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*“It makes me feel like I'm the typical Asian they think of me...”:*

**Beyond Homogeneous Characterizations of Chinese International Students**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

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Advised by Professor Lisa Smulyan

April 28, 2023

## **Abstract**

The dominant frameworks of analysis in the international student migration literature characterized students' decision-making processes as dichotomous or binary through consideration of either push/pull factors or professional, sociocultural, and personal factors (Alberts & Hazen, 2005; Guo, 2010; Wang & Miao, 2013). More specifically, generalizations have been made regarding specific demographic factors such as nationalities, socioeconomic status, and/or gender. The goal of this study was to examine the differential experiences of Chinese international students. Through an initial survey of broad student experiences and basic demographics followed by interviews, I was able to highlight the heterogeneity of students' experiences and provide a more nuanced view of individual narratives. Student experiences were then characterized in three interrelated stages of their narratives: experiences before departing China and motivations for coming to the US, experiences during their arrival in the US and at Swarthmore College, and their future aspirations and pathways. The findings suggest 1) the incompatibility between homogeneous frameworks of nationality and actual student experiences, 2) the interdependence of past, present, and future experiences, and 3) the agency students hold in the course of their personal development. As a result, implications include 1) shifting away from deficit frameworks and towards culturally responsive frameworks, 2) moving beyond temporally static frameworks by the implementation of longitudinal designs, and 3) rejecting passive frameworks by recognizing student agency.

### **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank my advisor, Professor Lisa Smulyan, who not only helped me with all my weaknesses academically but was also very understanding and caring. It was truly a blessing to have such a caring mentor who is an advocate for all her students. I would also like to thank all the participants who took part in this study and helped me better understand the lived experiences of international students.

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## 1. Introduction

The goal of this study was to examine the differential experiences of Chinese international students at Swarthmore College. My research questions were as follows:

1. What factors impact the experiences of Chinese international students across time?
2. What characterizes the differential experiences between Chinese international students?

The rationale for selecting the demographic of Chinese international students was twofold. First, choosing a specific demographic allows for a more streamlined analysis of student experiences. Second, since the United States hosts the most number of international students in tertiary education, the majority of whom are Chinese, the focus of this study will be on Chinese undergraduate international students in the United States (U.S. ICE, 2022).

Furthermore, I chose to study Chinese international students at Swarthmore College due to sampling convenience. Additionally, as most of the research on international students have been centered around large universities, a small liberal arts college provides an interesting context.

On the basis of prior research, I set up the current study in four stages. Section 2 provides an overview of prior literature in the field and an exploration of how this study responds to the limitations of a relatively static and homogenous portrayal of international students in the United States. In Section 2.1, I present a general overview of international student migration and its implications on the global economy, providing motivations for understanding migration patterns. Then, in Section 2.2, I review the literature regarding these migration decisions and extract key frameworks of analysis. Through an evaluation of these frameworks, I illustrate that variations arise from not only cross-national differences but also the experiences that characterize their time abroad. I streamline the purpose of this

study by specifically considering Chinese international students. In Section 2.3, I set the stage for the current study by highlighting the gap in the literature where the experiences of Chinese international students are characterized as homogenous and the interdependency of students' pasts, presents, and futures is not considered. Consequently, I argue for a framework that considers the relationships between international students' prior experiences, current contexts, and future pathways. Finally, in Section 2.4, I discuss existing frameworks in analyzing the experiences of Chinese international students and their implications regarding the applicability of certain existing theoretical frameworks.

Drawing from the literature review, I set up the structure and motivations of the current study in Section 3, and provide the methodology for this research in Section 4. Afterward, I provide a thematic portrayal of the collected data in Section 5 with respect to the frameworks discussed in the literature review, where I compare and contrast the various backgrounds, experiences, and pathways. Finally, in Section 6, I discuss the findings where I use the data to argue the incompatibility of homogenous, static, and passive frameworks of Chinese international students. At the end of Section 6, I provide limitations and future directions where I suggest that dynamic and intersectional conceptions of identity help us better understand the lived experiences of Chinese international students.



## **2. Literature Review**

Because I refer to the terms international student and Chinese among others repeatedly throughout the study, I first define the key terms. An international student refers to any student in tertiary education whose country of citizenship is different from that of the country in which they are currently studying. A Chinese international student in this study is characterized as an international student who holds Chinese citizenship and is from mainland China excluding Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan. The host country is the country in which the international student studies. The home country is the international student's country of citizenship.

### **2.1 Overview of International Student Migration**

As of 2020, even in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were 4.4 million students worldwide in tertiary education outside of their countries of citizenship (OECD, 2022). The substantial migration of international students gave rise to various economic, sociocultural, and political implications concerning the host and the home country.

The host country benefits economically and socioculturally from tuition fees and cultural exchange, respectively. Additionally, since some countries have a large influx of international students, there are political and policy implications regarding international students and employment (OECD, 2019; Wu & Wikes, 2017). An example of such a policy is the extension of the Optional Practical Training (OPT) program in the United States, where eligible international students may legally work in the US for up to 12 months upon completion of their degree program. Additionally, if the student obtains a major in a discipline categorized under science, technology, engineering, and/or mathematics (STEM), the OPT program grants 3 years of work authorization in the US. This extra two years of

work authorization acts as an incentive to help address the shortage of skilled workers in these high need technical disciplines (Kerr, 2019).

Home countries may also benefit from international student migration. Bilateral diplomatic agreements between two countries concerning education can foster the mutual benefit of both countries. For example, in 2010, China and Latvia signed the Agreement on Mutual Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications and Degrees (Sun, 2022).

Additionally, in 2010, China and the US set up a cultural exchange program that launched a series of cultural programs in which 10,000 Chinese and American students engaged. As a result, academic collaboration was fostered, and mutual funding resulted in joint research centers. Furthermore, due to the rise of neoliberalism in the late 1990s and the role higher education institutions play in international cooperation, South Korea's aggressive attempts at building world-class universities led to bilateral agreements with Japan and the United States. Some examples of these partnerships include South Korea's reliance on the United States and Japan in faculty training and research production (Ryu, 2017).

However, home countries do not always benefit from international student migration. When a large portion of international students do not return to their home countries, a phenomenon known as "brain drain" occurs, which describes the process of immigration of doctoral students and other highly skilled individuals into developed countries rather than returning home with the acquired capital (Thakur, 2022). Due to the globalization of higher education, there is an increasing flow of human capital across nations and higher educational institutions which may result in a net loss of human capital and future potential for growth for the home country. Due to the socioeconomic implications, much of migration literature is centered around this phenomenon. In order to understand this phenomenon, researchers naturally became interested in the rationale and the decision-making process

behind migration patterns. In the subsequent section, I provide a general overview of existing literature on international student migration centered around efforts to understand how future aspirations and factors impact migration patterns.

## **2.2 Literature on Migration Decisions of International Students**

As international students are a significant part of many tertiary educational institutions and the global economy, scholars have sought to understand their migratory decisions and patterns (Wu & Wikes, 2017). Prior research has shown that the flow of international students can be influenced by a wide range of factors from residency to better education (Baker & Finn, 2003; Rao, 1995; Li et al, 1996). A study by Alberts and Hazen (2005) proposes a structural framework consisting of three factors influencing migratory decisions for international students in the United States:

1. Professional factors, including employment and financial opportunities
2. Societal factors, including cultural and political alignment
3. Personal factors, including family, friends, and romantic ties.

Professional factors can influence international students' migration decisions in multiple ways. For example, students from low-wage nations such as China and India reported desires to stay in the United States due to job markets offering higher wages and greater professional freedom. Additionally, societal factors such as experiencing culture shock and discomfort due to drastic differences in social practices can influence students to return home. Lastly, the impact of personal factors on international students' migration decisions can vary highly. Some international students reported staying in the United States because they are married to an American, and others reported returning home to be with their families. With reference to Figure 1, I discuss how professional, sociocultural, and personal factors can incentivize or discourage students from returning home.

Whether or not *professional factors* incentivize students to stay in the host country or return home depends on a variety of factors such as socioeconomic background, educational background, and local institutional structures. Regarding socioeconomic background, a study of Chinese students in Australia illustrates how students of high and low socioeconomic backgrounds have differential migration plans (Guo, 2010). While most students of higher socioeconomic backgrounds returned home to capitalize on existing financial resources, students from lower socioeconomic classes preferred to stay in Australia to enhance socioeconomic mobility. Education can also impact how professional factors influence students' migration decisions. In one respect, a student's level of education may determine the potential benefits from government programs and policies. For example, the Chinese government's residential subsidies and job opportunities for Chinese graduate students abroad act as professional incentives to return home (Wang & Miao, 2013). In the other respect, a student's major may not be beneficial in their home country. Alberts and Hazen (2005) provide an example where students with technical degrees tend to stay in the host country because of fewer technological advancements back home. Lastly, local institutional and country-specific regulations can advance or restrict the degree of portability of the academic, social, and cultural capital that international students gain abroad. As Liao and Asis (2020) denote, since the Philippines' job market values foreign credentials, Filipino international students are motivated to return home where they benefit from greater employment mobility. Students could secure academic appointments, advance positions in academia, or enhance their professional networks. However, a lack of appreciation for foreign credentials can be a barrier. A study analyzing international students' portability of overseas education in Asia described how certain students were not able to receive accreditation because their foreign credentials were unrecognized by local institutions

(Collins et al., 2016). Therefore, the influence of professional factors on migration decisions hinges on socioeconomic background, education, and the portability of their acquired education rather than on nationality alone.

The influence of *sociocultural factors* on migration decisions is also multifaceted and characterized by comparative political and socio-cultural climates of the host and home country. Political structures can be a strong factor in migration plans. Chen (2017) reports how Chinese international students tend to remain in host countries with less politically restrictive regimes than China for more professional and social freedom. Another source of variation in migration decisions comes from the students' alignment with the sociocultural environments of the host and home country. Soon (2014) and Le and LaCost (2017) provide contrasting findings that indicate how it is not always harder for international students to adjust to the host country's culture. Soon's (2014) study on international students at two New Zealand universities indicated that those who experienced culture shock were more likely to return home. On the other hand, Le and LaCost (2017) discussed the phenomenon of reverse culture shock and found that it was harder for Vietnamese international students to readjust to their local culture and environment than to the United States. These students experienced unexpected reverse culture shocks such as negative family reactions to changes in mannerisms and disparities between American and Vietnamese work and social environments. Consequently, cultural differences provided an incentive for students to stay in the host country.

Additionally, sociocultural factors can influence whether or not professional factors act as an incentive to stay or return home. Several studies illustrate this interaction through gendered differences. Geddie (2012) describes a male Indian international student and a female Chinese international student who both describe the need to support their parents

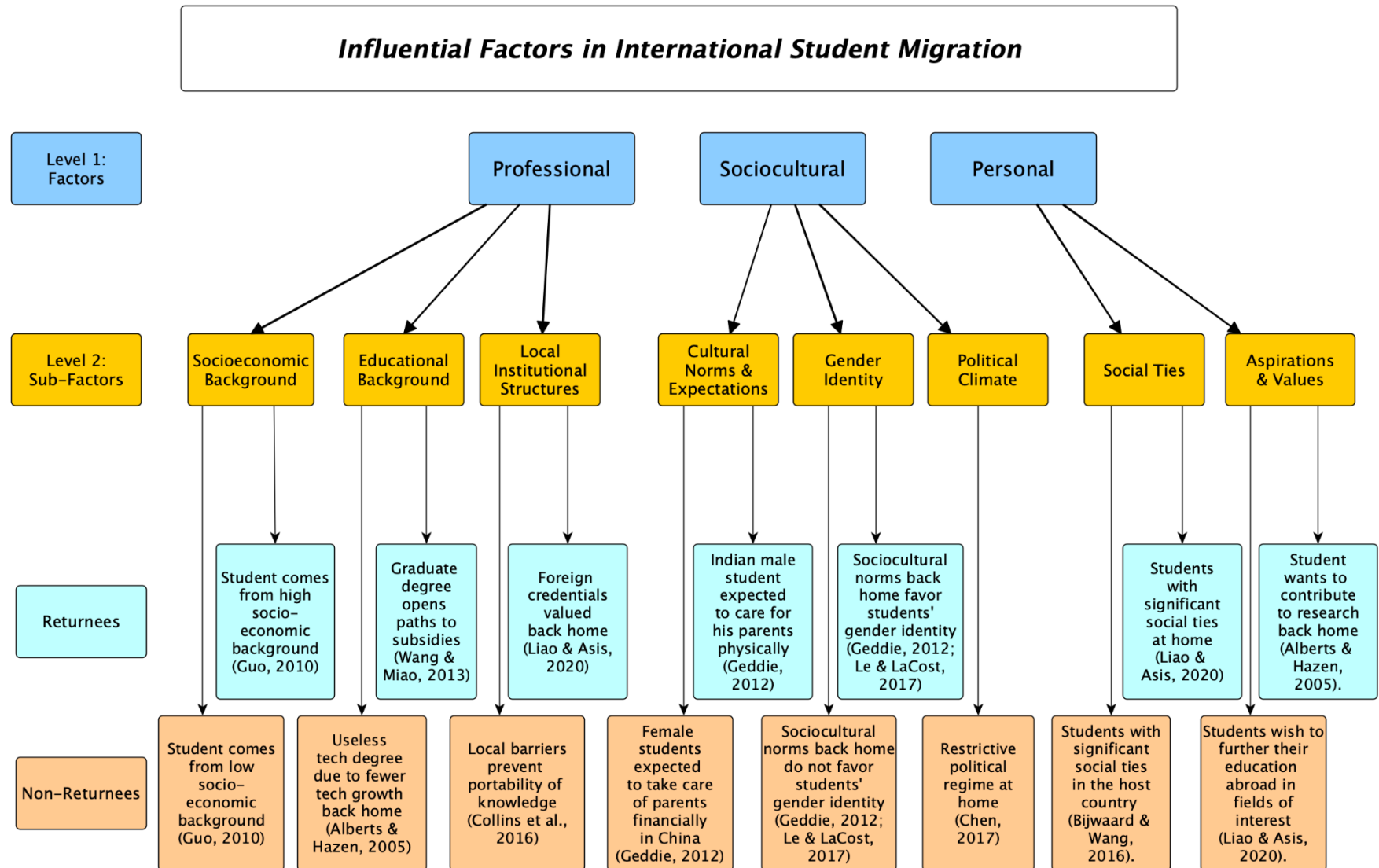
economically due to sociocultural expectations. However, the male Indian international student returned home, where his gender identity and professional goals are in line with the existing sociocultural norms. On the contrary, the female Chinese international student was inclined to stay in the host country in Canada where there are fewer gendered restrictions and expectations on her professional mobility. Le and LaCost (2017) also described gendered differences where women had difficulties adjusting to conservative Vietnamese norms such as raising a family and finding a husband rather than advancing their own professional career. Gendered differences emerge from the fact that women and men have differential access to resources and infrastructures depending on cultural norms and expectations. Therefore, a sociocultural factor can be an incentive to return home for those whose gender identity is favored by the traditions and cultural norms back home. This illustration of how professional factors and sociocultural factors can intertwine and give rise to unique scenarios. These unique circumstances are highlighted even more in the discussion of personal factors.

