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"Too White for Asian Spaces but Too Asian for White Spaces"

British Born Chinese Students' Experiences at pre-92 Universities

Mei Yee Yau

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Declaration

I declare that this Dissertation is the product of my own work, that it has obtained ethical

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Abstract

Navigating identity and having a sense of belonging is essential for young people entering the major life transition of attending university. This can be especially complex for bicultural people who are influenced by two cultures when trying to understand where they fit in. British born Chinese students make up a significant proportion of university students; however, pre-92 universities in the UK are predominantly white spaces, where minority groups may find it challenging to fit in. This research aimed to shed light on how British born Chinese people experience university life. Seven semi-structured interviews of British born Chinese students and thematic analysis were conducted to explore the experiences and challenges these students face at predominantly white universities. This research found that British born Chinese students may find it challenging to find a place to belong in both white and Chinese spaces. They experience feeling othered in various ways, such as identity questioning, denial, and fetishization. Secondly, the research highlights the importance of British born Chinese students' beliefs about how others perceive them and how this can influence how events are understood and how they interact with others as they anticipate other people's perceptions before reacting to othering and racism. This study provides valuable insight into the underrepresented group and points to suggestions that universities should create a climate that fosters trusting and inclusive relationships to support the overall psychological well-being of British born Chinese students and their academic performance.

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Contents

Introduction

Historically, the demographic of higher education in the UK has been made up mainly of white students from European backgrounds (Taylor, 2003). Higher education and pre-1992 universities remain predominantly white spaces with little diversification and representation (Arday, 2018a; Osbourne et al., 2021). British born Chinese students in the UK have the highest entry rate into university as 66 percent of Chinese 18-year-olds enter higher education (UCAS, 2018). However, there is a seven-percentage point difference between degree outcomes of Chinese and White students, with white students receiving higher grades than all minority groups, even when controlled for prior entry grades (Office for students, 2018). In addition to an attainment gap, minority ethnic students are less likely to be satisfied with their university experiences (NUS, 2011). Compared to most white graduates, only one-third of Asian students were satisfied with the course and institution they attended (Conner et al., 2004). This dissatisfaction may be due to a lack of sense of belonging, which is crucial to retention and success at university (Thomas, 2012).

A sense of belonging refers to feelings of connectedness that make individuals feel that they matter to others (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1979). This belongingness is a basic human need that takes on heightened significance in specific contexts, such as joining a university and entering a foreign environment (Strayhorn, 2018). Ethnic minority students not only have the stress of succeeding academically but are also having to find a sense of belonging and navigate the white culture they may be unfamiliar with (Wei, 2011). Subsequently, for many minority students, perceived diversity on campus and their expectation of belonging affects their choice of university (Read et al., 2003), and institutional culture is related to minority attainment at university (NUS & Universities UK, 2019).

Lack of belonging is related to alienation and isolation (Read et al., 2003) and can result in long term dissatisfaction, depression and low self-esteem (Hagerty et al., 2002). Our sense of belonging to a particular group fosters and validates feelings of acceptance and identity (AhnAllen et al., 2006). Consequently, our identity and sense of belonging are constantly intertwined, with them affecting one another. Identity formation is crucial during young adulthood as people begin to examine their ethnicity, the groups they belong to and their significance (Maehler et al., 2020). Consequently, people's identity can play a meaningful role in experiences at university as young people enter this life transition.

Bicultural identity and sense of belonging

Our identity is largely defined through the groups that we belong to (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This topic has been well studied with the development of social identity and self-categorisation theories understanding how people identify with social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). However, even though in today's global world, growing numbers of people identify with multiple groups research on the identification with multiple groups has been largely neglected (Hirsh & Kang, 2015). Biculturals are individuals who have internalised two cultures that influence their perceptions and behaviours (Hong et al., 2000), such as British born Chinese people who have both British and Chinese cultures incorporated in their identity. Portes and Rumbaut (2005) suggest that biculturals such as second-generation British born Chinese immigrants' sense of identity and belonging to one's ethnic and national cultures depends on the history of the first generation, the pace of acculturation, and the resources available to overcome any barrier to adaption. This identity formation can be especially difficult for bicultural students at university as they face new academic demands and the challenge of fitting in with their peers. Very little is understood about how

biculturals identify with different groups at university and how their dual identity influences their experiences.

Racial and ethnic minority students are the most likely to experience poor mental health at university; it has been argued that this may be due to the lack of belonging and the discrimination that minorities face (Arday, 2018b). At the university level, racial inequality is often implicit, with many minorities facing 'othering' and microaggressions that prompt exclusion (Olaniyan, 2021; Singh, 2011). Racial othering is when individuals are considered fundamentally different and outsiders to the majority group (Rohleder, 2014). People can feel 'othered' from overt discrimination or more covert forms such as microaggressions. Microaggressions are small, common, and sometimes ambiguous acts of racism (Yearwood, 2013). Despite the intention behind these comments, they can lead to upset and isolation for those on the receiving end. With Asian undergraduate students making up a growing proportion of the university demographic, understanding their identity and assimilation in predominantly white spaces is essential.

