



Research Article

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Social Challenges and Experiences of Chinese International University Students: The Sociocultural and Psychological Racism Perspective

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Abstract

International university students face challenges due to the sociocultural differences in the host country. However, only a few studies focused on the issues for Chinese international university students in South Korea. This study aimed to understand the experiences of Chinese international university students in a South Korean university majoring in public health and social care. The following questions guided the current study, how do public health and social care Chinese international students describe their academic and living experiences in South Korea in terms of the Sociocultural and Psychological Racism? With the qualitative inquiry, 50 participants with 100 interview sessions and 12 focus group activities were invited. The results indicated that university experiences due to nationality, social experiences due to nationality, and language learning experiences were the three main themes. University departments should read the students' comments in this study and take into account the results of this research to reform and improve the university experience of all international students. Also, government agencies may reform their current plans for international students and foreigners in the community.

Keywords: Cultural discrimination, discrimination, health student, international student, nationality, neo-racism, public health, Sociocultural and Psychological Racism, South Korean university, student experience

1. Introduction and Background

1.1 The research background

For the past several decades, globalisation has encouraged students to study abroad and pursue education away from their home regions and countries (Lambert et al., 2019; Lee & Opio, 2011). According to a recent report, Asian international students represent more than 50% of the international population globally. Although most international students decide to pursue education in English-speaking countries, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada, over the past few decades, many international students have moved to other Asian regions and countries, such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan, and South Korea, to continue their education (*Countries with the Largest Amount of International Students as a Share of the Total Higher Education Population in 2019, 2020*).

South Korea is a popular destination for university education. According to the *Study Korea Project 2004 (Education of International Students, 2020)*, South Korea aims to attract international students for the sake of educational and cultural diversity. According to recent statistics (Koh & Kim, 2019), more than 160,000 international students were enrolled in one of the 430 South Korean universities and graduate schools during the 2018/2019 academic year. The enrolment of international students has reached its highest point since the 1990s, based on the records of the National Institute for International Education and Education Ministry of South Korea. In 2021, a study (Yoon, 2021) sponsored by Statista further illustrated the number of foreign students in higher education institutions in South Korea from 2010 to 2020. During the 2019/2020 academic year, approximately 154,000 international students were enrolled in one of South Korea's higher education institutions, including degree-seeking candidates and language school learners (i.e., non-degree seekers). Figure 1 illustrates the enrolment of international students. During the 2018/2019 academic year, international student enrolment numbers rose to 160,165, the highest within the decade.

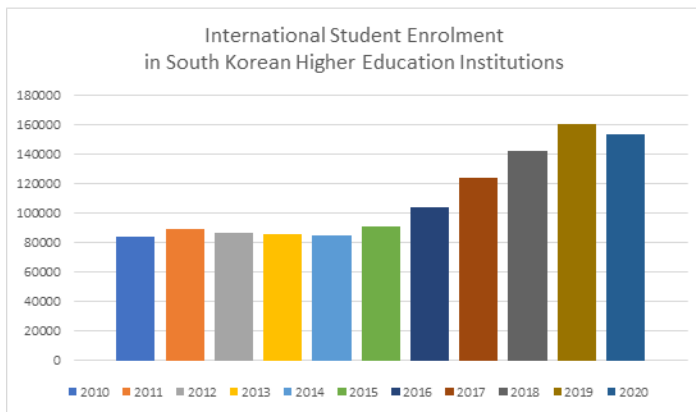


Figure 1: International student enrolment in South Korea Higher Education Institutions

From the perspective of recruitment and with the aim of encouraging international students to move to South Korea to study (Hawley & Paek, 2005), the *Study Korea Project* refined the recruitment procedure in regard to international students. First, unlike other English-speaking regions and countries, which have established long-term development and reputations in terms of student enrolment, the South Korean government has established government-sponsored scholarship programmes for potential postgraduate students pursuing Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) programmes, particularly for students from Asian regions and countries (e.g., China, India, Mongolia, etc.) that may have research-based student populations (Collins, 2014). By 2015, the South Korean government aimed to expand the Global Korea Scholarship (GKS) programmes to at least \$100 million USD per year for international students.