*Personal factors* are a large source of variation in migration decisions due to their individual specificity and may include social ties and aspirations among other influences. Bijwaard and Wang (2016) found that international student marriage in the Netherlands makes students more prone to stay in the host country. However, Liao and Asis' (2020) study on Filipino international students reported that because the incentive to study abroad was mainly related to career aspirations and students had strong social ties back home, they had plans to return. Therefore, social ties can influence students' decisions to stay or return home depending on where such ties are located. Furthermore, unsurprisingly, personal aspirations can also heavily influence students' migration decisions. Some students decide to study abroad in universities to further their education in pursuit of a doctoral or graduate

degree based on their interests for career purposes (Liao & Asis, 2020). Other students decide to return as they believe their skills acquired from doctoral studies can make a greater impact back home (Alberts & Hazen, 2005).

**Figure 1**

*Review of Literature Illustrating Differential Outcomes of International Students*



*Note.* The diagram illustrates how the three factors are influenced by subfactors, leading to differential migration outcomes as indicated by the returnees and non-returnees rows.



The variation in experiences and migration decisions illustrated above by prior research stems from multiple factors. Alberts and Hazen (2005) attribute the differences to cross-national variations, where the relative weight assigned to each factor in international students' migration decisions depends on nationality. For example, they discussed disparities in the effect of professional factors on migration decisions between certain nationalities. For Chinese students, societal factors such as greater freedom in the United States and escaping China's political regime were motivating factors to stay in the United States. Even though the Chinese government and firms offer financial opportunities as incentives to return home, societal factors were weighed more heavily in their context. Similarly, for some Greek students, societal factors were an incentive to stay in the United States in order to avoid military service or express resistance against the government. In contrast, Tanzanian students described how the job competitiveness of the U.S. incentivized them to return home. They described how their experiences in the United States would give them an employment advantage back home. Therefore, for Tanzanians, professional factors were weighted more heavily and influenced them to return home. Alberts and Hazen (2005) use these examples to illustrate how the importance of each factor depends on the nationality and national context.

However, the existence of cross-national variations does not imply homogenous migration patterns and motivations within the same nationality. The intersection of rudimentary factors can give rise to variations even *within* nationalities. From studies discussed above, Guo (2010) and Le and LaCost (2017) depicted divergent experiences of Chinese students of different socioeconomic backgrounds in Australia or Vietnamese returnees of different gender identities. The intersection of differing identities and backgrounds with cultures and traditions associated with a certain nationality give rise to these varying experiences. Therefore, the source of

variation in students' experiences giving rise to divergent migration patterns is not only limited to differences in nationality.

In summary, these studies illustrate two levels of variation, as shown in Figure 1. On the first level, there are variations in emphasis on each factor in decision-making processes. This is the level that Alberts & Hazen (2005) refer to where the emphases differ across nationalities. However, there exists variation within each factor as well. On the second level, there are sub-factors that give rise to differential decisions and outcomes within the same factor. Therefore, even within each factor, sub-factors influence whether or not the factor incentivizes students to stay or return home. As indicated by the second level, sub-factors are primarily students' experiences and backgrounds. As a result, researchers have sought to better understand the experiences of international students that will consequently motivate their migratory decisions. However, as evident in the studies above, only considering current experiences and future aspirations does not sufficiently inform the direction in which each of the three factors is going to influence decisions. To better understand the decision-making process, we need to consider the experiences of international students prior to arrival, which is the basis of the argument in the following section.

### **2.3 Existing Frameworks of Analysis on Chinese International Students**

Although current research provides motivations behind students' decisions, there exists a gap in the literature where past experiences, current contexts, and future pathways are not considered in relation to each other. In order to streamline the purpose of this study, I specifically consider the demographic of Chinese international students in the United States. There are additional motivations for this choice, including the fact that the largest number of international students come from China, and the vast majority of them go to the United States (U.S. ICE,

2022). By not integrating experiences across time and considering the prior backgrounds of Chinese international students, we risk portraying their experiences and pathways as

1. homogenous across all Chinese international students, and
2. temporally static where their decisions and experiences do not change over time.

With respect to various studies, I discuss how these frameworks give rise to deficit, inaccurate, and potentially harmful portrayals of Chinese international students.

### **2.3.1 Deficit Perspectives from Homogenous Frameworks**

There are many factors that impact international students; a homogenous perspective through nationality alone cannot effectively encapsulate their experiences. I illustrate this notion first by discussing the negative implications and consequences of homogenous perspectives. Then I provide an argument for acknowledging the heterogeneity of identities and experiences. Finally, I discuss studies that do go beyond homogenous frameworks, and extend this notion in the following section.

Viewing Chinese international students' experiences through a homogenous lens on the basis of their nationality has led to deficit perspectives and incorrect generalizations. Such frameworks, whether they are positive or negative, depict incorrect and restrictive portrayals of students' experiences. Clearly, homogenous perspectives can perpetuate negative stereotypes of a particular demographic. For example, in an attempt to improve Chinese international student experiences in the US, researchers have sought to understand what these students "need" by diagnosing what these students are "missing." Such perspectives implicitly reinforce the ideology that students of other cultures are expected to adapt and assimilate to the existing dominant culture without having their cultural values recognized. Some examples include investigating perspectives of faculty members and peers of Chinese international students in universities, as well as assessing their English proficiency. For example, prior research on faculty

perceptions of Chinese international students described them as passive, uncritical, and rote learners. Additionally, these characteristics were depicted with reference to the demographic of Chinese international students. Furthermore, among American peers, Chinese international students were characterized as incompetent in English and anti-social (Jenkins, 2000; Robertson et al., 2000).

Even when homogenous perspectives generate positive stereotypes, they instill certain expectations and stereotypes that other students within this demographic then have to uphold. Some positive stereotypes and generalizations of Chinese international students in American higher educational institutions include being nice, friendly, and hardworking (Heng, 2016; Rubin & Zhang, 2013). They were also seen as intelligent and diligent students who excel academically, especially in the STEM disciplines. An important commentary is how these positive generalizations of Chinese international students reflect literature on how Asians are perceived in general, characterizing Asian students (immigrant and American born) as hard-working, shy, and smart. Although this may seem like a positive stereotype, this perspective can also have negative impacts on the Chinese international student community. Lee (2009) discusses the heterogeneous experiences of Asian students in schools where, although some students fit into the mold of the model minority stereotype of Asians, others do not experience social pressure, criticism, and judgment from family and peers. Furthermore, even for those who do fit the mold, this stereotype becomes a looming threat where the student is expected to be perfect and there is nowhere to go but down. This further contributes to the deficit perspective on Chinese international students, where views on Chinese students become centered around incompetencies and expectations rather than acknowledging their cultural backgrounds and individuality. Without proper consideration and contextualization of Chinese students' cultural experiences, we enforce a deficit perspective by perpetuating stereotypes that they are

incompetent and deficient or that they are model minorities, like their American-born Asian peers. These portrayals of Chinese international students stem from an incomplete understanding of their lived experiences and the various sociocultural contexts in which they are situated. Although finding the solutions to the perceived incompetencies of Chinese international students provides a temporary fix, we still need a careful examination of the underlying causes of the challenges that they face. To do so, we need to acknowledge the heterogeneity of their sociocultural experiences instead of misattributing perceived incompetencies to a specific culture or nationality.

Drawing from sociocultural-historical perspectives of human development, learning, and behavior, we know that sociocultural contexts hold different implications for different identities (Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). Some previously discussed examples include disparities in Chinese international students' experiences in Australia across socioeconomic status and Vietnamese repatriates' experiences across gender (Guo, 2010; Le & LaCost, 2017). Therefore, generalizations across nationality and ethnicity can mask the lived experiences of certain demographics within the national identity such as women and students of low socioeconomic status (Hanassab, 2006). Homogenous frameworks, as Holvino (2012) critiques, considers certain demographic differences including race and gender, as innate, essential, and more central to identity than others. We cannot assume that nationality is the most central and salient identity among all Chinese international students. Therefore, we need to move beyond homogenous frameworks of nationality and consider the intersectionality of identities such as gender, socioeconomic status, and aspirations. We would then effectively speak to and acknowledge the differential lived experiences of international students.

Such experiences that are centered around the intersectionality of varying identities are not static, especially for international students. The development of an individual's learning,

development, and behavior stems from their cultural-historical backgrounds across time (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). Their behaviors and experiences are influenced by varying transnational and comparative sociocultural contexts. Additionally, the degree to which they participate and interact within different sociocultural contexts shapes their own behaviors and attitudes across time (Jenkins, 2000; Klemenčič, 2015). Furthermore, they may adapt differently depending on their resistance to the dominant sociocultural norms that exist in their higher education institutions. Their migration intentions and college experiences may be influenced by the degree to which they partake in opposition against the dominant culture (Ogbu, 2000). Since an individual's learning and behavior change across sociocultural contexts and time, we also need to consider their past experiences. Therefore, we should go beyond current experiences by weaving them with family backgrounds and prior schooling experiences, which brings us to the next point.

### **2.3.2 Rigid Characterizations from Temporally Static Perspectives**

Majority of the research so far on Chinese international students' experiences has focused on present experiences which are described as static instead of dynamic across time and situated in multiple sociocultural contexts. For example, Chinese students have been characterized as rote learners, passive, and silent (Durkin, 2011; Sit, 2013; Turner, 2013). This provides a glimpse of their behaviors at a single point in time. However, individuals, especially Chinese international students, change and are not governed by initial behaviors and reactions that arose from facing sharp contrasts in cultural norms (Heng, 2018; Guo & Guo, 2017).

Some studies highlight the transition that Chinese international students undergo during their time abroad by incorporating American values and cultures to achieve success in higher education. Students may adjust their behaviors and attitudes to succeed within U.S. higher educational institutions by seeking greater social support from professors and peers, relying more

on institutional resources such as libraries and counseling, as well as utilizing additional technological support such as social media and translation software (Heng, 2018; Parris-Kidd & Barnett, 2011; Wu, 2015; Yan, 2017). Ma (2020) discusses the reflections of Chinese international students on the changes in their lives after studying abroad including but not limited to becoming more active, engaged, and reflective. However, this transformation has not alienated them from China and Chinese culture. In fact, it has piqued their interest in Chinese society as their Chinese identity is made salient by being situated in multiple contrasting sociocultural contexts. This is illustrative of the fact that their learning and resultant behaviors do not arise from one culture or another. Rather, it arises from the complex decision-making process in negotiating multiple cultures and the transnational identities developed by some of these students. Holvino (2012) describes this as the process where “new identities are introduced into ‘old’ cultures with presumed stable identities” (p.163). Therefore, international students’ identities and behaviors change with engagement in varying sociocultural contexts.

Perhaps how and why these identities and behaviors change and what characterizes this change can be understood through considerations of past and future experiences. If we only look at one point in time, we leave out prior pathways and future aspirations, which taken altogether could provide a clearer and more thorough depiction of student experiences. There are two such longitudinal studies by Ma (2020) and Chiang (2022) that take this into account and portray the secondary schooling experiences of Chinese international students. Ma (2020) describes how Chinese international students study in US colleges as a means to accumulate capital. She also describes how there is an increasingly competitive culture in obtaining higher education degrees from countries such as the US and the UK, which pressures Chinese families to invest earlier and greater in their children’s education. Hence, these students embody the identity of an international student from a young age. In fact, their future aspirations inform their current

experiences and even their past schooling pathways. Some examples of this increased investment include sending their kids to school in the US before college. Ma (2020) identifies four major secondary schooling pathways that Chinese international students go through to gain admission into US colleges:

1. Chinese public schools with the GaoKao national curricula
2. Chinese public schools with international curricula
3. Chinese private schools, usually with international curricula
4. Private secondary schools in the US.

International curricula can consist of Advanced Placements (AP), IGCSEs, British A-level courses, and International Baccalaureate (IB) programs. She describes how students who go to certain international schools in China could be immersed in very cosmopolitan environments and transnational cultures, which could provide a very different experience upon entering the US for college than a student who attended a Chinese public school. Perhaps even more drastic are the experiences between those who went to Chinese public schools with the national curriculum and those who went to US private schools. Therefore, we cannot limit our analysis to students' current experiences in a United States college context. Moreover, we cannot focus solely on past or future aspirations either due to their interdependence. We need to consider students' past secondary schooling background, present experiences, and future aspirations together.

Although not specifically focused on migration patterns, Chiang (2022) takes into account the social implications of globalization on the patterns of social mobility among Chinese international students and families. Such considerations and frameworks also take into account the secondary schooling experiences of Chinese international students. By adopting this framework, we would be able to further uncover the patterns of migration of certain international students whose experiences and motivations are heterogeneous and dynamic.



## 2.4 Culturally Relevant Frameworks of Analysis

In addition to heterogeneous and longitudinal frameworks, we also need to consider the applicability of certain analytical frameworks used to understand the experiences of Chinese international students. We need to be cognizant of the fact that perhaps certain theories such as Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital and Lareau's conceptual framework of *concerted cultivation* may not necessarily apply in this context. These theories have been used to explain the access, success, and mobility of students in schooling and higher education within Western contexts. Therefore, the theories may not be applicable for two reasons.

First, they may not be applicable within Chinese culture due to different societal values and norms. These theoretical frameworks present a more individualistic philosophy, which is naturally a Western value (Metz, 2014). Additionally, high social connectedness among Chinese international students could mitigate the effect of socioeconomic status in the theories of cultural capital (Meng et al., 2017). Such a phenomenon advocates for consideration of the social circles in which these students are situated as a significant factor in examining the navigational capital that these communities possess. These communities are highly connected and have various international ties in which socioeconomic status as a precursor for cultural capital is no longer the prominent factor (Yosso, 2005). Additionally, conceptual frameworks such as *concerted cultivation* only hold partial truths in these scenarios as social connectedness may imply that such practices are not only prevalent amongst middle-class families (Lareau, 2014).

Secondly, from the perspective of international students, the degree of exposure to international education would play a greater role than socioeconomic status in terms of child rearing practices and support for greater success abroad. From their perspective, the parents are preparing them for not just college, but college abroad in a different sociocultural context. Then,

factors such as the degree of exposure to international education play a greater role in being familiar with support and practices that are suitable to the education system abroad.

### 3. Methods

The purpose of this study is to uncover the heterogeneous narratives and schooling experiences of Chinese international students at Swarthmore College. To uncover the heterogeneity among this demographic of students, I implemented a mixed methods study to capture larger trends and finer distinctions that would not have been found with quantitative or qualitative methods alone. More specifically, I collected data from two distinct processes: an initial survey followed by interviews.

