Belong in-between: through the lens of linguistics within Chinese international student community

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Abstract

The academic community has extensively explored the nature of identity; however, most of the prior language identity research falls short of addressing the importance of including an affective dimension in the processes of identification (Cornips & Rooij, 2018). This study aims to fill such a gap by proposing a discussion regarding the construction of a sense of belonging among Chinese international students in the United States through the lens of code-switching style as well as the discursive practices that constitute their everyday experience in the host country. Drawing on a series of in-depth interviews with six mainland Chinese international students, the current research reveals that the students construct their Chinese "middler" identity by employing both linguistics and nonlinguistic social practices, suggesting their active remapping (Rosa, 2015) of Chinese experience within the U.S

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Introduction

This project attempts to shed light on the language dynamics within the Chinese international student community, a sizable yet notably underrepresented population in the United States, through the interplay between language and place in the construction of their sense of belonging.

As far as Antonisch (2010) concerned, the notion of belonging has been "vaguely defined and ill-theorized" within various social disciplines (p. 644). He particularly points out the inadequacy of equating belonging with the notion of identity, especially national or ethnic identity (p. 644). Yuval-Davis (2006) offers one of the most exhaustive discussions in terms of the distinction between two analytical dimensions of belonging. According to Yuval-Davis (2006), the first one regards "emotional attachment, about feeling 'at home'" (p.197), and the second type, the politics of belonging, "comprises specific political projects aimed at constructing belonging in particular ways to particular collectivities that are, at the same time, themselves being constructed by these projects in very particular ways" (p. 197). Antonisch (2010) further refines Yuval-Davis's analytical differentiation by assigning the former statement with the term place-belongingness, which he defines "belonging as a personal, intimate, feeling of being 'at home' in a place", as opposed to the latter notion politics of belonging, considering "belonging as a discursive resource which constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of social-spatial inclusion/exclusion" (p.645) This difference is also consistent with what Fenster (2005) distinguishes "belonging as a personal, intimate, private sentiment of place attachment ('sense of belonging'), which is built up and grows out of everyday practices" (Antonisch, 2010, p. 645)

from “belonging as an official, public-oriented ‘formal structure’ of membership, as for instance manifested in citizenship” (p. 253).

Despite the analytical distinction, the notion of place-belongingness and the politics of belonging are not mutually exclusive. Rather, both ideas are closely intertwined. To be more specific, the affective aspect of place-belongingness is generated through the discursive practices that constitute the politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2007, p. 197). As put by Antonisch (2010), the “sociology of emotions” must take into account the “sociology of power” (p. 649), which concurs with what Probyn (1996) asserts that “belonging cannot be an isolated and individual affair” (p. 13). Alternatively, as Cornips & Rooij (2018) specify, “The affective dimension of place-belongingness is being produced through discursive practices that make up the politics of belonging” (pp. 6), indicating a dialectical relationship between the two. That is, one’s intimate feeling of belonging to a place must consistently reconcile with the discourses and practices of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion taking place within that very place, which inevitably affects one’s sense of belongingness (Antonisch 2010, p. 649). Indeed, if one experiences rejection or exclusion by those living in that place, it will undoubtedly shatter their sense of belonging (Antonisch 2010, p. 649). In addition, Cornips & Rooij (2018) conclude that a variety of social factors contribute to the articulation of today’s highly politicized idioms of belonging: “Increased mobility of people, goods, and technologies, feelings of nostalgia, and the perceived threat of losing one’s culture, economic security, and territory due to the workings of globalization” (p. 6).

Cornips & Rooij (2018) further propose that Brubaker & Cooper (2000) and Bucholtz & Hall (2005) have yielded successful, vital reworkings of identity, allowing us to view identity

from a more dynamic approach, while as such still lacking the acknowledgment of the significance that place-belongness possesses "in the processes of identification" (p. 7). Cornips & Rooij (2018) express concern about "whether what Brubaker & Cooper (2000) call 'instance of strongly binding, vehemently felt groupness' may at all be possible without at least some emotional investment in place, physical or imagined" (p. 7). Furthermore, Cornips & Rooij (2018) contend that the concept of belonging, which integrates the analytical facts with the "processual and multidimensional" aspects of identity/identification, could serve as a potent conceptual framework for examining the extensive landscape of place-making through language (p.7). Additionally, "such a toolkit would enable us to study how the construction of sociocultural categories and subjectively, emotionally experienced dimensions of identity are interrelated" (Cornips & Rooij, 2018, p.7)

In this respect, this research seeks to untangle the complexity that lies in the dynamics of belonging and place-makin g, through the prism of linguistic practices evident in the related discourse elicited from the six Chinese international students.

1.1. Chinese international students

The convention of studying abroad in the U.S. for Chinese international students has been long-existing and can be traced back to as early as the 1870s. Between the years of 1872 and 1875, the Chinese government at the time (Qing imperial government, 1644-1911) dispatched the first group of 120 Chinese students to the United States, with political aspirations and missions that tied their education to a larger goal of saving their nation (Yan & Berliner, 2010, p.174). The vast majority of the early Chinese international students in the US were sent and

funded by the Qing government, mostly specializing in natural science and other technical disciplines (Yan & Berliner, 2010, p.174).

From 1949 until the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), China was isolated from the international community, and studying overseas was therefore prohibited (Yan & Berliner, 2010, p.175). However, subsequent to the vast political and economic transformations that occurred in the country by the late 1970s, the government of the People's Republic of China vigorously promoted modernization through international scholarly and technological exchanges. As a result, the US-China educational exchange increased significantly: from a near zero figure at the onset of this period, the number of mainland Chinese international students in the U.S. climbed to 20,030 by 1988, after which it doubled in 1993 and tripled in 2003 (Yan & Berliner, 2010, p.175). In 1990, China for the first time became the number one source of international students in the United States and has remained as the top 5 source ever since (see table 1). During the 2003-2004 academic year, there were 64,757 Chinese international students studying in the United States, with 82% of those pursuing a graduate degree (Yan & Berliner, 2010, p.175). Financially, contrary to the government-funded fashion in the 19th century, the number of self-funded Chinese international students has grown substantially ever since, and now accounts for the majority of Chinese students in U.S. universities (Yan & Berliner, 2010, p.176). In the meantime, following the established pattern, current Chinese international students studying in the U.S. still remain largely focused on natural sciences, engineering, computer programming, biochemistry, and other technological disciplines (Yan & Berliner, 2010, p.176). In fact, with 58% of them pursuing degrees primarily in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), in the 2019/2020 academic year alone, Chinese international

students contributed $15 billion to the US economy (Gitnux, 2023). Among them, approximately 73% were self-funded or supported by their family (Gitnux, 2023). Furthermore, in 2020, Chinese international students constituted 34% of all international students in the U.S., with an estimated 380,000 Chinese students studying in the U.S. (Gitnux, 2023). 32% of them were pursuing an undergraduate degree, while 43% of them were enrolled in graduate programs (Gitnux, 2023). California is reported to host the highest population of Chinese international student enrollees (Gitnux, 2023).

In contrast to the Asian Americans residing in the Bay Area, whose local identity, as proposed by Hall-Lew (2010), is constructed by the membership of the ethnic local community, the construction of the belonging and identity for Chinese international students in the U.S. seems to remain relatively distinctive and ambiguous as there lacks a U.S. local neighborhood they are naturally tied to comparing to Asian American community.

In addition, despite the long-standing history of studying in the U.S. and the large population of Chinese international students present in U.S. higher institutions, a considerably limited amount of research has examined the internal language practices of the Chinese international student's community. Gal (1988) defines code-switching as "a conversational strategy used to establish, cross or destroy group boundaries; to create, evoke or change interpersonal relations with their accompanying rights and obligations" (p.274). Drawing on Gal (1998)'s idea, Chen (2008) 's study demonstrates how two Hong Kong returnees employ structurally distinctive and socially meaningful code-switching styles to construct, maintain, and traverse social group boundaries (p.58). Chen (2008) also emphasizes that a unique and salient in-group style of code-switching exists among the returnees, a group of individuals who spent a

considerable amount of time in Western English-speaking countries and recently returned to Hong Kong (p.60). This perception is also reaffirmed in the language attitude interview (Chen, 2008, p.62). In this vein, given that the participants in the current study are representative of the Chinese international student's community in the U.S. (i.e., 6 mainland engineering graduate students), this project attempts to explore the code-switching style among mainland Chinese international students in the U.S. in details to expand public awareness of this enormous yet highly overlooked speech community.

Table 1 Number of Chinese international students studying in the US from 1982 to 2009

Year	Number of students	Rank
2009	98,510	2
2008	81,127	2
2007	67,723	2
2006	62,582	2
2005	62,523	2
2004	64,757	2
2003	63,211	2
2002	59,939	2
2001	54,466	1
2000	51,001	1
1999	46,958	2
1998	42,503	2
1997	39,613	2
1996	39,403	2
1995	44,381	1
1994	45,130	1
1993	42,940	1
1992	39,600	1
1991	33,390	1
1990	29,040	1
1989	25,170	2
1988	20,030	3
1987	13,980	5
1986	10,100	11
1985	8,140	12
1984	6,230	16
1983	4,350	18
1982	2,770	27
1981	Below 1,000	Below 50

Open Doors 1980/1981–2008/2009 (numbers do not include visiting scholars doing research in American institutions)

1.2. Place-belongingness: 5 factors

Cornips & Rooij (2018) interpret the construction of place-belongingness as "processual and dynamic" (p.6), as Antonsich (2010) emphasizes it "is built up and grows out of everyday

practice" (p.645). In addition, Antonisch (2010) believes that in the context of place-belongingness, a place is perceived as "home". As such, belonging is found when an individual can feel "at home" in a certain place (p.646). Despite the wording, the "home" here does not stand for the "domestic(-ated) material space" (Antonisch, 2010, p.646); rather, it stands for "a symbolics pace of familiarity, comfort, security, and emotional attachment" (Antonisch, 2010, p.646). Cornips & Rooij (2018) also advocate that for the majority of people, if not all, the place-belongingness is a multidimensional feeling: depending on one's temporal and spatial situation, it could refer to one's "home, or nursing home, one's local neighborhood, region, city, and country" (p.6). Antonisch (2010) points out that scholars have not sufficiently theorized the concept of belonging as the emotional sense of being at home in a place, and often conflate it with the idea of collective identity or citizenship (p.647). While Yuval-Davis (2007) has provided the most comprehensive analysis to date distinguishing between "belongingness" and "the politics of belonging", Antonisch (2010) contends that her discussion lacks adequate justification for belonging as emotional attachment and the sense of feeling "at home". Additionally, it overlooks the notion of place, as if the feelings, discourses, and practices of belonging exist independently of geographical context (p.647). To address these shortcomings, Antonisch (2010) identifies five key elements that contribute to shaping an individual's feeling of belonging to a place: "auto-biographical, relational, cultural, economic, and legal" (p.647).

In the words of Antonisch (2010), auto-biographical factors revolve around one's past experiences, relations, and memories that connect them to a specific place (p.647). The quality of an individual's life in a specific location, as Antonisch (2010) describes, is enriched by their personal and social bonds, which are referred to as relational factors (p.647). These range from

deep, meaningful relationships with friends and families to what Buonfino and Thomson (2007) call "weak ties" -- less intimate, infrequent interactions with acquaintances in public places (p. 16). However, the "belongingness hypothesis" introduced by Baumeister and Leary (1995) suggests that the depth and stability of these relationships are crucial. To be more specific, for a sense of group belonging to be established, these bonds must be enduring, positive, stable, and filled with care, necessitating frequent physical interactions that fulfill individual social needs (Baumeister and Leary, 1995, p.497; Antonisch, 2010, p.647). Consequently, it becomes clear that "weak ties" such as casual everyday encounters or forms of "micro-publics in everyday life" (Antonisch, 2010, p.648), are generally insufficient for fostering a robust sense of connectedness and belonging (Baumeister and Leary, 1995, p.500).

