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“Creating a Home away from Home”: Chinese Undergraduate Student Enclaves in US Higher Education

Yajing CHEN and Heidi ROSS

Abstract: This paper draws on the theory of ethnic enclaves to study Chinese international student communities and their role in constructing Chinese undergraduate student experiences on US campuses. Enclave theory has primarily been used by sociologists to study immigrant and diaspora populations, but it can also provide an important analytical tool for scholars examining the internationalisation of student populations in higher-education settings. Student interviews and participant observation at a representative research-intensive, doctoral-granting institution in the American Midwest indicate that institutional and media characterisations of Chinese international student communities as closed and segregated are far too simplistic. Chinese student enclaves provide their members with crucial information, support, and social spaces that help them adapt to – and in turn change – their host institutions. Chinese students are active participants in and creators of campus cultures that are often invisible to university administrators, faculty, and peers.

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Introduction

Since 2006, institutions of higher education throughout the United States have been challenged by an exponential growth of Chinese undergraduate students. According to Open Doors Data (Institute of International Education 2013a), their number reached 93,789 during the 2012/2013 academic year, an almost tenfold growth from the 9,955 students enrolled in 2006/2007. Chinese undergraduates now make up the largest proportion (27.6 per cent) of international undergraduate students in the United States (Institute of International Education 2013b). Chinese undergraduate student tuition has filled institutional coffers during a time of financial austerity, but a concomitant rise in student-service needs has challenged college campus resources. The greatest of these challenges are commonly identified as Chinese students' inadequate English proficiency, fraudulent application processes, a lack of engagement of Chinese students in classrooms and campus life, and "closed" Chinese communities that, administrators believe, threaten the diversity missions of US campuses (Abelmann and Kang 2013; Bartlett and Fischer 2011; Bergman 2012; Levin 2010; Stevens 2012). This last challenge apparently "trump[s] all other concerns, as it goes to the very heart of why international students are courted by admissions offices in the first place" – namely, to (at least) expose domestic students to diverse populations and enhance campus cross-cultural understanding and global engagement (Stevens 2012: 2). Because of the increased presence on campuses of Chinese-only student clubs, organisations, and housing arrangements, US administrators and scholars have begun to question whether their increasingly polyglot campuses represent any kind of "real diversity." After all, diversity and multiculturalism, as understood in institutional mission statements, are valued for their potential to break down barriers through dialogue and exchange, not for their creation of organisations that have little connection to something conceptualised as "the larger campus community."

In fact, institutional perceptions of Chinese student communities as segregated groups are one-sided. As Lee and Rice (2007) note, such a perception

situates international students within a problem framework that presents them as having a set of identifiable and correctable problems rather than focusing on any inadequacies within the host community. (Lee and Rice 2007: 388)

This paper offers a different and, we believe, deeper understanding of Chinese undergraduate student communities and their interaction with their receiving institution through data collected at a research-intensive, doctoral degree-granting institution (Midwest University, a pseudonym) located in the American Midwest.

To that end, ethnic enclave theory has provided us with useful insights. Recent scholarship forcefully contends that immigrant enclaves are hardly “stepping stones” in a linear process of assimilation, but rather fundamental spaces for fostering immigrant “success.” Enclave theory has a long history in social science research, but has so far been primarily limited to the investigation of immigrant neighbourhoods (Portes and Bach 1985; Portes and Jensen 1992; Zhou 1992, 2009). Though students are perhaps best thought of as “potential” immigrants, we have found that enclave theory can shed new light on international student communities. The key is investigating the emic understandings of individuals within these communities – how they understand themselves to both build and benefit from the enclave. From this perspective, Chinese student enclaves are in and of themselves not a problem. In fact, they provide crucial information, support, and social spaces for those in the community to better adapt to and thrive within the host institution. If there is a problem, it occurs not within the enclave itself, but in the inability of the institution and the enclave to find common ground and in turn create a mutually beneficial relationship between the “Chinese network” and whatever is considered to be the greater campus community.

Our analysis has been guided by three overarching research questions: How do Chinese international undergraduate students construct an educational enclave at Midwest University? How does the enclave contribute to Chinese students’ personal, social, and academic success? How might the enclave hinder Chinese students from experiencing important aspects of US higher education? We begin with a brief review of the literature on ethnic enclaves and international overseas student communities. Then, we introduce findings from field research conducted at Midwest University and describe three fundamental ways in which Chinese students build their ethnic community – through academic networks, student organisations, and social media. This section of the paper also explains the ways in which social networking activities aid the engagement of Chinese

students and facilitate their academic success. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of the problems that stem from the enclave, including misunderstandings between the administration and students, and the enclave's potential shielding effect, which can limit students' contact with the host society.