The purpose of the initial quantitative process was to gain a general framing and understanding of the demographic of Chinese international students at the institution. The survey provides general trends and demographic information. However, although survey questions provide a sense of the background of the participants, the information elicited by participants in this manner is limited and restricts the full picture of their experiences. The purpose of the qualitative process was to address this limitation through a phenomenological design by gauging participants' lived experiences and subjective narratives. It allows the researcher to uncover not only what individuals experienced but also how they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). In this sense, the interviews allowed me to gather heterogeneous experiences and narratives through conversations.

#### 3.1 Survey & Interview Process

An anonymous online survey (qualtrics.com) was initially sent out from the Swarthmore College international student center email list to all the international students at the college. The survey entailed questions regarding social and academic experiences in both secondary and tertiary education, migration plans, and background information (See Appendix A). The questions were derived from a combination of my own questions and prior studies on international students. Details involving the study's purpose and eligibility to participate were all

included in the email, followed by a link to the survey. Five days after the survey was initially distributed, a reminder was sent out that it closes in five days to gather a few more participants and prompt them to finish incomplete surveys. The survey was sent out to approximately 70 Chinese international students at the college and yielded 42 respondents, for a response rate of 60%. At the end of every survey, there was a prompt asking participants to fill out a Google form indicating their interest in participating in a voluntary follow-up interview.

Eight participants were selected out of all the survey participants who agreed to participate in a follow-up interview. Individual survey responses were not linked to participants' identities to minimize any prior assumptions about the interviewee. The interviews were semi-structured face-to-face interviews that lasted from 30 to 90 minutes and were recorded for accuracy. All interviews were conducted in English and transcribed verbatim. During the interview, techniques such as probing and paraphrasing were used to improve the accuracy of the collected data. Furthermore, I took extensive interview notes. Throughout the paper, I use pseudonyms as well as some of the demographics for confidentiality when referring to the interview.

The interview questions were somewhat similar to the survey questions but were more open-ended and semi-structured to be less restrictive of the participants' expression of their experiences. The questions centered on participants' experiences regarding key academic and sociocultural transitions, academic preparation, and future aspirations (See Appendix B). Some of the survey questions were repeated such as family and background demographics, because the survey responses are not linked to the interview responses. I decided to place greater emphasis on the qualitative aspect of the data to better understand and not merely confirm the nuanced distinctions within the Chinese international student community.

### **3.2 Data Analysis**

For the quantitative survey portion of the data, I carried out descriptive statistical summaries of the data by grouping them in terms of demographic information. The descriptors regarding basic demographics were split into the class year, educational background, financial background, and geographical background. Subsequently, I found summaries of migration intentions and academic experiences. The transfer of student interests across secondary school, the beginning of college, and the current were analyzed on a data point basis to track each student's interests throughout time. These pathways were then mapped onto a Sankey diagram to portray the different flows and pathways of interest across secondary schooling to the current day.

Regarding the qualitative portion of the data, I reviewed the transcripts, interview notes, and recordings and examined key themes across each interview. I included key quotes in the synthesis of the narratives. This process was repeated until all the significant information and narratives had been extracted. The narratives were then compared and contrasted with the statistics to provide greater insight and distinctions that the survey data failed to provide. This elaboration is integrated into the discussion of the qualitative data.

### **3.3 Chinese International Community at Swarthmore College**

This study focuses on Chinese international students. Any student at the institution who is a citizen of China was eligible for this study. Out of 1689 students at this institution, approximately 250 of them are international students, constituting around 15 percent of the population. Chinese internationals make up the majority with around 70 students (Swarthmore College ISC, 2023). There are ample engagement opportunities on campus for Chinese students such as Asian organizations, a student-led traditional Chinese dance club, as well as a Chinese

society connecting students through various social events. Such events can range from celebrating the Lunar New Year and Mid-Autumn Festival to alumni career panels.

### **3.4 Limitations & Reflections**

The mixed methods design helped me to gain insight not only into the demographic of interest in various ways but also informed me of the appropriate methodology for studying the experiences of international students. While the survey allowed me to uncover background information on the students and build a basis and motivation for the formulation of the qualitative data, it was limiting in the sense that I could not extract information that sufficiently and accurately portrayed students' experiences. This limitation was mitigated by the interview process, which helped me see subtle distinctions between similar initial pathways among students that inform the divergent pathways later in their futures. Furthermore, interviews provided me with information and factors that I was not able to consider beforehand because the interview data was not limited to my specific questions and was more open-ended.

A possible extension or replication would be to carry out a focus group of students to engage with each others' experiences and reflect collectively to uncover more similarities and differences. As someone who is not completely familiar with and has not been immersed in the sociocultural environments of the participants, there is a risk of misinterpretation and oversight that could have occurred. Furthermore, due to time constraints, I could not have carried out a longitudinal study regarding their prior experiences. Although this study only provides students' subjective perceptions of past experiences, this is also valuable in and of itself because it portrays their attitudes and feelings upon timely reflection.

The assumptions that were made in this study include the participants being truthful and that their perceptions did not change between the time of the survey and the interview.

Furthermore, due to time constraints, I could not gather students' perceptions of their schooling

experiences at the time at which it occurred. Perhaps a future longitudinal study could turn this assumption into a portrayal of students' dynamic experiences and perceptions of these experiences across time.

### **3.5 Positionality Statement**

At the time of this research, I am an undergraduate international student in the United States from Myanmar. My ethnic identity consists of both Chinese and Burmese. I attended an American international school in Myanmar for the bulk of my K-12 education from Kindergarten to 10th grade. I conducted my final two years of study in an international curriculum in Singapore. For 11 consecutive years of my schooling, I was in the same international school in Myanmar, and everyone who graduated from that school went abroad to study, with the majority going to the US, UK, or Australia. Our identities as future international students were very salient to us since we were young because it was the most sensible and normalized pathway in our niche community. Upon the realization that this is not a universal experience for all international students, I was inclined to uncover other international students' experiences to compare and contrast them to mine and others I know.

Although there were common experiences among my international peers, there were also vast differences. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, I noticed that nationality and citizenship are huge privileges. Due to a lack of opportunities back home, I was forced to take classes between midnight to 4 in the morning, because taking a gap year would not have yielded anything fruitful in terms of my future. This experience was not replicated among all international students, as different students from different countries have institutional and national resources back home that provides them with the option of further advancing their careers and academics. Even within the same nationalities, the degree of navigational capital, connections, or financial resources that they had gave rise to vastly different outcomes.

This drove me to question what we can further infer about other international students beyond just being a citizen of another country. Being an international student is already out of the normal pathway for students in said country. If we take all these deviations from the norm, we need to be careful about making generalizations about deviations from the norms. I was curious to learn more about how the cultural, social, and academic backgrounds of students from different countries give rise to differential experiences that exist under the umbrella of an “international student.” However, precisely due to that motivation, as someone who has not been completely immersed in their culture, this may also cause oversight and assumptions on behalf of the participants that may not necessarily be reflective of their lived experiences.



## 4. Data

My goal in this study was to examine how the intersectional, agentic, and dynamic identities of Chinese international students impacted their reasons for coming abroad to study, their lived experiences in college, and their intended future migration plans. I used survey data to get a broader picture of student experiences and interviews to get a more nuanced view of individual differences. In this chapter, I present the basic demographics and trends that emerged from the survey data. I then use the interview data to explore 3 themes that arose in the data. The first theme concerns schooling experiences in China before leaving, including student experiences either in high school or middle school, depending on whether or not they came to the US for secondary school. The second theme consists of students' arrival in the US in either high school or college. This section is split into two further subsections discussing first how students exhibit different forms of agency, and second, how their language experiences contribute to that agency. Finally, in the third theme, their future pathways are portrayed in relation to their backgrounds and experiences in the prior two themes.

### 4.1 The Broad Picture: Survey Data

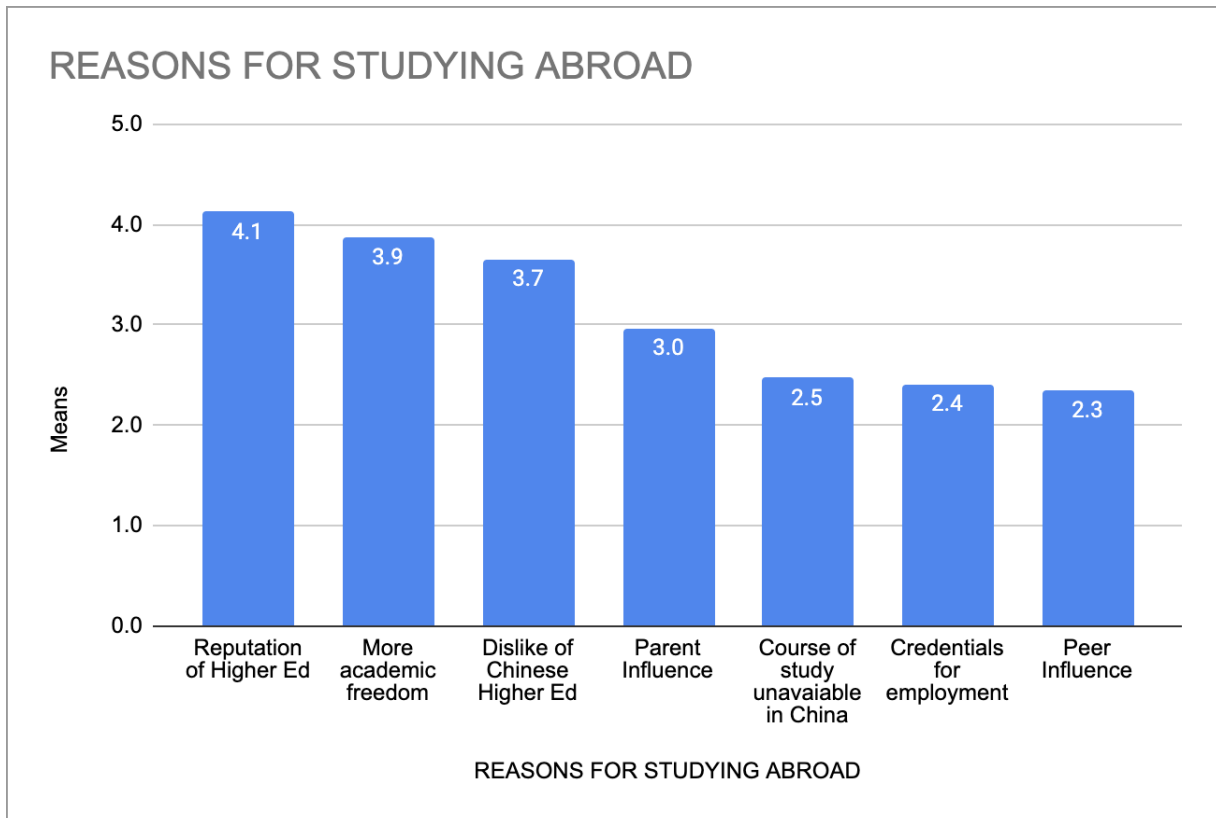
A total of 42 participants took part in the survey. The class years were fairly evenly distributed with responses from 15% freshmen, 31% sophomores, 27% juniors, and 26% seniors. Regarding family educational background, 73% of the students come from families where at least one of the parents had a bachelor's degree or higher from higher educational institutions. Financially, the proportion of household incomes is split evenly between annual salaries above and below \$100,000. Geographically, 71% of the respondents had not lived in a country other than China. However, although 73% of the respondents went to school in China, a substantial proportion of Chinese international students at Swarthmore College have exposure to higher

education institutions abroad. Approximately half (46%) of the students reported having family members or relatives who have acquired an international education in the past.

Nevertheless, family influence was not rated as high as other factors influencing their decision to study abroad. Three factors were listed as more important than family influence. As shown in Figure 2, the most significant factors in order were the reputation of higher educational institutions in the US ( $M = 4.1, SD = 1.9$ ), greater academic freedom in the US ( $M = 3.9, SD = 2.0$ ), and aversion towards Chinese higher education ( $M = 3.7, SD = 2.0$ ). Professional reasons were cited as significantly less important than the top 3 factors. Similar reasons were provided regarding their motivations for choosing Swarthmore College as shown in Figure 3. The majority of the students, around 78%, reported that Swarthmore College was their first choice. They reported that the academics ( $M = 4.8, SD = 2.2$ ), liberal arts curriculum ( $M = 4.4, SD = 2.1$ ), small size ( $M = 4.4, SD = 2.1$ ), and ranking & selectivity ( $M = 4.1, SD = 2.0$ ) were all significant factors in their motivations for choosing Swarthmore.

