

Institution, Culture, and Ideology:
The Self-segregation of Chinese International Students
at Wesleyan University

by

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On a Thursday late afternoon, Zhong, a student from Beijing, opened the side door of Usdan (the campus center of Wesleyan), and walked in with both hands holding a heavy stack of chemistry textbooks. He just came from a thorough three-hour review of the upcoming midterm. He passed by some down couches, round tables and a couple chatty freshmen, and hustled up the marble stairs to the second floor. After briefly greeting the cashier with his Beijing accent, he readied his student ID to be swiped in that familiar black register machine. After a quick glimpse of the menu at the entrance, Zhong already knew what he wanted for dinner: sautéed zucchini, turkey gravy, and green salad. This is interesting because when he first came to the United States, he could not wrap his mind around the fact that vegetables here are mostly uncooked; he used to think only animals eat raw vegetables. Now salad has started to grow on him, especially veggie salad with the Balsamic Vinaigrette dressing. Zhong walked straight to the drinking fountain, grabbed a brown plastic cup, and held it against the soda gun with the label “Dr. Pepper”, a soft drink that tastes like Chinese cough syrup.

Meanwhile, a lacrosse guy came by in his shoulder and rib pads. He and Zhong used to be lab partners for an Organic Chemistry class, and they always say hi to each other on campus. The lacrosse player, as usual, winked his eyes, and “what’s up” Zhong, while keeping his walk to get in line for Philly cheese steak. Though this was not the first time Zhong heard the phrase “what’s up”, he still had no idea how to respond to that. What the English education from Beijing taught him was “how are you”, a much more formal way of greeting. By the way Zhong also hated that bro shake. He thinks it is kind of “immature”. After the lax bro left, Zhong went on getting a couple apples in the fridge, and finally walked into the dining hall with a pair of wooden chopsticks. He always picked those up from that stir-fry station, which served the most “Asian” food in this school. As Zhong walked in, he did not even look around the hall as he immediately found a table of Chinese students in front

of him. After laying down his chemistry books on the red-green carpet, and adjusting his chair to a comfortable posture, Zhong merged himself in the daily dinner conversation with other Chinese friends.

This is nothing unfamiliar at Wesleyan. Almost every day at 6 p.m., hundreds of students eating at Usdan will witness the occupation of a row of tables next to the glass windows by Chinese students. It almost feels like a storm from Siberia. The occupiers are mostly from Mainland China. Usually there are fifteen to twenty of them, from varying class years. They always pick the tables on the side of the hall, where the lighting is the brightest and the walking distance to the food area is the shortest. They routinely sit down, eat, and talk in Mandarin. Sometimes, every one at the table will suddenly convulse with laughter after some one makes a funny joke. Moments like this are especially confusing to people sitting next to these Chinese tables. To outsiders, this world of Chinese students seems strange, intimidating, and almost impossible to blend in. Those who do not speak mandarin often wonder what are these Chinese students talking about, or what is so funny that makes them laugh so hard. And more importantly, the question on the tip of every one's tongue is: why are these Chinese students always and only hanging out with themselves?

With the attempt to answer this question, in this paper I examine the social network of the Chinese international community at Wesleyan, as a case study to better understand how self-segregation is perpetuated in a diversified college setting. I argue that institution, culture, and ideology play the most important roles in Chinese students' self-isolation from the rest of the student body on campus. This paper also grapples with the predominant liberal culture at Wesleyan with a close look at how it shapes, overpowers, and marginalizes Chinese students or more broadly speaking, international students in general.

In the following sections, section two will define "self-segregation" and discuss its theoretical causes presented in existing literature. In section three a historical and social

context will be provided to illuminate the causal mechanism that underlies the recent infusion of Chinese students into American colleges and universities. The rest of the paper will deal with my empirical analysis of the Chinese international community at Wesleyan, specifically looking at issues such as the International Student Orientation, cultural dissonance, cultural identity, ideology, and ideological challenges that are relevant to my argument. Finally, section five will conclude the results with a general discussion on the potential role the administration can play in shaping a more tolerant, multicultural, and pluralist environment on Wesleyan campus.

Literature Review

Self-segregation, by definition, means members of a subpopulation withdraw and create a self-sustaining “society” within the broader society. It was first used in the context of the Britain’s colonization of Spain during which the British gathered in groups, refused to learn Spanish and tried to retain as much of their “Britishness”, whilst living in Spain (Moore 1996: 120). Usually, the self-segregation of an ethnic or religious group is voluntary in the sense that a group chooses to cut itself off from the majority to preserve its own culture and traditions, or to maintain certain superiority over others.

The discipline of sociology has been systematically observing self-segregation through different lenses. As a specific mode of group formation, self-segregation is frequently explored in the concept of “homophily principle”, a term coined by theorists studying social network such as Miller McPherson and Lynn Smith-Lovin. They explicate that “homophily principle” is that contact between similar people occurs more frequently than among dissimilar people. These niches formed within social spaces tend to be localized, which characterize network systems and create social divides. One of the drawbacks of homophily principle is that though serving as the key to the operation of social systems, it constrains people’s social worlds in terms of the information they receive, the interactions

they experience, and the personhood they form (2002). McPherson and Smith-Lovin also find that in diverse societies homophily on race and ethnicity creates the starkest divide in the United States. Such homophily structures a variety of relationships, ranging from marriage, to schoolmate friendship, to working relations, and to the mere fact of appearing in public together. For instance, in a setting like classrooms, racial homophily occurs in friendship by the early grades especially among those who attend racially segregated schools. In work organizations that employ minorities, the pattern of racial homophily is even clearer. However, it is noted that value homophily (such as homophily on information, attitudes, and tastes) and various other homophilies (such as homophilies on education, religion, and income) may drive the inbreeding process of a social network as well (2001:422).

Along the same line, Grace Kao and Kara Jayne focus upon whether friendship activities are correlated with race or ethnicity. They use a nationally representative sample of adolescents in 1994-1995 and find that first listed friendships (in other words “best friends”) are more likely to be from the same ethnic group and report more shared activities—a useful indicator of friendship intimacy (2004: 558). It is also found that interracial friendships are the exception rather than the norm, thus facing greater challenges than intraracial friendships. Both white and minority youths overwhelmingly prefer to be friends with those from their own racial or ethnic groups, as opposed to crossing racial boundaries. Interestingly, their results also suggest an important pattern among whites, Hispanics, and Asians with black friends—these relationships are associated with particularly fewer activities, even after controlling for friendship order (2004: 571). This may be due to the fact that in the United States racial-group membership is often associated with differences in status, as opposed to pure differences in physical feature and culture. Yet overall they argue that gender, parental education, immigrant status and cultural beliefs may also constitute the variation in shared activities among interracial and interethnic adolescent friends.

Identity politics tend to employ the theory of identity development to decode the social message behind these complex patterns of social network. Identity, according to Beverly Tatum, is shaped by individual characteristics, family dynamics, historical factors, and social and political contexts (1997: 18). As children enter adolescence, they start to explore their personal identities including height, race, gender roles, religious beliefs and other dimensions. Compared with White adolescents, adolescents of color however are more likely to think about themselves in racial terms, as a result of the impact of dominant and subordinate status in the real world (1997: 53). Tatum argues that the phenomenon of black kids sitting together in the high school cafeteria can be seen as a process of black students defining for themselves the personal significance and social meaning of being black (1997). She also points out that the self-segregation of black kids in high school is not merely a response to the reality of racism in the wider world, but also a positive coping strategy to combat cultural stereotypes and systematic exclusion they encounter in school settings. Eating together in the dining hall in fact allows them to take collective and oppositional stance to protect their racial identities from the psychological assault of racism. Such bonding only occurs among peers who share similar racial experiences and can understand each other's perspective. Racial grouping in that way becomes an internalization of personal security against racial exclusion and cultural norms for adolescents of color.