Identity denial and frame switching

Student experiences are largely influenced by their identity and how others perceive them; this is evident in biculturals experiences of identity denial and frame switching (Albuja et al., 2018; Ramírez-Esparza et al., 2006). Identity denial occurs when personal identification does not align with how others perceive them (Cheryan & Monin, 2005). Prototypicality, a term explained in social categorisation theory (Turner et al., 1987), can explain this denial. Prototypicality refers to how a person matches the characteristics associated with a group; identity denial occurs when a person differs from the group's prototype. For example, widely held implicit perceptions of "American" and "white" can

cause Asian Americans to become outsiders in their native country if they do not fit the perceived archetypes (Devos & Banaji, 2005). Similarly, denial can occur when one's identification differs from the perceptions that others hold; for example, a second-generation British born Chinese person may have never lived in China and self-identify as British, but others may see them only as Chinese (Rockquemore et al., 2009). This rejection of group membership and identity denial threatens the fundamental need to belong (Eisenberger, 2003), and it makes individuals feel "othered".

In addition, the salience of ethnicity and identity often depends on situational factors; for example, Asian American immigrant youths feel more ethnic at home but more American at school (Huang, 1998). The situation specificity of ethnic identity demonstrates identity's variability; Hong et al., (2000) explain frame switching, where individuals shift between different cultural frames and behaviours in response to cues in the environment. Cultural knowledge becomes operative depending on the extent to which a construct is highly accessible. For example, exposure to Chinese icons such as famous people or landmarks, led to increased endorsement of Chinese values by Hong Kong students studying in America (Hong et al., 2000). Bicultural people will assimilate to norms that have been made salient by cultural cues (Rámirez-Esparaza et al., 2006). Similarly, external events may influence our experiences and perceptions of identity. For example, after the initial COVID-19 outbreak, negative perceptions of Chinese people led to racist events and narratives (He et al., 2021). This personal discrimination can create negative associations with an identity (Lou et al., 2021). These types of situational factors influence how people associate with Chinese identities and how this can influence the perceptions and behaviours of others.

Identity and belonging at university

Dealing with identity denial and navigating our identity in different situations is a challenge at any age; however, it can be especially difficult for young people as they reach developmental milestones such as ethnic identity certainty (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). These experiences of othering and identity denial make up the nuances of biculturals; they influence one's perceptions of identity and where an individual feels they belong. This can be especially important at university as a lack of belonging leads to poorer academic performance and an increased likelihood of leaving university prematurely (Freeman et al., 2007). Universities should actively support their minority students. For example, some suggest enabling interpersonal peer interactions can improve students' sense of belonging and consequently improve student success, adjustment, and plans to stay at university (Strayhorn, 2018). Universities UK and the National of Students campaigned in 2019 and urged universities to develop racially diverse environments that foster a sense of belonging at university (UUK & NUS, 2019). Although these are essential steps to improving the experiences of minorities at university, there is not enough research and genuine commitment to make progress. To create practical support, we should seek to understand these experiences in more depth, learning how the nuances of bicultural identity influences their university life.

The current research:

Literature has established that bicultural people's experiences and sense of identity are often complex. There has been much research into racism and the attainment gap among Black and ethnic minority students at universities (Bunce et al., 2019; Osler, 1999). However, less is known about the intricacies and experiences of bicultural people such as British born Chinese students in predominantly white universities. With Chinese people

making up a significant proportion of students in the UK, and their dissatisfaction with their higher education, research into their specific experiences could provide important insight.

This study investigates the experiences of British born Chinese students at pre-92 universities that are consequential to their sense of self and their university life. The study adopts a qualitative approach to shed light on the underrepresented experiences of this minority group. This knowledge can inform practice at universities to support British born Chinese students by improving psychological well-being, satisfaction and academic performance at university.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited through opportunity sampling, where a poster was uploaded to my personal Instagram asking if any British born Chinese university students would like to participate in interviews. I chose to use my personal Instagram account as it has a large reach and allowed me to have participants from universities all over the country. Respondents were emailed an information sheet (Appendix B) with relevant detail about the interview and its focus on their experiences at university.

Seven British born Chinese undergraduate and recently graduated students from pre-92 universities participated in this study. There were five women and two men aged between 19 and 24. Participants were from various disciplines, including STEM subjects, humanities and social sciences (see Appendix G for a breakdown of participant demographics). A sample size of seven was chosen to enable significant reflection and time on each transcript to identify underlying ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Materials

An interview schedule was designed (Appendix C) with a semi-structured approach. This method is suited for exploring the participants' experiences regarding complicated and sometimes sensitive issues and allows for probing for clarification of answers (Barriball & While, 1994).

I began by sharing information about myself, including my ethnic background and family history, before asking participants to introduce themselves in the same way to build

rapport. I then asked participants to recall any meaningful experiences they have had during university and stories, positive or negative, about times they felt conscious of being British-born Chinese. Participants were encouraged to include more detail through probes such as, "how did that make you feel?" and "how did you want to respond?". The open-ended questions and prompts focused on subjective experiences and allowed flexibility for interviewees to explain their thoughts and experiences.

Additionally, towards the end of the interview, if the topics had not already been mentioned, I explored a certain area of interest, guided by previous literature on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on discrimination (He et al., 2021). I was interested in whether the participant's experiences had changed in recent years due to the pandemic and the rise in anti-Asian hate; therefore, participants were asked about their thoughts on the matter. At the end of the interview, participants were given the opportunity to mention additional information they felt was relevant.

