity is embedded. While there exist many uses of the word *identity*, it is central to all human beings as at some point of our life we become concerned with how to understand ourselves, present ourselves to others and comprehend complex relationships between us and others as well as understand others as distinct human beings.

As one of the first psychologists to systematically analyze the lifelong development of personality, Erikson was also committed to the idea that psychological growth occurs across the lifespan. Thus, even though one's ego identity (the sense of continuity and sameness one has about one's character and values) is optimally achieved during adolescence (1956), Erikson acknowledged that identity issues are visited and re-worked many times both prior to and following adolescence (Kroger, 1993). Also crucial to Erikson's understanding of identity was the contention that young adults must come to "maintain an inner solidarity with a group's ideals and identity" (p. 57), in order to form their own personal identity. Thus, identity development does not occur purely on the "inside" of the individual, but also relies on cultural contexts and socialization to provide the "shapes" deemed acceptable by a society (Erikson, 1968; Levinson, 1980, in Smelser & Erikson, 1980).

Finding one's place in society was seen by Erikson as a crucial element of successful identity achievement, and part of finding one's place was committing to an occupational role (Erikson, 1950/1963, p. 261). Acknowledging the complexity of identity as a concept, Erikson (1968) writes,

We deal with a process "located" *in the core of the individual* and yet also *in the core of his communal culture*.... In psychological terms, identity formation employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observation, a process taking place on all levels of mental functioning, by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to a typology significant to them (p.22).

This idea of finding one's place was also echoed by Weeks who argues that

Identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others. At its most basic it gives you a sense of personal location, the stable core to your individuality. But it is also about your relationships, your complex involvement with others and in the modern world these have become ever more complex and confusing (Weeks, 1990, p.88).

Further, Edwards notes one's particular social context defines that part of the larger human pool of potential from which a personal identity can be constructed.

Thus, individual identities will be both components and reflections of particular social (or cultural) ones (Edwards, 2009). In Richard Jenkins' introduction to *Social Identity* (1996: 5), he begins by stating that he will use the terms 'identity' and 'social identity' interchangeably to mean the latter since 'all human identities are in some sense - and usually a stronger rather than a weaker sense - social identities'. We all have a number of social identities which organize our relationships to other individuals and groups within our social world. It would perhaps be true to say that whereas conventional sociology has concentrated on sameness, more recent and particularly post-modern sociology has concentrated on difference. He goes on to say that our identity is best seen as a process of constant negotiation with those around us; identity is 'the product of agreement and disagreement' and open to change.

Since identity is a many-faceted phenomenon, identity development does not occur purely on the "inside" of the individual, but also relies on cultural contexts and socialization to provide the "shapes" deemed acceptable by a society (Erikson, 1968; Levinson, 1980, in Smelser & Erikson, 1980).

Culture and identity. Culture, as the historically cumulative deposit of knowledge, beliefs, values, norms and identity structures of a human group, is important not only because it is the milieu through which people communicate but because it is the milieu through which people make sense of their situations generally, monitor and explain their own actions (including non-communicative ones) and form and maintain their personal identities (Carspecken, 2008).

To highlight the relationship between culture and identity, social identity theory also considers multiple and evolving identities as an on-going and situated construction. This interaction between culture / society and identity is illustrated in Wenger's theories of community of practice and situated learning (2008). The theory believes identity is situated and practiced in sociocultural context, and its negotiation is part of the formation of a community. In other words, identity is a reflection of multiple community memberships that is continuously negotiated, and the process is one of situated learning in which the community participants move from peripheral membership to more central positions. Reconciliations among memberships and discourses are involved in the process, and identity is defined through the constant and joint social participation in the community repertoire of established practices. Identity is seen as a process, a matter of external negotiation between oneself and the people around, and an internal negotiation or conversation between the "I" and the "me" (Mead, 1938). To understand what an "identity" is, or

a “self” or “person”, involves seeing the individual in the context not only of the surrounding “significant others” at different times of his or her life, but also in terms of position in the wider social structure and of the wider historical processes which provide us with the stage on which we act out our lives (Craib, 2003).

This focus on change is also emphasized by Hall (1996), especially when it comes to cultural identity. According to him:

This concept of identity does not signal that stable core of the self, unfolding from beginning to end through all the vicissitudes of history without change; the bit of the self which remains always-already 'the same', identical to itself across time. Nor—if we translate this essentializing conception to the stage of cultural identity - is it that 'collective or true self hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed “selves” which a people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common' (Hall, 1990) and which can stabilize, fix or guarantee an unchanging 'oneness' or cultural belongingness underlying all the other superficial differences. It accepts that identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation.

Hall (1996) argues that we need to situate the debates about identity within all those historically specific developments and practices, like the processes of globalization and global migration in the “post-colonial” world which have disturbed the relatively 'settled' character of many populations and cultures. Identity formation, or negotiation, in this sense, involves integration of various resources. Hall (1996) states:

Though they seem to invoke an origin in a historical past with which they continue to correspond, actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. Identities are therefore constituted within, not outside representation. They relate to the invention of tradition as much as to tradition itself, which they oblige us to read not as an endless reiteration but as 'the changing same' (Gilroy, 1994): not the so-called return to roots but a coming-to-terms-with our 'routes'. They arise from the narrativization of the self, but the necessarily fictional nature of this process in no way undermines its discursive, material or political effectivity, even if the belongingness, the 'suturing into the story' through which identities arise is, partly, in the imaginary (as well as the symbolic) and therefore, always, partly constructed

in fantasy, or at least within a fantasmatic field.

To understand the identity of international students working in a foreign culture, Homi Bhabha (1994) lends us a lens to focus on the difference of cultural and social norms in a cross-cultural context and explains how failure to recognize those differences produces stereotypes about identities from other cultures and how differences between those norms enable us to see where individual identity is ruptured, disrupted. Homi Bhabha reminds us that cross-cultural identity is essentially affected by the power relation of both the host and the home cultures, especially in a discourse where the power distribution of two cultures is not even, and where stereotypes about people from other cultures persist. Bhabha (1994) points out in *The Location of Culture* that stereotyping, a major strategy for fixing identity of others as rigid, unchanging, and repeatable in any time and context, is a form of knowledge and power that vacillates between what is “in place,” already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated (p.95).

The new identity for international students, in this sense, is a hybridity that mirrors the identity in the home culture and the identity in the host culture, yet the hybridized identity does not fully represent either cultural discourse. It is a partial presence, partial as in both virtual and incomplete in the dominant discourse. We are part of the agency that constructs and reconstructs our identities, and our identities are continually shaped and reshaped by the very norms that we create along the way.

The identity development lies both in their constant negotiation between cultures and meaning making process. Piper & Garratt's (2004) argument of identity as both being (what we are already), and becoming (what we might be in the future) lays a good foundation for doctoral students' negotiation of identity. A similar argument can be identified in Hermans and Dimaggio's (2007) discussion on the dialogical self, which is distinctively characterized by a combination of unity and multiplicity, an interchange and negotiation between local and global voices in an era of uncertainties.

Language and identity. The intimate connection between language and identity has discussed by researchers, specifically on how identity is shaped by the use of language. Coleman (1988) refers to a language as an expression of identity/self. She also points out

Acquiring an identity and self-concept through language represents a classic dialectic: a way to understand how others feel about us or what we are doing, and concurrently an opportunity for us to consciously reflect and shape our own unique personality of self. At the individual level, language operates like proprioceptive feedback, just as facial muscles provide information about emotional states. Listening to the ways we express ourselves—the use of a specific language or dialect, lexical items or phrases—gives us some insight into ourselves and how we perceive the world (p. 335)

Coleman (1988) also states

In both its written and verbal forms, language is such an important channel for thinking and feeling, for expressing the self and identity. To abandon one's native form of expression may require the denial of a central and salient component of the self" (p. 335).

Objecting to a static viewpoint of linguistic identity, Djité (2006) claims that "the concept of "linguistic identity" focuses on language (learning and/or acquisition) in terms of an identity that is lost or gained, and fails to capture the dynamic of continuously constructing one's own "identity" through language" (p. 14).

In terms of the how language expresses the speaker's personal subjectivity, Bakhtin (1981) claims

[L]anguage, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention (p. 293)

As Bourdieu (1977) notes, the value ascribed to speech cannot be understood apart from the person who speaks, and the person who speaks cannot be understood apart from the larger networks of social relationships. Every time we speak, we are negotiating and renegotiating our sense of self in relation to the larger social world, and reorganizing that relationship across time and space. Our gender, race,

nationality, among other characteristics, are all implicated in this negotiation of identity.

Summary

Locating myself through educational imagination, I was trying to have a panoramic view of the landscape of international education and positioning us in it as international doctoral students. The big picture of education as to improve global understanding and combat inequity around the world offer a rationale for the academic mobility of international students and an urgent call for their joint efforts and dedication to the enterprise of education. Taking the legacy by critical theoreticians such as Paulo Freire and Antonio Gramsci, I was aware of the self-empowerment and empowering others by locating our potential and energy, and started to look for a counter narrative to the deficit approach. The acculturation and enculturation process offers a lens into the diversity and heterogeneity of education in which we are both consumers of and producers.

A review of international doctoral students in the United States brought me to the struggles and resilience and also a wondering of the experiences of international doctoral students in the specific field of education. The transition of theoretical frameworks from one-sided socialization to a more holistic framework of identity trajectory signals a progress in appreciating different cultures and perspective from students. The meaning making experiences of international doctoral students in a

world of otherness are also about trajectory formation as an expanding image of the world.

Chapter III

Methodology

The truth about reality is always in our soul.

----Socrates

Introduction

This chapter represents my evolving understanding of research methodology and why I employ critical narrative inquiry for my current study. My identity as a doctoral student in the field of education propels me to approach qualitative research first in a holistic way, trying to understand its different forms of representation and their interconnectedness and interactiveness (Maxwell, 2013). My desire to humanize and understand educational research as a responsibility (Dilliard, 2000) to schools and community and the ultimate goal of educational research as improvement of education renders me to come into this inquiry with a critical lens. This chapter then, will delve into qualitative research as different forms of understanding, why a critical lens is needed, my understanding of narrative inquiry, and how I will use it in my research.

Qualitative Research and Multiple Ways of Knowing: Why Critical?

Qualitative research methodologies are now well-established important modes of inquiry for education (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). As Elliot Eisner (2017) stated:

One of the most significant shifts that is likely to occur in the educational research community is the broadening of its conception of what counts as

educational research. This increased breadth is not a license for "anything goes," but a recognition that the roads to understanding are many and that a narrow view of method is likely to lead to a limited understanding of how schools work (p.11).

Qualitative researchers are intrigued by the complexity of social interactions expressed in daily life and by the meanings the participants themselves attribute to these interactions. They are also exquisitely aware that they work in and through interpretations—their own and others’—layered in complex hermeneutic circles. These interests take qualitative researchers into natural settings, rather than laboratories, and foster pragmatism in using multiple methods— “a wide range of interconnected interpretive practices” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 4)—for exploring a topic. Thus, qualitative research is pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experiences of people.

Qualitative researchers tend to view social worlds as holistic and complex, engage in systematic reflection on who they are in the conduct of the research, remain sensitive to their own biographies/social identities and how these shape the study (i.e., they are reflexive), rely on complex reasoning that moves dialectically between deduction and induction, and conduct their inquiries systematically (Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

Qualitative research, then, is a broad approach to the study of social

phenomena. The various genres are naturalistic, interpretive, and increasingly critical, and they typically draw on multiple methods of inquiry.

Framed by a positivistic thinking, we tend to become quite intolerable of ambiguities and hope to obtain ONE answer to our puzzles, trying to reduce the complexity of lived experiences in an increasingly diversified world to one “true reality”. The reductionist view of knowledge neglects the function of a myriad of factors at play in forming our current society, which is formed, and can be reformed, by human beings.

Refusing to accept the status quo as a taken-for-granted, Kincheloe (2008) offers its readers an alternative perception of the world, not only as what it is, but what it *should* be. This educational and social vision of justice and equity for all human beings offers a solid ground for critical qualitative research, with a concern for the suffering of the marginalized and disadvantaged. A reconceptualization of the construction of knowledge and human possibilities guide the way to educational research with “an impassioned spirit”.

The current educational system is replete with feigned political neutrality while coalescing with the mainstream positivism of a standardized approach to education. The arrogance of ignoring “a cacophony of lived experience and the coexistence of diverse meaning and interpretation” characterizes the technicalization and hyperrationalization, with an addiction to power domination and privilege as the

insidious curriculum at play.

Critical qualitative research, according to Kincheloe, challenge the dominant positivistic approach to education, and focus on an understanding of the complexity and interpretative dimensions of reality. The interactive nature of people and their sociocultural context and their fellow humans offer educators an alternative approach to knowledge, learning, teaching and social action.

Shirley R. Steinberg and Gaile S. Cannelle (2012) also presented a transformative activist approach to examine the notion that everything is critical in qualitative research. In other words, research should be a social theoretical act, oriented towards a socially just and equitable praxis. Researchers, in this sense, should take a critical advocacy stance in doing research which goes beyond the reductionist and positivistic approach.

Critical research begins with the premise that research's role is not to describe the world as it is, but also to demonstrate what needs to be changed. As Foster (1986) clarified a quarter of century ago, critical researchers "do not presume to give a positivist and unilateral definition of history and society", but instead, probe "foundational assumptions that are normally taken for granted" (p.71). primarily, critical researchers "examine sources of social domination and repression, but with the caveat that since we ultimately make our worlds, we can ultimately change them" (p.71). Or as Lather (1992) describes it, critical inquiry "takes into account how our

lives are mediated by systems of inequity such as classism, racism, and sexism” (p.87).

In a world of complexities which rejects the oversimplification of positivistic model of one “truth” or one “correct” way of doing research, the need to tend to the daily complexities and inequities in our current system demands the methodology, or methodologies, of bricolage (Kincheloe, 2005), which basically views research methods “actively rather than passively, meaning that we construct our research methods from the tools at hand rather than passively receiving the correct, universally applicable methodologies”.

Kincheloe calls for a bricolage in the spirit of critical multilogicality. He advocates a mix of critical theory with indigenous and subjugated knowledge as well as other forms of knowledge from diverse culture. Also needed is an understanding of political economic forces, feminist theory, complexity and chaos theory, cultural studies and phenomenological and hermeneutic understandings. Norm Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (2005) contend that traditional research stops short of boundary crossing within interpretation. Observing that “over the past two decades, a quiet methodological revolution has been taking place in the social sciences (1994, p.ix) Denzin and Lincoln define this revolution as the “blurring” of boundaries within disciplinary research.

This boundary crossing in doing research for the improvement of education is a vision for all researchers who have a passion for education for emancipation. As a

beginner in this field, I interpret it as a willingness to make an effort and start from a rethinking and questioning of the universally accepted methodology and delve into what we can do as educational researchers. Being critical in my methodology, in this sense, prompts me to take what data I have at hand, place them on a larger landscape of education, and examine how they are affected by a network of power relations.

I started this research with a self-study, situating myself as the inquiry with my personal history. This is also in accord with Denzin and Lincoln's (2011) view of researchers as a "multicultural subject" (p.12) with their history, traditions, and conceptions of self, ethics, and politics as a starting point for inquiry.

I understand lived experiences as an interpretive story (Eisner, 1998; Greene, 1995) rather than a cause-and-effect sequence. An interpretive story "lives willingly with plurality, embracing the power of language to make new and different things possible; ...focuses on how we talk about the world and tries to deal with it; ...recounts improvisations, changes, contradictions, ambiguities, and vulnerabilities" (Bochner 1990, pp.5-6). My goal of interpreting the meaning of my own and other international doctoral students' lives motivates me to recognize the intermediate possibilities, instead of an either-or dichotomy (Dewey, 1938), between humanistic and scientific modes of inquiry (Geertz, 1980), rigorous-based on systematic observation, and imaginative--based on expressive insight (Bateson 1972).

Our lived experience, then, should not be subordinated to the "tyranny of

reason” or the “consolation of order” (Jackson 1989, p.16). Instead, they follow Kets (1958, p.193) in their attempt to cultivate the apprehension of “being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.” They return from their explorations with descriptions and interpretations intended “to keep a conversation going” (Rorty 1979).

