Vertical Transfer Experiences of Ethnic Chinese International Students from Community Colleges: Who Are They and What Have They Experienced?

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Abstract

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International students play a significant role not only in the U.S. higher education in terms of enriching the diversity into campus community and fulfilling the internationalization mission (Chen, 2014), but also contributing $43.8 billion to the U.S. economy and supporting more than 378,000 jobs during the 2023-2024 academic year (NAFSA, n.d.). The transfer pathway for international students from community colleges to universities in the U.S. is well-established with many advantages such as open enrollment policy and affordability. There is much research on vertical transfer from community college to four-year institutions in domestic students but not international students. Another issue is that data on international students of color are not separated in many empirical studies of ethnic American students or in institution's statistics and publications. International students, often students of color, are not included or lumped with resident students of color. There is much research in recent years on various topics

on Chinese international students from Mainland China, but other ethnic Chinese are relatively unstudied.

The purpose of this study is to identify and understand the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, place of origin, and non-immigrant status of ethnic Chinese international community college students. This study looks at the factors that influence ethnic Chinese international community college students in their vertical transfer experiences and examine how the intertwined identities of race, ethnicity, place of origin, academic achievement, and non-immigrant status impact their educational experiences in the U.S.

Keywords: *International students, ethnic Chinese international students, identities, intersectionality, vertical transfer, community college*

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Dedication

To my father Chue Leung and my late mother Lai Sheung Liu who did not have the opportunity to attend school because of the Japanese occupation of China and Hong Kong. Through them, I see education as a privilege rather than a basic right not only in challenging times. They are visionary and believers in education. They sacrificed a lot to send my younger sister and me to study in Canada when I was told I did not "fit in" at secondary school in Hong Kong. I am grateful they gave me all the freedom to navigate who I want to be. They never compare my grades with my younger sister or cousins and other kids who did so much better in school while a lot of Asian/Chinese parents do. I would not be who I am today without their unconditional love, support, and faith in me.

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To those who think graduate school is not for them – nothing is impossible!

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The vertical transfer pathway for international students from community colleges to universities in the United States is a well-established route. There are many advantages to enrolling in community colleges such as open enrollment policy and affordability. One of the most attractive advantages is the direct transfer agreement (often referred to as the "two + two model") upon completion of the associate degree to four-year institutions for international students who have demonstrated academic success (Cohen, 2007; Raby & Valeau, 2007).

The increasing enrollment of international students in community colleges in the U.S. enriches the diversity into campus community and fulfills the internationalization mission (Chen, 2014). In 2022/23, community colleges currently enroll about 5% of the total number of international students enrolled in the U.S. higher education system, with 52,622 students - an 7.2% increase from the previous year with the impact from the 2020 Pandemic (Institute of International Education, 2023e). International students, especially from East and Southeast Asia, are increasingly attracted to start their U.S. higher education experience in community colleges as an affordable option compared to enrolling in a four-year university as freshman. Since 2007, China, Japan, South Korea, and Vietnam are the top four locations sending their students to the community colleges in the U.S., and the next three top Asian places of origin are Hong Kong, Indonesia, and Taiwan. The ranking of these second-tier Asian places dropped over the last few years due to the diversification and growing number of international students from Mexico, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Brazil, Columbia, Venezuela, Kenya, and Nigeria (see Table 1).

Table 1

Top 20 countries of Origin of International students at Community colleges, 2017 – 2023 (IIE, 2023d and 2023e).

	2017/18		2018/19		2019/20		2020/21		2021/22		2022/23	
Rank	Place of Origin	% of Total	Place of Origin	% of Total	Place of Origin	% of Total	Place of Origin	% of Total	Place of Origin	% of Total	Place of Origin	% of Total
1	China	19.8	China	18.6	China	18.6	China	15.4	China	10.0	China	8.4
2	Vietnam	11.1	Vietnam	11.0	Vietnam	10.0	Vietnam	10.9	Vietnam	9.5	Vietnam	7.6
3	South Korea	6.0	Japan	5.8	Japan	6.0	South Korea	5.7	Japan	6.2	Japan	5.9
4	Japan	5.7	South Korea	5.6	South Korea	5.7	Japan	5.5	Mexico	5.8	South Korea	5.0
5	Mexico	3.8	Mexico	3.9	Brazil	4.3	Brazil	4.6	South Korea	5.5	Brazil	4.7
6	Nepal	3.7	Brazil	3.9	Mexico	4.2	Mexico	4.4	Brazil	4.8	India	4.3
7	Brazil	3.4	Nepal	3.7	Venezuela	3.0	Venezuela	3.5	India	3.6	Nepal	3.7
8	Venezuela	3.1	Venezuela	3.1	India	2.4	India	2.9	Venezuela	3.1	Mexico	3.5
9	India	2.6	India	2.6	Taiwan	2.3	Nigeria	2.3	Columbia	2.5	Columbia	2.9
10	Saudi Arabia	2.2	Taiwan	2.1	Nepal	2.1	Indonesia	2.1	Nigeria	2.4	Nigeria	2.7
11	Taiwan	1.9	Nigeria	2.0	Indonesia	2.1	Columbia	2.1	Indonesia	1.9	Indonesia	2.1
12	Nigeria	1.8	Saudi Arabia	1.7	Nigeria	1.9	Taiwan	2.1	Canada	1.9	Canada	2.0
13	Indonesia	1.8	Indonesia	1.7	Columbia	1.8	Nepal	1.6	Taiwan	1.6	Burma	1.9
14	Colombia	1.5	Columbia	1.6	Saudi Arabia	1.8	Canada	1.5	Pakistan	1.5	Pakistan	1.8
15	Hong Kong	1.4	Hong Kong	1.2	Canada	1.3	Saudi Arabia	1.4	Saudi Arabia	1.3	Taiwan	1.7
16	Canada	1.2	Canada	1.2	Hong Kong	1.2	Pakistan	1.2	Kenya	1.2	Venezuela	1.6
17	Pakistan	1.0	Pakistan	1.0	Sweden	1.0	Hong Kong	1.2	Nepal	1.1	Kenya	1.1
18	Turkey	0.9	Turkey	0.9	Pakistan	1.0	Kenya	1.0	El Salvador	1.1	Peru	1.1
19	Thailand	0.9	Sweden	0.9	Thailand	0.9	El Salvador	1.0	Burma	1.0	Saudi Arabia	1.0
20	Sweden	0.9	Thailand	0.9	El Salvador	0.8	Thailand	0.9	Hong Kong	1.0	Germany	1.0

Every year, the Institute of International Education (IIE) releases the top 40-leading associates' institutions hosting international students in the U.S. Washington state community colleges. This data shows current and accurate data that community colleges play a significant role in international student enrollment at the associate institution level in the U.S. These top five

community colleges appear in the top-ranking institutions report since 2004 - 2005 from the Open Doors Reports (IIE, 2023c). The “two + two model” – completion of a two-year direct transfer agreement (DTA) associate degrees in Washington State provides community college students a seamless vertical transfer to most Bachelor of Arts degrees at all four-year colleges and universities (SBCTC, 2021) with junior status that students see as a stepping stone to four-year institutions (Bennani, 2018).

In 2022/2023, Texas was the leading state with seven community colleges enrolling 8,766 students, or 16.66% of the total number of 52,622 international students enrolled in the U.S. Associate’s institutions (IIE, 2023a, 2023c, 2023e). California comes in second with 13 community colleges enrolling 8,257 students, or 15.69%. Washington is third place with five major community colleges. These five leading community colleges in Washington State are Bellevue College, Green River College, Edmonds College, Shoreline Community College, and Seattle Central College. Together, they hosted 3,431 students, or 6.52% (see Table 2).

Table 2

Ranking of Washington State Community Colleges Enrolling International Students among the Top 40 Leading Institutions, 2018 – 2023 (IIE, 2023c)

2018/19			2019/20			2020/21			2021/22			2022/23		
Rank	Institution	Total	Rank	Institution	Total	Rank	Institution	Total	Rank	Institution	Total	Rank	Institution	Total
9	Green River College	1,476	9	Green River College	1,295	11	Green River College	908	11	Green River College	749	11	Bellevue College	850
12	Seattle Central College	1,318	11	Edmonds College	1,176	12	Bellevue College	758	12	Bellevue College	699	12	Green River College	772
13	Edmonds Community College	1,178	12	Seattle Central College	1,147	15	Seattle Central College	719	13	Shoreline Community College	624	14	Edmonds College	611
17	Bellevue College	1,030	14	Bellevue College	1,007	16	Shoreline Community College	712	19	Seattle Central College	535	15	Shoreline Community College	609
19	Shoreline Community College	958	17	Shoreline Community College	928	17	Edmonds College	698	20	Edmonds College	521	16	Seattle Central College	589
34	South Seattle College	536	36	South Seattle College	466				40	Whatcom Community College	248			
40	North Seattle College	496	39	North Seattle College	440									

Statement of the problem

There is much research on vertical transfer from community college to four-year institutions with in-state resident rate-paying students (usually referred to as domestic students) with very limited research on international students (Bennani; 2018; Ghazzawi et al., 2020; Zhang, 2017). There is general consensus among scholars that the transfer rate of community college students is low (Budd & Stowers, 2015; Hagedorn et al., 2008; Wang, 2020). However, studies on international community college students show that transferring to four-universities is the major intent in enrolling in community colleges as the first step of their educational aspiration (Hagedorn & Lee, 2005). The exclusion of international community college students in the vertical transfer research or researching international community college students as a separate student population may yield a different outcome in vertical transfer rate.

Another issue is that data on international students of color are often not separated in many empirical studies of ethnic American students or in institution's statistics and publications. International students, often international students of color, are not included or lumped with resident students of color. For example, Chan et al. (2007) did not distinguish international students from mixed grouping/classification of non-white (i.e., Asian American college freshmen between 1971 and 2005), ethnic groups of students by ethnic origins, and citizenship/immigration status. There is no clear information whether international students from Asia are included or excluded in this study. There appears to be no differentiation between international students from Asia and Asian American resident students. Similarly, international students from South America and Africa are conflated in the Latinx and Black/African American students under the category underrepresented minorities (URMs) (Crisp & Nunez, 2014).

International students on F-1 visas in the U.S. are with non-immigrant status. They are an underrepresented group with different educational experiences complicated by financial issues,

visa status compliance, cultural adjustment, homesickness, poor academic advising, intercultural communication problems, faculty misunderstanding, language barriers, prejudice, and discrimination (e.g., Adewale, 2015; Anayah, 2012; Cohen, 2007, Bennani, 2018) in the U.S. educational institutions. I urge for more research attention to international students, with a focus in racial and ethnic identities besides nationality/place of origin, to understand their transfer experiences apart from domestic students.

There is much research in recent years on international students, using international students from People's Republic of China (hereafter Mainland China) as the case study, on various topics such as experience with academic advising (Zhang, 2016), engagement (Heng, 2020; Heng, 2021), stereotypes (Heng, 2018b), peer advising from currently enrolled students (Heng 2018a), satisfaction, feedback, and support (Heng, 2017), and overall college experiences (Heng, 2018c; Heng, 2019; Ma, 2020; Zhang-Wu, 2018). Are international students from Mainland China chosen due to the fast-growing number in enrollment in the past two decade? If data were traced back in late 1970s, other Asian locations have been the significant contributors to international students' enrollment in the U.S. (see Table 3). Nevertheless, other ethnic Chinese international students outside China are excluded. I urge for more research attention to ethnic Chinese international students with identity mindfulness that Chinese international students should be inclusive of any ethnic Chinese international students, from Mainland China and other places in the world.

Table 3

Enrollment number and percentage to the World Total of international students from selected locations in Asia, 1979 – 2021 (IIE, 2023c)

Year	1979/80		1984/85		1989/90		2000/01		2010/11		2020/21	
World Total	**286,340**		**342,110**		**386,850**		**547,867**		**723,277**		**914,095**	
Percentage of all locations in Asia	81,730	28.54%	143,680	42.00%	208,110	53.80%	302,058	55.13%	461,818	63.85%	645,622	70.63%
China	1,000	0.35%	10,100	2.95%	33,390	8.63%	59,939	10.94%	157,558	21.78%	317,299	34.71%
Hong Kong	9,900	3.46%	10,130	2.96%	11,230	2.90%	7,627	1.39%	8,136	1.12%	5,878	0.64%
Macau	48	0.02%	102	0.03%	140	0.04%	372	0.07%	497	0.07%	422	0.05%
Taiwan	17,560	6.13%	22,590	6.60%	30,960	8.00%	28,566	5.21%	24.818	3.43%	19,673	2.15%
Malaysia	3,660	1.28%	21,720	6.35%	14,110	3.65%	7,795	1.42%	6,735	0.93%	5,280	0.58%
Singapore	1,010	0.35%	3,750	1.10%	4,440	1.15%	4,166	0.76%	4,316	0.60%	3,558	0.39%
Subtotal percentage of selected locations in Asia	33,178	11.59%	68,392	19.99%	94,270	24.37%	108,465	19.80%	202,060	27.94%	352,110	38.52%

Asia is the dominant region of U.S. international students from places with a dominant ethnic Chinese population - China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Singapore. In 2020/2021, there are 352,110 (38.52%) international students from these six places of origin as illustrated in Table 3. Researching and understanding Chinese international students with a nationality-focused background ignores the racial, historical and transnational context of many ethnic Chinese living outside Mainland China for over hundreds of years. They are generally not citizens of Mainland China, but they are descents from ancient China. When we look at the other top places of origins besides China in Table 3, Hong Kong's population in the 2021 population census, Chinese comprises 91.6% of the total population 7.413 million (Census and Statistics Department, 2021, p. 43). At the end of 2021, Taiwan's largest ethnic group is Han Chinese, which is 96.42% of the population 23.21 million (Executive Yuan, 2022; National Statistics, 2022). In other Asian countries, according to the U.S. 2020 Census, of the ethnic composition of

Singapore's 5.69 million population, Chinese is the largest ethnic group with 74.3% in residents and 75.9% in citizens respectively (SingStat, 2021, p. 3 and p. 7). Chinese is the second largest ethnic group in Malaysia in the 2020 census (23.2%) that is over 7.5 million (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020).