Of all the cultural elements, language is typically deemed the most significant (Buonfino and Thomson 2007, p. 17). According to Therborn (1991), to belong to a culture implies possessing the cognitive and communicative competence to use a particular language (p.182). This language is not merely functional; it symbolizes the adoption of a particular social perspective and, more importantly, a distinctive way of interpreting and defining situations (Therborn, 1991, p.182). Therefore, membership in a certain culture is synonymous with being part of a unique universe of meaning and engaging in a specific manner of constructing and conveying meanings (Therborn, 1991, p.183). Complementing this view, Cohen (1982) notes that such forms of communication extend beyond verbal language, encompassing"tacit codes, signs, and gestures, not actually uttered, yet still understood by those who share the same semiotic universe " (p.11). While language can indeed play a role in the politics of belonging, distinguishing "us" from "them', it can also foster a sense of community on the other hand, a

"warm sensation" of being among those who not only comprehend your words, but also your true intentions (Ignatieff, 1994, p.7). In this respect, language can serve as a vehicle for deepening intimacy and nurturing a sense of belonging, ultimately cultivating a feeling of being "at home" in one's autobiographical realm (Hooks, 2009, p.24). A comparable sense of belonging can be evoked by other cultural elements such as, according to Antonisch (2010), "traditions and habits, related, for instance, to religion, as well as to the materiality of cultural practices like, for instance, food production/consumption" (p.648; Duruz, 2002; Fenster, 2005, p.252).

Economic considerations are crucial in establishing a secure and stable environment for individuals and their families (Antonisch, 2010, p.648). Yuval-Davis and Kaptani's (2008) research on Somali refugees in East London showed that those who established professional careers, as opposed to their counterparts engaged in temporary jobs, exhibited a stronger connection to British society. While economic integration alone is not deemed sufficient, it emerges as an essential element in fostering a sense of belonging to a place (Antonisch, 2010, p.648). This type of economic integration is significant not just for its material impact, but also for cultivating a sense of belonging and investment in the future of one's place of residence (Antonisch, 2010, p.648).

Legal elements, such as citizenship and residency permit, play a vital role in ensuring a sense of security, which is widely recognized as an integral aspect of belonging (Ignatieff, 1994; Antonisch, 2010). As Ignatieff (1994) puts it plainly, "Where you belong is where you are safe, and where you are safe is where you belong" (p.25), particularly in contexts marked by inter-ethnic conflict (Antonisch, 2010, p.648). However, Loader (2006) expands on this notion,

suggesting that security transcends mere physical threats, encompassing the capacity to navigate and mitigate the anxieties and uncertainties posed by the surroundings (p.210). In this regard, the presence or absence of legal recognition, such as citizenship or the associated rights of residency, employment, and social benefits, hold great significance. This legal recognition, or what Fenster (2005) describes as the “formal structure of belonging”, is crucial for individuals’ active engagement and influence on their surroundings, contributing to a sense of belonging (Mee, 2009). Empirical research further underlines the inverse relationship between insecure legal status and the feeling of connection to a place (Yuval-Davis & Kaptani 2008; Antonisch, 2010), emphasizing the importance of legal factors in the complex matrix of belonging.

A key element that may not fall under the categories discussed earlier yet holds significance for sociologists and environmental psychologists in terms of cultivating a sense of place-belonging for newcomers, is the duration of the residency (Antonisch, 2010, p.649). People who opt to reside in a location other than their birthplace (referred to as "incomers") do so for a variety of reasons, including the pursuit of a higher quality of life, enhanced material or intellectual prospects, or simply for aesthetic fulfillment (Antonisch, 2010, p.649). Savage et al. (2004) explains that a sense of belonging, or "elective belonging" as they describe it, can be developed when the new place one lives in aligns with one's personal life narrative.

1.3. Place attachment through discursive practices

People often express that feeling “at home” brings a sense of “ease”, “safety”, “security”, and “comfort”, and a harmonious connection with their environment (Duyvendak, 2011, p.27). This state of comfort, marked by peace and familiarity, where everything seems intuitively understood, is what environmental psychologists describe as place attachment—

essentially, “is conceptualized as a positive place-bound affection by which people maintain closeness to a place” (Hidalgo and Hernandez, 2001, p.274). Thus, home emerges as a unique environment to which individuals form significant social, psychological, and emotional ties (Easthope, 2004, p.136). Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu further explores this concept, highlighting the significance of familiarity in “feeling at home”, while contrasting with the unfamiliar being “out of place” (Duyvendak, 2011, p.28). Yet, Bourdieu contends that this perceived 'natural' sense of belonging is, in fact, a cultural construct, thereby challenging the assumption that feeling at home is inherently natural (Duyvendak, 2011, p.28).

Antonsich (2010) highlights the evolving nature of place-belongingness, noting it develops through daily interactions and is intricately linked to place attachment (P.645). This concept, often associated with feelings of being ‘at home', can also be expressed as a sense of deep-rootedness or closely tied to, and sometimes conflated with, place attachment, sense of place, and place identity (Antonsich, 2010, p.645). Such associations suggest that our emotional attachment to places stems from regular engagements and practices within these environments, contributing to a complex web of feelings toward our surroundings. The complexity of place attachment, as initially explored by Low & Altman (1992), reveals it as an intricate web of emotional ties across various landscapes, shaped by numerous temporal dimensions and the interactions of different social actors. (Brown et al. 2012: 183). Inalhan & Finch (2004) further elaborate on place attachment as a “continuous” and “dynamic” process, where individuals integrate spaces into their lives through active participation in their communities (p.126). They view the act of appropriation, or making a space one's own, as a key component of this process (Inalhan & Finch, 2004, p.126). Similarly, Fenster (2005) discusses how everyday activities, like

walking, serve as a means of claiming and appropriation of space, with de Certeau highlighting the repetitive nature of such practices that link to what Viki Bell (1999) terms performativity, reinforcing the connection between routine actions and the development of a sense of belonging (p.249).

Fenster (2005) describes performativity as the repetition and routine of specific practices, which, when enacted in designated spaces, foster a sense of attachment and belonging to those places (Fenster, 2005, p.249). Essentially, the attachment to a place evolves from and "grows out of everyday practices" (Antonisch, 2010, p.645). As Fenster (2005) puts it, "one does not simply or ontologically 'belong' to the world or to any group within it" (p.249), suggesting that suggesting that belonging is not an inherent state but rather an outcome achieved through various layers of engagement (Bell, 1999, p.3). Bell (1999) extends this idea to the construction of gender, arguing that gender is arguing that it too is performative, shaped by cultural and historical contexts rather than being an innate quality (p.3). In this context, gender is construed as a construct that masks its own origins, wherein the implicit societal consensus to enact, manifest, and uphold distinct and binary gender roles while cultural constructs become veiled by the apparent legitimacy of such enactments (Bell, 1999, p.3). In other words, according to Bell (1999, p.3), gender emerges from ongoing social performances, challenging the notion of fixed identities and highlighting that identity itself is a product of these performed actions rather than the other way around.

Fortier (2006) argues that performative acts of belonging, particularly within religious contexts, contribute to the sustenance of community cohesion and religious sentiment. This perspective is illustrated through her study of an Italian migrant community in London,

highlighting how shared rituals, histories, and spatial experiences foster a collective sense of belonging. Specifically, Fortier (2006) investigates the role of Catholic Mass in a predominantly non-Catholic country, noting how the ritualistic practices associated with Mass foster a deep connection between the community and the location of their religious observances. Bell (2005) comments that the repeated, sometimes ritualistic, enactment of these established norms embodies the belongings they aim to portray (p.4). Fortier (2006) emphasizes that such ritualized behaviors at Mass not only reaffirm community norms but also reinforce a sense of belonging through a stylized repetition of actions. Therefore, Bell (1999) highlights the “citational” nature of identity, arguing that the performative act of belonging is a way of 'citing' the norms that define or manifest the 'community' or group (p.3).

In another research by Fortier (2006), she analyzes how the Centro, an Italian church-cum-social club in South London, facilitates ethnic/diasporic intimacy through a variety of performative activities. She especially points out such ethnic intimacy emerges through movements of translation that generate an unusual sense of familiarity (Fortier, 2006, p.72). Fortier (2006) emphasizes the concept of translation as the ongoing recreation of the familiar, grounding it in what Hoffman (1989) terms the 'soil of significance' (p.278)—a metaphor for the cultural and communal foundation established through the regularity of habits, routines, and daily patterns (p.74).

Taking the example of the prevalent dinner dances within the London-Italian community, these gatherings can be seen as creating a 'sacred eating community,' where communal eating acts as a ritual that unites individuals through shared, bodily experiences. Pasi Falk conceptualizes this phenomenon as a 'two-way order,' where the act of communal eating not only

shapes the daily lives of individuals but also deeply influences and enriches their cultural identities (Fortier, 2006, p.73). In other words, such ritualized dinner gatherings are pivotal in reinforcing the Italian identity, nurturing a sense of belonging through shared culinary experiences (Fortier, 2006, p.73). Consequently, such gatherings forge a 'community of feeling,' characterized by 'sensual solidarities,' where communal bonds are strengthened through shared sensory experiences (Fortier, 2006, p.73).

However, the Centro serves as just one among numerous environments where individuals engage in practices that establish their 'soils of significance' (Hoffman, 1989, p.278), alongside other places like family homes, workplaces, evening classes, local shops, parks, and fitness clubs (Fortier, 2006, p.74). These locations significantly influence perceptions of home and intimate connections, whether ethnic or otherwise, not solely through the physical spaces themselves but also through the interrelations among them (Fortier, 2006, p.74). Such interactions at the Centro, for instance, offer glimpses into a fragment of their ethnic identity rather than embodying the entirety of one's cultural essence (Fortier, 2006, p.74). As Fortier (2006) puts it, “As such, the common ground found in the Centro is more like points of attachment, nodes in a rhizomatic network of connections, than they are about a holistic form of commonality, of ‘being alike’...... Spaces such as the Centro are part of a horizontal network of connections, not a vertical, hierarchical one, that allows cross-cultural relations of ‘likeness’ that are not about ethnicity, origins, and nation, but about much more mundane things that together constitute feelings of home and belonging” (p.74). In essence, it is the interweaving of these everyday connections that cultivates a comprehensive sense of community and belonging.

1.4. De-rooted and de-territorialized: a mobile home

In the context of a swiftly evolving global landscape, the sensation of 'feeling at home' is becoming more reliant on the interactions with newcomers within previously known neighborhoods (Duyvendak, 2011, p.30). Nowadays, the sense of belonging, or the opposite of which, is largely shaped by relationships with numerous others, evolving within a dynamic relational field (Duyvendak, 2011, p.30). People may be able to ‘familiarize’ themselves with new neighbors and shops, however, such ‘public familiarity’ (Blokland, 2003; Fischer, 1982) may not suffice for a genuine “at home” feeling (Duyvendak, 2011, p.30). When individuals experience feelings of marginalization or threats, they tend to reassess their place and position within the community in comparison to other groups, often reinforcing their distinct identities in the process (Duyvendak, 2011, p.30).

Many individuals who lead mobile lives eventually find stability and carve out their own spaces; newcomers, depending on their migration motives, may even attempt to assimilate (Duyvendak, 2011, p.31). However, many immigrants initially struggle to connect with their new locales, unfamiliar with and indifferent to the unique characteristics of their new localities as these do not contribute to a sense of home (Duyvendak, 2011, p.31). In their efforts to establish a sense of home in foreign lands, immigrants often reconstruct environments that resemble, to some degree, the places they have left, invoking the sights and scents of their homeland (Duyvendak, 2011, p.31). While native residents may feel nostalgic for past “times” when they were among their own, immigrants may experience homesickness for the “places” they are most familiar with (Duyvendak, 2011, p.31). Beyond just sentimental value, the goods that immigrants bring from their country of origin play a crucial role in creating a home in unfamiliar territories

(Duyvendak, 2011, p.31). This practice, which Duyvendak (2011) refers to as the 'mobile home strategy', is not exclusive to international migrants but is also employed by domestic travelers, whether for work or leisure, such as those using caravans or campers (p.31).