Second, the government encourages different interdisciplinary studies and programmes, upgrading single learning achievements with multiple goals and skills. For example, many graduate schools in South Korea have established taught master's degrees in technology and business. As a result, graduates are equipped with technology and business knowledge (Jon et al., 2014). Third, aside from some top-tier and metropolitan universities and graduate schools, most universities have reduced their admission requirements to attract additional student enrolment, particularly non-traditional students who could not otherwise afford the tuition fees or would be rejected by other universities (Choi & Kim, 2018).

Fourth, for some students who have not completed any internationally recognised exams for

university admission, the South Korean government recommends community colleges (i.e., university college, open university, junior-level college) for foundation degrees or higher diplomas. Students may transfer to a senior-level university for a top-up degree after graduation (Na et al., 2010). In short, the South Korean government and related schools may offer both merit-based and unprepared students opportunities to study abroad.

In terms of international students' living concerns and problems, two major elements have been established, including post-study work opportunities (Cha & Chang, 2009) and communication between local members of the public and international students (Lee, 2017). As mentioned above, the South Korean government has established many scholarship programmes for international students, to facilitate post-study workforces. In other words, if international students contribute their energy to the South Korean community after graduation, short-term and mid-term human resources shortages may be resolved. Therefore, in addition to offering government-sponsored scholarship programmes, the South Korean government also encourages academic and post-study internships at the organisational level (Cha & Chang, 2009). Second, living in a foreign country is one of the greatest challenges faced by international students. The government and local community centres may establish meetings, conferences, and peer-to-peer sharing sessions between international students and local members of the public in order to ameliorate some of this challenge (Suran Lee & Sohn, 2017).

From the perspective of university development, the South Korean government also encourages the recruitment of international faculty members in order to increase diversity and encourage international research studies between South Korea and foreign regions and countries (Lee & Bailey, 2020). Although many universities in South Korea have foreign language teachers' programmes (e.g., English and Chinese as a foreign language programmes), the demand for native foreign language teachers is still high. Therefore, populations of foreign faculty members (i.e., both foreign language and subject instructors) continue to increase gradually. In short, based on the *Study Korea Project* and the arrangements made by the South Korean government, over the decades, a large number of international students have decided to pursue their education in South Korea and contribute their knowledge to the country after graduation.

1.2 The significance of the study

Two significant points were founded. First of all, due to the rapid developments, many Chinese students decided to go abroad for university education. South Korea is one of the popular destinations, particularly for students in the field of public health and social care. However, based on the current database, there are only a few studies concerned about the problems for Chinese international students in South Korea, particularly in the field of public health and social care. Therefore, there is a demand and gap in this area.

Second, based on the previous studies (Betts, 2017; Cha & Chang, 2009; Kwon, 2013), many Chinese international university students decided to come to South Korea for university education. It is not hard to believe that some of them may stay in South Korea for career development after university graduation. Over the past few decades, the population of Chinese international university students in South Korea has grown rapidly. However, only a few research studies have explored the experiences of Chinese international university students, particularly in South Korean environments. Given the background of the current global challenges faced by Chinese international university students, the results of this study may help South Korean universities understand how to establish schemes and plans to aid international students (i.e., not just Chinese international university students) in terms of adapting socially and culturally. As the South Korean government wishes to attract Chinese international university students to their university system, the results of this study also provide recommendations for upgrading and reforming the *Study Korea Project 2004 (Education of International Students, 2020)*.

1.3 The purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of international university students at a South Korean university, particularly Chinese international university students and their experiences of the Sociocultural and Psychological Racism (Dos Santos, 2019, 2020; Lee et al., 2017; Lee, 2007). The current study was guided by two research questions:

1. How do Chinese international university students describe their academic experiences in South Korean society in terms of the Sociocultural and Psychological Racism, particularly for students who are majoring in one of the public health and social care academic programmes?
2. How do Chinese international university students describe their living experiences in South Korean society in terms of the Sociocultural and Psychological Racism, particularly for students who are majoring in one of the public health and social care academic programmes?