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to identify and understand the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, place of origin, and non-immigrant status of ethnic Chinese international community college students in Washington State. This study will look at the challenges that influence ethnic Chinese international community college students in their vertical transfer experiences and examine how the intertwined identities of race, ethnicity, place of origin, academic achievement, and non-immigrant status impact their educational experiences in the U.S. There is much research in recent years on various topics on Chinese international students from Mainland China, but other ethnic Chinese are unstudied. In my proposed research, I document the under focused transfer experiences from the unstudied ethnic Chinese international community college students. The research question that I am interested in learning about is, "What are the transfer experiences of ethnic Chinese community college international students from different places of origin?"

Significance and context

Since 2016, I have been an international student advisor at a community college in Washington State. There is professional significance to my daily best practice in academic and immigration advising, to my institution and other community colleges, and to the international education field. More specifically, this research brings the inclusiveness of ethnic Chinese international students outside Mainland China to clarifies and redefines the term "Chinese

international students" with the ethnic/racial lens, not confined by nationality. This study also studies specific support pertinent, or missing, to the international students in the community colleges. This study acknowledges and differentiates the vertical transfer experiences - processes, challenges, and outcomes - of ethnic Chinese international community college students from different places of origin.

Positionality

This proposed research on the transfer experience of ethnic Chinese international students has a strong connection to my lived experience. I was an international student in Canada, which has a similar education system to America in the 1990s. I transferred from a community college in Washington State to a four-year state-funded university in the same state after completion of a transfer associate degree under the direct transfer agreement. I am an international student advisor and adjunct faculty teaching international students first-year seminar courses at a major community college in Washington State.

I am a 1.5-generation naturalized Chinese American female from Hong Kong. I speak Cantonese and Mandarin, the two most spoken dialects in Chinese. I have lived in several places in Asia with a dominant ethnic Chinese population: Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore. I studied in Vancouver, BC, Canada as an international student before migrating to the U.S. at the age of 20. Since I moved to the U.S., answering the question "Who am I?" is problematic. The acceptance or rejection of being a Chinese American identification since young adulthood is more than positioning myself as an "Asian" in the racial category in the U.S. Census. It is also a political identity and racial classification. I have trouble including and excluding myself when I attempt to explain I was born in Hong Kong and I am Chinese by race, but not a citizen from Mainland China. Positioning myself as "Chinese" among different ethnic Chinese from different

nationalities and place of origin in the U.S. is political, beyond racial categorization. So, I used to identify myself as “just a live human being on the planet Earth" as I deemphasized my identities in ethnicity, race, place of origin, culture, multilingualism, gender, age, and religion. I was scared to explain to people who did not understand the word “Chinese” in English has multiple meanings as race and as a nationality. I do not want to emphasize the sensitive time that my family decided to leave Hong Kong in the 90s before the Handover in 1997, largely due to political reason.

I went to Langara College (LC) and Simon Fraser University (SFU) in Canada as an international student before completing secondary school under the Cambridge Advanced Levels system (A-Level Exams) in Hong Kong when my parents prepared the immigration application to the U.S. My college advising experience with international student advisors in Canada was unbearable to recall in both institutions. If I struggled in a class with assignments, I knew where to go for help such as writing center or math lab. So, when I struggled in academic and transfer planning, I expected the advisors would help me to identify different options. I could make an informed decision after assessing different options. The international student advisors showed very little interest and professionalism in guiding me to navigate the college system in Canada and explore the choice of majors and programs in social sciences. They did not listen to me. Indeed, the lack of support from transfer advising was the main push that I started disengaging in classes and withdrawing from social interactions.

There was also a lack of peer support as everyone (local Canadian or international students) that I knew from the first-year English composition or college-level mathematics classes was interested in either business or STEM majors. The majority of them aspired to transfer to University of British Columbia (UBC) or University of Toronto (UT), the two most

prestigious large-size public universities in Canada. I did not engage much with these classmates after class because my major is neither business nor STEM. I was not interested in transferring to UBC, as at the time, I preferred a mid-size university with smaller class size. My grades at LC were decent and I managed to transfer to SFU as a Geography major that I aspired to. In my two semesters at SFU, I was always one of the very few, if not the only, Asian-looking students in any Geography class. The local Canadian students, with a majority of white, were surprised when I introduced myself as an international student from Hong Kong and a geography major. I still remember in the linguistic class; a white classmate politely asked me if I felt being misplaced as there was no other student who looked like me in the course. At that time, I was not aware of the term "people/student of color"! It was the first time I mentally and physically felt I did not belong there, and people do not welcome me as one of them. I started thinking about the challenges I need to surmount with my multiple identities as an international student who is an ethnic Chinese female from Hong Kong, and study in a major that is not popular among Asians Canadians or international student from Asia.

Looking retrospectively, no one saw my struggle instead of labeling/stereotyping me as an international student/Asian with non-native English proficiency and seemingly doomed to failure as my grades, especially in mathematics and natural sciences, were unimpressive. I struggled with mathematics and natural science courses even when I was in secondary school in Hong Kong. This is so different from what I learned about Canada's cultural mosaic that recognizes and honors differences versus the American melting pot in the books that I read before I decided to study in Canada while waiting for the green card from the U.S. Nevertheless, feeling a lack of support from my advisors, disconnection with other international students as we had different transfer intentions, and not knowing many local students in both institutions, two

weeks before the second semester ended, I withdrew from SFU and flew back to Hong Kong to prepare for the green card interview with my family.

I resumed my studies at a community college in Washington State a month later as a permanent resident of the U.S. During my conversations with faculty members and other students, I did not mention I was a new immigrant. Some people assumed I was an international student as well. I did not bother to clarify because I felt it is hopeless to engage in this kind of conversation. That was the time I started identifying myself as “just a live human being on the planet Earth". I met great academic advisors since the first day of the quarter as well as instructors from the Geography and Communication Studies departments. I learned that international students here have designated advisors, and they could also meet other academic advisors for transfer planning. This was not the same experience I had in Canada where I did not have much opportunity to talk to the instructors after class or during office hours. Hence, I am motivated to follow my calling of academic interest and map out the transfer plan for undergraduate and graduate studies in economic geography. Because of the different advising experiences in Canada and the U.S., I have a passion for developing my career related to student affairs in a community college environment where I transformed and moved upward transferring to University of Washington’s Geography Department. My first full-time job after college graduation was with the admissions and registration office at a community college. Later, I was the undergraduate advisor position for three years during my graduate study at the University of Washington Department of Geography. After returning from the National University of Singapore as a research associate, I taught two human geography courses each quarter for three years at Green River College (GRC). Besides serving as an adjunct faculty at GRC, I was a credential evaluator at Bellevue College (BC) before moving to international education. In my

current position as an international student advisor, my major duty is assisting international students on the F-1 visa to complete the first two years of undergraduate study in a community college with the transfer intent to a four-year university. I provide academic and immigration advising to international students. I am also a female adjunct faculty of color. I teach a first-year-seminar course to international students for a smoother transition to a new country, a new college, and a new studying and living environment that could be both exciting and challenging.

I work directly with students in higher education in different two- and four-year institutions in the U.S. in different capacities. I advise. I teach. I evaluate students' credentials for graduation requirements. My lived experience as an international student in Canada and an immigrant/naturalized Chinese American from Hong Kong shape my positionality and analytic lens in understanding different ethnic Chinese international students' vertical transfer experience.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical lens for this study relied on AsianCrit (Museus, 2013) and Racial Transfer Gap (Crisp & Nunez, 2014). To my knowledge, these frameworks have not been applied previously in the research on successful vertical transfer of international community college students and will be further explained.

Critical Race Theory/Asian Critical Theory (AsianCrit)

Critical Race Theory (CRT), originally constructed as a legal framework, explains how dominant structures maintain whiteness, racial inequalities, and systemic oppression in different sociopolitical contexts (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Zamudio et al., 2011). CRT is used in higher education research "to identify, analyze, and transform those cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom" (Delgado &

Yosso, 2002, p. 25). CRT challenges "colorblind racism and the myth of meritocracy" (Poon et al., 2016) that aligns the need to study different racial groups with details with and dismantle the stereotyping on international students academically, socially and culturally. CRT recognizes intersectionality in other oppressive systems such as classism and sexism that target systematically disadvantageous and marginalized non-dominant groups such as women of color, besides racism as the focus (Poon et al., 2016).

AsianCrit (Museus 2013), as a theoretical branch extending from CRT, examines how racism affects the daily lives of Asian Americans in the U.S. and validates the diverse and differential experiences of Asians as a racialized group – based on skin color, place of origin, race, ethnicity, religion, language, culture, etc. – as being different or inferior to the dominant White. AsianCrit provides the theoretical framework and methodological tool (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002) to examine Asian students in higher education in the U.S. Museus (2013) developed a framework that has seven interconnected tenets and several of them are relevant to international students in higher education, each is discussed below.

Asianization refers to Asians who are racialized in the white-black dichotomy and hence the perpetual foreigners – a form a systematic racism against Asian Americans, regardless of the duration living in the U.S. or whether they were born in the U.S. The model minority myth masquerades nativistic forms of racism that Asian Americans struggle with and validates hegemonic ideologies of color-evasiveness and meritocracy. Asianization specifically has an impact on international students from Asia and they are also racialized with Asian Americans. Asian Americans are treated as a monolithic pan-ethnic group (Museus, 2013), regardless of their immigration/citizenship status in the U.S. Asian American students and international students from Asia do not have the same struggles in higher education as they have different

(restricted) accessibility and eligibility to various resources and support. One obvious example is that F-1 visa-holding international students are not eligible for most federal- and state-funded financial assistance. Also, scholarships for international students in public institutions are minimal, and they are further subject to additional admissions barriers and requirements such as proof of English proficiency regardless of completion of the transfer associate degree. From my current position as an international student advisor, most international students are in the middle- or upper-class in their home countries, and most come from the contexts where they were among the majority racial group. They now become the minority and subordinate in the U.S. What they see as their Asian American brothers' and sisters' experiences in the U.S. (Kolano, 2016) in terms of intersectionality, race, ethnicity, nationality, and language may not be what they ever expect to encounter when studying in the U.S. If Asian/Chinese-heritage American students' narratives are not heard, Asian international students outside are further marginalized.

Transnational contexts value the importance of situating transnational contexts when studying the impacts of racism on Asian Americans. The lives of Asians were and are shaped by globalization of people and capital. The historical, political, and socio-economic context of ethnic Chinese living outside China over hundreds of years got downplayed when researching international students with Chinese ethnicity. Chinese, in English, has two meanings. It can be referred to as an ethnic group and as a citizenship.

Intersectionality discusses other forms of subordinations beyond class and gender, such as race, ethnicity, nationality, linguistic/language use, sexual orientation, ableism, etc. that shape the lived experiences of Asian Americans. Classifying ethnic Chinese international students as a single racial group ignores the diverse and complex identities of individuals with diverse experiences and backgrounds. People from different places of origin classes generally experience

racism differently. There are international students whose parents/grandparents are (US) college-educated while some are first-generation college students. Male, female, and non-binary people also experience sexism – stereotyping on the basis of biological sex or gendered realities - differently. Race is a social construct (Du Bois, 1897) that establishes a hierarchy to treat people differently not based on biological inheritance but on social power dynamics and societal interpretations of physical characteristics. Racial differences are created, perpetuated, and reinforced by society to explain social inequalities. According to Yu (2006), “Asians are arguably the least homogeneous of all racial groups and Asian Americans possess an unusually wide range of social characteristics marked by diverse ethnic, social class, and immigrant experiences" (p. 327). The geopolitical identity relates to racial and ethnic identities as an inaccurate homogeneous combined identity. The word “Chinese” means more than nationality. It is also a racialized and ethnic identity. Chinese international students are those from Mainland China, and ethnic Chinese international students include those from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macau. It also includes citizens with Chinese heritage from Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, and many more countries. Also, U.S.-born, naturalized citizens, recent immigrants, and foreign nationals from Asia on F-1 visas experience racism and discrimination differently. But all are expected to live up to the racialization as perpetual foreigners and as a model minority who have better academic performance in college or with advanced education attainment.

Story, Theory and Praxis is the idea that counter stories, theories and practices are intertwined when analyzing Asian Americans’ racialized experiences. Attention to voices of marginalized people of color by listening to how their lived experiences and knowledge emerged from them, to disrupt the dominant narratives about race, racism, and racial progress. There are

more empirical studies on international students from China in recent years urging to listen to their heterogeneous experiences in the U.S. higher education (Heng, 2017; Heng, 2021), but the exclusion of other international students from places with substantial ethnic Chinese population makes the study on Chinese international students incomplete.

AsianCrit (Museus 2013) lends a theoretical framework and methodological tool to understand international students from Asia and how they live and experience racism differently from Asian Americans who are citizens or permanent residents. Nevertheless, it does not focus on the experiences in the U.S. higher education institutions.

Racial Transfer Gap

Crips and Nunez (2014) studied the racial transfer gap of African American and Latinx students – who are categorized as historically underrepresented minorities (URMs). They identify "student and contextual variables influencing vertical transfer that are both similar and different among the Whites and underrepresented minorities (URMs)" (p. 292). Their conceptual model hypothesizes "a combination of socio-demographic, precollege, environmental pull factors, educational expectations, and college experiences" (p. 299) to predict the transfer success of White and URM students with institutional factors that "influence individual students' transfer outcomes" (p. 299). Racial Transfer Gap compares White and African American and Latinx students based on students' and intuitional characteristics. Nevertheless, modification is needed to study and compare international students with the non-immigrant status and F-1 visa requirements and benefits, in different racial groups rather than by nationality.