In addition to immigrants, Duyvendak (2011) has also addressed the sense of belonging and the home-making strategies for a category of people that he terms “chronically mobile persons” – a group comprising “CEOs, workers in the transport sector, academics, people working for international NGOs, and many others” (p.32). He concludes that many of these individuals often find enjoyment in their mobility, grounded in the belief that ‘one dwells not only in a place but also in travel. Thus, home should be seen as something that individuals can take along as they move through time and space...For a world of travelers, home comes to be found in a routine set of practices, in a repetition of habitual social interactions’ (Nowicka, 2007, p. 72). To adapt to new environments, they adopt what Duyvendak (2011) calls “domesticating” strategies, enjoying generic places like hotel rooms through routine activities and forming connections with similar individuals (p.31). Andrews (2005) further notes that the incorporation of familiar items from one’s original culture—such as newspapers, television programs, and food—plays a crucial role in constructing a daily cultural framework, thereby facilitating a sense of home regardless of physical location (p.263).

Nowicka (2007) compellingly disputes the conventional idea that home is tied to a specific place, advocating to “de-root” (Duyvendak, 2011, p.32) the contemporary notion of home:

Home [was] regarded as a stable, unmoving center from which the world around can be perceived, conceived and experienced, and thanks to which ethnic and national identities can

develop ... It is considered to be a fixed environment: being at home means stationary, centered, bounded, fitted, engaged and grounded ... Social science would thus choose a spatially fixed home and investigate how its particularity and atmosphere is created. (p. 72)

For those who live a mobile lifestyle, new environments can become or feel like home, suggesting that one can form attachments to multiple locations at once (Duyvendak, 2011, p.33). Therefore, Duyvendak (2011) argues against the traditional concept of home as a fixed, geographical location, deeply connected to a physical or envisioned homeland. Instead, he emphasizes a "routes" perspective, which highlights a more fluid and unbounded conception of home, underscored by transnational connections and networks (p.33). As he puts it, ‘Rather than view home as rooted, located, and bounded, and often closely tied to a remembered or imagined homeland, an emphasis on “routes” invokes more mobile, and often de-territorialized, geographies of home that reflect transnational connections and networks’ (Duyvendak, 2011, p.33). This approach to understanding how people forge connections to places in a globalized context is termed the "routes paradigm" by Duyvendak (2011).

Nowicka expands on Massey's idea of place as a construct “out of numerous social relationships stretched over space’ (Massey, 2003, p. 69), framing home within the context of 'globally stretching networks' (2007, p. 83). In her view, the concept of home for those who are highly mobile is predominantly social rather than territorially defined, centered around connections with people and familiar encounters rather than a specific territory (Duyvendak, 2011, p.33). Thus, Nowicka (2007) moves beyond the traditional belief that a specific location is necessary for one to feel at home (Duyvendak, 2011, p.33). However, Nowicka (2007) provides limited insight into the specifics of the relationships and objects that contribute to a sense of

home for the mobile population, merely acknowledging that home is crafted around certain ties to people and objects (p. 81). Duyvendak (2011) takes this further by arguing that for highly mobile individuals, the defining characteristic of these relationships often stems from the generic nature of places, suggesting that the concept of home can be even more de-territorialized than Nowicka indicates (p.33).

In the subsequent section, I will examine interview excerpts with Chinese international students to explore how they navigate their mobile lifestyle in the United States and forge a "middler" identity through a variety of discursive practices, thereby cultivating a rather mobile sense of belonging.

Method

The participants consist of 5 Chinese male graduate students and 1 Chinese male software engineer aged 24-25, residing in the Bay Area, California, at the time of the experiment. All 5 graduate students were in their second year of pursuing either a master's degree or a doctoral degree in the engineering field at a higher institution located in the Bay Area, California. The software engineer who participated in this study has been working in the Bay Area for an equivalent amount of time. All of the participants earned their bachelor's degrees in engineering from different U.S. universities outside of California, however, the timespan that each of the participants spent living in the U.S. differs depending on their personal life choices as well as due to the COVID breakout that happened in their junior year of college. Before attending U.S. universities, 5 of the participants received education until high school in the People’s Republic of China, while 1 of them transferred from a Chinese university to a U.S. counterpart after completing his sophomore year in China. All 6 of the participants reported their L1 to be Mandarin Chinese alongside one additional regional dialect that is not specifically concerned in this study, and English to be the primary language they utilize throughout their past and current university education setting.

The data analyzed in this chapter is taken from audio-recorded interview sessions I conducted with each of the participants, which started at the beginning of March 2023 and continued through the end of March. The participants consist of 5 Chinese male graduate students and 1 Chinese male software engineer aged 24-25, residing in the Bay Area, California, at the time of the experiment. All 5 graduate students were in their second year of pursuing either

a master's degree or a doctoral degree in the engineering field at a higher institution located in the Bay Area, California. The software engineer who participated in this study has been working in the Bay Area for an equivalent amount of time. All of the participants earned their bachelor's degrees in engineering from different U.S. universities outside of California, however, the timespan that each of the participants spent living in the U.S. differs depending on their personal life choices as well as due to the COVID breakout that happened in their junior year of college. Each of the interviews analyzed here lasted between 60 minutes and 90 minutes. Audio recordings were made on a Zoom H4n Pro 4 Recorder and were taken in mono at a sampling rate of 44,100 Hertz in 16-bit resolution.

2.1.Participants

This project recruited six participants for interviews to elicit spontaneous Mandarin speech for analysis. All participants had similar academic backgrounds: they completed their pre-university education in China and earned bachelor's degrees in engineering in the United States. I have known one participant, Chauncey, since our undergraduate days at a public university in the Midwest. The other participants were mutual friends we met after moving to California for our master’s programs.

Kevin was in his second year of a PhD program in mechanical engineering at the time of the interview. He earned dual Bachelor of Science degrees in engineering from a university in Illinois and moved to the Bay Area immediately after graduation to pursue his PhD in the same field.

Bob began his university education in China and transferred to a university in Wisconsin after his sophomore year, spending the next three years there. At the time of the interview, he was in the second year of his master's program in mechanical engineering.

Johnny attended university in Texas after completing high school in China. He spent three years in Texas and then stayed in China for a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Like Bob, Johnny was in the second year of his master's program in mechanical engineering during the data collection.

Chauncey completed his undergraduate degree at a public university in Pennsylvania before moving to the Bay Area for his master's in mechanical engineering. He was in his second year of the master's program at the time of the interview.

Jerry followed a similar educational path in the U.S., finishing his undergraduate degree in computer science in three and a half years in Illinois. He then moved to the Bay Area to work as a software engineer and had been working there for two years at the time of the interview.

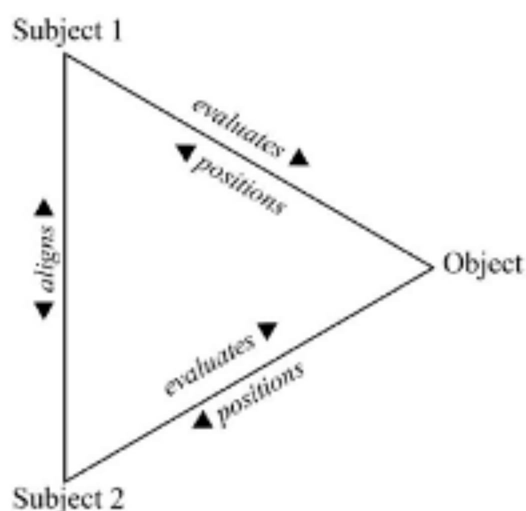
Before starting his master's program in mechanical engineering, Darry spent two and a half years in New York State for his undergraduate degree. He returned to China during the COVID-19 outbreak and later came back to the U.S., moving to the Bay Area for his master's. At the time of the interview, he was in his second year of the program.

2.2. Positionality

Dubois (2007) describes stance as an overt act achieved by simultaneous evaluation of objects, positioning subjects (both self and others), and forming alignments between a social actor and other subjects through a salient communicative method regarding any notable

sociocultural dimension (p. 163). In other words, considering the stancetaker perspective as the first-person speaking subject, Dubois (2007) rephrases this definition as “I evaluate something, and thereby position myself, and thereby align with you.”

Figure 1 Dubois (2007)’s explanation of stance



Sharma (2021) enunciates how biographical indexicality can affect style-shifting in the speech of Fareed Zakaria, a well-known Indian American media commentator. She argues that from a biographical indexicality perspective, rather than being the social evaluation (Y) of the group that uses the linguistics form X (Eckert, 2008a), Y is a varies of stances that not only derive their meaning from biography but also from the position of form X throughout that person’s style history (Sharma, 2021, p.260).

Anna Banas (2018) investigates the pronoun usage among Japanese wives who temporarily live in Amstelveen, Netherlands, with respect to their ways of establishing a sense of belonging. As a Polish and Japanese-speaking female researcher, Anna Banas (2018) defines her position in

regard to the Japanese participants as being an “outsider and foreigner, but not Japanese”, which she believes “plays a significant role in how participants in this research speak and how they present themselves to and in front of me” (p.90). Indeed, she later discovers that the utterance of “watashitachi nihonjin (us Japanese)” by one of the Japanese wives, Fumiko, indicates her primary identity as Japanese, reaffirming her belonging to the community of Japanese expatriate woman, while simultaneously presenting herself to another foreigner–the researcher herself (2018, p.102).

Therefore, I believe it is imperative for me to first clarify my position in regard to the participants–i.e. 6 Chinese international students who attained their bachelor's degree in engineering program from different US higher institutions. Even though we share similarities in cultural and educational backgrounds, we differ in various aspects. To start with, I am a fellow Chinese international student who completed undergraduate education in the liberal arts field at a US university located in the Midwest. I am also at the same age as all of my participants. However, we are distinct in terms of gender, the academic field we pursue, and the graduate school we currently attend. The above series of resemblance and distinctions make my position in this study diverge from Anna Banas’: in contrary to her position of being a thorough outsider in the Japanese migrant women community, I am both an insider and an outsider in front of my participants. Yuval-Davis (2006) suggests the construction of belonging as a relational and context-dependent practice (Banas, 2018, p.91), thus, it is crucial to consider my position in relation to my participants as it will shed an influence on how belonging is established.

2.3. Data collection and data analysis

The researcher audio-recorded one-on-one interview sessions with each of the participants to elicit spontaneous Mandarin speech data that was mixed with English utterances. Each interview session lasted between 60 to 90 minutes depending on how each participant would like to respond to the interview questions. As Cornips & de Rooij (2018) point out, a combination of factors such as "Increased mobility of people, goods, and technologies, feelings of nostalgia, and the perceived threat of losing one's culture, economic security, and territory due to the workings of globalization" shape the articulation of today's heavily politized concepts of belonging (p.6). In addition, Baumeister & Leary (1995) highlight the significance of "frequent personal contacts or interactions with the other person (that are) affectively positive or pleasant" as well as "interpersonal bond or relationship marked by stability, affective concern, and continuation into the foreseeable future" when it comes to constructing the sense of belonging (p.500).
In order to address the above considerations, the interview questions adopted in this study targeted participants' daily life, academic, future career and life plans, etc. (see Appendix A). The interview recordings were then manually transcribed and labeled in MaxQDA.