Ethnic Enclave and International Overseas Student Community

The theoretical constructs of social capital and migrant networks are the foundational building blocks of ethnic enclave theory. As Zhou writes in her study of Chinese migrant workers in New York's Chinatown, the social relations within the community provide newcomers "a familiar work environment in which they are effectively shielded from deficiencies in language, education, and general knowledge of the larger society" (Zhou 1992: 12). In other words, social capital derived from membership in co-ethnic networks can be converted into other forms of capital to improve or maintain migrants' positions in a new society (Bourdieu 1986; Massey 1999). Chinese international students differ from immigrants in several important ways. Most of them are sojourners rather than migrants and they are geographically dispersed across their campus with host nationals rather than being concentrated in large residential enclaves or ethnic business chains. They are also part of a host society's institutional context. However, despite these important differences, there are a number of similarities between sojourning students and immigrants that make concepts related to ethnic enclave theories, especially the characteristics of enclaves, useful in understanding their lives abroad. Perhaps most importantly, international students rely on informal networks that are grounded in home-country connections and provide a vital service by making those resources that are important for adaptation to and success in the new academic and social environment more widely available.

The notion of ethnic enclaves is frequently used in both daily conversation and academic research. They are envisioned as spaces with dense ethnic populations that are "culturally distinct and geographically definable" and "provide both a basis for identity and a range of facilities and resources to support local life in light of that identity" (Chaskin 1996: 663). Scholars have defined these communi-

ties in two ways. Most fundamentally, ethnic enclaves are defined as an everyday residential area for a particular ethnic group. The second definition refers to a physical space with a concentration of ethnic businesses that employ a majority of workers from the co-ethnic group. This stress on business networks has prompted some scholars, most notably Alejandro Portes, to label these communities “economic enclaves” (Portes and Jensen 1992). Based on their data from a longitudinal sample of Cuban émigrés, Portes and Wilson (1980) conclude that the large portion of new Cuban immigrants work for their co-ethnics and, more importantly, actually do better than those employed in white-owned secondary-sector businesses. While earlier scholars saw the enclave as a perpetual trap for immigrants, Portes and Wilson (1980) argue that the ethnic networks within the enclave often provide an experience similar to an apprenticeship – where newcomers learn the tools and skills for settling down and moving ahead. The idea of the economic enclave as a fundamental part of immigrant advancement has become an important tenet of the group of scholars closely associated with Portes. Works such as Portes and Bach’s *Latin Journey* (1985) and Min Zhou’s *Chinatown* (1992) and *Contemporary Chinese America* (2009) have elaborated on the concept. Here, ethnic enclaves are not traps or cordoned-off “dens of iniquity”; instead, they are spaces that concentrate extensive ethnic capital. Zhou states,

Enclave refers to a specific phenomenon, one that is bounded by an identifiable ethnic community and embedded in a system of community-based co-ethnic social relations and observable institutions. [...] [T]he ethnic enclave possesses the potential to develop a distinct structure of economic opportunities as well as opportunities for rebuilding the social networks that are disrupted by international migration. (Zhou 2009: 102–103)

Ethnic solidarity is the foundation of the ethnic economy and enables significant support systems. It offers social capital and other key resources for individual and group security and advancement. Coleman (1988) has written that social capital consists of the social networks embedded in relationships; these web-like linkages ensure group solidarity and confer benefits upon group members. While Bourdieu describes social capital as the preserve of elites, Coleman argues that it is open to marginal groups as well. Perhaps the most important characteristic of capital – whether financial, cultural, or social – is its

“convertibility.” Just as financial capital can be converted to real capital (in the form of goods) or cultural capital (in the form of expensive education), the benefits accrued from social capital can be converted into “other forms of capital” that enable personal and group advancement (Massey 1999: 43). The existence of the ethnic community can provide co-ethnics, even though strangers, critical support mediated through shared language and cultural values (Zhou 2009). Once they have developed these relationships, immigrants can draw on the resulting social capital and network information to improve their socio-economic position. In *Contemporary Chinese America* (2009), Min Zhou vividly describes the structure of an ethnic enclave economy along with a wide range of “ethnic social and cultural institutions” that support the daily needs of Chinese immigrants. For instance, in both traditional Chinatowns and newly developed Chinese ethnoburbs in the United States, after-school classes, weekend language programmes, and activities at cultural centres form the heart of the enclave community and its educational structures. It is here, Zhou writes, that young, second-generation Chinese Americans learn “traditional Chinese values”; it is here that “a sense of ethnic identity [is] nurtured” (Zhou 2009: 199); and it is also here that Chinese American youths attain extra preparation for academic advancement in the US educational system. The same can be said about Chinese enclave media – they connect members and foster community-building.

To focus just on the internal aspects of these educational/cultural centres and media, however, would be to misunderstand their wider roles. For these institutions not only reinforce community cohesion, but also connect members with the larger society. After-school programmes, for instance, teach SAT preparation skills in addition to Chinese languages; local papers relate national and international stories along with community news. In summary, ethnic institutions connect seemingly separated worlds – an ostensibly closed immigrant community and the mainstream society (Zhou 2009).

The boundaries of this community, however, prove rather blurred. In the literature on Chinese ethnic enclaves, little distinction has been made between Chinese immigrants from mainland China, those from Taiwan and Hong Kong, and those from communities in Southeast Asia. Our research on student enclaves complicates this broad understanding of Chinese ethnicity. The Chinese student enclave at Midwest University can be understood primarily as a com-

munity of Han students from the People's Republic of China (PRC). In this sense, one could describe the community as a national or, perhaps more appropriately, ethno-national enclave. Taiwanese and Hong Kongese students have a limited relationship with this group. They are included in some activities – for instance, a pan-Asian basketball league – but excluded from others. In this paper, when we use the term “Chinese student enclave” we mean the community of Han Chinese (汉人, *hanren*) from the PRC. When we speak of “Chinese ethnicity,” we generally refer to this more limited understanding, not the far larger community of ethnic Chinese beyond the PRC.

