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Stereotypes from the Inside: Chinese International Students' Experiences with Peers' Outgroup Favoritism

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ABSTRACT

Communication scholars often examine immigrants' ingroup favoritism to study their intergroup/intercultural communication. Less is known about how some immigrants exhibit outgroup favoritism for the host culture and how outgroup favoritism relates to their ingroup communication. Drawn upon literature on outgroup favoritism, this study understands international/intercultural communication in a global system where some immigrants favor the hosting outgroup. The researcher investigates how Chinese international students experience their peers' performance of outgroup favoritism in the United States. Through in-depth interviews (n = 15), this study identifies how outgroup favoritism enacts negative ingroup stereotyping and ingroup distancing. Students with outgroup favoritism strategically negotiate for less ingroup membership and more outgroup affiliation, creating mutual exclusion among ingroup members. Discussion focuses on Chinese international students' communication dilemma with outgroup-favoring ingroup members.

Keywords: intergroup communication, international students, outgroup favoritism, stereotype

INTRODUCTION

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) posits that people prioritize their ingroup identity and perform ingroup favoritism. Ingroup favoritism refers to the

bias that "when people strongly identify with their ingroup … they will tend to favor their ingroup and sometimes derogate other outgroups" (Dasgupta, 2004, p. 146). Many intercultural studies include ingroup favoritism to understand immigrants' intercultural communication, such as identity defense and priding (e.g., Zhang, 2019). Little is known, however, about the opposite tendency, outgroup favoritism, when intercultural communication engages an advantaged (favorable) outgroup (the group one does not belong to and does not share certain identities with).

Individuals, especially those from socially disadvantaged groups, sometimes devalue their ingroup and positively favor advantaged outgroups. Many studies (see Jost, 2019) report outgroup favoritism performances across domestic groups such as African Americans' outgroup favoritism for Caucasian Americans (Rankin et al., 2009), females' favoritism for males (Rudman et al., 2012), and sexual minorities' favoritism for heterosexuals (Pacilli et al., 2011). However, we know little about disadvantaged intercultural communicators' outgroup favoritism for advantaged nationals/cultures.

The relationship between the United States and China engenders an intercultural comparison of the advantaged (a developed country) and the disadvantaged (a developing country). Studying in the United States is a context where Chinese international students respond to this intercultural comparison and evaluate the intercultural relationship. This study seeks to explore Chinese international students' experience of outgroup favoritism in this intercultural context. Because outgroup-favoring communicators often negatively stereotype their ingroup members and adjust their ingroup communication (Jost & Kay, 2005), this study seeks to examine how Chinese international students experience being ingroup-stereotyped and being separated from outgroup-favoring peers. Studying Chinese international students' experiences with outgroup favoritism helps understand their identity preservation and ingroup communication. Understanding outgroup favoritism and outgroup-favoring immigrants' ingroup communication helps understand how their cultural favoritism relates to their cultural adaption.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Outgroup Favoritism and Intercultural Communication

Most research using social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) has focused on intergroup communicators' ingroup favoritism/bias as a strategy to maintain self-esteem and group identity. However, social identity theory does not account for the opposite favoritism in intergroup communication. Jost et al. (2004) reported that "members of disadvantaged groups often hold ambivalent, conflicted attitudes about their own group membership and surprisingly favorable attitudes toward members of more advantaged groups" (p. 884). For example, Brown (1986) observed that "subordinate groups like black Americans, South African Bantus, the Mayans of Guatemala, and the lower castes of India either do,

or until recently did, derogate or look down on the ingroup and show positive attitude towards the depriving outgroup" (p. 558). Besides race-related favoritism, scholars have also reported outgroup favoritism performances in disadvantaged groups such as females, sexual minorities, and aged populations compared with advantaged groups such as males, heterosexuals, and young populations (see Jost, 2019). Outgroup favoritism negatively influences disadvantaged people's self-esteem and discourages their equal communication with the advantaged groups. For example, females who show outgroup favoritism for males are more likely to endorse negative self-stereotyping (Laurin et al., 2011), engage in self-objectification (Calogero & Jost, 2011), and resist participating in collective action against sexism (Becker & Wright, 2011). Therefore, outgroup favoritism should be a significant concept in understanding intergroup communication.

