

Buffering or Perpetuating: The Perceived Role of Academic Institutions in Chinese International Doctoral Students' Double Pandemics Experiences in the United States

Yabin Tang^a and Maureen. A. Flint^a

University of Georgia, United States

*Corresponding author: Email: yabin.tang@uga.edu.

Address: University of Georgia, Athens, GA, United States, 30605

ABSTRACT

This study adopted a systemic perspective to examine the perceived role of academic institutions in responding to Chinese international doctoral students (CIDS) double pandemic experiences. A hermeneutic phenomenological approach was utilized to guide the research process. The results showed the interlocking relations regarding how individual academic experiences interacted with the social-political-institutional environment during this time of crisis. The discussions highlight the systemic influences on CIDS' experiences. The theoretical and practical implications were included in order to inform systemic interventions.

Keywords: anti-Asian racism, Chinese international doctoral students, perceived institutional role, social-political environment

Received May 1, 2021; revised October 1, 2021; accepted March 29, 2022

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has been perceived as a double pandemic among certain groups due to exacerbated discriminations against Asians (Starks, 2021) and non-citizens (Addo, 2020). In other words, certain groups have weathered both the challenges caused by the viral pandemic and have also experienced a pandemic of discrimination magnified by COVID-19.

This paper is part of a study investigating Chinese international doctoral students' (CIDS) lived experiences in the U.S. Specifically, our analysis in this paper focuses on how Chinese international doctoral students have encountered a double pandemic: navigating academic adaptations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and at the same time negotiating a social-political pandemic. We take a systemic perspective to examine how individual academic experiences interact with the social-political-institutional environment during this crisis. Furthermore, we pay special attention to the perceived role academic institutions play in CIDS experiences of a double pandemic. This focus on systems and institutions guides our implications for institutions to better serve CIDS, as well as how to better respond to the adverse social-political environment to facilitate an equitable, supportive, and inclusive environment in higher education settings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, people of Asian descent living in the US have carried the additional burden of feeling unsafe due to racist rhetoric and events that have occurred since the initial outbreak of the pandemic, on top of the fear of infection with COVID-19 (Lee & Walters, 2021). International students have also carried the additional burden of navigating policies instituted in the wake of the pandemic (Wong & Barnes, 2020) and restricted access to resources (Firang, 2020), which have a direct impact on their studies (Alaklabi et al., 2021). The following literature review will explore graduate students' academic experiences, the adverse social-political background during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the academic institutions response during COVID-19.

Graduate Students' Academic Experiences during COVID-19

Research regarding graduate student's academic experiences during COVID-19 has focused on the individual level experiences of how COVID-19 has impacted their work. Studies have explored how students have handled or experienced abrupt lab shutdowns (Suart et al., 2021), reduced opportunities to exchange research work and build research networks (Wang & Delaquil, 2020), the distinctive shift of research design or data collection (Barroga & Matanguihan, 2020), and scientific misconduct from producing quick results under time constraints (Dinis-Oliveira, 2020). Other studies have explored what COVID-19 has produced in terms of opportunities for graduate students: increased funding towards COVID-19 related research, more time to produce and develop research and grants due to more flexible schedules from working online (Omary et al., 2020), and positive experiences with online learning (Agarwal & Kaushik, 2020). In addition, studies have noted that the shift to virtual learning and communication during the pandemic has increased opportunities to recruit participants who used to be hard-to-reach (Archer-Kuhn et al., 2021; Dodds & Hess, 2021; Noonan & Simmons, 2021; Saberi, 2020).

The Social-Political Background during COVID-19

While students have experienced academic adaptations during the pandemic, Asian international graduate students have experienced an additional social-political pandemic during COVID-19. From the early days of the pandemic, Asians around the world were blamed for carrying and spreading the COVID-19 virus. This has produced a pervasive culture of anti-Asian racism globally from verbal insults (e.g., being told ‘Go back to where you came from!’) to hate crimes against Asians especially Chinese (Stop AAPI Hate Reporting Center, 2020). For example, in the US alone, anti-Asian hate crimes increased 164% across 16 of America’s largest cities and counties in the first quarter of 2021 (CSHE, 2021). Globally, hate crimes against Asians have increased 532% in four cities of Canada in 2020 (CSHE, 2021). In the UK police data indicated a rise of 300% in anti-Asian hate crimes in the first quarter of 2020 (Clements, 2021). Importantly, these percentages are more than numbers—they mark violence against actual people. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated long-existing patterns of racial discrimination against Asians, especially towards the Chinese (Cohn, 2012).

Looking to U.S. higher education specifically, the discourse surrounding several immigration policies threatened disruption for international students and particularly Chinese students throughout the 2020 academic year. For example, U.S. Homeland Security issued a policy banning international students who were enrolling in schools or programs that were fully online from entering the U.S. (ICE, 2020). A presidential proclamation (PP 10043, 2020) specifically targeted Chinese graduate students and researchers’ from obtaining visas due to their ties (real or perceived) to Chinese military schools (Anderson, 2021a; ICE, 2020; Wong & Barnes, 2020). There was also a tightening of the H-1B visa, as well as threats to cancel the Optional Practical Training (OPT) permit under the Trump Administration (Anderson, 2020, 2021b; NAFSA, n.d.). In all, regardless of the implementation of these policies, they have produced a discourse of fear and anxiety surrounding immigration, travel, and visa acquisition that has specifically and particularly affected Chinese international students. In what follows we explore the role of the academic institution during COVID-19 in shaping CIDS experience.

Academic Institutions’ Response During COVID-19

Academic institutions shape international students’ experience in a variety of ways. Previous research has demonstrated that when a university views international students as “carriers of diversity” to fulfill the diversity and multicultural needs on campus (Buckner et al., 2021, p. 37), to booster funding (Buckner, 2019; George & Mwangi, 2013), or to enhance the diplomatic relationship between the U.S. and other nations (Lee & Rice 2007), those perspectives can perpetuate systemic oppressions towards international students (Buckner et al., 2021; Yao et al., 2019). Other research has demonstrated how academic institutions can provide resources for international students through the counseling center, writing center, and international center (Banjong, 2015), or through holding follow-ups after international student orientations as ways to promote a sense of belonging on campus (Jean-Francois, 2017; Rodriguez et al., 2019).

When the COVID-19 pandemic started, many academic institutions shifted delivery of services online to accommodate social distancing policies, provided training and support for faculties and students in online teaching and learning (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021), and allocated emergency funds to students in need (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Despite the unique position of Asian international students during COVID-19, there has been limited research regarding how academic institutions responded to the adverse social-political environment faced by many Asian international students. Investigating the role of the academic institutions is crucial because the institution can work as a buffer to reduce the negative social-political influence, (e.g. through sending a clear anti-racist message and developing anti-racist systems (Jiang, 2020) or perpetuate historic and systemic

institutional oppression, (e.g. through providing no practical or emotional support for students who struggled to come back to the host country after returning home for various reasons (Xu & Tran, 2021).

