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12 International Students in Times of Corona in the United States

A Duoethnography of Foreignness

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has become a representation of different countries and cultures. In the U.S., it seemed to assert American elitism and white supremacy. The "go back to your country" trope became rampant, and Asians in the U.S. scrambled to ensure their health and safety both from the virus and from the social response it unleashed. Higher education was profoundly affected by COVID-19 and associated challenges. This volume has likely addressed the educational, financial, and political ramifications of COVID-19 on higher education. However, missing from the conversation are stories representing experiences of internationals. This chapter is a duoethnography about foreignness, demonstrating how COVID-19 in the U.S. perpetuated a postcolonial ideology that impacts the experiences of those deemed foreign by western standards. We use our lived experiences and narrative to illustrate how COVID-19 did not create this sense of foreignness, but intensified its presence and effects.

Keywords

international students; belonging; foreignness; duoethnography; postcolonialism; neo-racism

Introduction

As the Coronavirus and associated COVID-19 spread globally, the world went into a frenzy. The pandemic, and the response to it, have become cultural phenomena (Mansouri, 2020) not only because COVID-19 inspired a plethora of online memes (Romano, 2020) but also because it became a representation of different countries and cultures. In the U.S., it asserted American elitism, especially in its earlier stages; outrage was directed towards China, first for their lack of immediate response (Kuo, 2020), then for what was seen as excessive Draconian measures to curb the spread (Page, 2020). Stories

of discrimination, harassment, and violence towards Asians emerged in the media (Zho, 2020). The "go back to your country" trope became rampant (Escobar, 2020), and Asians in the U.S. scrambled to ensure their health and safety both from the virus and from the social response it unleashed.

Higher education was profoundly affected by COVID-19 and associated challenges. Students departed, demanding tuition refunds, and questioning their return in the fall (Dickler, 2020). Many colleges and universities are struggling financially and facing the possibility of closure, merger, or bankruptcy (Carey, 2020). This volume has likely addressed the educational, financial, and political ramifications of COVID-19 on higher education. However, missing from the conversation are stories representing experiences of internationals. As a cultural artifact, COVID-19 resulted in two phenomena. The first is hostility towards those who appeared Asian, including and mainly international students—this includes the numerous news stories about anti-Asian prejudice. The second phenomenon is harder to pinpoint: the pandemic and the response to it from individuals, groups, and governments were tools for western elitism to reassert its dominance, reminding all of us internationals in the U.S. that we are foreign. This chapter is a duoethnography about foreignness. It is about being colonized and pushed into western ways of thought. Our goal is to demonstrate how COVID-19 in the U.S. perpetuated a postcolonial ideology that has impacted and will continue to impact the experiences of those deemed foreign by western standards. COVID-19 did not create this sense of foreignness. It did, however, intensify its presence and effects.

Analytical Framework

Because of the personal nature of this duoethnography, we were intentional about how we approached the data to uncover new insights of which we may not have been aware. For that purpose, we adopted postcolonialism and neo-racism as analytical frameworks. The development of postcolonial studies is largely attributed to the work of Edward Said on Orientalism, a construct premised on positioning a "fundamentally ontological and epistemological distinction…between 'the orient' and 'the occident'" (Said, 1978, p. 2). Orientalism creates and authorizes a dichotomous distinction between being Occident and of being Orient leading to the enactment of hierarchical binaries of civilized/savage, rational/nonrational, developed/undeveloped (Prasad, 1997; Said, 1978). This conceptual maneuver justifies western colonialism as a moral obligation to civilize inferior non-westerners and essentializes the dominance of western thoughts. Occidentalism becomes the ambivalent production of "that otherness which is at once an object of desire and derision" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 67). Although western entities perceive the East as inferior and undesirable, westerners simultaneously desire Easterners' knowledge without allowing them to tell their own stories (Bhabha, 1994; Spivak, 1988). Further, esterners tell stories about the East that do not represent Eastern historical truths (Said, 1978). Centering and elevating the west as the default encourages mimicry of their western colonizers: "*almost the*

same, but not quite… almost the same, but not white" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 89, italics in the original).

Postcolonialism deconstructs western hegemony that subjugates the colonized economically, culturally, and ideologically (Christophers, 2007; Iwowo, 2014) and actively disrupts the Occident/Orient unbalanced binary. Postcolonialism for analyzing the data in this project meant that we asked the data fundamental epistemological and ontological questions to make meaning out of the lived narratives, bringing the duality of East and west to the forefront, leading us to question whether the way we interpret a phenomenon is entrenched in western-washed colonial remnants that make Eastern realities—our realities—inapplicable and irrelevant. Postcolonialism allowed us to go back in our analysis to the basics: why do we believe what we believe?

Racism in contemporary society is racism without races (Balibar, 2007; Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991). The definition of race itself varies based on the perspective of a particular discipline. Biologists, for example, often approach race from an essentialist perspective, making race fixed and attributed to physical phenotype, while Social scientists and researchers adopt a socially constructed definition of race that foregrounds the ways in which people make meaning of race and interact within and across racial categories (Hochman, 2021; Wagner et al., 2017). Racism, thus, holds numerous meanings as to how it is experienced, observed, and perpetuated (Banton, 2015). Globally, the connection between race/racism and culture/multiculturalism is one that has been increasingly highlighted (Modood, 2011), suggesting that elements beyond observed characteristics and interactions construct interactions across races (Modood, 1997, 2005a, 2005b). The overarching theme of *neo*-racism is no longer based on biological differences, but on nationality, language, and culture (Balibar, 2007; Lee & Rice, 2007). The underlying principle of the utility of "culture" is Janus-faced flexibility: the universality of culture can be deployed as a signifier for inclusion, while at the same time cultural difference can get escalated to the point of irreconcilable divergence, setting solid grounds for separation, discrimination, and exclusion (Rangan & Chow, 2016).