Outgroup favoritism is a result of people's justification of the social system (Jost & Banaji, 1994). System justification theory proposes that during intergroup communication, "people exhibit system-justifying tendencies to defend and rationalize existing social, economic, and political arrangement—sometimes even at the expense of individual and collective self-interest" (Jost, 2019, p. 263). For example, when African Americans believe the social structure is unchangeable and supposedly stable, they reported a higher intention to justify racial inequality by negatively stereotyping their ingroup and positively stereotyping Caucasian Americans (Jost et al., 2004). However, most research on outgroup favoritism has focused on domestic categories such as race, gender, sexuality, and age. Immigrants, especially those from traditionally defined disadvantaged countries (e.g., developing countries), may also justify the global system by performing outgroup favoritism for developed countries and cultures.

This study understands that intercultural communication takes place in a global system where some people from traditionally defined disadvantaged groups (e.g., developing countries) may perform outgroup favoritism for the advantaged groups (e.g., developed countries). A few recent studies have reported Chinese outgroup favoritism for Western cultures, especially American cultures (Ji, 2019; Ji & Bates, 2019). Chinese international students in the United States may have more direct experience with outgroup favoritism, as their peers (i.e., ingroup members) constantly interact with American students, teachers, and others (i.e., outgroup members). Thus, this study includes Chinese international students in the United States to understand their experience of outgroup favoritism.

Although previous psychology studies have shown that outgroup favoritism generates attitudinal changes such as less ingroup identification or ingroup esteem (Jost, 2019), we have little knowledge about outgroup favoritism as a communicative tendency. Supposedly, compared with ingroup-favoring students, outgroup-favoring students may invest less in ingroup connection than outgroup relations. In response to the scarcity of outgroup favoritism in intercultural studies, this study seeks to understand the manifestation of outgroup favoritism in ingroup communication.

Outgroup Favoritism and Ingroup Communication

One major performance of outgroup favoritism is activating and endorsing negative ingroup stereotypes. Jost and Kay (2005) explained that "one way in which stereotypes function to legitimize the system in the context of inequality is by ascribing to members of advantaged and disadvantaged groups distinctive, offsetting strengths and weaknesses" (p. 306). Disadvantaged group members' negative ingroup stereotyping preserves current social hierarchies/stratifications. Studies (e.g., Dasgupta, 2004) have found that people from disadvantaged groups often favor advantaged outgroups by associating their success with positive attributes (e.g., being hardworking). However, they devalue their ingroup by attributing their disadvantages to their wrongdoings (e.g., laziness). For example, females use the stereotype "women don't do math" to justify their failure in and their male peers' success in mathematics tasks (Blanton et al., 2002). Regarding intercultural communicators, we have limited knowledge about what some ingroup stereotypes are among Chinese international students.

Outgroup-favoring individuals' negative ingroup stereotyping may impact other ingroup members' identities. Negative stereotypes have been long studied as threats to identity and self-esteem (Steele et al., 2002). When one identifies with their ingroup strongly, negative stereotypes against this ingroup can create identity dissonance that leads to depressive feelings, less empowerment, and less self-esteem (Burkley & Blanton, 2008). Long-term influences of these negative ingroup stereotypes can even cause internalization of inferiority (Jost et al., 2004). Most research on stereotyping communication focuses on stereotypes that are created by outgroups. For example, Ruble and Zhang (2013) examined how American media stereotyped Asians and found that Asians were negatively stereotyped to be nerdy and likely "left out." However, we do not know what stereotypes can be activated by ingroup members and how ingroup members experience these ingroup stereotypes.