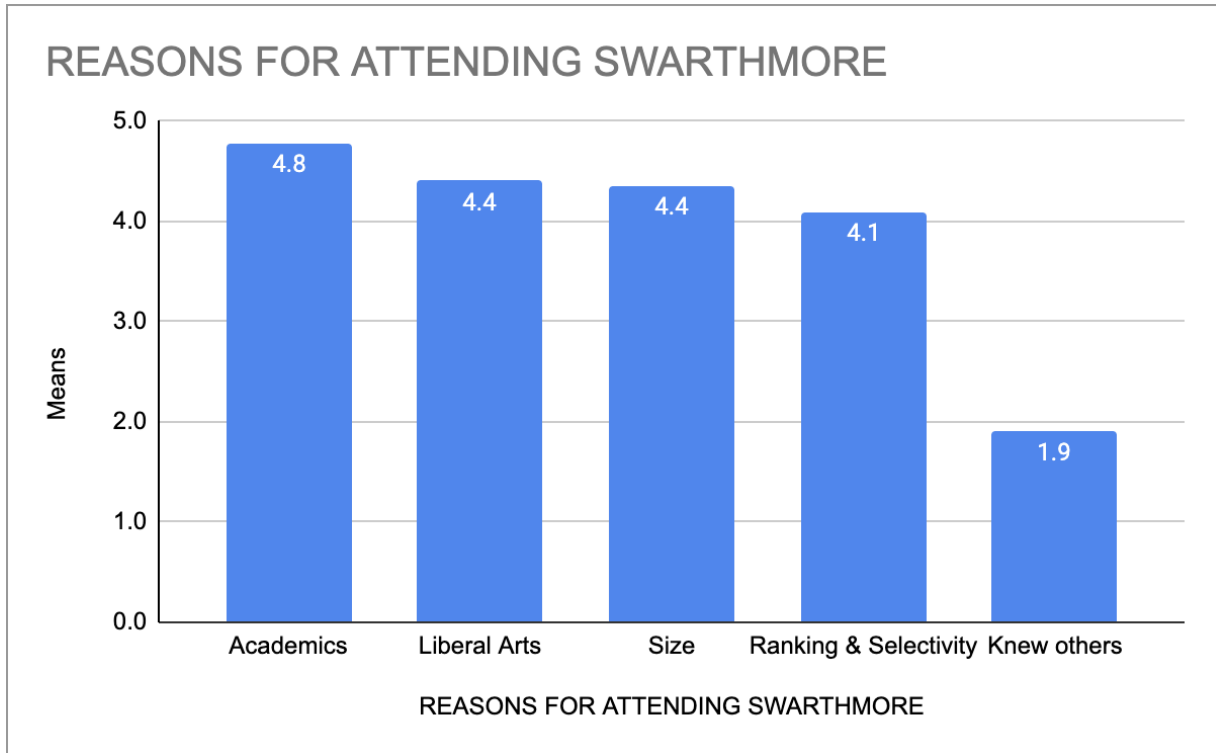
**Figure 2**

*Student Ratings of Importance of Reasons for Studying Abroad*

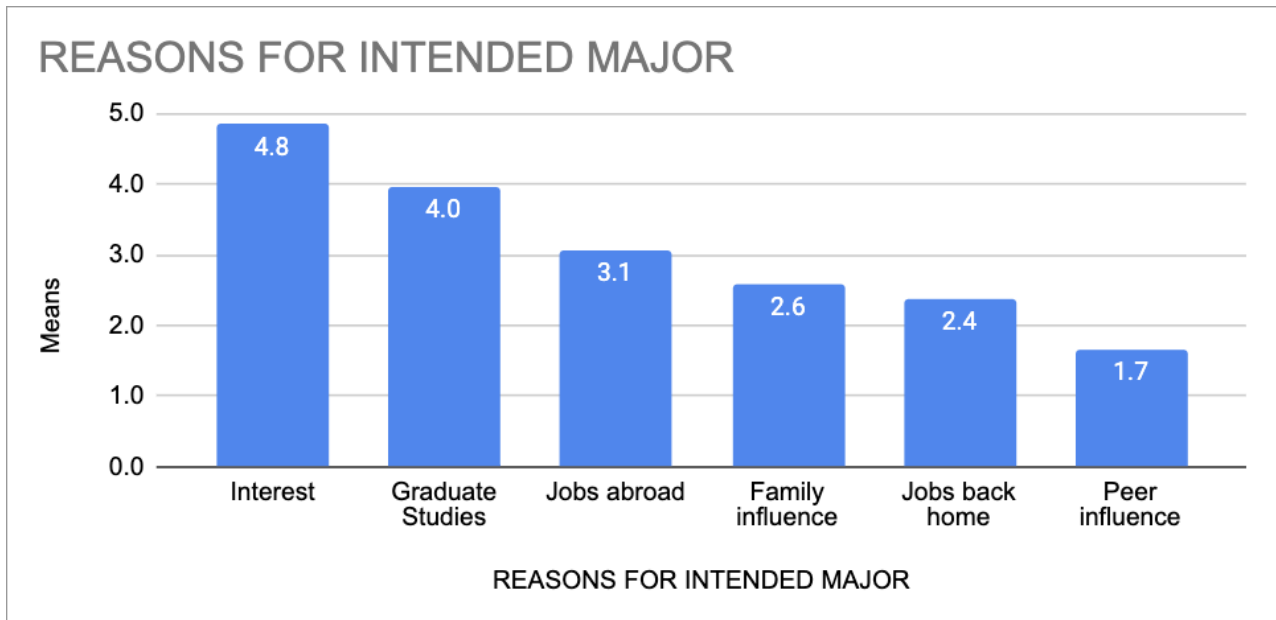
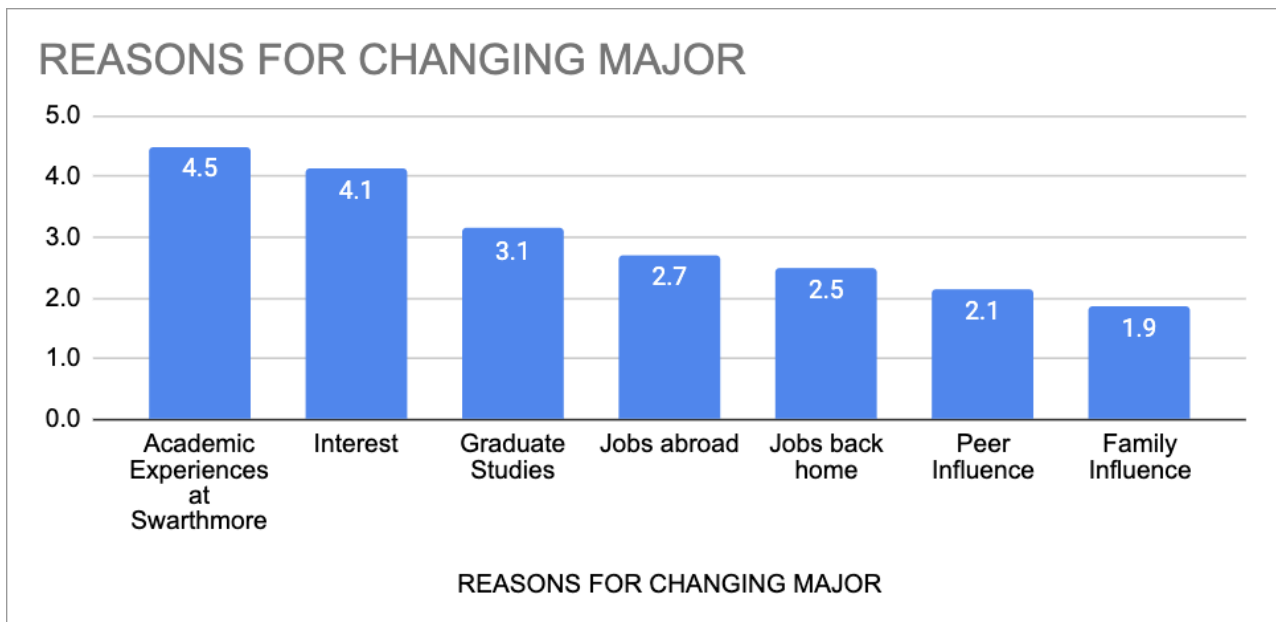


**Figure 3**

*Student Ratings of Importance of Reasons for Attending Swarthmore College*

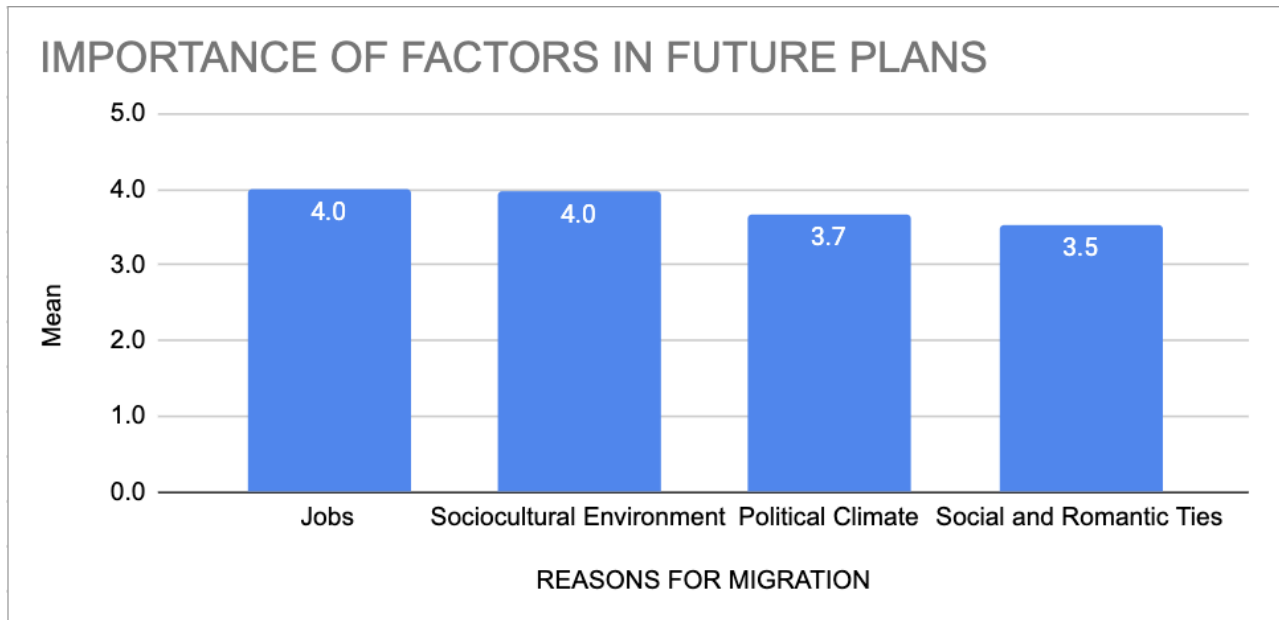


In addition to the factors influencing their decision to come to Swarthmore, students noted factors influencing their initial intentions for majors. Figures 4 and 5 denote their reasons for choosing their intended major, and the motivations behind changing their majors if applicable. In Figure 4, students reported that academic interests ( $M = 4.8$ ,  $SD = 0.3$ ) and future graduate studies ( $M = 4.0$ ,  $SD = 1.2$ ) were the two most important factors in their major decisions. In Figure 5, students reported that their academic experiences ( $M = 4.5$ ,  $SD = 2.2$ ) and interests ( $M = 4.1$ ,  $SD = 2.1$ ) were the two most important factors in changing their majors. In both scenarios, personal interest heavily outweighed utility concerns, potentially indicating their agency in pursuing their own interests and forging their own pathways. Furthermore, with regard to the future, students cited all of the reasons provided as very important as shown in Figure 6 below. Students reported that job opportunities ( $M = 4.0$ ,  $SD = 2.1$ ), socio-cultural environment ( $M = 4.0$ ,  $SD = 2.1$ ), political climate ( $M = 3.7$ ,  $SD = 2.1$ ), and social and romantic ties ( $M = 3.5$ ,  $SD = 2.0$ ) were approximately of the same significance in their decision-making process for their futures.

**Figure 4***Student Ratings of Importance of Factors in Choosing Intended Major***Figure 5***Student Ratings of Importance of Factors in Changing Majors*

**Figure 6**

*Student Ratings of Importance of Factors in Future Migration Plans*



Large standard deviations across the majority of the summaries denote a great variety in student responses, where the nuances are not encapsulated in the summary statistics. Although this does not fully capture the full picture of student experiences, the survey data regarding transitions of student interests across time from secondary schooling to the current provides a glimpse.

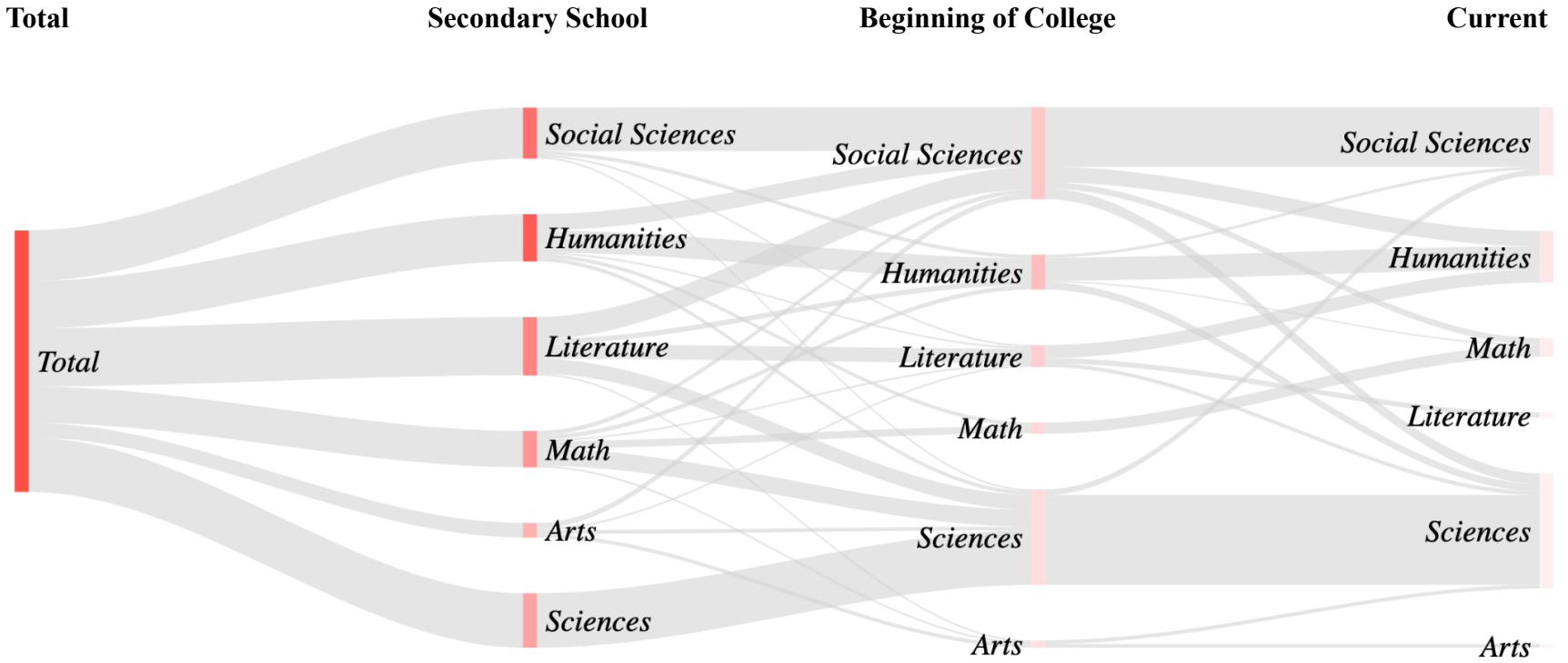
The Sankey diagram below in Figure 7 indicates the flow of student interests across time. The first column indicates the proportion of all the students surveyed. The second column represents the relative proportions of student interests during secondary school. As evident in the diagram, the proportion is fairly even across all disciplines regardless of the statistic that 73% of students went to schools in China. However, it is also a possibility that this characteristic of the data came out of a process of self selection as noted by the statistic that 78% of the students listed Swarthmore as their first choice. Being a liberal arts college with a very unrestrictive curriculum, the college attracts those with many passions or those who are uncertain of their

future pathways and want a place to explore. Furthermore, as they transition to college, in the third column, we see a larger shift towards the social sciences and sciences. It is interesting to note that as students go through college, in the fourth column, there is a significant increase in the number of students who pursue humanities. The motivations for this unexpected flow of students cannot be explained without further investigation through qualitative interviews. By only considering one point in time, i.e. one column, we lose the essential information of their past and future preferences and fail to capture the dynamic experiences of these students across time. In an effort to further elaborate on their temporally interrelated experiences, I present the interview data.