Chapter 3 Constructing diasporic Chinese emblems in the Bay Area, California

3.4.1. Celebrate Chinese festivals in the U.S.: a homemaking strategy

To start with, as both Antonisch (2010) and Fenster (2005) point out, language plays a crucial role in enhancing intimacy and fostering a sense of belonging, thereby creating a sense of "home" within one's autobiographical narrative. Similarly, a sense of belonging can also be invoked through various cultural factors, including traditions and practices associated with, for example, religion and the materiality aspects of cultural practices, such as the production and consumption of food (Antonisch, 2010, p.648; Fenster, 2005, p.252). In fact, when asked in the interview if they celebrate any Chinese festivals in the U.S., most Chinese international students reported that they had maintained the tradition of celebrating their cultural festivals annually from when they arrived in the U.S. for their undergraduate studies to the present. For instance, here Kevin described how he celebrates Chinese festivals by consuming food from his country of origin:

> "I always celebrate Lunar New Year, because it is a relatively important festival in Chinese culture. This year we had a group of friends eat dinner together on the Lunar New Year's Eve. It was not a day off at school, but it was an important day, so we had to celebrate it. I also celebrate the Dragon Boat Festival every year by eating some rice dumplings. I also make sure to get mooncakes for the Mid-Autumn Festival. I always try to celebrate those festivals that can be easily dealt with."

In Kevin's account, he emphasizes the significant role of celebrating Chinese festivals, particularly Lunar New Year, in his life by organizing dinners with friends on Lunar New Year's Eve—a practice deeply rooted in the Chinese tradition of family reunions and feasting on this special night. This ritual mirrors the celebrations he partook in back in China. Furthermore, he commemorates other Chinese festivals like the Dragon Boat Festival and the Mid-Autumn Festival by consuming traditional Chinese food–or a type of "material goods" as Antonisch (2010) specifies–such as rice dumplings and mooncakes, respectively, which are customary ways to celebrate these festivals in China. This behavior exemplifies what Duyvendak (2011) terms the "mobile home strategy", whereby individuals recreate familiar environments in new or foreign settings by introducing items from their homeland, effectively fostering a feeling of home in a foreign land (Duyvendak, 2011, p.31). Through the replication of Chinese festival customs and culinary traditions within the U.S., students navigate and personalize unfamiliar spaces. Antonisch (2010) also agrees that such cultural practices, including "traditions and habits, related, for instance, to religion, as well as to the materiality of cultural practices like, for instance, food production/consumption" significantly contribute to generating a sense of belonging and feeling 'at home' in a new environment (p.648).

Moreover, nowadays, Chinese international students have ample and easy access to ethnic foods such as mooncakes and rice dumplings from ethnic food stores, that sell specific Chinese food and spices, especially in Bay Area, California, including mooncakes and rice dumplings, available at stores specializing in Chinese cuisine and ingredients. This is particularly true in the Bay Area, California, which boasts the highest concentration of Chinese restaurants in the country (with California leading at 31,770 businesses, followed by New York with 20,647,

and Texas with 18,499). The Bay Area has also seen a demographic shift, with Asians now representing the largest racial group, surpassing Whites according to 2020 Bay Area demographics (Asians at 33.1%, Whites at 32.9%, Latinos at 23%, Blacks at 4.8%, and Others at 6.2%).

Fenster (2005) highlights "ethno-towns" like Chinatowns and Banglatowns as examples of space appropriation and territorialization (p.249). She notes that the "boundaries of belonging" are often symbolic and fluid, adjusting to the objectives and needs of dominant groups (Fenster, 2005, p.249). This delineation of belonging often translates into urban planning power, allowing for the control of space via zoning, and pushing marginalized communities into less appealing areas (Fenster, 2005, p.249). Fenster (2005) claims that since a strong sense of belonging frequently correlates with a preference for homogeneity (p.249). Therefore, ethnic locations, offering services and spaces tailored to the cultural needs of their community—ranging from food stores and traditional clothing outlets to street names in Bengali, music shops, mosques, and travel agencies catering to visits to Bangladesh—create "physical spaces of belonging" (Fenster, 2005, p.249). These spaces, in turn, form their own "networks of belonging" within the global cityscape of London, maintaining community connections and a sense of belonging to their original homeland (Fenster, 2005, p.250).

Similarly, for Chinese international students, access to ethnic resources such as Chinese supermarkets or Chinatowns plays a vital role in preserving ethnic traditions and enhancing their connection to their homeland, echoing Fenster's (2005) findings. This is illustrated in an interview with a British-Bengali-Muslim resident of London:

> "And the spices that I usually eat and cook with . . . Indian spices that you can get everywhere. . . I learned the names of the spices in English only five years ago when I arrived in London because at home [Canada] I would shop in Indian shops – food makes me feel I belong. (Mandy, 28, single, Canadian-Indian, Jerusalem, June 16, 2000)"

From this, Fenster concludes that food and spices, which are deeply intertwined with one's identity, play a crucial role in fostering a sense of belonging, particularly among immigrants (Fenster, 2005, p.252). Hence, for Chinese international students to cultivate a sense of "home" in a new environment, it is essential to recreate, or more precisely, to continue the familiar culinary experiences or traditions from their homeland, thereby reinforcing their ethnic identity.

Jerry also expressed his views on celebrating the Lunar New Year in the U.S., describing it as "a manifestation of homesickness while being in a foreign country":

> "Celebrating Lunar New Year is part of the Chinese culture. During the Spring Festival (i.e., Lunar New Year), I may go to my classmate's apartments, and we would eat snacks, and play pokers while watching the Spring Festival Gala (a well-known Chinese New Year special TV program that is broadcast annually on the night of Lunar New Year) together. This is a manifestation of homesickness while being in a foreign country. I spent this year's and last year's Spring Festival with my classmates. At least during the Spring Festival, everyone can really have fun together.

For the Mid-Autumn Festival, I usually just make a phone call to my family. Same for the Dragon Boat Festival. These two festivals are not as meaningful as the Spring Festival to us who study abroad."

Jerry's celebration of the Lunar New Year aligns with Kevin's practices, particularly the custom of dining with friends on Lunar New Year's Eve, a substitute for the traditional family reunion that would take place in their hometown. They both emphasize the significant role of the Lunar New Year within Chinese cultural traditions, more so than other festivals like the Mid-Autumn Festival and Dragon Boat Festival, which they do not celebrate as vigorously. Additionally, Jerry highlights watching the Spring Festival Gala, a renowned Chinese New Year television special aired annually on Lunar New Year's Eve, together with his friends, as another Chinese tradition that they have recreated in the U.S. territory. Jerry's statement aligns closely with the "mobile home strategy" proposed by Duyvendak (2011). Jerry specifically notes that celebrating Lunar New Year's Eve with dinner and watching the Spring Festival Gala in the U.S. is "a manifestation of homesickness while being in a foreign country". This resonates with Duyvendak's (2011) analysis that while native residents might experience nostalgia for familiar times, immigrants often long for the "places" they know best (p31). Accordingly, recreating an environment that captures the essence of their homeland by introducing cultural items and traditions is a vital component of their strategy to foster a sense of home abroad (Duyvendak, 2011, p.31).

In addition to the "mobile home strategy", Duyvendak (2011) introduces the "routes paradigm", a "domesticating" homemaking strategy for those who are frequently on the move, such as academics, CEOs, and NGO workers (p.263). This strategy involves creating a sense of

home through the routine use of generic spaces like hotel rooms, engaging in familiar activities, connecting with like-minded individuals, and incorporating elements from one's original culture, such as newspapers, television programs, and food (Duyvendak, 2011, p.263). This allows such individuals to establish a consistent cultural context, fostering a sense of home irrespective of their geographical location (Duyvendak, 2011, p.263). Bell (1999) also discusses the "citational" nature of identity, suggesting that acts of belonging are performative, serving to 'cite' the norms that delineate a community or group (p.3). For example, Jerry watching the Spring Festival Gala abroad with friends exemplifies this performative citation of Chinese cultural norms, helping him maintain a sense of home despite his continuous mobility from Shanghai to the Midwest for undergraduate studies, and then to the Bay Area for work three years later.

In a similar fashion, Darry, Johnny, and Chauncey shared comparable traditions for celebrating the Lunar New Year, which typically involves having dinner with friends on Lunar New Year's Eve and watching the Spring Festival Gala, the special television program broadcasted for the night of the Lunar New Year. As Johnny describes:

> "I would always have dinner with friends on the night of Lunar New Year every year when I'm in the U.S. For festivals such as Mid-Autumn festivals, I usually don't take the initiative to celebrate, but if someone told me they got good mooncakes, I would go get some too. Otherwise, I just keep those festivals casual. But I always make sure to celebrate Spring Festival by having dinner with friends."

Darry adds a similar sentiment:

> “For Lunar New Year's night, I always arrange a dinner with friends and take the day off for myself. Basically, I would celebrate every Chinese Festival, granting myself a day off even when there's no official break from school (in the U.S.). It's not a big deal, especially when you are still a student."

Every Chinese international student interviewed identified the Lunar New Year’s Eve dinner, also known as "Nian Ye Fan" in Mandarin, as the most pivotal cultural tradition in the Chinese community. Fortier (2006) documents how food-oriented events at Centro, an Italian church and social club in South London, play a critical role in shaping Italian identities within the community. Fortier (2006) details how activities such as weekly Wednesday lunches and dinner dances are central to fostering social bonds among the London-Italian community (p.73). These events are described as forming a 'sacred eating community,' where communal dining serves as a unifying ritual that connects participants through shared experiences and interactions (Fortier, 2006, p.73).

Similarly, for Chinese international students, the Nian Ye Fan, or Lunar New Year’s Eve dinner with close peers, holds substantial cultural importance. This tradition is universally recognized by Chinese international student participants as the primary way to celebrate Lunar New Year. Echoing Pasi Falk's concept discussed by Fortier (2006), these gatherings can be seen as a 'two-way order' where the act of communal eating not only shapes daily life but also profoundly enriches cultural identity (p.73). In other words, such traditional dinner gatherings as Nian Ye Fan, though occurring annually, are crucial in reinforcing Chinese identity and fostering

a sense of belonging through shared culinary practices. These events create a 'community of feeling,' marked by 'sensual solidarities,' where communal ties are reinforced through collective sensory experiences (Fortier, 2006, p.73). Fortier (2006) illustrates how ritualized dinner dances in the Italian community not only reinforce but also nourish cultural identity through communal participation (p.73). This concept is equally applicable to Nian Ye Fan, where the essence of 'Chineseness' is both nourished and expressed in these significant yet infrequent gatherings, ensuring that participants make time to honor Lunar New Year traditions. Thus, just like the food events in Centro, Nian Ye Fan among Chinese international students in the U.S. fosters a similar 'community of feeling' and embodies a community of 'sensual solidarities' (Fortier, 2006, p.73), reinforcing cultural ties and identity through traditional celebrations.

3.4.2. Indifferent towards U.S. tradition: to sustain the Chinese identity

Despite their strong engagement with Chinese traditions and enthusiasm for Chinese goods while in the U.S., Chinese international students often display considerable disinterest in U.S. holidays and food. This sentiment is clearly articulated by both Jerry and Kevin in their comments about Thanksgiving:

> "Thanksgiving doesn't really mean anything to Asians; it's just a break for us. Christmas means nothing either; we just enjoy the time off and maybe some pumpkin spice latte. It’s more about having fun. I personally never eat turkey on Thanksgiving because Turkey is freaking dry.” (Jerry)

"I've never once eaten turkey. I'm not really into celebrating American holidays. It's just that we get time off during Thanksgiving and Christmas, so I use it as a break. That's all there is to it." (Kevin)

Jerry similarly expresses indifference towards other U.S. holidays such as Saint Patrick's Day and Martin Luther King Day, addressing the history behind these holidays is detached from Chinese international students' own:

"To me, Saint Patrick's Day is basically about everyone wearing green and going out to drink. Even when there was an epidemic, people still bought green food and the shopping malls were decked out in green. It's all just about having fun, and I feel completely disconnected from it.