1.4 The theoretical framework: Sociocultural and psychological racism

The Sociocultural and Psychological Racism (Dos Santos, 2019, 2020; Lee et al., 2017; Lee, 2007) is the theoretical framework of this study. Unlike traditional racism, which mainly focuses on individuals' skin colour and biological characteristics, Sociocultural and Psychological Racism refers to different types of racism based on negative perspectives and social stigma about the individuals and groups. The researcher categorised two directions, including the psychological and internal factors with 1) religious and philosophical behaviours, and 2) personal beliefs; and social, personal, and external factors with 1) place of origin, 2) age, 3) social behaviours, 4) cultural characteristics, 5) spoken language, and 6) sexual orientation. Therefore, the Sociocultural and Psychological Racism allow the researcher to understand and explain the situation faced by Chinese international university students in South Korea, as it is determined by their social and psychological factors. Please refer to Figure 2 for an illustration of the Sociocultural and Psychological Racism.

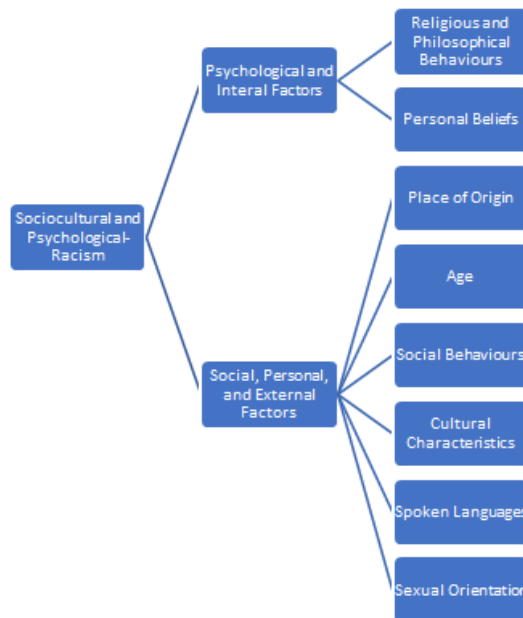


Figure 2: Sociocultural and Psychological Racism

2. Methodology

2.1 The qualitative design: Phenomenological analysis

The qualitative research design with the phenomenological analysis (Giorgi, 1985) was employed in this study about the experiences of Chinese university students in South Korea. The phenomenological analysis matched the expectation of this study. First, this study sought to collect data from a larger population across the Korean Peninsula, which did not limit a particular school, department, academic programme, or site. Second, the population of the participant was large (i.e. with 50 participants in total). With the phenomenological analysis, the wider perspectives and experiences from all participants could better create a holistic picture of the current situation in South Korea. Third, as this study sought the understanding and perspective from Chinese international students in the field of public health and social care, the ways for public health and social care offered the particular direction(s) for the readers and researchers.

2.2 Participants and recruitments

South Korea is one of the popular destinations for international students, particularly Chinese international students. With the governmental arrangement for *Study Korea Project 2004*, many Chinese students decided to come to South Korea for career and education development. First of all, the researcher contacted a Chinese international student who is currently enrolled at one of the South Korean universities as a student. The researcher sent the interview protocol, the rationale of the study, agreement forms, and related materials to the participant. Once the participants agreed with the participation, the participant signed the agreement for confirmation. Then, the data collection procedure began. After the first interview session, the participant was recommended to refer at least one Chinese international university student(s) for the study (i.e. in the field of public health and social care). After several rounds of the referral, a total of 50 participants were willing to join. In short, the researcher employed the snowball sampling strategy (Merriam, 2009) to recruit participants all across the Korean Peninsula. The participants should meet the following criteria,

- Identify as a Chinese international student;
- Currently enrolled as a student at a South Korean university;
- Major in the field of public health and social care, including but not limited to nursing, social welfare, pharmacy, clinical psychology, counselling etc;
- Undergraduate and postgraduate students;
- Stay in South Korea for at least one academic year;
- At least 18 years old;
- Non-Vulnerable person.