Likewise, Denzin (1989) reminds us that, like the film, life is not lived linearly: “It is lived through the subject’s eye, and that eye, like a camera’s, is always reflexive, nonlinear, subjective, filled with flashbacks, after-images, dream sequences, faces merging into one another, masks dropping, and new masks being put on” (pp.83-84).

Narrative Inquiry: A Fluid Interpretation of Lived Experiences

The concept of bricolage (Kincheloe, 2008) and methodological congruence (Morse & Richards, 2002; Richards & Morse, 2012) inspires me to integrate the purposes, questions, and methods of research of my study as a cohesive whole rather than as fragmented, isolated parts.

To study the lived experiences of international doctoral students, I commit my research to unraveling how they make meaning of their experiences, a process of being empowered and empowering. This critical stance to approach experiences in their fluidity puts me in a constant search for an appropriate methodology. As is pointed out by Eisner (1998), in choosing a research methodology, a doctoral student is greatly influenced by professors’ expertise and their stance in doing research. I

am no exception here. The critical stance I adopt for my research is influenced by my advisor Dr. Cameron White, who always challenges me to go beyond what it *is* and think about what it *should be*. His introduction to critical pedagogues like Paulo Freire, Kincheloe opens up my eyes to see how educators consider education as a political endeavor and commit themselves to getting out the voice and agency of those underprivileged and silenced by our society.

In the search for a form of representation, Dr. Cheryl Craig led me into the realm of narrative inquiry, the representation of experiences through narratives, or stories. Her introduction to Dewey's theory of education as experience and research as "study of experience" (1938) and Clandinin & Connelly's narrative inquiry as a way to understand experience (2000) opened a venue for me to "see big from seeing small" (Greene, 2005). This also coincides with our Chinese old saying that we can envision a big picture from discerning a small spot. I was also wondering how a researcher can capture the essence of stories lived by those participants, avoid misrepresentation and convey the stories "scientifically" to the readers.

This wondering pushed me to inquire into the historical root of narrative inquiry. Reading Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*, I came to understand the root of personal experience methods in Aristotle's theories of plot (Bate, 1970) and Dewey's theories of education (1938). They are connected with Polkinghorne's *Narrative Knowing*

and the Human Sciences (1988), Clifford Geertz's (1995) *After the Fact*, MacIntyre's theories of narrative unity (1981), and Robert Cole's (1989) *Call of Stories*. These methods have been used in such fields as history, literature, philosophy, anthropology and psychotherapy (e.g. Spence, 1982; Heilbrun, 1988; Carr, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1988).

Clandinnin and Connelly (2000) also mentioned the similar theoretical approaches like phenomenology and ethnography and their playing with the imaging of events using methods by phenomenologists and ethnographers. Their fight against a possible loss in the complexities of various methods brought me to my own puzzle of the differences between these methods. Meanwhile, they suggest that "it is more productive to begin with explorations of the phenomena of experience rather than in comparative analysis of various theoretical methodological frames" (p. 128). I interpret this as an exploration of both phenomena of experience and theoretical methodologies as new experience will constantly demand appropriate methodological frames. As researchers interpret the stories lived by participants, various methodological elements can be incorporated into the narrative framework of change and fluidity.

When Clifford Geertz (1995) reflects on his forty years of anthropological inquiry in *After the Fact*, change is the hallmark: change in the world, change in the inquiry, change in the inquirer, change in the point of view and change in the outcome,

all call for a battery of fluid interpretations of “how things go, have been going, and are likely to go” (pp. 2-3). While anthropological studies provide rich, descriptive data about the context, activities and beliefs of participants, they are “quite inadequate” without “mini-narratives with the narrator in them” (p. 65). This “mini-narrative” led to the narrative turn of the relationship between the researcher and the researched, a move away from an acceptance of the researcher-researched relationship as distanced, objective, static and decontextualized.

In this turn towards narrative inquiry, a new perspective is put on the relationship between the researcher and the researched, a re-conception of interactiveness between humans involved in the inquiry, a coexistence of the researcher and the researched in time and context. They bring into the research a history and perspective, both learning from the research process (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007).

By constructing my knowledge of research methodology from the perspectives of researchers from different fields, I came to understand that human experience is basically storied experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). By means of personal experience methods (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994), narrative as phenomenon (lived stories) and narrative as method (story telling) create the narrative unity and theories for me to link my personal and professional knowledge in my scholarly research.

As an international doctoral student who is going to research the experiences of other fellow doctoral students, I realize that narrative approach would be the most appropriate approach for my current inquiry due to the need for mutual understanding and commitment from both the researcher and researcher participants. At the same time, the epistemological, auto/biographical and feminist qualities of narrative approach offer room for my reflexivity to create a dynamic process of interaction between my participants and myself. In this inquiry, a collaboration will exist between the researcher and the participant, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus (Craig & Huber, 2007). By this means, we co-create multi-storied narratives that come close to representing the messiness and complexity of our life (Geertz, 1973, 1983) and enable us to create meaning out of experience (Bruner, 1986, 1990). Positioning my 'self' within the text, alongside the stories others tell about their lives, and viewing those stories within the contexts of dominant discourses (Derrida, 1981), we can create new and reflexive knowledge (Hertz, 1997) that can make transparent the values and beliefs that have inevitably influenced our being and becoming in the foreign land.

Inviting Participants

My research starts with my reflective narrative as an international doctoral student in the field of education, thus placing myself as a participant in the research.

Three other international doctoral students in the field of education through my personal networking were invited to my research.

I came to know them at different stages of my own doctoral journey under different settings. Their presence has informed me, to different extents, of my own understanding of being and becoming an international doctoral student in the field of education. After I applied for IRB and received the approval, I contacted them and expressed my wish to explore the experiences of international doctoral students and they signed the consent form. I will illustrate our detailed communication as part of my research findings in the following chapter. My participants all come from Asia to the U.S. for a doctoral degree and none of them is a U.S. citizen. By the time I finished writing this dissertation, two have graduated and chose to work in the United States. One is still working towards her graduation.

Field Texts

Field texts, normally called data in other research methods, could be presented in various forms such as observation notes, interview notes and transcripts, archival data, and researcher reflective journals (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, 2000). The field texts were utilized for reflection, analysis, and interpretation, with the purpose of “discover[ing] and construct[ing] meaning in [the] texts” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 423). The field texts of this research mainly derive from processes as observations, interviews, conversations and reflective journals.

Observations. By observation, I do not mean that I will go to spend time with my participants in the field and observe their behavior. Instead, as a doctoral student myself, I will observe my environment in order to gain an understanding of the context in which doctoral students in the field of education are navigating their social and academic journey. The stance I would adopt as a researcher was a participant observer rather than a distanced observer (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). A careful observation of my own surroundings will help me come to perceive the complexities, nuances and subtleties of the context in which I am crafting my identity as an international doctoral student. This ability of seeing the particular on a larger context also enables my interviews with other doctoral students to burrow deeper into their meaning-making process.

Interviews. Interviews will be conducted with my participants to bring out their experiences and perspectives. In this study, I would adopt Mishler's (1990) view of interview as a problem-solving activity in which my participants and I collaborate in bringing forward how international doctoral students negotiate their identity. Interview questions will be designed to elicit responses pertaining to the lived experiences of my participants.

✧ Life History

How did you come to the current Ph.D program?

What were your previous educational experiences in your home country?

✧ Details of Experience

What are the major challenges in your academic/social life?

Can you tell me some exciting moments in your life here?

What are your research interests?

Who do you usually turn to when you are in difficulties?

✧ Reflection and expectations

What do you think are the greatest achievements in here?

What career do you desire after graduation?

How do you think about the meaning of your research, be it personal, social and educational?

Reflective Journals. Researcher reflective journals would be employed as field texts as they are a powerful way to give accounts of experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Entries may take on a pattern as they are interwoven with other field texts and bring forward resonances between the researcher and participants. I kept my journals on and off, reflecting on own social and academic experiences before and during my doctoral learning. These entries serve as reverberations (Craig, 2007) with the experiences of my participants. My journal entries about those informal conversations with my participants will also be interwoven into the field texts.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The cornerstone of analysis in narrative inquiry has its roots in John Dewey's (1938) pragmatic philosophy, which views continuity and interactiveness as two key principles of experience. Analysis and interpretation begin with an in-depth review of and reflection upon the field texts. Drawing on the work of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative tools employed to facilitate analysis and interpretation included broadening, burrowing, storying and restorying (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Narratives, like all stories, are not descriptions of everything that happens. Rather they represent what happened that was considered most important and show how what happened interconnects central characters and events (Tobin, 2012). Broadening (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), in this sense, helps to take a holistic view of the stories my participants tell and generalize the social, political and educational context my participants are situated in.

While life stories serve the function of synthesis for fully lived experiences (Dilthey, 1991), they are articulated as life stories the stories will be different from time to time and audience to audience, giving a range of possible narratives (Carspecken, 2012). Cultures supply a variety of narrative forms for producing one's self-narratives, inclusive of typical character forms and plots. Burrowing (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), then, means reconstructing events from the point of

view of the central participants involved in the research study, supported by the perspectives of those who immediately surround them (Craig, 2007). This involves listening to how individuals piece together their life experiences from past to present and make sense of them. In my research, the personal stories my participants tell about their past and present will illuminate their understanding of themselves and their aspirations for their future.

Restorying is the third interpretive tool I will use in my research. It is an attempt to come back to present and future considerations and contemplate the meaning of all those events and capture the changes, projecting those changes onto the larger sociopolitical landscape of education (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Ethics and Trustworthiness

Ethical matters permeate the whole process of the narrative research, from the start of the inquiry, conducting the inquiry, interpreting findings, publishing, and even after that when both researchers and participants are going on with their narratives in the midst of cultural, social and institutional milieu.

Concerning ethics in research, Weis and Fine (2000) ask us to consider ethical considerations involving our roles as insiders/outsideers to the participants; assess issues that we may be fearful of disclosing; establish supportive, respectful relationships without stereotyping and using labels that participants do not embrace; acknowledge whose voices will be represented in our final study; and write ourselves

into the study by reflecting on who we are and the people we study. In addition, as summarized by Hatch (2002), we need to be sensitive to vulnerable populations, imbalanced power relations, and placing participants at risk. Marshall and Rossman (2014) also echo the importance of relationships—with participants, with stakeholders, with peers, and with the larger community of discourse.

As qualitative researchers always spend a lot of time with their participants, Creswell and Poth (2017) warn researchers of the possibility of failing to present multiple perspectives and a complex picture of the central phenomenon or only disclosing positive results that create a Pollyanna portrait of the issues.

When researchers choose critical qualitative research for studies that cannot be done experimentally and that require an ethical advocacy stance to address injustice and/or inequity, Marshall (1985) argues that we need “research designed to capture the words of the underclass, the hidden structured connections among organizations, the informal policies or the unanticipated outcomes of policies of particular populations” (p.367).

In terms of trustworthiness, Lincoln and Guba (1985) developed and urged the adoption of “unique criteria of authenticity”—fairness, ontological authentication (raising consciousness), educative authentication (increasing understanding of constructions rooted in different value systems), catalytic authentication (getting theory into action), and finally, tactical authentication (ensuring empowering action).

To protect my participants from possible harm, I use pseudonyms they chose for themselves and will not identify their countries of origin. A key tenet of my research is to avoid the imposing my own voices on those of my participants, as we certainly share similarities in our experiences. To make sure their voices are represented, I employ story constellation (Craig, 2007) to unravel the interacting narratives and plots to interpret the multiple meanings my participants bear on their meaning making process, acknowledging the value of both sameness and differences of our stories.

Summary

In the search for an appropriate methodology for my research, I situated my choice of narrative inquiry on the broad landscape of qualitative research, with an awareness of the long struggle for an acknowledgement of different ways of knowing in educational research. My effort to keep my inquiry open and fluid is also accompanied by my critical stance in bringing out the voice of my participants and imagining what can be changed. With this in mind, I will turn to my participants and unravel our experiences in this joint inquiry.

Chapter IV

Findings: Storylines of Participants

Introduction

This chapter represented my encounters with three participants, who were also Asian international doctoral students learning in the United States. I presented their stories separately, adding my reflective thoughts in the end of each story as a supplement to the context and trivialities in conducting the research. In so doing, I hope that my aim to present them as individual human beings was met satisfactorily.

This longitudinal study last around four years. It began the moment I experienced frustration in my doctoral journey, till the moment I wrote down the last word of my dissertation. For my three participants, I conducted two formal interviews with each of them, with a time interval of one to two years. The first interviews happened in the early stage of my research, the second immediately before or after their dissertation defense. Between the two interviews were conversations in different forms, including small talk, phone chat, and email.

At this time, Stacy and Jon S. have graduated and are working in the United States. Brenda is still working on her dissertation.

Stacy: “I need to see my role”

I met Stacy in my first year in the United States. After I decided to research the experiences of international doctoral students, I communicated with her about my desire to have her as my participant. She was a bit hesitant, telling me she had

already been a participant in another research project on international students. I was a bit disappointed. Finding research participants was not easy. We had some informal conversations and I moved on to look for other potential participants.

One day when I was browsing my email, her name appeared bold in the Inbox. I clicked it open and her message came out: If you need to have further conversations, I will be available in January. Suddenly, a feeling of warmth swept through me.

Thus unfolded, was Stacy's story.

"I felt like I could do more." My interview questions started with the reason why she came to the United States for a doctoral degree. Stacy told me about her previous experiences as an elementary teacher before coming to the United States. She first emphasized how competitive it was to become a formal public school teacher in her homeland:

It was very difficult to become a formal teacher. There is a list of procedures, including paper test, teaching demonstrations. I passed the paper test, and I also had a teaching demonstration in English and math. The percentage of being selected was about 2%.

As a young teacher, Stacy was confronted with a hierarchy within the school culture. She talked about the different treatment for young teachers and experienced teachers with regard to distribution of classrooms:

We did not have enough classrooms. If I have five classes to teach one day, I have to go to different classrooms to teach. Those experienced

teachers...they had their own classrooms and they didn't think that I should have one.

When she expressed her desire to have a classroom to herself, she was encouraged by experienced teachers to voice her desire to the administration. When I thought that was a good move, Stacy told me differently:

I was naïve and spoke at conferences like, we needed more classrooms. It became a problem, because I was trying to speak against the administration, because the people who assigned those classrooms were the administration.

This classroom fight did not secure Stacy a classroom. However, she did receive support from one of the administration. She was supported to organize a small library in the classroom in order for students to have easier access to books. This activity, again, was not welcomed by some senior teachers and brought about tensions between her and her colleagues:

Experienced teachers are not supportive, because now they would have one more responsibility: to take care of those books. They refused to cooperate.

I felt like, I could do more, but there were a lot of restraint. Teachers, they are not easy to get along with. Experienced teachers, they are ready to retire. They don't want to make any changes.

Stacy was frustrated. She shared her situation with friends who were learning in the United States. Finally, she came up with a desire to go abroad for a change.

When she communicated her desire to the principal of her school, she also received

his support.

I talked to the principal and he supported me to study abroad, to learn more, to experience American culture, to know more and share more. He was very supportive. Because it was his dream to study abroad, but he didn't think he could realize this now because of his age, family...it felt like he saw himself in me, to do something, to challenge myself. Because of his support, I started to apply, got the offer and came here.

Prompted by the tensions out of hierarchy, and with a desire to do more, Stacy applied to a doctoral program in education, received the offer and came to the United States.

“I wanted to sound like a native English speaker.” A large part of our conversation about Stacy's early experiences focused on the English language, which might be due to the fact that both of us have taught English as a foreign language in our home lands. Both of us pinpointed language as a major barrier during our early stay in the U.S. Stacy shared her difficulties in communication during her first year.

After the class, I told my friend, more than 50% of the class, I don't understand, I don't get it. I don't know what they are talking about. At first you need to get used to the way they speak. Because what we have learned, how we learned English is so different. I mean, the intonation, the accent. One thing is the way they speak, the way they say things, makes it hard for us to understand.

The differences in the way of speaking were also reflected in the different styles of writing, and consequently negatively influenced her participation in professional activities.