The interviews were conducted and audio recorded on Teams in November and December of 2021. The interviews were between 30 and 60 minutes in duration, averaging 39 minutes, and I (female, aged 21) conducted all interviews to maintain consistency. The interviews were transcribed verbatim using a simplified Jeffersonian notation system, based on Wetherall & Potter (1992). Non-linguistic features such as laughter and speech delays are transcribed to provide a more comprehensive representation of the content (Potter, 2012). See Appendix D for transcription conventions. In the transcriptions, pseudonyms were used to protect participant anonymity.

After the interview, participants were debriefed, and their consent was confirmed via email. All interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed by the experimenter; a British born Chinese student. Therefore, I had the advantage of being an insider. This allowed me to establish trust and equity, making it easier for participants to talk about sensitive topics. However, a danger is that participants assumed that I knew what they were talking about or that I understood their experiences fully. Similarly, I needed to be aware not to make assumptions about the meanings of the participants' experiences. This made probing for more detail and clarification particularly important. In addition, closeness to the topic I was studying could potentially hinder the scope of my research (Unluer, 2015). Therefore, I had to make a conscious effort to see the bigger picture and be open to new dimensions. It is important to note, the British born Chinese community is not a homogenous group; they come from different countries and have different experiences, views, and attitudes. Therefore, although I am an insider on one level of identity, I had to be open to new perspectives.

Analysis

Interviews were investigated using reflexive thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2019), as it is a flexible method and is appropriate for exploring participant experiences and perspectives to generate insight from the interviews (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). I take an epistemologically realist approach to explore participants' direct experiences of their realities (Nowell et al., 2017), which will be discussed considering the literature rather than generated deductively from theory. All interviews were transcribed and read multiple times to become familiar with the text. Codes were generated in both a deductive (based on existing concepts) and inductive way (based on data); these codes identified data relevant to various aspects of the research question. These codes were collated, and several

combinations of the codes were considered to generate themes. The themes represent patterns of shared meaning that explain central concepts. Qualitative extracts are labelled by a pseudonym to protect participant identity.

My desire to research British-born Chinese students' experiences was motivated by my own experience as a British born Chinese person at university. Reflexivity is the awareness of the potential influence of the researcher on the participants and the study (Gilgun, 2008); for my study, this involved examining my judgements during both data collection and analysis. During reflexive analysis, I had to be aware of how my part in the process shaped the outcomes of my study. For example, whilst conducting the interviews, I was surprised by some responses, such as when participants said they didn't mind hearing racist jokes. This struck me as interviewees gave perspectives I had not anticipated and opinions that did not necessarily align with my own.

Findings:

Participants' experiences as British born Chinese students are organised into two overarching themes. The first theme, "Where do you come from and where do you belong?" explores the experiences of British born Chinese people fitting into university. This theme explores how British born Chinese participants may not feel like they belong in Chinese ethnic groups or British groups. I investigate how British identity is questioned, denied, and misrecognised. I then explore the importance of shared experiences in finding a place to fit in. The second theme: "Understanding racism and the influence of others", highlights how participants spoke about two different racist encounters and reflects on how the anticipated perceptions from others influence how people respond to racism.

Theme 1. Where do you come from and where do you belong?

Asking somebody where they are from may appear like a harmless and straightforward question, but the participants were frustrated and upset when they were confronted with this question. However, the issue goes beyond this question, it lies in how participants have their identity, something so personal to them, denied. Othering was brought up throughout all the interviews conducted. Being othered took many forms, such as being questioned about where you are from; feeling tokenised; being fetishized; and being called whitewashed.

1.1. Where are you really from?

The participants provided insight into how they navigate their bicultural identities as both a British and Chinese person, specifically when white people would ask them where they are from.

Holly: "But it gets to me when someone meets me, and they're like 'where are you

from?' And then I'm hesitant to answer, like do I say London, or do I say my ethnicity?"

… "If I were to answer London, the response would always be like, "no, where are

you <u>really</u> from?" I can't just say London and not have to explain that further."

In multiple interviews, the question "where are you really from" was brought up. The

participants explained that it upsets them: "it gets to me" because they are hesitant about

how to respond. Holly suggests that her previous experiences shape her sense of hesitancy

when asked about her identity. This highlights the significance of her past in anticipating

how conversations about her identity will unfold. It suggests that these conversations are

not easy interactions as Holly cannot act naturally or answer without thought; instead, she is

anticipating responses and thus carefully considers how she answers the question.

Being asked where you are "really" from carries implicit assumptions about race,

ethnicity, and nationality (Cheryan & Monin, 2005). It implies that British born Chinese

people are not British enough, making the participants feel excluded in the country they

were born and raised in. When Mia is confronted with this question, she explains her

frustration with having parts of her identity invalidated. In response to this, Mia mentions

the pride she associates with being Chinese; this was a consideration that not everybody

mentioned: "I'm *from Essex. I was born in Essex. I'm proud of my culture, but I'm very much*

British as well as I am Chinese." She emphasises her pride in her Chinese ethnicity not to

disregard or diminish that part of her identity while highlighting her nationality. Her

emphasis on the dual identity highlights how disregarding her British nationality or Chinese

ethnicity invalidates her lived experiences. Consequently, Mia asserts her identity to prove

her group membership when faced with identity denial by explicitly repeating her British identification.