In the contemporary political climate of the U.S., a combination of multiculturalism and ethnic foundationalism has been on the rise during the last decade. Specifically, there has been a tendency to replace the term "race" with aspects of cultural diversity such as nationality, cultural heritage, language, lifestyle, behavior, and more, as a way of avoiding "race" and its biological and eugenic connotations (Balibar, 2007). However, the utility of cultural diversity provides racism with highly generative, sophisticated, and flexible new forms to persist in contemporary society. Seeing how neo-racism may be implicated in the study of foreignness allows us in our analysis to break the artificial boundaries of race, ethnicity, nationality, and culture. In a neo-racism framework, one does not need to be of the dominant race (i.e., white) to display prejudice against others and to hold others to the westernized standards of being and knowing. A neo-racism perspective allows us to analyze the data outside of biological and phenotypic manifestations of race, to

broaden our awareness as racialized, cultured, and internationalized beings. The combination of postcolonialism and neo-racism provides an opportunity to look at racial, ethnic, and cultural experiences through a lens that is not western-centric, but that acknowledges the role that systemic manifestations of western dominance motivate our views of culture vis-à-vis experiences of foreignness triggered by a large-scale global event.

Literature Review

Institutions of higher education in the U.S. have increased their efforts to recruit international students as part of an overall move towards globalization in higher education. The Institute for International Education (IIE) indicates that over 1 million international students studied in the U.S. in the 2019–2020 academic year (5.5% of total enrollment; IIE, 2017, 2020). Although the COVID-19 pandemic coincided with a 1.8% decrease in international student numbers, it remains larger than that recorded in the 2016–2017 academic year. The overwhelming field of study for international students was science, technology, engineering, and math in 2019, followed by business and management and the social sciences. The international student population is a growing demographic despite the restrictions that have been imposed on international travel and education. In 2020, the top three places of origin for international students were China (34.7% of total), India (10.9%), and South Korea (5.7% of total). In the past three years, institutions have witnessed a decline in new international student enrollment due to obstacles related to procuring visas, and competition from other countries such as Canada, China, and Australia (NAFSA, 2020; Redden, 2018, 2019), not to mention shifts in the sociopolitical climate in the U.S. which presented anti-immigration rhetoric and policies under the Trump administration (Burmila, 2019; Dreid, 2016; Patel, 2018). And yet, the U.S. has historically hosted the largest proportion of global students. In 2016, a report from IIE indicates that the majority of students who study abroad globally come to the U.S. (25%) followed by the United Kingdom (12%), China (10%), France (8%), Australia (7%), Russia (7%), Canada (6%), and Germany (6%). As for U.S. students, in 2018–2019, it was estimated that over 347 thousand U.S. students studied abroad, the majority of whom studied in Europe (193,422), Latin America and the Caribbean (47,954), and Asia (40,602). The top nation destinations for U.S. students studying abroad are the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, Mexico, and France. The majority of these students are white (69% in 2019) followed by Hispanics (11%), Asians (9%), and Black or Africa American (6.4%).

A substantial body of literature pertaining to international students in American postsecondary institutions has historically emphasized the various perceived deficits that international students face as they adapt to social and academic life, often neglecting the resilience, motivation, and capability of this pool of students (de Wit, 2020; Shaheen, 2019). Regardless of the perspective on the source and perpetuating factors, the reality remains that international

students face difficulties in classroom curricular, co-curricular, and social engagement. For example, faculty often misunderstand and misinterpret the engagement in classroom settings of international students, attributing silence as a sign of disinterest and incompetence when it might stem from a difference in cultural attitudes towards student-teacher interactions (Bjork et al., 2020; Wekullo, 2019). International students—particularly those from Asian and Middle Eastern countries—face an unwelcoming college campus climate marked by well-documented hostility and discrimination (e.g., Azim & Happel-Parkins, 2019; Quinton, 2019; Yeo et al., 2019). It is important to note that "international student" is a legally defined category of students who are not U.S. citizens or permanent residents (NAFSA, 2020), and yet international students hold multiple social identities that color their experiences. Notably, the top countries from which international students hail (China, India, and South Korea) are not majority-white nations. (Hackett et al., 2015; IIE, 2020). When international students express opinions that differ from mainstream white cultural beliefs, U.S. nationals sometimes perceive the American sociocultural system to be under threat (Suspitsyna & Shalka, 2019). The state of international students in the U.S. is related to dominant social systems, motivated by racism and xenophobia.

Research Method

Duoethnography is a research methodology in which two authors use their experiences to explore and explain a shared phenomenon (Norris & Sawyer, 2012). In a duoethnography, the researchers are equal partners. They become the subjects and instruments. Their narratives become data (Breault, 2016). We chose duoethnography to legitimize storytelling as a way of understanding social issues. We have felt stifled—our stories were viewed as "too unique" or "ungeneralizable." Our ways of thinking have been uninvited in classrooms, our peers and professors have micro-aggressed us, and we have felt foreign. It is our shared sense of foreignness that brought this duoethnography together. Duoethnograpahy uses our similarities and differences to make more significant meaning, broader than a single autoethnography could. Therefore, duoethnography needs to be conducted intentionally and responsibly (Ashlee & Quaye, 2020; Breault, 2016).