The thing I find very hard is the way I think is very different from the way Americans think about things. It will be reflected in the way you speak and the way you write. If you bring a paper to the writing center, they will recognize immediately this is not written by an American. Because the way we address things is so different. In our class when we share our work with American classmates, the way you organize your article is so hard to read. She also mentioned her experience in a writing class and how shocked she was after reading her own paper revised by the professor.

When I submitted it [writing assignment] to Dr. M and got it back, I didn't think she had revised a lot. But when I went to read my original copy, Oh My Gosh! She changed everything, but she kept all my ideas. That was a great shock to me. It is a different way of thinking...that was a big shock to me.

“That explains when we submit to a conference, a journal, we kind of easily get rejected, because of the language.” Stacy added.

I conducted this first interview with Stacy in English. Every time I posed a question, she would offer me as many details as possible. Apparently, she was trying to help me with my research by being a good participant. All through the

interview, she spoke English very fluently. So I was confused and asked why she did not feel confident even with her high fluency in English, and she offered me the following explanation:

Stacy: In presentation, for me, it's very hard to give presentation because I am not confident in my language.

Yumei: That's where I want to ask you! You are very fluent in English now.

Why don't you feel confident?

Stacy: I never felt confident. I try to use my language to make it sound like native speakers. Sometimes, I found people don't understand me. A lot of times when I go to grocery stores, they don't understand me. I am afraid to go to the bank, talk to the bank assistant over phone, the phone services. We choose words they don't understand. I make up words that I think would make sense to others but no they don't.

Yumei: ...

Stacy: Sometimes I spoke English over phone, and the person on the other side would get mad, because they don't understand what this meant. So I don't think people understand me.

Yumei: So what is your expectation of your language proficiency?

Stacy: I don't think accent is the only reason. I think I need to pronounce the word in a correct way, I need to use the correct words, to help others understand me.

Yumei: ...I feel more confident now because sometimes when I talk with people over phone, they have accent but they sound very confident.

These excerpts about language as a barrier were taken from my first interview with Stacy. One year later, when I asked again about language as a barrier, Stacy shared with me her efforts to improve her language proficiency. She highlighted a professional training she received as a participant in a research project on pronunciation. She had the training session for one year.

I am very thankful for that opportunity to be trained, for about one year... That program wants me to pronounce the word correctly, so they break down to all the vowels, how I pronounce those vowels and consonants... So I started to be aware of the way I pronounce word... and make changes.

By the end of the training, an assessment was done and the report said that she had only about 32% accent. This result helped to bolster her confidence in her English language.

After that training, they gave me a report, saying I had only about 32% accent.

I don't think it's low enough, but I'm making a 100% progress during that training. I know more about myself from that training. And I think yes, I am getting more confident, with my language, with my ability, in, as a doctoral student. Now I can grasp the main ideas, understand roughly the context. I can understand the major part.

As an international doctoral student, I speak English with my Chinese accent.

This was why when Stacy mentioned 32% accent, I took it for granted and did not ask further. However, when I shared this part with an American friend, she underlined this figure and asked about what it meant. What does 32% accent mean? This is a question.

“One thing I came here is to experience culture.” It was not surprising that another focus of our talk was culture. Stacy talked about her active participation in various activities during her first year in the U.S.:

So in the first year when I was in here, whenever there were events, I would attend, like the Renaissance, and I went to different restaurants, some events more culturally embedded, like collecting blackberries, something Americans would do. How they celebrate Christmas and make for Christmas dinner, something like that.

Stacy also talked about how she made efforts to make American friends in her first two years:

It’s difficult to have American friends if you don’t know much about movies, football...I don’t watch football. In my first two years, I watched football to understand the rule...but after that, I don’t watch. I am not so much of a fan...

When she reflected on these experiences, she realized that the aim of her earlier effort was mainly to be “Americanized.” However, when she was conducting her dissertation research, she began to rethink issues like language, culture, and

identity, and unearthed the root of her earlier failure to assimilate into American culture:

Because of my own research topic, I started to think that culture and language is very important to a person, and started to think about my culture and language I bring from my country to the U.S. context. And I understand now why I was faced with so many conflicts when I came to the U.S. Until I started to reflect on these experiences, I started to feel, oh, that is why I faced so many difficulties, and I had so many conflicts in my mind. I wanted to live the way they live, but I couldn't because I am used to the way I live.

Our conversation concerning socialization into American pop culture did not last long. Instead, we switched to the topic of educational context and the socialization to the culture of the institution. For her early experiences, Stacy mentioned the unfamiliarity with the educational context in the U.S.:

Then of course, the content. Because professors, they don't use textbooks, they give you articles, then we read and discuss. There is no structured discourse. Some local students, they think of one direction, and will lead the discussion that way. So there is no frame, like saying in this class we are going to talk about this, structured or rigidly organized agenda, so it is so broad. So it's hard for us to understand. We are not familiar with the US context. They like to use some short forms. We don't get it. like what is ELA? Even ELA is hard for us to understand at the beginning of that time.

Right? They like to use those short terms. We don't have that background.

So that is the difficulty.

Despite the difficulties experienced due to unfamiliarity with the local educational context, Stacy held very positive attitudes towards these challenges and considered it important to see the big picture of education as a doctoral student.

I think one of the reasons is because this is a doctoral program, of course it need to be broad, everything is interwoven together. We are going to talk about a specific thing in the course, because everything is connected to culture, politics, language, some racial issues, some background, and that broad aspect of education.”

As a doctoral student, she has accumulated rich experiences through participation in academic settings in various forms:

I experienced a lot. I was encouraged to attend seminars, to volunteer, to present. I think the best part is I experienced the growth as a doctoral student.

I became a secretary of a student organization. I held some events, interacted with students, provided service to teachers, principals, and students from different areas. I think the best part is I got every chance I have to experience, not only on campus, but also out of campus. Because I was serving as an assistant in office, I interacted with professors, I picked up phone calls and I learned how to respond to people, especially when students come for help.”

Her outstanding performance in her doctoral studies and desire to immerse herself in the American educational context won her a teaching fellowship in her fourth year in the doctoral program, which offered her an opportunity to co-teach first-year undergraduates with other doctoral students and professors from different colleges.

We got this opportunity to create our lesson plans. So everyone brings their expertise in that discussion...That is really an interesting and amazing experience, to talk to people, because we have different mindset. How do we conduct a lesson, a curriculum?

This co-teaching experience also allowed Stacy to see the culture of the educational institution, how people collaborate together in curriculum planning, and how professors communicate with local undergraduates.

Those supervisors are very helpful to keep us on track, because we are kind of beginning teachers...So they gave us some, how you work in an academic field, how you communicate. You need to know there is a hierarchy, there is a culture of this organization. Instead of doing things you want to do, you need to be aware of things, because it's not just about you as a teacher, it's about a group...

As a perceptive person, Stacy was learning from different aspects of this experience and equipped herself with more expertise in the teaching profession in the local context.

Of course, you become more professional, and you know how professional people do things, how they make things, how they report, the way they address things, because supervisors also send emails to students, like how they encourage students to do things. In each email, they kind of keep that going, the energy. So you'll learn from those things, those things not that much, but they'll add up, right?

Gaining exposure to education in the U.S. prompted Stacy to compare it to education in her home country. She talked about the rigid structure of education in her home country and the flexibility and student centeredness in American education:

I think back in my home country, education is more framed. We followed a textbook, focused on details. We were afraid to do anything different from what we had been told to do. But here, it feels like now teaching is quite unique to design, related to students, related to their real life, you don't need a text book. What you need is a team, work on objectives, you create some activities that is creative, interesting. You can implement anything you have created, you won't be doubted, like why don't you follow this rule, you need to teach this, you need to teach that. But in my home country, the parents will doubt you. Why don't you follow the textbook? Why don't you teach what would be tested? Like for the third grade, students need to know those 1000 vocabulary, you need to include those in your design.

When talking about the classroom teaching, she singled out how presentation is done

in different ways in the U.S. and her home country:

We had textbook for every class. We need to give presentation on some topics for each class. The way we present was we do summary. We did summary, gave examples. It feels like there was always an answer to things. There would be a right way to address the theory. Like when you were talking about the theory, you need to mention this or that. But here you can present in various ways. You can choose a topic you like. Theory is not the focus. It is how you relate that to your real life. They encourage you to think about how you relate that theory to your real life. In one class, a student gave a presentation on the image of female in Disney world. There are so many princesses in Disney movies. They project the image of females. There is a theory behind that. But they present it in a vivid way. So the way we learn, the way we present, it's so different.

“It turned out to be a way to connect us together.” Stacy decided on her topic of dissertation in the first year of her doctoral program. As she was a teacher of English as a foreign language, it seemed natural for her to focus on teachers in ESL education in the U.S. context.

While doing her research, she also faced some difficulties. The first was to recruit participants in local schools in the U.S., which was a long and difficult progress for her at the beginning.

I had a framework, in my proposal defense. At that time, I wanted to recruit

new participants, but it turned out that I could not...It's too limited time for me to find the participants because they are in-service teachers. It's very hard for them to commit their time in my dissertation. And especially in, during spring semester, they have STAAR test going on. So they're all very busy, they had a heck of work to do."

As a diligent doctoral student who began research in the early stage of her doctoral learning, Stacy had her IRB approval early on and began to conduct interviews with participants she could find. Although she could not find new participants in the later stage, the data she already had collected enabled her to finish her dissertation successfully. She considered it a type of compromise as she had planned to recruit more participants but needed to graduate.

However, she commented that conducting research with the participants she already had benefitted her a lot. Coming from different cultures, Stacy and her participants, to her surprise, did not experience any barrier in language or culture.

Yumei: ...What do you think about the communication with each participant, because they are all native Americans?

Stacy: Their students are mostly English language learners. They are really kind and understanding about my position. So all of them, when they speak to me, they slow down, they explain the word when I made the kind of face "I don't really get you. At the point, they will explain to me, what that phrase means, they will repeat

Yumei: Besides language, is there any point that you cannot, like, wait, I still need to figure out what this means?

Stacy: Because my research topic is about the experience of their professional development and I did address multicultural education in my dissertation, I don't feel there is any cultural boundaries between me and my participant.

We are able to understand each other because we have the same standing point.

When we address cultures, that piece in our conversation, so we don't have conflicts about ideas, value of multicultural education, and diversity in education. So it turned out to be a way to connect us together, instead of breaking us apart."

She also highlighted their care for English language learners:

Because we have the same concern for English language learners, we all saw they kind of struggle in learning that language that comes somewhere, not from their own root of culture and language. And we kind of promote that the English language is the best language you have to learn, but actually, their culture, their previous experience and background are neglected in this period. So there is something we really want to build on.

Speaking about how she negotiated her progress in the dissertation research, she emphasized support from her professors in each class.

So in every class, the professor will allow me to connect my assignment to my dissertation. If you can't meet the requirement like to finish Chapter two,

you can talk with her and say I wanted to make some adjustment. They will try to help you complete assignment in a way that will help meet your needs.

She went on about the flexibility and accessibility of professors in her department:

Professors here make it more adjustable for international students. Whenever you have trouble, have problems, or issues of presentation, you can talk to the professor.

She also talked about her feelings in taking those classes when professor were accommodating:

For those courses I took, I always feel safe in those courses. It is a safe place to get along with other students. I guess our program has been working with international students for a long time and that helps. Those professors know how to help international students. They allow more time for us, our language, they know our strength, and we can share different perspectives and culture. The professors allow us to share. We bring different stories.

“But for now I just do what I can.” When talking about expectations for the future, Stacy mentioned the great efforts she put to improve herself and the desire to have her work published.

Of course, being a doctoral student, you need to have enough publications. That’s why I submit proposals; go to a lot of conferences regularly, once a semester, because I know how important it is for me. I force myself to speak

to teachers, to get involved in that context, with those scholars. I understand how important it is, for me, that makes my life meaningful. I am not just doing my work. I need to connect with other people, other educators and researchers, help me know more about education in the U.S. That is why I expose myself. Talk to people will make you understand why you think this way, and know more about yourself.

She also mentioned the difficulty to find a job as an international student.

So, the thing is, because in education, if you want to have a position like associate professor, or full professor, you need to have experience in k-12 in US context. And most of the international students don't have that. Even though I was an English teacher in my home country, I'm still lacking experiences in the U.S. context. So that kind of excluded me from an associate professor or full professor.

The reality made Stacy turn to another direction in looking for jobs.

So for now, I kind of try to align my expertise in teaching and teacher education to some position as a specialist. I look for job, like curriculum design, teacher supervisor, any program development related to teachers' development. It's gonna to be different from being a professor. They require you to have teaching experience, research experience and community service experience. But for now, I think this is just a step, a beginning step for me. I will try to build my ability in different areas, but for now I just do

what I can, see my role in it.

When I asked about doing research as a doctor, Stacy commented:

But it doesn't mean I want to lose those research skills. No. Those abilities are still with me. But it depends on what kind of job allows me..."

Yumei's reflection. In this part, I combined excerpts from two of my reflective journals containing my communication with Stacy, in order to offer more details of our evolving relationship and mutual understanding in the process of our research. It also revealed my confusion in conducting qualitative research as a beginner researcher.

Entry one. Stacy texted me last Friday, telling me she would be available for an interview that day. I was surprised and touched, as I did not expect a participant to contact me first for my interview. I was proctoring the writing assessment that morning, so we decided to meet after that.

When she came in, she told me she happened to be available and thought it would be good to finish the interview now, as she would be very busy looking for jobs later on. We talked a little bit about her job hunting, and she was still working on it. She was preparing for an interview for a position of a teacher supervisor at a community college. She was planning to get some suggestions from native fellow doctoral students. I also thought about a native fellow doctoral student who was working at a community and might help her. Then we started our interview.

As I was transcribing my interview, I noticed that I was trying to ask about her

feelings of communication with native participants, and issues related to language and culture. Obviously, she did not feel as challenged as she had when we were having the conversation last year. Her teaching experience has helped to build up her confidence, and completing her dissertation is surely a confidence building milestone for her, in terms of academic writing. She mentioned the pronunciation training program, how she was aware of her own pronunciation and made progress, and her final assessment report. I could certainly feel her pride. Of course, after four years of efforts, she has the right to enjoy her progress and pride herself on that. The efforts, all the challenges she has been through, these might not be explained by mere words. I was thinking about her concern with language last year during the interview and the different tone she is having now. In a sense, I am so glad for her.

While I was reviewing our conversation, one thing stood out. It could be my researcher bias. I was attempting to ask about how she thought about herself as a researcher and how she saw herself positioned in her research. She was focusing on what her participants were talking about and how she extracted important themes, without discussing much of her personal self in the research. However, she mentioned her desire to expand the research to include more voice. I am not sure whether that was because of my leading question.

When we talked about her teaching experiences, she focused on different ways to communicate with students, collaboration with fellow students from different disciplines and with supervisors. She seemed to enjoy those experiences and learned

a lot about those structures in academics. I still need to figure out how I should place that in my research.

The office work was something I also needed to single out. She mentioned how the office work has helped her to get familiar with the program and the system, and to communicate with cooperative and supervising teachers. she focused on all the good points in doing office work. I did office work today. I did copy and paste work, for five straight hours. I was disappointed with myself, for not having the capability to find a better job. When I was communicating with her about the job responsibilities, it turned out that she did similar stuff., but she was trying to look to the bright side.

At lunch, we talked about looking for jobs. She told me about her friend Katy, who worked at a position where her expertise was not fully applied. I could tell that Stacy still desired to find a job where she could apply what she has learned. In the meanwhile, she was also discouraged by those impractical requirements for associate and full professor, where K-12 teaching experience in the United States were necessary.

We talked about a dissertation defense we both went to. Stacy said she had a very high expectation of this defense, because it was done by a very eloquent American doctoral student. I shared my thoughts about how we can locate our strengths as international doctoral students. We might never catch up to them in language, but we could try to work hard on methodology and research content.

In the end of our interview, she asked me to clarify my research purpose and topic, and told me she wanted to make sure that I was not lost as I had asked so many broad questions. I felt a sense warmth and an appreciation of such a learning community. This research, for me, aimed to bring the voice out, is also a community for me to connect, and to grow. That is where my passion is.