THE STUDY

As addressed in the literature review, Chinese international graduate students may experience a ‘double pandemic’ — dealing with both the challenges of adapting academically during the COVID-19 pandemic and the adverse social-political pandemic. To date, there has been one study which explored how Chinese international doctoral students navigated the disrupted study trajectory during COVID-19 (Xu & Tran, 2021). However, this study focused mainly on how individuals successfully identified and used multiple resources to overcome academic challenges (Xu & Tran, 2021). Therefore, the current study took a systemic perspective and used a social-political-institutional lens to examine how individual academic experiences interacted with the social-political-institutional environment during this crisis. Specifically, we ask: 1) What are the experiences of CIDS in the US during the pandemic? 2) How did CIDS perceive academic institution’s response to their experiences? 3) What are CIDS experiences of immigration policies and anti-Asian racism during the pandemic in the US?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Two frameworks guided the study: the ecological model and critical race theory (CRT). The purpose of using an ecological model is to take a systemic perspective to investigate how individual academic experiences interacted with the institutional-social-political environment during this time. Critical race theory offers an interpretation of CIDS unique experiences within the exacerbated anti-Asian racism context to center the voice of this marginalized group. Further, CRT takes a critical approach to the ecological model, offering a lens to analyze how race and racism function through individual and at systemic levels.

Researchers have repeatedly pointed out institutional, cultural, and other systemic contributions to international students’ individual experiences (Elliot et al., 2016; Yao et al., 2019; Zhang, 2018). The ecological model consists of five basic systems—microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1995, 2005). In this study, the microsystem refers to the academic challenges and opportunities. The mesosystem refers to the perceived role of the academic institutions in responding to the double pandemics. The exosystem and macrosystem indicate the social-political background: pervasive anti-Asian racism and disturbing immigration policies. Finally, the chronosystem alludes to the COVID-19 pandemic that this study was situated in, and the history of discourse surrounding people of Asian descent in the U.S.

Critical race theory is a multiple-dimensional theory with several core tenets, including the permanence of racism, White supremacy, interest convergence, and intersectionality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Yao et al. (2019) used CRT to analyze articles from 1996 to 2016 regarding international students’ marginalized experiences in the US in higher education and highlighted the systemic influence in perpetuating their negative experience in four themes: permanence and centrality of race and racism, Whiteness as property and White supremacy, intersectionality, and meritocracy and interest convergence. This review has opened the door for future researchers to interrogate the systemic nature of international students’ oppressed experiences through CRT and focuses on academic institutional influence. Therefore, building on Yao et al.’s (2019) work which addressed the utility and necessity of applying CRT to international students’ marginalized experiences, the current research investigates first CIDS experiences of double pandemics, and then takes a closer look at the perceived academic institutions’ response to the social-political environment.

RESEARCH METHOD

A hermeneutic phenomenological approach guided the current research, including conceptualization, data collection, analysis, and results representation. According to van Manen (1990), a hermeneutic phenomenological approach is “the description of the experiential meanings we live as we live them” (p. 11) and emphasizes the interpretation of the phenomenon. This approach fits the current study, which intended to explore the lived experiences (e.g., thoughts, feelings, and behaviors) of international Chinese doctoral students’ living in the U.S. during the COVID-19 pandemic, and their interpretations of the role of their academic institutions in their experiences.

Recruitment Procedure and Sample

Approved by The University of Georgia Institutional Review Board (IRB), the inclusion criteria for participants included (a) identifying as a Chinese citizen; (b) currently enrolled in a doctoral program in the US; (c) having completed at least one year of coursework; (d) being single or partnered but without children since being a student parent has unique challenges during the doctoral journey (e.g., Springer et al., 2009). Participants were recruited via multiple approaches including direct email invitations, snowball sampling, and posts on Facebook from the researcher’s account. Potential participants were asked to complete a 5-minute online survey to assess their eligibility for the study. Fifty-two people completed the online survey, and twenty-six met the inclusion criteria for this study. In the end, eighteen participants from five public universities agreed to participate in the study, and eight participants came back for the focus-group interview (see Table 1 in Appendix I). All five of the institutions are predominately white public institutions, and all are in the Eastern U.S. One of the institutions (University #5) has a satellite campus in China. At four of the five institutions in the sample, Chinese students make up the majority of the international student body except University #4, where China is second to India in international student demographics. To be clear, the sample was not purposefully selected from White-dominated universities; it happened by chance.

Data Collection

Participants engaged in an hour to an hour and a half long in-depth Zoom interview with the first author. Every participant provided informed consent before the interview. A follow-up focus group interview was conducted for member-checking six months after the individual interviews to improve the trustworthiness of the findings. Based on the participant’s preference, the individual interviews were conducted either in English or in Mandarin, and Mandarin was used in the focus group interview. Participants received a \$5 eGift card for participating in the individual interview and a second \$5 eGift Card for participating in the follow-up focus group interview as compensation for participating in this study.

The first and second authors created semi-structured interview questions to explore CIDS’s perceived challenges and barriers during COVID-19. Questions were designed to explore their academic and life experiences at the individual level, the perceived institutional level, and the perceived social-political level. The first author conducted two pilot interviews with two different Chinese international doctoral students who were not among the 18 participants. A sample interview protocol in English is included in Appendix II.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed van Manen’s (2016) hermeneutic phenomenological framework to “isolate semantic statements” (p. 92) and was conducted primarily by the first author. First, using a holistic approach, each transcript was attended to “as a whole” to grasp the “fundamental meaning” of the text (van Manen, 2016, p. 93). Second, phrases or sentences

that seemed particularly salient regarding CIDS' experiences during COVID-19 were selected. Third, each transcript was read line by line to mark the meaningful units, and finally, essential and incidental themes were distinguished (van Manen, 2016). Then, the importance of the initial themes was considered to cluster them into higher-level themes that were essential to the phenomenon. For Mandarin transcripts, Mandarin was used to generate initial themes and codes in first-round coding. Then, themes were translated into English to discuss findings with the second author to refine codes and themes. Afterward, English was used for the second-round coding and further analysis. For the English transcripts, English was used throughout the coding process.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that trustworthiness is significant when evaluating a qualitative study and involves credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility refers to the confidence in the "truth" of the findings. In order to improve the credibility, participants were invited to return for a follow-up focus group interview, which enabled the participants to correct and co-create the interpretation. To improve dependability, or the extent to which the findings could be repeated, the first and second authors met regularly to discuss study design and analysis. Throughout the research, the first author wrote reflexive memos and debriefed findings with the second author to establish confirmability or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents. Throughout the analysis, we use hermeneutic "thick description," to offer transferability and provide the context related to the experiences shared by participants and thus offer connections to other contexts (Freeman, 2014). In addition, the discussion provides implications for transferability grounded in the findings for broader higher education policy and practice.