This study seeks to contribute to our understandings of Chinese international students' outgroup favoritism. Specifically, I asked the following research questions:

> RQ1: How do Chinese international students understand their outgroup-favoring ingroup peers' ingroup communication?
>
> RQ2: What are some negative ingroup stereotypes that Chinese international students experience during their sojourns in the United States?

METHOD

Participants

The study used a combination of criterion sampling, convenience sampling, and snowball sampling (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017). Because the participants of

interest were Chinese international students and outgroup favoritism was believed to be relevant among the disadvantaged group (e.g., immigrants from less developed countries), the criterion was that the participants had to be Chinese international students who were studying in American universities or colleges. Because Chinese international students likely interacted with outgroup-favoring peers, regardless of their own cultural favoritism, participants' favoritism was not set up as a screening criterion.

To identify participants, I used my interpersonal networks with other Chinese international students ($n_1 = 7$). The initial participants then reached out for more Chinese international students ($n_2 = 8$) to participate in this study. All participants were Chinese international students studying at the same large Midwest U.S. university. All of the participants were self-identified Chinese international students from the Chinese mainland. They varied in their genders (10 females and five males), majors, age (mean age = 21.9 years), educational levels (nine undergraduates and six graduates), and sojourn lengths (from four months to over three years; participants' sojourn lengths didn't seem to influence their experience of outgroup favoritism). After accepting the interview invitation, the participants read and signed the institutional review board consent form. I gave each participant a $5 gift card for their participation at the conclusion of each interview. I conducted 13 interviews face-to-face and two through live chat software. All participants preferred to have their interviews in Mandarin (see Table 1).

Table 1: Participant Demographics

No.	Gender	Age	Citizenship	Sojourn stay	Major	Educational level	Highest earned degree
1	Male	19	Chinese	3 years and 5 months	Environmental chemistry	College	High school
2	Female	25	Chinese	9 months	Biology	Doctoral	Masters
3	Female	18	Chinese	11 months	Language preparation program	College	High school
4	Female	21	Chinese	9 months	Art design	College	High school
5	Female	23	Chinese	3 years and 2 months	—	Masters	College
6	Male	22	Chinese	1 year and 7 months	Economics	College	High school
7	Female	23	Chinese	10 months	—	Master	Bachelor
8	Female	24	Chinese	1 year	Economics	Master	Bachelor
9	Male	20	Chinese	10 months	Undecided	College	High school

No.	Gender	Age	Citizenship	Sojourn stay	Major	Educational level	Highest earned degree
10	Male	27	Chinese	3 years and 10 months	Medical	Doctoral	Masters
11	Female	22	Chinese	3 years and 6 months	Communication studies	College	High school
12	Female	21	Chinese	2 years and 6 months	Economics	College	High school
13	Female	23	Chinese	1 year and 2 months	—	Masters	Bachelors
14	Female	21	Chinese	2 years and 5 months	Education	College	High school
15	Male	19	Chinese	1 year and 5 months	Language preparation program	College	High school

Note: Dash indicates that the participant chose to not disclose their major.

Interview Procedures

I used a semistructured interview protocol (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to collect data from the participants. To match the meaning of intercultural outgroup favoritism in Chinese, I used the phrase 崇洋媚外 to explain the research interest in the invitation letter. 崇洋媚外 is an expression for those Chinese who admire and favor other, especially Western, cultures in a biased way. I asked the participants to recall their experience with other Chinese international students who they believed had outgroup favoritism for the United States. All of the participants believed that they had experienced communicating with some Chinese international students who had outgroup favoritism.

The face-to-face interviews took place at cafeterias and library discussion rooms on campus. I started the interviews by introducing the concept of and examples for outgroup favoritism (Ji & Bates, 2020). I then asked the participants their general understanding of and experience with outgroup favoritism after their arrival in the United States. The participants recalled their Chinese peers (e.g., friends, classmates, acquaintances) who they believed had outgroup favoritism for the American culture. To answer the research questions, two central questions were anchored in interviews: "How do those outgroup-favoring students maintain their ingroup communication with you and other Chinese students?" and "What are some stereotypes that outgroup-favoring students may have against you and other Chinese students?" The participants also talked about their communicative adjustment to their outgroup-favoring peers. After the convenience sampling, I started data analysis simultaneously with snowball sampling.