There have been few studies of Chinese student enclaves, although a small handful of scholars have investigated international student communities and their “diversity experiences.” Those who study abroad often form close networks with their co-nationals. Furnham and Alibhai (1985) found that, while studying abroad, students form a primary, monocultural network consisting of close friendships with other co-nationals. This primary network provides students help with personal problems, offers companionship, and provides “a setting in which ethnic and cultural values can be rehearsed and expressed” (Furnham and Alibhai 1985: 709). A secondary, bicultural network between international students and host nationals sometimes is established, but more for instrumental purposes, such as help with a language problem. Trice's study of faculty views on international graduate student isolation in the United States found that the faculty members firmly believed that their international and domestic students are quite segregated. The reasons for student segregation as they are perceived by faculty members include a strong bond with students of similar cultures – preferred by both international students and American students – and international students' weak English-language skills, as well as a lack of opportunities for interaction due to institutional structures (Trice 2007). A more recent study by Gareis (2012), meanwhile, builds upon previous findings on international student friendships and compellingly demonstrates the distance felt by many of newly arriving international students in the United States. Gareis's conclusion that nearly 40 per cent of international students report having no close American friends has caused quite a stir within the US academic community (Jaschik 2012). The reasons, as understood by the students themselves, are both internal – perceived cultural enclosure of international students – and external –

perceived “superficiality” and incurious nature of American students (Gareis 2012). In our recent quantitative study of Chinese freshman engagement at Midwest University, we found that these students tend to interact less with other groups (seldom having serious conversations with someone from a different ethnic or racial background) than do their domestic peers (Chen 2013).

Such findings are important in shining a spotlight on the problems that arise from international student communities and their relations with host nationals. There is far less scholarship that investigates the internal dynamics of international communities and the ways students themselves build enclave organisations that structure their experiences in US higher education. In the next section, we do exactly that by providing findings from a year of field research on how Chinese students create their enclave through an ethnically focused academic network, student organisations, and social media. We found that these three key modes of community-building are fundamentally interrelated; one cannot exist without the others.

Research Site and Methods

As a Carnegie Foundation-classified “research 1” university, Midwest is among approximately 100 research-intensive, doctoral-degree awarding institutions in the United States that are noted for “very high research activity.” Like its fellow member-institutions of the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC) – a consortium of largely public, research-intensive universities located in an arc from the US Midwest to the Northeast that enrol the nation’s largest populations of Chinese (and other) international students – Midwest is one of the most internationalised institutions of higher learning in North America. It enrolls the fourth-largest population of international undergraduate students in the nation, largely a result of a recent and dramatic growth in its Chinese undergraduate population. The number of Chinese undergraduate students skyrocketed from 164 in 2008/2009 (0.54 per cent of the undergraduate student body) to 2,348 students in 2013/2014 (6.3 per cent of the undergraduate body). Currently, Chinese students at the university make up 52 per cent of the international undergraduate population. Moreover, Chinese student voices are growing on campus, as evidenced by an increasing number

of Chinese student organisations. For these reasons, Midwest University provides a compelling site for a study of student enclaves.

Conclusions shared here derive from a much larger research project on Chinese international undergraduate student engagement on US campuses. Findings are based on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 24 Chinese undergraduate students, including eight student organisation leaders. Each interview lasted 90 minutes and focused on how Chinese students understand the contours of their ethnic enclave, how they build their networks, and why the enclave is important to them. Another element of the study involved long-term participant observation in key sites of the larger Chinese student community. Both of the authors were able to participate in Chinese student activities on and off campus and have followed student communication on Chinese social media, such as WeChat and QQ. Participant observation has allowed us to establish rapport with our participants and gain a deep understanding of how Chinese students engage with their own community and the larger campus.

Chinese Educational Enclave: A Culture within Cultures

Attinasi (1989) has described university campuses as composed of at least three geographies: the physical geography, the social geography, and the academic/cognitive geography.

In order to locate themselves within these campus geographies, students actively employ strategies of “getting to know” and “scaling down” (Attinasi 1989: 263). In the former case, students form bonds with senior students, who mentor their younger “siblings” or “protégés,” providing insights and suggestions about the campus, their education, and activities. “Getting to know” also involves “peer knowledge sharing,” which includes “experiences with fellow newcomers in which there was a kind of cooperative exploring of the geographies” (Attinasi 1989: 264). “Scaling down” refers to students parsing the large campus (behaviourally or conceptually) into a “more narrowly defined geography,” where students are able to find membership and anchor themselves. These narrowly defined geographies can be student clubs or organisations. That niche can also be a group of students sharing similar views or attributes, such as ethnic communities. In general, college communities are viewed as positive so-

cial support systems. A person may have a set of incongruences with his or her institutional ethos; however, finding a communal niche can prevent stress, sustain an individual's attachment to the institution, and encourage him or her to complete a degree (Tinto 1993). The Chinese student enclave serves exactly these functions and allows members to find themselves within larger campus geographies.