Our methodological design was based on the tenets defined by Norris and Sawyer (2012), as well as previous scholars who used duoethnography in the higher education setting (e.g., Ashlee & Quaye, 2020; Hummel & Toyosaki, 2015; Snipes & LePeau, 2017). Duoethnography is dialogical where "the voices of each researcher are made explicit throughout the narrative" (Breault, 2016, p. 778), resisting metanarratives—the assumption that there is a single version of someone's story (Norris & Sawyer, 2012), and prioritizing differences. Duoethnography relies on telling and retelling stories while resisting supporting a universal truth (Ashlee & Quaye, 2020; Breault, 2016; Norris & Sawyer, 2012). In our data collection, analysis, and presentation, we

ensured that both our voices occupy adequate space and time. The narrative is not just the stories we share about ourselves but also how we responded to each other. We looked for points of connection and reflected on points of departure. Our stories are presented in their raw forms to demonstrate the messiness of our experiences. Most importantly, duoethnography requires trust. We could not have completed this project without trusting each other with our stories, our time, and our deepest thoughts.

Data Collection and Analysis

During our first meeting about this project, we talked via Zoom about our vision for this work, the frameworks we want to use, and our hopes and fears going into the research process. Following Ashlee and Quaye's (2020) example, we each wrote narrative responses to two questions: (1) What does it mean to be Chinese or Syrian in the U.S.? and (2) do I belong here? We kept the questions broad to capture different ways of reflecting and writing, Musbah being more narrative and Wu more analytical. We read each other's narratives and made written comments before the second meeting. During the second Zoom meeting, we reflected on the process of writing and asked clarifying questions. We began to recognize and discuss commonalities and differences that emerged. After the second meeting, we read the transcripts and/or listened to the audio while taking notes and jottings to capture our immediate reactions (See Jones et al., 2014). We then came up with shared ideas that stood out in the data that included feelings we experienced (e.g., sadness, anger, and frustration), incidents we encountered (e.g., microaggressions, discrimination, and hostility), and memories we shared (e.g., interactions we had before the pandemic). These shared ideas functioned as open codes (See Corbin and Strauss, 2008) which we then continued to refine by reading and re-reading the transcripts. We repeated this process one more time by reading the transcripts (or listening to the audio) and refining our thematic findings. In the next meeting, our goal was to distill our open codes into thematic clusters which became the three themes we present below. The themes revolved around the personal implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, the political violence that accompanied the pandemic and its development, and the omnipresent nature of prejudice that we encountered long before the pandemic started.

The duoethnographic approach was iterative—we allowed our stories, thoughts, and reflections to guide the conversations, which strengthened our mutual trust. Adhering to the tenets of duoethnography, we maintained the connection with the central phenomenon, that is feelings of foreignness in times of COVID-19. It was perhaps the most challenging aspect of data collection and analysis. We both know much about foreignness as something we have experienced our entire lives. Nevertheless, we needed to focus on this particular historical moment. This methodology was useful because it allowed us to start with feelings we know we felt during the pandemic but were not sure what they meant. As a result, we emerged from the data collection analysis

with a deeper understanding of ourselves and the world around us. Before we present the findings of the analysis, we want to share with the reader excerpts from our written reflections.

Narratives

Do I belong in Syria? Do I belong in the U.S.? Do I belong to the Academy? Belonging feels so amorphous and unquantifiable. If I say that I feel that I belong in the U.S., does that mean I have the right to claim the benefits of being in the U.S.? When I start to feel like "I belong," the fact remains that, technically, I don't. What good is it to feel belonging if I am at risk of being hauled back on a plane at any given moment? I am not American, but there is something about this place that draws me. Something compels me to be here. Typically, one of the first remarks that people make is: "wow your English is so good! You don't even have an accent!" It doesn't bother me that much—having an accent is not a bad thing. But people expect people like me to sound different. How could it be that I speak perfect English? They often ask if we spoke English at home, which we didn't. My story with the language has everything to do with belonging. I wanted to be prepared not only to succeed in the U.S. but also to blend in. This blending in is the biggest mind (expletive). To me, part of belonging is not being seen as foreign, to blend in. But people will always see me as foreign. My immigration status becomes a form of "small talk" in gatherings. I ask myself, what is the threshold of years required for one to be considered equal to those who were born here? Being born somewhere else is beyond my control. That can never change. Therefore, I will never be enough. Enoughness seems to mean being purely and unequivocally American. I feel trapped between a Syria that would not recognize me and an America that will forever see me as foreign