Data Analysis and Member Validation

The qualitative study used grounded theory research methods (Charmaz, 2014). All of the interviews were audiorecorded. The recorded interviews lasted 16 hrs in total. To stay close to the original data, I transcribed the interviews in Mandarin. I then used open coding and focused coding procedures (Charmaz, 2014). This two-phase coding procedure allowed me to create categories that are close with firsthand evidence that reflects the participants' experience with and cultural understanding of social realities in the field. In the open coding phase, I examined the interview narratives line by line and assigned the data into similar thematic categories. I translated the initial codes into English and used English in the following analysis. In the focused coding phase, I constantly compared and integrated initial codes that shared similar thematic connections and conceptual potentials. At the same time, this inductive process was informed by my theoretical knowledge of and sensitivity to intercultural communication. After creating the focused codes, I mapped out common themes I identified through the transcripts to articulate the participants' experiences of outgroup favoritism.

Each participant received a typed transcript of their interview through email. I asked the participants to evaluate the accuracy of the transcripts. Ten participants replied and confirmed that the transcript was accurate. I did not receive disapproval of the transcripts. In the following description of findings, participants have been given pseudonyms.

RESULTS

The data analysis yielded three themes in answering the research questions. The first theme reveals ingroup distancing and potential ingroup exclusion as the result of outgroup favoritism. The second theme adds to the first theme and portrays how outgroup-favoring Chinese students ingratiate themselves with the outgroup. The third theme discloses that those Chinese international students with outgroup favoritism often enact negative ingroup stereotypes to generate their distinctiveness from other ingroup members.

Ingroup Distancing and Mutual Exclusion

Participants believed that their outgroup-favoring peers were more likely to distance themselves from the Chinese international students' ingroup. Expressions such as "abandon," "look down," "distance," and even "betrayal" appeared in the interviews as the participants were describing their communication with outgroup-favoring peers. Participant 4 said:

> They [students with outgroup favoritism] don't seem to like other Chinese students. I think they value their experience with American culture, not with other Chinese students. If we hang out too much with other Chinese students and we want to include them, they would question "what is the point of coming to the U.S. if all you do is staying with a

> network circle of Chinese students?" … I think you can see two types of students here: who are always with other Chinese and who despise the first type.

Besides distancing themselves from the Chinese students' social circle, outgroup-favoring students were believed to look down on those who restrictedly preserve ingroup membership. Participant 14 said:

> I don't understand why they are so comfortable with leaving their ingroup people… Most of them look down on other Chinese international students who are shy and introverted. They believe they speak English better, and they know American culture better.

Similarly, Participant 8 said: "You can feel their feeling of being superior…They may think that they are 'half-American'."

In addition to accusing outgroup-favoring peers of culturally defecting from their ingroup, participants also expressed disappointment. They thought outgroup favoritism necessarily meant devaluing one's cultural pride. Participant 6 who said "I love my nation" right at the beginning of the interview, said: "I am concerned [with outgroup favoritism] … It seems common especially among international students. But it really means that you are less proud of our culture and that's problematic. The moon in the U.S. is not rounder." In one extreme case, one participant used a very negative label for those with outgroup favoritism. Participant 15 claimed: "I am angry with those who don't value Chinese culture. Is everything in the US that good? I do not have respect for those people."

The participants' reactions to outgroup favoritism demonstrated a mutual exclusion between the ingroup-favoring and the outgroup-favoring. Participant 9 said: "They don't like us and we don't like them. It is almost mutually exclusive." Similarly, Participant 15 said: "I am fine with them [not liking the ingroup]. I look down on them too." Even though most of the participants would not confront outgroup-favoring peers and those negative ingroup stereotypes, they seemed to choose to stay ingroup as resistance to outgroup favoritism. Participant 7 said: "Two different paths [free translation by the author]. Since they already dislike Chinese ingroup, it is natural that they have their social circle, and we have ours."