Positionality

The first author positions herself as an insider to the target population of this study as she is a current Chinese international doctoral student in the U.S. during COVID-19. She is aware that her insider perspective had both strengths (i.e., having the basic knowledge about what to ask the participants and being less invasive to the studied context (Bridges, 2001) and limitations (i.e., her personal experiences may interfere in the research process in the current study (Drake, 2010; Kanuha, 2000)). Apart from thinking critically, she wondered how her shared identity might have shaped stories that were shared with her, as well as what might have been assumed or left out.

The second author is an outsider to the target population as a white faculty member who is a U.S. citizen. She studies questions of equity and justice in higher education as a qualitative methodologist, and her role in the research included assisting in study design and methodology. Throughout the research she remained aware of the power dynamics she brought to the study and talked often with the first author about her role as a contributing author.

RESULTS

Findings from the analysis are broken into two broad categories: (1) academic adaptation and perceived institutional responses, and (2) perceived institutional responses to the social-political environment. The participants' response frequencies were collapsed into the following categories: few (1–3 participants), some (4–8), many (9–12), most (13–17), and all (18 participants). These frequencies are utilized to give the audience a clear picture of the range of shared experiences to avoid suggesting generalizability. Thinking within our theoretical framework, we also point to how these categories are located in/between ecological systems. We bridge these ecological systems further in our discussion.

Microsystem and Mesosystem: Academic Adaptation and Perceived Institutional Responses

Chinese international doctoral students (CIDS) described a range of adaptations and institutional responses during the COVID-19 pandemic that moved between the microsystem and mesosystem. It is important to note that many of these academic experiences are unique to doctoral students, but not necessarily unique to CIDS. As we will explore further, it is considering these experiences in relation to and in conversation with the perceived institutional responses to the socio-political climate that we see a fuller and more complex picture of CIDS experience. The themes we explore include (1) microsystem: academic challenges and opportunities. (2) mesosystem: perceived care and support from major professors or committee and/or from the academic institution.

Microsystem: Experiences of Academic Challenges and Opportunities

Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1995, 2005) model describes the microsystem as the individuals and groups directly surrounding students, as well as the roles that an individual holds. During the pandemic, students' microsystems were often in relationship and response to the chronosystem produced by the pandemic.

Many students described research challenges specific to the pandemic. Some participants struggled with whether to switch to COVID-19 related topics or not. Some participants mentioned the challenges, such as data collection, prolonged IRB process, prolonged publication process in some journals, and the disappointments regarding conference cancellation. For example, one participant struggled with data collection, but one of her committee members suggested that she contact a "volunteer science" online platform to collect data that was free to everyone during COVID-19.

With regard to a sudden shutdown of a lab in crisis, seven participants were regularly involved in lab work. Four out of seven expressed how lockdown disrupted their lab's normal functions, and in turn, influenced their research process. For some majors, a sudden lab lockdown could lead to the delay or entire disruption of the research process. Another participant pointed out that lab protocols during the initial stages of the lockdown were ambiguous. For example,

Only *essential* experiments are allowed to conduct during the lockdown. But what experiments are *essential* is vague, so several of my experiments were put off as they were considered not essential.

Some students also held roles within their institution other than researchers. For example, seven of the 18 participants worked as TAs during the pandemic, and all reported increased stress related to this position. Two of the seven were independent instructors (i.e., taught a course independently of a professor) who expressed intense stress in teaching online during COVID-19. The TAs' stress centered around overwork to accommodate online teaching and what one participant described as "email bombs" from other students. Specifically, this participant noted that, "the numbers of emails increased drastically when I was teaching an experiment class online during COVID-19 compared to the time when I taught the same class in-person before COVID-19." Additionally, two participants noted that they felt TAs were an ignored population when it came to resources and support systems. One participant remarked:

How can I take care of my students if I cannot take care of myself? We have two roles, double stress, but I feel the focus was on undergrads only... So, I think our graduate students also need more support and care.

In terms of research opportunities, some participants mentioned the positive influence on the research process: the boosted new research topics inspired by COVID-19, the ability to collect data across the country online, quick publication processes for COVID-19 related research, funding for COVID-19 related topics, and finally the increased accessibility of academic resources (e.g., some databases were rarely accessed before the pandemic).

These experiences of challenges and opportunities in students' microsystem with individuals and within the roles they held can be further explored through examining their mesosystems – or what Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1995, 2005) described as the relationships among a student's microsystems.

Mesosystem: Perceived Care and Support

In our analysis, the mesosystem was constituted through interactions between students' academic experiences and the academic institution. During the pandemic, this took the form of support and acknowledgement of the effects of the pandemic, often facilitated by major advisors or committee members. For example, one participant described her advisor's emotional support:

I remember at the beginning of the lockdown, we were scared, but our advisor called each of us regularly to check in with us. He told us if we felt stressed or something, he was there for us to talk to. It feels good, you know, it feels like I was cared for.

Other participants mentioned financial or research support from advisors, such as one participant who stated, "My advisor sent me a \$100 check and always asked me how my family were doing. I felt touched very deeply." Another described an advisor who rewrote their grant to ensure graduate student support, and reflected:

My major professor, she can apply for delaying the project. However, if she applied for the delay, our graduate students couldn't get any assistantships... She decided to face a challenge and change the protocol, change the whole research plan. And now we are doing this research smoothly. So, I'm really grateful to her.

Another relationship comprising the mesosystem was the perceived support from the institution. For example, many participants mentioned assistance received from their departments or university. A few participants received university emergency funds, while others received health packages from their institution including masks, thermometers, or sanitizer. Moving our analysis to the exosystem and macrosystem makes possible a consideration of the double pandemics, the role of the larger socio-political environment and the perceived institutional policies and responses.

Exosystem and Macrosystem: Adverse Social-Political Environment

As the Chinese international doctoral students in our study described navigating their microsystem and mesosystems of challenges and support, they were also influenced by their exo- and macrosystems. Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1995, 2005) described the exosystem as connections between events or communities not directly involving the individual and the macrosystem as the overall culture or context. The themes we explore in this section include (1) Exosystem: Navigating disturbing immigration policies; (2) Macrosystem: the anti-Asian racism discourse.