**Figure 7**

*Sankey Diagram of the Flow of Subject Interests Across Time*



## 4.2 The Nuances: Interview Data

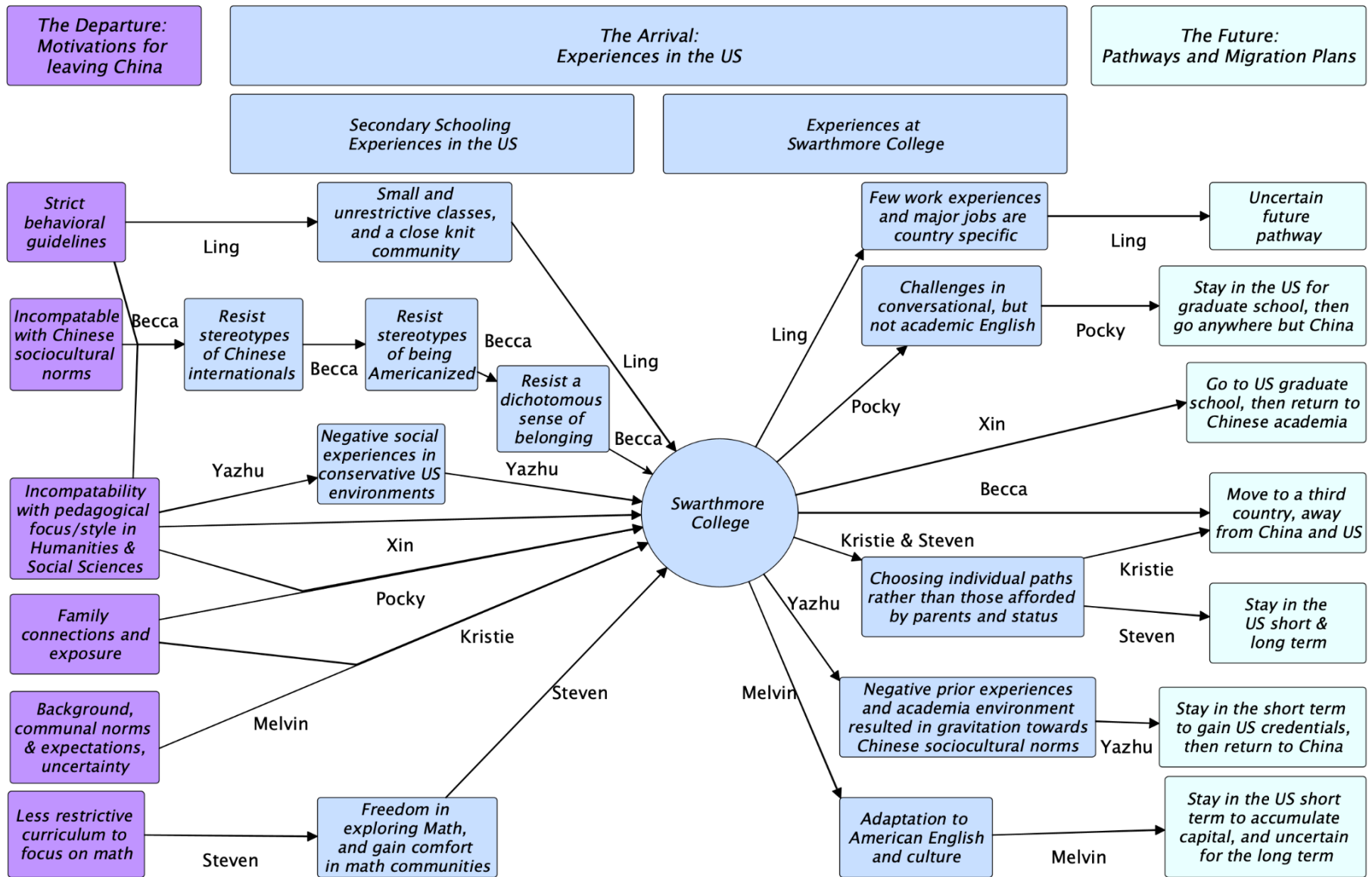
The interview data provides insight into the nuanced differences between participants' experiences. The descriptors of interview participants are illustrated in Figure 8 below. The thematic portrayal of the interview data distributes student experiences into three stages: their departure from China, arrival in the US, and future pathways. Student narratives suggest that they came for different reasons and intend to take different pathways upon departure while passing through the common experience of Swarthmore College. First, I discuss the multiple migration pathways that students took to converge at Swarthmore College in the present. This entails secondary schooling experiences and motivations for leaving China and coming to the US for high school or college. Second, I focus on their experiences in the United States during high school and at Swarthmore College which manifested in two major forms: 1) language experiences in schooling and social interactions, and 2) different forms and degrees of agency that students exhibit. Finally, I discuss how these experiences lead to a divergence in future migration plans.

Although I present these three time periods and themes separately, the three are interwoven in each student's unique experience, indicating the incompleteness of prior frameworks in capturing the experiences of international students. Throughout this portrayal, I repeatedly reference Figure 9, which encapsulates the experiences in the three stages.

**Figure 8***Descriptors of Interviewees*

<b>Name (pseudonyms)</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Parent's Highest Education</b>	<b>Socioeconomic Status</b>	<b>Secondary Schooling</b>
Ling	Female	Bachelor's Degree	Middle Class	Chinese Public to US Public
Yazhu	Male	Bachelor's Degree	Lower Class	Chinese Public to US Public
Pocky	Female	Bachelor's Degree	Middle Class	Chinese Public
Xin	Male	Master's Degree	Upper Class	Chinese Private International
Becca	Female	High School Diploma	Lower Class	Chinese Public to US Public
Steven	Male	Bachelor's Degree	Upper Class	Chinese Public to US Private
Melvin	Male	Master's Degree	Middle Class	Chinese Private International
Kristie	Female	Doctoral Degree	Upper Class	Chinese Private International

**Figure 9**  
*Flowchart of the Experience and Pathways of Eight Interviewees*



Note. The diagram is split into thematic sections in the data coded by color.

### **1st theme: The Departure: Secondary Schooling Experiences and Immigration Pathways**

The experiences of Chinese international students prior to arrival are characterized by the relationship between their schooling experiences, their motivations to study abroad, and their family backgrounds. First, I discuss the multiple motivations and pathways for leaving China to study in the US. In contrast to the literature, we see more nuanced differences in motivations than just professional, social, and personal factors. Furthermore, we also see that reasons for leaving China and reasons for coming to the US are distinct but related motivations. Then, I present the multiple ways in which families prepare their children for such pathways, highlighting the incompatibility between the cultural capital framework and the data. Students cited a variety of reasons for studying abroad, all of which were characterized by some combination of aversion towards the classroom behavioral expectations and pedagogical style of Chinese education.

Several students wanted to study in the United States because they disliked Chinese approaches to teaching and learning. For example, Ling's motivation for coming to the US was focused on the behavioral expectations concerning restrictive instructional behaviors. She describes how she felt less constrained and more engaged in US classrooms when she visited the US for a summer and decided to come to the US for secondary school.

My parents visited some high schools here when I was in sixth grade, I think. They liked it. I went to a summer camp my sixth-grade summer, and so I kind of experienced what it is like to study here, and kind of enjoyed it. [I]n China, it's like everyone sits in rows, and when the class is in session, you're not supposed to drink water. I came here and I liked it. I felt like, I'll just try and apply and see how it goes.

She describes her college visits during her high school years, where she decided to come to Swarthmore due to the small class sizes, close-knit communities, and unrestrictive classes. These were the characteristics that attracted her to come to the US in the first place.

I think it's probably a science or history class that I went to that was a very small class. I like small schools, so that idea actually really attracted me. After coming here, and staying for some time, I just felt like this is the school I want. Because my high school's also very small. I'm very used to this small classroom, and also the close community. [Back home], if you really want to go outside, you have to raise your hand. But here, professors were like, 'Do whatever, just don't interrupt the class.'

Yahzu and Pocky were more focused on aversion towards the pedagogical style in which the social sciences and humanities content was delivered. Yahzu states how "history classes are basically memorization of materials," and Pocky recalls how the system was heavily examination focused and stated, "the education system does not work the best for me, because I'm not an exam type of student." As a result, both of them came to the US to learn and engage more effectively in the humanities and social sciences. Similarly, Xin describes his public schooling experience as the "fixed stereotype of the Chinese traditional school" that emphasized examinations and described how sometimes he could guess the answer correctly without even knowing how to do the problem, because he knew the mechanism of these exams.

That school, I don't know what to say. It's the fixed stereotype of the Chinese traditional school. I worked for exams and I think that prepared me really well in terms of how I study, especially for exams. Sometimes I don't know how to do a problem, I just know what the right answer is. I can predict what kinds of questions a professor would give us. It's like that.

Furthermore, he wanted to study philosophy, but the delivery and pedagogical style of this discipline back in China did not suit his interests. His reasoning for coming to the US consisted of escaping this rigid instruction so that he could pursue philosophy in the manner that he wanted. Sharing a combination of Xin, Yazhu, Pocky, and Ling's experiences, Becca despised both the pedagogical styles and general classroom experiences in her schooling experiences. She disliked the cultural norms for students and girls, because she felt like she was punished for being outspoken. She demonstrated resistance against teachers when it went against her will, to which teachers responded with reprimands.

I was constantly punished by the teachers because I was really speaking my mind in class. When a teacher does something I don't think is what I want to do, I would resist that. And I got into a lot of trouble.

Additionally, she recounts how she was not a STEM person and disliked the intense emphasis on these subjects.

I only liked Chinese and English, and it was like seven subjects. I'm only good with two of them, so I suck for the rest of them. And I just got horrible grades in math and sciences because I couldn't understand. I feel like in China everyone's really, really smart, especially in STEM area for some reason. And the school, you're just so happy when you're, like, leaning towards STEM education and they basically completely ignore humanity.

Her outspoken character and passion for literature drove her out of the Chinese schooling environment, because neither characteristic was a good fit. For all of these students, in a search for a more agentic environment that also promotes learning in social sciences and humanities, they ended up at Swarthmore.

Although a lot of the students who came to the US had an aversion towards Chinese education, this is not always the case. Steven, Melvin, and Kristie's experiences can be contrasted with the others. Although Steven excelled in the Chinese national education system, he came to the US because he liked this alternative, where the ease of the curriculum allowed him to explore content on his own. Back in China, he could not focus on the areas specifically in math that were of interest to him, whereas in the US, his high achievement granted greater freedom and allowed him to explore areas of interest. Consequently, it allowed him to consider a clearer pathway into mathematics. He wanted to challenge himself on his own terms, where although the curriculum is easier in the US, he states how he's "given the freedom to do anything [he] wants. So, that makes it really easy to find [his] interest in a really early time." Furthermore, he ended up at Swarthmore due to the fact that he can get access to research with professors early on.

I wanted to be somewhere that is small and I can have a close relationship with my professors, and I'm pretty sure I want to do math. So, I want to do some research in math in my freshman year. And if I go to a large university, those opportunities are usually for juniors and seniors. If you don't know what other places are, you can kind of be blinded at how easy it is to research here. And sometimes, you don't even have to ask them. Sometimes, all it takes is one good conversation and they ask you if you want to do research.

Despite not being of a high socioeconomic class that would provide what is considered cultural capital, an interesting thing to note here is that Steven gained exposure to Western education through his parents. Even though his family did not know about international schooling experiences and studying abroad, they were situated in social circles where this was common.



My family has a really close friend, and their child is about the same age as me, and they decided to retake ninth grade to prepare for college. So, that's why my parents think that, 'Well, if they do the same thing, maybe we should just copy them.'

On the other hand, both Melvin and Kristie attended Western international schools back home and came from families with great familiarity with the US education system. They grew up in an environment where it is the norm for students coming from a combination of these two backgrounds to study abroad. Melvin's parents put him in a bilingual school since elementary school, and Kristie's family members have or are in the process of obtaining undergraduate and graduate degrees in the US. As a result, coming to the US to study abroad was the expectation in their social circles, as evident in Kristie's narratives.

I think just college abroad is the normal path for me. And I didn't think of an alternative path, and so I didn't really have to think about what I was going to study, just that I was going to college, not for the sake of going to college. It's just like, what else would I do? Of course I'm going to college, kind of thing.

Furthermore, Kristie and Melvin's parents heavily influenced how they ended up specifically at Swarthmore. Kristie's parents always pushed her to learn more and enjoy learning for the sake of learning. We see this characteristic unravel in her decision-making process, where Kristie also chose Swarthmore College for its reputation for engaging in learning for the sake of learning, which is influenced by her parents' practices throughout her childhood.

I think my parents always encouraged learning for the sake of learning. My dad is always like, oh, I want to be a lifelong learner...I think [Swarthmore] just fits my interest really well. The fact that I could do anything. And I also liked Swarthmore, because at least the reputation was that people were very in here because of genuine curiosity for the subject instead of for purely professional gains. So I think that I liked that.

Melvin states how the academic nature of the college attracted him and his parents, which eventually drove him to come here.

There is a degree of recognition for how academic Swarthmore is, and I would say that a lot of them are supportive of me going.

Consequently, their uncertainties about their goals along with their parent's navigational capital led them to Swarthmore College (Yosso, 2005).

One commonality that arose was the degree of navigational and community cultural capital that these students possess. Regardless of socioeconomic status or educational attainment, there were substantial child rearing practices and awareness on the part of their parents and themselves. As a result, their schooling experiences back home and the decision to move were very intentional. Becca, whose family was lower class and whose parents' highest level of education was the completion of high school, denotes how her parents guided her English development as she was growing up.

My mom was like, 'You have to practice your English. You're not going to pick up English until you watch American shows.' That's how I pick up everything. I was starting to watch weird shows. I think one was like Once Upon a Time. The very beginning was about... They redid all the fairy tales. It was really dark and gothic. That's why I watched. And I watched 2 Broken Girls. My parents didn't know any of those. But I feel like I was catching up on all culture references, like how I see other people live. And I was watching Friends.

Their push for greater exposure to English not only helped her become more proficient in English, but also become more familiar with the sociocultural norms associated with Western culture. We see a similar case with Yazhu, whose family was also lower class and whose parents'

highest level of education was a bachelor's degree. His parents prepared him early on for an education abroad.

Basically my mom, my dad decided one day when I was two years old to buy a set of Disney CDs. It's like a cartoon, basically teaching you English through cartoons. I just watched it throughout my childhood. It was like 50 CDs. I just watched it again, again. So I basically developed a sense of the understanding of the English language naturally, because I started learning English about the same time I started learning Chinese. So by the time I go to school, my English is already much better than my peers.

Both Becca and Yazhu's parents do not know English nor do they know what these shows are about. What they do know are practices that they think they can scaffold for her to succeed. We see a similar pattern with Melvin, whose family was middle class and whose parents' highest level of education was a master's degree. Since he was very young, he was sent to a bilingual school because his parents knew that they wanted him to go abroad for college.

Since I was about third grade was when I was sent to a bilingual school. So from then they put me on a path to go abroad in the future. They knew from very early on that this was the path.

Steven's case illustrates how his parents introduced the idea of sending him to the US based on what others have been doing in the community.

My family has a really close friend, and their child is about the same age as me, and they decided to retake ninth grade to prepare for college. So, that's why my parents think that, 'Well, if they do the same thing, maybe we should just copy them.'

Parents' cultural and navigational capital allowed these students to prepare for study abroad.

Furthermore, all of these students come from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. They did not need to have high status or wealth to know how to navigate higher education abroad. Regardless

of their status, they were situated in social circles and communities where they could easily learn the implicit rules and norms relating to their child's future success. The cultural capital model does not capture alternative means outside of wealth and status through which families and students can gain access to knowledge that helps them succeed.