Max explained another way that British born Chinese people might feel like an outsider and not "one of us" while living in university accommodation: "*I did feel like a minority… I felt like this token Asian friend or something*". 'Token ethnic friend' is a colloquial term for when there is only one ethnic minority in a white group of friends. Max felt that being this glorified Asian friend made him caricatured as "other". For Max, his identity was made very apparent living in a white space, making him feel separate from the group.

Fetishization

Being othered in the dating scene exemplifies the complexities of being seen as different as a British born Chinese person. When asked about dating, female participants describe being fetishized by white men and how are very conscious of it when they date.

> Mia: "*I always felt like I had to be careful when dating. I feel like I have to worry about people's intentions with me. I'm like, are they only looking at me because I'm east Asian and they have yellow fever, you know? … I feel like I'm always kind of like an experiment for boys. Or they're just like, 'Oh, she's a bit exotic. She's a little bit different'. I feel like people like Asian women because they have this stereotype that they're petite, shy and cute and won't talk back.*"

Mia describes how some of her dating experiences are structured around her race and Chinese identity. At face value, it may seem that desiring a person for their race is a positive

form of being othered. However, Mia explains that it makes her hyperaware of how others perceive her. She understands that although this othering is construed as positive, it is damaging as she becomes associated with the fetishized stereotype that East Asian women are "*exotic*", "*petite*", and "*shy*". This represents the intersection between sexism and racism that make up the complexities of being a British born Chinese woman.

Mia hints at the complicated dual use of "*different*", where white people can use the term as a compliment and an insult. There is a stark contrast between being "different", meaning you are an outsider who does not belong in a space and being "different" and subsequently being desired.

Lily is hyperaware of how her identity is perceived, considering fetishization in her everyday life. Lily explains that: "*whenever I put on a pleated skirt, I'm like 'Oh my God am I making myself look like a Japanese schoolgirl?".* The fact that experiences of fetishization have influenced how Lily thinks she is being perceived and subsequently what she chooses to wear demonstrates how this 'othering' influences not only her dating life but also her daily life.

1:2 Not belonging in ethnic or national identity groups

For several participants, they found it challenging to navigate their dual identity, feeling as though they do not fit in with Chinese students or white British students. Participants describe how they feel too 'different' around white people and too "whitewashed" around Chinese people.

Ben: "I feel like I'm too white for Asian spaces, like when I'm around Asian people I feel like they might look down on me for not being able to speak Chinese, but at the same time, I'm too Asian for white spaces… Like sometimes in ABACUS [Association of British and Chinese University Students Society] *I would feel almost too white, especially because I was a generation below them. And then in white spaces, you feel like you're too Asian, or too different, so yeah there's definitely levels to it, it's really hard to find that balance in a way… to fit in"*

The words "*too white*" and "*too Asian*" highlight the need for British born Chinese people to morph into different versions of themselves to gain group acceptance with these groups. This "*balance*" underscores the struggle that British born Chinese people face when attempting to hold onto their Chinese identities without becoming too different and outcast from the surrounding white community. Ben suggests that this "balance" requires constant attention as this feeling of non-belonging is continual. Ben emphasizes this concept of bicultural straddling, the ongoing process of adaption from living within different cultural influences (Kao & Huang, 2015). British born Chinese students experience this as they live with Chinese influences at home and British influences in society. The key takeaway here is that these participants feel isolated, not only from British people but also from other Chinese students. They feel too different from white people but are also othered by the people they feel would relate to their minority experiences.

Mia echoes how she tried to find this "balance" and fit in with the groups: "*I used to dress just like my white friends to fit in more, and I would talk about different things around Chinese people".* Mia asserts her identity by changing herself to "fit in more" with the groups. She shifts between her British and Chinese cultural frames by responding to cues in

the environment. In this case, being around white people made Mia mimic how they dressed and being around Chinese people influenced her conversations.

1.3 Identity misrecognition

For several participants, including Max, not fitting into the Chinese community was linked to the idea of being too Westernised for Chinese natives: "*I would feel almost too white*". Holly explained in more detail how her identity is misrecognised by Chinese nationals.

> *Holly: "But it's annoying that they think that being Westernised or whitewashed is so bad… Because they're not understanding it from our point of view, they're almost saying like, 'oh, you're ignorant, like you can't be bothered to learn the language or you're centred around fitting into white spaces,' and that is not the case".*

In contrast to being asked 'where are you really from?" and having her British identity denied, being called "whitewashed" suggests Holly's British identity is accepted by Chinese nationals but misrecognised.' Whitewashed' is a term used to describe Chinese people who have assimilated into the white mainstream and have not retained many ethnic practices (Pyke & Dang, 2003). The term "whitewashed" diminishes her Chinese identity. Holly understood that she was being called whitewashed because the Chinese nationals lacked the perspective of British born Chinese people. It highlights how Chinese nationals did not value Britishness in the same way that Holly did, and subsequently, they could not understand why she would align with this culture so significantly and not Chinese cultures.