Using the same framework, Zhao Peiling delves into the identity crisis faced by Chinese graduate students in American universities. He argues that every Chinese student, regardless of gender, class, religious beliefs, or language proficiency, has to overcome various culture shocks and transform him or herself in order to succeed in American higher education. For Chinese students, living in the United States has never been easy because they are constantly making adjustments and negotiations with their identities because of the multitude of the differences between China and the United States (2008: 13). The confusion

and frustration of transforming themselves and merging smoothly into a new society is essentially an identity crisis. Such crisis starts before one leaves one's home, and exacerbates when one starts to live in a foreign country (Zhao 2008). Zhao also uses the Foucauldian notion of identity to elucidate the power relationship behind the scene: identity is not a natural given but a social, cultural and linguistic construction. When Chinese students come to America, a new identity is being imposed on them by American dominant discourses as being ignorant of the culture, linguistically incompetent, too obedient in the classroom, and too hardworking outside the classroom, etc. Chinese students psychologically feel being marginalized, and are forced to internalize these new identities created by American linguistic, cultural, and institutional norms.

Nonetheless, according to Zhao, this power relationship also spares room and freedom for Chinese students to explore effective ways to reject those prescribed identities. In the process of developing a new identity, there are two extreme attitudes worth noticing: some Chinese students attempt to preserve a one hundred percent pure Chinese identity by completely rejecting American culture; others go to the other pole by totally dismissing Chinese culture in order to be fully Americanized (2008). Therefore, grouping with other Chinese students can be understood as a way to reconstruct identities and reject preexisting stereotypes. As Zhao puts it, "identity is dialogic in the sense that one cannot achieve one's identity alone" (2008: 45). Chinese students need allies to help them reposition so that they won't be trapped by racial stereotypes or constrained by such binary of two cultures.

Scholars of immigration politics have also addressed this issue of racial grouping. For instance, Yen Le Espiritu and Diane Wolf examine the linearity of assimilation processes by studying the adaptive trajectories of Filipino children who immigrated to San Diego, California. They find that most Filipino Americans surveyed do not identify themselves as Americans, and they socialize mainly with other Filipinos and prefer to maintain their

national-origin identity. This sentiment, according to Espiritu and Wolf, is a result of both racial discrimination and a racialized history of Filipinos and other Asian in the United States. Most of those interviewed report that they have been verbally or physically harassed by others for their perceived racial differences. Plus historically, Asians were marginalized as “aliens” or “foreigners” by dominant groups, and faced many exclusionary policies throughout the time of immigration. These two factors help explain why most young Filipinos reject American national identity (Rumbaut and Portes 2001).

Another scholar D.Y. Yuan studies the voluntary segregation in New York Chinatown by tracing the history of Chinese immigrants in the United States from being welcomed for their cheap labor, to being discriminated against because of the labor competition in the mine industry. He argues that it was when anti-Chinese prejudices were intensive that Chinese people started to be aware of their own group-identification on the basis of either cultural or biological similarities (1963: 6). As a response to the changing environment and intensifying hostility triggered by race, these Chinese laborers withdrew from those competitive businesses, seeking one another out and forming groups with each other. Furthermore, along with the attempt to avoid insults, the shift in their business to domestic services brought groups of Chinese immigrants to urban low rent areas in large cities like New York. These people maintained their Chinese way of lifestyle, lived closely with their relatives, and gradually formed a “Chinatown” as their defensive insulation against racism. Today, though discriminations against Chinese people are much less prevalent than before, Chinatown still remains as a “symbol” of voluntary segregation.

Unlike those who tackle self-segregation of racial/ethnic groups from the perspectives of network, identity and immigration, Qian Ning situates his theory in the context of culture and ideology by examining the first group of Chinese students that went to America in 1978. In his finding, when Chinese students first came to the states for education, they were

shocked by the materialism, democracy, individual freedom and abundance of food in the United States. However, as these students were enjoying personal freedom and consumerism, they also felt lonely and helpless because of the separation from their country, families, friends and relatives. This loneliness was further deepened by their marginalized status as foreigners (2001: 80). The feeling of non-existence and irrelevance to the society they live in consequently push Chinese students together to satisfy the need to belong in a foreign world. In addition, Ning also highlights the emotional attachment to China felt by Chinese students abroad, arguing that “the consciousness of being Chinese is cast deeply into their psyches by a lifetime of upheaval and suffering” (2001: 165). Such attachment is especially strong when the motherland is abstract and farther away. Multiple respondents in his study recall how furious they were when American students talked disparagingly about China. However, Ning does not address whether these students’ patriotic sentiments have triggered them to group with other Chinese, as opposed to reaching out to friends of other races.

On the same note, a documentary made by Xiangjun Shi (2012) from Brown University looks into the insular Chinese international student community at Brown, and sheds light on their nervous psychology in a foreign world by focusing upon cultural transitions and friendship development. Two Chinese girls interviewed in the documentary attribute the difficulty of being friends with Americans to Chinese students’ incapability of understanding American humor and their lack of knowledge of American pop culture. They also claim that in order to become friends with Americans, Chinese students have to be bold and initiate the friendship by showing who they are, as opposed to waiting to be taken into conversation. They have to act like Americans and sell their personality. This mechanism of socializing and making friends, to a lot of Chinese students abroad, is very unnatural and nerve racking. Eventually, they choose to remain in their comfort zone with other Chinese students after being worn out by the cultural differences.

Some other theorists link the isolation of Chinese students with factors such as economic status, cultural practice and foreign students' attitude. For instance, Viv Edwards and An Ran point out that some Chinese students coming to the United Kingdom for higher education are under enormous financial sacrifices of their families. These students want to take an active part in their university life but they have a lot of work to do. The enormous pressure to succeed in academics inevitably takes away their free time to socialize with other British students. Besides, cultural practices also accentuate the differences between Chinese and British students. For example, Chinese students are more willing to cook with other Chinese students as they have similar taste for food. Many respondents feel cooking is their most enjoyable leisure activity as a group. Pragmatically, these Chinese students find other compatriots the most accessible source of support when they run into problems such as homework and visa issues. Especially during the early adjustment period, friendship networks with students from a similar cultural background play an important role. Chinese students tend to seek support from each other after they arrive in a foreign country and face communication difficulties. However, there are also arguments attributing the problem of self-segregation to the reluctance of local students to invest in cross-cultural friendship or the lack of emotional support provided by college institutions for Chinese students (Edward and Ran, 2006: 13).

Given this wide range of existing theories that situate racial grouping in different politics including social network, identity development, immigration, and culture, this project is going to examine the Chinese international community at Wesleyan University to better understand the mechanism of self-segregation. The methodology I use for this paper is ethnographic analysis, in which I conduct in-depth interviews with multiple Chinese students and ask them a series of questions that are crucial to my research. As an insider and a part of the Chinese international community who speaks the language and understands Chinese

culture, I certainly have access to the first-hand information. Moreover, my personal friendship with these respondents lowers the risk of them generating “socially desirable” answers. In terms of sample selection, six undergraduate students across all four years will be interviewed for this project. This sampling method allows me to capture an array of factors that may contribute to the formation and perpetuation of self-segregation. Yet, it is important to note that such sample is by no means generalizable, given that Wesleyan is a small liberal arts college and I am only studying one of the many international communities. Nevertheless, this approach can still shed light on how self-segregation is created and perpetuated within a racial/ethnic group.

Historical and Social Context

Before the paper delves into the phenomenon of Chinese international students segregating themselves at Wesleyan, the broader historical and social context behind this craze of Chinese students’ overseas study is certainly worth noting. Most of the Chinese students at Wesleyan are classified as “Post-90s” in China, meaning people born between the years 1990 to 1999. They are the second generation after the introduction of the “One-child policy”, a national family plan policy launched by the Chinese government in 1979 in the hopes of decreasing the rate of population growth and improving the quality of life for every Chinese citizen. Though the overall effect on population control is widely considered successful, the policy’s negative social consequences have aroused many criticisms and controversies both within and outside China (Hvistendal 2010: 1458). Among the many disputes over the “One-child Policy”, the phenomenon of “Post-90s” is always central to the debate. As China’s last twentieth century cohort, the Post-90s generation is stereotyped as “lazy, selfish, and spoiled” due to their single child status (CNN 2010). In contemporary China, they are infamously labeled as the “little emperor” of the family. Although later the term “little empresses” was invented by scholars in reference to female single-children, the

androcentric term “little emperors” remains a much more familiar term in Chinese public discourse (Jun 2000). Ye Gongshao, an educator and specialist in child development, highlights that a defining characteristic of families with “little emperors” is the “4-2-1 syndrome”, which means four grandparents and two parents pamper one child (Jun 2000: 2). In contrast to the traditional family structure in which the power in a household is devolved from the father, today’s household structures itself entirely around the single child (Marshall 1997). These emperors and empresses are given excessive amounts of attention and care since the day they were born. Today’s parents in China are much more able and willing to shower their child with material goods to let them experience the benefits they themselves were denied during the Cultural Revolution.