Precisely because Chinese students are often viewed from the outside as passive learners by the US media and American institutions, we shift the focus and look at the Chinese student community from the inside. From this perspective, we encounter Chinese students as active producers of a new campus culture within a changing institution. This community, the Chinese educational enclave, helps its members find their spaces on the larger campus. The culture of this community creates both possibilities for Chinese students and social distinctions that consolidate perceptions that there is a Chinese "us" and a domestic "them" – and vice versa. The particularities of this culture also frequently remain invisible to many in the institution who are tasked with serving them.

Academic Networks: Mentoring and Peer-Support Circles

Chinese students have created their own academic network, a fundamental part of the Chinese educational enclave. The network provides Chinese students with enormous academic capital through a strong mentoring and peer-support circle. This academic capital includes information about US academic norms, strategies of selecting majors and courses, and what it takes to be a successful Midwest University student.

Chinese students face a brand new academic/cognitive geography when they first arrive on campus. Midwest University offers 180 undergraduate programmes and a long list of course names with multiple sessions taught by different instructors. The flexibility and diversity of course/major selection provides students with a seemingly infinite array of choices. However, such diversity of choices creates difficulties for Chinese students, who are for the most part unaccustomed to a system that postpones major and thus course selection to the second year of undergraduate education. Students are confused about which courses to choose and which courses would best suit their abilities and ensure their academic success. After all, most ma-

triculated from a high school system that offers little choice and flexibility. Though they are required to meet academic advisors on campus, Chinese students rely heavily on their peers and senior colleagues (学长, *xuezhǎng*, 学姐, *xuejiě*). Relations between these elders and their younger classmate siblings (学弟, *xuèdì*, 学妹, *xuèmei*) are based on ties that borrow from patterns of chosen kinship and are inherently hierarchical. “Younger brothers and sisters,” in other words, seek guidance from their elders, particularly academically successful elders, on unequal terms. Though there may be little age difference between them, younger students expect their older peers to offer sage advice based on their greater experiences with American higher education, and they tend to respect these suggestions. As a freshman female student explained to us,

For my academic work, I often consult senior [Chinese] brothers and sisters. They can advise me on which class to take and which teacher is an easier grader. (Anonymous 1 2013)

A male sophomore acknowledged to us how much he appreciated his Chinese friends and his roommate in helping him gain admission into a prestigious professional school at the university. His roommate, though a sophomore himself, had successfully entered the professional school earlier and was viewed as a role model by the student. The student explained,

My roommate is so helpful. Whenever I have questions and troubles with my assignments, he is there to help. Without him, I might not have been able to get into the school. (Anonymous 2 2013)

Peer-mentoring and the sharing of academic information also occur at levels beyond that of individuals or groups of friends. Perhaps most significantly, the larger Chinese undergraduate community is guided, in a number of ways, by the Midwest University branch of the Chinese Students and Scholars Association (CSSA). CSSA chapters exist on many campuses and are partially funded by the Education Office associated with the nearest Chinese consulate (in Chicago, in the case of Midwest University). Other funding comes from money raised by students themselves, as well as that provided by Midwest’s administration. On their official website, Midwest’s CSSA claims that they are the “only organisation” on campus sanctioned by the Chicago consulate, legitimating their position to speak for the Chinese

student community. Mission statements for both Midwest University's chapter and others throughout the US express that the CSSA is to provide support, not just to students, but to all Chinese (华人, *huaren*) – Chinese from greater China as well as PRC citizens – in the surrounding area. In this sense, CSSA chapters aim to contribute to spreading an understanding of Chinese culture and promoting intercultural exchange. Departments (部门, *bumen*) such as Finance, Public Relations, Marketing, and Activities organise specific events and handle the daily running of each chapter. Membership in the CSSA is open to any Chinese student as long as he or she is willing to “abide by the regulations,” provide a resume and other related documents, and present a three-minute speech on why they want to join. The chapter president (主席, *zhuixi*), vice presidents (副主席, *fuzhuixi*), and department heads (部长, *buzhang*) are elected by current members of the organisation. Though official connections to the consulate certainly constrain the forms and activities of the CSSA chapter, specific programming decisions are, in the main, left up to each campus community, and there is very little day-to-day interference in the chapter's running. Midwest University's chapter has been in existence since 1990 and its organisation has been approved and generally welcomed by the administration.

How much influence regional consulates' educational offices have upon the programming, mentoring, and community-building aims of the CSSA is a matter of debate and perspective. Regional consulates maintain contact with CSSA student leaders, and China's socio-political policies certainly shape the ways in which the CSSA functions in the broadest sense. Yet, the everyday working of the organisation remains quite independent. Having attended primary and secondary schools in the PRC, students generally arrive in the United States with values aligned with a strong sense of what some scholars have called filial or civilisational nationalism, and they have largely internalised the government's metanarratives about history and modern geopolitics. There are no CSSA-led symposiums on Taiwan or Tibet, for instance, not necessarily because of overt control, but because Chinese students themselves are understandably both wary and weary of addressing such topics with a “foreign” audience. Conceptualising the CSSA as a mere extension of PRC policies of engagement and of political-boundary maintenance ignores how the organisation functions on the ground. In fact, the primary activities of the

CSSA reflect a concern for conveying to newcomers practical survival, safety, and academic advice.