Coming back to Stacy's story, I felt she had mixed feelings towards her language abilities. On the one hand, she was talking about her improving confidence; on the other hand, she still mentioned her lack of confidence. In the interview, she mentioned a time when she was talking over the phone and the person on the other side got mad. Then she added, they were trying to get more information. She also began to attribute this failure in communication to both sides, instead of just her own fault.

She also talked about her attempt to say the correct word and pronounce the correct way. She emphasized her training in pronunciation. How could I interpret this? How has English learning mania affected the mindset of people from non-English speaking countries? Can I relate it to language and cultural hegemony?

I guess, my biggest obstacle now is my own bias, due to my understanding of the role of a doctoral student. I really need to put it aside and have a fresh look at her account.

Entry two. I was thinking about the morning's email from the doctoral program coordinator Dr. A, in which she urged all full time transition students to quicken their pace, defend their candidacy and take the qualifying exams, no later than this fall. Is the main purpose of a doctoral program to push one on to graduation? What about equipping them with necessary qualifications as an educational researcher?

This related to my question to Stacy as to whether she preferred to be a professor or a program manager. She told me she would choose to be a program manager because she was afraid that she could not deal with undergraduate students in the United States. I was a little surprised, as she has already taught this level for one semester. She said she was still not sure about language, and had a lack in confidence to be a professor. I did not push hard to ask where her fear came from. I did not want to dig too much into the field for now. Despite her answer and explanation, I guess she might still prefer to become a professor. This could be my presumption, or my own bias. However, I was thinking about her eagerness to take the leading responsibilities in a research project we were both involved in. She told me that she felt that I was always positive. I was glad that we have established such a rapport during our long-term communication. I hope that the message I conveyed for each of us was clear, that we, as international students, need to support each other.

I realized I just used "us". So who are "them"? I have no intent to isolate international students as a segregated group. However, if we could not understand

ourselves and do not want to understand ourselves, how can we understand others?

This is a right time to quote Bingham (2003):

We must understand the complex interpretative dimensions of reality, humans are not isolated agents in their efforts to acquire knowledge, they must receive help from others to engage in learning. Complex critical analysts are not isolated individuals but people who understand the nature of their sociocultural context and their overt and the occlude relationships with others.

It would be great if I can take the initiative to create this learning community and grow alongside others who are experiencing their struggles and epiphanies. This actually could be a hard task, considering my recent failure in recruiting some other potential participants. This brought me back to the conversation I had with my advisor, who do I think I am in interviewing the fellow doctoral students? What is my stance? Do they think they can benefit from this conversation with me?

When we were talking about IRB, I mentioned that contacting participants after approval was kind of impossible for me as we already knew each other and had all sorts of exchanges. She acknowledged my claim, suggesting that I could use our casual talk for my data, as her advisor had done.

She mentioned that she needed to find a job where she could see her role in it. What does it mean? Am I trying to impose my understanding of doctoral learning on her, that we all should become educational researchers?

This brought me back to my original question: why do we come to the U.S.?

What are we seeking to experience? A different environment, culture, but not necessarily trying only one way of living. We may not embark on the academic road, even as a doctoral student. We are constantly adjusting, improvising whatever we have, so that we can stay.

Jon S.: “He tries his best to always do the best for his people”

Before I started to write down his story, I emailed him about what pseudonym he would prefer in my dissertation.

“Can it be Jon S.?” He emailed back.

“Sure. Any connotations?” I asked further.

“It's the name of the main character of Game of thrones (TV show). He's treated differently because he's a 'bastard'. However, he tries his best to always do the best for his people.”

What does that mean for him?

Thus, began Jon S.'s story, the story of an international doctoral student in the United States.

Yumei: Why did you come here?

Jon S.: So...

Yumei: A hard question?

Jon S.: No. I was always fascinated by US cultures through movies. It was always my dream to come here to do something. So during 2011, I got an opportunity and a scholarship, Fulbright Scholarship.

Yumei: Fulbright scholarship? You must come from a very prestigious university in your country.

Jon S.: I think that was one of the criteria. It was very competitive.

...

Jon S. came from a beautiful small island country in Asia. As a practicing medical doctor and a lecturer at a university, he was caught between the tensions of teaching and practice in the medical field. These tensions led him to rethink how training could help to change the nation's health education system and he hoped to commit himself to this undertaking. His vision won him the Fulbright scholarship, which supported him to come to the U.S. for a Master's degree at an accredited university.

“It was not easy in the beginning.” I was watching his self-introduction video on Youtube:

Jon S.: I have never thought about being part of education moreover to win a prestigious scholarship and enroll in a tier one university in the United States...Although I enjoyed being in the program it was not easy in the beginning...

Coming to the U.S. alone, Jon S. sorely missed his wife and his two-year-old son as he had never been separated from them before. He communicated with them through video chat as often as he could.

One of the things that helped me a lot is Internet. It was on the Internet that

you can see them, you can talk with them. But it is depressing that you can only see them but you cannot touch them... Good at least my son can see me.”

He said, laughing a little.

His family came a year later. This reunion brought a lot of happiness to his doctoral journey, alongside a heavier financial burden.

As a foreign student, he was not allowed to work extra hours in the U.S. The sole source of income was his scholarship and from draining his previous savings. This posed a great challenge for him as he had a family to support. Fortunately, his wife managed to find a part time job after sending out “hundreds of applications”, which helped the family to scrape by in the foreign land where living expenses were much higher than those in their home country.

Besides financial difficulties, language also proved a challenge for this international student whose mother tongue was not English. Having learnt English during his school years back in his home country, Jon S. found it hard to understand the accent of native English speakers during his early period of staying in the U.S.

But language, I feared picking up my phone for the first three or four months.

Every time I talked over phones, I had to repeat several times because they didn't understand me.”

When I told him that I was also asked to say things again over phone, Jon S. smiled, “Say that again? That was polite. Some, just ignore you and hang up the phone.”

It was no wonder when I asked him toward the end of his doctoral journey about his perceived achievements, he pinpointed the language issue and told me: “When I talked over the phone and they understood.”

Despite taking comfort in his growing progress in spoken English, Jon S. continued to grapple with written English.

Every time, I submit my paper, my candidacy papers, my proposal paper, every time I submitted it to my, my committee members, the most corrections that I, I had to do was related to grammar, and the way you say a sentence. So, You know this is not my first language. It's not our first language. So, when we think that this is a way to say a sentence, native English speakers, our advisers, our dissertation committee members might think that it is not a proper way to say it. The most changes that I had to make were related to grammar, grammatical errors.

He laughed slightly.

My memory flashed back to two years ago. I was sitting at a table with other doctoral students at a large class.

“Dr. B, when are you going to return our last assignment with your feedback?” a voice came from behind. I turned my head and saw him, Jon S., looking eagerly at the professor for some feedback on his written assignment.

“Poor Jon S.!” I heard a whisper from another classmate. I knew what she meant: Dr. B seldom gave students very detailed feedback except for some general

comments.

Later I picked up the topic during our conversation.

Yumei: You are quite outspoken and every time you have doubts, you would speak up...

Jon S.: We need to ask something...to participate...Some professors are really good in giving feedback and help to find another perspective, but some are, I don't know, maybe they are too busy. But you submit something without feedback. Grades are great. I like A, but...

I could feel his thought. As doctoral students, we do need feedback from professors in order for us to grow. When I mentioned a course offered by a professor who went through students' written work sentence by sentence and gave very detailed suggestions, I could feel his regret for not having taken the class.

Jon S. told me that he did not participate in the classroom so much back in his own country. Growing up in an educational system which emphasizes rote memorization and reinforces it through k-12, he was not exposed to the problem based approach to education until he was in his college years. This has helped to cultivate his interest in dealing with concrete problems in education. However, it also made it hard for him to adjust to discussing educational problems in a broader way. This difficulty, he concluded, could also come from his unfamiliarity with the different ways of discussion and the American educational context. He mentioned the differences between discussion in the American classrooms and those in his home

country:

It's quite different here. In our discussions, we were presented with questioned we had to solve. Questions one to ten, for example. We had to solve these problems by discussion and arguing. Basically we help each other by providing more facts...

He continued:

But here it's more about what you think is right, what you think is wrong. I mean, I don't know...the discussion here in education, it's so different.

He added:

If you ask me to discuss something I am familiar with, like movies, I would really be outspoken...you know.

“Discussions in class completely changed this perspective.”

Jon S.: When I grew up in my own country, it's always something great if somebody could speak fluent English...So seeing people speaking English so casually made me think it would be great if I could go to such countries.

When I come here and experience the culture, now I think that is something ...something not special

Yumei: Yes. Because this is the U.S....

Jon S.: ...I learn culture from U.S. movies. I think it's just the Hollywood portrait of the U.S., not the real U.S. Before I came here, I was imagining I will meet a lot of White people...and when I came here, I saw a lot of Black

people, mixed with other international students. I didn't know Hispanics before I came here. But I think it is good, to know the diversity.

Years of learning in the U.S. and his personal encounters are changing Jon S.'s perspectives of U.S. and its education.

When I first came, I thought there was no issue of Black and White. You know U.S. president is a Black guy, U.S. famous players are Black, artists, like Beyoncé, Michael Jordan is also an African American. But discussions in our class completely changed this perspective. Then, I know there is gap in education, the gap in wealth. This also comes from my personal experience looking for schools for my son in the area where I live.”

Living in an African American community, Jon S. found the rating of the zoned school was very low. When he was trying to locate some high rated schools, he noticed that such schools were always located in wealthy zip codes. This changed his previous vision of American education as the best for all and racial inequality as something made up by people who were unwilling to move on.

As a dedicated father, Jon S. compares the education his son has received in the U.S. with the one back in his home country. He noticed that education in the U.S. lagged behind in math, but elementary students here are more ready to explore science and can explain some concepts very well. He also appreciated the practical approach adopted by schools here to address different subjects, to relate school learning to students' daily life.

“I think this is my thing.” While he was pursuing a Master’s degree, Jon S. had the opportunity to create some online courses and was immediately fascinated by the activity.

When I look to MOOC [Massive Open Online Course], and see how it can teach, a large number of students, and how it can change the world, I think this is my thing, this is something I want to do. And at that time, the only possible thing for me to study and get this opportunity was to enroll in the doctoral program. So I thought why not? Just take it.”

Coming from a family where his parents run a small business in a city, Jon S. is highly aware how the constraint of family financial situation has taken a toll on the youth in developing countries. He is the only one of three in his family who has received a college education. The college matriculation in his country is very low. The MOOCs, according to him, have the potential to offer opportunities to those from underdeveloped countries.

Well I think, in my personal opinion, Mooc is something that is really useful. It operates education in the world where everybody can have access to something from Harvard, for example, from MIT or so you can get to learn anything you want to learn, for free, from these universities.”

He was not unaware of the challenges faced by people from disadvantaged background, like Internet access or computers. However, Jon S. has an eye for change in an information society. He is also optimistic about the changes of

technology and how it can improve learning and communication.

We cannot change the whole world, but we can give more access to make it better...at least some parts will get better. And if you never start, you'll never know."

Having helped his advisor create "hundreds of videos" for online courses during his doctoral learning journey, Jon S. was very confident in his skills to implement technology within classroom teaching contexts. These experiences have also led him to consider continuing professional training program as effective means for teacher development.

It's something that they can learn, given some time, for teachers, educators.

If they would give out some time to improve the knowledge, instead of taking a master degree. That is my change of opinion. You know I used to think if I wanted to learn something, I have to go ...that's my opinion. it's not a bad thing if you like your work and you just want to improve your work, your knowledge, esp. in teaching. That continuous professional development programs should really help. But it should be well managed. Like there is continuation between one training and another training. Like if this training talks about curriculum, the other training should focus on how to connect theory to practice..."

This view of teacher development through continuing relevant training programs also reinforced his strong belief in online learning, which would allow students repeated

access to materials and make the learning process more enjoyable by offering a variety of resources.

“We rub each other’s back.” Several years of experiences in designing online courses with his advisor and familiarity with technology pushed him to single out the low completion rate of online courses as his dissertation research focus, trying to figure out why people around the world do not make full use of these wonderful resources.

He planned to use quantitative research methods by sending out surveys. Having taken many courses related to quantitative research, he felt quite confident in adopting this method. He also had a very clear idea about the whole process that he had to go through.

However, at the initial stage, he was struggling with whether or not to interview some of those research participants. He was hesitant, as he did not have experience in interviewing. In addition, gathering more data would surely involve more analysis, which will delay his time of graduation. Weighing all those pros and cons, he finally decided to send a survey and import the data to SPSS for analysis, which was more practical and manageable to him for the time being.

If I combine the mixed methods, I will gather more data, but if I gather more data, that means I have to spend more time in the Ph.D. Doing Ph.D., you know, as international students, living cost is not easy... and that's also one of the challenges.

Jon S. considered his dissertation a major achievement in his academic journey. While this was quite an achievement for most doctoral students, Jon S. regretted a little for not having spent extra time on research, as the major part of his job was to help create online courses.

In order to build more on his CV before graduation, he was collaborating with his colleagues in the lab to write proposals for conferences, and planned to publish articles from his dissertation research.

His desire to improve research expertise prompted him to take a post-doctoral position before graduation, where he would work in a program well aligned with his expertise. This, according to him, would be a continuation with what he has already been doing, while adding some focus in research area. He considered this a good opportunity for him to build his research resume.

“I want to be involved.” Having worked as a teaching assistant in all those online courses, Jon S. desired to work as an instructor by himself. With his background in medical science and curriculum and instruction, his long-term plan was to strengthen the skills and apply them in medical teaching field, to train medical faculty with a focus on curriculum and instructional design through technology.

So my plan is to help faculty members especially in the medical field, working with their courses, helping them implement what they have known, what they are teaching. And, applying to, move it to online or, in using technology, to apply it to the course.

His personal experiences as a practicing doctor and a lecturer back in his own country led to his awareness of the tensions confronted by medical professors.

Many professors, they are invited to teach, not because they know how to teach. They are invited to teach because they have some knowledge in that specific field. Now the challenge is, there are smart people but it doesn't always mean when you are smart you can transfer your knowledge from yourself to your students. That's why there is this curriculum and instruction field, now.

He related his observation to his personal experiences.

And I think, and I experienced that too because I taught medical courses too. I experienced that too. It's, it's not easy. So you have to plan what you want to teach, the objectives and how you want to achieve this objective. So. I want to help them with that. I want to help them in in designing their courses.”

While speaking about helping professors design their courses, Jon S. did not satisfy by just staying behind and supporting faculty members or staff with technology. Instead, he longed to come to the front and conduct teaching by himself.

“I don't want to be just that person. I just, I want to be involved. I want to be helping direct them and not just, you know, only as a support person.” Jon S. explained.

Yumei's reflection. It is very dramatic to have an interview with Jon S..

Every time I saw him, he would be very kind and quick to agree to an interview “anytime”. He said he would be very happy to help. I felt a wave of gratitude hearing such kind words. However, when I emailed him about a follow-up interview, he did not respond. I texted him and there was no response either. Considering he must be very busy writing his dissertation and looking for jobs, I kind of understood his packed schedule. However, I was having issue with not responding to my request. What was going on there? Okay, just wait and see. I told myself. I have already lost a participant.

Catherine, another Asian international doctoral student, initially agreed to participate in my research, but decided to withdraw from it later. She did not explain the reason, but just chose not to respond to my member check stories. As I reflected on it, I figured perhaps it came from my attempt to unravel our past worries and frustration. Without detailing her past worries, she was emphasizing perseverance and resilience, and the optimistic attitude she always held for her future.

I was frustrated for a while, but gradually I tried to reflect on what I was doing. Was I trying to delve too much into her privacy and go beyond boundaries? How much data would be abundant for me to go on with my research? How can I invoke their inner desire, or pleasure to share their very honest thoughts? What about the imagined identity, or narrative identity? This is the image they want me to see, or want others to see. Why should I impose my view on that?

Let me come back to Jon S. Last Thursday I ran into Jon S. After some short exchanges, he picked up the topic, “I saw your email...”