Theorizing Asian international students' experiences

Theorizing the experiences of Asians with non-immigrant status in America is even more challenging. This theoretical framework adopted from AsianCrit (Museus, 2013) and Racial Transfer Gap (Crips & Nunez, 2014) with additional variables pertinent to international students in the U.S. on F-1 visa. Combining these frameworks provides a critical lens to identify specific challenges that ethnic Chinese community college international students tend to confront during the transfer process and explain how they surmount the obstacles and analyze the outcomes for international education practitioners to learn from each other by listening to their individual narrative experience.

To answer the research question "What are the transfer experiences of ethnic Chinese community college international students from different places of origin?", I modified the variables in Racial Transfer Gap conceptual model, serving as the base of interview questions and prompts of this study. This theoretical framework aims to understand the vertical transfer experiences - processes, challenges, and outcomes - of ethnic Chinese international students in community college from different places of origin. There are 23 variables in the first section that are student centric, organized in five major categories: academic and social environment, precollege factors, outside classroom factors, educational expectation and college experiences and support (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Student-level Variables

Academic and Social Environment	Precollege Factors	Outside Classroom Factors	Educational Expectation	College Experiences and Support
Gender	English Proficiency by Standardized Exam Prior To Admission	On-campus Work	Initial Choice of Major/Pathway	Advising Meetings
First-generation Status	Previous Academic Pathway in High School	Internship (CPT) Experience	Choice of Degree	First-Year GPA
Place of Origin, Home Country, Nationality	Mathematics Placement	Volunteering Experience	Transfer Intention	Class Modality (In-person, Hybrid, and Online)
Expectation from Parents	College-level Credits earned	Participation in Student's Clubs and Activitites	Previous Degree Earned	Access to Other Campus Resources
Native Language(s)	Delayed Enrollment	Participation in College's Sports Team		Access to Off-Campus Resources
		Housing Options (On- and Off-Campus)		

Note. Modified from "Understanding the Racial Transfer Gap: Modeling Underrepresented Minority and Nonminority Students' Pathways from Two- to Four-Year Institutions," by Crips & Nunez, 2014, p. 300.

Figure 1 shows different factors of individual international community college students that are said to impact their transfer from the community college upon completion of an associate degree. The academic and social environment variables: gender, first-generation status, place of origin, influence from parents/sponsors and peers, and multilingualism, are evaluated and how they impact students' initial choice of major and choice of associate degree. College readiness variables are also studied before they start their first term in the U.S. to answer questions such as "Is higher English and Math proficiency or college credits by examinations (such as Advanced

Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), or Cambridge International Advanced Level Exam (A-level), or Running Start) helping students to stay on track for degree completion and transfer? What about those who made admissions with minimum English proficiency requirements at the time of application?".

Impacts from student life factors (or outside classroom factors) are also examined on students' progress besides academic performance. It closely analyzes whether internship, volunteering, leadership experience, and campus activity participation bring a positive impact to their transfer application. Also, major readiness (how early international students should finalize the choice of major or a general pathway, when to determine the number of required courses and prerequisites to be fulfilled prior to transfer application) is also studied. Lastly, the depth and frequency of interaction with their designated international student advisors, as well as counselors, pathway advisors, career center specialists, faculty members, and peers for support also plays a significant role in paving their successful transfer.

At the institution-level, there are nine variables organized in two major categories: Socio-demographic and institutional support (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Institutional-level Variables

Socio-Demographic Variables	Institutional Support Variables
% of F-1 Visa Students to Total Enrollment	New Student Orientation
% of Faculty of Color	First-quarter Support Course
% of Full-Time to Adjunct Faculty	Designated Advisors and Support Staff to International Students
% of Domestic Students Self-identified as Chinese	Mandatory Advising Meetings
% of Female Students	Workshops Concerning International Student Topics
	On-campus Support Services
	Guided Pathway

Note. Modified from "Understanding the Racial Transfer Gap: Modeling Underrepresented Minority and Nonminority Students' Pathways from Two- to Four-Year Institutions," by Crips & Nunez, 2014, p. 301.

Figure 2 shows the campus racial climate and specific support to international students, in both community college and four-year institutions. What support do the institutions offer to students of color, whether domestic or international students? What are the different experiences that ethnic Chinese international students encounter compared to Chinese American students in and outside the classroom? Then I further examine the specific additional support that institutions provide to international students that are not implemented for resident students such as F-1 student workshops.

The Racial Transfer Gap model does not research Asian American or Native American students, as it compares White in relation to Black and Latinx students (p. 292). In contrast, AsianCrit (Museus, 2013) validates the diverse experience of Asian American students in the

U.S. colleges. Although AsianCrit does not place the same level of focus on Asian students in America who are in non-immigrant status, several of the tenets are still relevant to international students from Asia. Combining AsianCrit and Racial Transfer Gap frameworks give us a new lens to see how ethnic Chinese international students of different national, racial, academic, and immigration status identities impact the experience of their own vertical transfer journey from community colleges to four-year institutions.

As the enrollment of international community college students continues to thrive, it is critical to understand their overall transfer experiences in order to provide the best support to this unique and diverse student population. International community college students confront different challenges from in-state resident rate fee-paying students academically, socially and culturally. Their vertical transfer experiences have been understudied. This study is to design a holistic practice and to help the staff, administrators, and faculty in community colleges to understand these students' challenges and strengths, and to provide the support needed in the transfer processes within the intuition's resources. Chapter two, the literature review, highlights empirical and theoretical studies on international students' study experiences, vertical transfer experiences of international community college students, and the multiple identities of international students in the U.S. Chapter three outlies the research design and methodology for this study. Chapter four discusses the findings and Chapter five discusses the recommendations for practice.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In the literature review that follows, I establish a shared baseline for readers by framing and contextualizing major themes which run throughout the work that international students transfer experience. (1) Theoretical engagement in research on international students, (2) experience of international students in the U.S., and (3) Multiple identities of international students in the U.S.

Theoretical engagement in research on international students

Although they are an increasing presence in community colleges, the international student population has remained largely unstudied by educational researchers. Heng (2020) addressed the lack of theoretical engagement and how general diversity research hampered our understanding of how international students experience higher education in the U.S. Using the experience of international students from China as an analytic case, Heng conducted a literature review of 43 qualitative research articles from 16 higher education journals to examine the role theory plays in relation to research designs, focuses and findings, from a qualitative, interpretative, and pluralist stance. She defined theory, theoretical framework, paradigm, and the role of theory in research. She then moved on to discussion on empirical research and concluded with an explanation why adopting international students from China as an analytical case.

Heng used Denzin & Lincoln's (2005) argument that theoretical perspectives drive research goals, questions, methods, and findings, and are linked to a researcher's paradigm, which is in turn shaped by his or her personal history, socio-cultural environment, and any other external influences. Tight (2004) identified, out of 406 articles in 2000, 58% were atheoretical, 16% showed some theory engagement, and 26% were explicit in theory engagement. Similar result found in Abdullah et al. (2014). If theories are engaged, they are clustered around acculturation and sociocultural perspectives whereas identity and internationalization and quality

are less used. Heng's findings are around three main categories: frequency and research design, theoretical engagement, and theory and research focus (often primarily on problems or challenges with limited explanations). There is a shift from atheoretical to a growing awareness on theoretical engagement from Tight (2004) and Abdullah et al. (2014). Heng urges an increase, diversity and generate theories on research on (Chinese) international students with cross-institutional and cross-disciplinary collaborations.

Experiences of international community college students

Socio-cultural experiences of international community college students of color

International students are often positioned by institutions as linguistically, culturally, and academically deficient in U.S. colleges (Fuentes, 2012; Trazo & Kim, 2019). The deficit view on international students as one single student group ignores and undervalues the diverse and complex identities of individuals in race, ethnicity, gender, age, cultures, class, religion, nationality, and geopolitical considerations. Compared to the non-white U.S.-born or naturalized citizen or immigrants with permanent residency, international students of color receive generally much less research attention.

There are fundamental differences between international students and American students (U.S.-born, naturalized citizen or immigrant with permanent residency). Zhang-Wu (2018) aims to explain the international students' experiences in the higher education institutes (HEIs) in the U.S. with detailed examples. Although there is a growing number of research on Chinese international students from Mainland China as this is the largest group (Heng, 2017, 2020, 2021; Zhang-Wu, 2018) with various research focus in academic, and/or social-cultural barriers. The ethnic Chinese and/or Chinese-speaking international students from other popular Asian locations such as Hong Kong, Indonesia Macau, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, and Thailand are

not usually studied. The exclusion of these ethnic Chinese international students in the research makes comparison with Chinese American students incomplete. Yeo et al. (2019) studied how domestic students generally perceive Asian international students by addressing biases, prejudices, and racial microaggressions (RMAs) perpetrated against internationals through Asian American students' voices. International students of color often report experiences of racial bias and discrimination due to distinct phenotypical characteristics, English accents, nationality, international student status, and religion and international students from Western and English-speaking countries report minimal to no discrimination.

The EYES theory by Yeo, McKee and Trent (2018) challenged institutional indifference toward racial experiences of international students and for addressing the process of racialization and racial identity development. There are two tenets of EYES theory: 1) international students of color undergo a cataclysmic transition into race-based concepts as they attempt to integrate into predominantly White universities; and 2) the U.S. racialized campus climates and racial stereotypes rooted in U.S. historical, sociocultural, and political contexts influence the college experiences and identity development of international students of color. The EYES theory challenges deficit perspectives as a monolithic entity and global commodity. Patterns of racism and RMAs that American students of color endure are similar to international students of color (p. 42). Yeo et al. (2019) coded any reference regarding international students to capture emergent patterns. Certain words keep repeating in students' stories including "international," "mistaken," "lumped," "go back," China/India/Asia/country, "language," "English," and "accent". They are "being repeatedly mistaken for international students and for being Asian American". There are seven themes that emerged. Four themes emerged in mistaken identification groups – 1) xenophobia; 2) mockery of English accents/Asian languages and

ascription of intelligence; 3) overt, direct, and intentional expressions; 4) being alienated in their own land. Three themes emerged in microaggression - 5) stereotypes, 6) homogenization; and 7) monolithic categorization of Asian American and Asian international students. The counter-stories of Asian American students demonstrated that Asian international students are racialized by skin color, English language proficiency, and nationality. The racialized campus climates and the U.S. racial framing influence Asian international students' college experience and create a gaze that renders students as one monolithic student population group.

Vertical /linear upward transfer of international community college students

Wang (2020) studied STEM transfer pathways of community college students and identified four trajectories: linear upward, detoured, deferred, and taking a break. This model provides a foundation to understand transfer pathways, not only limited to STEM majors, of community college students.

There is much research on vertical transfer from community college to four-year institutions (Dougherty, 1992; Hagedorn, Cypers & Lester, 2008; Shapiro et al. 2013, Wang, Chuang & Mccready, 2017). Despite the wealth of research on the factors influencing educational success and challenges of vertical transfer, international students are largely unstudied or not as a specific population group. The data from international students are either aggregated to the ethnic groups (such as Asian or Hispanic) or in further detailed category based on origin of ancestry such as Chinese Americans, or Japanese Americans, and so on; or they were not included in the research. There is general scholarly consensus that the transfer rate of community college students is low (Budd & Stowers, 2015; Hagedorn, Cypers & Lester, 2008, Wang, 2020).

There are few studies with dedicated research attention to the vertical transfer experiences of community college international students. Ghazzawi et al. (2020) study the viability of community college as a pathway to bachelor's degree attainment for international students. The researchers used hierarchical logistic regression of longitudinal transcript data of 591 F-1 visa international students from 76 countries for six academic years (2010 – 2016) from a large community college district with multiple campus in Texas to compare college experiences and transfer outcomes based on three regions of origin (Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean). However, the regional level of data lacked specificity for individual countries. It is too broad and does not stipulate details of each country of origin. Moreover, the study of transcript did not capture the change of major/change of program during the six years. Zhang (2016) assesses the demographic backgrounds, academic interests and performance of international community college transfer students in Taxes and Bennani (2018) discussed the challenges and contributors to the successful transfer of international students from community colleges in California. There is no further study on the transfer rate of international community college students within the same state and out-of-state institutions.

Multiple identities of ethnic Chinese international students in the U.S.

There is more research on Asian Americans students in the U.S. higher education institutions (Kolano, 2016; Iftikar & Museus, 2018, Liu, 2009; Ma, 2020, Museus, 2013, Yu, 2006) than on Asian international students in America who do not have immigrant status (Ma & Garcia-Murillo eds., 2018; Trazo and Kim, 2019). Race-related research about community college to university transfer such as racial transfer gap studies underrepresented minority (URM) students (Crisp & Nunez, 2014). Nevertheless, the international student population, often international students of color, is conflated with resident students of color. Another example is

Chang et al. (2007) did not distinguish international students from mixed grouping and classification of “non-white” ethnic groups of students, Asian American students specifically in this study, by ethnic origins and citizenship/immigration status. There is no known disaggregated data on Asian international students by place of origin or race.

Ethnic Chinese international students in the U.S. have multiple sociocultural identities. National identity is an individual's sense of collective identity based on their membership in a county (Chu & Lin, 2001). Racial identity is people’s sense of collective identity based on their membership in a racial group, such as Asian Americans (Helms, 1995). Ethnic identity is one’s sense of collective identity based on perceived commonalities such as culture, ancestry, and language, such as Korean American (Phinney, 1993). Also, international students have different academic identities based on the programs that they started and currently enrolled. International students are often seen as linguistically, culturally, and academically deficient in U.S. colleges (Fuentes, 2012; Trazo & Kim, 2019), and community of colors are seen as culturally poor and deficient inspires deficit thinking about students of color and Yosso (2015) characterizes deficit thinking as “one of the most prevalent forms of contemporary racism in U.S. schools” (p. 75). The deficit and oversimplified view on international students of colors as a homogenous student group ignores and undervalues the diverse and multiple identities of individuals in race, ethnicity, gender, age, cultures, class, religion, nationality and place of origin. Compared to students of color who are U.S.-born or naturalized citizens or with immigrant status, international students of color receive limited research attention.

Much research on international students is through the nationality lens. Nationality and place of origin is the main marker/label to categorize the international student populations, besides type of institution and education level of program enrolled. Race and ethnicity are not

further subcategorized than commonly seen in NAFSA and IIE publications that most researchers in the international education field heavily rely on for secondary quantitative data.