Meanwhile, these single children bear enormous pressure from their parents to compete academically and succeed in careers. This is because the “Little Emperor syndrome” has compelled parents to push their only child to educational extremes. Many parents devote a huge portion of their income on their child’s academic learning such as private tutors and preschool English lessons. Under such tremendous pressure, it is of little surprise that in some urban areas like Shanghai, most children can recite the English alphabet or do easy math by the time they are seven (Marshall 1997). Statistics suggest that since the late 1990s Chinese parents’ educational spending on their child has increased significantly. An average household in Shanghai now spends 40 to 50 percent of its total annual income on child’s education (China Daily 2005). However, this number only takes into account the amount of educational spending on domestic schools and colleges. Sending a child to study abroad costs much more. For instance, for 2012-2013 the tuition Wesleyan charges a full-time undergraduate student is around \$45,000. Meanwhile, the average annual household income in China, converted to dollars, is \$10,220, according to a survey conducted by Tsinghua University in 2009 (Weagley 2010).

Although the educational cost of sending a child abroad far exceeds average income level, those who possess sufficient financial capacity are eagerly sending their child overseas for college and graduate school. In recent years, this trend of Chinese students studying overseas has indeed become a social phenomenon in China. According to a report published by the Institute of International Education, the number of Chinese international students at colleges and universities in the United States increased by 43 percent at the undergraduate level during the 2010-2011 compared to 2009-2010 (Institute of International Education 2011). China's domestic higher education system may be one of the explanations for this recent explosion of Chinese students. For a long time, Chinese schooling has been criticized for its over-emphasis on rote memorization, as opposed to on critical thinking. American higher education, in contrast, focuses more upon well-rounded development, creativity and self-improvement. Noticing the strength of American colleges in higher education, more and more Chinese parents believe sending their child overseas for education will lead him or her to a successful career.

In a broader context, this soaring number of Chinese students abroad actually reflects the tremendous socioeconomic transition of China in the second half of the 20th century. In the late 1970s, the succession of Deng Xiaoping to power and the series of reforms he launched mark the beginning of a new history in modern China. He initiated the "Reform and Opening Up Policy" in the early 1980s, proven to be the major force that transformed China from a socialist state-planned economy to a capitalistic market economy. One of the immediate consequences was the increase in each individual's income, as well as his or her consumption of material and cultural goods. China's fast growing economy in the first decade of the twenty first century further precipitates the augmentation in people's wealth. Different from the early 1980s when resources were scarce, the growing upper and middle class in China now can afford more expensive products such as cars and houses. Moreover,

given the significant role of single children in families, today's parents are financially capable of allocating the majority of their wealth to their child's higher education. According to the Chinese Luxury Consumer White Paper's report,

Nine out of every Ten Chinese citizens whose assets exceed 100 million Yuan (\$16 million) plan to send their children abroad, and 85 percent of those with at least \$1 million said they would send their children overseas for education. The average spent on education among high-net-worth families is 170,000 Yuan (about \$27,000) per child. This was the third-highest area of spending, after travel and luxury goods (World Education Service 2012).

With the booming Chinese economy, there has been a sharp growth of upper class in China since the late 1990s. A staggering number released by the Huran Report in August 2012 says there are currently 1,020,000 millionaires in China, an increase of 6.3% over the previous year (Financial Post 2012). As the report suggests, a huge proportion of these upper class elites are sending their children overseas for education. Though one may point out that these "super-rich" millionaires only constitute about 0.07% of the total population, the overall trend of spending more on education is actually seen across class boundaries. For middle and lower class parents in China, many of them are sacrificing almost everything they have for their child's education. A survey conducted by China National Statistic Bureau in 2001 shows that more than 60 percent of Chinese families spend one-third of their income on their children's education (Shu 2001). A.T. Kearney, a global management consulting firm, projects that by 2020, Chinese one-child households will spend six times on education than today (A.T. Kearney 2012). In this context, the legacy of "One-child Policy" is reflected in the recent explosion of Chinese students coming to the U.S. for higher education.

This backdrop of China's tremendous economic growth and social transformation in the recent decades, as well as the significant social impact of the "One-child Policy" and parents' fascination with the American education system, explains why more and more Chinese students are flocking to colleges and universities in the United States. One striking number is reported by Darcy Holdorf in her study of Chinese students' social life at Ohio

University: in 2010, 603 Chinese undergraduate students came to Ohio University compared to 17 in 2004. In the same year, 81% of all international students at Ohio University came from China (Holdorf 2011). This explosion of Chinese students is certainly evident at Wesleyan as well. In the Class of 2012, there were only five students coming from Mainland China. The Class of 2013 has thirteen, more than twice as many. In the following class years, the number has remained around fifteen, almost a quarter of the international population at Wesleyan in total.

Among these Chinese students, most of them come from similar socioeconomic background. At Wesleyan, only one student per year from Mainland China can receive the Freeman Asian Scholarship (a program that provides expenses for a four-year course of study). This means, more than 90% of the Chinese students at Wesleyan are not on any scholarship or financial aid. Most of them come from upper-middle class families, and grow up in well-developed cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou. It is not an exaggerated prediction that this infusion of Chinese students to Wesleyan is most likely to persist for at least another two or three years because of the following reasons. First, the US economy may not recover in the near future due to the danger of fiscal cliff as well as the Euro zone impact. This would compel the U.S. government to rely more heavily on capital inflow of all kinds, including foreign expenditure on American higher education. Secondly, the increasingly friendly visa policy towards Chinese students may also play a positive role in facilitating this trend. Thirdly, as more Chinese parents start to realize the advantage of the U.S. higher education as well as the value of a U.S. college diploma in the domestic job market, more will be incentivized to send their child to the U.S. for college.

The Case of Wesleyan

Wesleyan University, located in Middletown Connecticut, is known for its excellent academic programs and distinctive campus culture. As a private liberal arts institution,

Wesleyan has long enjoyed the reputation of being liberal, reflected in both its predominant political stance and its diversity in the student body. The administration also brands itself in the culture of diversity and inclusion on campus, as well as the fact that most students and faculties are very politically correct, racially aware, culturally sensitive, and environmentally responsible. However, lurking beneath this multicultural and pluralistic facade, it is not hard to find the existence of conservative political ideologies that have been “othered” or “silenced”. Neither is it difficult to observe the prevalence of self-segregation on campus organized either by race and ethnicity, or by culture. For instance, though racial discrimination at Wesleyan is not nearly as visible as in other places of the society, there are still complaints from students of color and international students that they feel excluded or intimidated by certain aspects of Wesleyan culture.

This sense of being marginalized is certainly felt by the Chinese international community. To many Chinese students, the process of reconciling and mitigating the cultural and ideological differences between China and the U.S. is not only difficult, but also extremely exhausting. Consequently, they resort to each other and remain in that comfort zone throughout their time at college. Based on my research, among all the international students from Mainland China on campus, 67% of these students are currently living with other Chinese students. This number is deducted from the entire Chinese freshman population whose housing is randomly assigned by the Office of Residential life, in order to show the voluntary aspect of the self-segregation phenomenon. In other words, almost two thirds of Chinese international students who are sophomores, juniors and seniors choose to room with each other.

Another variable used in this paper to measure the self-segregation of Chinese international students is the number of close U.S. friends they feel that they have. My research finds that more than a third of the Chinese students I interviewed say they have zero

close American friends, and many say they wish they could have closer relationships with American students. Both results suggest that the Chinese international community at Wesleyan is poorly integrated with other communities on campus. Most of the Chinese students are living in the same house or apartment with each other, speaking Chinese, and having lunch and dinner together every day. They socialize within a Chinese circle of friends, cracking jokes about Chinese politics, watching Chinese TV dramas and singing competitions, cooperating on problem sets for their economics classes, and gossiping about other Chinese students' relationships. And for seniors, their topics often center on finding jobs in the financial industry, preparing interviews and figuring out how they can remain in this country after graduation.