2.3 Data collection

Two tools were employed for the data collection. First, the researcher employed the in-depth and semi-structured interview tool for some in-depth understanding and sharing from the participant. According to Seidman (Seidman, 2006), in order to capture in-depth sharing and lived stories from the participants, the researcher should employ multiple interview sessions for the data collection procedure. Therefore, the researcher invited each participant for two in-depth interview sessions (Merriam, 2009). As the data collection procedure was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher offered the participants the options (i.e. face-to-face interview or distance-based interview). As a result, 11 participants selected the distance-based interview option. Each interview session lasted from 41 to 75 minutes.

After 100 in-depth and semi-structured interview sessions, the researcher invited all the focus group activities (Morgan, 1998; Vaughn et al., 1996). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the

recommendation of social distancing, only three participants were allowed to join the face-to-face-based focus group activities in person. However, the distance-based focus group activities might join up to ten participants. As a result, two face-to-face-based focus group activities were formed. Then, ten distance-based focus group activities were completed. Each focus group activity lasted from 78 to 109 minutes.

During the interview sessions and focus group activities, the researcher employed a digital recorder for the recording. All participants agreed with the arrangement. However, no visual data could be recorded in order to protect the privacy of all parties. After the researcher collected all the data from the interview sessions and focus group activities, the researcher transcribed the voiced messages into written transcripts. The researcher sent the related materials to the participant for the member checking procedure. All participants agreed with their data for further development.

2.4 Data analysis

The researcher employed the data analysis tool from the grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). First, the researcher re-read the transcripts multiple times for the potential groups and categories. The researcher employed the open-coding technique for the first-level themes and subthemes. From this stage, 22 themes and 12 subthemes were yielded. However, qualitative researchers advocated that further developments should be followed. Therefore, the axial-coding technique was followed. As a result, three themes and six subthemes were reported.

2.5 Data protection

The privacy of the participants was the most important element as the general public members, school leaders, and government agencies may capture the information from the participants. Therefore, all participants were given the pseudonym for this study. All signed agreements, voiced messages, written transcripts, personal information, contact information, email addresses, computer, and related materials were locked in a password-protected cabinet. Only the researcher has the rights to read the materials. After the researcher completed the study, all related materials were deleted and destroyed in order to protect the privacy of all parties. The study was supported by Woosong University Academic Research Funding 2022.

3. Results and Discussions

Although the participants came from different parts of China and studied in different parts of South Korea, many shared similar comments and opinions based on their experiences in South Korea. After several rounds of the data collection procedure, the researcher categorised the comments and opinions from the participants. Three themes and six sub-themes were yielded. Table 1 outlines the themes and subthemes of this study.

Table 1: Themes and subthemes

Themes and Subthemes	
Negative experiences: University experiences due to nationality	
	Discrimination from university instructors
	Discrimination from Korean classmates
	Chinese students should not learn public health
Negative experiences: Social experiences due to nationality	
	Hate speech and behaviours from members of the general public
	Social exclusion: Non-Korean people should leave the region
	Do not believe in foreign and Chinese public health professionals
Positive experiences: The language is not hard	

3.1 Negative experiences: University experiences due to nationality

...coming to South Korea is the worst decision...I have ever made in my life...I regret my decision every single minute...and I want to go to Japan or other foreign countries instead...as a Chinese student...I felt...I should not be here...and I should leave this horrible region immediately...to save my life...this region is dangerous for women... (Participant #18, Interview)

In the interview sessions and focus group activities, all participants expressed significant negative comments and opinions. The researcher tried to balance these trends with positive follow-up questions and guidelines. Nevertheless, many of the participants did not have any positive comments to make and refuse to share any positive opinions and lived stories about their time in South Korea. The researcher yielded two themes regarding negative comments and opinions from the perspective of Sociocultural and Psychological Racism (Dos Santos, 2019, 2020; Lee et al., 2017; Lee, 2007).