There are much recent empirical research and case studies in international students focusing on international students from Mainland China from enrollment management topics such as recruitment, marketing, and relationship with agents (Hagedorn & Zhang, 2011; Zhang and Hagedorn, 2014) to student-centric topics such as experience with academic advising (Zhang, 2016), engagement (Heng, 2020; Heng, 2021), stereotypes (Heng, 2018b), peer advising from currently enrolled students (Heng 2018a), satisfaction, feedback and support (Heng, 2017), and overall college experiences (Heng, 2018c; Heng, 2019, Ma, 2020; Zhang-Wu, 2018). For example, Zhang-Wu (2018) identified three research focuses on international students from China: 1) language barriers, 2) acculturation, and 3) intercultural communication from over 170 peer-reviewed journal articles on their experiences in higher education institutes in the U.S. Students from China in the four-year institutions were reviewed. However, this study excludes international students from Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and many Southeast Asian countries with noticeable ethnic Chinese population and ignores different educational experiences such as previously attending US high school or English as a second language (ESL) school or community college.

The current research focusing on international students from Mainland China portrays an oversimplified picture as a monolithic ethnic group that ignores the complex historical, political and racial context of ethnic Chinese in other Asian locations. The homogenous view of Chinese as citizens from Mainland China reinforces the stereotype on nationality, race and ethnicity that makes the study on ethnic Chinese international students incomplete.

Race is a social construct in the U.S.; populations labeled as whites, blacks, Asians, Latinx/Hispanic, and Native Americans are the five major categories (Hollinger, 2006, as cited in Okura, 2021, p. 150). There are many models on racial and ethnic identity such as Helm's (1995) People-of-color identity model; Kim's (2012) Asian American racial identity development theory, and Phinney's (1993) ethnic identity model. All these models focus on people of color with the U.S. citizenship. U.S.-born and U.S.-raised people are said to have different experiences from non-U.S. raised, with various immigrant/non-immigrant status. Okura (2021) brings up the view that "Chinese (from China) did not – and to this day generally does not - see themselves as belonging to the same "race" as other nationalities in Asia such as the Japanese, Korean, or Vietnamese" (p. 150). Yu (2022) discusses the racial learning of international students from mainland China in the U.S.; for example, one of her interviewees expressed that she "did not fully grasp what it means to be Asian or Chinese in the US contest" (p. 11).

There is very limited research on the multiple identities of international students. Wang et al. (2020) discussed the combined multiple identities of Taiwanese international students' experience of race, ethnicity and nationality in the U.S. There are four domains on how Taiwanese internationals understand their race, ethnicity and nationality – 1) self-identification, 2) perceived salience of Taiwanese identity, 3) Issues related to China/Chinese and 4) perceived influence on interpersonal relationships. They acknowledge the difference from the U.S.-born people of color in the development of racial and ethnic identities of international students.

Many international students of color encounter racism and other race-based discrimination after they start studying in the U.S. My proposed study provides an inclusive space to learn the experiences of an ethnic group in the U.S., without permanent status staying in the U.S., with mindfulness beyond nationality.

Chapter 3: Research Design

Research question

The purpose of this study is to seek a more robust understanding of the vertical transfer experiences from international community college students in a particular ethic group with various nationalities by asking the question, “What are the transfer experiences of ethnic Chinese community college international students from different places of origin?” There is research on transfer trajectories of community college students, *or* students of color, *or* international students, separately. I research the transfer experiences of international community college students of color, who are in non-immigrant visa status, combining three identities together.

Noted in Chapter 2, mainland China is the largest source of international students in the U.S. in both undergraduate and graduate programs. There is much research on different topics on Mainland Chinese international students. However, ethnic Chinese international students from Hong Kong; or from places like Taiwan, Singapore, and Malaysia, as well as overseas Chinese from Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam, are not included or mentioned or not being defined clearly who are the “Chinese international students”. They are also Chinese by ethnicity but with different nationality and political identity. I want to study these students that are not included in the current research of “Chinese international students”. I propose researching international students with an ethnic and racial lens from the single focus on nationality.

Research design

My research design draws from the theoretical lens for this study relied on AsianCrit (Museus, 2013) and racial transfer gap (Crisp & Nunez, 2014). I focus on relationality as Patel (2015) and Gerlach (2018) emphasized. The people in the community I research are not my subjects. People should never be considered as "subjects" who is to be “studied” naturally. They

should never be categorized, grouped, classified, or even extracted. The participants are real people with pride, culture, heritage, history, wisdom, philosophical orientations, and knowledge. I engage in research with them, listen to their stories, acquire new knowledge, and borrow wisdom from them. The second focus is "no othering" by making all efforts to reject the colonial scientific-research methodologies that emphasize objectivity, the third-person distant observation and quantitative "fact-based" data. Enacting decolonizing methodologies from within the community, such as counter-storytelling from Critical Race Theory (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) to bring the unheard voices of the people that I am researching, rather than my voice, my view, and my power as the researcher.

Research methods

I recruited the study's participants from the following channels: 1) professional connection through The Association of Washington International Student Affairs (AWISA) asking international student advisors to forward my email interview invitations; 2) email invitations to respective international education unit in all four-year institutions in Washington State that oversees international students' enrollment and advising to recruit qualified participants for interviews; 3) connection with recent transfer students from the community college that I am working there as an international student advisor; and 4) personal connection for referral from family and friends from my church.

Semi-structured open-ended reflexive interview questions are developed from AsianCrit (Museus, 2013) and variables modified from Racial Transfer Gap (Crisp & Nunez, 2014). Participants had freedom to expound on the areas that they choose and elaborate on their own interests. I identified patterns of issues, activities, and experiences from the interviews.

Content analysis, a research method that provides a systematic and objective means to make valid inferences from verbal, visual, or written data in order to describe and quantify specific phenomenon (Downe-Wambolt, 1992), is adopted to analyze the narrative experiences from participants took place in one-on-one settings. A few opening questions included "When did you start researching the universities?", "How did you choose the universities for transfer application?", "Can you tell me the biggest challenge in your transfer application?", "Did you get any help to plan your transfer, from whom?", "What made you decide to transfer to (name of the university that participant currently attending)?" to answer the research question "What is the transfer experience as a community college ethnic Chinese international student?". The main goal of this proposed research is to compare and analyze the transfer experience of ethnic Chinese community college international students from different places of origin outside Mainland China.

Justification

The method chosen to carry out this study was one-on-one interviews on Zoom. I borrow Gerlach (2018) on grounding research in relationships, engaging in reflexivity as a relational process, and generating contextualized knowledge. I aim to create mutually respectful relationships and that "relational foundation provides a safe space to initiate a dialogue". I am mindful of my own positionality and critical reflexivity to knowledge construction. My positionality and social identity are epistemologically and methodologically significant (Rix et al., 2018). My study emphasizes the importance that I (the researcher) learn *from* participants' lived experiences rather than study *about* them from quantitative enrollment data such as English and Mathematics test scores, or class grades, or cumulative GPA.

Interview design

Participants

A total of 13 students from six universities participated in this study (see Table 4). They are international students who self-identify and self-report as "Chinese" in Race/Ethnicity at a SEVP-certified four-year university in Washington State. They are currently on F-1 visa with the Form I-20 "Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status – For Academic and Language Students" issued by their respective four-year institution. All participants previously attended community colleges in Washington State before the transfer. All participants met all of the following criteria:

- Age 18 or older at the time of interview
- Self-identify as "Chinese" in respective institution's student enrollment management database with nationality other than People's Republic of China in the Form I-20
- Previously attended a community college and transferred their SEVIS record directly from the community college to a SEVIS-certified four-year institution (public or private) in Washington State, in an undergraduate or graduate program
- Currently enrolled in a SEVP-certified four-year university in Washington State at the time of interview in an undergraduate or graduate program as listed in the Form I-20
- Currently in active F-1 visa status

Table 4

Profile of Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Nationality	Place of Birth	Before F-1 visa	Before studying at Community College in Washington	Transfer University	Major
Aidan	Male	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	Home Country	Aided high school in home country with DSE curriculum	State University D	STEM
Connor	Male	Indonesia	Singapore	Home Country	International high school in home country with IB curriculum	State University B	STEM
Emma	Female	Belize	Belize	Home Country	International high school in home country	State University B	STEM
Hailey	Female	Indonesia	Indonesia	Home Country	Private high school in home country	State University B	Business
Isabella	Female	Taiwan	Taiwan	B1/B2 Visa	Public high school and public university in home country	State University C	STEM (Graduate)
Jacob	Male	Canada	Canada	H4 Visa	US public high school with AP curriculum	State University A	STEM
Kaitlyn	Female	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	Home Country	Aided high school in home country with DSE curriculum	State University B	STEM
Madison	Female	Canada	Taiwan	E1/E2 Visa	US public high school with Running Start in community college	State University B	STEM
Nicholas	Male	Taiwan	Taiwan	E1/E2 Visa	US public high school with AP curriculum	Private University E	STEM
Olivia	Female	Macau	Macau	Home Country	US private high school with IB curriculum	State University B	Humanities / Social Sciences
Ryan	Male	Malaysia	Malaysia	Home Country	Private high school in home country with IGCSE curriculum	Private University E	Humanities / Social Sciences
Tyler	Male	Taiwan	Taiwan	Home Country	Public high school in home country	Private University F	Business
Zachary	Male	Singapore	Singapore	Home Country	Public high school (Junior College) with GCE Advanced Levels curriculum	State University B	STEM

Research setting

Online meetings on Zoom were used to conduct all interviews with participants' preference. All 13 interviews in this research project occurred between June 21 and September 10, 2023. All participants conducted the meetings in English of their choice, and hence, there were no Cantonese or Mandarin translation.

Ethical consideration

I sent my research statement, the purpose of the study, study procedures, risks and benefits of the study, and confidentiality of the research information to each participant prior to the interview to ensure informed consent. Participants also provided verbal consent before the interview.

I asked each participant whether they wanted to create a fictitious name for themselves, or I assigned one for them from the "Popular Names by States" from the Social Security Administration in Washington in 2003 prior to the Zoom meeting – the year that most participants were born. All private names of persons or colleges or agents were coded with pseudonyms and remain anonymous.

Data collection

All Zoom interviews were recorded with participant consent. Each interview was initially transcribed by Zoom. Then I listened to the recording to refine the transcript for accuracy. The final written transcripts are saved in Microsoft Word and then converted to PDF with password protection. The Microsoft Word version was deleted immediately after the PDF conversion. No transcript or Zoom recordings were retained.

Data analysis

As Holsti (1968) defined, content analysis is "any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying special characteristics of messages". I used Quirkos that is common in social sciences to identify the presence of concepts, words, and themes in the transcript. It is not limited to the conceptual analysis on tracking the frequency of terms mentioned during the interview such as advisor/advising, major, department, program, competitive(ness), admissions requirements, as well as what words/phrases are associated with "transfer". I reviewed the transcript and watched the Zoom recording of each participant multiple times to track significant nonverbal communication such as eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, and posture. I signaled the change of tone and change of emotion when they mentioned particular event, people, class, moments of accomplishment or challenge. I compared the non-verbal communication among the participants and identified patterns or events that are related and shared by multiple participants. I compiled a list of themes and keywords from each transcript and then consolidated to larger themes without generalization as individual's voices and experiences should not be lost.

Some participants shared their academic records with me during the interview such as program of study, grades and cumulative GPA, completed classes, English and Mathematics placement test scores upon admissions to the community college and university, number of transfer credits, graduation date and title of the degree earned, and so forth. I did not request verification of the data and honored the data they were willing to disclose.

Limitation

The number of participants of this student was small. The place of origin of participants are dominated by three geographic locations: Canada, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. All participants

studied at the community colleges located in the Puget Sound area with no participants from Eastern Washington. The majority of participants are enrolled in STEM-related disciplines regardless of place of origin or nationality.

Chapter Four – Participants' Vertical Transfer Experiences and Findings

My findings will discuss how international students from community colleges confront unique challenges and barriers when transferring to a four-year university. Equity in transfer applications to universities is a particular concern. While many universities have non-discriminatory policies, instances of biased or unfair admissions processes can occur. I present the analysis based on the narratives from 13 participants' one-on-one Zoom interviews.

Theme one: Who are they?

The complex identity of being a "Chinese"

Adapting to a new academic, social, and cultural environment in another country is a daunting challenge. International students confront cultural differences, language barriers, and difficulty in adjusting, adapting, and/or assimilating into the new education and social community. Admissions officers who do not understand complex issues of diversity and identity may unintentionally hold biases based on misunderstandings such as monotonous stereotyping of international students as a single group of the student population or stereotyping ethnic Chinese students as a single "Chinese" group that ignores different places of origin with intertwined historical and political context. Implicit biases, which are unconscious attitudes or stereotypes, may influence decision-makers during the transfer application process. This can manifest in the evaluation of recommendation letters, personal statements, or other qualitative aspects of the application. These biases can affect perceptions of international student's abilities and qualifications with different English proficiency, place of origin, and family history. Participant "Isabella" shared that

> I am an older student, and my educational goal is different from other teenagers. I just want to take the classes I need to apply for graduate schools. I always worry about my

> accent and how people judge my talent and potential based on my English-speaking skills. However, you (the researcher) told me in class that we should feel proud of ourselves as having an accent means we speak more than one language which is an asset, not a deficit. You don't know how much this meant to me when I felt no confidence in classes that I needed to speak so much more than what I did in Taiwan in Mandarin.

The deficit approach of English proficiency is one of the popular research topics in international education and international student enrollment in U.S. higher education whether in an ESL program or college-level program. Isabella is perceived as a "typical" international student with English is not her native language. She does not have much confidence in conservational English and chooses to remain quiet/invisible in the classes, although her English writing skill is assessed above college-level. However, participant "Jacob" provides a different story that is largely ignored when we research international students from English-speaking countries, and English is their native language.