—Musbah

I am from China. I position myself at an in-between angle, influenced by the amalgamation of Confucianism and western culture. I am a transnational individual who has felt at home in Oregon, the States, and Hefei, China. I am here, pursuing a Ph.D. degree in Higher Education and Student Affairs at Ohio State for a reason, that is social justice. However, the question of "Do I really belong here?" has constantly been hovering over me since the very beginning. By here, I mean any spaces in the States, including classrooms, offices, local communities. The responses to the questions might be full of ambiguity or merely negative. It seems self-contradictory by saying that I feel a sense of being at home in Oregon while articulating a sense of alienation wherever I am. The reason is that I am always reminded that I am a foreigner; I don't belong to any spaces that are supposed to belong to Americans and other white international students. After having a glance at me entering a space, some people instantly and subconsciously treat me with a certain attitude, manifested in eye contacts, speech patterns, and physical distances

they keep from me. When I disrupt westerners' imagination for Chinese people influenced by the U.S. propaganda, living my life in an 'assertive' way and being very vocal about my opinions, which western society values, I evoke criticism for not conforming to westerners' stereotypical images of Chinese women as feminine and submissive. A more explicit manifestation of the reminder that I don't belong is indicated in an insensitive statement from a white woman, "Where did you live in China? You need to find your roots," following my expression of feelings of belonging to Oregon. So, being a Chinese woman in the States means that living my life can evoke irrational contempt and hatred, and that my feelings are subject to be defined by privileged American people.

—Wu

Findings

The data we collected in our duoethnography through written narratives and recorded discussions demonstrated that our experiences as international students before and amidst the COVID-19 pandemic are similar yet very divergent based on our other identities and experiences. Musbah, a Middle Eastern man in his late twenties, and Wu, a Chinese woman in her thirties. In the data emerged three thematic findings. First, COVID-19 and the response to it from government, groups, and individuals personally affected us in different ways. Second, we saw COVID-19 as a means of enacting a xenophobic social and political agenda. Third, our experience of the pandemic did not surprise us but was a reflection of broader issues we saw and experienced.

COVID-19 and the Response to It Are Personal

COVID-19 affected everyone who fell ill, lost loved ones, or lost a job. For us, the pandemic had deep emotional and personal connotations that extended to our presence in the U.S. and experiences as internationals. Wu, in particular, felt more on edge in public. She said, "I try my best not to go out during this time as I am fearful of any potential harassment I might encounter once I show up in public spaces." Even when doing something as simple and mundane as buying groceries, Wu felt the need "not to speak in Chinese and not to let people figure out my nationality based on accent." Musbah did not describe similar anxiety. During our discussions, Musbah reflected on how Wu's Chinese background was particularly salient in this example, while Musbah "felt off the hook" when navigating a public space because his presence did not feel like a risk to onlookers. In response to Wu's story, Musbah said

> When people look at me, they see foreign, but in this instance, they see the *right* type of foreigner… For Wu, it seemed like, in times of COVID-19 she felt like a target. We have the same citizenship status… But she is an Asian woman, and I am a White-passing man. That makes a huge difference.

COVID-19 pandemic also affected Wu's connection with the Chinese community, the same community she had felt isolated from. Wu talked about how the Chinese student community banded together using an "emergency support group on WeChat" the purpose of which was to share urgent information. The group's creators included this guidance, "In a state of emergency, please call 911 first and then share location to the group chat so that any group members are aware of the occurrence of an emergency and get to the location. Let's stick together!."

In making sense of how this group brought Wu a sense of solidarity with the Chinese community, Wu realized that "when encountering racist, xenophobic harassment, violence, we cannot fully rely on schools, police, or any other authorities and the safe way to protect ourselves is to band together and rely on one another." Both of us had felt foreign before the context of COVID-19, both within our communities and with the larger American society. Nevertheless, the pandemic intensified and morphed our feelings of lack of belonging differently based on our national, racial, and ethnic identities.

Waves of Political Violence amidst COVID-19

The omnipresence of xenophobic attitudes could be seen in political responses to the pandemic and its ramifications. For example, soon after the pandemic outbreak, the Trump administration issued the Proclamation on the Suspension of Entry as Nonimmigrants of Certain Students and Researchers from the People's Republic of China. For Wu, this proclamation

> pulled me into an anxiety whirl where I know I am viewed by U.S. society as outsiders and as not rightfully belonging. Being a Chinese person in the States at this time means that our lives can be recklessly discarded.

For Wu, references to COVID-19 as the China virus by government officials, choosing to halt travels from China and not Europe even when Europe was showing more severe infection rates, demonizing the Chinese government for its response to the pandemic as unnecessarily draconian, and announcing the Proclamation collectively were:

> a striking mirror of … history in the late 19th century and early 20th century, where Chinese people in the States were treated as medical scapegoats and discriminatory laws were designed to expel those already in the States and to discourage other Chinese people from immigrating to the States…Being a Chinese person in the States one hundred years ago meant that they were held responsible for any mishaps in general as a result of being perceived as a filthy menace to white civility.

Musbah, who was unaware of many of the things that Wu shared about the history of discrimination against Chinese people, expressed a sense of guilt

reflecting that "if I really cared about solidarity, I would have known this happened. Because I am not from China, I think this isn't a priority. That's why I feel guilty. I don't do what I preach." Our dialogue was crucial for unpacking the power dynamic that exists between us due to the identities we hold. Yet, our mutual rapport allowed us to be honest and reflective. In response to Musbah's feelings of guilt, Wu said, "you were not aware of how personal it can get for Asians, especially for Chinese people when it comes to this pandemic…This made me think about the meaning of voicing my narrative and challenging systemic issues in higher education."

Further, regulations from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), which revoked visas for international students if their campuses went to an entirely online format, enraged us. Musbah exclaimed, "it makes zero sense… no sense at all to send international students back. Like, they're not working or taking money. We would sit on our asses and eat pizza and spend money. I don't understand." Wu concurred but noted that "this shouldn't be just about economic benefit" and that threatening to send students home impacts their sense of worthiness and belonging. Wu commented that "things weren't that much better before" and that "ICE regulations mirror previous neglect of international students."