In fact, the self-segregation of Chinese international students started the minute after they came to Wesleyan. There is an old Chinese proverb often quoted by parents in China before they send their child abroad: “在家靠父母， 出门靠朋友”, meaning “at home one relies on parents; away from home one relies on friends”. When most Chinese students first land in America, they are faced with a new social environment in which they do not have any friends. Therefore, psychological bonding with people who share similar experiences and cultural background becomes immensely important to these students. Having a tight community would immediately allow them to benefit from both mutual support and the pool of information they can receive from each other. This simultaneous bonding can be seen as the early formation of the self-segregation among Chinese students.

The administration, on the other hand, is trying to mitigate the cultural differences that many international students encounter when they first come to Wesleyan. The program “International Student Orientation” (ISO) designed by the school is intended to prepare international students to successfully transit from the society whence they came to the American college life. It is held prior to the general new student orientation, offering multiple

information sessions that address various issues including health insurance, cultural adaptation, weather adjustment, and academic expectation. Though the range of logistic issues covered by the ISO is generally considered comprehensive, the program has in fact failed to anticipate or resolve the psychological dependency of international students, which later transforms into more exclusive form of racial grouping. One of my respondents, Liu, says,

Me and my Chinese friends did almost everything together at the ISO. We figured out how to join the phone plans in AT&T, how to apply for social security numbers, how to find campus jobs, and what classes to take, etc. It is so much easier to connect and talk with other Chinese students. Not just because we all speak the same language, but also the fact that we are all Chinese feels comforting and secure to us. Making friends with other Chinese students makes me feel less homesick and lonely.

Concurrently, this self-segregation problem is also replicated in the Korean international community as well. For instance, one of my Korean friends, Park, told me that Korean students also formed their niche during the ISO. “We were all speaking Korean when there was no other international student around”, she said, “In fact, we spent most of our time together besides that skit”. The skit that Park mentioned refers to the highlight of the ISO program: a group project in which all international students are divided into multiple mixed-ethnicity groups, and asked to perform a skit that parodies events that students went through to adjust both to the U.S. and to campus life. These skits usually poke fun at cultural clashes and interesting experiences such as getting immunized at the health center. This can be seen as one of the active efforts made by Wesleyan’s administration to integrate across ethnicities and promote cultural interactions. Many respondents in my research do appreciate the fact that the ISO has helped them meet students from other countries. However, they also admit that they much more enjoy spending time with those who share the same ethnic and cultural background.

This suggests: the ISO program has not built international students a good foundation for interethnic and interracial communication. Ironically, the administration has in fact

perpetuated the self-segregation problem among international students by physically grouping them together early on. Such grouping is not translated into real exchange of ideas and value among these international students. Neither has it facilitated their integration with American students, if at all. Once these international students start to feel comfortable within their own racial/ethnic community, it becomes extremely difficult for them to reach out to American students as the semester goes along.

“Parties? No, It Is Not Our Culture!”

The institution and its program ISO are far from sufficient to rationalize why Chinese students are self-segregating on campus. As the first semester of Wesleyan begins, these freshmen from China immediately immerse themselves in academic learning. Meanwhile, they also start to build a social life at an American college. Many students say that living in a freshman dorm with American students does provide them with a great opportunity to make friends with Americans, which was lacking during the ISO. Chinese students are often invited by their American hall mates to dinners, parties, or simply “hanging out”. These social occasions for the first time engage them closely with American culture and society. However, Chinese students soon begin to realize that even though they speak fluent English, it is very difficult and tiring to communicate with American students. It is even more difficult to become good friends with them. For instance, Ming, a sophomore from Shenzhen, talks about an experience from freshman year:

When I was a freshman, I lived in Clark (a freshman dormitory) and I was the only international student on the first floor. Right after we met each other, they tried to include me in their friend groups and invited me to things. For example, they would be like “hey Ming! Do you have any dinner plans? You wanna come with us to Usdan?” At first I felt so happy that I would finally make some American friends. But after a few times having dinner with them, I started to feel excluded because I couldn’t understand anything at the dinner table. For example, sometimes they liked to talk about politics and they would spend an hour arguing about “Planned Parenthood” or something I’ve never heard of. Sometimes they talked about the latest episodes of some popular American TV shows I’ve never heard of, like “30 Rock”, “the Office”. You

know in China, the real popular American show is “Friends” or “the Big Bang Theory”. So most of the time I didn’t know what’s going on. And even when I tried to understand what they were saying, they all talked so fast and always interrupted each other. It was really difficult for me to follow. So gradually I felt it was just too boring and decided not to go out with them to those things anymore.

Similarly, Wang, a junior at Wesleyan from Chengdu, describes his experience of going to a club meeting on campus:

I went to this club that does a lot of outdoor activities like hiking, skiing and canoeing. I thought it would be very cool to join the club because you know in China we barely had any experience with nature. So I went to their meeting and the president of the club proposed we should do an icebreaker: every one at the meeting says his or her names, class years, and favorite song from the 90s. I was like oh no, I don’t know any American songs from the 90s. What am I gonna say? While I was nervously thinking, American students were already coming up with all those songs by some singers named Nirvana or something. Every one there was like humming the rhythm, commenting on each other’s song, and laughing together. So finally it came to my turn, I couldn’t think of any songs I know. So I just told everyone I don’t know any songs from the 90s. And right after I said that, I felt like the time had stopped. Every one was looking at me with a surprised look on their faces and there was an awkward moment of silence. It was really really embarrassing. I felt like I was an idiot.

In the documentary “Across the Seas”, two Chinese sophomores from Brown University reflect upon their personal experiences, and tell the camera how difficult it is for them to blend into American culture. For instance, they say at a table full of Americans, when they don’t really understand the conversation because of their little knowledge of American culture, it would be extremely embarrassing for them to admit that because it would automatically mark them as different and not “cool”. It would be even more embarrassing for them to interrupt the conversation, and ask what is this or that, while every one else is enjoying that conversation. Therefore, Chinese students have to constantly pretend they know what is going on, and try to act “cool”, whatever that means in American culture.

Of all these accounts, the word “embarrassing” or “awkward” is frequently used in Chinese students’ description of their experience of interacting with American peers. These “embarrassing” experiences indicate one of the core aspects of culture: socialness. John Fiske,

a renowned media scholar, defines culture as “the social circulation of meanings, values, and pleasures, to the processes of forming social identities and social relationships, and to entering into relation with the larger social order in a particular way and from a particular position” (Lentricchia and McLaughlin 1990: 322). In Fisk’s rationalization, culture making is a social process. It is in the place of society where these meanings, symbols and pleasures generate and circulate. Pratt Nicola makes a similar argument that culture precedes cultural practices, thereby influencing and constraining how individuals engage in the reproduction of culture (Pratt 2005). In other words, knowing the social and political context in which culture is made and produced is the prerequisite for an actor to participate in cultural practices.

On the same note, Raymond Williams, one of the founding fathers of cultural studies, elucidates the “ordinariness” of culture. He argues that culture is ordinary to every society where local, national and global meanings circulate and collide. This ordinariness of culture stems from the fundamental nature of human society: every human society has its own shape, purposes, and meanings; every human society expresses these in institutions, as well as in arts and learning (Williams 1989: 5). Therefore, culture is actually a reflection of the ordinary processes of human societies and human minds, in which a society is constantly finding common meanings and directions, and a mind is always learning shapes, purposes, and meanings so that work, observation and communication become possible. In that sense, “Culture is ordinary, in every society and in every mind” (Williams 1989: 6).