Mia highlights how being called whitewashed diminishes the lived experiences of being a Chinese woman: (Mia) "*regardless of experiences and stuff, we're still perceived as just as Asian as any other Chinese people like … to a British white person, I'm still just Chinese*". Mia highlights the irony of having her Chinese identity denied while also enduring the negative experiences associated with being and looking Chinese in predominantly white spaces. This underscores the importance of understanding the nuances of British born Chinese experiences, as it is much more complex than it may initially appear.

1:4 The importance of shared experiences

One factor that stood out throughout the interviews was the importance of shared experiences between Chinese students and how it can influence how people find a place to belong.

> Max: "*I would say that actually you are drawn to ethnic minorities because you share experiences … It's hard to put like a pinpoint on that because everyone's experience is unique, but there are elements in everyone's stories that you can relate to. I feel like it's because you have that common ground in the first place, and you feel more comfortable with them straight away.*"

Like Max, many participants explained how they were drawn to other Chinese students when forming friendships. Despite the spectrum of Chinese students and their differences, Max understands that there is a common thread of being a Chinese minority studying in the UK. This common ground put people at ease and made it easier for Max to make friends. Holly echoed this, explaining that collective experiences and mutual

understanding were a reason why she joined ABACUS (Association of British and Chinese University Students). For Holly, joining ABACUS meant "*there was somebody else who would always understand."* Holly emphasises the importance of having a shared understanding of identity as feeling understood validates her experiences and the challenges that being a British born Chinese minority can bring.

On the other hand, some students believed they did not have enough shared understanding with other Chinese students, which acted as a deterrent to joining ABACUS. ABACUS is made up of British born Chinese students and Chinese international students. One student feared that he was not 'Chinese enough' to fit in: (Ben)" *I never joined ABACUS, I don't know why, but I just don't think I would get along with them, I don't think we have much in common because I can't speak Chinese and I'm not very like traditional Chinese if that makes sense*". Unlike Max, who believed the shared experience of being an ethnic minority made him comfortable around other Chinese students in ABACUS, Ben believed his lack of mutual understanding of identity discouraged him from joining ABACUS.

Similarly, Mia reinforces this from a different perspective, explaining that she did not want to share her experiences of being a minority with her white housemates: "*In my flat, I have always been the only non-white person, let alone the only Chinese person, so I always felt a little bit different, and as much as I love them, I couldn't really talk to them about these kinds of things*". Mia emphasises the importance of being able to talk about her identity, such as her culture, history, and experiences. In this circumstance, her shared experiences play an essential part in her feelings of connectedness and closeness.

Theme 2: Understanding racism and the influence of others

The previous theme explores identity and perceptions of the British born Chinese identity. In this next theme, I consider how identity influences racist experiences and how participants speak about this racism. I observed a stark contrast between participants' conception of 'casual' racism and the overt racism related to the pandemic that affected everyday life. Lastly, I reflect on how other people's perceptions influence how British born Chinese people respond to racism.

2:1 "Casual" racism.

An interesting observation in the interviews was that participants hinted at this idea of 'casual' racism despite later recalling experiences of blatant racism.

> *Will: "Coming to uni, I would say I've experienced less racist kind of stuff than at school. It's kind of hard to say, but now it's kind of more like casual, like fun racism if that makes sense."*

There are two interesting points here in Will's statement. The first is that Will suggests that his experiences are now less racist, as he compares them to his previous experiences in school. This highlights how his past experiences and where he comes from influences his understanding of his present experiences of racism. The next interesting thing is that he describes racism as "casual" and "fun". This links heavily with a lot of literature on the representation of racism as humour (Pérez, 2017; Pauwels, 2021).

Later in the interview Will goes on to explain an experience of overt racism he has faced.

Will: "In London, I guess there was this one time I was walking home and this guy just kind of came up to me and said, uhm, 'death to all Chinese people' or something like that. I guess that did kind of stick out to me, but that hasn't really happened too often before."

Will explained a circumstance of blatant racism he experienced, which directly contrasts his previous statement explaining his experiences as "casual" or "fun" racism. However, how he described this experience so nonchalantly emphasises the idea of racism not being that significant in his life. This was highlighted further in his statement as he immediately follows it up by saying that it doesn't often happen to confirm that racism is not a frequent occurrence in his life.

2:2 How racism manifests in everyday life

Our interviewees suggested that during the pandemic, racism influenced their day to day lives. The most obvious example of this was a racist experience on public transport that was recalled by three different participants.

Ben: "the whole train was full of people all standing up in the middle of the aisle. Every single one of these seats were booked, some of them even had three people sitting on two chairs. And no one sat next to me… I think because obviously at the time COVID was really new, and the only thing it was really associated with was China and maybe Chinese people. It was so mad because it was so busy, and people still were like 'I don't want to sit there'"

The fact that three participants brought up almost identical experiences highlights how this was a salient event for British born Chinese people. This quote highlights the importance of context in racist encounters. In this case, the COVID-19 pandemic was understood as the fuel for racism. The participants understood these everyday social interactions signalled white peoples' perceptions, assumptions, and apparent fear of Chinese people. The participants believed the fear was grounded in racism, which was surprising and upsetting for the participants. Importantly, regardless of whether participants' beliefs about how others perceived them were accurate, the beliefs influenced their emotions and how they understood the events.