From the initial conversations about the effect that COVID-19 had on us, we knew that the pandemic came as a new tool utilized to exclude and stigmatize internationals. In Musbah's words, "when COVID-19 ends, the problem is not going to end. It is just going to look different." and "the powers that be will always find ways to exclude people who aren't American and aren't white. Before it was the Arabs and Muslims, then it was Mexicans. Now it's Asians' turn again." We were frustrated and angered by living through another example of pervasive xenophobia in the U.S. political and social contexts.

COVID-19 Speaks to Modern Western Colonial Relations and Neo-racism

The events occurring in response to the pandemic, including ICE policy, and the Proclamation, are not isolated events. As Wu asserted, "It's not new. I'm not surprised. You're not surprised. The systemic issues are so embedded and so prevalent for a long time." Before COVID, we had experienced these dynamics of postcolonial thought and neo-racism. We firmly believed that COVID-19 revealed, exposed, and intensified systemic oppression that existed before the pandemic. Many things had just been insidiously hidden.

Americans have been intensely interested in knowing us as one from China and one from Syria. Musbah narrated, "the most intriguing thing about me is from Syria." Similarly, Wu recalled being asked, "do women in China marry someone totally because of money?" in a restroom during class break time and being asked, "Do Chinese people tend to burp in public?" during a project meeting. It is likely that coveting mainstream approval leads to

Wu's complicated relationship with the community of Chinese international students. Wu "was sometimes struggling with finding a fit in my own community—Chinese international students' community." Musbah had a similar experience as he emphatically responded by saying: "I avoid Syrian people like the plague…the people who hold the keys to the culture like food and stuff would probably not like how I think or who I am."

Two years of working and studying in the States made Wu aware of the fact that "no matter how hard I attempted to run away from being seen as one that reflects the Chinese image, regardless, westerners would label me as a forever inferior foreigner." Wu has since then started decolonizing her mind by giving constant attention to the processes in which Americans attempt to colonize the "Orient." She pointedly asserted that

> What has been so intriguing to witness all the time is the fact that people (in most cases, by people, I'm referring to white Americans) can quickly and tacitly find a way to mitigate their internal dissensions and develop a united identity to confront me who is deemed as an inferior threat or peril to their privileged body and mind.

Seeing an undercurrent of discrimination and othering veiled in multicultural America, Musbah shared a similar sentiment, "there would always be someone who would delegitimize my belonging as a function of my background and citizenship status. White America's obsession with White America will never grant me belonging even if it ever grants me citizenship."

Reflective of how westerners (Americans in this instance) enact insidiously emotional violence against us as international students, who are forever "Other" is the striking statements that Wu and Musbah heard. Wu heard from a white woman, "Where is your hometown in China? You need to find your roots," following Wu's expression of feelings belonging to Oregon. In a similar vein, following Musbah's opinions about politics and election in the U.S., a white man responded, "as one born here, I actually know how this works." Consequentially, being non-white international students in the States means that westerners define our feelings and label our pursuit belonging in the States as illegitimate and thus denied by Americans.

Discussion

We conducted this duoethnography in the midst of the pandemic. Everything around us was changing and evolving rapidly; it was challenging to keep up. For example, the changes in ICE policies on international students were announced halfway through our data collection efforts. We needed to discuss that policy, which shifted our entire meaning-making process. The goal of this duoethnography is not to have recorded chit-chats, but to arrive at a better understanding of ourselves and of the world as it converged around COVID-19. By the time our words are likely in ink, more and more have already changed.

This duoethnography speaks to the force of the systems of power that surround us on a large scale. Following a duoethnographic approach, we learned from each other's differences and bonded over our similarities. We challenged each other's perspectives with empathy to illuminate a web of social relations characterized by race, class, gender, and power in the U.S.

Our experiences demonstrate how westerner's perceive us as both subjects of knowledge, be it for entertainment or serious eagerness to understand the "other," and objects of derision, a duality that is prevalent in postcolonial thought (Bhabha, 1994). Our attempts to belong – to be less foreign – like Musbah's desire to blend in, and Wu's efforts to disguise the marks of her Chinese culture, led us to an important realization: no matter what, Americans will forever label us as inferior foreigners. It is what Bhabha (1994) describes as "*almost the same but not quite…almost the same but not white*" (p. 89, italics in the original). Besides, the ontological difference between us and the community surrounding us prompts westerners to feel obligated to remind us that, we are inferior not just in terms of nationality but also our forms of knowledge (Prasad, 1997; Said, 1978) and that they, westerners, have every right to tell stories about everyone (Bhabha, 1994; Spivak, 1988), including international students whom they do not possess direct experience or knowledge.

Westerners feel entitled to represent us to tell our stories sometimes as a way of advancing in academic careers while the genuine dedication to trying not to see us as "other" is missing from their work. What is even more irritating is that our real-life stories are misrepresented and distorted in narratives emerging from a bevy of settings, including the workplace, personal life, popular media resources, and academia, which accurately speaks to what the seminal scholar in postcolonialism Said (1978) has to say regarding the fact that the stories westerners tell about us as easterners do not represent actual histories or life.