Exosystem: Navigating Disturbing Immigration Policies

During the pandemic, the exosystem was composed by the direct and indirect influence of a series of policies issued in 2020 at the federal level in the US related to international students or Chinese international students specifically. Many students referenced these policies, and the most frequently mentioned policy, was the policy which sought to bar foreign students from online study (ICE, 2020). None of the participants were directly impacted by this policy since it was rescinded several days later. However, some participants addressed the anxiety for the future this policy created. For example, one student noted that,

This policy can disrupt even destroy my whole career plan and I cannot say anything... I have the constant anxiety and worry. It feels like I am the lucky

fish who wasn't caught by the fishnet this time. But as long as there will be another, and another new policy targeting the international students, I won't escape the fishnet next time.

Some participants, especially the four participants in their final year, were especially worried about their visa due to the tightening H-1B visa by the Trump administration. For example, one participant shared her confusion regarding those changing immigration policies,

The policies are constantly changing. I feel confused. Are you welcoming international students or not? if you don't, you can say it. If you do welcome, what's the point of setting barriers after they come here?

Macrosystem: Anti-Asian Discourse

All participants mentioned they noticed the anti-Chinese/anti-Asian comments in the media, as well as the increasing number of hate incidents across the U.S. These incidents composed a macrosystem of a culture of anti-Asian sentiment and racism toward Chinese people. The majority of participants felt anger and helplessness about being blamed for the virus after Trump labeled COVID-19 the "Chinese virus." As one participant described, "I feel angry, I feel I was attacked collectively from different social media platforms." A few participants fought back on social media. For example, one participant said that,

I was so upset to read those anti-Chinese comments on media that I couldn't sleep. No matter how late it was, I got up and fought back. Then, one day I realized, if they chose to believe what they believe no matter right or wrong, there's no way for me to change their opinions. So, I dropped.

Two participants had experiences of direct racism. One shared in an individual interview that she was asked, "where are you from?" in a shopping mall and in a restaurant. She shared,

Those experiences made me feel scared of being asked where I come from. It's a normal question but like a bomb question now... I also feel if I cough or sneeze in public, I would be assumed to have COVID-19 instead of flu because I come from China.

All eight participants in the focus group indicated that the attitudes towards anti-Asian racism seemed to change in a progressive way after the highly publicized aftermath of a shooting in Atlanta that was motivated by anti-Asian sentiments (McDonnell Nieto del Rio & Sandoval, 2021), especially as universities started taking an active role in fighting against it. However, some participants pointed out the anti-Asian discrimination was still there. For example, one student who held clinical hours as part of their doctoral work shared,

The client told the agency that they wanted to switch to another therapist when they just saw my name is an Asian name. I haven't met the client yet. This never happened to me before. This happened after Atlanta shooting.

Some participants expressed the - the fear of living in the US, "I feel my basic safety has been threatened. I live my everyday life in fear." One participant indicated a deprived independence and freedom,

I'm afraid of going out by myself because I am scared, but I know I don't have to be scared if I go out with my boyfriend (White American male) ... I feel I'm no longer an independent person anymore. For my safety, I have to depend on someone. This is basically wrong!

Return to Mesosystem:

Perceived Institutional Responses to the Negative Social-Political Environment

Returning to the mesosystem considering the adverse socio-political context of the exo and macrosystems, we conclude our analysis by exploring students' perceived institutional responses to the negative social-political environment.

Some participants stated that they perceived support from their department and university. These included the department and the university showing their care for international students via correspondence and communication. For instance, a participant said “I felt like a comfort when I received the emails to check in with international students from the International Center, the school president, and the Dean.”

It also included universities taking actions to stop anti-Asian racism. A participant gave an example of her department:

Our department, the Chair, the Dean and all faculties initiated a long Zoom meeting with international students to ask about our needs, what support we need. And our department also organized a seminar to discuss racism against racial minority occurred in the last year. That was good.

Many participants expressed the perceived ignorance from the department and university. The ignorance focused on two aspects: lack of compassion and care for Chinese international students’ or international students’ situations during the pandemic, and institutional ignorance towards anti-Asian racism. In terms of lacking compassion, some participants mentioned the lack of communication from their departments or university’s surrounding the disturbing and racist immigration policies. As one participant said,

We know they (i.e., the department and university) may not have the power to change the policy, but we hope they could send emails to show they are concerned about us.

The perceived institutional ignorance towards anti-Asian racism was mainly related to “no-response” or brush-off behaviors from institutions. Some participants indicated that they never received any statements from their department and/or university to condemn the hateful rhetoric “Chinese virus” or to express solidarity with the Asian community. One participant described the encounter with their department chair:

I went to the department chair to raise his attention. I told him the attacks and discrimination against Chinese students are serious on campus. Well, he asked me if I experienced any attacks. Then, he asked me to let him know if something more happen. I felt helpless and angry because no actions are taken to stop the racism or attacks, and it seems no one cares about thousands of Chinese international students’ situations on campus, and how they are handing those discrimination. No one cares.

Another participant attempted to raise the university’s attention but got brushed off.

When we saw a group of students on campus holding a sign to call the COVID-19 “Chinese Virus,” we think it’s a serious issue. So, several of us reached out to a university office to raise their attention and asked them to condemn this hateful rhetoric. Unfortunately, they responded us officially and said that they cannot control people’s right of free speech.

Later, that participant noted that after being brushed off several times, the office contacted another office to issue a statement. However, the statement letter was only sent to international students. Three participants hesitantly and delicately mentioned BLM (Black Lives Matter) and expressed that they felt “anti-Asian racism seems acceptable.” For example, When BLM event occurred, the college, department, students’ associations were all standing up to declare they allied with black and African American community. That was great, but when the country’s president was call COVID-19 as “Chinese virus,” I think this was really terrible. But no one in our department stood up to condemn this or to protect Asian students. I feel somehow, black students were important. I know I shouldn’t compare, and it’s not even a problem of comparison. But at least there should be a support for us,

you know, especially the majority of the internationals in our department are Chinese.

There was a notable change of department and university's attitudes and response towards anti-Asian racism after the March 2021 Atlanta shooting (McDonnell Nieto del Rio & Sandoval, 2021). This result was added after the member checking focus group in June 2021. All eight participants addressed that they received emails condemning anti-Asian racism from multiple school offices. They all believed "this is progress;" however, they also questioned how truly the department and university validated Asians' racialized experiences and allied with the Asian community. For example, two participants compared the BLM rally and anti-Asian racism rally, "half of the department joined the BLM rally. However, not many faculties or students join the anti-Asian racism rally." Finally, a participant summarized and echoed by all others,

The Biden administration condemned the anti-Asian racism. The department and the university issued statements, showed more compassions to Asian students than before. Those are progress, but hard to know how they really think, is that because it is a politically right thing to do? Well, it's still a long way to go.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The current study uncovered the interlocking relations regarding how individual academic experiences interacted with the social-political-institutional environment during the COVID-19 pandemic. Below, we highlight the perceived role of academic institutions in responding to the adverse social-political-institutional environment, and to the doctoral students' unique academic experiences via the ecological model and the CRT framework. The discussions and implications will be situated within exting literature.