> I was born in Canada and English is my native language. My parents are from Hong Kong. I speak some Cantonese because I am forced to speak at home. I never attended Chinese language school on Saturdays in Canada. We moved to Washington when I was ten as my parents got jobs at a tech company. I did not go to Chinese language school on Saturdays in Seattle either. I don't read Chinese, and I don't speak Mandarin. When people ask me where are you from, I feel offended as they assume I am from Asia based on my skin and hair color. I got even more angry when they commented that my English was *very good* (emphasized). I am sick of telling them I am a Canadian born in Vancouver, BC and I only speak English.

Native English-speaking Asian and ethnic Chinese international students receive even less research attention with the assumption that English is not the primary language. Jacob's primary language is English which is different from most ethnic Chinese international students. During the interview, he raised his voice whenever he talked about the English language or English proficiency. He has different struggles in identifying himself with intertwined linguistic background, mixed sense of place and belonging with heritage (Hong Kong) and nationality (Canadian).

Nationality and heritage – silencing other Chinese outside Mainland China

Besides adjusting to the new learning and living environment, American cultures, and the language barrier with English being the dominant language, ethnic Chinese international students face another challenge that has not been studied. The English word Chinese has a few different meanings in different contexts. When you say someone is "Chinese", it could mean a person that is of Chinese nationality from Mainland China, or a person that is of Chinese heritage of a different nationality, given the history of Chinese migrated to neighboring Asian countries and North America hundreds of years ago. There are millions of "Overseas Chinese"[1] living in Southeast Asia such as Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam where their ancestors from southern provinces in China. Participant "Zachary" shared his family heritage,

> I struggle with how to describe who I am in the personal essay. I want to tell them I am a Singaporean. My grandparents were born in Malaysia before Singapore gained independent sovereignty in 1965. We have no connection to anyone in China. Don't judge me or compare my academic performance with others from Mainland China.

[1] A quick overview of Overseas Chinese: https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/overseas-chinese-long-history-0

Two participants are multi-racial and demonstrate more complex stories with cultural, historical, colonial, and political factors in contemporary East Asian history. Participant "Isabella" shared the following:

> I avoid any conversation related to "Chinese". When people ask me "Are you Chinese?", I will detour and answer, "I am from Taiwan" and change the conversation topic. I don't want to be labeled as Mainland Chinese. It is pointless to educate others as they have no or limited knowledge about the historical and political context of the Strait relationship – which is sensitive. There are so many more students from Mainland China here and I don't want to be targeted. My paternal great-grandfather is a Japanese. My great-grandmother was his partner in Taiwan and they never got married. He has a wife in Japan. Indeed, my great-grandmother was the Taiwanese mistress of a Japanese businessman. He abandoned my great-grandmother and my grandfather and returned to Japan after WWII. My great-grandmother only speaks Taiwanese and Japanese. After the KMT (The National Party of China, Kuomintang) came to Taiwan in 1949, my grandfather was forced to learn Chinese and speak Mandarin. My maternal great parents and grandparents came to Taiwan from Shanghai, China after WWII. They are known as the Mainlanders (外省人) in Taiwan.

Participant "Olivia", who is from Macau, a former Portuguese colony for over 400 years, shared that

> My mother is a Macanese. She is a Portuguese born and raised in Macau. My dad is Chinese with ancestry somewhere in Canton (Guangdong province). I am a mixed race - half Cantonese and half Portuguese. I never felt I was different when I was in Macau as many of my relatives and friends are mixed. In Macau, and also in a lot of places in Asia

> and other parts of the world, we identify ourselves based on patrilineality. I never consider that I am NOT a Chinese from Macau. It's confusing when I need to answer my race/ethnicity as I am not 100% White or 100% Chinese. I don't understand what "White" means. I always check "Other" and write "Macau". And now, you made me think about who I am indeed, by race or nationality.

Isabella's family history under the Japanese Occupation in Taiwan, and Olivia's Portuguese heritage in Macau remind us of the transnational contexts in AsiaCrit - *transnational contexts* - that the lives of Asians were and are shaped by the globalization of people and capital with political and socio-economic factors. Although they are multi-racial, they identified themselves as "ethnic Chinese" at the time of this study.

Theme two: Challenges

Visa regulations and policies

International students must navigate complex F-1 visa regulations and stay compliant with federal laws and regulations. Getting the F-1 visa is only the first step after getting the admission acceptance. They need to maintain active F-1 visa status while studying in the U.S. On many occasions, they may need a new F-1 visa, and any mistake in this process can lead to complications or inability to return to the U.S. These visa complications or delays can disproportionately impact international students' academic plans and degree completion progress. Participants "Jacob", "Madison", "Isabella" and "Olivia" confronted different immigration/visa challenges when they enrolled in the community college and prepared the transferring to a four-year university.

Participants "Jacob" and "Madison" shared some common identities. They were on H-4 visas as the dependent of their parents who were on H-1B visa. Their parents are from Taiwan.

They both enrolled in U.S. high schools. However, their nationalities determined their visa options to study in the U.S. “Jacob” is a Canadian citizen by birth, and “Madison” is a Canadian permanent resident. “Jacob” did not need to apply for an F-1 visa as he could come to the U.S. to study as a Canadian citizen as long as he maintained the F-1 status (without the actual F-1 visa). On the other hand, “Madison” must get an F-1 visa to continue studying full-time in the U.S. after reaching the age of 18. “Madison” shared that

> I was born in Taiwan and moved to Canada when I was a toddler. I went to kindergarten and elementary school in Canada. I am a Canadian permanent resident. My family moved to Seattle when I was thirteen, a seventh grader. My dad was on an H-1B visa. My mom and I were his dependents. I did the Running Start program at a community college in Grades 11 and 12 just like a lot of my classmates. I didn’t feel much difference in middle and high school with my classmates until I turned 18 when I needed to apply for an F-1 visa with my Taiwan passport. I understand I have an option to wait until I turn 21 when my H-4 visa ends and keep studying, but only part-time in college. The foreignness made me feel out of place as I am still studying in the same college and my immigration status has changed. The worst outcome is that I need to apply to the universities as an international student which is a different (and disadvantaged) queue. I felt my chance to get into one of my dream universities in the U.S. would be diminished. My parents advised me to look for Canadian universities. This is not what I want as I have limited connections with Canada.

Besides applying for an F-1 visa from the U.S. Embassy or U.S. Consulate General in the student’s home country after receiving the I-20 from the admitted school, prospective international students who are currently in the U.S. on a different nonimmigrant visa could file a

request to change to another nonimmigrant status. “Isabella” is an example of a change of status approval from B2, the visitor visa. This is another common way to obtain F-1 status to study in the U.S. With the change of status approval to F-1, these students cannot leave the U.S. as the duration of status will expire once they leave the U.S. The change of status approval limits the mobility to travel outside the U.S. “Isabella” shared,

> In early 2022, after my advisor explained to me there would be a gap of over five months between my final quarter at community college (late March 2022) and the start date of the graduate program (late September 2022), and they could not release my SEVIS record directly over to the university, I did not know what to do. I came to the US with a B2 visa to visit my aunt in Autumn 2019. After visiting a few universities, I made up my mind to pursue a graduate degree here, not in Taiwan. I did not want to go back to Taiwan and wait over a year until I got accepted from a graduate program and applied for an F-1 visa. I decided to apply for a change of status from B2 to F-1 with a community college so that I can stay in the U.S. and work on the prerequisites for graduate school applications and improve my English. Then COVID came and I was stuck in the U.S. anyway. Since I don’t have an actual F-1 visa, I cannot leave the U.S. or my F-1 status will end with my departure. It is not an apt decision to return to Taiwan during the COVID and try to get a new F-1 visa when the American Institute in Taiwan had limited operation and the wait time for a visa appointment is unknown. I did not complete an associate degree in the community college so applying for post-completion Optional Practical Training[2] (OPT) is not an option for me. I decided, well no other choice indeed, to study an extra quarter

[2] Optional Practical Training (OPT) is temporary employment directly related to an F-1 student's major area of study, usually after completing an eligible program such as a one-year certificate, an Associate degree, or bachelor’s degree or higher.

> (Spring 2022) so that my transfer gap will be under five months and the community college can release my SEVIS record to the university. This cost me another four thousand dollars. Well, it's still better than returning to Taiwan and waiting for an unknown time without knowing whether I could get an F-1 visa and re-enter the U.S. by September.

The validity period of F-1 visas ranges from one month to five years depending on the specific case and the consular officers' assessment in different countries. If an international student departs the U.S. and travels to a country other than Canada, Mexico, or an adjacent island that is not included in the automatic revalidation[3] provisions after the visa expires, a new F-1 visa is required to reenter. Participant "Olivia" shared her frustration about the decision not to apply for a new F-1 visa during the Pandemic,

> I got a five-year F-1 visa when I came to the U.S. in 2017 studying Grade Ten at a private high school in another state outside Washington[4]. My grades and International Baccalaureate (IB) scores were not impressive. I did not get accepted by most universities I applied to as a freshman. Then, I moved to Seattle and studied at a community college after high school. I studied for two years there and completed an associate degree with a psychology concentration. My F-1 visa expired in May 2022 before my final quarter (Spring 2022) ended in June 2022 at the community college. My advisor told me if I plan to go home to Macau, for the summer, I need to get a new F-1 visa to re-enter the U.S. for Autumn 2022. What is she (the advisor) talking about? I haven't been back home all these years! I really miss my parents and friends in Macau. I left my advisor's office in

[3] Automatic revalidation is another option if they depart the U.S. for brief travel to Canada, Mexico, or an adjacent island for thirty days or less.

[4] "Olivia" disclosed the actual state in the interview and I changed to anonymous.

> tears. I was alone at my high school graduation in 2020. My parents could not come to the U.S. for my community college commencement in June 2022. My advisor told me if I go home in Summer 2022, I may not make it back for Fall 2022 because I need to get a new F-1 visa! I called my parents at night. We talked and I cried so much. My parents do not want to risk if I cannot get a new F-1 visa within three months in Hong Kong[5], which is an extra trip for me from Macau. Not to mention the limited flights to Macau, mandatory quarantine in designated hotels at own expense and crazy high prices for the air ticket.

The F-1 visa and immigration restriction does not only limit the application processes for the F-1 visa. Prospective international students could come and study in the U.S. with other possible means. "Olivia" has not traveled outside the U.S. since her F-1 visa expired in May 2022. At the time of the interview, August 4th, 2023, I asked her if she planned to go home as there were still another seven weeks before the Fall 23 term started. She said the Fall 23 quarter is the beginning of her senior year and she will complete the degree in three quarters. She does not want to risk not getting the F-1 visa on time and returning to Seattle by mid-September. If she misses the Fall 23 quarter classes, she will mess up the sequential classes in subsequent Winter and Spring 24 quarters and will not graduate in Spring 24. Her projected degree is a STEM-eligible degree, and she plans to apply for post-completion OPT and STEM OPT Extension.[6] She concluded that the uncertainty in the likelihood of getting a new F-1 visa impacts her decision in degree planning, graduation date, and mobility to travel.

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[5] The Consulate General of the United States, Hong Kong and Macau is located in Hong Kong for consulate services for US citizens and people in Hong Kong and Macau.

[6] Optional Practical Training Extension for STEM Students (STEM OPT Extension) is a F-1 visa benefit in work option that certain F-1 students who receive STEM-eligible degrees may apply for a 24-month extension of their post-completion OPT: https://www.uscis.gov/working-in-the-united-states/students-and-exchange-visitors/optional-practical-training-extension-for-stem-students-stem-opt

Academic preparedness and major readiness

Navigating the required courses, transfer degree requirements, and admissions applications to community colleges and four-year universities is daunting. International students are always in a maze to figure out what courses to take to satisfy the graduation requirements of the associate degree at the community college and the required courses for the transfer application and departmental requirements at the universities. The transfer equivalency information is generally limited and non-transparent. The acceptance of transferred credits, whether from overseas or another college in the U.S., is at the discretion of the receiving institution and program. Participant "Zachary" had college-level equivalent credits from Singapore and he shared,

> It's a very competitive environment in Singapore. We compete with each other in grades and ranking in the class and public exam scores. My A-level (GCE Advanced Level) result was not good enough, only with Bs and Cs. I could not get into the major from the universities I wanted in Singapore or in the UK. So, I decided to come to the U.S. and start at a community college and hope to transfer to one of the top schools after two years. This is my last chance to get into a top university worldwide. Even though I received transferred credits from my A-level exams, I decided to take all required courses for the transfer associate degree in the community college because I do not want to use my credits with Bs and Cs from Singapore for transfer application.

Participant "Kaitlyn" studied as a famous girls' school in Hong Kong, received top grades in public university entrance examinations in Hong Kong and a decent Duolingo English

Test[8] (DET) score struggled at the beginning of community college enrollment. “Kaitlyn” shared,

> I got the ENGL& 101 placement at the community college with a Duolingo English Test score of 105 when I applied. I got a 5* in English in HKDSE[9] in Hong Kong which was not bad. I thought I was ready for college. But when I logged in to Canvas and read the syllabus of my classes in the first quarter, I was scared. It took me over 10 hours to complete the first reading and type 200 words in a discussion assignment. I may spend too much time but I don’t feel confident/prepared until I read it four times. I am not a native English speaker. I need 93% to get an A, and I know I will not get an A in the course. I wanted to major in Computer Engineering at one of the top schools in the East Coast. From the first meeting with my advisor (before coming to Seattle), I know that I need to work very hard and get an A in every course besides working on other experiences for my application to top universities. My advisor kept reminding me that good grades are not everything. I am glad that I talked to my advisor within the first three days that I could switch to another humanities/social science class and defer taking ENGL& 101 in the next quarter when I feel more confident and prepared.

When I asked “Kaitlyn” why she didn’t attend the local university in Hong Kong with her grades in HKDSE, she mentioned that her grades were not competitive for the specific major in the local university that she wanted. With the results released in July, it would be too late to

[8] Duolingo English Test is an adaptive internet-based test of English Proficiency that most colleges in the U.S accepts besides TOEFL and IELTS to fulfill the admissions requirement or English course placement.