This “socialness” or “ordinariness” of culture, highlighted by Fiske, Nicola and Williams, explains what impedes Chinese students’ from pursuing American friendship. It is not the language per se; rather, it is the local and regional sense of culture that performs the role in hindering both student bodies from getting to know each other. For example, those considered as prominent social issues in the U.S. such as “Planned Parenthood”, gay marriage, death penalty, and “Affordable Care Act” are often out of the loop to Chinese

students. They are generally more concerned with domestic issues such as corruption, excessive materialism, air pollution and food poisoning scandals. As Chinese students are coping with numerous social and cultural differences between two societies, their lack of prior knowledge of the social and political context in which American culture manifests itself would immediately create a sense of embarrassment and discomfort, which is characterized by Winifred L. Macdonald as “cultural dissonance”:

A sense of discord or disharmony, experienced by participants in cultural change where cultural differences are found to occur which are unexpected, unexplained and therefore difficult to negotiate and which inhibit behavioral adaptation. (Macdonald 1998: 2)

As Macdonald points out, unprecedented change in cultural milieu perceived by individuals will generate a sense of alienation that is characterized as “cultural dissonance”. In the case of Chinese students, this troubling by “cultural dissonance” is evident in their incapability of understanding the satire of U.S. political talk shows. For instance, “The Daily Show with Jon Stewart” is one such extremely confusing show to the Chinese. The show draws its comedy and satire from recent news stories, politicians, and many newsmakers in the U.S. Jon Stewart, the famous American political satirist, often starts out the show by relating to recent headlines and featuring exchanges with correspondents who adopt humorously exaggerated takes on current events (Official website 2012). This show is very popular at Wesleyan with its liberal political standing and pointed, yet humorous style. However, this is not the case in the Chinese international community at all. Chinese students were barely educated about the history and dynamic of American political system at schools in China. Many of them have never even heard of the term “electoral college” or American politicians such as Chris Christie and Bob McDonnell. Nor do they have much knowledge about what exactly distinguishes the Democrats and Republicans, or what “liberalism” and “conservatism” really entail. Therefore, many Chinese students feel culturally dislocated when they don’t get what is funny about Jon Stewart’s mocking of a politician or a newsmaker. Even though the show

is supplemented with Chinese subtitles in some Chinese video sites, the satire and wittiness are still lost in translation due to this crucial role that social and political context plays in culture.

However, the lack of cultural knowledge only partially explains why Chinese students have a hard time acquiring an intimate relationship with Americans. “Cultural identity”, a theoretical concept that has been used to explore the contemporary “Chinese diaspora”, constitutes another important factor in the self-segregation phenomenon. “Diaspora” is a historical term used to refer to communities that have been dispersed reluctantly, dislocated by slavery, pogroms, genocide, coercion and expulsion, economic migration or refugee exodus (Agnew 2005: 193). In the time of global capitalism and transnationalism, “diaspora” simply means the movement of people away from an established or ancestral homeland. Diaspora members, coming from the same homeland, often share a collective cultural memory that represents the knowledge of past social events that are collectively constructed (Paez, Basabe, and Gonzalez 1997: 150). This collective cultural memory ultimately forms these individuals a “cultural identity”, in which the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes provide diaspora members, as “one people”, with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning (Hall 1990: 223). In the context of Chinese students in America, their act of recalling and performing cultural memories such as making Chinese food, watching Chinese dramas, and speaking Chinese with each other, all creates this “oneness” that is the essence of their “Chineseness” experience. As Deborah Madsen argues, the ideological foundation of the concept of a Chinese diaspora is a community living “here” but allied politically and culturally “there” (Madsen 2005).

This construction of a collective cultural identity within Chinese community is prevalent both within and outside Wesleyan. On the one hand, this construction of “Chineseness” alleviates the loneliness of Chinese students studying abroad and acquires

them mutual support from other compatriots; yet on the other hand, it perpetuates the phenomenon of self-segregation and further isolates Chinese community from other student bodies. For instance, Darcy Holdorf's observation at Ohio University discovers that most Chinese students don't go out to bars like what most Americans do. They prefer to hang out with each other at home playing Mahjong (a tile-matching game originated in China), watching movies and cooking Chinese food (Holdorf 2011). This pattern can certainly find its resemblance at Wesleyan. Many Chinese students here report that they like to spend time with each other because they have a lot in common and share similar views on relationship, society, or life in general, which makes communication a lot easier and more straightforward. For instance, Zhang explains why he has more Chinese closer friends than American friends at Wesleyan:

I think I have a lot of Chinese friends because we share so many commonalities, and we all come from very similar backgrounds. Most of us went to traditional Chinese high schools. We all had the 应试教育("exam-oriented education"), and went through a very intensive and rigid academic training. At home most of us had very strict parenting, and we barely had any social life before we came to college. All of this makes our views on things a lot more similar. And culturally, we all grew up in the same culture, watched the same TV dramas or animations when we were little, and listened to the same music like Faye Wang, Jay Chou (famous Chinese pop singers) when we were at adolescence. With each other, we can talk about anything that is happening in China, like the recent food poisoning case, the political scandal of Bo Xilai, or the Zhao Wei's latest film. It is much easier and more fun to talk about these with other Chinese students because we can understand each other's cultural cues.

During the week, most Chinese students would meet at Wesleyan's major dining halls after finishing classes. They would take several long tables, grab food, sit down, and start speaking Chinese to each other. The range of topics in those conversations is very broad including classes, professors, news, jobs, TV dramas, gossips, personal feelings and so on. Even at the weekends, Chinese students like to gather together in one's house or apartment, cooking some authentic Chinese food with the spices they brought from home, and hanging out for hours watching videos online or doing homework together. When asked why they don't go to

any parties on campus, their answers are surprisingly similar: “Parties? No, it is not our culture”. Liu, a junior from Nanjing, was once invited to a party by her American hall mates.

The minute she arrived at that party, she felt she did not belong there:

It was some athletic team’s party that my hall mate invited me to go to. I remember it was at some senior’s house and right after I got inside the house, a bunch of Americans were already dancing in the kitchen with the lights off. As I looked closer, they were all touching and kissing each other. I was really shocked because I have never seen people dancing like that. It was way too much for me. So I went to the living room instead and there were several Americans standing on a table drinking, and every one else was screaming and singing along those American pop songs. I didn’t know any of those songs and I literally felt like I was going deaf with such loud music. So I went into the next room, people were just throwing some Ping-Pong balls into plastic cups, back and forth. Every one was screaming. I was like oh my god. I wanna leave here as soon as I can. I hate all of this. It is so not my culture. I will never go to parties again. Later I made an excuse to my friend and just went home.

One of the important aspects of “cultural identity” is that people with a shared history and ancestry see themselves as a sort of collective “one self”, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed “selves” (Hall 1990). In Liu’s and many Chinese students’ mindset, indulging oneself and getting crazy at parties is certainly not “Chinese”. Then, what exactly makes it not “Chinese”? And, what is “Chinese”? In fact, this repulsion against overindulgence can be traced back to the early Confucius thinking in Han Dynasty. One of the major themes in Confucianism is “Li”, rites. “Li” is a crucial element of self-cultivation, which according to Confucius would lead to both personal goodness, as well as social harmony (Chinese Cultural Studies 2012). Confucius advocated a genteel manner that one “restrains oneself and restores the rites” [克己复礼]. Moreover, in order to achieve “Ren”, goodness, each member of society should only pursue moderate desire that avoids deficiency of indulgence and mortification. This mentality is seen in the *Doctrine of the Mean* as well, in which Confucius taught his students the idea of “Zhong-yong” [中庸]. “Zhong” means impartial, neither exceeds nor falls short; “Yong” means mediocrity. “Zhong-yong”

represents an ideal state of harmony and equilibrium in which “a happy order will prevail through heaven and earth, and all things will be nourished and flourished” (Legge 2012).

Interestingly, Confucianism, including his teaching on mediocrity and propriety, after thousands of years is still worshiped and revered in contemporary China, despite the conquest of communism and the influx of western culture. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, there has been a strong revival of Confucianism since the end of the Cultural Revolution, mostly evident in the national craze of the 2007 national television series on the Analects, the best-known collection of Confucianism. In recent years, the teachings of Confucius have reentered Chinese schools as a part of cultural heritage lessons that will help the younger generation join the world economic scene without completely absorbing Western cultural values (Carr 2006). This rehabilitation, to a certain extent, is a reflection of the far-reaching and persistent impact of Confucius thinking on Chinese society and people’s mind. It is in this context that going to parties and getting crazy deviate one away from Confucius’ definition of “properness” and make him or her not “Chinese”.