As these students move from their adolescence towards the late high school and early college experiences, we see a transfer of agency from the parents to the children. As a result, we see the various depictions of how each student exercises their agency with respect to their new environment in the US. Now we focus on the present and their narratives regarding different forms of agency in defining their own pathways.

## **2nd Theme: The Arrival: Agency and Language in America**

When students arrive in America, they begin to use their prior language development and the navigational capital learned from parents to negotiate their personal and academic pathways. Now we turn to students' experiences in high school and/or college after they arrive in America. I present their experiences abroad on two levels:

- a) how prior parental capital manifests in different forms and degrees of student agency to define themselves, and
- b) how language experiences in schooling and social interactions further contribute to agency.

Agency refers to the freedom that international students have in defining their own actions and development. These students exercise their agency in service of formulating one's identity and redefining oneself. Resistance is also a form of agency, where students reject impositions of identities and expectations on them that do not align with their personal values and identities.

## 2nd Theme a) The Arrival: Agency in Pathway Development

As prior research has shown, international students are highly mobile agents of their own pathways (Anderson et al., 2021). Agency can take the form of resistance to Chinese cultural norms, resistance to stereotypes, and decision-making. Even within these forms of resistance, students demonstrate individual pathways. Their narratives depict different self-perceptions intertwined with past experiences, giving rise to diverse portrayals of agency. For example, as a result of aversive experiences that arose from interactions in the US, Xin display of agency manifests in the alignment towards Chinese communities and societal norms. He describes this sense of not belonging in the US through portraying the perceived dichotomy between international students and Americans. He repeatedly recalls negative interactions with American students in a conservative high school and how, for example, “American students would actually sabotage [his] work,” and how he would later leave to transfer to a different school in the US.

[I]t was horrible. I just left after sophomore year. [T]he problem is that school is a very conservative, it's far, far conservative type of school. But it was okay. The people there did not treat me well.

He holds a static perspective on the incompatibility with American students by describing how “Chinese students tend to bunch up together instead of disseminating into the wider American community,” and how he does not “fit in within the American people whatsoever. It’s the same back in high school anyways.” Additionally, he describes the lack of institutional belonging where again he felt like an outsider with respect to the American system. He recounts his frustration in having to take certain English classes or repeat grades and attributes this to his status as a Chinese international student.

[T]hey force you to take English. Even though I can speak English near native level, my English is not that bad, but they forced me to take ESL classes with people who barely

...speak English, because I'm Chinese. Because I'm Chinese. Yeah. I'm an international student and also they force me to do ninth grade again, even though I don't really want that, but they kind of just force you to do it. Because I'm international. They think you need one more year to adjust, but apparently you don't. I don't feel like I need it.

Along with these experiences, he recounts more recent experiences in college that were detrimental to his sense of belonging in the US. He recalls several traumatic experiences, contributing to his aversive experiences.

Getting threats because of COVID, it's overwhelming. Just not very good. It's out just walking on the street, there's like this guy just came to me, and then they just chased me. This happened twice. And then also it was George Floyd's protest and Chicago was like, there's also a lot of looting happening around Chicago. And it impacted me a lot because we were essentially, we're going for lunch and then the place is just looted. So I was like, holy, I can't live here. So yeah, that's part of the reason why it's just got really bad.

The difficulty of navigating both the academic and social structure in the US led him to gravitate towards Chinese social norms and expectations he knew very well. He describes how if he wants to succeed, he has no option but to take part in the social structures present within the larger Chinese student society. He recalls his participation in the implicit Chinese social and cultural politics and norms in order to succeed in that culture. Even during his high school years in the US, he took part in agencies back home that helped him prepare for college applications. He felt as if he was forced to utilize college admissions services and tutoring companies in order to gain an edge and compete against other Chinese international students. Yazhu recalls a jarring statement that captures this experience.

There's a literal ad in a Beijing subway that says, 'If you come to us, we will coach your kid. If you don't come to us, we will coach your kid's competitor.' It's like collective

anxiety. And then we're kind of forced to do this because all the other Chinese students who are doing this, if I don't do this, I'm not getting college. And I think the colleges know.

On the other hand, Melvin's background informed his self-identity as more international than most Chinese students, which led to intentional resistance against the stereotypes of Chinese international students. He takes pride in being different:

I always like to pride myself in my ability to defy stereotypes. International students, Chinese international students don't fit it that well, right? They struggle. They tend to hang out amongst themselves or amongst other internationals. It's a little bit more difficult talking to Americans.

As we saw in the prior section, he grew up in a diverse international cohort and always knew that he was going to study abroad for college. This positioned Melvin as not particularly situated in the nation's normative academic path. Since elementary school, his parents prepared him by having him attend a bilingual school in order for him to be able to attend higher education institutions abroad. As a result, his experiences are more aligned with western educational standards, and he describes his adjustment to college as comparatively easy.

[T]he transition to college was, I would say, easier for me than a lot of other people, because of the very international curriculum, very Western curriculum that I've been taught all throughout secondary school.

His awareness of existing stereotypes as well as his own positionality and schooling experiences presented a contradiction between who he is and what is expected of him. For example, in stating his perception of existing stereotypes of Chinese international students, he specifically refers to the perception that Chinese international students make no effort to socialize outside of their

groups. Consequently, he resisted this stereotype by deliberately trying to socialize in American circles in the proximity of his dorm during his arrival on campus.

Okay, okay, so these are the American athletes. I'm going to go talk to them. Talked to them for about two weeks. Still didn't get invited over to their table. I was like, 'Okay, no. I give up.' So I came from ambition to disillusionment to, I would say, reflection. I'm able to get a more holistic view.

He then recalls how he didn't necessarily feel comfortable or natural in these social circles, a process which he refers to as "reflection" from which gained a greater understanding of his own positionality. He became "much more capable at deconstructing cultural and social norms." In conclusion, in resisting the stereotype that is most salient to him, he became more aware of his complex positionality as a Chinese international student in the US. The means through which he exhibited his agency changed as a result of realizing that he does not truly wish to fully integrate into the dominant American culture.

Similarly, Becca's self-perception and the manner in which she exercised her agency once she arrived in the US were dynamic throughout her adolescence. She grew up with great exposure to American culture through Western media and recounts her affection and romanticization of American culture.

I guess someone who has stayed in China all her years... living in a homogenous society and seeing this play on the other side of the world and seeing Black people, Asian people, people from every single culture living in the same country, was very fascinating to me. And I feel like I just really romanticized America in general. I think it was a projection of my idealizing a utopia in my head. I want to go so bad.

When she came to the US to attend the latter part of her secondary schooling, she was finally able to immerse herself in a culture that she had only experienced from "far away." Upon



grasping this opportunity, she started to realize the disparity between her expectations and reality, setting off a cascade of identity shifts and different forms of resistance. Her resistance was characterized by a process of understanding her own positionality as both a Chinese and an international student.

First, she was met with frustration from stereotypes about her character because of her status as a Chinese international student. She describes having to deal with expectations of having certain hobbies or having to act a certain way, which was in sharp contrast to her experiences back home.

When I first came, I was like... I see me only as myself, like 'Oh, this is me.' But when I came, it was with the assumption that I knew math. I must be smart. But, I was really into English. I love reading and I love talking about old poetry all the time.

Frustrated with the expectations of others, she resisted the stereotypes that American students had of her as a Chinese international student by conforming more towards the American culture that she always wanted to be immersed in. However, her actions to conform to US culture did not feel representative of herself, which led to disillusionment.

But then at the end of the day, it didn't feel like it was part of me. But just going to an all girls school, and they're all white girls, sometimes seniors saw me and I think, 'Why do I have to wear glasses? It makes me feel like I'm the typical Asian they think of me.' And yeah, I think it's just really hard to escape how other people perceive me in a way.

Secondly, throughout her time in the US, she became more aware of her own biases due to growing up romanticizing Western culture through the media and resisted the views that her parents and friends had of her as becoming whitewashed. In her resistance, she reflected and started questioning the degree of truth of the stereotypes that she was whitewashed and westernized.

I think even coming to Swarthmore, people think I'm really whitewashed. And I don't have any Chinese friends, which is, I think in some way I am questioning myself. I'm like, 'Am I becoming a banana?' Because whenever I go back to China, my parents are like, 'You're so American. And you are just so always just outspoken.' And when it comes to America, it also feels like, 'Oh, I'm an international student, I'm Chinese, but not exactly.' So I'm actually questioning, 'Am I?'

Finally, by having to negotiate between the binary identities set by both Americans' stereotypes of Chinese students and family and friends' stereotypes of Americanized international students, she began to realize her own positionality as the intersection between being Chinese and being international. As a result, she illustrates a different form of agency; she is not resisting the idea of being whitewashed or being stereotypical Chinese, but rather the dichotomous view that she has to be one or the other. She states how "[a]t some point, you really had to compromise." Upon revisiting home several times, she started to embody a "third culture" identity and describes how she felt like she couldn't go back home anymore due to who she is. She felt like her cultural values and mannerisms were in misalignment with the existing culture in China for women and gender expectations.

I feel like at this point, even my parents realized, it's not about whether I want to go back to China, it feels like I'm unable to go back to China because of the way I'm kind of Americanized. They actually interact with me and you see they do want to keep distant. They feel like this is uncomfortable or this is unfamiliar. At this point, I don't think I can be reciprocating Chinese culture, or I don't know whether I will be able to live or survive a Chinese workplace because the way I interact is so different from everyone else.

Multiple aspects of her identity such as being a woman, Chinese, and international became more and more salient to her as she constantly battled with multiple stereotypes. Born out of this intersectionality was her refusal to take part in a dichotomous representation of belonging.

Kristie also shares a similar issue in negotiating this dichotomy between Chinese and American culture as a third-culture kid. She describes herself as being more westernized than her peers.

I think even in high school we were like third-culture kids, between Chinese and American, and I was a bit more Western than the average person in my high school. So I guess in college I'm not too far off from the norm anyway.

However, she also illustrates a different form of agency through resistance against opportunities arising from family and social connections. She does not wish to take full advantage of the resources that her family provides. Although she benefits from her family's experience and familiarity with US undergraduate and graduate institutions, she does not wish to explicitly take advantage of the connections that her family has. For example, she describes how she worked for her father for a summer but felt like the job she found on her own was more meaningful and valuable. Steven also exhibits a similar experience where he refuses to indulge in his family's financial resources to gain work opportunities because he would just be "taking advantage of the money." Both of them would rather partake in a more fair meritocracy, where the things that they accomplish are majorly attributable to them instead of their family connections.

Pocky presents another case of a third culture identity, showing how it can arise without even being situated in an international culture. Although she went through the national curriculum at a Chinese public school and grew up in China her entire life, she expresses a lack of comfort among the Chinese international community at Swarthmore. Rather, she expresses comfort in a subset of international students during her initial arrival at the college.

Yeah, we were just all internationals and... I mean, I don't know that much about Chinese popular culture in circumstances. It's celebrities, all this stuff I'm not really super familiar with. Sometimes, I feel like the Chinese group's conversation is not what I like the most as well. And then I just found myself really comfortable with my international friends. Along with this, she also describes how she indulged in her motivation for coming to the US by immersing herself in the humanities such as art and art history. Within her recollection, she is also mindful of the utility of her disciplinary interests back home, which as we will see later, informs her future pathway. Even though she is aware of the lack of utility back home, she refuses to pursue disciplines that have much more utility solely on the basis of utility.

I think [economics] will be a really useful thing to learn about. I just feel like I want to study something that actually really excites me, what I truly liked, because I feel like college time is really short. I want to devote it to stuff I am really, really passionate about, and not something I just feel like very practical in certain senses. So, that's how I decided not to do econ.

Furthermore, Pocky also describes language-related challenges that she faced when she got to the US, which is the focus of the second subsection of this theme.

In this section, we saw that different forms of agency arose from the resistance against various impositions of sociocultural norms on their identities. The various impositions of sociocultural norms were then attributed to different backgrounds. For example, Steven, who came from an upper class family, resisted taking advantage of her family's connections, whereas Becca, who was a Chinese international student who was very accustomed to Western culture, resisted a dichotomous sense of belonging. From these different backgrounds also arose differences in language preparation and experiences with respect to the English language. In the

following subsection, I discuss how these various experiences with the English language during their schooling shape their experiences in the US.

## **2nd Theme b) The Arrival: The Role of Language in America**

In this subsection, we will see three different experiences regarding the English language in the US. The data illustrates how

1. some students are comfortable with *academic English*, but not with *conversational English* given their school backgrounds,
2. some students are comfortable with *conversational English*, but not *academic English* due to their exposure to Western media, and
3. some have relative comfort with both resulting from a combination of school background and parental experiences.

The interview data suggests that students' academic and conversational English proficiency, preparation, and comfort levels lie in niche pockets which are then characterized by nuanced differences. Recognition of these niche pockets of proficiency is not present in the literature. Meng et al. (2017) discuss how prior research on foreign language proficiency tends to focus on the host language and competence in a specific cultural context. In the data, Chinese students' different experiences of conversational and academic English prior to arriving in the United States gave rise to different challenges and experiences adjusting to college.

For example, continuing Pocky's narrative from before, the English that she learned back home did not align with the English in America's social contexts. She attended Chinese public schools her entire life, and the form of English taught in the Chinese national curriculum was different from the English she encountered in college.

I feel like it's actually more pressure for me for my social life, because I don't really know how to talk English casually, I think. But it's more the extracurricular activities.

An interesting thing to note was that Pocky was more concerned about conversational English than academic English, which she had more exposure to. She was able to immerse herself in her disciplines of interest without any issues. Similarly, both Becca and Ling share this experience where they expressed how they were taught rigid English focusing on grammar and structure, providing little exposure to the fluidity and spontaneous nature of conversational English. It seemed as if the type of English that was taught was for receptive and not productive purposes. Ling also recalled how she could understand but struggled to reply to people.

And it was pure memorization, like grammar or vocabs. It wasn't like we tried to read something or have a conversation with one another. It wasn't like that at all.

However, although Pocky, Ling, and Becca voiced similar criticisms about the rigidity and unnatural manner of learning English back in China, their concerns here were in contrasting domains. Pocky and Ling emphasized the difficulty of English on the side of having conversations with people, but less so in academics. As stated before, Becca, on the other hand, grew up with Western media content and had a lot of exposure to conversational English.

My mom was like, 'You have to practice your English. You're not going to pick up English until you watch American shows.' That's how I pick up everything. I was starting to watch like weird shows. I think one was like Once Upon a Time. The very beginning was about... They redid all the fairy tales. It was really dark and gothic. That's why I watched. And I watched 2 Broken Girls. My parents didn't know any of those. But I feel like I was catching up all culture references, like how I see other people live. And I was watching Friends.

However, she did not have great exposure to academic English, as her academic work was done in Chinese, and she wrestled with conventions in academic English.

I got 50 or something on my first major exam and I got C+ on my freshman research paper because the teacher told me I didn't know how to write, and that crushed my ego. Yazhu also had a similar experience where he grew up on Disney educational CDs. In his case, however, he did not have any issues with academic English.