[9] Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE) is an examination organized by Hong Kong Examination and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) for students upon completion of a six-year secondary education. This public examination is considered as the proof of secondary education (equivalent to Grade 12 completion in the U.S.): https://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/en/hkdse/introduction/. HKDSE also serves as the university entrance examination to local universities through the Joint University Programmes Admissions Schemes (JUPAS).

apply to any U.S. four-year university as a freshman. She applied for several community colleges in Washington and California before sitting in the HKDSE, as a backup plan. Therefore, starting from a community college is her alternative option to attain an undergraduate degree in the U.S. She said once she has the entire degree plan with lots of flexibility, studying in a U.S. community college is indeed not a backup option. She was happy about this decision as she might not get the same level of support from advisors in a much larger four-year university in Hong Kong or in the U.S.

Some international students come to the U.S. with a gap in transitioning from the overseas high school curriculum to an undergraduate program in the U.S., which is often overlooked. Participant "Emma" that

> I went to a small private international school in a South American country. I have no issue in taking college-level classes in English as this is what we had in the international school. There was no lab session in natural science classes in my high school. Initially, I want to transfer to the university as soon as possible with minimum credits required for application. However, after talking to my advisor, I realized the university I want to apply to prefers students to complete a transfer associate degree with most general education courses completed. I changed my plan and stayed for two years to complete the associate degree to ensure all the general education requirements, especially the natural science class with lab component, were met for most university transfer applications.

There is a stereotype that international students are strong at academic performance, especially in STEM subjects, with a deficiency in English. "Zachary" and "Kaitlyn" come with better preparation for college-level classes. "Emma" needs readjustment in her academic plan and expectations to fulfill the lab science requirements for the associate degree completion and

university transfer application as her high school curriculum did not match the U.S. requirements. Nevertheless, every student has different strengths and struggles and may not decide on their major or pathway before enrolling in college-level programs. Another participant from Hong Kong, "Aiden" struggled and shared,

> I failed most subjects in the HKDSE. My parents did not want me to stay in Hong Kong to repeat the exam next year as I likely won't get into any university. The two-year degrees in Hong Kong are not truly transferable to any university. My parents sent me to Seattle to study intensive English in a community college and take time to think about what major I wanted to study in the future. I felt very lost at the orientation as I didn't know what I wanted to study when everyone else seemed like they knew what they wanted to do. I think I am the only international student from Hong Kong in that quarter. There are many more from Mainland China and Taiwan and they speak Mandarin. I didn't know how to explain my poor high school grades from Hong Kong, and the B and C grades from the ESL program at the community college that impacted my cumulative GPA on the transcript in the personal essay for transfer application.

On the other hand, there are participants "Jacob", "Nicholas", and "Madison" studied in high schools in the U.S. on other non-immigrant visas (H-4 and E-1/E-2 respectively) before enrollment in the community college as their families are in the U.S. Their transition from U.S. high school to community college appears seamless as their reactions and responses to this question were positive. They did not mention any notable challenge and there was no change in non-verbal cues. Participant "Olivia" studied in a private high school as an F-1 visa student in the U.S. and reflected on whether there is a benefit of coming early if she is not a high-performing student. She shared the following:

> I do not know if studying high school in the U.S. makes my college application more competitive. My high school GPA was 3.1, which is not good enough to apply as a freshman-direct to the major I want. My high school tuition was over $30,000 a year which is more than double than studying in the community college.

Each international student is unique. They have different previous academic achievements, lived experiences in their home country, social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds, and most importantly, individual educational and career aspirations. Treating all of them as identical students is not the best practice in nurturing their U.S. education and living experiences. Faculty members, administrators, and staff in community colleges and four-year institutions should pay more attention to individual students by listening to their concerns and assisting them in resolving their problems, especially in transfer planning.

Financial considerations – we are not the "cash cows"

International students often pay higher tuition rates than in-state resident rate-paying students enrolling in state-funded universities. Transferring may lead to increased financial burdens for international students as tuition is lower at community colleges than at most four-year universities. International community college students need to budget and secure additional funding for their education after transferring out from community college. Financial barriers, including non-resident tuition costs, accessibility to financial assistance, and cost of living can influence a student's decision to transfer.

International students may face challenges in securing scholarships or other forms of financial support as most public universities have limited (or no) scholarships for international students. Students with talents and skills that are not valued by U.S. schools have no competitive advantage as participant "Hailey" share,

> The sport that I am professionally trained for in the national competition in Indonesia, badminton, is not popular in the U.S. I realize not only community colleges but also most universities do not have badminton teams. Joining the badminton club for leisure is not what I want. It is not challenging for me. This was one of my strengths, but I cannot make use of it for a scholarship or "extra merit" for a transfer application here.

Not all international students are eligible for scholarships, and they are fully responsible for the cost of attendance. Some international students may decide to transfer to schools with lower costs as participant "Tyler" did. He decided to transfer to a private university that ranked lower than the most popular university in Washington for the same major. He mentioned it was cheaper with the merit-based scholarship of $17,000 per year with direct admissions to the business school for major rather than the general admissions as pre-social science major at another popular public university. "Tyler" expressed that he could not afford to wait for another year and end up studying something other than business as an economics major.

Participant "Zachary" expressed frustration when people stereotyped him as an affluent international student. He shared that

> When people know that I am from Singapore, they automatically connect to the characters in the *Crazy Rich Asians* movie (with eye-rolling). My family is not even middle class in Singapore. Both my mom and dad are in management positions, and we live in an HDB[10] flat only. They started putting money in the educational fund for me since I was born. They could afford to send me to study overseas because of careful

[10] The Housing & Development Board (HDB) is Singapore's public housing authority: https://www.hdb.gov.sg/about-us#:~:text=The%20Housing%20%26%20Development%20Board%20(HDB,quality%20living%20environment%20for%20all.

financial planning and intentional saving, rather than being rich or inherited from my grandparents. I am not a cash cow. I am mindful of every dollar I spend here.

The estimated cost of attendance varies depending on tuition and fees, course materials, living expenses, transportation expenses, etc. “Zachary” mentioned another determining factor why he chose to attend a community college, apart from his A-level grades shared in an earlier section, is the affordable tuition at community college. He mentioned the tuition was under $12,000 at the community college for three quarters (one academic year) in 2020 and 2021, and he paid over $42,000 at the university in the academic year 2022-23. “Zachary” was grateful for his parents for putting his education attainment as the family’s priority and wanted to keep the costs as low as possible. He mentioned he struggled to choose between the offers from less prestigious colleges with merit-based scholarships and the offer from his dream school - a prestigious public university - with no financial assistance. He eventually decided to transfer to his dream school after his parents assured him there was sufficient funding to study for three years at the university with living expenses in the metro Seattle area.

Transfer credit evaluation barriers

Evaluation and acceptance of transfer credits vary between institutions. International students may find that some of their previous college-level credits do not apply to the major or program at the university, leading to a potential delay in graduation or not being accepted to the university. Participants “Connor”, “Zachary”, “Madison”, and “Isabella” have different college-level credits from International Baccalaureate (IB), GCE Advanced-level (A-level) Examinations, Running Start, and previous university in the home country and confront different challenges.

Participant “Connor” had International Baccalaureate (IB) credits from Indonesia. He shared the following on navigating the transfer equivalency:

> When my advisor showed me the IB equivalency guide from a few universities, I was lost. There is no standard equivalency. Each university accepts my IB credits differently based on the scores. I thought I was ahead in the game, but in reality, I am not. The community college accepts most of my IB credits towards the associate degree, but not at the two universities that I am thinking of in the future. Therefore, I decided to retake the Calculus and Physics courses all over again.

Participant “Zachary” took the GCE Advanced-level (A-level) exam in Singapore for the subjects in English, Math, Physic, Chemistry, and Biology. This is the typical bundle for prospective science majors. But his grades were in the B and C range, which is too low for big-name universities in the U.S. He has concerns about my competitiveness in the admission applications. He decided to retake most science classes at community college. Participant “Madison” earned college-level credits through the Running Start Program at the community college in Washington State. She experienced similar frustration to “Connor” regarding the non-standardized acceptance of credits. “Madison” shared,

> I have Running Start credits from a community college. If I apply to the universities in Washington State, the equivalency guide is clear and transparent. However, the equivalency guides from out-of-state universities do not exist or are incomplete. My advisor was very supportive and helped me to compare the course descriptions between the community college and the universities. I have to do that for every single university that I want to apply to. I realized that some universities do not acknowledge the “duality” of the credits from community college that counted towards both high school completion

> and associate degree. I felt exhausted from contacting each potential out-of-state school to confirm how my credits taken from running start would be counted.

Feeling overwhelmed by the amount of time needed to delineate the acceptance of the college credits earned in the Running Start at each potential university, “Madison” concentrated on applying to the universities in Washington State eventually because of the transparency of equivalency information. She mentioned there are a few universities in Washington with decent ranking in her prospective major. She would rather focus on class completion and other activities to enhance her competitiveness for the transfer applications.

Another participant “Isabella” graduated from a top university in Taiwan with a STEM-related degree. She recalled the steps to complete the transfer credit review request when she enrolled at the community college and share that

> I need to order an official transcript in a sealed envelope from the university in Taiwan, and ask them to mail it to the U.S. I heard from others that if the transcript is not in English, I would need to get the translation. The transfer credit evaluation takes several months to complete at the community college as they do the evaluation in-house. And the community college acceptance may not be the same for each university to which I will apply. It was a very fracturing experience to navigate how my credits will be accepted, from each university. I am glad that I am preparing for my graduate school application, so the universities do not count the beans from my undergraduate degree in Taiwan for a course-by-course evaluation. I can focus on taking the prerequisites such as English composition and other lower-division major-related courses here.

The number of incoming international community college students with previous college credits from overseas is generally low and most of the incoming new students have high school

credentials. “Isabella” situation was less stressful compared to those who did not earn a bachelor’s degree for graduate program admission applications. Nevertheless, the next challenge discussed is very common to most incoming international students.

Limited knowledge of transfer pathways and other options upon graduation from community college with an associate degree

International students may not be as familiar with the intricacies of transfer pathways and articulation agreements between community colleges and universities within the same state or in different states. The lack of detailed information on different majors and different degree options offered at community colleges and four-year universities could lead to suboptimal choices in selecting courses that align with transfer requirements. Work option upon graduation is not a popular option over transferring out. From my advising caseloads, those who express interest in work options after graduation would discuss early, even before coming to the U.S. and the academic plan incorporates this post-graduation option. Also, many community colleges in Washington State offer applied bachelor’s degrees[11] and international students may undervalue this alternative option.

Participant “Kaitlyn” has identified her intended major in computer engineering before enrolling in the community college. Her advisor helped her to create an academic plan to strategize the required classes for transfer application rather than focusing on getting the associate transfer degree. She could demonstrated the major-readiness by showing more completion of courses. “Ryan”, from Malaysia, also received helpful advice from his advisor, and shared,

[11] For the complete list, see https://www.sbctc.edu/colleges-staff/programs-services/bachelors-degrees/current-bachelor-programs (assessed Dec 9, 2024)

> My intended major in car exterior design. But after the first advising meeting, I realized what I want is very specific, well, very narrow. I don't know whether I should study in an art school or transfer to a typical university as an art/design major, or I should change my major to industrial engineering. My advisor kept pushing me to identify possible schools with programs that align with my academic and career interests.

When it comes to choosing the most appropriate associate degree that aligns with the bachelor's degree completion, participant "Hailey" and "Nicholas" shared their limited knowledge in understanding the program of studies offered at the community colleges that professional & technical degrees are the substantial. "Hailey" shared her first meeting with her advisor. She was confused with the names of the degrees. She wanted *business management* and get a bachelor's degree in business at the university. She did not know that at the community college she attended, there were two business degrees. When she applied to the community college, she picked Business Management associate degree that indeed is a professional & technical degree. Her advisor did not start the course planning based until listening to "Hailey" and asked a few screening questions. Once the transfer intent was confirmed, she changed the program of study in the college's database and SEVIS to reflect the proper degree that she intended to complete for transfer. The importance of clarifying the degree and transfer intention with advisor is critical to student's success. Another participant "Nicholas" shared the following:

> I want to study artificial intelligence (AI). When I applied to community colleges, this is what I wrote as my major. But when I met with my advisor, he asked me if I planned to transfer to a university to complete the bachelor's degree there. I did not understand what he meant. He explained that the college offers a Bachelor of Applied Science degree in artificial intelligence. I didn't even know that it existed. I also realized not many

> universities have a specific bachelor's degree in AI, but rather a concentration in computer science. The early advising meetings helped me a lot in identifying my options as I could stay and complete a bachelor's degree in the community college after getting the associate degree.

Besides discussing academic plan for degree completion and transfer application strategies with advisor, many international students are not fully aware of the F-1 visa benefits such as post-completion OPT. Some community colleges strongly encourage F-1 students to apply while other colleges focus primarily on vertical transfer. Participant "Nicholas" shared,

> I was torn between transferring out to university and doing OPT after getting the associate degree. I wanted the U.S. work experience just like the local people. As an F-1 visa student, employment options are limited when I am in school. Getting an internship is almost impossible unless you have luck and connection. I want the OPT but I worry whether I could get a job in a computer science-related field with an AA (associate) degree. What happens if I can't find a job and I use up the 90 days of unemployment? I don't even know if the OPT employment experience is helpful to my transfer application since my GPA is just around 3.5. Or will I waste and defer a year to complete the bachelor's degree?

Applying to the OPT or vertical transfer to a four-year university after completing the associate degree is never a simple decision. A few participants shared the support outside the international student advising, such as career advising, directly impacts their post-graduation decision and will be discussed next.

Limited non-academic support services

Many community colleges have specific support services for international students, but these services might be more limited to those available at universities. This can affect the academic and personal support for international transfer students. According to Jennings (2017), community colleges lack resources to support campus life for international students, such as designated and guaranteed on-campus housing or support programs. Other limited or lack of support include career advising, college sports, and extracurricular activities, additional support to struggling students, mental health counseling, and health insurance guidance in understanding the medical system that several participants mentioned.