Systemic Perspectives of CIDS Experiences via Ecological Model and CRT Frameworks

Informed by the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1995, 2005), the current study showed the interlocking relations among the CIDS academic adaption during the COVID-19 (the microsystem), the adverse social-political environment that they were embedded in (the exosystem and macrosystem), and the perceived role of academic settings in responding to both pandemics (mesosystem). Importantly, we found that although many students experienced support in their mesosystem from major advisors and committee members for navigating academic challenges, they were ignored or brushed off by the institution in regard to their experiences as Chinese international students. From a systemic perspective, we argue that these roles – that of a doctoral student and that of a Chinese international, cannot be separated, and indeed must be considered together to more fully support CIDS. In other words, an academic institution is perceived as either a buffer or perpetuator depending on whether the institution can validate *both* CIDS' identities (that of a doctoral student and a Chinese international student).

Examining these contrasting experiences of buffering and frustration within the ecological model with CRT highlights the paradox of anti-Asian racism that CIDS have experienced: the pervasiveness of anti-Asian racism exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the perceived institutional invisibility towards anti-Asian racism. The current results expanded Critical Race Theory in two aspects: adding empirical evidence supporting the pervasiveness of racism and interest convergence serving as a possible explanation of the paradox.

Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson Billings & Tate, 1995) emphasizes the pervasiveness of racism to the culture of the U.S. All participants noted anti-Chinese or anti-Asian comments and the frequent use of "Chinese Virus" referring to COVID-19 in the media. This "othering" experience supported CIDS marginalization experiences of

neo-racism: discrimination based on one's culture and national order (Barker, 1981; Lee & Rice, 2007; Spears, 1999). This rhetoric is not confined to the U.S. as several other countries' leaders including the U.K, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and Greece have "latched onto the COVID-19 crisis to advance anti-immigrant, white supremacist, ultra-nationalist, anti-Semitic, and xenophobic conspiracy theories that demonize refugees, foreigners, prominent individuals and political leaders" (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

Another tenet of CRT, interest convergence, states that the needs or desires of a marginalized group will only be met or responded to when they further that of the white or dominant group (Bell, 1980). Interest convergence may help explain the paradox of anti-Asian racism that CIDS experienced: at the same time as CIDS experienced heightened levels of racist rhetoric, they also experienced invisibility at their institutions. They described not receiving statements from the academic institution to condemn anti-Asian rhetoric on campus, getting brushed off when bringing up their racialized experiences on campus, and feeling that "anti-Asian racism seems acceptable" compared to the perceived institutional response to BLM movement. This is especially notable given that at four out of five universities represented in our study, most of the international students are from China. However, as noted in our sample, all five of the universities in our sample are predominately white institutions. As Bourke (2016) noted, "what is predominant at PWIs is not simply the number of white students versus the number of students of color but embedded institutional practices that are based in whiteness" (p. 17). Institutions only responded to CIDS needs as Chinese international students (as noted by students in our focus group) when it was in their interest – namely after a highly publicized mass shooting drew national attention to the violence against Asians. It is also important to think about this moment in light of the macrosystem of 2020-2021, when BLM protests pushed for change and corporations, institutions, and communities released statements following pressure from activists and protestors that 'silence is violence' and 'silence is complicity'. After a year of silence about the rhetoric of anti-Asian hate on their campuses, responding to the mass shooting in Atlanta worked for many institutions as a "non-performative statement" that simultaneously acknowledged the existence of anti-Asian racism while situating it elsewhere, outside the boundaries of the institutions (Ahmed, 2012, p. 117). This simultaneous acknowledgement and separation then, "became a matter of generating a positive white identity that makes the white subject feel good. The declaration of such an identity [of antiracism/of rejection of Asian Hate] sustains the narcissism of whiteness" while at the same time making the institution feel as though it had 'done' something" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 170).

We return to the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1995, 2005) to discuss implications and offer suggestions. The institution can take actions at the mesosystem to buffer the adverse social-political influence at the exosystem and macrosystem. One clear action is to communicate a clear and formal anti-racist message. Commitments to stop Asian hate can happen at many levels – from faculty syllabus, lab expectations, residential hall community norms, and first year orientation programs, as well as from the president's office. Although we critique these messages when they function as non-performative statements, our study also demonstrates the consequence of ignoring the pervasive anti-Asian racism. As the students in our study noted, not making any statement also makes the implication that "anti-Asian racism seems acceptable," which can, in turn, lead to increasing racialized incidents on campus and reinforce systemic oppression. Thus, statements need to be combined with grounded community actions to disrupt and dismantle anti-Asian racism.

Another implication is to look outside the institution for supportive and inclusive policies. For example, the Biden administration signed the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act aiming to stop the rising anti-Asian hate crimes (Vazquez, 2021). Additionally, the United Nations pushed governments to 'act now to strengthen the immunity of our societies against the virus of hate' and Asia Advisory Director John Sifton at HRW [Human Rights

Watch] suggested that ‘governments should act to expand public outreach, promote tolerance, and counter hate speech while aggressively investigating and prosecuting hate crimes. (Lee & Johnstone, 2021, p. 229)

These suggestions can also be taken up at an institutional level.

Intervening in the microsystem through a series of workshops to raise all faculty, students, and staff awareness of anti-Asian racism in the US is also a crucial step. These interventions in the microsystem could produce changes in the culture—the macrosystem. Another significant response is to validate Asian students’ racialized experiences when they happen, and better support students’ activism for equity and inclusion (e.g., Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016). Meanwhile, institutions should pay attention to the influence of disturbing immigration policies that target specific groups of international students. For example, Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology condemned the policy and sued the U.S. government in federal court, which led to the rescinding of the policy barring international students from attending online classes (Treisman, , 2020). Additionally, it could be helpful to set up a need-based scholarship or fellowship specifically for international students as they are excluded from many federal financial relief programs due to their international status (IRS, 2020). Although several participants received emergency funds, they were not exclusively for international students.

Finally, university offices and student organizations need to be modified and updated to better meet international students’ needs. For example, the International Center is usually the only agency officially responding to international students. Due to its heavy workloads, having a liaison or a committee specifically devoted to supporting international student needs in each department or within colleges may help with communication (Nguyen, 2013). Moreover, we see value in having an international students’ union, as well as organizations that exclusively focus on race and ethnicity on campus. These kinds of specific organizations can provide specialized support, such as walking international students through the reporting process when they encounter racial discrimination (EHRC, 2019). In all, there are a myriad of ways to help rather than perceive international students as part of the diversity pie chart, or expect them to conform to the institution. Instead, academic institution can better focus on the lived experiences of international students to adjust and intervene in the systems and culture (Lee & Rice, 2007; Yao et al., 2019).