I knew there was hope.

Yumei: Oh, yes. I sent you an email and you did not respond. I knew you must be very busy in writing your dissertation and looking for jobs.

He smiled briefly and shook his head.

(Silence for a short while.)

Yumei: How is your dissertation going?

Jon S.: I was having some problem with my data analysis.

Yumei: Are you doing a quantitative research?

Jon S.: Yes.

I felt sorry that I could not help him. I was trying to think of anyone who might be of help. I suggested him talking with a professor who was very good at statistics.

Yumei: She is really good at quantitative research. You know you can have five professors on your committee.

Jon S.: I already have five committee members now. I do not want to make things complicated. That would take more time and...

Yes. I recalled his previous concern about finance.

After some talk, we agreed to schedule an interview. He also asked me how many participants I had found. I told him two, and would be three including him.

He tried to help me think about some potential participants and gave me some names.

Yesterday, I emailed him about meeting today. He emailed me back saying he would be on campus today 9-2 and will have a “meeting tough” at noon. I suggested meeting at 9. There was no response.

Early this morning he emailed back saying 11:00 will work for him. I suggested going to have lunch first since it was lunch time. We had a brief conversation over lunch.

We talked about family and education for kids. His wife is working at a day-care at a church and enjoys her job very much. But he also revealed that this was only a part time job and she wanted to find a full-time job. When I asked about the salary, he smiled, “you can’t expect too much.”

Talking about my current office work, Jon S. mentioned another doctoral student John who was also assigned office work. Jon S. told me that John was not happy with the office work. So he talked with the professor and was assigned some other things to do instead of scanning papers. The “other things”, turned out to be grading students’ work. This kind of TA work, from the tone of Jon S., was much better than scanning papers. Perhaps he was right. He talked about John doing this stuff for four years.

Jon S. asked me about when I was going to graduate. Learning that I am planning May 2018, he suggested it would be good time to search for jobs early on. He talked about those high expectations, three years’ teaching experience,

publications, “They want you to have everything before you graduate as a doctoral student.”

“If you want to be a professor, they also ask you to write down your philosophy. You have to make up something.” Jon S. added.

He also asked me about my other participants, and helped me think about some potential participants. I might contact them later. But I need to think about that.

Later, he mentioned those job interviews he had, and picked up the issue of language again. “If I could use my own language, I would be ...”

Without finishing his sentence, he clapped his hands, with a you-know-what-I-mean expression. I thought I knew what he meant.

Yes, language again, for all your expertise and talent.

Brenda: “Searching for a best-loved self”

Brenda sat across the table, looking at me, “are you sure you want to make this the topic of your dissertation research?”

“Why not? After what we have gone through, why don’t we put it into words?”

I responded.

I have been thinking for a long time before I typed out these words. Where should I start to tell Brenda’s story?

I have known Brenda for a long period of time. We have attended conferences together and met each other under different settings. As an Asian

international doctoral student, she immediately agreed to my request to be my research participant.

“My own accent is also a variety of English.” Brenda came to the U.S. first for a master’s degree.

Our first interview started from the time and reason she came to the United States.

Yumei: Why did you want to come here?

Brenda: It’s a good opportunity to have experience in America.

Yumei: Why do you want this experience?

Brenda: Well, I always wanted to have some foreign experience. I have learnt English for many years, but I didn’t get an opportunity to go abroad. Besides, people say in America, higher education is really good.

Yumei: Who told you that in America, education is very good?

Brenda: It’s just the media and people who have been there. I think that America is a really developed country, and, I think, ...It’s more like, ah, there might be so many opportunities, and they are different from my own culture.

Coming to the United States, the “land of opportunities”, has always been a dream to people like Brenda and me, who are immersed in English learning as a foreign language and foreign movie watching for years but lack the opportunity to experience the culture in person.

With English learning mania and the successful promotion of English movies

around the world, the United States has become a symbol of freedom, of wealth, and of good education. To experience such a culture has always been a long cherished dream for people from developing countries.

“The picture in my mind was, I would be hanging out with American friends.”

Brenda told me.

In order to “hang out with American friends” and know more about the American culture, Brenda eagerly registered herself in a university program that helped to pair international students with local families. She and another international student were paired up with an American couple who had previously stayed in Brenda’s country for a year. The couple had been very well treated by people there and wanted to extend the hospitality to international students when they came back to the U.S. They scheduled dinners to know each other and exchanged perspectives on aspects of life and culture. However, three times into the meeting, Brenda felt herself left out of the conversation. Finally, she decided not to go any more.

In my first writing draft, I attributed her decision of leaving this group to her lack of interest in the conversation topics, which were mainly focused on religious beliefs. However, when she was reading my first draft, she commented that it was not that simple. Instead, it was out of some complex reasons.

She mentioned the girl (I will refer to her as Ann thereafter) who was also paired up with the same couple. Brenda and Ann came from the same country and

learned in a cohort master program in the U.S. Ann later brought her boyfriend to their meeting. One week after their meeting, Ann and her boyfriend converted to the religion and their conversation was led by them about what they did in the church.

Brenda explained this to me:

I did not know how to explain this to you...Though I was interested in knowing about their religion because it is an important part of their culture and life, I felt I could not blend in conversations like 'what did your priest tell you this Sunday'. Even though I wanted to participate, I found myself sitting there, quiet, most of the time.

Brenda went on:

Imagine a meeting of five, two couples were mostly talking about their religion, I did not have much to say even if I wanted to step in; if I mentioned something else, the others would not be interested.

I was wondering what made Ann and her boyfriend convert to a religion in such a short period of time. While I could not have direct viewpoints from them,

Brenda offered more details about their meetings:

You know, Ann and her boyfriend gradually kept a distance from us after they settled down in the U.S.

Brenda continued:

I also felt uncomfortable when they talked about our home country. They were always disparaging every aspect of our home country...The couple

showed great interest...’

She went on to describe how Ann and her boyfriend were having exchanges with the couple:

They also brought two tickets for some show as a present to the couple, and told the couple that the dinner was on them. These made me feel left out of the conversation...

After this frustrating and embarrassing encounter, she began to rethink her initial thoughts of knowing American culture through knowing American friends and became more focused on her academic pursuit and developing her research expertise.

Brenda told me:

I think that part has turned my negative experience into positive ones. So, now I just naturally communicate with people I met in my college, department and class. We could do something together. It’s more about research instead of hanging out.

This changing perspective of socializing with Americans also came from her experience of working as a graduate assistant in an office with other American coworkers.

Financially supported by her hardworking parents, Brenda could successfully finish her Master program study in the U.S. However, going on a doctoral study without scholarships for another several years was not what the family could afford.

In the first semester of her doctoral learning, Brenda was very anxious about her

financial situation. Later, with help from her doctoral advisor, she landed an on-campus job, had her tuition covered, and felt greatly relieved from the financial burden.

Working with American co-workers for the first time in her life, Brenda hoped to receive acceptance from them at the beginning. Brenda's co-workers went to every room in the office in the morning and had casual conversations with each other, and she began to ask herself whether she should do the same.

I wanted to talk with my co-workers, trying to know more about each other.

I had so much desire. Should I do that? Should I go to talk? But I didn't know how to do that naturally. What if I didn't understand them? So when my American co-workers, they were telling jokes, sometimes I didn't understand. I still smiled, even I did not understand the joke sometimes, because I didn't want them to think I was like a log or something. That's what I felt a bit embarrassed about, almost everyday.

This was her second year in the United States. As time went by and with her improvement in language proficiency, Brenda gradually adjusted herself to the environment.

I still communicate with my coworkers. When they tell funny jokes, I would also laugh at my desk. However, I am no longer anxious about how I should communicate with my coworkers. Right now, we feel comfortable with each other. Also, I know what is important for me, to work hard and build up my

resume.

Later when I was member checking with her, Brenda commented that “you might want to add some quotes about my struggles in English so that people could understand my frustration more easily.”

I reached back to her, asking for clarification since language seemed no longer a barrier to her in her later communication with American coworkers. Brenda remarked that the barrier still existed, but how she thought about it was changing.

How should I put it? I think the barrier always exists, it is just my view is changing. It might not be a barrier. Like sometimes, it is the first time you have been exposed to something, some project. Those terms, you might get confused with, like what are these? I had no clue. My supervisor and the secretary in the office were very patient and would explain to me in great details what to do. It was very helpful.

She also mentioned her unfamiliarity with the job itself:

The scariest thing for me was to answer the phone at that time. My language being one thing, the other thing was I was not familiar with the position at the very beginning. Like when I was answering the phone, the student on the other end told me that she had some problem with some course under her account. I had no idea what she was talking about, completely lost. With more exposure to such situations later, I did not think this was a barrier, but I always had new items to catch up with.

She explained how she dealt with these issues later:

Later, I felt like, if I had no idea of what someone was talking about, I just needed to ask for clarification. There would always be new terms coming up, which I might panic a little. However, I gradually felt better. Does that mean I understand everything others are talking about now? Not necessarily. Now I feel natural and comfortable to ask for clarifications and to say that I did not get what the others said before. Even between people of the same language, smooth communication is not always the case.

Brenda went on with her evolving understanding of communication:

It might be the change of my focus. Previously I might attribute all these communication failures to language, and felt stressful, like what could I do? I had no idea about what was going on. Now, the focus was not my frustration due to failure of understanding, but more on how to figure things out.”

Speaking about how she had changed her way of seeing things, Brenda talked about the gradual acceptance of her own language.

Gradually I began to accept the fact that I could never speak like a native speaker, especially in accent. My own accent is also a variety of English, and I do not think there is any standard English. I always thought about BBC (British Broadcasting Company) or VOA (Voice of America) as standard.

However, I now consider the main function of speaking English is to communicate.

“I saw my previous self from them.” She did not think about pursuing a doctoral degree or embarking on a journey of research when she was in her master program. She was thinking about getting the degree and working to have some practical experiences in the U.S. with the OPT (Optional Practical Training). However, when she was invited to be a participant in a qualitative research conducted by a doctoral student, Brenda was amazed at the way research was done, which was contrary to her previous understanding of research as only doing statistic study. This experience as a research participant helped to open her eyes to different ways of doing research.

“So when I was talking about my own experience, I think, wow, this is also research!” Brenda expressed how amazed she was by the way research was conducted. She was also encouraged by an instructor in the same field. Later, Brenda explored further and decided to embark on this doctoral journey with her passion for teaching and her emerging awareness of research as a way of interpretation.

“I know doctoral study is a long journey. I want to do something I am really into.” Brenda explained to me why she chose her current program.

During her first year in the doctoral program, Brenda wanted to research failing schools in the United States. She explained that the idea of failing school was appealing to her because of her personal experience as a failing student back in her own country. Since her middle school, Brenda has constantly failed in math, a core subject for every high-stake exam. With twelve points below its admission

cutoff score, she still managed to go to the best high school in her county when her parents helped to pay sponsor fee. This is a common practice in some high rating schools nationwide when many parents are willing to do whatever they can for their kids to receive the best education. However, learning in the best high school was not good experience for Brenda as she ranked 46 out of 72 in her class. On the first school day, Brenda's teacher decided her seating in the last rows of the classroom with other students who also paid sponsor fee to be admitted. She was highly sensitive to the different treatment based on scores and considered herself different from those students who were admitted to the school with their scores above the cutoff line.

Math still remained to be Brenda's major issue and failed her in the National College Entrance Exam. It turned out that she could only go to a tier-three university and have to pay very high tuition fee. Brenda thought she could do better than that and decided to take the exam for a second time in the following year. However, too much pressure, lack of sleep, and bad health failed her again. Eventually she ended up in a tier-three university and majored in English, a major chosen for her by her mother because her mother thought "at least she could be a teacher."

She talked about her feeling of incompetence because of failures in those standardized exams.

Living in a rural town, my family believed that I had to be good at school

learning in order to be successful in life, and education was the only way out.

After my failure in the exam to the best high school, I felt a strong sense of self-abasement. It was like I could not succeed in anything. You know, the only measure of whether a kid is good or not is the exam.”

Her failure in exams also negatively influenced how her extended family members talked about her.

Like my grandma, she always compared me with my cousins, telling them if they worked as hard as I did, they could end up in any tier-one universities. I did not consider it a compliment. It might be that I was over sensitive. All I thought about was, what happened to me? Was I stupid?

Even though Brenda has recovered a little bit through her excellence in her undergraduate study, her past failing experience in exams was a great blow to her self-confidence and made her doubt her own ability to achieve success in life.

Thus, she decided to conduct her dissertation research on the lives of teachers in failing schools, where there are “students like me.” She wanted to figure out what made failing students.

With the help of her local friend in the U.S., she volunteered to tutor several high school students at a local urban school. However, it was not with difficulty when she began her research. She found it difficult to recruit teachers as participants for her research. She was also worried about how to communicate with them effectively.

Like what is appropriate, what is not appropriate, to communicate with potential research participant? Like how could I ask them to participate in my research? Do I just say ‘would you like to participate in my research?’ What would they say?

How to build up rapport with potential research participant in the U.S. was an issue for Brenda to conduct her research.

I am still confused about this part...because I just figured out the context is not what I am familiar with...I was always holding back...But you know, if you want to speak out to them, your language is a big issue...actually, it's hard to be confident if my language has grammatical issues. That's what I was thinking about.

Besides language, culture was another factor Brenda was not confident in.

Yeah, like how do you access them appropriately, make them feel comfortable, that's really important for me. As a researcher, I don't want to make my participants feel uncomfortable.

When we were reviewing what it meant for her to “hold back” from recruiting the participants, Brenda listed her previous concerns:

I felt not familiar enough with the culture and educational contexts of my potential local participants, and was afraid that I might misunderstand what they were talking about. I might feel a little hesitant in reaching out as I was not sure whether they would agree to my request. I also think it would be

bad if I could not understand what my participant was talking about.

With all the difficulties she encountered in doing research at the very beginning of her doctoral learning in the U.S. context, Brenda was considering transferring the research context to her own country. “I know people are doing research about their own country. That’s a good way. I am thinking about that...”

We conducted our first formal interview in the very beginning of the second year of her doctoral learning. By the end of the third year, Brenda went back to her own country during winter break. She conducted her research in a rural high school near her home.

When I asked about how she felt about the change of research context, she talked about her familiarity with the cultural and educational context of her home country, which made it easier for her to resonate with her participants.

Speaking about the reason she transferred her research context from the U.S. to her home country, Brenda commented:

Firstly, I grew up there and had a good understanding of the educational system. I had no concerns about language or cultural barrier and could easily resonate with the experiences and emotions of my research participants. As a qualitative researcher, I hope to go beyond what I hear and see, and to dig deeper into the experiences of my participants.

Brenda went on:

Secondly, it is also related to my personal experiences. Previously, I was

trying to research failing schools. However, I realized there were no failing schools, as the word “failing” was actually defined by others or the test system. I once regarded myself as a failure, internalizing the concept due to the way I was defined by the high-stake tests.

She went on with how she resonated with the experiences of students in this rural high school:

I grew up in a small town. Although I personally did not experience the hardships of a rural life as those depicted on the TV, I have witnessed the harsh conditions. When I was conducting research in the rural high school, I saw those young adults who had no interest in learning or felt stressed in school. I immediately felt a connection with the students, as I seemed to see my previous self in them. I knew this was not who they really were. Once being happy kids, they were constrained by a lot of factors out of their own control and were internalizing the negative perception of them by others.

“That is why I want to do something, to bring some change to rural education in my country through my research.” Brenda added.

“Who would pass me the paddle?” During our first formal interview when Brenda was in her first semester of the doctoral program, I asked her who she thought was the biggest influence on her in the United States. She told me that another classmate had posed the same question once during class and told them to imagine themselves in a canoe going forward without a paddle. Who would be the person that gives you the paddle?

He asked us to close our eyes and think about the scene. At that time, I could not answer the question. My eyes were all tears, because, you know, I just was like, there was no person there for me, and my answer would be myself.

I recalled another incident she told me when she was anxiously looking for an on-campus job. The on-campus assistantship positions were already filled. She was sitting at a park, feeling frustrated and powerless. A homeless man came to her and asked whether she could give him several dollars for lunch. She told him that she was also thinking about where she should go next semester. Without any financial aid, she could hardly go on with her learning and might quit and go back to her own country. The man offered her some kind words, leaving her continuing to worry about her future.