For example, participant "Jacob" said the first-year seminar course was helpful. However, there was no further structured class after. He was proactive in attending most workshops for F-1 students, including transfer planning and CPT[12]/OPT workshops. He wanted the U.S. work experience. However, he said the workshops were short, and the information was general. He needed to explore more on his own. There is a career center at his community college and the help from the career center is limited to reviewing resumes and most on-campus jobs are work-study positions for local (domestic) students. I asked "Jacob" about the expectations from the career center and he said internship placement for international students as showing the job search databases was not helpful enough.

Having a safe living environment and interactions with different people are essential contributions to international students' social experience. Participant "Olivia" shared her suboptimal experience in homestay and student housing,

[12] Curricular Practical Training (CPT) is an alternative work study, internship, cooperative education or other type of required internship or practicum that a sponsoring employer offers through agreements with a student's school.

I went for homestay when I studied in high school here before the Pandemic. I have no other option because I am underage. My host parents were not home a lot of the time for business travel. I paid them rent, cooked most of my meals, took care of their three cats, and was home alone for more than half of the days per month. I love cats but I am their free cat sitter which now I see as (it's) a manipulation. When I searched for community colleges, I only looked for those with student housing as I had enough with homestay and irresponsible host parents. Well, the student housing experience was not very sweet either. We needed to stay in our bedrooms during the Pandemic. Until the final quarter, I had not seen my roommate without the face mask. I don't know what a normal campus living experience is until I am at the university. We missed so much during the three years.

Another participant "Emma" told me about her terrifying experience dealing with on-campus housing staff when she confronted a dispute with her roommate. She shared that

My roommate brought her boyfriend to the dorm and stayed overnight. There is a clear policy of no guest overnight. I am scared even though I locked my room. To me, her boyfriend is a stranger. I emailed my advisor and she made room to meet me the next morning. She comforted me and did not judge me while some of my friends said it's not a big deal. She called the housing director and tried to help me. Guess what, I was offered the option to switch rooms and my roommate did not even get a warning. That's it. So, the person who violated the policy could stay and the one who was impacted would leave. I moved out from student housing next month and lived in an apartment with two other international students through the connection of the club that I joined.

The roommate incident that "Emma" encountered may not be infrequent depending on whether students share it with their advisors or other support staff, such as counselors. Advocacy for self is critical for international students as part of their experience in the U.S. "Emma" also shared that there were no mental health services[13] that she can get sleeping pills at the community college she attended. She talked to her advisor about the stress of the roommate incident, and was advised to talk to family doctor for a referral.

"Tyler" self-identified as a mid-to-low-range student and felt uncertain about what universities he could apply to as a business major with a cumulative GPA of 2.70. He expressed loneliness and lack of support besides his international student advisor. I asked if he ever talked to any counselors, and he said no. It appears that mental services are available on-campus and off-campus referrals at most participants' community colleges. However, breaking the myths about seeking mental health counseling is challenging to promote international students' well-being. Understanding health insurance in the U.S. is another obstacle for many international community college students as they are unfamiliar with this complex system. "Tyler" share,

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The experience that "Tyler" shared in getting medical and mental health in the U.S. is full of roadblocks as the healthcare systems between Taiwan and the U.S. are substantially different, and the patient expectations are not clearly conveyed.

Application and admission process and deadlines

International students may encounter challenges in understanding and navigating the application and admission process for universities. This includes submitting high school and college transcripts, standardized English test scores, and other documentation that may have

[13] After the interview, I checked the community college that "Emma" enrolled, and there is counseling center on campus. I was unclear if "Emma" interpreted mental health and counseling as two separate services, with prescription involved.

different requirements compared to domestic students. Understanding and navigating the application procedures and deadlines for transfer admission can be challenging. This includes submitting personal essays, recommendation letters, and transcripts. Many universities have two applications for general admission and departmental application. There are different application deadlines and extra steps in the departmental application. The type of application that international students submit varies in each university, ranging from transfer application (based on the current enrolling institution) or international application (based on immigration status) to more specific admissions categories such as international transfer application.

Some international students may face discriminatory admission policies or practices, including biases in the evaluation of their academic credentials, extracurricular activities, or personal statements. Some universities admit F-1 visa students once a year for the Fall term and admit domestic students every term. Therefore, a lack of planning to align with application deadlines could cause delays in admissions and graduation. For example, participant “Olivia” needs to adjust her academic plan to meet the transfer application deadline for certain out-of-state universities by enrolling 15 credits in the summer quarter before the application deadline in November and graduate in the following June.

Also, many universities provide options for students to apply for more than one major in the application. If students are not admitted to the first choice of major, their applications will be reviewed again for the second choice of major. “Kaitlyn” was confused as she has never considered any second major besides computer engineering. In most of her transfer applications, she only put computer engineering as her choice of major and did not select Mathematics or Physics as backup major as she said she will not study even if she gets accepted.

(Extra) English language proficiency requirement

While international students may have met language proficiency requirements to enroll in a community college, the English proficiency demands at the university at the time of transfer application are more rigorous. This may pose challenges in terms of academic performance and communication. English language proficiency is a critical factor in the transfer process. Some universities may have stringent language requirements for international students and meeting these requirements can be a barrier for some applicants. In the interviews, all participants who completed two English written composition courses or received equivalent credits for ENGL& 101 as the first course and ENGL& 102 or ENGL 201 as the second course, expressed discontent and the feeling of unfairness regarding the extra English language proficiency requirement. Participant "Nicholas" received transfer credits in ENGL& 101 with AP English and completed ENGL& 102 at the community college with an A grade. He complained,

> I have AP English with a score of 4 and I am on track to graduate with a transfer associate degree. When I start reviewing the transfer application requirements at some universities, it is unfair to us (international students) that we have to take the TOEFL, IELTS or Duolingo English Test to prove our English is "good enough". What's the point of taking another test if they accept my AP score for transfer credits in English composition? This is an extra requirement that costs money and time to prepare.

"Zachary" was angry with the extra English Proficiency requirement for international students but needed to compromise and take Duolingo as the English language exam is the only way to satisfy the English proficiency requirement for admission. "Zachary" was frustrated when shared that

> I got 4.0 in ENGL& 101 and 102 and completed a transfer associate degree. Why am I subject to additional requirement to prove my English that the domestic students are not

> required, even if they did not get the A grades? Don't you know how hard it is to get a near perfect score in every assignment in the English writing classes even for a native speaker? The extra English requirement is obviously a discrimination against international students!

The extra admissions requirements in transfer applications and the less frequent admission cycle for international students are inequitable. Many students may not be aware of this unjust obstacle until they start researching the transfer application requirements, usually in the summer months. However, the difficulties and challenges in work options and employment opportunities are present even at the beginning of their enrollment at community colleges.

Work options and employment opportunities

On-campus student employment is eligible for all F-1 visa students when they start studying at their SEVP-certified school such as community college regardless of their program of study. It sounds hopeful but "Ryan" never got a job offer and he shared,

> As an international student, working on-campus is the only option during the first year at the community college. There are limited student jobs available, and the competition is fierce. We are competing with domestic students, and with all international students. I applied here and there every quarter but never got a position.

International students on F-1 visas have more restrictions on off-campus employment. International students are eligible for Curricular Practical Training (CPT) once they have completed one academic year of study[15], with full-time enrollment, and have an internship offer that is considered an integral part of their academic program. In the interviews, none of the participants participated in CPT when enrolling in the community college. When I asked whether

[15] English as second language (ESL) program is not an eligible program for CPT

they have tried, “Kaitlyn” commented on the likelihood of a private company’s willingness to offer an internship to a non-US person, a prospective computer engineering major with no previous work experience in the U.S. or home country. Securing internships related to their field of study is challenging for transfer degree students.

Optional practical training (OPT) is eligible for most F-1 visa students who completed an eligible certificate or associate degree at the community colleges. “Nicholas”, a STEM major, eventually completed a transfer associate degree in science instead of a professional/technical degree in artificial intelligence. He expressed his struggles in considering OPT as part of his academic plan because he worried about his competitiveness with an associate degree completion in the job market, his non-US resident status, and the worst outcome if he could not find a job within the approved time. Also, with the maximum length of worth authorization up to twelve months, he is concerned that most employers may prefer an employee who could stay over a year. He mentioned earlier that he was not confident whether the OPT experience will enhance his transfer application in the following year.

Conclusion – building a sense of community for international students

Addressing these challenges requires a collaborative effort between community colleges, universities, and support services that cater specifically to the needs of international transfer students from community colleges. Providing holistic advising, mentorship, and adequate resources can enhance the overall experience for international students during the transfer process.

Colleges may not have sufficient awareness, resources, and training on issues related to diversity and inclusion, contributing to unintentional biases against international students. It is important to note that not all universities engage in intentionally biased or discriminatory

practices, and many institutions are committed to fair and equitable treatment of all applicants. However, addressing discrimination, whether intentional or unintentional, requires an ongoing effort from universities to enhance awareness, provide diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training, and ensure that admission processes are transparent and unbiased.

On the other hand, not all non-academic support is available in each community college such as on-campus housing, health center, counseling, career center, and student engagement programming exclusively for international students. Some of the less obvious struggles such as food insecurity and homelessness were mentioned by "Aiden" although he did not directly experience them,

> Our (community) college has a lot more services compared to others in the area. I did not know that we (international students) could qualify for some assistance at the food pantry until you told me. I thought we were not eligible at all as we are on F-1 visa and I should be responsible for all the expenses from tuition to food and rent. I am lucky that my parents could fully support me and I know some international students struggle with the high rent and grocery bills in this beautiful city.

A call to build a sense of community for international students in the community college was mentioned by most participants. Some students actively search for a place that they want to be part of such as joining/chartering a student club, playing in the sports team, or reaching out to others and creating a community where they could act together and support each other to nurture "cultural wealth" (Yosso, 2005). However, "Zachary" revealed the challenge in creating/joining the community that he feels comfortable,

> I want to make new friends from all different places but deep in my heart, I want to meet new friends from Singapore and Malaysia. We have a lot in common and we can support

each other and share information. But there were very few of us. I think I was the only one from Singapore in 2021 and there may be two or three from Malaysia. I did not join the Chinese Students Association or Taiwanese Students Club because I am from Singapore. We are so different even though I speak Mandarin.

The challenges discussed in this chapter experienced by these 13 ethnic Chinese international community college students' vertical transfer experience close the gap in modeling non-White students that Crisp and Nunez (2014) studied for African American and Latinx students that referred to as underrepresented minorities (URMs). The narratives also bring international students in the research of vertical transfer that previous study focused on domestic students among different racial groups.

Chapter Five – Summary, reflection, and recommendation

Examining ethnic Chinese International students' challenges from enrolling in community college to transferring to a four-year university through their self-narrations allows us to get a deeper understanding of this unique student population in the U.S. higher education institutions from the transfer experience of ethnic Chinese international students.

The lived experiences of their transfer journey from community college to university of 13 ethnic Chinese international students, outside Mainland China, in Washington State community colleges, enrich the current research in recruitment, enrollment, advising, transfer pathways, and their identities as international students as well as student of color. Illustrating their stories through their stories in vertical transfer aims to dismantle the stereotype and reveal different barriers that international students at community colleges confront. The study does not compare with other international students' transfer experience, such as the international students from Mainland China or other places of origin or non-native English-speaking places. This is because the main purpose of this study is to bring this student population into future research. This study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the complex identities of ethnic Chinese international students apart from the lens of nationality.

Summary

The primary purpose of this study was to identify the challenges in vertical transfer that ethnic Chinese international students confront and the journey they experience in searching, identifying, and affirming their identities with the intersectionality of race, place of origin and nationality. My findings reveal the general lack of a holistic understanding of the silenced ethnic Chinese international students, those who are not mainland Chinese, in the U.S. higher education system. This study provides evidence that their U.S. academic experiences intertwine academic preparedness, major readiness, visa requirement and immigration policies, work options,

financial background, and support, additional barriers for international students' application, social and cultural challenges through their acknowledgement and discovery of their own identity as a "Chinese" in the community colleges in the U.S.

Reflection on my positionality

As a 1.5-generation naturalized American from Hong Kong who was in her 20s after graduating from college in the U.S., the stories of these 13 ethnic Chinese international students resonate with my previous experience as an international student in British Columbia, Canada. I went through the transfer journey from Langara College to Simon Fraser University in the 1990s when "Chinese" international students mainly referred to those from Taiwan and Hong Kong in Canada. At every single step, I felt alone, as my intended major was not a popular choice among international students. There was a lack of support – from academic support to emotional and mental health concerns. These challenges still prevail, and my participants confront more challenges now with their nationalities and ethnic identities being blurred and their voices silenced, with the rise and dominance of international student enrollment from Mainland China that I did not experience two decades ago.

Reflection on my profession

My definition of leadership is "inspiring people to become the best self of their own." My role as an advisor is to guide the students to become the best person during the process, not where they start or end. During those months conducting interviews, I kept asking myself this question: "Have you done what you wanted to inspire your students as an international student advisor and as a faculty member?"

Most advisors in higher education institutions in the U.S. advise international students in two separate capacities – academic advising and immigration advising. My current role as an

international student advisor in a two-year community college provides a holistic approach by combining both academic and immigration advising. My advising practice incorporates consideration and planning from both academic and immigration perspectives. From the stories of participants that academic and immigration advising are separated, they tended to have more struggle in degree and transfer planning to satisfy both academic and F-1 visa requirements. For instance, enrolling in too many online classes will not align with the current immigration requirements with a minimum number of in-person classes/credits. These students need to go for a minimum of two meetings, one for each advisor, for planning each registration period. Students are confused as they struggle between on-time program completion and extra classes enrollment outside the degree to maintain active F-1 status every term.