Unique Doctoral Students’ Academic Adaptation and the Implications

The current study highlighted doctoral students’ unique academic challenges and perceived support during the COVID-19 pandemic. Those challenges include research challenges (e.g., whether and how to grab emerging opportunities, the disruptive effect due to sudden lab shutdown), and feeling overburdened by fulfilling roles as both a TA and as a graduate student. Meanwhile, the perceived support emphasized the advisors’ double roles: as an academic coach (e.g., helping modify data collection plans) and an emotional support (e.g., providing regular check-ins). Although some of these findings are not unique to CIDS, they highlight the unique academic experiences of doctoral students and expand the literature, which has focused heavily on undergraduates’ online learning efficiency during the pandemic.

Therefore, our implications focus specifically on assisting academic institutions to better support doctoral students in crisis. First, although participants shared that advisor and committee members were helpful in their process, it is unrealistic to put all the responsibilities on one’s advisors because advisors were/are also going through a pandemic (Byrom, 2020). This is especially true for junior faculty who are facing career challenges due to COVID-19 (Levine et al., 2021). Thus, we argue that this time of crisis requires institutional support for advisors to better support their advisees. Second, the chaos caused by the sudden lab shutdown may imply the significance of having a clear lab protocol ahead of time to guide all involving

parties through a crisis (Stuart et al., 2021). Even an updated message of “we are working on it” could primarily reduce the initial panic and chaos (Coyne et al., 2020).

Finally, the institution should not only provide teaching training for TAs but show compassion for TAs as well. Correspondingly, research regarding TAs’ experiences need to be expanded from focusing on improving their teaching skills only with the purpose of promoting undergraduates learning experiences (e.g., Winstone & Moore, 2016) to caring for TA’s unique challenges as playing double roles. Supporting TAs more explicitly also has direct implications for international students who work as TAs who are often simultaneously navigating a new language and culture at the same time as they are learning to teach and manage a classroom (Collins et al., 2021).

The current study is limited in three ways. First, we investigated the perceived institutional responses from the CIDS’ perspectives, not directly from the institution’s perspective. Specifically, we noted how institutional responses, when they did occur, often functioned as “non-performative statements” (Ahmed, 2012) that simultaneously acknowledged the existence of racism while not requiring change or culpability from the institution. Thus, an examination of the gaps between what is said and what is done, the institutional view and the student’s view, could spark a dialogue to inform concrete changes to the culture of the institution. This research might also take up or explore what happened in the wake of these statements, how *did* departments and universities engage in fighting against racism in the wake of COVID-19? How *have* departments and universities continued to act on their stated commitments to Asian life? Second, the current sample was from the U.S. only, thus we are careful not to generalize the results to other non-U.S. samples. Finally, participants in our study fought back against racist comments on the internet, brought up the racialized incidents to their institution, and pushed the university office to release statements condemning anti-Asian racism. A further study of Asian students’ activism may offer important insights, as well as implications for institutional policy and procedures.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the perceived role of academic institutions in responding to Chinese international doctoral students’ experiences of double pandemics. To be clear we do not imply that all the Chinese international students have experienced racism or marginalization or want to discourage Chinese students from studying in the U.S. (Lee & Rice, 2007). Our focus is on encouraging academic institutions to be part of the solution to fight long-standing anti-Asian racism and actively work to acknowledge and take responsibility for perpetuating oppression and marginalization (Lee & Rice, 2007).

REFERENCES

- Addo, I. Y. (2020). Double pandemic: Racial discrimination amid coronavirus disease 2019. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 2(1), 100074, 1-4. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.SSAHO.2020.100074>
- Adedoyin, O.B., & Soykan, E. (2020). Covid-19 pandemic and online learning: The challenges and opportunities. *Interactive Learning Environments*, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2020.1813180>
- Agarwal, S., & Kaushik, J. S. (2020). Student’s perception of online learning during COVID pandemic. *The Indian Journal of Pediatrics*, 87(7), 554. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12098-020-03327-7>
- Ahmed, S. (2012). *On being included: Racism and diversity in institutional life*. Duke University Press.
- Alaklabi, M., Alaklabi, J., & Almuhlafi, A. (2021). Impacts of COVID-19 on international students in the U.S. *Higher Education Studies*, 11(3), 37-42. <https://doi.org/10.5539/hes.v11n3p37>
- Anderson, S. (May, 2020) Next Trump immigration target: OPT for international students. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stuartanderson/2020/05/04/next-trump-immigration-target-opt-for-international-students/?sh=5584819045f9>

- Anderson, S. (2021a, December 8) Trade and immigration policies toward China have backfired. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stuartanderson/2021/12/08/us-trade-and-immigration-policies-toward-china-have-backfired/?sh=7fe2770e7ccb>
- Anderson, S. (2021b, February 1) The story of how Trump officials tried to end H-1B visas. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stuartanderson/2021/02/01/the-story-of-how-trump-officials-tried-to-end-h-1b-visas/?sh=7ce3abe5173f>
- Archer-Kuhn, B., Beltrano, N. R., Hughes, J., Saini, M., & Tam, D. (2021). Recruitment in response to a pandemic: Pivoting a community-based recruitment strategy to Facebook for hard-to-reach populations during COVID-19. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2021.1941647>
- Banjong, D. N. (2015). International students' enhanced academic performance: Effects of campus resources. *Journal of International Students*, 5(2), 132-142. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v5i2.430>
- Barker, M. (1981). *The new racism: Conservatives and the ideology of the tribe*. London: Junction Books.
- Barroga, E., & Matanguihan, G. J. (2020). Fundamental shifts in research, ethics and peer review in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Korean Medical Science*, 35(45), 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.3346/JKMS.2020.35.E395>
- Bell, D. A. Jr. (1980). Brown v. Board of Education and the interest-convergence dilemma. *Harvard Law Review*, 93(3), 518–533. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1340546>
- Bourke, B. (2016). Meaning and implications of being labelled a Predominantly White Institution. *College and University*, 91(3), 12-21. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1819910716?pq-origsite=gscholar&fromopenview=true>
- Bridges, D. (2001). The ethics of outsider research. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 35(3), 371–386. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/1467-9752.00233>
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1995). Developmental ecology through space and time: A future perspective. In P. E. Moen, G. H. Elder Jr, & K. E. Lüscher (Eds.), *Examining lives in context: Perspectives on the ecology of human development* (pp. 619-647). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (2005). *Making human being human: Biological perspectives on human development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Buckner, E. (2019). The internationalization of higher education: National interpretations of a global model. *Comparative Education Review*, 63(3), 315-336. <https://doi.org/10.1086/703794>
- Buckner, E., Lumb, P., Jafarova, Z., Kang, P., Marroquin, A., & Zhang, Y. (2021). Diversity without race: How university internationalization strategies discuss international students. *Journal of International Students*, 11(S1), 2166-3750. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1300574.pdf>
- Byrom, N. (2020). COVID-19 and the research community: The challenges of lockdown for early-career researchers. *ELife*, 9, 1-3. <https://doi.org/10.7554/ELIFE.59634>
- Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism at California State University (CSHE, 2021), Report to the nation: Anti-Asian prejudice & hate crime. New 2020- 21 first quarter comparison data. <https://www.csusb.edu/sites/default/files/Report%20to%20the%20Nation%20-%20Anti-Asian%20Hate%202020%20Final%20Draft%20-%20As%20of%20Apr%2030%202021%206%20PM%20corrected.pdf>
- Clements, L. (2021, March 9). Covid in Wales: Racist incidents 'take your breath away'. *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-56323775>
- Cohn, S. K. (2012). Pandemics: Waves of disease, waves of hate from the plague of Athens to AIDS. *Historical Research*, 85(230), 535–555. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2281.2012.00603.x>
- Collins, J., Brown, N., & Leigh, J. (2021). Making sense of cultural bumps: Supporting international graduate teaching assistants with their teaching. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 1-11. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/14703297.2021.1919175>
- Coyne, C., Ballard, J. D., & Blader, I. J. (2020). Recommendations for future university pandemic responses: What the first COVID-19 shutdown taught us. *PLOS Biology*, 18(8), e3000889, 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.1371/JOURNAL.PBIO.3000889>
- Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2001). *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