I understood why she was all tears at the question posed by her classmate at that time. I also understood why she was full of gratitude to her advisor who helped her find graduate assistant position and led her into the research field.

Two years later when we came to our second formal interview, Brenda

recalled that the feeling of helplessness was during the early stage of her stay in the U.S. She felt completely different now. Having walked through the stage of self-doubt and self-denial, in her own words, she has come to the stage of self-confidence and self-recognition.

A lot has happened during this period of time.

She is honing her expertise in conducting research and has progressed steadily. The research project she collaborated with a local classmate in the U.S. has already turned into a book chapter. She gained valuable experiences with her advisor in national research grants and academic article writing. She has presented her other research projects at national and international conferences. Right now, she is committed to writing her dissertation papers. She is hoping that her research can help teachers find out a way to empower themselves and work with a more positive mindset.

Speaking about the achievements in her doctoral learning journey, Brenda listed her improving confidence in the English language, and in herself as an educational researcher:

To be honest, I have learned a lot from these years. The first biggest achievement is in language. You could certainly feel more confident communicating with others, although you might still feel a little anxious sometimes. The second biggest achievement is my change of feelings like a failure to my confidence in doing things. For example, if I want to conduct a

research project, I could confidently talk about how I would go about it, instead of doubting whether it is a correct way for me to do it. I feel that I have much less doubt about my own ability.

She mentioned her evolving understanding of beauty in life, beginning to decorate her desk and was amazed that she missed so much joy previously.

My advisor always has some arts pieces in her office and would bring us some as gifts when she comes back from abroad. I began to place those small art pieces on my table, a camel, an angel and a fish. Anyway, I started to watch for beauty in life and appreciate it. Previously I would doubt whether I understand art. Now I would think art is what is beautiful in my eyes.

She has made more friends with different cultural backgrounds and these exposures helped her to become more open minded and tolerant towards differences.

I began to have a stronger desire to know new cultures, without much hesitance, like wondering what to do. I am very curious about different cultures and trying to understand its different meanings. I feel I am much more open minded than before, and according, more tolerant of differences. I feel that in many life situations there is not much right or wrong, but just more differences.

She explained further:

Instead of feeling powerless, I now feel that I also have the power to handle things in life. I like making friends, talking with different people, and I want

to turn my life more international by communicating with people from different countries and conducting research together. In the past, I might hesitate a lot, wondering what to do or to say.

Brenda attributed her progress to her advisor, who has always been there for her, especially at her difficult times. That was why she wanted to make sure that I explicitly state that her feeling of helplessness only happened at the beginning of her stay in the U.S.

Pressure is not uncommon for any doctoral student who is supposed to meet the academic requirements. It would be much harder to handle when complicated by accidents in life. In the second year of her doctoral learning, Brenda lost her father to heart disease. It had been three years since she stayed with her father before coming to the United States. She did not talk much about it, thinking she could handle it herself and move on with her academics.

Once in the office, she told her advisor, breathing a deep sigh, “doing research is so difficult.” Hearing it, her advisor was very concerned and asked whether she had any other worries. Brenda said she was fine and they did not go on with the conversation. A week later, her advisor mentioned her long sigh again during a meeting, and Brenda still said she was okay. Another week went by. When there were only two of them in the office, her advisor approached Brenda and asked whether she was okay. Brenda felt that she could not hold her pressure any longer and shared her concerns with her advisor. Brenda told about how grateful she felt

towards her advisor:

My advisor told me that whatever happened in life, live with it and move forward. She told me she was here and I could always contact her. I felt much less pressure since then. When I lost my father, my advisor gave me a home in the U.S., helped me put myself together and move forward. Having an advisor who is taking care of me as family, what else could I say?

She went on:

My advisor helped me come out of the sorrow I was suffering from the loss of my father, and guided me to a different and meaningful life socially and academically. She attempted to approach me several times in a delicate way and her persistence to talk me through enabled me to trace back to the root of my pressure. She helped me realize that it was time that I make a change to myself. What she has done for me will surely have a lifelong influence on me.” This, according to Brenda, was “the biggest gain” in her doctoral learning journey.

When Brenda talked about how her advisor had helped her come out, her voice was choked with emotion. I asked whether I should turn the recorder off and find another time to go on with our interview. She told me not to and went on with all the details about how her advisor communicated with her and gave her support at the time she needed most.

She encouraged me from a realistic point, without any big empty words. She

made me feel that I had different options in life and could always go for them.

This feeling of family and having support at my difficult times really matters a lot to me.

Yumei's reflection. I added two entries of my reflection here to provide the communication between Brenda and me while conducting the research.

Entry one. I sent my first draft to Brenda for member check. It took one week before she emailed it back to me. When I opened the document, I saw proofreading with comments all through the text. She helped to proofread the whole text, changed some dictions, made some deletions and additions to make sure her story would not be misunderstood.

She told me she felt a bit stressed for a time a while ago, not in a mood of doing anything. She asked whether I had also experienced similar kind of mood. The root of her stress, as she thought about it right now, came from her overly high expectation of herself. She figured that she was too concerned about what impact her research would have on the outside world, how it would exert a great significance and make a change to the world. This high expectation, according to her, also led to her fear that she could not live up to it. Therefore, she experienced great anxiety and lost the motivation to work for it for a time. As she was trying to live out of the stress, she critically examined her own thoughts. She concluded that while she was aware of the integration and interwoven impact between past, present, and future, she focused overly on only one of the three factors. To think about too much about the

future without setting foot in the current reality would lead to feeling of being lost.

As she has adjusted herself now, she came back to track and reminded herself that the most important things for her right now was to get her research done, have the findings published and land a desirable job.

Stacy helped proofread her story and make sure that our sentences were grammatically correct. She also deleted some sentences from her quotes to make them succinct.

Jon S. was very quick in responding to my request for member check.

Without making any changes in the text itself, he wrote me back:

Hi Yumei,

Just finished reading your paper. I like it. You expressed my frustration and expectation in a very clear and elegant way. I think this story relates well with the struggles of other international students. Thanks.

Jon S.

As I was reflecting on these interactions, I noticed that Brenda and I have spent plenty of time sharing our thoughts, frustration and expectations in every fabric of our lives. When I thought about my communication with Stacy and Jon S., I realized that although we did not spend equally large amount of time sharing those details, our informal conversations including email exchanges and text messages, small talks, casual encounters, were all telling ingredients of our everyday lives.

I remembered Stacy's anxiety two years ago in locating research participants,

her efforts to theme out her research findings as “there was too much information”, and her eagerness to perform perfectly at her dissertation proposal defense by memorizing every word of her speech.

Jon S. is working in his new job now. I do not want to imagine how he has navigated through his difficulties and finally successfully defended his dissertation. I recollected a casual conversation with another fellow international doctoral student, who complained that she was suffering from insomnia for a long time during her dissertation writing. I understand why he did not respond to my email for an interview, and feel more grateful that he committed time to being one of my participants despite the difficulties he was going through.

Entry two. I contacted Brenda in an attempt to go on with our topic as she suggested I put more emphasis on her research. She was busy writing out her own research and participating in research conferences. We postponed the interview until last Saturday.

We went through her research progress. It was evident that Brenda felt very confident in her ability to conduct research now, which, according to her, was mainly due to her advisor’s help to engage her in the academic conferences and meetings. Brenda was amazed that she “could do whatever research” she wanted to do and was “able to do something”. This sense of achievement was surely incomparable as an international doctoral student, and especially considering her self-doubt in her earlier stages of doctoral learning journey, and her lack of self-confidence in her learning

experiences back in her own country.

Brenda later added she did not think these trivialities between Ann and herself could be represented in my dissertation. She told me about this because she trusted me and she believed I understood. Her experiences reminded me of the aloofness of one of my former acquaintances, who came to the United States earlier than I did. I also thought about a Chinese international student, who claimed that speaking English made her feel like finding another self. Is it possible that we integrate into a new environment without negating our previous culture and experiences? Telling about these trivialities might reveal a subjective note, but isn't it subjectivity that makes us human beings?

One More Story: Meditation for Resonance

I used third person narrative in my first draft of the section, imagining myself to be "Anonymous", thinking this might allow my thoughts to run wild, free from any restraint for a while. However, when I was going through this draft, I turned the third person narrative into first person narrative. Yes, I am telling my story.

My interview questions with my participants always began with why they came to the U.S. / current doctoral program. I was also thinking about my own story. Previously, I did not really think about going abroad for a degree, not in my student years when I was greatly restrained by my financial situation, nor in my teaching years when I had a family to take care of. I guess that I did not go all out for my dream. This playing-it-safe attitude was also criticized by my sister, who stubbornly

believed that I could have done far better than how I am doing. I knew my sister still saw me as the smart girl in our school years. I was thinking about a catchy sentence in China's social media recently: poverty has restricted my imagination.

However, I could eventually come to the United States, due to a collaborative program established between University of Houston and the university where I was working. "It is the program that ultimately got you here," my advisor told me.

Language issue? Again? Life was not easy during my early stay in the U.S. Like many other international students who first came here, I also experienced language barriers. I missed a lot when classmates spoke very fast. I could not catch the African American English accent. I was used to "Standard English", which was what I learned back in China. I speak English with a heavy Chinese accent. Having taught English for nine years at a university, I still failed to grasp the ideas of my local counterparts in the U.S.

I had heard a lot from my fellow international students how they were ill prepared by their teachers back in their own countries. Many of them attributed their failure to communicate fluently in English with native speakers to the incompetency of their previous teachers.

I remembered a conversation with my own students previously when I was still in China. I ran into several former students in the hallway of a teaching building. I knew they were having an oral English class offered by a native English speaker and asked about their experiences. One student took over the conversation and told me

that he could not understand the professor at all when he spoke very fast, “but it feels good just to hear his American accent.” The student added.

Me: Then why don't you just listen to the radio or watch some English movies by yourself?

The student (laugh): It's different to have a native speaker talking to you directly.

My memory flashed back to the setting in the U.S. A classmate from China commented, “all the classes added together I took back there are not worth one class I took in the United States.”

Most recently, when we were attending a seminar, a Chinese international doctoral student claimed: “The English we learned in China was rubbish.”

Really?

After I graduated from a university located in the southwest of China, I went to teach at a northern city. Carrying a heavy accent due to the influence of my dialect, I could not understand people in the northern city when they spoke their dialect, while they sometimes failed to understand me for some specific phonetics I had difficulty pronouncing in the “standard” way. I never felt such a strong lack of self-confidence before, just because I did not sound like the people in a different place.

Relating this experience to what I have gone through in the United States, a diverse country with people from different countries of origin, I was amazed that

many people showed great confidence in their speech even with a very heavy accent.

Why, then, should I feel otherwise?

Understanding the local context: how familiar is familiar enough? It should have been a common understanding that one cannot understand a place until she or he lives there for a while. It is like swimming. You can never really boast you can swim by simply learning about swimming. I once naively thought that with my years of learning about the culture of U.S., I should do Okay.

I was wrong.

I could not understand the issues the native classmates were discussing. I was not familiar with the local contexts of education and society. All I knew before coming here turned out to be some rough or superficial understanding of English culture, something far from adequate. I thought about what teaching culture meant back in China, and realized that it was true in many language classroom culture was reduced to what Kramsch (1991) called “the four Fs”, that is “foods, fairs, folklore, and statistical facts” (p.218). What was in lack was the hidden curriculum of culture pointed out by Byram (1989) that reflected the target language speakers’ perceptions of the world and sociocultural roots behind.

My understanding of the local educational and social contexts gradually improved with my stay in the U.S. My daughter came here at an early age, going through the school system from day care to elementary school. This offered me opportunities to closely examine the daily communication of schools and their

schedules. I took every opportunity to volunteer in my daughter's schools and established good relationship with the teachers. I also communicated with parents of my daughters' good friends. These encounters are familiarizing me with what is going on in schools in the U.S., how parents think about education for their kids, and some routine lives of these native friends. I also took my daughter to activities initiated by some charity organizations, and was amazed at how philanthropic and committed people in the U.S. are, with an aim to improve the lives of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. I thought about China, believing there is still a long way to go.

Reading and classroom discussion have also opened my eyes to see the societal ills in the United States and I am also greatly moved by the passion my fellow doctoral students exhibited towards social justice and change.

Working as a graduate assistant in the office, I considered myself a participant observer of the academic climate of the college. Efforts to secure funding, debates between different research paradigms, and conversations about miscellaneous events happening around, these are the universality of human nature and struggle, and transcend nationalities.

So, am I familiar with the local context now? The answer can hardly be a yes. Full understanding of a context takes time, and the world does not stay static for people to learn. Do we have to have a full understanding before participation? I was thinking about the concept of peripheral visions proposed by Bateson (1994).

Chapter V

Discussion

Introduction

This chapter is an attempt to discuss the stories of my participants by positioning them back to the larger landscape of international education, weaving together issues of language, culture, identity and doctoral education into their life trajectories.

Culture, Language and Vulnerability / Power

Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language I cannot take pride in myself...while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate.

(Anzaldúa, 1987)

A child cannot be taught by anyone whose demand, essentially, is that the child repudiate his experience, and all that gives him sustenance, and enter a limbo in which he will no longer be Black, and in which he knows that he can never become white. Black people have lost too many children that way.

(Baldwin, 1979)

The above two quotes, concerning the language and culture experiences of Hispanics and Black people, are highly relevant to any people whose culture and / or

language are not in the mainstream in the United States. I put them here as the starting point of this section to open up a discussion about language, culture and identity reflected by the stories of my participants, and in a larger vein, offer some resonance to the stories of Asian international students in the United States.

As international students who comes from different cultures and speak other languages than English, we inevitably experienced a period of adjustment during the early stage of our stay in the U.S. It is no surprise that language and culture represent the first major barrier, which has also been reiterated by all my participants about their earlier experiences.

Stacy had difficulty understanding the class discussion and lacked confidence in writing because of the different ways of thinking. She believed that the article written by herself was “hard to read” because she organized it in a different way from what Americans did. She also attributed the proposal or manuscript rejection to the language barrier. She emphasized the correct way to pronounce and use words in order for others to understand her. Eventually, she felt more confident in English after she received the professional training on pronunciation and went through an assessment which said she had a slighter accent.

Jon S. also experienced the language barrier during his earlier years of stay in the U.S. With more exposure to English, he later revealed that spoken language was no longer a problem, although written English was something he still needed to work

on. He did not mention accent in our formal interview. However, when it came to job landing, it was apparent that he still considered language an issue which prevented him from landing a desirable job.

Language was an issue for Brenda too. This barrier was reflected when she hesitated to communicate with her coworkers, when she could not immediately understand her job assignment as a graduate assistant, and when she was not sure how to effectively communicate with potential participants in the U.S. local context. In her advanced stage of doctoral learning, Brenda came to accept the fact that she could never speak like a native speaker and began to consider her own English one of those varieties. She also considered her previous focus on accent quite superficial.

Speaking English with fluency is considered a privilege in many Asian countries, as pointed out by Jon S. Brenda mentioned the British or American English she learned back in her own country which was considered standard. As competent speakers we are sensitive to the variations in accent and vocabulary which reflect different positions and backgrounds in the social milieu. Accent, to some extent, is “salient in the same way as ethnicity, age, gender and skin color” (Deprez-Sims & Morris, 2010). The linguistic reality within English language teaching and communication, tends to be focused on native speakers’ accents, mostly American or British (Sung, 2016). Accordingly, international students who have learned English as a second / foreign language tend to prefer the accents of native

speakers, often viewing them as more proper (Beinhoff, 2016; Jenkins, 2006; Kaur, 2014).

While understanding how social power has influenced the way my participants regard their own English proficiency and their efforts to achieve native speakers' fluency and accent, I also refer to human agency as another aspect to see their growth, in order not to fall into deterministic or reductionist analyses, leaving conceptual room for the actions and investments of human agents.