First of all, the participants' Chinese nationality was one of the elements for which they were discriminated against in South Korea. In other words, the participants believed that the South Korean people discriminated and looked down on Chinese people due to their place of origin. Some participants expressed their comments and opinions about the environmental setting at their university:

...in some classroom environments...there are no Korean and English signs...there are only Chinese signs...for these classrooms...only Chinese international students are using these classrooms...no other international students and Korean students and classes are assigned to these rooms...why and how could they exclude Chinese to some places?... (Participant #20, Interview)

...there is a sign in the library, Chinese students go to the left...but why only Chinese students? What about Korean students and other international students?...why Chinese students can enjoy or experience...this unique experience?...I don't care is it good or bad...I care about the term Chinese student...but not international students... (Participant #3, Focus Group Activity)

Besides the special arrangements for Chinese international university students, more than half of the participants expressed their concerns about the arrangements regarding dormitory or on-campus living units at their university. Many of them were living on-campus in one of the school housing quarters. However, many were concerned about the living units exclusively for Chinese international university students. The participants shared the following comments:

...I agreed that the university wants to move students with similar backgrounds on the same place...but why there is a building...only for Chinese?...if you are grouping us by major, which is okay...why they are grouping us because of our nationality...I don't feel good... (Participant #19, Interview)

...Chinese students are living...in some off-campus halls and rooms...we have to take the bus...at least 20 mins away from the university...the building is only for Chinese students...other students are living on-campus with others...only Chinese students are living in another town...outsides of the town of the university... (Participant #31, Focus Group Activity)

Some of the other participants also expressed concerns about the school housing arrangements, due to their nationality. These concerns do not only cover problems faced by Chinese students, but are relevant to all other international students, as explained by some of the participants:

...I really don't like the idea that the dorm building and rooms...are divided...based on our nationality...Japanese students are in building A...Chinese are building B and C towers...students from Central Asia...are building D...is it because of our living behaviours?...but can't us...international students are living with Korean students?...why Korean students can live in some better and nicer buildings... (Participant #33, Focus Group Activity)

...yes...Japanese and Chinese are living in a building...with a lot of Korean flags and political slogan...about the territory conflicts...the messages from the political leaders...but Koreans students...have different types of rooms and setting... (Participant #38, Interview)

In short, based on Sociocultural and Psychological Racism (Dos Santos, 2019, 2020; Lee et al., 2017; Lee, 2007), university leaders arrange the school environmental setting and school housing plans based on the students' nationality. Many participants expressed that the biases and discrimination involved not only affect Chinese students but also international students from different parts of the world, particularly countries with histories of conflict with South Korea (Dos Santos, 2020a). Reflecting on previous studies (Jon, 2012), it is evident that conflict and misunderstandings regarding Chinese individuals are not uncommon in South Korea. The experiences and opinions of the participants confirmed the findings from the literature in regard to Sociocultural and Psychological Racism (Dos Santos, 2019, 2020; Lee et al., 2017; Lee, 2007).

3.1.1 Discriminations from university instructors

Based on a previous study (Walcutt et al., 2012), when the researcher asked about the participants' learning experiences with their faculty members, all expressed that their Korean instructors contributed different levels of energy and had different expectations of students, dependent on their nationality and surname. The participants also stated that foreign faculty members do not discriminate against students based on their nationality:

...Korean students left hand sides...Chinese students in the middle...other international students right hand sides...are you sure?...is it called the exclusion? Is it called slavery?...I reported this to the international students' office...no answers and no actions were taken... (Participant #7)

...my instructors always group us...for the discussion...based on our nationality...Korean students in these groups...Japanese, Chinese, Indian, Canadian...in our own groups...we cannot have intercultural communications...we are all isolated...(Participant #12)

In short, university faculty members tend to group students based on their nationality and surname (Walcutt et al., 2012). Based on the Sociocultural and Psychological Racism perspective (Dos Santos, 2019, 2020; Lee et al., 2017; Lee, 2007), nationality plays an important role in individuals' learning experiences, as people with different nationalities cannot easily communicate with each other in the same classroom environment. Although a few participants believed that the language barrier could be a concern, most participants advocated that discrimination and bias are key.