Outgroup Ingratiation

In addition to ingroup communication, many participants also shared their observation of outgroup-favoring peers' outgroup communication. Participants believed that outgroup-favoring peers were more likely to socialize with American friends, attend American-hosted events, and learn American culture. Participant 7 said: "They like to hang out with American friends and attend their activities like parties. Even though we don't have drinking parties like that [in China], they seem to have no problem in doing that." Participant 1 said: "Making American friends is international and cool. And making friends with other Chinese students is sort of bad [stigmatized] because they will say that you are isolating yourself." Some participants also mentioned that those with outgroup

favoritism also would use or blend English in their daily communication. Participant 7 said: "Use English in daily communication with other Chinese. Especially when they blend English words in Mandarin talks, it is annoying."

One specific indicator of their inclination to make American friends was on social media. Participant 5 said:

> I have some friends, and they always post pics and short videos of them with American friends [on Wechat, a popular Chinese chat app]. Look at how these posts are written in English. It is a Chinese app, and they are using English all the time. I bet they feel good with these English posts.

Other participants also said that their peers with outgroup favoritism seemed to be more active on American-used social media such as Instagram and Facebook.

Participants problematized outgroup-favoring peers' ingratiation with Americans. Many participants claimed that they did not believe that one with outgroup favoritism can communicate with the host outgroup equally. Participant 11 said:

> It is like you are so enthusiastic about them [the host outgroup], but they are not as enthusiastic. I think when you try too hard, you will be given the cold shoulder [free translation by the author] … The favoritism is one-sided.

Similarly, Participant 13 commented:

> Sometimes over-enthusiastic. Immediately put on a different face and try to ingratiate with Americans. You can tell they work so hard to be polite, to be funny, and to be communicative … [They] Almost like to be patronized. I don't know why but I see them communicate [with the host outgroup] not normally. If you are too enthusiastic, they will think you are not worth it.

These narratives showed that participants disliked their outgroup-favoring peers' assimilation to the U.S. culture at the cost of equal communication. They commonly understood favoritism-motived intergroup communication as ingratiation.

Ingroup Stereotype as Self-Delineation

Three major types of stereotypes against Chinese international students emerged: separating from the host culture, relying on family, and having low cultural competence. The three thematic stereotypes referred to Chinese international students often being stereotyped as reluctant to adapt to the American culture, dependent on their family's financial support, and inapt at adjusting to the new host culture.

Most interviewees mentioned that their peers with outgroup favoritism often stereotyped Chinese international students as resisting assimilation to U.S. culture. Some subcategories under this type of stereotype included only socializing with other Chinese students, being cliquey to other outsiders/groups,

being introverted, being disinterested in school, and isolating themselves. Outgroup-favoring students seemed to believe that most Chinese international students were not interested in adapting to the new culture. Participant 15 said: "We often are labeled as introverted and exclusive. Stay with other Chinese. Stay small groups." Similarly, Participant 4 said: "Introverted. Don't speak up. But sometimes we are afraid; sometimes we are not interested. I think it makes sense because many students like to form and stay within a small group of international students." Another commonly mentioned stereotype of Chinese international students was that they were not actively participating in school. Participant 12 said: "Many others think that we skipped school all the time. We are criticized that we are not committed to school work because we are not actively expressive in classes."