I just watched it throughout my childhood. It was like 50 CDs. I just watched it again, again. So I basically developed a sense of understanding the English language naturally, because I started learning English about the same time I started learning Chinese. So by the time I go to school, my English is already much better than my peers.

Therefore, although all of these students had the same criticism of the English learning process back home, their concerns in the US were in different domains.

Other students show different variations of proficiency in different forms of English. For example, Xin had strong academic English skills due to his immersion in an international school with the International Baccalaureate curriculum. He was also comfortable with conversational English. He developed his conversational English skills from his social interactions and hobbies, centered around and fostered by his passion for the game of basketball. He expresses no concern about socializing in English, because the contexts in which he socializes are the ones in which he acquired conversational English skills.

[I]f there's one non-Chinese student playing on the court, the entire court has to speak English, right? So that's the mechanism. Unless the entire court is occupied by Chinese people. That's why I speak English. In the varsity training, our coach, he was from the United States, so we had to speak English. Our social lives, mostly I speak Chinese. I play Chinese gamings. So that must be Chinese.

Just as the context in which Xin developed his conversational skills is within a specific social context, the academic context in which Steven's English proficiency developed is specific

to mathematics. Steven expresses a phenomenon that is present in the literature regarding Chinese students, where they are not pushed or inclined to always speak in English due to the Chinese social groups that form in the US. Although the Chinese community in his high school provided a sense of comfort, it did not help improve his conversational English. However, his academic language seemed to be catching on due to repeated exposure, but given his limited interaction with American students in English, he was not confident about his conversational English abilities. Even within a general academic context, he expresses concerns in certain aspects. He states how he is most comfortable speaking in English when he is talking about mathematics. Even so, if there are narratives associated with the question, it becomes more challenging for him.

[I]f I talk math, then I'll be confident. And also, when the questions are so long, they are not math equations anymore. Yeah. The wordings...

Melvin's experience illustrates another form of conversational English that emphasizes semantics rather than syntax. Academically, his immersion in the International Baccalaureate program in high school prepared him very well in academic English. The nature of the assignments and assessments equipped him with the necessary skills to succeed in college courses that require extensive analytical writing and reading. He even compares his English to his Chinese language development and recounts how he considered Chinese to be his primary language of expertise until high school. During this transitional period, he became very proficient in terms of writing and academic English, but he still considers his spoken Chinese to be more proficient than that of English.

I'd say for the most part I would consider English my second language, because for most of my time throughout school, up until high school, I would say, my Chinese was always better than my English. I would say starting high school is when you write everything in



English, you read everything in English. I wouldn't necessarily say my spoken English is better, but my written English definitely is. Academic abilities, I cannot write a Chinese college paper.

On the more conversational side, an interesting finding was that Melvin did not have trouble with the spontaneity and fluidity of conversational language. He describes how he had plenty of social interactions in English in his schooling because it was an international school with a diverse student body.

Certainly there are some friends that I would talk to exclusively in Chinese. We are an international school, so we have a very diverse student body, so those people we would then talk in English. It's always a really funny mix, and people pick up all different languages, so we're really funny with each other, and we mix and match languages.

For him, the English language itself was not an issue, but rather the social and cultural connotations that came with American English. He recounts a particular conversation with an American that was a prime example of the usage of a word that stemmed from Western cultural language. Perhaps there is a generational gap that was present in the English that Melvin had acquired through his schooling.

There's also times where she's like... Okay, I remember she said something. She was like, 'That's sus,' and I was like, 'What the hell is sus?' I was like, 'It means suspicious.' I'm like, 'I don't know what that is.' I did not know it was supposed to be from *Among Us*. And she was like, 'You talk like an old white man.' I'm like, 'Who do you think taught me how to speak English? It's old white men.'

Although he faced challenges in the social aspect, these experiences together with his attempt to resist stereotypes of Chinese international students allowed him to come to terms with these differences. To his success, he was even able to form meaningful romantic relationships with

someone from the US. Being able to reflect back and understand the experiences that he faced, he is more able to negotiate and navigate cultural differences to prevent them from being a barrier to professional or academic work in the US.

There is a case where a student's linguistic experiences aligned with the dominant American notion of English proficiency. For example, Kristie did not recount any struggles or concerns when it comes to any form of English, which reflects her family's capital. One of her parents acquired a doctorate from the US and her sibling was already attending college in the US as well.

I didn't really touch Chinese at all in all of my high school. And in terms of English, 'cause I feel like I always just liked to read a lot. And in high school I did more than the average person in terms of academic work.

In this subsection, we saw that students such as Melvin, Yazhu, Kristie, and Becca who grew up acquiring English skills that were in line with the Western culture were comfortable in conversational English. However, there are more factors that come into play when informing their migration decisions. As we will see in this next section, students' future pathways are forged through a compromise of desires and necessities stemming from their various experiences.

### **3rd Theme: Future Pathways: Divergence**

Across all the students, we see nuanced differences in their reasons for leaving China and coming to the US for higher education. All these motivations spurred decisions that led them to converge in the present by bringing all of them to a small liberal arts college. However, this does not imply that their future paths will be similar. In fact, their future aspirations and migration decisions are influenced not only by their current but also by their same past experiences that led them here. In fact, this is in accordance with differential secondary schooling experiences giving

rise to different adjustment experiences as depicted by Ma (2022). As we move beyond temporally static frameworks by considering prior pathways and experiences, we are able to better understand their future trajectories.

Two of the interviewees would like to go to a third country in the future. Continuing our discussion of the four students in the prior section, I start by presenting Becca's future experiences and how they intertwine with the past and present. As someone who acquired a significant understanding of Western culture through the media, her mannerisms and identity were not in line with Chinese cultural norms. Furthermore, as a Chinese international student, she has to cope with and resist stereotypes, which consequently resulted in her history of resisting both American and Chinese culture and identities. As a result, she describes how she wishes to go to a third country, such as Germany. Kristie presents a similar plan, where she feels like a third-culture kid who does not belong either in the US or back in China. Consequently, she turns to the option of leaving to a third country, preferably Northern Europe because,

It's the combination of the best parts of the US and China. It's safe. It has good public transport and you get freedom. So what else do you want? I think it's just everything you could ask for.

Two interviewees' plans include the possibility of returning to China after graduate study in the US, although their reasons for doing so are very different. Yazhu's future aspirations and pathways mirror that of his past. In the previous section, we saw how he gravitated toward Chinese culture and away from American culture. The challenges of navigating both the academic and social structure in the US led him to conform to the Chinese social norms, in which he was well versed. He has successfully navigated schooling in the US, and he knows how to navigate success in graduate school in the future as well, because that is what the norm

prescribes him to do so in order to succeed. He recounts remarkable statistics regarding Chinese international students that provide justification for his actions and future aspirations.

But eventually I'm going to have to get a PhD because the fact is, I saw the statistics two years ago, but of all Chinese international students who return back to China, 95% have a graduate degree. So if I don't get a PhD, there is no competition. I just can't compete. So I have to get a PhD degree.

While the statistics seem blown out of proportion, this statement captures the essence of his perceived experience where he is forced down a certain path because everyone else is doing it and he has no other option. These experiences explain past actions and inform future aspirations. In the past, majority participation in these systems and services where students go to accumulate capital has put him at a disadvantage if he did not participate, forcing him to take part. In the present, he faces a similar looming threat upon graduating, and he feels like he has his back against the wall and will lose the game of life if he does not, again, participate in the same game. Therefore, in the near future, he plans to stay and accumulate capital and graduate credentials in the US before returning home.

A similar, but more complicated framework of thought was evident in Xin's discussion regarding his future pathways. He was already certain and had a strong interest in philosophy, which drove his decision to apply for his high school back in China which had an international curriculum. In order to continue his pursuit of philosophy, he decided to come to the US because he liked the pedagogical style and content. His interest and passion for this discipline have been informing his decisions; he states how "it's predetermined long ago." Xin discusses how he plans to stay in the US for graduate school in order to pursue philosophy in Chinese academia. He illustrated an intricate pathway that he intends to follow where, due to severe restrictions on

Chinese-educated philosophy professors, he intends to get his degree from the US, and then go back home.

[I]f I go back to China with a Philosophy PhD, that doesn't help me at all. I'm just a normal graduate student. [Chinese-educated] philosophy professors] have to [teach] according to the PowerPoints or to the books. And they're supervised. Some [of their]students, when they go to [the professor's] class, if the professor says something that shouldn't be said, they report it to the principal. And the professor would never know which students are the supervisors. So they have to be really careful on what they say and how they behave in the class. But if I go back [with] a title in the US, like a professor or something, and some Chinese university invites me to go back, that's different because the restrictions on me will be less. So that's one of the reasons I will definitely stay in the US for some period of time, before I actually go back to China.

In comparison, Ling's pursuit of law and preference for the US pedagogical style brought her to the US, but her uncertainty about future migration plans stems from the same professional reason that brought her here: her certainty of pursuing law. Since working in this domain can vary drastically across countries and she does not have comparative experiences, her future migration plans are uncertain. She stated, "I haven't really worked, I just worked for an internship, so I haven't really experienced the kind of full picture of the work life in law here."

Several other interviewees plan to stay in the United States, some for work reasons, others because they have come to identify with American culture and values. Pocky does not wish to return to China due to the lack of freedom in the workplace, as well as a lack of focus in her areas of interest in the humanities and social sciences. She is open to other places and is not specifically bound to the US, and plans to engage in graduate studies as her ability in academic English is no barrier. Furthermore, her realization that she feels more comfortable in other social

circles also pushes her decision to migrate outside of China. Another factor that influenced her is her extended family in the US. Her uncle and aunt have both gone to graduate schools in the US, and are working there as well. This was also the initial influence towards studying abroad in the US, and could once again sway her towards professional and graduate work in the US.

Additionally, Swarthmore's reputation and environment where a substantial portion of students attend graduate school also influenced her. She mentions all of these as significant factors in their decision.

Family certainly influenced me but just looking at my uncle and my aunt, they all did PhD. My uncle only finished part of his PhD, but still higher education is quite prevalent in my exposures. And also, part of it is social as well. I think a lot of people at Swarthmore also want to go to higher ed and all this stuff.

Steven is certain of his plan to stay in the US to continue his path as a mathematician. His high achievement in the field informed him early on about this certainty. Additionally, due to his comfort in communication and conversation in the field of mathematics, his anxiety in English is not a factor in this pathway. Furthermore, he describes how he hopes to remain in the US and has been certain of this for quite some time due to his early certainty of pursuing doctoral studies in mathematics. He hopes to continue his graduate studies and work in the US because he prefers the mathematics community in the US.

Melvin's entire background has led up to the idea of him studying abroad in the future. Therefore, his focus and ideologies are more catered towards the US, and he denotes how his personal and cultural values align with America's. Even with the challenges he faced in college regarding cultural adjustments, his reflection and reconciliation assured his certainty of staying in the US at least in the near future. He plans to do so in order to gain status, capital, and economic opportunities.

My goal will be to stay in the US, so not to pursue the career and want, so to get some sort of a status first, which I'm probably going to work in a non-profit sector because my dad has connections in non-profit sector, and he could definitely get someone to sponsor my visa here.

He does hint at the possibility of going back to China in the far future, as he notes how there do exist some people who “share the same values” as him back home.

## 5. Discussion

The goal of this study was to understand the heterogeneous experiences of Chinese international students, and what impacts these experiences across time. The findings across the three themes can be summarized into three categories. Present throughout the data is evidence for

1. the incompatibility between deficit and homogenous frameworks of nationality in capturing sufficient and accurate student narratives,
2. the interdependence of students' past, present, and future experiences and aspirations, and
3. the agency students exhibit in the course of their development.

First, prior theoretical frameworks approach the Chinese international student experience through a deficit and homogenous perspective, which fails to provide a comprehensive and accurate portrayal of their past, present and future choices. Greater socioeconomic status does not necessarily imply that Chinese international students will have more navigational capital than others. Rather, parents' navigational capital along with the social connectedness of these Chinese international communities allowed these students to prepare for study abroad (Yosso, 2005). All of the students interviewed for this study come from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. They did not need to have high status or wealth to know how to navigate higher education abroad. Regardless of their status, they were situated in social circles and communities where they could easily learn the implicit rules and norms relating to their child's future success. The cultural capital model does not capture alternative means outside of wealth and status through which families and students can gain access to knowledge that helps them succeed. Additionally, gender becomes a differentiating factor in migration decisions. For example, although Melvin, Yazhu, Kristie, and Becca all grew up with very Western English and conversational English compatibility with the US culture, their migration plans differ. Melvin and Yazhu are more



focused on the dichotomy between China and US, and the reasons are very career and/or utility oriented. On the other hand, Kristie and Becca emphasize the cultural aspects in presenting their motivations for not returning to China. Perhaps in a male favoring society, Melvin's and Yazhu's gender roles in accordance with sociocultural norms were not salient to them in making this migratory decision. On the other hand, to someone such as Becca, gender is very salient as it forms the basis of much of the resistance that she exhibited. Our observation of this difference stems from students' backgrounds and experiences in identity formulation, which only surface when we consider past experiences. Furthermore, viewing challenges in conversational English from a deficit perspective not only fails to consider the specific contexts but also inaccurately implies that those without challenges in conversational English would fit in. In fact, the narratives contradict this perspective. Although Steven and Pocky both had challenges in conversational English, this was no barrier to their plans to stay, because their domain-specific proficiency in academic English did not hinder their motivations to stay. However, on the other hand, both Kristie and Becca did not feel like they belong in the US although their conversational English is much in line with the Western culture. Therefore, language proficiency can have different implications depending on future aspirations, cultural interactions, and experiences. In summary, deficit perspectives and homogenous frameworks are not useful in representing and understanding the lived experiences of Chinese international students.

Secondly, from a temporal perspective, the static perspective of analysis of previous research methods fails to consider the multifaceted and dynamic nature of student experiences. In contrast to the literature, we see more nuanced differences in migration experiences and motivations than just professional, sociocultural, and personal factors. Motivations, attitudes, and experiences change over time, as we saw with Melvin and Becca. By looking only at one point in time, we discard these significant experiences and motivations. Their attitudes and manner in

which they exhibit agency to develop their own sense of self as third culture kids change and shift as they engage in varying degrees with multiple cultural contexts. Furthermore, by considering multiple time points, we go beyond the binary migration outcome of staying in the US or going back home. As Wu & Wikes (2017) have suggested, there are alternative possibilities other than just staying in the US or going back to China, including moving to a third country, as we saw with Becca and Kristie, or having open options due to uncertainties, as evidenced by Ling and Melvin's narratives. By incorporating the possibility of open migration plans into the framework of international student migration, the experiences of these students can be captured. However, even this updated framework does not consider the temporal factor in students' decisions. It does not account for the possibility of future migration plans characterized by both staying in the US and going back to China as we see in the data. In this sense, the framework should parallel the dynamic framework used to analyze students' prior experiences. As evident in the student narratives, some of them plan to stay in the US in the immediate future, and then go back to China or are uncertain regarding the distant future. It is substantial to consider the immediate and distant futures in students' intentions because as we saw with Xin and Yazhu, their current experiences and plans for the immediate future are borne out of their aspirations for the distant future.