3.1.2 Discrimination from Korean classmates

With a reflection of a previous study (Suh et al., 2019), all respondents described negative experiences with their Korean classmates in some of their lessons. First, many expressed that their Korean classmates are unwilling to work with them on group projects due to their nationality and spoken language. Although all participating students had upper-intermediate or near-native Korean language proficiency, their accents prevent them from joining Korean students' groups, as some participants described:

...I can speak Korean...but my classmates told me...they cannot understand my Korean...they laughed at my language accent...they asked me to go back to China and leave Korea...because of the political conflicts...all of my friends' experiences...this discrimination...almost every semester...(Participant #23, Focus Group Activity)

...my classmates don't like me because I am Chinese...or non-Korean...also, I cannot speak Korean well...they believe I am not a good partner...but my grade is the best in our class...but these people judge me because of my birthplace and my language...it is unfair...but it is the general practice in Korea...(Participant #37, Interview)

3.1.3 Chinese students should not learn public health

...international students...and you Chinese students...need to leave South Korea...South Korea and all the Korean people do not welcome foreigners...this is what I hear every day in South Korea...it looks like I am begging the degree or money...(Participant #41, Interview)

When the researcher asked the participants about their role(s) as public health and social care students in the university, all participants expressed extreme comments and opinions, particularly their classmates and schoolmates due to their nationality and academic programmes (i.e. public health and social care). Most of the participants indicated that their nationality as Chinese international students always limited their opportunities and prevented positive discussions in the classroom environment. Two said:

...many of my classmates told me that...international students and Chinese students should not learn public health...because many Korean students are waiting for the spaces...as many Korean students cannot receive the offer letters from the university...but we Chinese and international students...with excellent grades did...therefore, they asked us to leave the country...(Participant #2, Focus Group Activity)

...a lot of my Korean classmates...said my nationality as Chinese and I cannot speak well in the Korean language...should not occupy the degree in health sciences...I come to Korea because I received the offers from the university...I do not need your [Korean classmates] permission...but those Korean people do not understand...(Participant #10, Focus Group Activity)

In conclusion, almost all participants shared negative comments and opinions about their nationality and spoken language in the school environment, and in regard to faculty members and classmates in the classroom environment (Kim, 2009; Suh et al., 2019; Walcutt et al., 2012). In line with the Sociocultural and Psychological Racism perspective (Dos Santos, 2019, 2020; Lee et al., 2017; Lee, 2007), individuals' place of origin and spoken languages play important roles in Chinese international university students' experiences in South Korea. This finding further confirms that the discrimination and bias experienced by Chinese international university students are solidified due to the elements outlined by the Sociocultural and Psychological Racism perspective (Dos Santos, 2019, 2020; Lee et al., 2017; Lee, 2007). Although the participants have tried their best to improve their language proficiency, their place of origin and nationality continue to prevent them from positive experiences in South Korea.

3.2 Negative experiences: social experiences due to nationality

Besides the comments and opinions regarding the university environment, all participants shared negative experiences related to their nationality in South Korean communities. Nationality cannot be changed. All participants were proud of their nationality and identified as Chinese international university students in South Korean communities. Although all of the participants advocated that they love China (i.e., their homeland), all were willing to learn and exercise South Korean social and cultural practices in their host environment. All had gained at least upper-intermediate to near-native levels speaking the Korean language before these interview sessions (e.g., they could express Korean cultural expectations). However, due to their accents and place of origin, these participants continued to experience negative feelings from members of the general public:

...I tried...I learnt the language and cultural courses from my school...I tried to speak Korean as much as possible...in school, in the community...but when those Korean people listen to my language...you can see their face(s)...they are acting your Chinese accent...you know they are making fun with your accent...(Participant #45, Interview)

...I was called the Chinese pig in the café...I don't understand why?...I did not say or do any bad things...I am just a student here...I do all the right things...but I was discriminated because of my nationality and my place of origin...I learnt the language everyday...but the discrimination...continued...(Participant #5, Interview)