Another stereotype explained why some Chinese international students were stereotyped as disengaging in the host culture. Many participants said their intercultural competence was believed to be low. English proficiency seemed a commonly targeted weakness of Chinese international students. Participant 6 commented on this stereotype: "They believed that our English is bad… Many students are terrified of speaking up because they can be judged [based on their English proficiency]." Participant 2 also said: "[They think] We don't speak English because of bad accent. It is a bad loop. The more scared you are, the less you speak. The less you use [English], the more you are worried about your accent." Similarly, Participant 10 said: "The more scared you are, the fewer opportunities for you to practice." In addition to language concerns, the unfamiliarity with the host culture seemed to add to the communication barrier. Participant 2 said: "The U.S. culture is very different from Chinese. Sometimes because we are outsiders of the culture, [they think] we are awkward and inconsiderate. We can make mistakes."

The last major type of ingroup stereotype was Chinese students' reliance on their family. Mostly for undergraduate students, it is common to rely on parents' financial support. Some of the subcategories of this type of stereotype included being rich, being obsessed with luxury brands, and being extravagant. Being rich has negative connotations because it is an ironic expression for some students' financial dependence on their families. Participant 6: "Many students are believed to spend most of their parents' money on buying products of luxury brands." Similarly, Participant 2 said: "[Many Chinese international students pursue] The Instagram influencer's lifestyle… Expensive cars, luxury brands, and oversea vacation."

As these stereotypes emerged from the interviews, the interviews also disclosed how Chinese international students with outgroup favoritism strategically used ingroup stereotyping to address their distinctiveness to other Chinese international students. Participant 6 said: "They [students with outgroup favoritism] mean others, not them … They believe that they are different from the majority." Similarly, Participant 13 said: "They are good. The problems are others', not theirs … You see them criticize other Chinese peers like they are different." Participants explained this strategic use of ingroup stereotypes by their needs for distinctiveness. Participant 4 said: "I think some of them see themselves

better than others." In addition, outgroup-favoring peers seemed to need distinctiveness from other Chinese students in Americans' presence. Participant 11, shared her experience:

> I remember one time I was in a group project team. I, a Chinese guy, and two other American students were working on a presentation. One American complimented that we spoke English really well … And the other Chinese guy immediately responded and said that many Chinese international students don't speak English well, and he tried hard to learn … [I] Rolled my eyes right away.

In this excerpt, the outgroup-favoring student used an ingroup stereotype to distinguish himself from other Chinese international students. The purpose of this ingroup stereotyping was to obtain American students' recognition. Similarly, Participant 4 said: "They ingratiate themselves with Americans by confirming the stereotypes [that American students already have] … Americans would think, 'oh, you are with us'."

Participants did not often confront these ingroup stereotypes directly. Participant 2 said: "We would ignore those stereotypes. They are not always true and we don't bother to argue with them." They seemed aversive to address these ingroup stereotypes. Participant 1 said: "It is no use. Americans have stereotypes [of Chinese international students] anyway." Instead, they actively block those outgroup-favoring students once they find them practicing ingroup stereotypes. Participant 8 said that if she finds her peers negatively stereotyping other Chinese students, she would "cut off immediately."

DISCUSSION

This study aims to examine Chinese international students' experience with outgroup-favoring peers. Throughout the in-depth interviews, Chinese international students in the United States disclosed that they experience their outgroup-favoring peers' negative ingroup stereotyping, outgroup ingratiation, and ingroup distancing. From a perspective of ingroup communication, Chinese international students were sensitive to others' outgroup favoritism and mutually excluded each other based on their cultural affiliations.

Ingroup Stereotyping as Attributional Communication

Outgroup-favoring students' ingroup stereotyping can be understood as attributional communication. According to attribution theory (Kelley, 1973; Martinko, 2018), individuals desire to explain why things happen, especially when they experience adverse outcomes. One primary function of attributing is ego and identity defense (Berger, 1973). For example, students who failed an exam are more likely to attribute their poor performance to "bad luck," "unfair questions," and "poor instruction from the teacher" (i.e., external attributions), whereas students who get good grades like to attribute their success to their "hard

work," "preparedness," and "commitment pay-off" (i.e., internal attributions). On the contrary, attributing one's success to external attributions and attributing one's failure to internal attribution would diminish one's ability and attack one's self-esteem (Berger, 1973; see also Martinko, 2018).