2:3 Doubting one's own understanding

Two participants spoke about the emotions they felt after racist experiences, their beliefs about others influenced how they reacted to their experiences.

Lily [talking about the racist experience on the train]: "I actually didn't want to talk about it to anybody because it was almost like if I spoke about it, it made it real. And not only that, it made it available to be scrutinised. So, if I said it to someone, I was scared that they would be like 'there are more important things', or 'you're making it up.' So almost to just save myself the like fear of being scrutinised I did it myself. I'm still really working on this idea of why my reaction is to feel ashamed."

Lily emphasises how being faced with discrimination can be a lonely experience as a minority. In these situations, her emotions from being singled out are exacerbated by her

fear of being scrutinised when talking to others or seeking help. Lily's reaction was largely

influenced by how she perceived others would respond. Her anticipation of being belittled

caused her to close off and not talk to others. This meant she couldn't act in ways she

normally would and talk on her own terms.

Discussion:

This study aimed to investigate the experiences of British born Chinese students at pre-92 universities; I believe there are two main takeaways from this research. The first important consideration is the complexity of students' experiences being othered by both British and Chinese groups. What was striking was that these students found themselves caught between these two cultures and found it challenging when fitting in with both groups. They experience racism in their own country and feel left out of some white spaces. And they expect to be recognised by Chinese international students but instead have their identity misrecognised as they are deemed too westernised. This is important for British born Chinese students, as for some going to university may be the first time they are surrounded by both white and Chinese groups in close quarters. Therefore, finding a place to belong in these groups is important, especially in a new environment and at a time when establishing identity is particularly relevant.

However, what is perhaps more interesting is the importance of meta-perceptions in how they affected these experiences of othering and non-belonging. The participants' sense-making of their identity was not only influenced by their perceptual field at present (e.g., being the only Chinese person in their university accommodation) but also by their meta-perceptions of other white and Chinese students garnered partly by their previous experiences of othering and racism. How these students believed they were being perceived by others powerfully shaped how they felt about their identity and informed how they understood events. It influenced how they responded to othering and racism, and for some influenced day to day decisions such as what they wore. This occurred regardless of whether these perceptions are accurate on not. This is especially important to understand the experiences of British born Chinese students as they develop their understanding and sense

of identity at university. Compounding this is the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic that has put a spotlight on many British born Chinese people and forced conversations about identity. This has made people's perceptions of Chinese people much more accessible and may influence British born Chinese people even more recently.

Universities need to be aware of the nuances of British born Chinese experiences. Understanding how students may find it difficult to belong in their nationality and ethnicity groups can be useful for universities when supporting their students**.** To improve student issues of equity and diversity, the culture at pre-92 universities needs to change. Groups like Chinese society should strive to be more appreciative of the spectrum of Chinese experiences, and universities should strive to educate students to understand intergroup and intragroup racism in greater depth.

I hope my study provides valuable insight into the experiences of British born Chinese students to improve their lack of representation in the existing literature. The findings extend previous literature on bicultural identity and belonging to provide insight into the specific experiences of British born Chinese people at university. The research is consistent with dual identity research and theories of frame switching, highlighting how biculturals may have their identities denied which may lead them to change aspects of themselves to fit in with white and Chinese groups. It also provides further evidence for research into the fetishization of East Asian people, highlighting how damaging and influential it can be for minorities.

This research also highlights how minority groups are often attuned to the perspectives of the majority and those in power (Lammers et al., 2008; António & Monteiro,

2015). Research has found that this can lead to different social construals (Saguy et al., 2013). For instance, to white people, the question "where are you really from" may appear harmless, showing interest or curiosity. However, for minorities, this question may trigger a sense of alienation as it demonstrates how, at best, minority identities are questioned and, at worst, their identities are denied (Cheryan & Monin, 2005). Similarly, although non-Chinese people may construe fetishization of Chinese people as a compliment and an acceptance of looking different, from the perspectives of Chinese students, the experience was of being othered and defined by harmful stereotypes.

Considerations

Despite the value of my study's findings, caution should be taken when generalising small-scale studies. The participants were constrained by the people I could reach on social media; thus, some participants raised in the same areas or with similar backgrounds may have restricted viewpoints. Therefore, sampling limitation restricts the extent to which research can be generalised to all British born Chinese students at pre-92 universities. Other British born Chinese students growing up or attending universities outside of those studied may have different experiences. This limits the generalisability of the experiences to all British born Chinese students. Similarly, this sample was made up mainly of Westernised Chinese people, however, there is a whole spectrum of British born Chinese experiences. Therefore, further research comparing other British-born students is crucial to understanding their range of experiences and subsequently improving the support these students receive at university.

Nonetheless, the participants in the study represent a prominent part of the population and provided deep insight into their experiences. This is novel research

investigating an underrepresented population and helps British born Chinese students feel seen and heard. Studies reflecting the rich diversity in our communities and at university can help generate understanding about the causes of and strategies to address disparities such as poorer grades and satisfaction rates for minority students at university.

This research points to the potential for psychological analysis of other minority groups at university. Many other students would benefit significantly from having their group and experiences investigated. This could help create specialised interventions and support for other minority groups, for example, British-Pakistani students, that make up a significant proportion of university students (Office for Students, 2018).