It is our cultures, not our skin color (Balibar, 2007; Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991) that legitimize the reality of exclusion we experience. The rationale is that after all, how we are treated does not stem from our biological differences but instead from cultural differences—nationality, immigration status, language, behaviors, lifestyles (Balibar, 2007). This form of racism without races, neo-racism, represents an insidiously effective form of racialization developed by modern colonizers to govern people who are not Anglo-Saxons, like us. Depending on needs and settings, Americans leverage the flexible nature of culture to either promote inclusion and diversity (e.g., us being tokenized, representing diversity) or discriminate against us due to the so-called irresponsible divergence between our culture and mainstream culture.

COVID-19 served as a tool to advance the narrative of cultural incompatibility. Some responses to the pandemic were to blame it on eating exotic animals (Campbell, 2020), which has always been an image imposed on Eastern cultures (Reuter, 2016). The incompatibility with western culture, which is implied in statements like "go back to your country," shifts to become that of cultural incompatibility. The depth of the chiasm depended on the

closeness to whiteness that allowed Musbah to be "of the hook," to exist, move, and function without fear, and made Wu's trips to the supermarket excruciatingly stressful.

Implications

After the completion of data collection and analysis (and perhaps throughout the process to various degrees), we got frustrated not knowing what to do next. We uncovered many of our feelings and experiences and connected them to the broader context, and yet we could not articulate what we think needs to be done. Through reflection, we came to conclude that what we need is solidarity–both in our praxis on the ground and in our scholarship in the academy.

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, waves of political violence targeted at people of color in the U.S. prompted us as junior scholars to reflect on whom we are standing together with and what we are going to do on our micro-level on a daily basis. The whole collaboration of developing the book chapter is an exemplar of building solidarity across lines of race, nationality, and other social identities. We are standing with people of color whose cultural values are marginalized in the west. Reflective of such stance, we call on higher education educators to invest in programs and practices about supporting international students in understanding the complex relationships among race, gender, nationality, other social identities, and power in U.S. college communities and U.S. society as well as in getting involved with not only academic communities but also campus communities. In the meantime, we call for more efforts in exposing the apolitical positionality of American higher education when it comes to supporting international students because the fates of international, more accurately, international students of color are subject to be controlled by U.S. white supremacy as well as international politics as demonstrated in our chapter.

Based on emerging ideas/findings from our study, we are interested in a more nuanced understanding of different ways international students of color encounter, internalize, and resist the force of being "othered" in the U.S. Future studies should explore the roles that aspects of the social identity and values of international students of color impact the processes. We are also interested in seeing more studies analyzing practice and research in higher education through the lens of postcolonialism to challenge the dominant Eurocentric forms of knowledge.

Conclusion

Higher education has long grappled with issues of diversity, inclusion, and social justice for many years. Fortunately, educators have embraced an international perspective that acknowledges and celebrates cultural diversity as evident by the swaths of U.S. students who study abroad every year, which undoubtedly

yields positive outcomes. However, these programs are not immune to the paradigmatic assumptions of western thought (see Chakravarty et al., 2020 for a discussion of neo-colonialism in U.S. study abroad programs). The real dilemma seems to be not just getting students to interact and become comfortable with diversity. The challenge for educators, and for society writ large, is to disrupt hegemonic ways of thinking that exclude, alienate, and privilege some over others. When a calamity like the COVID-19 pandemic occurs, the fundamental ways in which people see each other and interact across lines of difference become rooted in prejudiced dominant ontologies. The Coronavirus reminded all that the U.S. is far from being the melting pot some would like it to be. Much more work is yet to be done.