As an adjunct faculty teaching the first-year seminar course specifically for international students, this research brings up different concerns that I have not considered in depth previously. The modules I created are based on what we (the college/institution, the International Education Department, and the instructor) want our students to learn in the first quarter to assist them in adjusting to the new learning and social environment in a foreign country. The needs of the students (one of my participants called the user experience) are not taken into consideration for curriculum planning. Another participant said he never completed any end-of-the-quarter class evaluation because the evaluation focuses on feedback on improving the ways of teaching, not on the course content and getting feedback on students' expectations to learn from the course. In his own words, “It’s useless and who will read the evaluations? And if I give low points, it could impact the faculty members as many of them are part-time”. I reflected on how I created the curriculum when I was teaching Human Geography classes in a community college when I

was a doctoral candidate. This deficit mindset in curriculum design and instruction should not be encouraged and continued.

As an academic and immigration advisor, there was very little structured support after this first-quarter course. If students are not proactive in planning their degree and transfer application, they could have missed some eligible opportunities such as internship (curricular practical training - CPT) and post-completion optional practical training (OPT) besides the vertical transfer option. As a partitioner in international education serving international students at the community college, I realized as an advisor in international education, I could change my daily practice and mindset to enhance their educational experiences in the U.S. as the major focus, from an advising perspective, was placed in pre-arrival, new student orientation, and first-quarter advising meetings. The support in subsequent quarters of the student life cycle needs to be adequately implemented. I will propose to my division that more F-1 visa benefits workshops be organized, in addition to work options such as CPT and OPT. Also, other support staff would coordinate with our insurance broker on information to understand the U.S. healthcare system besides getting assistance filing the claims. Also, advisors would advocate the presence of international students in the campus community and create a safe space for international students to build the communities that they feel they belong to.

Reflection on my experience with participants

Listening to their stories, before they started enrolling in the community college, shows me the vast differences of the unique backgrounds of each ethnic Chinese international student I interviewed for this study. A few of the participants were from my previous caseloads or from the college where I work. I witnessed their transformation from a brand-new international student to a seasoned and major-ready student at a four-year university. Meeting them again after

they transferred out is rewarding. All of them still remember their respective IE advisor, which was a positive surprise to me as I did not expect. Most of them compared their engagement with advisors at different institutions and they acknowledged the community college provided a good foundation and were well-prepared for the challenges at the universities. Their positive transfer experience acknowledged the dedicated work from the advising team to international education.

Meeting participants from other community colleges and learning from them was an invaluable lesson for me as I learned from other colleges' best practices and approaches to international students and avoided the mistakes that participants mentioned.

Recommendations for action

Respect the complex identity of international students

International students in the U.S. are diverse. Stereotyping them as a monolithic student population group is problematic and ignores diversity and individual identity by reinforcing racialized stereotypes. Community college is the first educational institution that many international students start their academic journey in the U.S. A holistic support approach is essential to enhance academic, social, and cultural experience. Community colleges need to strategize their resources for international students to assist them to be major- and transfer-ready. Intentional support to international students is critical for their educational experience in the U.S.

Respect the complex identity of ethnic Chinese international students – un-silencing the voice of "other Chinese"

This study brings forward the complex identity of ethnic Chinese international students from places outside Mainland China deserves a mindful and respectful representation, apart from the generalized data collection on Chinese international students. The narratives of these 13 aspiring young international community college students about their "Chinese" identity struggles

in chapter four beyond academic and F-1 visa status challenges allows us to disrupt and dismantle the nationality-lens on defining who the “Chinese International Students” in the U.S. Here is the summary from the participants’ recommendation that I synthesized on how to convey with ethnic Chinese - people from Hong Kong or Taiwan and other places in Asia are not from mainland China.

- Be clear and specific: clearly state the difference by explicitly mentioning that Hong Kong and Taiwan are distinct regions with separate identities from mainland China.
- Use geographic terms: emphasize geographical terms to highlight the separate locations. For example, "People from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China have different backgrounds and histories."
- Respectful language: choose language that is neutral and respectful to avoid causing offense. Avoid generalizations or assumptions about cultural or political affiliations.
- Ask for Context/clarification: keep an open mind and learn a little bit about the historical and political backgrounds of each region. This can help others understand the complexities of the situation.
- Avoid Stereotypes: be mindful of stereotypes or assumptions that may be associated with any of the regions. Highlight the diversity within each region and avoid making sweeping statements.
- Cultural Sensitivity: acknowledge and respect the diverse cultures, languages, and identities within Hong Kong, Taiwan, Mainland China, and other Asian countries.
- Use the term "Chinese" carefully: when referring to people from Mainland China, use the term "Chinese" carefully to avoid confusion. Specify "Mainland Chinese" if necessary to be more precise.

- Encourage Questions: encourage open communication and questions. If you are genuinely interested, welcome the opportunity to ask the people for more information and clarify any misconceptions.
- Share personal experiences: if you have personal experiences or connections to these regions, share them to humanize the people and help others understand the individuality of each place.

Some participants acknowledged that conversations about political and cultural distinctions can be sensitive, so approaching the topic with empathy and a willingness to listen can foster better understanding. Indeed, a few participants asked me not to discuss the Chinese identity as they were uncomfortable. Additionally, staying informed about the historical and geopolitical context of these regions can contribute to more informed discussions.

Dismantle the barriers for vertical transfer against international students

Through the participants' experiences, barriers against international students in transfer application are identified, and the four-year universities should be abolished. First and most obvious is the deficit approach of the additional English proficiency requirements. If an international student completes college-level English composition/written communication courses with a transfer associate degree, it is unclear why they need to show extra proof of their English writing skills in a standardized English test such as TOEFL, IELTS, or Duolingo English Test that are not required of domestic students. The second barrier is the application type that international community college students need to submit – some colleges have a separate admissions team to review international students' applications – and the evaluation criteria are usually different from domestic student applications. The third barrier is the recognition of transfer students at four-year universities that are bigger, more distant, and more diverse in terms

of campus resources and connections. One participant expressed they are not valued as those incoming freshmen who identify themselves as the class of 2025 when they enrolled in 2021 as a freshman. There is no such recognition for transfer students who entered in 2023. International community college students also find it more challenging to contact the staff for immigration advising whereas departmental advising appears positive with more availability.

Final words

This research challenged the monolithic portrayal of ethnic Chinese international students. I critiqued systematic issues in community colleges and four-year universities that impact their academic, social, cultural, and racial identity development. I aimed to address the multiple identities of international students at community colleges. I intended to bring the inclusiveness of ethnic Chinese international students outside Mainland China to clarify and redefine the term "Chinese international students" with an ethnic/racial lens, not confined by nationalities. My research also contributed to AsianCrit (Museus, 2013) as international students from Asia, including ethnic Chinese international students, are marginalized and confront systematic racism differently from local Asian American students in higher education. I analyzed the structural inequalities that affect international community college students' success, in terms of vertical transfer; and identity apart from Asian/Chinese American student population. Through the narratives of ethnic Chinese international community college students in navigating their racial and cultural identities, it emphasized the heterogeneity within this ethnic group in different nationalities and recognized that place of origin, nationality, heritage, socioeconomic status, non-immigrant status, and cultural differences profoundly shape their unique educational experiences in the U.S.

I focused on the vertical transfer experiences of ethnic Chinese international community college students with racism and intersectionality that neither international students of color nor Asian students were studied in the Racial Transfer Gap (Crips & Nuenz, 2014). I identified how institutions overlook the diverse challenges of different racial student population groups. The deficit-based lens through which institutions often view marginalized groups, including various racial groups of international students, framing their struggles as personal failures rather than the result of structural inequities. I contributed by closing the research gap in modeling international students in the research of vertical transfer that previously focused on domestic students among different racial groups.

This is just the beginning of calling for more research on different topics of international community college students, such as intersectionality, career advising and post-graduation plans, and other challenges beyond cultural adjustment. I advocate for community colleges and four-year universities to adopt an asset-based approach, emphasizing the importance of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), community building, and resilience in supporting international students.

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Appendix A

Sample participant recruiting email

Hello,

My name is Angela Leung. I am a third-year doctoral student in Educational Leadership at the University of Washington Tacoma. I am recruiting research participants for face-to-face or Zoom interviews (45 – 60 minutes) on the research study: Understanding the vertical transfer experience of international community college students: A case study of ethnic Chinese international students in Washington State. The purpose of this study is to identify and understand the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, place of origin, and non-immigrant status of ethnic Chinese international community college students. This study will look at the factors that influence ethnic Chinese international community college students in their transfer experiences and examine how the intertwined identities of race, ethnicity, place of origin, academic achievement, and non-immigrant status impact their educational experience in the U.S. higher education institutes.

If you:

- Self-identify as "Chinese" in your respective university's student enrollment management database with a nationality other than People's Republic of China (Mainland China) in the Form I-20, and
- Previously attended a community college and transferred your SEVIS record directly from the community college to a SEVIS-certified four-year university (public or private) in Washington State, in an undergraduate or graduate program, and

- Are currently enrolled in a SEVP-certified four-year university in Washington State (public or private) at the time of interview in an undergraduate or graduate program as listed in the Form I-20, and
- Interested in participating in this study

Please contact Angela Leung at angela2u@uw.edu or text at 425.780.5639 if you want to learn more about this study or participate in the interview.

Please note:

- Participation in the research study is always voluntary
- You can choose not answer any question(s) during the interview
- Interview will be recorded. Each digital audio / Zoom recording will be deleted after transcription.
- Interviews are conducted in 1) mutually agreed public venues and times such as campus library, meeting rooms, etc. during regular business hours; or 2) remotely via Zoom.
- Participants' identities are protected using the University of Washington's IRB guidelines. The interviewee's real name is not mentioned during voice or video recording as participants will be addressed as "you" by the investigator (Angela); or the pseudonym you choose.
- Participants will be informed that private names (person, institution, or company) will be coded with pseudonyms. If any physical address is mentioned, data is presented at the city level such as the City of Seattle. No street name or street number will be collected in surveys and interviews, even in voluntary optional contact information.

- No sensitive or identifiable information will be collected (for example, monetary or financial data will be represented in the range, not in specific amount).

Sincerely,

Angela Leung, Ph.C.

EdD Candidate

University of Washington Tacoma

Appendix B

Sample questions in the interview

Background

- Do your parents attend college and earn a bachelor's degree? Where? What's the highest degree?
- How many language/dialects do you speak at home, before you come to the U.S.?
- Do you have any AP, IB or Advanced Level examinations completed before you started studying in the US?
    - What subject(s) and score – whether they receive college-level credits

Identity

- What is the place of origin in your Form I-20? Is it the same country that you were born?
- How do you identify yourself when you fill out the questions in nationality, race and ethnicity in the community college and university?
    - How do you identify yourself (who are you?) when you are in conservation with others?
    - Did you have any experience that other people assume you are from Mainland China? How did you respond?
    - How do you see you are different from international students from Mainland China?
- What comes to your mind with these terms:
    - Asian in America
    - Asian American
    - Chinese American

    - Chinese international students
    - Other _____ (in participant's exact wordings)
- Talk to me a little bit about how you see yourself as:
    - International student
    - Transfer student
    - International transfer student
- Are you a member of any Chinese student association on-campus in the CC or now at the university? (Or Hong Kong, Singaporean, Taiwanese, Vietnamese, Thai, Malaysian, Indonesian student association - depending on their place of origin). Or any student association specific for international students?
    - How did you find the association(s)?
    - Who recruited you?
    - How did you choose which association to join?
    - If not joining any student association that is country-specific or for international students, why?
    - Did you join any student association/club that is related to your major?

Transfer Process

- How did you decide to transfer to (name of the university that participant currently attending) as your final decision?
    - Did you talk to anyone before making the final decision?
    - Did you get accepted to the major? Or just for general admissions? Follow up: if interviewee did not get accepted to the major, why would they accept the offer?
        - When did you start researching universities?

    - What resource(s) do you use to research universities?
- Did you get any help to plan your transfer. If so, from whom?
    - Can you tell me how long did you work with (each of them, if interview mention more than 1 person/group)?
    - How did you choose (those) universities that you plan to apply to?
- What was the biggest challenge in your transfer application (not necessarily the college that interviewee eventually transferred to)?
- How did you satisfy the English proficiency requirement (for International Students) when you applied to the community college,
    - and then in the university transfer application? Did you complete ENGL& 101 and ENGL& 102 (ENGL 201) before application or before graduation?
- Do you think volunteering, internship, on-campus job, leadership experience in student organization/club and campus activities participation enhance your transfer possibility?
    - Did you mention these experiences in your personal statement/admission essay?

Supports

- Did you attend the new student orientation at the CC?
    - How long was the orientation? What format?
        - Half-day? One-day? Multiple day?
        - In-person? Online? Or hybrid?
    - What was the most important/useful information that you learned from the orientation?
    - Did you register for your first quarter classes before the new student orientation?
- How often do you meet with your advisor in CC (and university now)?

  - Is the meeting mandatory? (For example, you cannot register until you had a meeting)
  - What advisors? (Academic and/or immigration) – depending on which CC.
  - For what issues?
  - Besides the designated advisor(s), who did you talk to on-campus when you need advice?
  - Do you have any mentor or peer-mentor, or "buddies" assigned? By whom?
- Did you take any class that is specified for new students in the first quarter in the college-level program? Is it mandatory? Does it bear college credit? Is it counted towards your degree requirement? Is that class for any new students or inclusive for international students on F-1 visa?
  - Overall, do you think the course was useful to help you survive in the first and subsequent quarters?
  - What is the assignment/lesson that you found most impactful?
  - Did you register for your first quarter classes before the new student orientation?
- Did you join any student organization or club on-campus that is related to your major in CC?
  - What kind of support did you get from the club?
  - Are you a member of any national/regional student organization?
- Did you attend the new student orientation at the university or at the department?
  - If skipped CC's and attended 4-year, follow up with the reason(s)
  - How long was the orientation? What format?
    - Half-day? One-day? Multiple day?
    - In-person? Online? Or hybrid?

  - What was the most important/useful information that you learned from the orientation?

- What help do you get for your onboarding at the university or department besides the new student orientation?

Wrapping up

- What do you wish to know or what support do you wish to have (that was missing) as an international student to be best prepared for all challenges that you mentioned?
- Is there anything else you want to share with me?