It's mostly just a family gathering where everyone talks about what they're thankful for, similar to how we celebrate the Mid-Autumn Festival. It doesn't connect with its historical roots. I'm not concerned with the history or meaning behind these holidays. Likewise, Martin Luther King Day doesn't really mean anything to Asians either."

Both Darry and Chauncey expressed similar sentiments of detachment and indifference towards U.S. holidays, highlighting a general lack of interest in the historical aspects:

"I just take the chance to have some fun whenever there's a holiday, but I don't really celebrate any of them specifically. For example, Thanksgiving is supposedly about thanking Native Americans for the land, but who am I supposed to thank? I don't really celebrate Christmas or Saint Patrick's Day either. I know Saint Patrick's Day is in March and it's a Scottish holiday where people wear green. To me, it's an odd holiday and just doesn't hold any meaning." (Darry)

"For me, holidays like Christmas and Thanksgiving are just breaks from school. Christmas falls during the winter break, and then there's also a week off for Thanksgiving, so it's a good time to rest. I don't do anything special to celebrate these days because they don't really matter to me. My understanding of U.S. holidays is pretty much just about getting days off from school. When you really think about it, American federal holidays like Martin Luther King Day or Memorial Day are just days off too, without the specific traditions that accompany Chinese festivals like the Qingming Festival, where we eat Qingtuan balls (i.e.green dumplings made of glutinous rice and Chinese mugwort or barley grass.), or the Dragon Boat Festival, which includes eating rice dumplings and and other activities." (Chauncey)

Holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas hold no special significance to Bob as they are just like any other day to him:

"I usually travel during Thanksgiving because we get time off from school, but I don't really see it as a holiday, let alone celebrate it. As for Christmas, I might have a meal, but to be honest, that meal feels just like any other meal on any other day. There's really no difference. I sometimes invite friends over for dinner on my birthday as well, so having a meal on Christmas is just part of my usual social activities."

Fenster (2005) asserts that a sense of belonging is closely linked to power dynamics and mechanisms of control (p.253). She notes that the impact of power relations on an individual's sense of belonging intensifies with the expansiveness of the space involved (Fenster, 2005, p.253). In public spaces, power relations are identified as "claim," "appropriation," "exclusion," and "discrimination" (Fenster, 2005, p253). In public spaces, power dynamics manifest as "claim," "appropriation," "exclusion," and "discrimination" (Fenster, 2005, p.253). These dynamics establish "the boundaries of belonging," shaped by dominant forces to exclude "the other," such as Palestinians in Jerusalem and, to some extent, Bangladeshis in London, who are not recognized as part of the mainstream by these forces (Fenster, 2005, p.253). Palestinians, for instance, often feel marginalized as their historical and cultural identities are overlooked in major national initiatives like Israel's National Master Plan, which primarily addresses Jewish concerns (Fenster, 2004). Meanwhile, Bangladeshis may find themselves outside the bounds of what is considered "Englishness", although they are included within the broader scope of "Britishness" (Fenster, 2005, p.253). Fenster thus indicates that the interplay between belonging and power involves both private dimensions—where power can exclude—and public dimensions—where power can enable access (p.253). In addition, Fenster (2005) emphasizes the crucial role of "the

right to belong" in shaping one's sense of belonging (p.253). She defines "the right to belong" as the entitlement of individuals from diverse backgrounds to be recognized and to participate in civil society, regardless of identity differences—a concept Sandercock (2000) refers to as "the right to difference" (Fenster, 2005, p.253). In contested urban environments, this right evolves into a more profound form of "citizenship in the global city" (Fenster, 2005, p.253). It pertains to circumstances where individuals' rights to equality and to preserve their distinct identities are respected (Fenster, 2005, p.253). These rights are linked to the ability of communities to uphold their historical and cultural sites, which are recognized and protected through urban planning and development policies (Fenster, 2005, p.253).

Duyvendak (2011) argues that in today's swiftly changing world, the sense of 'feeling at home' is increasingly influenced by the actions of new arrivals in previously familiar neighborhoods (p.30). He suggests that feeling at home or not is now largely shaped by our interactions with a multitude of others within a relational sphere (Duyvendak, 2011, p.30). While individuals can somewhat acclimate to new neighbors and local businesses, this level of 'public familiarity' (Blokland, 2003; Fischer, 1982) alone is insufficient for fostering a genuine sense of home (Duyvendak, 2011, p.30). Feelings of marginalization or threat can lead individuals to emphasize their distinct identities in comparison to others, transforming 'home' into a place of deep personal significance and exclusivity (Duyvendak, 2011, p.30). In our era of mobility, many find the notion of a secure, well-defined home increasingly attractive (Duyvendak, 2011, p.30). While some cosmopolitans view the fluidity of home positively, embracing 'nomadism', many others find it challenging to belong in a diverse and transient society and deplore the loss of a familiar, stable home (Duyvendak, 2011, p.30).

Consequently, feeling at home can devolve into a zero-sum situation where one can only feel like an insider if others remain outsiders (Duyvendak, 2011, p.30). Those with ample resources secure their comfort by residing in gated communities among people who share their outlooks (Low, 2004). In contrast, the less privileged must confront these changes directly, facing the disruption brought by unfamiliar shops and new demographics that alter the established, perceived natural order, challenging their long-held identities (Duyvendak, 2011, p.30). In defense, they attempt to reconnect the broken ties between 'culture' and 'place,' where their "homely racism" emerges as a reaction to the threat migration poses to their exclusive connection between routine and residence (Duyvendak, 2011, p.30). Therefore, the sense of what constitutes home emerges from a dynamic interplay between elements that are seen as belonging to the place and those that are not; what is psychologically close and what is distant; what feels like the 'inside' versus the 'outside'; and the distinctions between 'us' and 'them' (Duyvendak, 2011, p.30).

In a similar vein, due to the limited public expression of Chinese culture and traditions in the U.S., Chinese international students, as a relatively marginalized group, often find it challenging to feel that their "right to belong" in U.S. society is recognized (Fenster, 2005, p.253). As a response, these students establish a sense of ethnic belonging through private means within their community by actively defining "what is felt as home," differentiating between what aligns with their identity and what remains foreign (Duyvendak, 2011, p.30). This includes discerning "what belongs to the place and what does not; what is mentally near and what is far; what feels like 'inside' and what does not; who are considered 'we' and who are labeled 'others'" (Duyvendak, 2011, p.30). Their general indifference towards American holidays and

the associated histories, despite residing in the U.S., contrasts sharply with their active efforts to recreate a Chinese cultural environment. This behavior not only reflects the emotional challenges many immigrants face in connecting with their new settings—where the unfamiliar aspects do not foster a sense of home (Duyvendak, 2011, p.31)—but also illustrates their efforts to establish a sense of home abroad through recreating environments that echo the familiar sights and scents of their homeland (Duyvendak, 2011, p.31). Moreover, this behavior aligns with what Duyvendak (2011) describes as "homely racism," where immigrants re-establish and maintain the cultural connections to their places of origin in response to feeling out of place in their new environment (Duyvendak, 2011, p.31). Thus, through these private practices within their community, Chinese international students in the U.S. navigate their complex identities and strive to maintain a connection to the cultural heritage they have left behind, even within their mobile lifestyle in the U.S. Moreover, this behavior aligns with what Duyvendak (2011) describes as "homely racism," where immigrants re-establish and maintain the cultural connections to their places of origin in response to feeling out of place in their new environment (Duyvendak, 2011, p.31). Thus, through these private practices within their community, Chinese international students in the U.S. navigate their complex identities and strive to maintain a connection to the cultural heritage they have left behind, even within their mobile lifestyle in the U.S.

3.4.3. The "Middler" identity: originated from the mobile lifestyle

When discussing how he views his role in the U.S. compared to China, Bob describes feeling like a "guest" in the United States, contrasting with his deeper sense of societal responsibility in China:

> "My experience in the States has been positive, largely because I engage very little with the broader society. I'm curious about it, but I don't seek to immerse myself fully. My involvement with everything happening in the U.S. is from the standpoint of an outsider; I don't feel compelled to engage more deeply because I see no need. I won't want to participate more deeply, because I don't feel the need. My mindset here is distinct from how I feel in China, where I feel a responsibility to be more actively involved in societal matters. Here, I am aware of my status as a guest, and that is the lens through which I view my interactions—simply observing what is happening in what is considered the most advanced country in the world."

Kevin shared his views on what constitutes home within his mobile lifestyle, stating that "home is anywhere I am with my girlfriend and friends". This reflects Duyvendak's (2011) notion that fostering a sense of home, irrespective of location, is achievable through forming close, intimate connections with others:

> "I barely recall what home feels like, so it's not something I find particularly important. To me, home is where my close ones are — it used to be where my family was, but now

it's wherever I am with my girlfriend. Also, having done my undergrad and now my grad studies in the States, all my friends are here, which reinforces this feeling.

And I genuinely prefer my life in the States. I feel quite free and happy studying here. Back in China, education tends to be more exam focused. Also, being physically closer to my parents there doesn’t appeal to me; I prefer my own company or the company of friends to be with my parents. Plus, the weather in Shanghai, especially the unbearable summers, is another drawback for me."

Kevin's response exemplifies what Antonisch (2010) emphasizes regarding the role of "strong ties" or intimate relationships in developing a sense of belonging to a place. Kevin identifies "home" within his mobile lifestyle in the U.S. as being wherever his long-term friends and romantic partner are located. Furthermore, Kevin's situation illustrates how intellectual opportunities and a culture that matches one's personal preferences significantly contribute to shaping one's sense of home.

Johnny expressed his appreciation for the mobile lifestyle in the United States, aligning with Duyvendak's (2011) concept that home does not have to be fixed or bounded, but can instead be dynamic and dispersed, reflecting transnational connections and networks. Johnny values the flexibility and mobility this lifestyle affords, emphasizing that home is more about the routes and connections one forms rather than a specific, rooted location:

"For me, having a fixed sense of home isn't crucial. What matters is my happiness and my own sense of belonging, which I can create for myself. As long as I'm on the right path and clear about my objectives, I feel secure. I don't see a need to fully assimilate into U.S. culture."

From the reflections on their mobile lifestyle and their roles in the U.S. and China, it's evident that despite Chinese international students' positive experiences and preferences for life in the U.S., they remain culturally connected to their Chinese identity, finding a comfortable balance between the two cultures. Chauncey attributes this to the influence of his upbringing within Chinese culture:

"I definitely plan to stay in the United States and have no intentions of returning to China. Nonetheless, I am inherently Chinese, having been raised in Chinese culture. This background influences the pace and extent to which I integrate into American culture. For instance, I enjoy watching football and eating American food. However, I'm not much for parties, so I don't push myself to assimilate completely into American culture or live entirely like an American. It's not necessary. My deep understanding of Chinese culture helps me maintain and even preserve my cultural heritage, even while living abroad."

Fenster (2005) discusses the complex sense of belonging for immigrants as "ambivalent," through the lens of Harun, a British-Bengali-Muslim immigrant who feels disconnected from both his homeland of Bangladesh and his current residence in London. Despite no

longer living in Bangladesh, Harun does not feel "at home" in London and identifies with neither British nor Bangladeshi nationalities, occupying a space "in-between-homes." Harun's move to London during childhood was not by choice but was dictated by economic necessity, and he remains due to his children who were born and are being raised there, further complicating his ties to Bangladesh (Fenster, 2005, p.251). Fenster notes that Harun exemplifies a segment of the Bangladeshi diaspora caught between two cultures, feeling out of place in both his nostalgic, "imagined" home in Bangladesh and his "real" home in London (Fenster, 2005, p.251).