The relationship between language, identity and resistance also surfaces in the stories of my participants. When they had difficulties in English, they also received response from other people in various ways. Stacy mentioned people at the other end of phone "get mad", Jon S. talked about people who just hang up the phone, and Brenda told me about one student over the phone who demanded talking with someone "who speaks English." While larger social context might position speakers of English as a second language in undesirable ways, my participants, with human agency, were resisting these positions and acknowledging their own identity. Stacy later added that people who got mad with her might have their own problems. Brenda reflected on the exchange between the student and pointed out the reason might be that the student was too anxious because she was experiencing some difficulty with her account. Without directly addressing any specific exchange with native speakers, Jon S. indicated that people who just hang up his phone were rude.

Although they still considered language as something they need improvement in, they came to accept their own linguistic identity, to some extent.

Besides language, culture is another aspect all my participants highlighted when talking about the reason to come to the United States. Both Stacy and Brenda talked about the desire to experience American culture. They made efforts to socializing with Americans, though unsuccessfully. Stacy began to watch football in an attempt to socialize with local people and stopped doing so when she realized that it was not her real interest. Brenda withdrew from the social meeting with the local couple because she could not find her own place in the discussion and could not stand the way other international students interacted with the local Americans. Jon S. did not mention similar experience but talked about how he finally settled down after finding his church in the city.

The previous perception of English language and western cultures by all my participants, reflects how the cultural and linguistic hegemony is at work for people from developing countries. Every relationship of “hegemony” is necessarily an educational relationship and occurs not only within a nation, but in the international and world-wide field, between complexes of national and continental civilization. Even if one admits that other cultures have had an importance and a significance in the process of “hierarchical” unification of world civilization, they have had a universal value only in so far as they have become constituent elements of European

culture, which is the only historically and concretely universal culture—in so far, that is, as they have contributed to the process of European thought and been assimilated by it (Gramsci, 1996).

When particular languages or cultures are valued or devalued according to the power of their users, a critical awareness of language and culture is needed to interrogate the dominating discourse on language and culture and foreground the examination and interconnectedness of identities, ideologies and the hierarchical nature of power relations between groups (Alim, 2005). For all my participants, this critical awareness comes from the empowerment in education.

Empowerment in Doctoral Education

I began this section with my search for a definition of empowerment. Amartya Sen (1999), focusing on the empowerment of women, wanted to recognize women as ‘active agents of change’ through their own agency. For Sen, empowerment is the acquisition by women of ‘agency and voice’ (p.193). Stromquist (2006) asserted that empowerment was based upon individual self-discovery, self-assertiveness, and critical learning about one's world, as well as upon collective organization.

This “self-discovery, self-assertiveness and critical learning about one’s world”, was exemplified by all my participants through their constant negotiation of their own stance as international doctoral students, and reflected in the research they

have done or are still doing. All of them found passion in what they have done or are doing and expect to bring about change through their work.

While it is important to highlight the individual agency, it is equally important to examine at a broader level of social and institutional support in order for ‘the expansion of people's ability to make strategic choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them’ (Keeber, 2000). Empowerment also involves a set of knowledge, skills, and conditions that international doctoral students must possess in order to understand their world and act upon it (Stromquist, 2006). Institution support, is key for international doctoral students to develop an awareness of their reality, including possibilities and obstacles in their doctoral learning journey; in the meanwhile, establish the sense that one's self has value and deserves a good and fair existence. In order for them to develop the awareness and act upon it, institutions working with international doctoral students must play a crucial role in their empowerment.

Support from the institution and faculty is mentioned in different ways by all my participants. Stacy mentioned the accommodation of assignments by professors in classes, which gave her more flexibility and helped her focus on her dissertation. With such accommodation, she considered classroom a safe place to walk into. Office work, like answering the phone or doing paper work, helped her socialize into the institution. So did her co-teaching experience which helped her see the hierarchy in

the institution, including the procedure to communicate with different people in the process of teaching. Jon S. defined support from professors as “giving feedback and help to find another perspective.” He was perplexed when he did not have detailed feedback from professors on his work.

While I did not specifically discuss with Stacy or Jon S. the support they have received from their advisors, Brenda’s story offered details about what an advisor had done to empower an international doctoral student. With care and professionalism, Brenda’s advisor helped to cultivate not only her research expertise, but her self-esteem and her whole well-being. Empowerment in doctoral education, in this vein, involves a development of students’ potential in order for them to empower others.

While all my participants highlighted their efforts in searching for their own positions in cultures and languages as international doctoral students, each of them has their unique way of addressing challenges and crafting identity trajectories.

As a former English teacher back in her own country, Stacy conducted research on the development of ESL teachers in the United States, and felt a sense of connection with her research participants when they shared their passion in multicultural education and care for their students. She was constantly building on her previous experience and negotiating with her current situation.

Her agency was also reflected in her positive attitude towards her

surroundings. When she was experiencing difficulties in understanding the local educational context or the classroom discussion, she considered it necessary for discussions in education to go broad and offer a lens for students to perceive the interwoven relationship between culture, language, politics and education. She was also improvising what was available to her. Small things, like answering the phone in the office, or doing a large amount of paper work, were considered opportunities to socialize into the department climate. She experienced difficulties in conducting her research, like locating potential research participants or analyzing her research data, and she eventually handled those difficulties successfully. When she did not see possibilities in locating jobs as assistant professor, she turned to administrative jobs where she had more expertise.

With the prestigious scholarship, Jon S. took up a new field he had never thought about before and developed a lot of expertise in it with the support of his advisor and research team. He envisioned the possibilities of massive open online courses and how it could bring a change to the education of the whole world, which was in accord with his previous desire to change education of his own country. This was related to the reason why he chose the pseudonym Jon S. because “he tries his best to always do the best for his people.” As a doctoral student doing research, he was stuck in his research data for a while. Having a family to support, he was constantly having financial concerns. Despite all those difficulties he had gone

through, he still cherished the desire to contribute his share. He wanted to be involved and come to the front to help people through education.

For Brenda, empowerment of education was reflected in her self-empowerment and the desire to empower others through education. Once considering herself a failing student in her own country, she later realized it was the education system which had failed her. This critical consciousness prompted her to research failing schools in the United States. Although she did not go on with the research due to the difficulties to locate potential participants, she went back to her own country and conduct research on education which had failed many rural kids. She hoped to bring change to rural education through her own research. As she was in a low mood, she critically examined her own stress, overcome it and moved forward with her research.

Whether it is about multicultural education, education for a larger population through technology, or education for the rural kids, all my participants have a mind on quality education for kids from disadvantageous groups. Their vision was also influenced by the diversity they had been exposed to in their doctoral journey.

International Education and Understanding

While the aim of international education is on global understanding and social equity, how these aims can be fulfilled by international students depends, to a large extent, on what they are exposed to. As doctoral students in the field of education,

all my participants talked about the different perspectives they have gained from classroom discussions, from what their own personal experiences and from how they perceive of these experiences.

Exposed to discussions and presentations in the U.S. classrooms, Stacy saw the flexibility of class instruction in the U.S. and compared it with the style back in her own country. She thought about the rigid framework of teaching in her home country and considered teaching and learning in the U.S creative and interesting.

Jon S. considered class discussions a venue for him to know social inequity in the U.S., which shattered his previous illusion of the U.S. as a country of freedom and equality. His personal experiences to find a school for his son also opened his eyes to the inequity in the U.S. The opportunity to work for online courses brought him hope of an education for all, with people from disadvantageous backgrounds in mind.

Brenda saw the failing schools in the U.S. and wanted to trace the root of its cause. Taking classes in the doctoral program, volunteering in local schools, and collaborating with fellow American doctoral students, all these experiences offered her lens to see education on a broad landscape and to rethink her own educational experiences and education for rural kids in her own country.

As international students, my participants brought with them their own background and perspectives into the discussion of issues in education. Jon S. thought about his own family and his two brothers who could not go to the college,

Brenda saw her previous self and how she was defined as a failure by the educational system. A constant examination of the situation in the U.S. and that of their home countries enabled them to gain more knowledge about places beyond immediate locality and the relationship to a global reality and an international society.

Education for international doctoral students, should offer different exposures and room for the examination. In the meantime, an acknowledgement of the value of different perspectives and the experiences they have brought with them is a prerequisite for this meditation to happen.

Summary

A discussion of the findings revealed that all my participants were in a constant negotiation of identities as international doctoral students learning in the United States. In this process of negotiation between languages and cultures, they have reexamined their own cultures and languages and related their personal experiences to the research they have done or are still doing. Through institutional support in various forms, together with their own agency, they are beginning to empower themselves and hope to make a difference to current education. International education, offers my participants different perspectives, and is also enriched by the perspectives my participants have brought to the foreign land.

Chapter VI

Becoming an Educational Researcher: An Afterthought

It has been three years since I wrote the first word for my candidacy. During this period, I was living my life as an international doctoral student and understanding the lives of other international doctoral students. With the unravelling of their lives in my dissertation, I was looking into my own life and constantly wondering in which direction I was heading.

Becoming an educational researcher, that was my previous and immediate understanding of what a doctoral student is expected to do in education. That also explains why we need a dissertation to prove that we are qualified and ready to graduate. In this sense, conducting research with my fellow international students is a journey for me to become a critical narrative researcher. The way I unraveled their stories, I reflected on the interaction with them, and I chose to put them into words, all exemplified my efforts, my aspirations, together with my limitations.

Drawing on Dewey's theory of experience (1938), I attempted to explore the experiences of international doctoral students, aimed at finding their identity trajectories, how they made sense of their own experiences and how they are becoming educational researchers. Narrative, or stories, were employed as a tool for me to represent these experiences. For a long time, I was in search for an appropriate narrative form, trying to find a metaphor as a frame for me to develop these stories.

However, with the unravelling of our stories, I noticed that my effort to search

for one frame for the experiences of my participants was, to say the least, in vain. Moreover, it ran counter to the fluidity of a narrative, which should be about my participants' stories that were telling in their own course. My role as a researcher should be one to facilitate the flow, instead of trying to squeeze them into one artificial framework (Clandinnin & Connelly, 2000).

Did I impose my own researcher bias on my participants? That was the question I kept asking myself during the writing process, when I noticed that my participants did not answer my questions in the way I desired, and when they changed dictions in the representation of their stories. This reminded me, a beginner researcher, of the trustworthiness of conducting narrative research. Whose stories am I telling? Am I trying to steal the voices of my participants and to put my voice in their stories? As a researcher, I must respect my participants' way of constructing meaning and analyze how it is accomplished (Riessman, 1993). This was accomplished by my constant member check with my participants, revisiting my field text and going over their storylines several times to make sure I was preserving their stories instead of fracturing them. I added my reflection to track my thoughts about my communication with my participants, which represented my journey to become an educational researcher and my understanding of doing qualitative research. Being critical, for me as a beginner researcher, involves a constant examination of my own stance as a researcher, the tools I employed to elicit the voice of my participants, various data I utilized as field text, and my interpretation of my participants' stories with the play of

power relationship in mind.

With the unfolding of my participants' stories, I also came to realize that becoming an educational researcher might not be the only choice for international doctoral students. They may have chosen another path, depending on how they are prepared and how they interpret their own journey. Despite these different possibilities, I still kept the title "becoming educational researchers." It reflected my own aspirations and previous assumptions of doctoral education. In this sense, there is no ethically neutral narrative, but narratives which serve as a propaedeutic to our estimations, evaluations and judgments (Ricoeur, 1992).

Throughout this inquiry, I imagined myself being involved in a community of practice (Wenger, 1998), where we pursued our shared enterprise, although on different trajectories. It is through this community, that I saw in depth how my participants met those challenges and grew in the process. Their challenges, aspirations and achievement also informed me of my possibilities. It is through this community that I experienced their encouragement, advice and suggestions for me. I recalled Stacy's advice to use our small talks as field texts, her questions concerning my theoretical framework lest I get lost and her willingness to help me think out my themes. Jon S. gave me practical advice on landing jobs, introduced software for me to transcribe my interviews and helped me find potential participants. Brenda's constant negotiation with me about how to represent stories brought me to a rethinking of subjectivity in research.

Coming to the United States for a doctoral degree, for various motivations, has been a decision for us to experience, to do more, and to fulfill a dream which might not be realized in our home countries. International education offers us this opportunity to explore those possibilities and challenges us to negotiate our own identities in this broad landscape of education. In a sense, it offers us the venue to compose a different life.

What is my next step then? I am trying to delineate the significance of this research first. As was stated in my first chapter before conducting the research, I was thinking about rejecting the deficit model of representation and adopting a holistic view of the identity trajectories of international doctoral students. I also attempted to add insiders' perspectives to international education and doctoral education. It was also hoped that this research would offer some resonance to other international doctoral students in their learning journey and help them craft their own trajectories with their previous cultures, languages and experiences in mind. Now with my research coming to an end, I am able to list one more item significant in my research, which is reflective thinking as a means for international doctoral students to actively pursue meaning and make sense of their lived worlds (Dewey, 1933). This "reflection-in-action" and "knowing-in-action" (Schön, 1984) allow both my participants and myself as a researcher to reflect on the understandings which have been implicit in the action, understandings which we surface, criticize, restructure, and embody in further action. This examining and reexamining of our own thoughts is

a way to make explicit what lies below the surface of consciousness and develop the sense of agency that allows us to take initiatives and embark on new beginnings with some awareness of what might be (Greene, 1995).

My next step also depends on my own positions. Will I continue my research in international education if I am not in the United States? I cannot come up with a definite answer. As international doctoral students, we are always negotiating between imagination and reality.

“I want to do a lot, but what I can do now seems to be little.” I was recalling the comments made by Brenda. Now I am going to graduate. I have sent out applications with no response except for a few which politely thanked me for my “interest in the position.” I am facing a lot of uncertainties.

I began my dissertation with the dream by Master Zhuang. With my doctoral learning journey coming to the final stage, I am constantly thinking about another dream:

Scholar Lu, dressed in worn out clothing, was travelling to take the royal test and stopped at a rest-lodge. At the lodge, he reclined on a pillow and fell asleep. At that time, the host of the lodge began to steam millet. The pillow led Lu into a dream, in which he has experienced glories and contentments of human life. When he woke up, he saw himself still in the lodge, and the host was still steaming the millet which was not yet cooked.

Record Within a Pillow

Is everything but an empty dream? However, Scholar Lu has become a different Lu.

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Appendix

University of Houston Institutional Review Board (IRB) Application



UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
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UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
Division of Research
Institutional Review Board Application

Generated at: 2/2/2017
10:28:16 AM

Institutional Review Board
Application ID :

16572-EX - (8196)

Title :

Becoming educational researchers: Experiences of international
doctoral students in the U.S.

Approval details for the Application Id: 8196

	Decision	Approver Name	Date	Comment
PI signature	Approved	Li, Yumei	10/19/2016	
DOR signature	Approved	Admin, IRB	12/15/2016	

University of Houston

Division of Research

Application Data for Application ID: 8196

Title	Becoming educational researchers: Experiences of international doctoral students in the U.S.
Application Type	New
Review Type	Exempt
Expedite Code	Not Applicable
Exemption Code	2: Research involving the use of educational tests
Research Reason	Doctoral Dissertation

Investigator Data for Application ID: 8196

PI Name	Is Principal?	Is Co-Investigator?	Is External?	Other Personnel Type?	Is Student?	Faculty Sponsor Name
White, Cameron Dr.			No	Thesis Committee Member	No	Not Applicable
Hutchison, Laveria F. Dr.			No	Thesis Committee Member	No	Not Applicable
Craig, Cheryl Dr.			No	Thesis Committee Member	No	Not Applicable
Li, Yumei	Yes		No		Yes	White, Cameron Dr.