The CSSA has held “Academic Advising Workshops” for freshmen since 2012. These workshops are not sanctioned by the institution; as advertisements were found only on the group’s Chinese-language WeChat account, we doubt that anyone in the administration is even aware of them. A number of “study masters” (学霸, *xueba*), senior Chinese student representatives with excellent academic achievements, are invited to lead the workshops. They provide information and advice on time management, major and course selection, and learning strategies to a couple hundred students each year. The workshops are open only to Chinese students and aim to help the entire Chinese undergraduate community be academically successful. The “study masters” are believed “to provide the most realistic advice and answers for Chinese students to ensure that they safely survive their school years in the United States, no matter what major” they are pursuing (CSSA WeChat Post 1 2014).

The academic networks, like the immigrant ethnic enclaves they help create, provide newcomers and current members useful information for academic success and ease students’ transitions to their new environment. Moreover, academic networks provide students with a safe space in classroom settings. For example, in many of the pre-business courses required for admission to Midwest’s business school, it is common for many Chinese students to sign up for the same session. Students told us that the large presence of co-nationals offered support and mutual help. One Chinese sophomore who intended to major in Business explained,

I feel secure when I see some of my friends or several Chinese are in the class I am taking. We often help each other with homework. We can *watch over* each other. When I do not understand what the teacher said in the class, I can instantly ask my friends who sit just next to me in Chinese about what the teacher just said. (Anonymous 3 2013; emphasis added)

Meanwhile, many students in majors without a large Chinese population have expressed unease about being alone. One student who registered for a journalism class described her anxiety at the beginning of the semester when she found herself in a predominantly “white classroom”:

In the classroom, there were about 25 people, who were all American students. I was the only one who had black hair and yellow skin; I was like a different species. When there are not fellow Chinese around, I feel uncomfortable and anxious at first. I know that I do not have anyone to *look after* me now. (Anonymous 4 2014; emphasis added)

The phrases “look after” (照顾, *zhaogu*) and “watch over” (照应, *zhaoying*) were often mentioned by Chinese students during our interviews. Being surrounded by fellow Chinese gives the students psychological security and the sense of having academic help at hand in a foreign environment. Moreover, the academic guidance and information from Chinese student-peers and senior colleagues have been handed down to the younger cohort each year, a practice that maintains the continuity and stability of the academic community. A large and growing corpus of “study-master strategies,” for example, continues to be passed along and shared on social media. For the students whose native language is not English, especially these newcomers, the academic help and support from their Chinese peers prove critical for their transition and adaptation to a new academic geography.

Chinese Student Organisations: “Our Home” and “Our Stage”

Chinese students have created a culture within cultures at Midwest that speaks largely Mandarin Chinese. With the increasing number of Chinese undergraduate students on campus, this culture now supports three basketball teams made up of mainland Chinese students. With two additional teams consisting of players from Hong Kong and Taiwan, these teams comprise Midwest’s Asian Basketball League. The larger culture also includes two Chinese dancing clubs, a calligraphy club, a photography club, a business association – and the list goes on and on. These student organisations, as their members have told us, provide a platform for demonstrating student talents, for improving skills, and also for meeting people with similar interests. A senior Chinese student leader told us,

We like being together. In the US, we can be counted as a minority group. In this group, we find our friends, sharing similar backgrounds and interests, speaking the same language; we feel we understand each other’s heart. (Anonymous 4 2014)

The Asian Basketball League is a particularly lively example of community-building. When we visited the Chinese student basketball games on a warm Saturday afternoon in early April 2014, the local recreation centre's basketball courts were filled with the sounds of cheering fans and squeaking sneakers. Each team was battling for the league championship. With referees, coaches, trophies, and scoreboards, the league represented an enterprising spirit and organisational leadership, certainly some of the characteristics universities hope to cultivate in their undergraduate students. Players from all teams valued the experience and, as one of them said to us, liked having an arena in which “to develop their skills and pursue their interests.” That the players thought such a league was necessary in the first place, however, reveals some of the distance between them and the university administration, if not the campus community more generally. The university supports a large and well-known intramural sports league in which a whole range of students compete. Nevertheless, the Chinese students, with a belief that they “cannot compete with Americans both physically and technically” (体质和技术不如老美, *tizhi he jishu buru laomei*), set out on their own and appealed to school officials to help sponsor their league. The administrators initially refused to support their request, arguing that the university already had an intramural league and that having group-specific sports programmes worked against the university's diversity mission statement. The quite resourceful students went ahead anyway, finding on their own a suitable site off-campus and staging some impressive events, where, as the Asian Basketball League president said, “every Chinese player can have a chance to play basketball for the whole semester” (Anonymous 5 2014).