In short, due to the Sociocultural and Psychological Racism (Dos Santos, 2019, 2020; Lee et al., 2017; Lee, 2007), the participants' place of origin and the way in which they spoke Korean with a Chinese accent became limitations and challenges in South Korean society. A previous study has also indicated that, although expats may try their best to learn about and enter the communities and societies of their host countries and regions, many encounter difficulties and challenges due to bias related to their background, beyond skin colour. In this case, although both Chinese and South Korean individuals share a similar skin colour, the challenges created due to their different places of origin and spoken languages prevented the Chinese participants from gaining positive experiences in South Korea.

3.2.1 Hate speech and behaviour from the general public

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, a great number of hate crimes and cases of discrimination occurred against Chinese people. South Korea is one of the places in which this was a serious issue. A previous study indicates that many South Korean people hold social and cultural biases against Chinese people, due to historical and political issues. Moreover, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, such biases and discrimination have been elevated. All participants in this study had experienced verbal abuse due to their social behaviours, spoken languages, and place of origin, as was highlighted:

...I was in the shopping district in Myeongdong...it is the visitor's heaven...after the COVID-19 pandemic...no visitors, especially Chinese visitors...I talked across the shopping districts once...the salespeople called me Chinese virus and bacteria...I called the police because I don't think it is right...the police officers did not care and support the salespeople...(Participant #1, Focus Group Activity)

...I was surprised that the Korean people hate me because I am a Chinese national...I did nothing wrong...I stayed in Korea for months and years...I did not go back to China...and I did not occur the coronavirus...but they called me Chinese virus because I am a Chinese...this is violence...but the Korean government and society...don't care...(Participant #11, Focus Group Activity)

Besides verbal harassment, all participants had seen written posts on social media about the off-limit for Chinese people. These illegal notes were shown in the newspapers. However, inaction from the government failed to acknowledge the discrimination taking place against Chinese residents in South Korea, as one participant highlighted:

...Chinese people are not welcome...this sign was everywhere in Korea after the corona outbreak...I believed the government might take actions...for all the foreigners...but no actions...they acknowledged and recognised...it made me vomit...(Participant #23, Interview)

In short, since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Chinese people have faced many challenges and discrimination due to their nationality. According to some previous studies (Fadda-Conrey, 2011; Kaplan, 2006) examining discrimination against Muslim individuals (i.e., Islamophobia) following 9-11 in the United States, after social crises and disasters, some groups of people may face bias and discrimination due to their characteristics (i.e., both traditional racism and Sociocultural and Psychological Racism). In this case, based on a recent study, Chinese people may face similar challenges after the COVID-19 pandemic as Muslim individuals do internationally, particularly in Korea (Abidin et al., 2021). The participants, in this case, have already expressed their concerns and described the social discrimination they have faced in South Korea.

3.2.2 Social exclusion: Non-Korean people should leave the region

Both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, all participants experienced social exclusion due to their nationality and place of origin. First of all, before the COVID-19 pandemic, more than half of the participants had been called 'Chinese pig' or 'Chinese dog' because of their nationality (Abidin et al., 2021). The participants were told to leave the region and go back to China:

...I was yelled at the café...as I could only speak broken Korean...I ordered a coffee in the café with my horrible Korean...but I spoke in Korea and I tried my best...to show respectfulness...to the local people...but my feedback was negative...the Korean server asked me to go back to China because I am not a Korea but a Chinese...(Participant #27, Interview)

After the COVID-19 pandemic occurred during the early 2020s, the violence and hate speech against Chinese individuals increased dramatically. Besides the verbal and written discrimination described above, one Chinese participant described how community members in the neighbourhood had screamed in front of their living units:

...I was scared...a lot of people...at least 20 people...every days...for nearly 2 months...screamed in the neighbourhood and asked all Chinese residents and students...back to China...they don't need the coronavirus...they called as the Chinese virus and worms...I called the police and asked the police...stop these impolite behaviours...no answers...no changes...(Participant #9, Interview)