Then, what is exactly “Chinese”? How does “being Chinese” reproduce self-segregation? One example here will illustrate that performance of cultural identity may incur confrontation, and consequently deepen self-segregation. Shuran, a senior from Nanjing, recalls his experience of being called out for making racist jokes by American students:

In China, it is socially acceptable to make homophobic and racist jokes. You know in high school, you and your friends always tease each other and be like “Why do you look like so black?” or “You are like an African.” or “this is so gay...” something like that. But clearly this kind of jokes is not okay to make here, and I didn’t know that. Once I was corrected by an American after I made a joke about black people. Some of my Chinese friends laughed but this American heard us, and got very serious and told me the joke was very inappropriate and offensive. And I was like “Come on, this is just a joke. We make these jokes in China all the time. Why are you being so serious?”

Shuran’s story is by no means a singular case. Some other Chinese participants have also encountered similar experiences of being given a lesson on race by an American student. In

the interviews, a lot of Chinese students expressed this confusion: why is it inappropriate to make jokes about black people, or why does race matter so much in the United States? On the other hand, American students are probably wondering why are these Chinese students so racist, given that they chose to come to Wesleyan, a college known for being politically correct.

To answer these questions, first of all it is important to point out that China is a country of very little racial diversity. The major ethnic group in China, the Han people, constitutes about 92% of the population in Mainland China. This dominance of Han ethnicity in China certainly has silenced the discussion of racism in China's public sphere. It is hardly surprising that most Chinese students coming out of the traditional Chinese education system are not racially aware. However, on a deeper level, these anti-black sentiments are actually a part of the "cultural identity" for being Chinese. Scholars have pointed out that Chinese culture traditionally embraces the notion of black inferiority. Barry Sautman, an expert on ethnic politics and nationalism in China, highlights how "blackness" is perceived in Chinese society:

Traditional Chinese culture idealized fair skin and, among elites at least, associates it with intellectual endeavor. The most attractive man was a "white-faced scholar" (*baimian shushing*) whose freedom from manual labor at once implied a high status, potentially leisured life and light complexion. Fair skin continues to be a standard of female beauty. Many urban Chinese women take pains to avoid the sun and some use whitening creams. Chinese, in common with other languages, associates blackness with negative qualities, as in *heixin* (black hearted), *heiren* (black person, but also one who lacks a residency permit), *heishi* (black market), *heishehui* (gangster organization) and *heihua* (bandit argot). Urban Chinese have long associated the dark complexions of manual laborers, particularly peasants, with low economic and cultural status (1994: 427)

In Sautman's account, racial stereotyping in China has a long history. The images of black people are historically associated with backwardness, laziness, and poverty. This is still the case in the twenty-first century in China. Unlike in contemporary western culture where a person being tan has come to mean he or she can afford leisure or vacation, traditional

Chinese culture has the exact opposite view. Darkness and blackness in Chinese culture are still linked closely to the images of peasants and manual laborers who are usually at the bottom of the social ladder. In this context, Sautman's cultural notation explains that even though China is not considered a racially diverse country, racial distinctions are still deeply ingrained in people's mind due to the persistent impact of the traditional culture. These distinctions give rise to the racist stereotypes that Chinese students bring with when they come to the U.S. For instance, a lot of Chinese students at Wesleyan feel there is nothing wrong to make jokes about the physical features and other stereotypes of black people. Unsurprisingly, these explicitly racist jokes would encounter criticism at a liberal arts college like Wesleyan, where most American students are politically correct, and would not hesitate to call out racism in any situation. These incidents of confrontation further discourage Chinese students from seeking friendship with Americans, which ultimately exacerbates the self-segregation problem.

In sum, culture, as a social practice, is interfering in the process of Chinese students finding American friends. This interference operates in two different mechanisms: firstly, Chinese students' unfamiliarity with the social and political contexts in which American culture manifests itself essentially causes the so-called "cultural dissonance" that discourages them from integrating with the American student body; secondly, Chinese students' practice and performance of their cultural identity further isolate themselves from other communities. Such practice, significantly impacted by traditional Chinese culture, sometimes may even cause confrontation between Chinese and American students, ultimately deteriorating the problem of self-segregation. In this context, culture becomes one of the means of structuring social relationships and creating voluntary segregation.

"But Dalai Lama Looks So Kind!"

Once, my American roommate asked me: "what do you think of Dalai Lama?"

“Well we Chinese people think he is a liar, a separationist who is anti-China.”

“Really??? But he looks so kind! You don't like him?” the American student seemed very shocked by my “version” of Dalai Lama.

“No, we don't.” I responded.

“That's interesting. Well I guess it makes sense that you guys think he is anti-China. Aren't Tibetan people always oppressed by your government?”

One of my participants recalls this dialogue between him and his roommate who is an American. This participant later told me he was very upset by the last question his roommate asked him because that question sounds extremely condescending and accusatory. It feels more like a sharp criticism of Chinese government's politics, which in his eyes is one of the typical “western biases” against China. Moreover, the fact that his American roommate has never been to Tibet, or even Asia before, makes the Chinese student wonder how does he know Tibetans are under oppression.

Coincidentally, another participant also had this conversation with her friend from New York. She told me she had a fierce argument with this friend who also accused China for oppressing Tibetan citizens. The participant showed her friend many evidences, arguing that the Chinese government in fact has been very friendly towards Tibetan people in recent years. For example, China built the Qinghai-Tibet Railway to support the Tibetan economy by reducing the cost of transporting industrial products to other parts of China. Another example she used was that Tibetan students, because of their ethnic minority status, can receive bonus marks in *Gaokao* (the national college entrance examination known for being ultra competitive). However, despite the various evidences she pulled to show what Western media tend to ignore, her friend responded with something that really offended her: “Everyone knows Chinese government is good at using propaganda. I think you've been brainwashed.”

This is what Chinese students find to be the most irreconcilable difference between them and American students: ideology. In *The German Ideology*, Karl Marx defines

“ideology” as the production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness that one say, imagine, and conceive (Marx 2001). It is a system of representations and beliefs determined by the ruling class of a society, functioning as the superstructure in society. When one’s core value set is being challenged or called into question, conflicts of ideology tend to occur.

These conflicts of ideologies are extremely difficult to reconcile between two parties when, first of all, both parties are highly defensive of their own beliefs and core values and resistant to change; second, when there is a lack of a mutually respectful environment where open communication can take place. In the case of Wesleyan, ideological conversations between Chinese and American students on Chinese politics usually result in tension. Due to the lack of willingness to embrace counter opinions on both sides, one of the consequences of these ideological conflicts is the self-exclusion of Chinese community from other student bodies. In the rest of the section, I will identify and discuss a number of major ideological conflicts between Chinese and American students, including disputes over communism, democracy, individualism, and human rights.

First of all, one of the dominant ideologies at Wesleyan or more broadly speaking in contemporary America is anti-communism. M.J. Heale has pointed out that for nearly a century and a half, anti-communism has been a diverse, painful sideshow of American politics, exploited by political and economic elites who characterized Marxism as a frightening threat to American ideals of boundless opportunities and riches. It appears as a constant thread in the American political and social fabric, and sometimes such perceptions become so pervasive as to constitute a Scare, exemplified by the Palmer Raids of 1919-20, and the McCarthyism of the 1950s. Heale argues that though the term *anti-communism* is of fairly recent general usage, it has deep historical roots in the United States (1990: 1).

The Communist Part of China (CPC), on the other hand, is officially adhered to communism and Marxism-Leninism. The party was founded in July 1921 in Shanghai, after a

lengthy civil war. Soon after the CPC established its political power, Mao Zedong launched a revolution with a rural focus that was essentially based on Marxist-Leninist ideologies. Later in 1949, he founded the People's Republic of China and started ruling over the country for almost three decades. Different from Western society where Mao is perceived as a dictator and a tyrant comparable to Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin, Chinese people idolize Mao as "the red sun in their hearts" and a "Savior of the people" (Wang 2008: 34). After Mao died in 1976, his influence still remains latent in China, exemplified in the multiple waves of "Mao Fever" since the 1980s.