Meanwhile, the CSSA has become a well-oiled machine not only for providing academic support and advice, but also for staging social and cultural events. Since 2013, Midwest CSSA members have organised a large-scale, student-run orientation programme for incoming Chinese freshmen. Compared to the university's two-week international-student orientation programme that takes place in August, the CSSA programme lasts much longer: five months, from April to August. A student leader proudly told us of the CSSA's endless efforts in staging this programme:

We really wanted to do our best to help the new students. Our team was able to call together more than 600 new Chinese stu-

dents through a QQ group account when they were still in China. We provide pre-departure orientations in four major cities in China, free airport pick-up services, useful information about the university, a Chinese mass meeting about current Chinese student organisations, and an academic advising meeting [...]. From starting the QQ group in April, to the first week of class registration, we are always there to help, to take care of the new students. (Anonymous 4 2014)

The CSSA has been a crucial player in the creation of the Chinese student community on the campus. As their president stated at the annual Chinese mass meeting, “We want to create a home away from home for Chinese members” (Anonymous 6 2014).

The Asian Basketball League, the CSSA, and other ethnic student organisations do more than merely serve as a point of connection for individual students, in which members speak similar languages and have similar interests. As a whole, they form a coherent organisational network, providing a complete and “positive social support system” (Tinto 1993). At the Chinese Spring Festival celebration, for example, the CSSA serves as the major activity leader. The dancing clubs and music bands perform at the event. The photography club records the celebration. Local Chinese restaurants, many kept running by business investments from wealthy Chinese undergraduates, deliver food for hundreds of visitors. As a CSSA student leader stated,

The number of Chinese students increases every year. Our [Chinese] clubs and organisations are growing like “luxuriant foliage.” Each activity can be accomplished by the collaboration among different organisations, which does not require us to reach out to the broader stage [outside the Chinese community]. (Anonymous 7 2013)

Social Media

As noted above, Chinese international students link up with what will become their organisations and the enclave more generally even before they set foot on campus. Social media provides the platform for this possibility, but not social media based in the United States. Domestic organisations and, more recently, the institution’s administration, have used Facebook and Twitter to disseminate information about programmes to gradually create a campus-wide digital commu-

nity. Because of Chinese government policies banning the use of these platforms within China, however, incoming freshmen from mainland China have little contact with local groups or Midwest's administration. For example, one of the institution's e-mail servers is run through Google, and incoming Chinese students who sign up for that service have difficulty accessing information. Rather, they rely on Chinese social media, dominated by two platforms from the large IT and telecommunications company Tencent: QQ and WeChat. The job of relaying to incoming Chinese students important information not included in institutional acceptance packets – information about organisations, the best dorms, or what courses have easy-grading instructors – falls upon the Chinese students themselves.

Beginning around 2010, a group of Midwest students set up a new QQ group account, similar to Facebook, for incoming freshmen. Uploaded to this account were masses of information and advice on classes, housing, and tuition matters. Many students joined the account, but at this point the networking was still on a rather small scale. In the years before 2013, a number of students had used the name “CSSA” to organise orientations in China and publish information on social media, but without the formal backing of the group. Formal backing commenced in 2013 and made the QQ account far more visible. In 2014 more than 600 members registered for the Class of 2018 QQ group, and 27 detailed documents have been uploaded onto the shared group space. A document entitled “Strategies for Picking Classes,” written by a “study master” (学霸, *xueba*), has attracted more than 100 readers. It clearly lists each class's difficulty level, study strategies for getting an “A,” and classes to take for the purpose of achieving admission into Midwest's business school. These shared documents have become important tools for Chinese first-year students in navigating the campus's physical, social, and academic geographies.

After settling down on campus, students gradually move away from the initial QQ group. Friendships formed, they turn to Tencent's other social media application – WeChat. WeChat is perhaps best described as a mixture of Facebook, Skype, and texting, using wireless internet to send written and voice messages to friends or organisation members. Each Chinese student organisation and club uses a WeChat account to disseminate activity information. The CSSA's WeChat account, for example, promotes a wide range of

activities. Some are core activities primarily meaningful to the Chinese community, such as the Mid-Autumn Festival celebration. Others are for the entire campus community. On 3 October 2014, two messages were posted on the CSSA WeChat account. The first referred to a new popular Chinese movie, *Breakup Buddies*, which was being shown for the first time in a local movie theater. The promotional message proclaimed:

It is the Chinese National Day! [Midwest University] CSSA congratulates our nation's birthday! You do not need to complain that there are no good movies in the local movie theater. You do not need to worry that you do not understand English movies. You do not need to worry that you cannot find a great comedy. *Breakup Buddies* is coming to town. [...] [Midwest University] CSSA hopes this excellent movie by Chinese people can give you a happy and unforgettable National Day. (CSSA WeChat Post 2 2014)

The event was just one of the many activities that spoke to and therefore solidified the Chinese enclave and its predominant identity. The native language that everyone understands, the jokes that make sense, the familiar movie stars – all of these factors created a comfortable space in which Chinese students could spend their leisure time with co-nationals after a busy and tiring exam week.

US media and university administrators often view the Chinese enclave as a segregated space for students protected within their closed niche (Stevens 2012). However, as Zhou (2009) argues, ethnic institutions like Chinese Sunday schools and Chinese newspapers are actually a bridge that connects the enclave to mainstream society. For instance, the CSSA WeChat account recently posted information about Midwest's famous bike race:

On the third weekend of April, cyclists from hundreds of teams compete at [Midwest University Stadium]. The team that is victorious in the end receives the greatest honours of [Midwest University]. On this one week, all Midwest fans are crazy for the participants – and you just want to be in the audience? Now! The Chinese team, in their first, unprecedented try is looking for cyclists! (CSSA WeChat post 3 2014)

Another message on the same WeChat board introduced a photo contest titled “The Most Beautiful University.” The message calls for

students to take out their cameras and record the most beautiful places on campus. The statement reads, in part:

We are busy at [Midwest University], but have witnessed its changes and are intoxicated by its charms.