- Dinis-Oliveira, R. J. (2020). COVID-19 research: Pandemic versus “paperdemic”, integrity, values and risks of the “speed science.” *Forensic Sciences Research*, 5(2), 174-187.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/20961790.2020.1767754>
- Dodds, S., & Hess, A. C. (2021). Adapting research methodology during COVID-19: Lessons for transformative service research. *Journal of Service Management*, 32(2), 203–217.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/JOSM-05-2020-0153>
- Drake, P. (2010). Grasping at methodological understanding: A cautionary tale from insider research. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 33(1), 85–99.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/17437271003597592>
- EHRC. (2019). Racial harassment in British universities: Qualitative research findings. *Equality and Human Rights Commission*. <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/racial-harassment-british-universities-qualitative-research-findings>
- Elliot, D. L., Baumfield, V., & Reid, K. (2016). Searching for ‘a third space’: A creative pathway towards international PhD students’ academic acculturation. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 35(6), 1180-1195. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2016.1144575>
- Firang, D. (2020). The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on international students in Canada. *International Social Work*, 63(6), 820-824. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0020872820940030>
- Freeman, M. (2014). The hermeneutical aesthetics of thick description. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20(6), 827-833.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1077800414530267>
- George Mwangi, C.A. (2013). The impact of state financial support on the internationalization of public higher education: A panel data analysis. *Higher Education in Review* 10, 61-77.
http://sites.psu.edu/higheredinreview/wp-content/uploads/sites/36443/2016/02/V10_Complete.pdf#page=73
- Hoffman, G. D., & Mitchell, T. D. (2016). Making diversity “everyone’s business”: A discourse analysis of institutional responses to student activism for equity and inclusion. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 9(3), 277-289. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000037>
- Human Rights Watch (2020, May 12). Covid-19 Fueling anti-Asian racism and xenophobia world-wide. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/12/covid-19-fueling-anti-asian-racism-and-xenophobia-worldwide>
- Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE, Jul. 2020). <https://www.ice.gov/news/releases/sevp-modifies-temporary-exemptions-nonimmigrant-students-taking-online-courses-during>
- Internal Revenue Service (2020). Questions and answers about the first economic impact payment — Topic A: Eligibility <https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/economic-impact-payment-information-center-topic-a-eip-eligibility>
- Jean-Francois, E. (2017). Exploring the perceptions of campus climate and integration strategies used by international students. *Studies in Higher Education*, 44(6), 1069-1085.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2017.1416461>
- Jiang, S. (2020) Asian and Asian American college students’ educational and career dilemmas during COVID-19. *Center for Research on College-Workforce Transitions (CCWT) Student Intern Report*. https://ccwt.wceruw.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/ccwt_report_Asian-and-Asian-American-College-Students-Educational-and-Career-Dilemmas-during-COVID-19.pdf
- Kanuha, V. K. (2000). “Being” native versus “going native”: Conducting social work research as an insider. *Social Work*, 45(5), 439–447. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/45.5.439>
- Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. (1995). Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education. *Teachers College Record*, 97(1), 47–68.
https://learn.redlands.edu/theme/keypath/courses/MALT610A/Section03/doc/Toward_a_Critical_Race_Theory_of_Education.pdf
- Lee, E., & Johnstone, M. (2021). Resisting the politics of the pandemic and racism to foster humanity. *Qualitative Social Work*, 20(1–2), 225–232. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325020973313>
- Lee, J., & Rice, C. (2007). Welcome to America? International student perceptions of discrimination. *Higher Education*, 53(3), 381-409. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-005-4508-3>
- Lee, S., & Waters, S. F. (2020). Asians and Asian Americans’ experiences of racial discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic: Impacts on health outcomes and the buffering role of social support. *Stigma and Health*, 6(1), 70-78. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/sah0000275>