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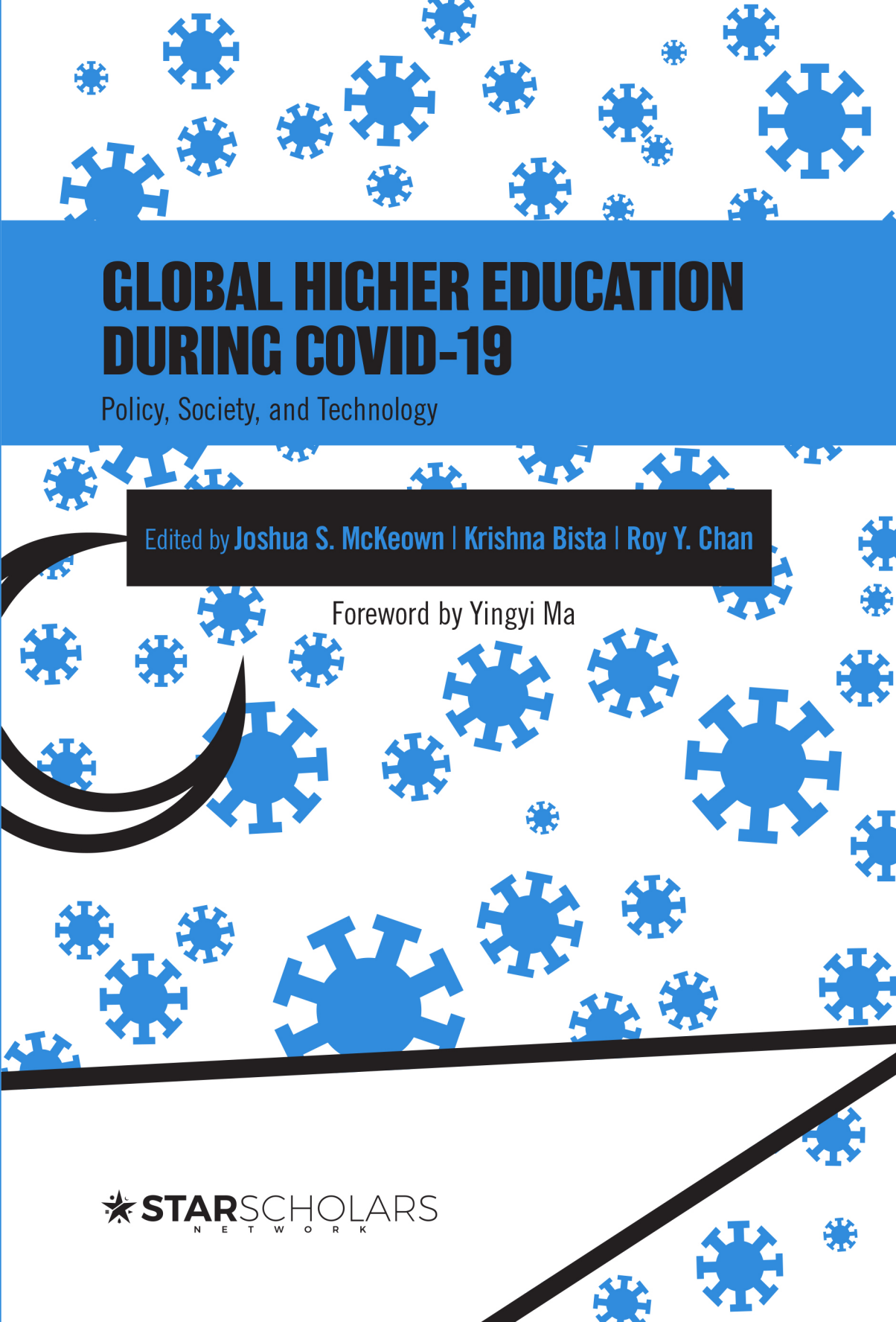
GLOBAL HIGHER EDUCATION DURING COVID-19
Policy, Society, and Technology
Edited by Joshua S. McKeown | Krishna Bista | Roy Y. Chan
Foreword by Yingyi Ma
STARSCHOLARS NETWORK

Praises for this volume

COVID-19 pandemic and digital innovation are making unprecedented disruption to the global higher education landscape. These disruptions have increased academic discussion on how to reimagine the future of higher education after post-COVID 19. Thus, the book, *Global Higher Education During COVID-19: Policy, Society, and Technology* problematized these realities from a global policy context with policy recommendations on issues of racial justice, funding, technology among others. Therefore, I would like to congratulate the editors: *Joshua S. McKeown, Krishna Bista,* and *Roy Y.* Chan for this excellent publication.

Dr. KS Adeyemo, Senior Lecturer, University of Pretoria, South Africa

Global Higher Education During COVID-19: Policy, Society, and Technology is a highly recommended resource for higher education institution policymakers and educators around the globe. Not only does this book provide invaluable insights from higher education institution policymakers, educators, and students during the COVID-19 pandemic, but it also offers useful suggestions on dealing with possible challenges and seeking opportunities in future higher education.

Dr. Misty So-Sum Wai-Cook, Centre for English Language Studies, National University of Singapore

It's a timely book reporting the most recent responses of international higher education across the world during the Covid-19 pandemic. Besides providing the theoretical contributions, the book also offers practical implications for stakeholders, including policymakers, education managers and practitioners, international students, and parents.

Dr. Hiep Pham, Director, Center for Research and Practice on Education, Phu Xuan University, Vietnam

Global Higher Education During COVID-19: Policy, Society, and Technology is timely and relevant providing a critically engaged reflective account of geographically diverse higher education institutions' response and practice during the COVID-19 pandemic. This book illuminates some of the current

impediments to higher education internationalization within the context of COVID-19 and provides insights into shared learning experiences that address new challenges to internationalisation imposed by the pandemic. A must read for international higher education specialists, practitioners, scholars and researchers.

Dr. Tasmeera Singh, Advisor, International Office,
University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

A worldwide phenomenon: Strategies and inspiration to address the challenges and opportunities for the new normal in the field of global higher education. I cannot recommend it highly enough.

Dr. Daisy Kee Mui Hung, Associate Professor,
Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia

The movement of people across borders furthered the spread of Covid-19. This inevitably impacted international higher education, which although not reducible to student mobility is its primary form. *Global Higher Education during COVID-19: Policy, Society, and Technology* is therefore a timely edited collection that begins to unpack the multifaceted impact the pandemic has had on higher education worldwide. It adds to the growing conversation on reimagining higher education. The collection will be valuable to current and future scholars of higher education, offering an important snapshot of policy and practice during the pandemic.

Dr. Will Brehm, Lecturer of Education and International
Development, UCL Institute of Education, UK

With the COVID-19 crisis having upended higher education around the world, this timely book provides a deep and much-needed analysis of the roles and responsibilities of universities going forward. It sheds light not only on the shared challenges countries have faced, but also reveals how the impact of the pandemic has varied in important ways across countries.

Dr. Rajika Bhandari, Author/Advisor,
STAR Scholar Network, USA

Case studies provide valuable baseline information for practitioners of higher education as the world begins to emerge from the pandemic. A must-read for those looking to understand how various regions reacted, and how institutional systems changed their models to survive.