Every flower, a work of art that surpasses that of Heaven itself.

Every tree, a meticulous engraving weathered by the passage of time.

Every building, as if talked about in glorious history.

Every statue, thick with a history reciting the songs of ages past.
(CSSA WeChat Post 4 2014)

WeChat is a message platform used almost exclusively by Chinese students, and the messages here are specifically addressed to a Chinese-language audience. We might view these examples, even literary allusions that would be lost on domestic students, as fostering an enclave setting apart from the rest of the campus. And yet, such an understanding would miss the entire point of the student photography contest. Chinese students exude a real passion for their school and engage with it in meaningful ways. It is just that this engagement is channelled through the enclave, rather than through institutionally sponsored domestic organisations and institutionally employed social media. Whether enjoying the fall colours or participating in events like Midwest's famous cycling competition, Chinese students organise parties and activities through Chinese social media, but with the goal of celebrating the institution, its history, and their place in it. The enclave fosters engagement with the larger campus community, though in Chinese-specific ways.

Challenges Posed by the Chinese Student Enclave

Some of the earliest studies of ethnic enclaves tended to view such communities as springboards, at best, or hindrances to assimilation. Since the 1980s, this understanding of the enclave has come under attack, and rightly so. The first studies took a simplistic view of white, middle-class culture as a normative baseline and judged enclave communities against it (Gordon 1961). More recent scholarship has gone a long way to right this unbalanced perspective and shown how

enclaves both ensure the maintenance of ethnic identity and provide opportunities for members' economic/academic success (Portes and Bach 1985; Portes and Jensen 1992; Zhou 1992, 2009). This is an important intervention, but it also threatens to muffle, if not silence, some of the very real difficulties residents of ethnic enclaves have in creating positive pathways between their communities and the larger society beyond their boundaries. For Chinese international students, the creation and navigation of such pathways is very challenging. Key to their challenges is the fact that ethnic communities, especially those of international students, are not closed entities. They are embedded in and partially the product of the larger host institution. Chinese students, despite their organisations, are, after all, part of a greater institutional structure. A completely closed community is not beneficial for students who pursue a college education, especially for those studying abroad. The tensions between the student community and the host campus that threaten student engagement and development are real and need to be explored.

The Chinese educational enclave can protect Chinese undergraduate students from campus stereotypes and provide social, academic, and spiritual support. At the same time, our research has shown that organisations in the educational enclave can sometimes negatively affect their members. Chinese international students' strong academic-mentoring and peer-support circles, for example, can sometimes encourage students to follow a narrow and well-worn educational track. In one of our more striking interviews, a senior male Chinese student reflected on how he achieved admission into the business school at Midwest University (Anonymous 7 2013). The student explained that he did not have a clear idea about what to study in college. However, during his first two years, almost every Chinese peer around him talked about their classes, assignments, and plans of getting into Midwest's prestigious business school. Whenever he asked for course and major suggestions from his Chinese senior "brothers and sisters," most of whom had chosen to study business, he learned about Midwest's education only from a business major's perspective. Gradually, he felt he was dragged into studying business without ever really considering whether that was what he truly wanted. He just "followed the group flow" (隨大流, *sui daliu*). While he eventually enjoyed many of his classes, he also laughed at his behaviour of blindly following what other Chinese students were

doing. He summed up his decision with a shrug, “Everyone else chooses it; therefore, I choose it.” The seduction of this kind of “group mentality” has the potential to limit Chinese students’ opportunities to explore and to communicate with a broader population of students and faculty. Indeed, stepping out of their comfort zones can bring students (international and domestic) a number of advantages. One male Chinese student told us:

I do not like taking classes with a lot of Chinese. I will choose some unpopular classes [as viewed by Chinese students], or a class that is offered at a different time. [...] If they are my friends, it is hard to do group work. We are too familiar with each other; some would never do their part of the work and drag the whole team [down]. Some of the American students are great, from whom I can learn a great deal of new things. If you always take classes with the same people like you, and receive the same education, you will always have the same results. If you communicate with students in other majors or with other people different from you, you will find they are very creative and you wonder why they have this idea that is so different from yours. (Anonymous 8 2014)

A number of student leaders acknowledge similar problems stemming from the increasing number of Chinese organisations and their impact on students. “The success of Chinese student organisations hinders Chinese students integrating into the United States and American culture,” a student leader said (Anonymous 7 2013). Another student leader added:

Our five-month-long orientation programmes, indeed, helped the new students have an easier transition from China to the United States. However, our student groups have done almost every aspect of the preparation for them; therefore, the new students do not need to interact with Americans. We complete so much to help the new students, but we also cut off Chinese students’ paths for communicating with the university and American people. (Anonymous 4 2014)