- Levine, F. J., Nasir, N. S., Rios-Aguilar, C., Gildersleeve, R. E., Rosich, K. J., Bang, M., Bell, N. E., & Holsapple, M. A. (2021). Voices from the field: The impact of COVID-19 on early career scholars and doctoral students. *American Educational Research Association and the Spencer Foundation*. <https://doi.org/10.3102/aera20211>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767\(85\)90062-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767(85)90062-8)
- McDonnell Nieto del Rio, G., & Sandoval, E. (2021, July 27). Women of Asian descent were 6 of the 8 victims in Atlanta shootings. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/17/us/asian-women-victims-atlanta-shootings.html>
- NAFSA (n.d.). National Association for Foreign Student Affairs. *Immigration executive actions under the Trump administration*. <https://www.nafsa.org/professional-resources/browse-by-interest/immigration-executive-actions-under-trump-administration>
- Nguyen, H. M. (2013). Faculty advisors' experiences with international graduate students. *Journal of International Students*, 3(2), 102-116. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v3i2.504>
- Noonan, D., & Simmons, L. A. (2021). Navigating nonessential research trials during COVID-19: The push we needed for using digital technology to increase access for rural participants? *The Journal of Rural Health*, 37(1), 185-187. <https://doi.org/10.1111/JRH.12446>
- Omary, M. B., Eswaraka, J., Kimball, S. D., Moghe, P. V., Panettieri, R. A., & Scotto, K. W. (2020). The COVID-19 pandemic and research shutdown: Staying safe and productive. *The Journal of Clinical Investigation*, 130(6), 2745-2748. <https://doi.org/10.1172/JCI138646>
- Pokhrel, S., & Chhetri, R. (2021). A literature review on impact of COVID-19 pandemic on teaching and learning. *Higher Education for the Future*, 8(1), 133-141. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2347631120983481>
- Presidential Proclamation (10043) (May 29, 2020). *Suspension of entry as nonimmigrants of certain students and researchers from the People's Republic of China*. <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/06/04/2020-12217/suspension-of-entry-as-nonimmigrants-of-certain-students-and-researchers-from-the-peoples-republic>
- Rodríguez, C., Chavez, C., & Klauber, C. (2019). International graduate student challenges and support. *International Research and Review*, 8(2), 49-64. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1227500.pdf>
- Saberi, P. (2020). Research in the time of coronavirus: Continuing ongoing studies in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. *AIDS and Behavior*, 24(8), 2232-2235. <https://doi.org/10.1007/S10461-020-02868-4>
- Spears, A. K. (1999). Race and ideology: An introduction. In A. K. Spears, (Ed.), *Race and ideology: Language, symbolism, and popular culture* pp.(11-59). Detroit, MI: Wayne State Press.
- Springer, K. W., Parker, B. K., & Leviten-Reid, C. (2009). Making space for graduate student parents: Practice and politics. *Journal of Family Issues*, 30(4), 435-457. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0192513X08329293>
- Starks, B. (2021). The double pandemic: Covid-19 and white supremacy. *Qualitative Social Work*, 20(1-2), 222-224. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325020986011>
- Stop AAPI Hate Reporting Center (2020). <https://stopaapihate.org/national-report-through-march-2021/>
- Suart, C., Suart, T. N., Graham, K., & Truant, R. (2021). When the labs closed: Graduate students' and postdoctoral fellows' experiences of disrupted research during the covid-19 pandemic. *Facets*, 6(1), 966-997. <https://doi.org/10.1139/facets-2020-0077>
- Treisman, R (2022, July). ICE agrees to rescind policy barring foreign students from online study in the U.S. <https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/07/14/891125619/ice-agrees-to-rescind-policy-barring-foreign-students-from-online-study-in-the-u#:~:text=Radio%20Ambulante-ICE%20Agrees%20To%20Rescind%20Policy%20Barring%20Foreign%20Students%20From%20Online.will%20now%20be%20rescinded%20nationwide>
- U.S. Department of Education (2020). CARES Act: Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/caresact.html>
- van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experiences: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. The State University of New York.
- van Manen, M. (2016). *Phenomenology of practice: Meaning-giving methods in phenomenological research and writing*. London, UK: Routledge.

- Vazquez, M. (2021, May 20) Biden signs bill aimed at addressing rise in anti-Asian hate crimes. CNN. <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/05/20/politics/biden-anti-asian-hate-crimes-covid-19-signing/index.html>
- Wang, L., & Delaquil, T. (2020). The isolation of doctoral education in the times of COVID-19: Recommendations for building relationships within person-environment theory. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 39(7), 1346-1350. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2020.1823326>
- Winstone, N., & Moore, D. (2016). Sometimes fish, sometimes fowl? Liminality, identity work and identity malleability in graduate teaching assistants. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 54(5), 494-502. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2016.1194769>
- Wong, E., & Barnes, J. E. (2020, May 28). U.S. to expel Chinese graduate students with ties to China's military school. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/28/us/politics/china-hong-kong-trump-student-visas.html>
- World Health Organization. (2020, March 11). *WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19*. <https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020>
- Xu, X., & Tran, L. T. (2021). A qualitative investigation into Chinese international doctoral students' navigation of a disrupted study trajectory during COVID-19. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 1-19. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/10283153211042092>
- Yao, C. W., George Mwangi, C. A., & Malaney Brown, V. K. (2019). Exploring the intersection of transnationalism and critical race theory: A critical race analysis of international student experiences in the United States. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 22(1), 38-58. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2018.1497968>
- Zhang, Y. L. (2018). Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach to understand academic advising with international community college students. *Journal of International Students*, 8(4), 1764-1782. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1468084>

YABIN TANG is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Human Development and Family Science at the University of Georgia. Yabin's research centers on empowering culturally diverse populations. Email: yabin.tang@uga.edu.

MAUREEN ALICE FLINT, is an Assistant Professor in Qualitative Research at the University of Georgia. Her scholarship explores the theory, practice, and pedagogy of qualitative inquiry and questions of equity and justice in higher education. Email: maureen.flint@uga.edu

Appendix I

Demographics

	Focus group	Current major Art / Science ¹	Gender	University	Where gained bachelor's degree	Where gained master's degree	Years of staying in the US	Years at doctoral training
1	attended	S	woman	1	China	US	5 ⁺ years	3rd and above
2	attended	A	man	2	China	China	3~4 years	final year
3	attended	A	woman	1	China	US	5 ⁺ years	3rd and above
4	attended	A	man	4	China	no master's degree	3~4 years	3rd and above
5	attended	A	woman	1	China	no master's degree	1~2 years	2nd year
6	attended	A	man	3	China	US	5 ⁺ years	3rd and above
7	attended	S	woman	2	China	no master's degree	3~4 years	3rd and above
8	attended	A	woman	4	China	US	3~4 years	2nd year
9	no	A	woman	5	US	no master's degree	5 ⁺ years	2nd year
10	no	A	woman	2	China	US	5 ⁺ years	final year
11	no	S	woman	1	China	China	1~2 years	2nd year
12	no	S	man	1	China	US	5 ⁺ years	3rd and above
13	no	A	woman	1	China	US	5 ⁺ years	final year
14	no	S	woman	1	China	US	5 ⁺ years	2nd year
15	no	S	woman	1	China	China	3~4 years	final year
16	no	A	woman	1	China	US	3~4 years	2nd year
17	no	A	woman	1	US	US	5 ⁺ years	3rd and above
18	no	S	woman	1	China	elsewhere	3~4 years	3rd and above

¹ Here, we group majors broadly into Art (this includes doctoral degrees in liberal arts and humanities, such as, Education, Social Sciences, etc.) and Science (this includes physical and natural sciences, such as Chemistry, Physics, etc.)

Appendix II

Sample interview protocol

- 1) As a Chinese international student receiving doctoral training during this pandemic in the US. What are the challenges/difficulties in your life academically and non-academically? The key point is, what makes it a challenge to you?
- 2) During this pandemic, have you experienced racial discrimination (i.e., people treat you differently just because you are Chinese or Asian)? If yes, could you describe the experience? How did you handle it? From your perspective, how did your department or university handle it?
- 3) At the sociopolitical level, how may the immigration policies, travel ban, and the political climate between China and the US influence those Challenges you mentioned and how you handled them? From your perspective, how did your department or university handle it?