Conclusion

This study sheds light on the experiences of a minority bicultural group and increases the awareness of diversity. This is increasingly important for universities that should strive to understand and meet the needs of their diverse population. This research adds to the growing psychological research on bicultural identity and highlights the significance of sense of identity for British born Chinese students at university. This research also highlights how British born Chinese students may find it challenging to find a place to belong in both white and Chinese spaces. They experience feeling othered in various ways, such as identity questioning, denial, and fetishization. Secondly, the research highlights the importance of British born Chinese students' beliefs about how they are viewed and how this can influence how events are understood and how they interact with others as they consider and anticipate perceptions before reacting to othering and racism. It is crucial to investigate experiences and identity at university to provide representation for minority groups and to create diversity within psychological research to reflect the diversity in

society. This research can help universities understand the specifics of the British born

Chinese identity and encourage them to provide more inclusive spaces and improve

education on othering for both Chinese and white students. This could support the overall

psychological well-being of British born Chinese students and help improve their academic

performance.

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Appendices

Appendix A: contribution to thesis

PS30094/ PS30155 Psychology Dissertation

Student
Mei Yee Yau

Placement Provider
N/A

Dissertation Supervisor
Leda Blackwood

Please indicate with a tick if you had any help from either your placement provider or your dissertation supervisor on the following aspects of your dissertation. If you are on the PS30155 degree or if your dissertation was not based on work done on placement then please put N/A (i.e., not applicable) for the Placement Provider boxes, but still put ticks in the Dissertation Supervisor boxes where appropriate.

	Placement Provider	Dissertation Supervisor
Development of Research Question	N/A	✓
Literature Search (Guiding your search for papers)	N/A	✓
Data Collection	N/A	

Data Analysis	N/A	✓
Reading Drafts	N/A	✓
Commenting on Drafts	N/A	✓

Appendix B: Information sheet

An investigation into the experiences of British born Chinese students in predominantly white universities

Participant Information Sheet

Who am I?

My name is Mei Yee Yau and I am a student in the Department of Psychology at the University of Bath. I am conducting this study as part of a project into the experience of British born Chinese students in predominantly white universities.

What is this study about?

I am looking for individuals to take part in an interview with online access. In this interview I would like to talk to you about your experiences as a minority on a pre-92 university campus. I am interested in the experiences that British born Chinese students have at university and how they are meaningful to them.

What will I be asked to do?

I would like you to come along to an interview where we would talk about experiences as a British born Chinese person at a pre-92 university. There are no right or wrong answers – I just want to hear what you think. The interview itself will last 30 minutes to an hour and will take place at a time that suits you. The interview will occur on an online Teams meeting.

The discussion will be recorded so that I can catch everything that you say and listen to it again later.

Do I have to take part?

Taking part in this research is entirely voluntary, and you are free to make your own choice about whether you want to participate. If you agree to take part, you can choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to and you are free to withdraw at any time.

What will happen to the information I provide?

Should you decide to take part, the interview will be recorded. These recordings will then be typed up and the files stored on an encrypted password-protected computer. Any potentially identifying details, including your name, will be removed and all recordings will be destroyed. The anonymised transcripts will not be linked to any contact details that you provide and will be stored separately so you cannot be identified.

Once the project is completed, the information you have given to me will be kept safely by the University of Bath. If you give your consent, it may be used by other genuine researchers, with the University of Bath's approval, under the strict rules governing the confidentiality of your information. So again, your name, or any material that might identify you, will never be used or given to anyone.

What will happen to the results of this research?

What you tell me will inform our project on the experiences of British born Chinese students at university. I may use extracts taken from what you have told me, however these would not identify you to anyone. The findings of the research may also be published in research

journals or used in presentations. If you would like to be sent a summary of the findings, we can arrange for this.

University of Bath privacy notice

The University of Bath privacy notice can be found here: https://www.bath.ac.uk/corporate-information/university-of-bath-privacy-notice-for-research-participants/.

What do I do if I would like to take part or have any more questions?

You can contact me, Mei Yee Yau, to arrange a suitable time or to discuss any questions you might have.

Email – my648@bth.ac.uk   Phone – 07447924388

You can also speak to the supervisor of the project, Leda Blackwood

Email – lb791@bath.ac.uk

If you have any concerns related to your participation in this study please direct them to the Chair of the Department of Psychology Research Ethics Committee, email: psychology-ethics@bath.ac.uk.

Our address is

Department of Psychology

University of Bath

Claverton Down

Bath, BA2 7AY

Many thanks for taking the time to read this

Appendix C: Interview Schedule

Semi structured schedule:

Introduction:

Thank you for taking part in my study about British born Chinese students. I'm Mei Yee and my grandparents are from Hong Kong but my parents were born here so I am second generation. In this interview I am going to ask you about life at university and your experiences here. There are some topics that you might assume I will understand (as a fellow British born Chinese person), however for the purpose of the interview I may ask you to elaborate and explain in more detail.

Icebreaker:

So to start off, tell me a little bit about who you and where you are from.

Main question:

I am really interested in your experiences at university as a British Chinese person. Could you tell me a story about your experience, or the kinds of experiences that made you conscious of being a British born Chinese person. They can be positive or negative and you can tell as many stories as you like.