Similar to Harun's experience, the primary motivation for Chinese international students to come to the U.S. is what Antonisch (2010) terms "intellectual prospects," namely pursuing undergraduate or higher education at U.S. institutions. However, the mere pursuit of education does not entirely sever their ties to their cultural origins nor does it lead them to fully assimilate into U.S. culture. Over time, these students, particularly those who completed their undergraduate studies in the U.S., develop a set of strategies to adapt and find a balance in their identity, referred to here as the “middler” identity. This identity comfortably sits between their native and adopted cultures, facilitated by various cultural practices such as enjoying ethnic foods and recreating traditional celebrations within the U.S.

Incorporating English words into Chinese conversations, a practice known as codeswitching, also exemplifies this hybrid identity among Chinese international students. Antonisch (2010) highlights the profound role of language, as described by Therborn (1991), in defining cultural membership through unique universes of meaning and specific communicative

styles. As such, language not only deepens intimacy and fosters a sense of belonging but also helps cultivate a sense of "home" within one's narrative, as noted by Hooks (2009). Codeswitching, in this context, requires a shared background knowledge among speakers to be effective. It not only facilitates communication within the community but also acts as a marker of belonging, distinguishing insiders from outsiders. Moreover, as Darry repeatedly points out, there is a notable ideological and cultural divergence between Chinese students who completed their undergraduate education in the U.S. and those who did not. This difference underpins the specific codeswitching behaviors observed in this study, underscoring its role in meaning-making within this particular community of Chinese international students.

Chapter 4 Linguistic results

To index belongings

Politics of Belonging

John Crowley characterized the politics of belonging as "the dirty work of boundary maintenance" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p.204). The creation of boundary discourses and practices that distinguish "us" from "them" is the very fundamental core of any politics of belonging (Antonsich, 2010, p.649; Yuval-Davis, 2006, p.204). In this respect, belonging to a place is equivalent to belonging to a group of people, and therefore is equated with identity, both social and individual (Antonsich, 2010, p.649; Lovell, 1998, p.1).

Membership (to a group) and ownership (of a place) are essential to any politics of belonging (Crowley, 1999, p.25; Antonsich, 2010, p.649). The special link between a certain group of people to a specific place on Earth is not only established through identity but also through the concept of exclusive territorial ownership, such as "diasporas, nation-states, islander communities, and racially defined rural and urban areas" (Antonsich, 2010, p.649). As Antonsich (2010) puts it, "belonging is inherently spatial, and therefore who belongs and who does is written in the landscape" (p.650). In other words, landscape, as a form of visual communication, effectively imparts meanings of inclusion/exclusion by (re)creating a particular order of things as well as a concept of a unified culture (Trudeau, 2006, p.437; Antonsich, 2010, p.650). Brubaker and Cooper (2000) provide a comprehensive classification concerning varying degrees of membership construction by distinguishing between commonality, connectedness, and groupness. According to Brubaker and Cooper (2000), commonality implies that individuals

possess shared traits and practices, as well as facing comparable limitations and restrictions. Jaspers (2018) builds on this notion by demonstrating an example of a shared train compartment, where the commuters might not instantly gain a common sense of belonging. Nonetheless, those who occasionally strike up a conversation may develop into a genuine friendship, which, in this sense, is referred to as connectedness, the social connections people establish, by Brubaker and Cooper (p.20). That said, neither commonality nor connectedness leads to groupness, "the sense of belonging to a distinct, bounded, solidary group" (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000, p.20; Jaspers, 2018, p.20). Groupness can indeed be influenced by the levels of commonality and connectedness, however, it is also contingent on additional factors such as "particular events, their encoding in compelling public narratives, prevailing discursive frames, and so on" (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000, p.20). Groupness can persist even without being integrated into a social network, as long as commonality and narrative are compelling and adequate, as the study of nationalism has manifested (Jaspers, 2018, p.21; Anderson, 2020). For example, Anderson (2020) interprets nations as "imagined communities", because "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (p.6).

Jasper (2018) points out that the concepts of commonality, connectedness, and groupness will allow us to differentiate between "strongly binding, vehemently felt groupness from more loosely structured, weakly constraining forms of affinity and affiliation" (Brubaker & Cooper 2000, p.21).

Pronouns and Ethnic Labels

As stated by Gal & Irvine (1995), "[l]inguistic features are seen as reflecting and expressing broader cultural images of people and activities... [S]peakers have, and act in relation to, ideologically constructed representations of linguistic practice" (p.973). While some methods for identity construction propose that there are certain linguistic variables more likely to be recognized as salient, the points of emphasis are usually: "personal reference (e.g. personal pronouns, quantifiers); spatial reference (e.g. adverbs of place, toponyms) and temporal reference (e.g. temporal prepositions, adverbs of time, temporal conjunctions)" (Anna Banas, 2018. p.98). Modak (1999) also specifies personal pronouns as one of the most frequently mentioned features concerning group identity and belonging. In this regard, Anna Banas (2018) investigates how Japanese immigrant wives in the Netherlands construct belonging by (re)producing and differentiating between "us" versus "them" boundaries through linguistic practices, including (i) personal pronouns (ii) ethnic labels. The author discovers that the Japanese wife Fumiko's use of watashi ("I") in her conversation referring to the shared challenge faced by all Japanese when enjoying the Dutch opera, alongside her comparison between Dutch and Japanese clothes in the opera, suggests she prioritizes her identity as primarily Japanese. This reaffirms her sense of belonging to the group of Japanese immigrant wives, while simultaneously demonstrating such a collective identity in the presence of another foreigner, the author herself. In that manner, Fumiko's declaration of her affiliation to the group of Japanese expatriate women "seems to be done simultaneously for the group she belongs to and for someone who does not belong" (p.102). Likewise, when Yumi was complaining about the fish

quality in the Netherlands, her use of watashi ("i") once again serves to denote the Japanese identity for the group, as well as a wrapped identity to present in front of an outsider. Moreover, the use of 1 PL watashitachi together with Nihonjin ("Japanese") – watashitachi Nihonjin ("We, Japanese") – highlights their common national identity, Japanese, irrespective of the individual differences among them (p.102). Specifically, Watashitachi Nihonjin ("We, Japanese") appears in conversations that underscore collective experiences, reiterate shared knowledge and beliefs, and downplay individual distinctions (p.104). Meanwhile, this usage also actively makes for shaping the "image of others" (i.e. those who are the outsi335ders of this group), portraying them as groups instead of "collections of individuals" (p.104).

Apart from pronouns, Anna Banas (2018) also proves that the use of ethnic labels "the Japanese" versus "the Dutch" not only serves similar purposes as pronouns do: (i) to present an abstract national notion over collections of individuals (ii) to stress the in-group national cohesion in comparison of the other country, but also achieve to convey values and expectations about self and others (p.106). The group boundaries and the belonging are hereby invoked once again (p.107).

Taking a comparable approach, I will now turn to examine and elucidate how Chinese international students in the U.S. make use of pronouns and ethnic labels to index belonging. However, their intent goes beyond establishing a collective group identity as proposed by Anna Banas. More importantly, they employ these linguistic tools to showcase their approach to delineating group boundaries at a more individual level.

Collective group identity

To start with, Excerpt 1 is extracted from Chauncey's response to a query relating to his leisure activities while in the United States. Following that, Chauncey proceeds to share his observation on American party culture during his time as an undergraduate student at a public university in the Midwest. In the excerpt below, Chauncey expresses his disinterest in American party culture and finds Americans' obsession with drinking quite absurd.

Excerpt 1
Chauncey:

1	wo	gerende	ganshou	kengding	shi
	1SG	personal	feeling	certainly	
	"My personal feeling is that"				

2	meiguoren	gande	bi	zhongguoren	duo henduo
	Americans	does	compare to	Chinese	more a lot
	"Comparing to Chinese, Americans definitely do this a lot more "				

3	tamen	meiguoren	dongbudong	jiuhui	jingxing
	3PL	Americans	frequently	FUT	conduct
	"They Americans will always conduct"				

4	yixie	qingzhuhuodong
	DET	celebration
	"Some celebrations."	

5	danshi	tamen	jutide	huodong
	but	they	specific	activities
	"But their specific activities"			

6	wo	juede	zhuyao	jiushi	hejiu
	1SG	think	mainly	just	drink
	"I think mainly just drinking"				

Chauncey starts by opposing ethnic labels *meiguoren* ("Americans") to *zhongguoren* ("Chinese") in line 2 while commenting that American students appear to enjoy partying far more than their Chinese counterparts do. This ethnic comparison accords with how Japanese wives utilize ethnic labels. That is, it draws an abstract national boundary that highlights the distinctions between self and others, particularly in the realm of leisure activities in this instance. Subsequently, Chauncey's use of *tamen meiguoren* ("They, Americans") in line 3, along with *tamen* ("They") in line 5 offers a glimpse into the intricacies of affirming belonging in the position Chauncey perceives himself to be in–on one hand, it appears that Chauncey is further elaborating on his previous remark about the observed cultural differences regarding American students' leisure time lifestyle; meanwhile, the sole usage of *tamen* ("They") without referring back to *women* ("We") aligns with what Yuval-Davis (2006) proposes, that establishing belonging is always "relational and context-dependent" (Anna Banas, p.104)– in this circumstance, a key distinction from Anna Bana's situation is that Chauncey regards me as a fellow Chinese international student. As a result, during the interview, rather than feeling the need to reaffirm the salient in-group Chinese national identity, as Japanese wives do in the

presence of Anna Banas, a Polish researcher, Chauncey opts to employ *tamen* ("They") to underscore the out-group boundary. The usage of the 3PL *tamen* ("They") in conjunction with the ethnic label *meiguoren* ("Americans") reinforces a sense of group belonging by foregrounding the national affiliation, while shaping an image of both "us" (i.e. those within our group, distinguished from the ones who do not belong) and "others".

Likewise, in Excerpt 2, Kevin is sharing his perspective on the pervasive enthusiasm for outdoor activities among American students, which he observed during some of his prior lab-gathering activities. Kevin begins his discussion by using the ethnic label *meiguoren* ("Americans") as he starts to articulate his observation of Americans' passion for outdoor activities in line 1. Subsequently, in line 2 and line 3, Kevin utilizes two consecutive *tamen* ("They") to provide further details in support of his earlier statement. That is, this conclusion in fact derives from his observation that the Americans in his lab seem to simply enjoy participating in outdoor sports, irrespective of their skill level. As we can see, similar to Chauncey, Kevin also constructs such imagined nation dichotomy between the Chinese and American national community (Anderson, 2020) by prioritizing the perception of others, *tamen* ("They"), over the notion of self (line 2 and line 3),

Excerpt 2

Kevin:

1	keneng	meiguoren	bijiao	xiang	gao	huwai
	maybe	Americans	relatively	want	do-INDF	outdoor

"Maybe Americans just want to do outdoor (activities)."

2	tamen	buguan	huibuhui
	3PL	In spite of	Able or not

"They, in spite of being able to do it or not"

3	tamen	jiuzai	na	wan
	3PL	just	there	to have fun-INDF

"They are just there having fun."

As evident, when using ethnic labels such as *meiguoren* ("Americans") and *zhongguoren* ("Chinese") to convey evaluations and expectations of American students, both Chauncey and Kevin establish the abstract national boundary by first aligning their positionality to the interviewer, a fellow Chinese international student, and therefore choose to emphasize the differences of others by employing the pronoun *tamen* ("They") rather than reiterate the in-group similarity.

Excerpt 3 and Excerpt 4 capture a conversation in which Jerry is evaluating and attempting to unravel the factors contributing to the historical and political disputes, as well as the cultural discrepancies between China and the United States. Referring to the citizens of the respective countries by their nation names *meiguo* ("America") and *zhongguo* ("China"), in Except 3, line 4, Jerry uses the 1PL pronoun *women* ("We") while reflecting on the prior education that he and I, the interviewer, both had received before attending university in the U.S.