Dr. L. Amber Brugnoli, Assoc Vice-President and
Executive Director for Global Affairs
West Virginia University, USA

This book presents a comprehensive and rigorous worldwide account of Covid-19 impact, challenges and new opportunities. It stands out as a ground-breaking valuable companion for all those involved in the future of internationalization in higher education.

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Global Higher Education During COVID-19: Policy, Society, and Technology
Joshua S. McKeown, Krishna Bista, and *Roy Y. Chan*

Global Higher Education During COVID-19

Policy, Society, and Technology

Global Higher Education During COVID-19: Policy, Society, and Technology explores the impacts of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) for institutions of higher education worldwide. Specifically, this book responds to the growing need for new insights and perspectives to improve higher education policy and practice in the era of COVID-19. The sub-theme that runs through this book concerns the changing roles and responsibilities of higher education leaders and the demand to rethink global higher education post-COVID. Topics in this book include: international student experiences, pedagogical innovations through technology, challenges to existing organizational cultures and societal roles, international academic relations, and shifting national policy implications for global higher education.

With the increasing threat of COVID-19 on all aspects of the global economy and workforce, this book serves as an opportunity for teacher-scholars, policymakers, and university administrators to reconsider and reimagine their work and the role of higher education in a global context. The ultimate goal of this book is to provide a critical reflection on the opportunities and challenges brought by COVID-19 and how tertiary education systems around the world learn from each other to address them.

Joshua S. McKeown, PhD, is Associate Provost for International Education & Programs at SUNY Oswego and International Education Leadership Fellow at the University at Albany, USA.

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Policy, Society, and Technology

Editors
Joshua S. McKeown
Krishna Bista
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In memory of those who lost their lives during the COVID-19 global pandemic (as of August 2021):

4.38 Million

And to the 204 million heroes worldwide who recovered from the disease.

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Foreword

Yingyi Ma

COVID-19 is upending daily life, and its impact on global higher education (HE) is seismic. How to understand the impacts and improve policy and practice in the field of international HE during and post-COVID? Colleges and universities around the world are wondering about the above questions, and this book has provided a much-needed discussion for those questions.

The editors of this book have done a tremendous job in assembling a wide range of in-depth studies, both in terms of substantive topics and geographic regions. The topics range from the role of HE in society, crisis and innovation through technology in HE, international student experiences navigating the pandemic, national policies, international academic relations, public and private university responses, and the innovative engagement efforts of global HE institutions. Despite the expansive topics, various articles share the theme of exploring the traditional and changing roles of HE in society. Part I presents a few studies grounded in diverse national contexts that show how HE operates and adapts to society changed by the pandemic.

I commend the editors for their efforts to include a wide variety of contexts of HE institutions in different countries. While the impacts of COVID-19 on HE may be uncertain, what is certain is the increasing inequality among countries in dealing with the pandemic due to the unequal access to resources, technologies, and public health management. Part II in this book, in particular, focuses on the Global South (lower-income countries). The studies have shown the devastating impact on HE in countries of the global south due to the faltering economy during the pandemic as well as the incredible resilience of faculty and students in these countries to lessen the hardship through impressive innovations.

Technology-powered online education has been the quintessential innovation of 21st-century HE. Technology is liberating as much as limiting. COVID-19 has forced global HE to confront, leverage, and manage the power of technology to engage with students, experiment, and explore new pedagogy. The editors of this book have presented a wide range of empirically based studies in different HE settings to show that technology is indeed the double-edged sword, and it is incumbent on global HE leaders and educators to figure out innovative ways to use technology well, while fully recognizing and managing its limitations. Part III has been devoted to this theme.

This book is for anyone who is interested in HE in the global world, including but not limited to scholars, teachers, administrators, and students, and for any concerned citizens to reimagine and redesign the global HE in a new era.

Bio

Yingyi Ma is an Associate Professor of Sociology and Director of Asian/Asian American Studies. She is the Provost Faculty Fellow on internationalization at Syracuse University (New York), carrying the term between 2020 and 2022, where she leads and supports culturally responsive pedagogy and programs for international education and partnership. She received her Ph.D. in sociology from Johns Hopkins University in 2007. Ma's research addresses education and migration in the U.S. and China and she has published about 30 peer-reviewed articles and book chapters, in addition to books. She is the author of *Ambitious and Anxious: How Chinese College Students Succeed and Struggle in American Higher Education* (Columbia University Press, 2021). This book has won multiple awards from the Comparative and International Education Association and has been featured in national and international news media such as *The Washington Post* and *Times Higher Education*. She is the co-editor of *Understanding International Students from Asia in American Universities: Learning and Living Globalization* (2017), which has won the honorable mention of the Best Book Award from the Comparative and International Education Association's Study Abroad and International Students Section.

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We would also like to acknowledge the help of all the scholars who were involved in this project and, more specifically, to the authors and reviewers that took part in the review process. Without their support, this book would not have become a reality. At Morgan State University, Dr. Bista would like to thank his colleagues for their encouragement and support including graduate students and graduate assistants in the Department of Advanced Studies, Leadership and Policy. At Lee University, Dr. Chan would like to thank his Ed.D. students for their comments and feedback in this project.

Special thanks to the following reviewers who assisted us in reviewing manuscripts received for this book. It would not have been possible to finalize the selected chapters without their evaluations and constructive feedback.

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"Global Higher Education during COVID-19: Policy, Society, and Technology is a timely edited collection that begins to unpack the multifaceted impact the pandemic has had on higher education worldwide. It adds to the growing conversation on reimagining higher education."

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