Prompts:

• Have you experienced anything that made you realise you're a British born Chinese person (or made you feel different?

• Can you tell me more about that?

- What happened?

- Who was there?

- What did it make you feel?

- What did it make you feel about other groups?

- What did you do?

- Is there anything that you wish you did?

Question 2:

One of the things I am really interested in is whether there have been any changes to your experience as a British born Chinese person in the last few years. Have you noticed anything different? Talk me through that.

Prompts:

- COVID

- Anti-Asian hate crimes

- Casual racism - Trump

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix D: Transcription conventions

- Underline for emphasis

- (.) for a noticeable pause of less than 2 seconds

- (3.0) for a pause of more than 2 seconds (*approximately* timed)

- (inaudible) for indistinguishable utterances

- :: for when there is elongation of prior sound

- [text] for descriptive text added by the researcher

- "text" for when someone is quoting/mimicking another's (or their own) prior speech

- [laughs] for when a participant laughs during the interview

Appendix E: Consent Form

An investigation into the experiences of British born Chinese students in predominantly

white universities – *Confidential, then anonymised*

Please answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge

	YES	NO

Do you confirm that you:

	YES	NO
• Are a British born Chinese person	□	□
• Attend a pre-92 university in the UK	□	□
• Age 17-23	□	□

Have you:

	YES	NO
• been given information explaining about the study?	□	□
• had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?	□	□
• received satisfactory answers to all questions you ask?	□	□
• received enough information about the study for you to make a decision about your participation?	□	□

Do you understand:

	YES	NO
That your interview will be recorded on Teams	□	□

That you are free to withdraw from the study and free to withdraw your data prior to

anonymisation

	YES	NO
• at any time?	□	□
• without having to give a reason for withdrawing?	□	□

I hereby fully and freely consent to my participation in this study

I understand the nature and purpose of the procedures involved in this study. These have been communicated to me on the information sheet accompanying this form.

I understand and acknowledge that the investigation is designed to promote scientific knowledge and that the University of Bath will use the data I provide for no purpose other than research.

I understand that the data I provide will be kept **confidential**, and that on completion of the study my data will be **anonymised** by removing all links between my name or other identifying information and my study data. This will be done two weeks following the interview, and before any presentation or publication of my data. Participants can withdraw their data until this date.
I understand that the University of Bath may use the data collected for this project in a future research project but that the conditions on this form under which I have provided the data will still apply.

Participant's signature: _____ Date: _____

Name in BLOCK Letters: _

Final consent

Having participated in this study

I agree to the University of Bath keeping and processing the data I have provided during the

course of this study. I understand that these data will be used only for the purpose(s) set out

in the information sheet, and my consent is conditional upon the University complying with

its duties and obligations under the Data Protection Regulation.

Participant's signature: ___ _____ Date: _____

Name in BLOCK Letters: __

If you have any concerns related to your participation in this study please direct them to the Department of Psychology Research Ethics Committee, via email: psychology-ethics@bath.ac.uk.

Appendix F: Debrief Sheet

Debriefing Information

Thank you for taking part in this project which has been investigating the experiences of British born Chinese students at predominantly white universities. Your contribution is very much appreciated.

I decided to study British born Chinese students because there is little research into our experiences and how these are meaningful and shape our experiences at university. Although little has been studied, we know that British born Chinese students may face injustice and are vulnerable to racism when attending a university that lacks diversity. Understanding these experiences is essential to provide support and to help prevent these events from occurring. If any of the topics mentioned have affected you, below is a list of organisations and websites that may contain information useful to you.

Student counselling – provides peer support programmes for students and provides information about how to help others

https://www.studentminds.org.uk/supportforme.html

Stop Hate UK - provides confidential support to people affected by hate crime

https://www.stophateuk.org

AKT – How to intervene safely when witnessing racism

https://www.akt.org.uk/news/stop-asian-hate

Report it – A site to report a hate crime without having to visit a police station

https://www.report-it.org.uk/your_police_force

Equality and Advisory Support Service: Advises individuals on issues relating to equality

Phone: 0808 800 0082

Thank you again for participating. If you would like to speak to us about the project, please

get in touch.

Email – my648@bath.ac.uk   Phone – 07447924388

You can also speak to the supervisor of the project, Leda Blackwood

Email – lb791@bath.ac.uk

Our address is: Department of Psychology, University of Bath, Claverton Down Bath, BA2

7AY

Signed……………………………………………………………………………

Date…………………………………………………

Researcher's signature………………………………………………………..

Date…………………………………………………

If you have any concerns related to your participation in this study please direct them to the

Chair of the Department of Psychology Research Ethics Committee, email: psychology-

ethics@bath.a.uk.

Appendix G: Demographic information

Demographic variable	n	%
Gender		
Cisgender woman	5	71
Cisgender man	2	28
Family from:		
Mainland China	2	28
Hong Kong	2	28
Mainland China and Hong Kong	1	14
Chinese diaspora in Vietnam	2	28
Generation		
First (first generation to be born in UK)	4	57
Second (parents were also born in UK)	3	43
Degree		
STEM	3	43
Social science	1	14
Humanities	3	43

Appendix H: Recruitment advertisement flyer