Reflected by the genres of the stereotypes, outgroup-favoring students attributed their ingroup peers' less successful cultural adaption to their internal traits (e.g., being cliquey, dependent, shy, lacking commitment), instead of external causes (e.g., linguistic difficulties, cultural unfamiliarity, exclusive environment, stress). This attributing pattern identifies the outgroup-favoring students' partial and biased observations of their peers: They tend to gaze at the "wrongdoings" of the ingroup peers but ignore the many hidden environmental factors that challenge Chinese international students' cultural adaption. According to attribution theory, results of these attributions are twofold: The stereotyped Chinese international students perceive attacks on their ego and identity, which leads to their hostile attitudes to the outgroup-favoring students, and the outgroup-favoring students develop negative affective dispositions to the ingroup peers due to their incapacity.

Outgroup-favoring Chinese international students use stereotypes that exclude them out of the ingroup (e.g., "They don't speak English well"). A clear distinction between "they" and "we" is identified. By not including themselves in the stereotypes, they extract themselves from the ingroup. At the same time, by this "downward" comparison with other Chinese students, these outgroup-favoring Chinese students sought better self-evaluation. Comparing self with other ingroup members and finding distinction from other ingroup members are typical defensive mechanisms for better self-evaluation among lower status group members (Collins, 1996). This study implies some Chinese international students would utilize ingroup distinctions and ingroup stereotypes to defend their positive self-perception under the pressure of intensive intercultural communication or comparison. Future research may want to expand on outgroup-favoring students' motives to stereotype their ingroups.

One of the concerns of negative ingroup stereotypes is reduced pursuit of social change. From the perspective of system justification theory, Burkley and Blanton (2008) argued that negative ingroup stereotyping decreases a person's tendency to question intergroup hierarchies and unjust social arrangements. As a result, ingroup stereotyping "is analogous to comfort food—it may alleviate immediate discomfort, but over time, the cumulative effects can be detrimental" (Burkley & Blanton, 2008, p. 296). For international students in the United States, those who negatively stereotype their ingroup may temporarily gain satisfaction upon derogating their ingroup that they identify with less. But the use of stereotypes would preserve a negatively attributed ingroup and decrease the disadvantaged group's ability to question or change the status quo (Jost & Banaji, 1994). The negative ingroup stereotypes may concern intercultural communication scholars, as they perpetuate the marginalization of international students.

Mutual Exclusion and the Cultural Root

Participants depicted the ingroup distancing and outgroup ingratiation of outgroup-favoring students, along with the use of negative ingroup stereotypes. Ingratiation is a less studied concept in intercultural communication. Gallois et al. (2015) argued that in intercultural communication, ingratiation is overaccommodation. Overaccommodation reflects unmatched communication commitments and often leads to adverse results. Outgroup-favoring students' affinity seeking is problematic when their American peers show less interest. We do not know how this ingratiation, especially in the form of negative ingroup stereotyping, influences American students' inclusion of Chinese international students. But ingratiation preserves the unequal positions between the advantaged/ingratiated American students and the disadvantaged/ingratiating Chinese international students. At a deeper level, ingratiation can also lead to self-harm beliefs, especially after being rejected (Breines & Ayduk, 2015). Therefore, future research may want to study the ingratiation of outgroup-favoring immigrants.

This research notices the mutual exclusion between the Chinese students based on their cultural favoritisms. The mutual disdain and exclusion between those with strong ingroup favoritism and outgroup favoritism bring challenges. For strongly ingroup-favoring members, their strong objection to outgroup favoritism may lead to less cultural adaption, more ingroup cliquishness, and consequentially more acculturative stress (Yan, 2017). For strongly outgroup-favoring students, they may be positioned in a place where they are not yet accepted or included by their American peers after they have distanced from their ingroup. Previous research (Bhochhibhoya et al., 2017) showed that for international students, ingroup relationships are the primary source for social support. Most international students reported lowest obtained social support from family and friends living and born in the United States. That said, strongly outgroup-favoring students may end up with limited social supports. Therefore, future studies may want to focus on those international students with outgroup favoritism and research how they negotiate their identity maintenance, belongingness, and social support from the in/outgroups.