Here, Jerry's employment of *women* ("We") resonates with Japanese wives' usage of 1PL pronoun in marking national identity as predominant. Nevertheless, what appears to be unique in this scenario is that Jerry's usage of *women* ("We") is rooted in the shared culture and education experience that both Jerry and I have in common. This, in turn, suggests that our shared knowledge and beliefs, as understood through *women* ("We"), take precedence, with any culture-specific knowledge is quickly evoked. In contrast to Chauncey and Kevin, Jerry adopts 1PL *women* ("We") in place of 3PL *tamen* ("They") to create the imagined national boundary (Anderson, 2020), however, the essence remains the same: that is, the group belonging is established based on participant's position in relation to the interviewer.

Excerpt 3
Jerry

1	meiguo	neibu	feichangde	fenlie
	America	inside	very	split
	"(The politics) inside America is very split"			

2	cong	zhongguo	de	jiaodu
	from	China	POSS	perspective
	"From China's perspective"			

3	cong	erzhan	bei	zhimin	de	jioadu
	from	WWII	PASS	colonize	POSS	perspective
	"From the perspective of a colonized country during WWII"					

4	cong	women	xiaoshihou	shoudao	de	jiaoyu
	from	1PL	childhood	receive	POSS	education
	"From the education we received as a kid"					

5	versus	meiguo	de
	versus	America	POSS
	"versus America's"		

6	wo	juede	huiyou	gengdade	shock
	1SG	think	there will be	bigger	shock-ENG
	"I think there will be bigger shock"				

On a similar note, in both line 2 and line 6 of Excerpt 4, Jerry utilizes 1PL *women* ("We") as he is discussing the historical events that occurred during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), particularly the period when the Chinese empire faced attack from Western allies. This event, considered of great historical significance by Jerry, is expected to be known by every Chinese individual. Therefore, the usage of *women* ("We") in this context serves to underscore their in-group membership and reaffirm their belonging to the broader Chinese community.

Despite that, Jerry also adopts out-group references, such as *meiguoren tamen* ("American, they") from line 1 and 3PL *tamen* ("They") from line 9, in order to express his evaluations and expectations (De Fina, 2000) towards potential American viewpoints on those historical events. By employing both *women* ("We") and *tamen* ("They"), Jerry manages to create an "us-them" boundary concerning the national identity he perceives–that is, a clear

ideological divergence between Chinese and American communities, under the assumption that both Jerry and I shared the same group membership.

Excerpt 4
Jerry

1

meiguoren	tamen	jiubuhui	ganshoudao
American	3PL	won't	feel

"Americans they won't feel"

2

women	cengjing	shi	yige
1PL	used to	AUX	one

"(That) We used to be one"

3

bei	qiya	le	henduo	nian	de
PASS	suppress	PST	many	years	POSS

"(nation that) has been suppressed for so long"

4

zai	qingchao	shou	guo	wushu
during	Qing dynasty	suffer	PST	countless

"And has suffered so much during Qing dynasty"

5

xiuru	de	minzu
humiliation	POSS	nationality

"(so much) humiliation (during Qing dynasty)"

6	women	cengjing	bei	baguolianjun
	1PL	used to	PASS	Eight-Nation Alliance

"We used to be attacked by Eight-Nation Alliance"

7	ruqing	guo
	invade	PST

" (We used to be) invaded"

8	zhexie	lishi	de	baofu
	these	history	POSS	burden

"This kind of historical burden"

9	tamen	buhui	you	zhege	qingkuang
	3PL	don't	have	this	situation

"They won't resonate with us"

It is noteworthy that, in contrast to the Japanese wife community studies in Anna Banas's research, who predominantly favor a combination of 1PL pronoun *watashi* ("i") and ethnic label *watashitachi nihonjin* ("We, Japanese") in their conversations, Chinese international students exhibit a different preference. That is, they tend to adopt both *women* ("We") and *tamen* ("They"), or oftentimes lean towards only establishing out-group boundaries due to the

assumption that the in-group knowledge is shared between the participant and the interviewer. Additionally, compared to Japanese expatriate women who primarily rely on ethnic labels to denote "Dutch" (referring to the outsiders), Chinese international students possess greater flexibility in switching between both pronouns and ethnic labels to index belonging. This flexibility arises from my specific positionality in relation to them.

Taken together, the way Chinese international student participants use pronouns and ethnic labels to indicate a collective national identity shares some similarities with what Anna Banas proposes for the Japanese wife community. Specifically, Chinese international students adopt pronouns and ethnic labels to index a collective national identity as well as to convey values and expectations about self and others (Anna Banas, 2018). Nonetheless, it also exhibits notable differences, that is, the flexibility of switching between *women* ("We") and *tamen* ("They") to index group belonging. This distinction is mainly attributed to my positionality in this research, and may also result from the distinct nature of the Japanese and Chinese languages.

On the other hand, Jaspers (2018) also comments on Banas's (2018) examination of Japanese expat wives from a groupness perspective. He contends that a lack of groupness among Japanese wives stems from their shared yet loosely-knit ethnographic connections (Jaspers, 2018, p.22). While they exhibit a relative connectedness among themselves, it fails to fully encompass a "compelling public narrative" (Brubaker & Copper, 2000, p.20) regarding Japanese or Club membership (Jaspers, 2018, p.22). Jaspers (2018) maintains that one would encounter difficulty in order to identify a "strongly binding, vehemently felt groupness" or "genuine solidarity" among these women that extends beyond their affiliation with the Club (p.22).

I argue that in the case of Chinese international students under examination, there are discernible linguistic cues that exemplify the concept of groupness. Take, for instance, Jerry's usage of *women* ("We") in both line 2 and line 6 of Excerpt 4, within the context of a historically significant event. While neither of us was directly involved in this 19th-century historical occurrence, it holds considerable importance in shaping part of the collective national identity among today's Chinese international students, albeit with varying degrees of influence on different individuals.

Clustered individual identity

As previously discussed, ethnicity certainly plays a vital part in identity formation among Chinese international students. Yet, given the considerable overlap between their positionality and my own, such overlap also leads to the demonstration of multifaceted identities that go beyond ethnicity. In combination with two or more aspects besides ethnicity, we will further explore the intricate composite identity that Chinese international students exhibit during the interview conversations.

First, as Dary responds to the interview question about his future career plans, he brings up another group of peers in the graduate program, who constitute a considerable portion of the Chinese international engineering student body. Unlike Dary, who obtained his Bachelor of Science degree from a university located on the East Coast, these students completed their undergraduate studies in Chinese universities before coming to the United States to pursue a more advanced degree. Dary refers to this type of peer by the term luben (referring to individuals from a Chinese undergraduate background) as in line 2 of Excerpt 5. Within this conversation,

Dary playfully mentions his *luben* (“from Chinese undergrad”) peers multiple times and jests their eagerness to switch from mechanical engineering career path to coding, making use of the 3PL pronoun *tamen* (“They”) in line 2, 3, 4, and 5. During the interview, Dary mentions that he is still in search of a job that will allow him to utilize the mechanical engineering knowledge he has gained so far, even in the midst of the coding-centric ambiance in the Bay Area and also in his school. Referencing *luben* (“from Chinese undergrad”) serves a comparable fundamental purpose to the ethnic label. In this context, it emphasizes the in-group unity shared by Dary and I, both of who completed undergraduate studies in the United States, in contrast to the *luben* (“from Chinese undergrad”) counterparts. Simultaneously, it acknowledges the ideological differences between these two groups. To be more specific, the alignment between the positionality of Dary and me empowers Dary to draw group comparisons that extend beyond the ethnicity level, providing him with the flexibility to address self-versus-others group membership and the freedom to incorporate multiple dimensions when indexing more intricate group identity. In respect to Excerpt 5, the components that Dary combines to form a clustered identity include educational background (i.e. Dary and I, versus *luben*), along with a less salient one in this very excerpt, the shared Chinese ethnicity.

Excerpt 5
Dary

1	youdeshihou	yehui	jiaolv	danshi	buxiang
	sometimes	also	anxious	but	unlike
	“ (I) sometimes get anxious too, but unlike”				

2	tamen	luben	lai	zhebian	zhuama
	3PL	CH undergraduate	come	here	Switch to coding

"them (who) did their undergraduate in China and come here switch to coding"

3	wo	ganjue	tamen	shi	daizhe	shiming	lai	de
	1SG	feel	3PL	AUX	carry	mission	come	PST

"I feel like they (act like) come here with some missions"

4	tamen	xiang	jiandie	yiyang
	3PL	like	spy	same

"They are like spies."

5	tamen	yiding	yao	ancha	zai	wanqu
	3PL	must	have to	place	at	Bay Area

"They must have to place (themselves) in the Bay Area"

In a similar manner, Excerpt 6 demonstrates Chauncey's uses 1PL pronoun *women* ("We") to accentuate the shared educational background between him and me. This commonality is explicitly affirmed in lines 6 and 7, specifying that both of us pursued undergraduate studies in the United States. Following this clarification of *women* ("We"), Chauncey proceeds to discuss one of the linguistic characteristics he believes is prevalent among this speech community, namely, the frequent code-switching to English words within Chinese speech context, especially when encountering academic or professional engineering terms, as shown in line 9. He attributes

this characteristic to the English-language undergraduate education *women* ("We") received. The substantial overlap between Chauncey's positionality and mine once again allows Chauncey to creatively delineate group boundaries and index diverse group identities without confining the options solely to ethnic labels. Furthermore, Chauncey's employment of the 1PL pronoun *women* ("We") together with the specified group membership (i.e. Chinese international students who earned their bachelor's degrees from American universities) underscores that not only is the referenced group membership no longer constrained by ethnic labels, but also that the evaluations and expectations towards both self and others (De Fina, 2000) extend to a broader spectrum of attributes beyond nationality. In this setting, akin to Dary, Chauncey crafts a clustered identity that incorporates characteristics such as educational background and ethnicity. However, in comparison to Dary in Excerpt 5, what sets this excerpt apart is that it shows how Chauncey employs the 1PL pronoun *women* ("We") rather than both *women* ("We") and 3PL *tamen* ("They") to simultaneously project the image of both us and others, as Japanese wives do (Anna Banas, p.104).

Excerpt 6
Chauncey

1	ruguo	shi	gen	zhongguo	tongxue
	if	AUX	with	Chinese	students
	"If I am with Chinese students"				

2	xianzai	zuo	group	project-ENG
	now	do	group-ENG	project-ENG

"when we are doing group project"

3	women	haishi	hui	zhong	ying	jiaoza
	1PL	still	FUT	Chinese	English	mixed

"We will still mix English with Chinese"

4	yinwei	youshihou	yao	zhaodao
	because	sometimes	want	to find

"Because sometimes wanting to find"

5	duiyingde	zhongwen	mingci	bijiao	kunnan
	corresponding	Chinese	words	relatively	difficult

"The corresponding Chinese words is relatively difficult"

6	youqi	shi	women	zhezhong
	especially	AUX	1PL	Kind of

"Especially our kind of"

7	zai	meiguo	du	benke	de
	at	America	study	undergraduate	POSS

"(who) did undergraduate in United States"

8	henduode	zhuanye	mingci
	Lots of	professional	terms

"And lots of professional terms"

9	women	xue	de	shi	yingyu
	1PL	learn	PST	AUX	English
	"We learned were in English"				

10	suoyi	duiyingde	zhongwen
	therefore	corresponding	Chinese
	"So in terms of the corresponding Chinese terms of those"		

11	wo	ye	bu	zhidao
	1SH	also	NEG	know
	"I have no idea"			

What's more, Excerpts 7, 8, and 9 provide an in-depth exploration of Dary's perspectives on towards engineering graduate students, each highlighting nuanced differences. These extracts demonstrate how Dary navigates the intricacies of constructing multi-layered identities based on the similarities and disparities in the positionality held by both the interviewer and the participant.