Project Review Summary Data for Application ID: 8196

Question	Answer
4) State the specific research hypotheses or questions to be addressed in this study	My research is aimed to address the three questions: 1) What are the academic and social experiences of international doctoral students in education in the United States? 2) In what ways do these international doctoral students address challenges they encounter in their doctoral education? 3) How do these international doctoral students interpret their own social and academic experiences and construct their identity as educational researchers?
5) What is the importance/significance of the knowledge that may result?	The significance of this study for me, as an international Chinese student, also represents my own attempts for understanding the experiences and processes that have informed my perceptions of "self" as a developing educational researcher. It will also enable me to develop a deeper understanding of my experiences through the process of establishing a shared narrative of experience with my peers, and provide "voices from within" (Fishman, 1997) as to the struggles and needs of the international doctoral students in education, and an understanding of how we transform our personal practical knowledge into professional knowledge in our personal curricula (He, 1998). This research also will offer implications for other international doctoral students, their advisors and administrators.
6) Type of Subject Population (check all that are appropriate)	Adults
6.01) Expected maximum number of participants	10
6.02) Age of proposed subject(s) (check all that apply)	Adults (18yrs-64yrs)

6.03) Inclusion Criteria:	My participants will be international doctoral students who are pursuing a doctoral degree in the field of education in the United States.
6.04) Exclusion Criteria:	My participants will exclude those: 1) who are not international students; 2) who are not pursuing a doctoral degree; and 3) who are not majoring in education.
6.05) Justification:	While a substantial number of previous studies have addressed academic and nonacademic challenges experienced by many international students concerning the increasing number of international students in the United States, there are two gaps in current literature: First, most of them have focused on the international students in general and tend to overlook the particularity of individual Asian students at different educational levels (Fritz, Chin, & DeMarinis, 2008). Second, there is a paucity of research of Asian international doctoral students in the field of education, since they only account for 2% of the international population and remain the underrepresented minority. In view of the gap in current research, this study will conduct a narrative inquiry into the experiences of international doctoral students in education and offer a perspective into this minority group concerning their development, or the transformation to evolve into emerging scholars (Walker et al., 2008), and provide implications for other educational researchers and administrators. While most research is from outsiders, like professors who have already completed their doctoral journey, this study is also aimed to add an insider's voice of how international doctoral students make sense of their own experience and construct their identity as educational researchers.
6.06) Determination:	After obtaining the approval from IRB, an invitation letter will be sent to prospective participants with a consent form attached. International doctoral students refer to those who came to the U.S. for a doctoral degree on a student visa. They are learning in a college of education in the U.S. Snowball sampling strategy will be adopted to identify potential participants. In snowball sampling, each research participant will be asked to identify other potential research participant (Johnson & Christensen, 2013). All participants will be identified through the researcher's personal networking.
7) If this study proposes to include children, this inclusion must meet one of the following criterion for risk/benefits assessment according to the federal regulations (45 CFR 46, subpart D). Check the appropriate box:	
8) If the research involves any of the following, check all that are appropriate:	Interview, Other (Explain) :To gain an understanding of how international doctoral students make meaning of their experiences, the researcher will keep reflection journals on the interaction between the researcher and participants.
9) Location(s) of Research Activities:	Other (Explain) :Locations will be chosen based on participants' preference.
10) Informed Consent of Subjects: Your study protocol must clearly address one of the following areas:	Informed Consent. Signed informed consent is the default. A model consent is available on the CPHS website and should be used as a basis for developing your informed consent document. If applicable, the proposed consent must be included with the application. (http://www.research.uh.edu/PCC/CPHS/Informed.html) ATTACH COPY OF PROPOSED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Research Protocol Data for Application ID: 8196

Question	Answer
11) Describe the research study design. (Describe the research methods to be employed and the variables to be studied. Include a description of the data collection techniques and/or the statistical methods to be employed.)	Narrative inquiry would be the most appropriate approach for my inquiry due to the need for mutual understanding and commitment from both the researcher participants. Field texts, normally called data in other research methods, will be presented in various forms such as observation notes, interview notes and transcripts, archival data, and researcher reflective journals (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, 2000). The field texts were utilized for reflection, analysis, and interpretation, with the purpose of “discover[ing] and construct[ing] meaning in [the] texts” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 423). The field texts of this research mainly derive from processes as interviews and the researcher’s reflective journals concerning the interaction between the researcher and participants.
12) Describe each task subjects will be asked to perform.	During the interview, participants will be asked to share their experiences and their perspectives.
13) Describe how potential subjects will be identified and recruited? (Attach a script or outline of all information that will be provided to potential subjects. Include a copy of all written solicitation, recruitment ad, and/or outline for oral presentation.)	Snowball sampling strategy will be adopted to identify potential participants.
14) Describe the process for obtaining informed consent and/or assent. How will investigators ensure that each subjects participation will be voluntary (i.e., free of direct or implied coercion)?	A consent form will be sent to participants and the researcher will explain in detail the purpose of the study and what the participants will do for the research.
15) Briefly describe each measurement instrument to be used in this study (e.g., questionnaires, surveys, tests, interview questions, observational procedures, or other instruments) AND attach to the application a copy of each (appropriately labeled and collated). If any are omitted, please explain.	Interviews will be adopted as the main instrument for data collection. Questions will be asked about participants’ experiences in both the U.S. and their home countries. The researcher will use her own reflective journals as another instrument to interpret the interaction between the researcher and the participants.
16) Describe the setting and mode for administering any materials listed in question 15 (e.g., telephone, one-on-one, group). Include the duration, intervals of administration, and amount of time required for each survey/procedure. Also describe how you plan to maintain privacy and confidentiality during the administration.	Interview will be conducted at a place where the participant prefer. The number and time length of interviews conducted with participants will be determined by their answers and the researcher’s observation and reflective journals. There will be fluid and ongoing interactions between the researcher and the participants as their meaning making processes are evolving. All the recordings will be coded in files with pseudonyms.
17) Approximately how much time will be required of each subject? Provide both a total time commitment as well as a time commitment for each visit/session.	Data collection will last six months for the researcher to gather adequate data for detailed analysis.
18) Will Subjects experience any possible risks involved with participation in this project?	
18.01) Risk of Physical Discomfort or Harm	No:
18.02) Risk of Psychological Harm (including stress/discomfort)	No:

18.03) Risk of Legal Actions (such as criminal prosecution or civil sanctions)	No:
18.04) Risk of Harm to Social Status (such as loss of friendship)	No:
18.05) Risk of Harm to Employment Status	No:
18.06) Other Risks	No:
19) Does the research involve any of these possible risks or harms to subjects? Check all that apply.	
20) What benefits, if any, can the subject expect from their participation?	None
21) What inducements or rewards (e.g., financial compensation, extra credit, and other incentives), if any, will be offered to potential subjects for their participation?	None.

Research Data for Application ID: 8196

Question	Answer
22) Will you record any direct identifiers, names, social security numbers, addresses, telephone numbers, patient or student ID numbers, etc.?	No:
23) Will you retain a link between study code numbers and direct identifiers after the data collection is complete?	No:
24) Will anyone outside the research team have access to the links or identifiers?	No:
25) Where, how long, and in what format (such as paper, digital or electronic media, video, audio or photographic) will data be kept? In addition, describe what security provisions will be taken to protect these data (password protection, encryption, etc.). [Note: University of Houston policy on data retention requires that research data be maintained for a minimum of 3 years after completion of the project. All research data collected during this project is subject to the University of Houston data retention policy found at http://www.research.uh.edu/Home/Division-of-Research/Research-Services/Research-Policies/Access-to-and-Retention-of-Research-Data.aspx]	Recording will be kept under pseudonyms and transcribed to word documents. All data will be kept in word files with password protection in the researcher's personal computer. These data will be kept for 3 years after the research is finished.

MNSA

UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON

DIVISION OF RESEARCH

August 29, 2016

Yumei Li
c/o Dr. Cameron White
Curriculum and Instruction

Dear Yumei Li,

Based upon your request for exempt status, an administrative review of your research proposal entitled "Becoming educational researchers: Experiences of international doctoral students in the U.S." was conducted on August 19, 2016.

In accordance with institutional guidelines, your project is exempt under **Category 2**, contingent upon the following:

- Please clarify how participants will be identified and recruited for participation in the study (question 6.06 of the application). Also, please provide copies of all recruitment materials that will be used (e.g., email, script, etc.). All recruitment materials need to include the following statement: "This project has been reviewed by the University of Houston Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (713) 743-9204."
- Provide a copy of the informed consent form that will be provided to participants prior to participation.
- Provide a copy of the questions that will be asked during the interview.
- The response to question 25 of the application needs to be revised to include the location of where the data will be kept, as well as how long the data will be kept.

The required revisions to your application must be submitted online via the Research Administration Management Portal (RAMP), by September 19, 2016 or the Committee's sanction may be revoked. To expedite review; please highlight the changes made for all revised documents that will be uploaded.

As long as you continue using procedures described in this project, you do not have to reapply for review. * Any modification of this approved protocol will require review and approval by the Committee.

If you have any questions, please contact Alicia Vargas at (713) 743-9215.

Sincerely yours,



Kirstin Rochford, MPH, CIP, CPIA
Director, Research Compliance

Protocol Number: 16572-EX

316 E. Cullen Building Houston, TX 77204-2015 (713) 743-9204 Fax: (713) 743-9577

COMMITTEES FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS.

Interview Questions - Interview protocol by Yumei Li.pdf

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Below is a sample protocol. There will be fluid and ongoing interactions between the researcher and the participants as their meaning making processes are evolving.

I. General information

1. Name
2. Sex
3. Nationality
4. Area of research
5. Years in the U.S.
6. Years in the doctoral program

II. Life history

7. Why did you want to come to the U.S.?
8. How did you choose the current program?
9. Did you have any research experience in your homeland?
10. What was your undergraduate/graduate major?
11. What was your job, if you had one?

III. Social Experiences in the U.S.

12. How often do you communicate with your family/friends in your homeland?
13. How do you get accustomed to the new environment in the U.S.?
14. Is there any challenge? Please explain.

IV. Academic experiences in the U.S.

15. What is your current research interest?
16. Who do you usually turn to for advice on your research?
17. What challenges do you have in your research?
18. What was the happiest/saddest moment during your stay here?

V. Future plans

19. What career do you desire after graduation?
20. How are you preparing for the future?
21. What do you think might be your strengths/weaknesses?

Recruitment Script - Recruitment email from Yumei Li.pdf

Recruitment Email

Hello,

You are being invited to participate in a research conducted by Yumei Li, a doctoral student from the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Houston. The project title is: **Becoming educational researchers: Experiences of international doctoral students in the U.S.**

The purpose of this study is to understand how international doctoral students in the United States are making sense of their experiences and become educational researchers.

Interviews will be conducted concerning your social and academic experiences in the United States and how you make sense of your own experiences as an international doctoral student in the field of education.

The project has been reviewed by the University of Houston Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (713) 743-9204.

If you are interested in participation, please email me back or call me at 713-325-3308.

Thank you.

Yumei Li
yli91@uh.edu
713-325-3308

Consent form

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

PROJECT TITLE:

Becoming educational researchers: Experiences of international doctoral students in the U.S.

You are being invited to participate in a research project conducted by Yumei Li, a doctoral student from Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Houston. This research is part of her dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Cameron S. White.

NON-PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any question. *[If you are a student, a decision to participate or not or to withdraw your participation will have no effect on your standing.]*

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to understand how international doctoral students in the United States are making sense of their experiences and become educational researchers.

PROCEDURES

You will be one of approximately 10 subjects to be asked to participate in this project.

After you sign the consent form, the researcher will negotiate with you about the time and place for interviews. Questions will be asked concerning your social and academic experiences as an international doctoral student in the field of education. Interviews will be recorded, transcribed verbatim and shared with you to avoid misunderstanding. The researcher will also keep reflective journals on the interaction with you and share these journals with you for triangulation.

The number and time length of interviews conducted will be determined by your answers and the researcher's reflection. There will be fluid and ongoing interactions between the researcher and you as the meaning making processes are evolving. Data collection will last six months for the researcher to gather adequate data for detailed analysis.

AUDIOTAPING

The interview will be audiotaped and the transcript will be shared with you to make sure there is no misunderstanding.

Please check whether you agree or not to the audiotaping of the interview.

- Yes. I agree to the audiotaping of my interview.
- No. I do not agree to the audiotaping of my interview.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your participation in this project will be kept confidential. All research records will be coded and secured with password protection in the researcher's personal computer. These data will be kept for 3 years after the research is finished. The researcher will not include any information in any report or future publication that would make it possible to identify you.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

There are so foreseeable risks for the participants.

BENEFITS

While you will not directly benefit from participation, your participation may help investigators better understand how international doctoral students in the field of education in the U.S. make meaning of their own experiences and negotiate their identity as educational researchers.

ALTERNATIVES

Participation in this project is voluntary and the only alternative to this project is non-participation.

PUBLICATION STATEMENT

The results of this study may be published in professional and/or scientific journals. It may also be used for educational purposes or for professional presentations. However, no individual subject will be identified.

If you have any questions, you may contact Yumei Li at 713-325-3308. You may also contact Dr. Cameron S. White, faculty sponsor, at 713-743-8678.

ANY QUESTIONS REGARDING YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT MAY BE ADDRESSED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (713-743-9204).

Principal Investigator's Name: Yumei Li

Signature of Principal Investigator: _____

Final_Approval

UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON

DIVISION OF RESEARCH

December 15, 2016

Yumei Li
c/o Dr. Cameron White
Curriculum and Instruction

Dear Yumei Li,

Based upon your request for exempt status, an administrative review of your research proposal entitled "Becoming educational researchers: Experiences of international doctoral students in the U.S." was conducted.

At that time, your request for exemption under **Category 2** was approved pending modification of your proposed procedures/documents.

The changes you have made adequately respond to the identified contingencies. As long as you continue using procedures described in this project, you do not have to reapply for review. * Any modification of this approved protocol will require review and further approval. Please contact me to ascertain the appropriate mechanism.

If you have any questions, please contact Alicia Vargas at (713) 743-9215.

Sincerely yours,



Kirstin Rochford, MPH, CIP, CPIA
Director, Research Compliance

*Approvals for exempt protocols will be valid for 5 years beyond the approval date. Approval for this project will expire **December 13, 2021**. If the project is completed prior to this date, a final report should be filed to close the protocol. If the project will continue after this date, you will need to reapply for approval if you wish to avoid an interruption of your data collection.

Protocol Number: 16572-EX

revised_consent

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

PROJECT TITLE:

Becoming educational researchers: Experiences of international doctoral students in the U.S.

You are being invited to participate in a research project conducted by Yumei Li, a doctoral student from Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Houston. This research is part of her dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Cameron S. White.

NON-PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any question. *[If you are a student, a decision to participate or not or to withdraw your participation will have no effect on your standing.]*

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to understand how international doctoral students in the United States are making sense of their experiences and become educational researchers.

PROCEDURES

You will be one of approximately 10 subjects to be asked to participate in this project.

After you sign the consent form, the researcher will negotiate with you about the time and place for interviews. Questions will be asked concerning your social and academic experiences as an international doctoral student in the field of education. Interviews will be recorded, transcribed verbatim and shared with you to avoid misunderstanding. The researcher will also keep reflective journals on the interaction with you and share these journals with you for triangulation.

The number and time length of interviews conducted will be determined by your answers and the researcher's reflection. There will be fluid and ongoing interactions between the researcher and you as the meaning making processes are evolving. Data collection will last six months for the researcher to gather adequate data for detailed analysis.

AUDIOTAPING

The interview will be audiotaped and the transcript will be shared with you to make sure there is no misunderstanding.

Please check whether you agree or not to the audiotaping of the interview.

- Yes. I agree to the audiotaping of my interview.
- No. I do not agree to the audiotaping of my interview.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your participation in this project will be kept confidential. All research records will be coded and secured with password protection in the researcher's personal computer. These data will be kept for 3 years after the research is finished. The researcher will not include any information in any report or future publication that would make it possible to identify you.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

There are so foreseeable risks for the participants.

BENEFITS

While you will not directly benefit from participation, your participation may help investigators better understand how international doctoral students in the field of education in the U.S. make meaning of their own experiences and negotiate their identity as educational researchers.

ALTERNATIVES

Participation in this project is voluntary and the only alternative to this project is non-participation.

PUBLICATION STATEMENT

The results of this study may be published in professional and/or scientific journals. It may also be used for educational purposes or for professional presentations. However, no individual subject will be identified.

If you have any questions, you may contact Yumei Li at 713-325-3308. You may also contact Dr. Cameron S. White, faculty sponsor, at 713-743-8678.

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Principal Investigator's Name: Yumei Li

Signature of Principal Investigator: _____