Finally, viewing students as passive agents does not properly reflect the degree of agency that they have. As evident in Becca, Melvin, Steven, and Kristie's narratives, students exhibit agency by resisting the imposition of identities that are imposed on them as a result of their Chinese international status, gender, or other defining characteristics. They exhibit agency in the service of formulating one's own identity, and in doing so, resist influences and factors that hinder such development. Some students will go to great lengths to achieve their goals. Xin came to the US because he wants to go back home and engage in Chinese academia in Philosophy.

However, in order to do so, he needs to circumvent and navigate both US and Chinese academic institutional structures properly to gain agency in his desired profession. The vast number of paths that students can take to achieve their goals gives rise to variations that make it impossible to clearly predict their futures and past experiences. As we have seen, although Pocky, Yazhu, and Xin had the same reasons for leaving, their motivations for these reasons were different. Yazhu had not paved her future yet, Pocky did not want to return because her interests were unsupported, and Xin already knew he wanted to pursue philosophy back home and came to the US as a means to achieve this goal. Therefore, they came for different reasons and will take different pathways when they leave, but they are currently passing through the common experience of Swarthmore. Different forms and degrees of agency that students exhibit constitute differential resistance toward different cultural norms. Language experiences in schooling and social interactions include how the type of linguistic capital they acquired affects their comfort and proficiency in socialization and academia. This, in turn, impacts how and with whom they choose to socialize, impacting their sense of self-perception and behavior.

Each of the three findings provides implications for future studies in understanding the experiences of international students. From these findings, I advocate for:

1. shifting away from deficit perspectives and towards culturally responsive frameworks,
2. moving beyond temporally static frameworks by implementing longitudinal designs, and
3. rejecting passive frameworks by recognizing student agency.

First, in order to shift away from the deficit perspectives of international students, we should acknowledge the navigational capital (Yosso, 2005) that Chinese international communities have. We move past the framework that those from lower socioeconomic statuses do not possess the essential skills and capital to move up the social ladder. These findings urge us to consider more applicable theoretical frameworks in considering international student

experiences that are borne out of the engagement and negotiation with a variety of sociocultural contexts.

As discussed before, due to the high social connectedness among Chinese international communities, certain frameworks such as Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital and Lareau's idea of concerted cultivation may not apply (Lareau, 2014; Meng et al., 2017). Social class is no longer the central factor in social mobility and reproduction. Frameworks that apply homogeneously across a demographic socioeconomic status become difficult to apply, especially for third-culture kids who leave their sociocultural contexts and exercise their agency in response to novel environments. This implies a need to consider the social circles in which students are situated as a significant factor in examining the navigational capital that these communities possess (Yosso, 2005). By considering students as embodying their own cultural identities and experiences, we acknowledge the intersectionality and simultaneity/multiplicity of identities that rise from the multiple sociocultural contexts in which Chinese internationals engage.

Subsequently, by moving beyond temporally static frameworks, we acknowledge the existing interplay between past, current, and future experiences. Survey data alone cannot fully capture the narratives and pathways of Chinese international students. The very nature of the unique and intentional experiences of Chinese international students rose out of their intersectionality and agency in defining themselves. This presents a challenge in developing or analyzing their experiences using a homogenous theoretical framework. As a result, the survey methodology is not sufficient due to our inadequate theoretical framework, because specific questions set by the researcher without further elaboration would filter their experiences. However, this is potentially costly and could present multifaceted challenges in implementation.

Finally, through rejecting passive frameworks and recognizing student agency, we depict a more humanistic picture of their experiences and cater more towards international student

needs. In recognition of agency, we also become cognizant of their varying participation in multiple social contexts and gain a better understanding of their narratives through consideration of the intersectionality in which they are situated.

There is apparent danger in assuming that all nationalities are heterogeneous. Perhaps some demographics are very streamlined, resulting in very similar experiences across their pasts, present, and future. As such may be the case, these findings and implications hold for this subset of international students, and maybe even only for Chinese international students at liberal arts colleges.

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## Appendix A

# SWARTHMORE

### SECONDARY EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Where did you attend secondary school? (From grades 6 through 12) Select all that apply.

- Chinese Schools with National Curriculum for Gao Kao
- Chinese Schools with International Curriculum (American AP, International Baccalaureate, British A-Levels, IGCSEs)
- US Public Schools
- US Private Schools
- Other: Please Specify

What were your favorite subject(s) in secondary school?  
Check all that apply.

- English
- Chinese
- Mathematics
- Sciences
- History/social studies
- Literature
- Arts

How well did you do in high school?

- Very well - all A's
- Fairly well - A's and B's
- Average - A's, B's, C's

## What factors influenced your high school success?

	Strong positive influence	Moderate positive influence	No influence	Negative influence	Strong negative influence
Family expectations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Peer expectations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Desire to learn	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Desire to go to best college	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Desire to study abroad	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How many days of a week did you spent time outside of school on academic preparation for classes in high school?

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7

How many days a week did you spent time outside of school on English language preparation in high school?

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7

## COLLEGE CHOICE

How many other countries have you lived in (1 month or longer) other than the U.S. and China?

- None
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4 or more

How many colleges did you apply to?

Did you apply only to colleges in the US?

- Yes
- No

Where else did you apply to college besides the US?

What type of colleges did you apply to in the US? Select all that apply.



- Liberal Arts
- Public and State Universities
- Private Universities

How important were the following factors in choosing to study abroad?

	Not important	Slightly Important	Somewhat important	Important	Very important
Dislike of Chinese Higher Education / Secondary Education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
US Credentials for employment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
More academic freedom in the US	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reputation of higher educational institutions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parents' influence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Peer influence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teacher suggestions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Course of study not available in China	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Was Swarthmore College your first choice?

- Yes
- No

Where was your first choice?

Why did you not go to your first choice college? Select all that apply.

- Changed your mind
- Didn't gain admission
- Financial reasons
- Other: Please Specify

What were the most important reasons for attending Swarthmore?

	Not Important	Slightly Important	Somewhat important	Important	Very Important
Liberal arts curriculum	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Academics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Small School	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ranking and Selectivity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Financial Aid	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parent's influence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Knew other students who attended	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## LANGUAGE EXPERIENCES

Where did you learn English? Check all that apply.

- Home
- Tutoring
- School

Other: Please Specify

What was the main language of instruction in your secondary school?

- English
- Chinese
- A blend of both
- Other: Please Specify

What is your primary language of interaction at home?

- English
- Chinese
- A blend of both
- Other

What was the main language of interaction with your peers during Secondary School?

- English
- Chinese
- A blend of both
- Other: Please Specify

How confident do you currently feel carrying out conversations in colloquial American English?

- |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Not Confident         | Slightly Confident    | Somewhat Confident    | Confident             | Very Confident        |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

How confident do you currently feel carrying out academic work in English?

Not Confident   Slightly Confident   Somewhat Confident   Confident   Very Confident

## ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES IN COLLEGE

To what extent do you feel that your secondary education prepared you for college?

Not prepared   Slightly Prepared   Somewhat prepared   Prepared   Very Prepared

Please select your intended major(s) at the START of your undergraduate studies.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Applied Mathematics        | <input type="checkbox"/> Global Studies                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Arabic                     | <input type="checkbox"/> History                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Interpretation Theory             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art History                | <input type="checkbox"/> Islamic Studies                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asian Studies              | <input type="checkbox"/> Japanese                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Astronomy                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Latin American and Latino Studies |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Biology                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Linguistics                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black Studies              | <input type="checkbox"/> Literatures in Translation        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chemistry and Biochemistry | <input type="checkbox"/> Medieval Studies                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chinese                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Music                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Classics                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Neuroscience                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cognitive Science          | <input type="checkbox"/> Peace and Conflict Studies        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Comparative Literature     | <input type="checkbox"/> Philosophy                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Computer Science           | <input type="checkbox"/> Physics                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dance                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Political Science                 |

- Economics
- Educational Studies
- Engineering
- English Literature
- Environmental Studies
- Film and Media Studies
- French and Francophone Studies
- Gender and Sexuality Studies
- German Studies
- 

- Psychology
- Pure Mathematics
- Religion
- Russian
- Sociology and Anthropology
- Spanish
- Statistics
- Theater

Other: Please Specify

How important were the following factors in deciding your INTENDED choice of major?

	Not Important	Slightly Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
Family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employability abroad	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employability back home	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Interest	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Graduate School / Further Studies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Is/Are your current major(s) the same as your intended major at the START of your undergraduate studies?

- Yes
- No

## What major(s) did you change to or end up with?

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Applied Mathematics            | <input type="checkbox"/> Global Studies  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Arabic                         | <input type="checkbox"/> History   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Interpretation Theory   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art History                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Islamic Studies   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asian Studies                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Japanese  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Astronomy                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Latin American and Latino Studies   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Biology                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Linguistics   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black Studies                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Literatures in Translation  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chemistry and Biochemistry     | <input type="checkbox"/> Medieval Studies  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chinese                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Music   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Classics                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Neuroscience  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cognitive Science              | <input type="checkbox"/> Peace and Conflict Studies  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Comparative Literature         | <input type="checkbox"/> Philosophy  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Computer Science               | <input type="checkbox"/> Physics   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dance                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Political Science   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Economics                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Psychology  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Educational Studies            | <input type="checkbox"/> Pure Mathematics  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> English Literature             | <input type="checkbox"/> Russian   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Studies          | <input type="checkbox"/> Sociology and Anthropology  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Film and Media Studies         | <input type="checkbox"/> Spanish   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> French and Francophone Studies | <input type="checkbox"/> Statistics  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gender and Sexuality Studies   | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> German Studies                 | Other: Please Specify  |
| <input type="checkbox"/>                                | <input type="checkbox"/> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 300px; height: 25px; display: inline-block;"></div> |

## How important were the following factors in this change?

	Not Important	Slightly Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
Family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Swarthmore Friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employability abroad	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Not Important	Slightly Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
Employability back home	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Interest	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Academic Experiences at Swarthmore	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Graduate School / Further Studies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other: Please Specify. Type "none" if not applicable. <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## **SOCIAL EXPERIENCES IN COLLEGE**

Would you describe your friends as:

- Mostly Chinese
- Mostly international
- Mostly American born Chinese
- Mostly American born not Chinese
- Other: Please Specify

To what extent do you feel that you feel socially connected to the campus community?

- Not Connected      Slightly Connected      Somewhat Connected      Connected      Very Connected
- 

How frequently do you communicate with people back home while you are abroad?

	Not Frequent	Slightly Frequent	Somewhat Frequent	Frequent	Very Frequent
Family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
OthersOther: Please Specify. Type "none" if not applicable.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="text"/>					

## MIGRATION PLANS

Do you plan to attend graduate school in the next 5 years?

- Yes  
 No

In what field do you plan to pursue graduate studies?

Do you plan to stay in the US post undergrad, return back to China, or stay in a different country?

- Stay in the US  
 Return to China  
 Travel to another country

When do you plan or expect to return home?

- Immediately after undergraduate / graduate studies



- After 1-3 years of OPT employment after undergraduate / graduate studies
- After more than 3 years post undergraduate / graduate studies
- Not in the foreseeable future

How important are the following factors in influencing your plans to stay in the US, return home, or move to a different country altogether?

	Not Important	Slightly Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
Job opportunities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social and romantic ties	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sociocultural Environment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Political Climate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other: Please Specify. Type "none" if not applicable.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input style="width: 150px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>					

What career path do you see yourself following? Or - list 1-3 careers you can see yourself pursuing after college or graduate school.

## BACKGROUND DEMOGRAPHICS

Please select your HIGH SCHOOL graduation year.

Please select your COLLEGE graduation year.

Please select your gender.

What is your father's highest level of education?

What is your mother's highest level of education?

How many siblings do you have?

What is your estimated total household income in US dollars?

- 0 -20,000
- 20,000-40,000
- 40,000-60,000
- 60,000-80,000
- 80,000-100,000
- 100,000 and above

To what extent is your undergraduate education funded by the following sources?

	Not funded	Slightly Funded	Somewhat Funded	Funded	Very funded
Scholarships from home	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Financial aid/scholarship from Swarthmore	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Personal Savings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Has any one of your family members (extended or immediate) had an international education in the past? (An international education consists of any form of education outside of their country of citizenship)

- Yes
- No

Please describe the country in which they acquired an international education.

## Appendix B

### Interview questions

#### Academic Preparation & Transition

1. Where did you attend secondary school? How did you make the decision to attend that school?
2. What was the curriculum offered at your secondary school(s)?
  - a. How well did this help you prepare for college?
  - b. What was the language of instruction at your high school?
    - i. How well prepared did you feel in English to take on college academics?
3. Why did you choose to go to college abroad?
  - a. What were your goals and career aspirations?
  - b. Have they changed over time?
  - c. What were your expectations about returning to China? Did your experiences abroad change these expectations?
4. How did you prepare for applying to college?
  - a. What tests did you take? How did you prepare for them?
    - i. Disciplinary Tests
      1. AP and IB
    - ii. Aptitude Tests
      1. SAT and ACT
    - iii. English Test Prep
      1. TOEFL and IELTS
  - b. Application essays
  - c. Extracurricular activities
  - d. Letters of Recommendations
  - e. What role did your parents play in the application process?
    - i. Parents' financial support
    - ii. Parents' academic support
  - f. What role did your school play in the application process?
  - g. What role did your friends play in the application process?
5. What did you take into consideration when deciding where to apply? How did these factors influence your decision?
  - a. Parents' influence
  - b. Peer influence
  - c. Financial support
  - d. Ranking and Prestige
  - e. Available Programs
6. How are liberal arts colleges perceived back in China among your peers and parents?
7. How did you find out about Swarthmore and why did you choose it?

8. What did you plan to study before you came?
  - a. Why was that your goal?
  - b. Has that changed? Why or why not?

#### Sociocultural Preparation & Transition

9. How would you describe your time here at Swarthmore?
  - a. How would you describe your friendships/friendship groups?
  - b. How would you characterize your participation in extracurricular activities or campus events? Or organizations
10. What made it easy for you to adapt to college? What challenges did you face?
  - a. Did you experience any significant cultural differences during your studies in the U.S.?
  - b. How often do you keep in touch with people back home while you are abroad?
    - i. How often do you go back home?
11. How would you characterize your ability to carry out conversations in colloquial American english?

#### Future Aspirations & Migration Intentions

12. What do you intend to do or where do you intend to go after your undergraduate studies?
  - a. What do you think has influenced those plans? (Gender and cultural expectations / Parents' expectations / Socioeconomic status)
  - b. Can you see yourself living in the U.S. after you graduate?
    - i. Why? (Gender and cultural expectations / Parents' expectations / Socioeconomic status)
13. What are your long term CAREER ASPIRATIONS? Have they changed since high school and the start of college? Why or why not?
14. Is there anything else you would like to share?