To begin with, in Excerpt 7, Dary extends his previous discussion about his *luben* ("from Chinese undergrad") peers in the engineering department. These peers have displayed a strong interest in transitioning to coding careers, prompting Dary to naturally refer to them as 3PL pronoun *tamen* ("They") in line 3. However, Dary quickly becomes aware that I am attending a

different university than his own. As a result, in line 4, he promptly shifts his choice of words, replacing the 3PL pronoun *tamen* ("They") with the 1PL pronoun *women* ("We"), and continues to explain that his school has a rather fervent coding environment. He then goes on to give additional details on *luben* ("from Chinese undergrad") people, *tamen* ("They") who are not from the same mechanical engineering department as Dary does, but mainly come from different varieties of engineering, that is, civil engineering, environmental engineering, and structural (see line 6). In line 7, Dary once again employs the 3PL pronoun *tamen* ("They") to complete the description of the *luben* ("from Chinese undergrad") fellows he discussed earlier that they are the people he playfully referred to as spies and, in his view, are overly enthusiastic towards a software engineer career. As observed in Excerpt 7, Dary for the first time explicitly excludes me from being one of the *women* ("We") group due to the misalignment of the positionality between us, namely, we are attending different schools. Nonetheless, he returns to use *tamen* ("They") to depict the traits of *luben* ("from Chinese undergrad") students, but it remains unclear whether he ncludes me again into the *women* ("We") group again (see line 6 and line 7). With divergent future career objectives between him and me, it is likely that Dary is simply delineating the boundary between him and the *luben* ("from Chinese undergrad") students he encountered, and presenting the boundary in front of me, a complete outsider in this instance who is studying in a non-engineering field in a different university. As Dary is voicing his evaluations and creating group boundaries, the dimensions he takes into account are career direction (i.e. mechanical engineer or software engineering, and non-engineering job), educational background (i.e. *luben* or US undergraduate degree), and different university affiliations.

Excerpt 7
Dary

1	ganjue	luben	lai	de	ren
	feel	those who did undergrad in China	come	POSS	people

"I feel that those people here who did their undergrad in China"

2	zhende	yixin	zhuan	ma
	seriously	wholeheartedly	switch to	coding

"Seriously, they are so determined to stitching to coding."

3	yinwei	tamen	…….
	because	3PL	

"Because they……"

4	women	zhebian	yixin	zhuan	ma	de
	1PL	here	wholeheartedly	Switch to	coding	POSS

"The people who are very determined to switch to coding here at our school"

5	tebie	duo
	especially	A lot

"Are a lot."

6	tamen	civil	huanjing	jiegou	shenmede
	3PL	civil-ENG	environmental	structural	etc.

"They civil (engineering), environmental (engineering), and structural engineering

people"

7	tamen	zhuan	ma	de	ren
	3PL	switch to	coding	POSS	people
	"Those people who switch to coding"				

8	jiu	zhende	shi	xiang	liuzhe
	just	seriously	AUX	want	to stay
	"They are so determined to stay (in the Bay Area)."				

As Dary continues to discuss the traits of *luben* ("from Chinese undergrad") in Excerpt 8, he explicitly points out nationality as an equally salient feature this time, together with education background by opposing ethnic label *meiguoren* ("American", line 3) against *luben* (line 2). Moreover, in line 5, Dary once again includes me among the *women* ("We") group, as our positionalities align, particularly in terms of our shared nationality. Accordingly, by employing the 3PL pronoun *tamen* ("They") to establish an out-group boundary in line 7, Dary and I regain the same group membership as Chinese international students who completed undergraduate studies in the United States, where Chinese nationality serves as a significantly more salient dimension in this context.

Excerpt 8
Dary

1	yinwei	xuexiao	CE	de
	because	school	Civil engineering-ENG	POSS

"Because the civil engineering department of the school"

2	luben	tebie	duo
	those who did undergrad in China	quite	a lot

"Has lots of grad students who did their undergrad in China."

3	yinwei	meiguoren	bu	du	tumu
	because	Americans	NEG	study	Civil engineering

"Because Americans don't tend to study civil engineering"

4	bu	du	huanjing
	NEG	study	Environmental engineering

"Or environmental engineering"

5	ranhou	women	tumu	hao
	and	1PL	Civil engineering	good

"And we have great civil engineering programs (in China)"

6	K University	shenmede	bijiao	hao
	name of a Chinese university	something like that	relatively	good

"Universities like K University have great civil engineering program."

7	suoyi	tamen	lai	le	yipi	ren
	therefore	3PL	come	PST	A batch	people

“Therefore lots of them (peers who did undergrad in China) come from there.”

8	nabang	ren	zhende	hen	qiguai
	Those	people	really	very	weird

“Those people are really weird.”

9	jiushi	ju	zisi
	just	super	selfish

“They are so freaking selfish.”

Last but not least, Excerpt 9 further sheds light on the internal dynamics among Chinese international students in the U.S., while Dary compares the different ethnic populations between the environmental engineering department and the mechanical engineering department. According to Dary, the environmental engineering department consists of a larger number of Chinese international students than the mechanical engineering, his own. As a result, he and Chauncey are often isolated from the environmental engineering students, even when they are in the same class. In line 1 and line 2, Dary employs the 3PL pronoun *tamen* (“They”) to make reference to the environmental engineering students, whom he later contrasts to *women* (“We”) mechanical engineering students and remarks as the opposite of being normal (see line 3 and line 6). Here, Dary amalgamates various aspects, encompassing their educational background, the specific engineering specialization they pursue, and the less salient yet pivotal aspect of their

ethnicity. In doing so, he once again presents this composite identity in front of a partial outsider–as I only share the same nationality but none of the other dimensions–while he is addressing evaluations and denoting group membership towards both self and others simultaneously, and this perception of self is always associated with the identification of others, as De Fina (2000) proposes.

Excerpt 9
Dary

1	tamen	huanjing	ren	duo
	3PL	Environmental engineering	people	a lot

"They environmental engineering department has lots of Chinse students."

2	tamen	yibang	ren	dou	yiqi	shangke
	3PL	Bunch of	people	all	together	Take classes

"They always stick together in the (engineering requirement) classes."

3	ranhou	women	ME
	and	1PL	Mechanical engineering-ENG

"But we mechanical engineering people"

4	doushi	suibian	shang
	just	casually	take

"We are chill"

5	zhiyou	wo	he	Chauncey

	only	1SG	and	Chauncey
	"Only Chauncey and I"			

6	women	liangge	bijiao	chuncui
	1PL	two	relatively	innocent
	"We two are the normal ones in the class."			

Taken together, the analysis of the pronoun and ethnic label usage among Chinese international students to create boundaries and index both collective and clustered identities support and reinforces the argument put forth by Anna Banas (2018), Antonsisch (2010), and Yuval-Davics (2006), that there is a strong link between creating boundaries, indexing identities, and employing linguistic resources. While constructing a link of this sort, it is imperative to take into consideration positionality, which has been attested to exert a strong influence on how participants would delineate boundaries and employ corresponding linguistic resources to index their multilayered identity. In addition, the alignment and disparities in individuals' positionality would enable the participant to index identities at both a collective level, as evidenced by the collective national identity, or a more individualized level, as exemplified by all of the clustered identities.

Indeed, as Antonsisch (2010) states "belonging is essentially linked to a shared perspective of a group of people, who perceive themselves as having something in common, something that necessarily distinguishes them from others – may it be e.g. language, place or a set of values. Language plays a role in marking or creating this distinction, as it can be, and often is, used to differentiate 'us' from 'them'", which mirrors the essence of this section. Therefore, I

believe this segment of the study adds to the pertinent scholarly discourse by uncovering the internal dynamic within the Chinese international student community through the examination of pronoun as well as ethnic label usage.

Conclusion

This thesis has investigated the complex interplay of language behaviors, specifically codeswitching and pronoun use, among Chinese international students in the U.S., exploring how these linguistic strategies influence their sense of belonging, group membership, and identity navigation. Through a detailed analysis, this study has demonstrated that codeswitching and pronoun usage alongside other nonlinguistic discursive practices together constitute a significant component indicating cultural identity and social integration.

The findings reveal that codeswitching serves multiple functions for Chinese international students. This unique way of inserting English words into Chinese conversation allows them to convey meanings that require in-group experience and knowledge, which suggests that such linguistic adaptability aids in constructing a hybrid identity, enabling students to fit in with both their Chinese peers and broader American society, and delineating the membership between inside and outside the Chinese international student community. The use of specific pronouns we/they, adapted to the context of the conversation and the positionality, further illustrates the nuanced ways in which these students delineate the boundary between insider and outsider of the various community of practices within the Chinese international student community.

Moreover, the study highlights that these language practices are deeply tied to the students' experiences of belonging. By codeswitching and adapting pronouns, they signal their affiliation with particular groups, negotiate their positions within social networks, and express their evolving identities in an intercultural setting. Such practices are not just about linguistic

proficiency but are strategic responses to the challenges of identity navigation within a diasporic community.

This research contributes to the broader academic discourse on identity in migration contexts and fills the gap by providing an analysis of the correlation between the construction sense of belonging and language practices, a topic that has been insufficiently touched upon. It also offers insights into the adaptive strategies employed by international students and the role of language in mediating their cultural integration and social interactions through nonlinguistic discursive practices analysis.

Due to the limitation of time and scope, this project is unable to provide a more in-depth analysis of the codeswitching behavior among the current Chinese international student community. In the future, this study will involve other international student communities such as those who completed their undergraduate studies in China rather than in the U.S. as a comparative group in order to provide a richer understanding of the universality and specificity of codeswitching practices.

In sum, this thesis not only deepens our understanding of how Chinese international students utilize linguistic features to navigate their identities and group memberships in the U.S. but also underscores the critical role of language in shaping the experience of this diasporic community. As globalization increases and more students' cross borders for education, the insights from this study will become ever more relevant to educators, policymakers, and students themselves, aiming to foster more inclusive and supportive environments in higher education.

Appendix

Appendix A: List of Interview Questions

Part 1 (Communicative setting 1: casually talk about everyday life)

1. Extracurricular hobbies
    a. Sports
    b. Travel plans
    c. Pets
    d. Celebrities you have been following recently
    e. Songs you listen to
    f. Social media: Do you spend more time or post more on Chinese or American social media? In what language do you post on each social media?
    g. Have you developed any new hobbies after you came to the US and why?
        i. Are the activities you do in the US different from what you do in China?
    h. (nostalgia) Do you celebrate any Chinese holiday traditions when you are in the US? What do you do?
        i. Have you ever celebrated any American holidays? With whom? On what occasion? What did you do?
2. Life
    a. Live on-campus or off-campus
    b. Whether cook by yourself or eat at the school cafeteria
    c. What type of food do you usually eat?
    d. How often do you talk to your parents? When was the last time you went home?
3. interpersonal relationship
    a. Friend circle
    b. Where or what do you do with your friends when hangout

Part 2 (Communicative setting 2: talk about your academic life and treat me like someone who is in your field)

1. program in general
    a. How do you feel about the program you are enrolled in general?
    b. Pressure?
    c. Major academic events recently and in the future?
    d. Reflect on your undergraduate and graduate life
        i. Undergrad routine?
        ii. Grad routine?
        iii. Moving from a different city in the US to California, does that make any changes to your lifestyle? (Preference?)
2. Academic research
    a. How many classes are enrolled for this quarter? How many are left for your program?
    b. Describe briefly the two classes/three classes you feel are the most helpful to your research
    c. The lab you are in? The academic direction of the whole lab?
    d. What do people do in your lab?
    e. Describe the research you are currently doing
    f. The career you are looking for at this point and what is that aboutt?
3. Future career plan
4. Work-life related
    a. Lab mate relationship?
    b. Lab activities?
    c. Do you enjoy those activities?
    d. Do you want to develop a deeper relationship with your lab mates?
5. (Place) How do you consider your role in US society? China society?

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