At Wesleyan, this clash of ideologies on communism between Chinese and American students is very transparent. For instance, though Marxism or socialist thinking in general is well received by many American students on the left, Maoist' interpretation of Marxism and practice of communism in politics is widely unpopular. At Wesleyan, the dominant view of American students on China is that: China is a country where democratic ideals are missing as a result of the oppression by the Communist regime. In response to this stereotype of China, many Chinese students feel upset and regard it as a typical "Western bias". They also blame the Western media for insinuating Americans an anti-China mentality that is infiltrated with ignorance, arrogance, and hostility against China. This anti-China mentality, strangely, goes hand in hand with the general appreciation of Americans for Chinese food, Chinese Kung Fu, and other cultural forms. One student, Xi, says after she started reading the New York Times' report on China, she came to realize how U.S. media distorts the image of China and completely overlooks the political progresses that are taking place in China.

For instance, in Western news media, the rhetoric still references China as a "socialist country" where individual freedom is very limited. However, few realize that the term "socialism" is actually outdated because back in the early 1980s the Communist party took the neoliberal approach to reshape its economy. Neoliberalism is a contemporary political

movement advocating economic liberation, free trade and open markets (Yu 2008: 198). In the context of China, the continuing process of privatization of state resources toward privileged individuals and full participation in the global economy represent the trademark of the neoliberal approach. Furthermore, the rise of private entrepreneurs, private restaurants and private housing has indicated the transition of China from a socialist collectivization to private ownership in the context of the global economy (Yu 2008). Besides privatization and marketization that have been actively promoted by the state, deregulation is another key tenet of neoliberalism being practiced by the Communist government. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, deregulation of the leisure industry was one of the most noticeable changes in the state's attitude, from "cracking everything down" to "letting things go". This change can be traced in the emergence of many new leisure activities that were previously prohibited, such as bowling (Gan 2000). Chinese individuals have been ceded much greater autonomy in the realm of sociability and leisure consumption since the high Maoist era.

However, these shifts and nuances in the political ideologies of the Chinese government are often ignored or dismissed by Western individuals, media, and society. Many Americans still perceive China as a country where denies individual freedom and oppresses its citizens. At Wesleyan, Chinese students are often confronted with questions that challenge those Maoist ideologies that are no longer in place. These challenges, on the one hand, show how out of touch the majority of American individuals are with China's contemporary politics. On the other hand, they often come across not only as critiques, but also as attacks on the beloved motherland of Chinese students. For instance, Peng, a senior at Wesleyan, expresses her frustration:

American students have this patronizing tone when they ask me about democracy in China. It just feels that they are not really asking you about the condition and they already have their answers in mind. They all hate dictatorship. They think countries without freedom of expression suck. And sometimes, they give off this vibe that really bothers me: like oh we have democracy and you don't. You guys can't vote? That is unfortunate...you

know, that kind of attitude is very...very patronizing. How much do they know about China? Those Americans have never been to or lived in China before. Everything they know about China is from their media. And just based on that, they arbitrarily assume that China has no democracy at all, or Chinese people must be unhappy because they can't vote. American students don't understand that democracy is not everything. And at this point, democracy is certainly not the primary concern for the majority of Chinese. Getting wealthier so they can afford an apartment, their child's tuition, their parent's medical treatment are much more realistic concerns. Do people really care they can't get on YouTube or Facebook? No, we have our own websites for social networking and videos. You know I wish American people could be more respectful of other culture. They shouldn't just criticize other country's political system without knowing much about it. That's very disrespectful.

Peng's account reveals one of the major ideological conflicts between Chinese and American students: democracy. American students tend to criticize China for its absence of democracy; whereas, Chinese students just don't consider democracy as such an important issue at the moment. To most Chinese students, though they appreciate democratic values such as individual liberty, equality of opportunity and freedom of expression, they still think it is unfair for Western countries to impose these values on Chinese society.

The academia has placed this dispute over the necessity of democracy between two countries in the notion of "modernity". For instance, German sociologists Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim argue that contemporary Western Europe is currently in the state of "second modernity", a new era of post-democracy and a post-welfare state. After the industrial revolution, scarcity was greatly reduced thanks to the development of technology. An enormous amount of goods were produced for the populations of developed countries. Yet, new challenges had quickly emerged: post-industrial societies had to deal with hazards and insecurities introduced by modernization itself, which are characterized by Beck as "risks" (1992: 15). In other words, the "second modernity" involves pressing issues that are different from the ones in "first modernity". These issues, as faced by many developed nations, include global economic crises and widening transnational inequalities.

Meanwhile, the Chinese individuals are still striving to achieve goals that belong to the “first modernity” of Western Europe, such as comfortable material lives, secure employment, welfare benefits, and freedom to travel, speak and engage in public activities (Yan 2010: 290). At the state level, the Chinese government is also prioritizing economic growth and sustainability over political structural reform. Xi Jinping, the new leader of China, recently explains the so-called “Chinese dream”: “by the time the Communist Part of China celebrates its 100th anniversary, we will no doubt have achieved the goal of completely building a ‘Xiaokang Society’. We will become a prosperous, strong, democratic, civilized and harmonious socialist modernized country on its way to the ultimate great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.” (Tiechuan 2013) Xiaokang (Chinese: 小康), a Confucian term first used 3000 years ago, now became one the Chinese leaders frequently use in reference to the party’s goal. “Xiaokang Society” basically describes a well-off society in which most of the population in Mainland China are able to live comfortably. Correspond to what President Xi points out, Hu Jintao, the recently retired party secretary of China, set a new growth target for China in his opening speech at the Party Congress last November: “on the basis of making China’s development much more balanced, coordinated, and sustainable, we should double its 2010 GDP and per capita income for both urban and rural residents [by 2020]” (Roberts 2012). Both the revival of the concept of “Xiaokang Society”, as well as the focus on elevating the living standards of every Chinese citizen, confirm that the Chinese government in fact is prioritizing the economic wellbeing of people over political change.

This suggests, the difference in ways of understanding democracy between two student bodies in fact speaks to the fundamental difference in the broader conditions of modernity between China and the U.S. Different from the U.S., China is just starting to transform from the “first modernity” to the “second modernity” by precipitating its practice of market economy and global capitalism. In addition, recognizing the growing gaps between

rich and poor, city and countryside, the government has placed enormous emphasis on adopting a more balanced and sustainable model of development that ultimately would lead China to a more harmonious society. Given this social context, it is of little surprise that at this particular moment, democracy may not seem as important to the Chinese as it is to the Americans.

Similarly, the ideological conflict on individualism between two student bodies embodies another broader social difference between two societies. For instance, many Chinese students grew up being taught not to challenge the authority or to question the system. Even though they come to a politically progressive school like Wesleyan, they still feel reluctant to engage in social activism that are popular among American students. Neither are they interested in joining any of those heated debates on campus such as chalking, need-blind, and diversity. Some of my American friends told me they do not understand why Chinese students think these issues and debates about social justice are unimportant or irrelevant to them. Many hypothesize it may have to do with China's authoritarian regime, that living in an oppressive society like China would make people politically passive and not willing to question the ideologies of the state.

Fei Xiaotong, China's finest sociologist, prefers to locate the fundamental difference between Western and Chinese ideologies in the mode of social association. His famous text on China "From the Soil" analogizes Western society to "straws in a bundle", in which all members in an organization are equivalent. This pattern produces a concept of constitutionality: an organization cannot deny the rights of an individual. Chinese society, on the other hand, is a lot more hierarchical and egocentric. It mirrors the image of "ripples in the water": the ripple becomes weaker as it goes farther out, resembling the power in the society. In these rather elastic networks that make up Chinese society, there is always a self at the center of each web. Fei highlights that this notion of the self amounts to egocentrism, not

individualism (1992). With individualism, individuals make up the organizations in a way that one person cannot encroach on others. Whereas, “in Chinese traditional thought, there is no comparable set of ideas, because, for us, there is only egocentrism. Everything worthwhile rests on an ideology in which the self is central”. (1992: 67) This is probably why Chinese students are not as actively involved in political issues such as institutional racism, poverty, and inequality of education, as other students are on campus. In most cases, Chinese students are much more concerned with their own academic performance, career planning, and individual pleasure that mostly derives from consumerism, media, and sports. This political reluctance of claiming rights is not necessarily rendered by the communist regime per se, because fundamentally, “the Chinese mode of association does not allow individual rights to be an issue at all. ” (Fei 1992: 70)

In addition to these different understanding of communism, democracy and individualism, human rights condition in China also created an ideological conflict between two student bodies. In my interviews with Chinese students, they say they are frequently asked to comment on the human rights condition in China. These questions are often very pointed, and sometimes come across as accusatory. For instance, several respondents recall that they were asked by their American friends to comment on the detention of Ai Weiwei in 2011. Ai Weiwei is a well-known Chinese contemporary artist who has been an outspoken critic of the Chinese government. He was arrested by Chinese police at the Beijing airport in 2011 for tax evasion. Yet many believe his detention was in relation to his political activism that potentially would “cause disturbance”. Several Chinese respondents encountered questions from their American friends such as: what do you think of the detention of Ai Weiwei? Do you know that Ai Weiwei was detained at the airport by the police? Isn't that crazy?