Beyond its insularity, the academic network has been accused of fostering cheating and academic dishonesty. We are wary of definitively declaring that here, but it does appear that mentoring and community websites occasionally cross the line between advice and outright plagiarism. For instance, a Chinese business major told us,

Chinese students tend to cover up more for each other. I suffered from this. Once I did not want to sell out my team member, who plagiarised on our group project. I tried to cover up for her. We were all disciplined for academic misconduct. (Anonymous 9 2013)

“Study masters” gain legitimacy not only from their grades but from their willingness to share their knowledge. Many are viewed as generous by the community because they post their homework and exam answers on Chinese social media. Such evidence is merely anecdotal, however. With little quantitative data on cheating, we have no way of knowing whether the rates of Chinese student cheating exceed those of other student communities, including their domestic peers. Because of the negative stereotypes associated with Chinese students and academic dishonesty, scholars should be careful of making quantitative conclusions from qualitative evidence. At most, we can say that the Chinese student enclave carries the potential for cheating.

Chinese student clubs and organisations must strike a delicate balance between the creation of co-ethnic and larger institutional ties. If this balance tips too far toward the ethnic community, the group becomes closed to the larger institution, shielding its members from the rest of the student body and American society, with all of its diversity. Shielded too much, students are less likely to improve their English-language skills, have fewer interactions with members of the host society, and come to accept a narrower view of academic success and potential future careers. However, it is not the international students’ sole responsibility to initiate this balance. The institution has just recently begun to recognise this; for instance, last year, Midwest University invited the CSSA to participate in homecoming events for the first time. The university has also begun to offer professional-development workshops for faculty designed to improve classroom learning environments for Chinese international students, and it encourages a growing number of student events and organisations that intentionally bring domestic and international students together prior to and throughout their undergraduate studies. Much more remains to be done before Midwest University fulfils its mission to create a genuinely global community for all its students and faculty.

Conclusion

Writ large, the significance of our findings stretch well beyond the education sector and touch uneasily upon China's rise and the global ambitions the state has laid out for its institutions and citizens. First, Chinese elite educational institutions, like their counterparts in other parts of the world, operate simultaneously as economic markets exchanging products and commodities; as status-seeking institutions competing for global rankings and prestige; and as networked partners collaborating on everything from school-to-work internships to "grand challenge" translational science (Marginson 2011). The increasing global mobility of Chinese students and scholars is integral to each of these operations and will have a significant influence on the structure and organisation of knowledge and the disciplines; on emerging regulations guiding new interpretations of academic freedom, intellectual property rights, and technology transfer; and on the creation and composition of elites who cluster in hubs connecting increasingly privileged world-class universities. Second, the intense pressure to succeed – to embody global ambitions – that Chinese international students feel as they recognise and claim their rightful spaces, roles, relationships, and support networks on US campuses requires performing a difficult balancing act. Chinese students create enclave organisations and teams to experience success "on their own terms," even as they eagerly construct homecoming parade floats and organise elaborate all-campus celebrations to showcase the "best parts of Chinese culture," the beauty and pride of being Chinese to members of their host community.

Writ small, ethnic enclave theory sheds new light on Chinese international students. All too often, administrators and media outlets have fallen back on staid stereotypes – the meek, quiet, or stand-offish Chinese student unwilling to integrate into the "rest" of campus life. Our research on Chinese student enclaves indicates this is not the case. Chinese students are in no way "passive." The specific forms of their involvement, however, are often hidden or barely visible when viewed from the perspective that assumes a dominant, mainstream campus culture. Unfortunately, this reference to a singular culture is starkly at odds with the complexity of life at Midwest. There is not one culture, but many cultures within a culture. The recognition of this plurality challenges common assumptions about engagement. There is not one way for students to engage in campus

life and learning. The Chinese student enclave promotes engagement in ways that are easily translatable to newly arrived international students but unrecognised or misunderstood by administrators. Few host-country students or administrators have heard of the Asian Basketball League, but ABL players themselves view their organisation as part of Midwest University, not concealed in the shadows. The players, just like their native counterparts, hold parties where they cheer on the varsity basketball team in the NCAA tournament. The information networks, social media, and student organisations based in the enclave provide a space for the formation of social capital, which constitutes the collective resources specific to the Chinese student community: friendship and ethnic networks, trust and cooperation, and cultural norms and values (Zhou 1992: 12). These resources contribute to Chinese student success despite their lack of familiarity with American education and their non-native language abilities. Chinese international students choose to rely on the enclave and its networks because they view this as the best strategy for success.

Understanding the Chinese student community as an enclave brings to light the complexities of student lives in a way that institutional emphases on “diversity” and “multiculturalism” may not. Challenges involved with the growing enclave are certainly complicated, and they deserve study. Ethnic organisations do not simply help students – offering emotional and academic support – or hinder students – preventing English-language acquisition – but reveal fundamental tensions within higher education in the twenty-first century. By understanding the ways Chinese students form their ethnic networks (the process, in other words), we can begin to paint a textured picture of student experience and create specifically targeted policies. To realise a truly globally diverse campus, after all, requires that we make an effort to understand complicated realities rather than simply repeating high-flying rhetoric about the importance of cultivating global competence or thinking along the lines of low-lying stereotypes that will prevent any meaningful achievement to that end.

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