The findings of this study should be read in reference to the nature of Chinese culture. Chinese culture has been typically seen as a collective culture with high power distance (Hofstede, 2001). Cultural members of collective cultures are often dependent on other cultural members and comply with the culture's behavioral norms and codes, and cultures with high power distance tolerate the unequal distributions of powers. Chinese international students' performances of outgroup favoritism reflect the collective and high power distance culture's influences. Instead of questioning or challenging the unequal power relation between the host culture outgroup and the ethnocultural ingroup, outgroup-favoring students endorse the dominance by separating from the ingroup and ingratiating with the outgroup. This influence of collectivism and high power distance specifies the acculturation strategy of many Chinese immigrants, which generates stereotypes such as the model minority (Kawai, 2005). For immigrants

from more individualistic and low power distance cultures, they may perform outgroup favoritism differently. Future research may want to compare outgroup favoritism across disadvantaged groups from different cultural backgrounds.

Limitations and Implications

There are some methodological limitations worth noting. The first limitation of this research comes from the small convenient sample. Fifteen Chinese international students from the same Midwest university were interviewed. Given the sample size and the homogeneity of school affiliation in this sample, future research may want to explore outgroup favoritism in other educational contexts. In addition, all the participants were originally from the Chinese mainland, which leads to a homogenous sample exclusive of other culturally defined Chinese international students. Likely, international students from other spaces that are culturally defined Chinese have different definitions of ingroup and outgroup. Future research may want to investigate outgroup favoritism of international students from other cultural backgrounds.

There might be other translations for outgroup favoritism. In the participation invitation, I used the Chinese phrase 崇洋媚外 to explain outgroup favoritism. There might be some nuances among translation options, but the invitation included both English and Chinese. I gave a brief definition of and several examples for outgroup favoritism (Ji & Bates, 2020) before each interview, and the participants understood outgroup favoritism similarly to how scholars have conceptualized outgroup favoritism.

Stereotypes can be exerted based on one's other domains of identity such as gender and sexuality. The current study focused on the identity of immigrants and did not account for the multifaceted nature of stereotyped identities. Future studies may want to assess the interactions of marginalized identities and ingroup stereotypes.

In this exploratory study, the goal was understanding Chinese international students' experiences of outgroup-favoring peers. From the participants' responses, they seem more ingroup-favoring than outgroup-favoring. A more straightforward approach would be to recruit outgroup-favoring immigrants directly, although recruitment may be challenging because of social desirability concerns.

Furthermore, my personal bias as a Chinese may have influenced data collection and analysis. When ingroup members are present, participants may be more likely to criticize outgroup favoritism (Dasgupta, 2004). At last, some participants mentioned that outgroup favoritism sometimes might not manifest in communication behaviors as it can be a hidden, unspoken bias. Therefore, future studies may want to introduce more explicit, observable indicators for outgroup favoritism.

In conclusion, this exploratory study offers insights into how Chinese international students experienced ingroup stereotyping and ingroup distancing due to outgroup favoritism performances. Based on the result that outgroup favoritism is relevant and important to ingroup communication, I hope future

research can include cultural favoritism in understanding international students' in/intergroup communication and cultural adaption. More sociocultural factors (e.g., sojourn length) need to be included in understanding cultural favoritism. Given the significance of favoritism in international students' in/intergroup communication, future research may want to investigate how outgroup-favoring international students maintain their ingroup membership, how outgroup-favoring international students subscribe to the host culture, and how international students' cultural favoritism (ingroup-favoring vs. outgroup-favoring) influences their communication with outgroup-favoring peers. Specifically, scholarly attention should be directed to ingroup stereotyping, as current research tends to focus on out/intergroup stereotyping.

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