These questions often come across as “unfriendly” to Chinese students because they seem to imply, as one respondent puts it, “China is such a terrible country”. Moreover, these are some really tricky questions to answer. On the one hand, some Chinese students do feel sympathetic towards those dissidents detained by Chinese government. Internally, they agree with most American students that the government should not arrest people for voicing their opinions or critiquing the party. On the other hand, the emotional attachment to China compels these students to conceal their support for human rights and instead devote every effort to defend their mother country.

Meanwhile, there are also a number of Chinese students who do not necessarily support such detention, and yet they buy into the rhetoric often used by the Chinese media, which sees every “human rights” critique from the West as an instance of “interference in China’s internal affairs”. As Liu says in the interview: “I don’t know why Americans make such a big deal out of the detention of Ai Weiwei. It is not their business. It is not their place to criticize China. We do not want their opinions on our domestic issues”. This rejection of Western criticism on China’s politics and the rhetoric of “internal affairs”, as some scholars have argued, indicates the resurgence of Chinese nationalism since the mid 1990s, accompanied with the rise of China as an economic giant. Geremie Barme delineates this in his study of Chinese Avant-garde nationalism:

The end of the Cold War has seen the revival throughout the world of national aspirations and interests; developments in China have certainly not occurred in isolation. The rapid decay of Maoist ideological beliefs and the need for continued stability in the Chinese Communist Party have led to an increased reliance on nationalism as a unifying ideology. But whereas throughout the 1980s the Communist Party emphasized its role as the paramount patriotic force in the nation, mobilizing nationalistic symbols and mythology to shore up its position, by the 1990s the situation had altered. Patriotic sentiment is no longer the sole province of the Party and its propagandists. Just as commercialization is creating a new avaricious social contract of sorts, so nationalism is functioning as a form of consensus beyond the bounds of official culture (Barme 1995: 211).

This resurgence of Chinese nationalism is most evident in the aftermath of the US bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, when “thousands of students in Beijing shouted anti-US slogans, burned American flags, threw bricks, and besieged the American embassy for four days” (Zhao, 2002: 887). Though it is argued that this anti-US demonstration was more of a momentary outrage, nationalism has unarguably reemerged and flourished in China ever since the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre (Zhao, 2002).

This revival of nationalism certainly has impacted the Post-90s generation who witnessed both the socioeconomic transformation across the country, as well as a growing disenchantment with the West and its dominant ideologies. The sense of pride and self-worth once instilled by Mao during the 1960s is now coming back to China in a more systematic and transformative language. For instance, some Chinese students at Wesleyan refuse to feel humiliated by its distinctive political culture, despite the challenges they encounter on campus. They also reject the simplistic dichotomy between democratic versus undemocratic. They believe China is somewhere in between these two ends of the spectrum. Many Chinese students told me they wish their American counterparts could go to China and see what is really going on over there. They also wish American students could be more tolerant of different political culture and have a more moderate view on China.

However, the reality suggests that such wishful thinking is very difficult to come true at Wesleyan. In fact, many Chinese students are overwhelmed by this dominant Wesleyan culture, and ultimately choose to form their own social network. The dominant ideology controlled by American students at Wesleyan in fact fails to extend its reach to international communities. Many Chinese students at Wesleyan find it inadequate to identify themselves as “liberal” and “politically progressive”, the typical image of Wesleyan students. At the same time, due to the marginalized status of international students, their non-Western political

ideologies are often dismissed or even problematized at this liberal place, which fundamentally draws the very definition of “liberal” into question.

Conclusion

Substantial research has been done on the self-segregation of immigrants and black people in the United States within the context of racial discrimination and identity crisis, but less work has been devoted to understanding the self-segregation of international students in a college setting. Particularly, given that the explosion of Chinese students in American colleges and universities just recently became a social phenomenon, very few studies have been conducted to investigate the experience of Chinese international students in the U.S. This analysis of the Chinese international community at Wesleyan University fills the gap by situating the study in the phenomenon of self-segregation, arguing that it is the combination of institution, culture and ideology that perpetuates such phenomenon. Firstly, different from previous studies on Chinese students in America, the role of structural program is found to be crucial in explaining self-segregation. At Wesleyan, the International Student Orientation program (ISO) is held prior to the beginning of the first semester. Although it is intended to help international students better transit from their home country to U.S. college environment, it actually facilitates the formation of exclusive communities by physically grouping all international students together. This institutional grouping turns out to have provided little incentive for international students to reach out to American students because they already form a tight community with their compatriots. Also, the office of International Students has not fully taken up the responsibility of integrating international students with other communities, or helping them to mitigate cultural clashes both during and after the ISO program. This negligence in promoting interracial exchange and cultural dialogue ultimately catalyzes the isolation of Chinese students from the rest of student bodies.

Secondly, the analysis calls for greater attention to the role culture and ideology play in the self-segregation of Chinese international students. Unlike several existing literature that points at the presence or the history of racial discrimination, this paper argues that it is both the cultural dissonance caused by Chinese students' unfamiliarity with American culture, as well as their practice of Chinese identity that play the role in self-isolation. It is found that discordant cultural experience consequently discourages Chinese students from seeking friendship with American peers. Meanwhile, previous studies have also failed to identify ideology as one of the major barriers to interracial friendship. My finding suggests that the ideological clash on communism, democracy, individualism and human rights between Chinese and American student bodies further deepens self-segregation. It is important to note that these ideological conflicts are by no means confined within the place of Wesleyan. In fact, they are a reflection of the broader differences in history and culture between these two countries. For instance, the history of anticommunism in the U.S., the rise of Chinese nationalism in Post 1989, the dichotomy between Chinese egocentrism and American individualism, and the Western tradition of demonizing non-Western political culture have all shaped these clashes of ideologies experienced by two student bodies.

In the context of Wesleyan, I argue that the current prevalence of self-segregation of international communities on campus fundamentally problematizes the liberal culture of Wesleyan. It is ironic that Wesleyan as a progressive liberal arts institution, on the one hand, is respected for its diversity of culture and tolerance of different opinions; yet on the other hand, Wesleyan's predominant political culture and progressive ideologies have marginalized and intimidated those who hold very different political views, or those who are less "liberal". This contradiction in the theory and practice of political diversity actually reflects a deeply ingrained prejudice that is Wesleyan should only have one political ideology. Such belief in homogeneity and the intolerance of other ideologies is a false understanding of education. In

a truly liberal institution, education should welcome dissents and disagreements, and protect different voices and opinions. In this regard, President Michael Roth's words are rather illuminating:

I often describe Wesleyan as representing the best in progressive liberal arts education. To truly be progressive, to develop programs that lead other institutions to learn from our example, we need to hear thoughtful voices from a variety of political perspectives. We need more vigorous debate on campus about political issues, and debate that does not just feature different views from the same sector of the ideological spectrum. (Roth 2012)

As President Roth points out, Wesleyan as a leading institution should strive for an educational environment that is able to tolerate polarized ideologies without imposing one on the other. It is also important to point out that recruiting more and more international students to Wesleyan is far from accomplishing the mission of promoting diversity and inclusion. Having a physical presence of a diverse student body while rendering some of the population feeling marginalized is not what Wesleyan should take pride in. Therefore, rather than permitting the existence of self-segregation in international communities, the administration should take a much more active role in puncturing cultural barriers and transgressing political boundaries through dialogues and conversations. Only in that way, Wesleyan would be truly respected for its tolerant, pluralistic and multicultural environment.

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