3.2.3 Do not believe in foreign and Chinese public health professionals

Many of them have participated in internship, practicum, or volunteering services in the Korean communities before the data collection procedure(s). For the participants who joined and experienced the services in the Korean communities, all expressed negative feeling due to the impolite comments from the local Korean people. Based on the comments, many local Korean people do not believe in foreign public health and social care professionals, particularly Chinese people, two said:

...Korean people...not all of them...but I can say most of them...do not believe skilled Chinese workers...I want to express my passion to my patients...I do not see their nationality or place of origin...I just want to provide help and services...but the local Korean people...judge us because we are Chinese...(Participant #24, Interview)

...some senior citizens...do not want me to touch them...because I am a Chinese student...they asked me to leave the country...the staff in the centre...did not prevent this bias and ask me to provide service to other patients...but other patients said the same...(Participant #26, Focus Group Activity)

In conclusion, nationality and spoken language are two significant elements on which the Sociocultural and Psychological Racism is based (Dos Santos, 2019, 2020; Lee et al., 2017; Lee, 2007). Following the rationale of this study, the researcher confirmed that Chinese international university students face significant challenges, bias, and discrimination beyond their skin colour. Although both Chinese and South Korean people share a similar skin colour, this does not eliminate discrimination. After the occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic, discrimination and bias against Chinese people (not only Chinese international university students) in South Korea increased significantly (Abidin et al., 2021).

3.3 Positive experiences: The language is not hard to handle

The majority of comments in this study were negative. A few participants shared some positive experiences from their language learning journeys in South Korea, mostly in regard to the language

learning lessons at their university. For example, several said the South Korean culture and language are very similar to Chinese (Lee, 2017), due to their historical backgrounds:

...I could learn Korean...as short as a year...because more than 80% of the vocabulary in Korea...are the same as Chinese...I could feel the satisfaction...because I earned good grades in my language classes...(Participant #29, Focus Group Activity)

The researcher asked follow-up questions about the participants' positive experiences. One respondent noted that the Korean writing system is easier than Chinese characters, as a form of positive learning experience:

...I think it is very easy to handle the Korean language in a year...because the Korean characters are just voice symbol...it does not have any meaning...it should be easy for both Chinese and Japanese learners...(Participant #34, Interview)

In conclusion, although the researcher persisted with many follow-up questions about the participants' experiences (before and during the COVID-19 pandemic), only a few expressed positive experiences in regard to their time studying abroad in South Korea. This lack of positive experiences was largely due to their place of origin and spoken languages (i.e., based on the Sociocultural and Psychological Racism) (Dos Santos, 2019, 2020; Lee et al., 2017; Lee, 2007). It is worth noting that bias and discrimination do not only occur based on individuals' skin colour; social, cultural, and personal characteristics can play important roles.

4. Limitations and Future Research Directions

Based on the rationale and background of this study, the researcher concludes with four limitations and future research directions. First, the current study employed a qualitative research design with 50 participants across the Korean peninsula. However, the researcher could only recruit a few participants in each province and city. Intensive understandings and perspectives may have been overlooked as a result. Therefore, future research studies may increase the number of participants to enrich the results and findings.

Second, the current study examines Chinese international university students. This does not include students from different global communities. Although Chinese students are the largest population of international university students in South Korea, the voices and opinions of other students should be taken into account. Therefore, future research studies may further cover information and ideas from students from other countries and regions.

Third, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the data collection procedure was conducted via distance-based tools and systems. Without face-to-face interactions and relationships, some participants might not have been as willing to share some in-depth lived stories and perspectives. Therefore, after the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers and future studies may consider collecting data using face-to-face tools.

Finally, the current study focuses on issues in South Korea. However, populations of Chinese international university students are not limited to this one country. For example, the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, Canada, Japan, and Singapore host many Chinese international university students. Therefore, researchers in these countries and regions may take this study as a blueprint for similar research conducted in these other countries and regions.

5. Implications for Practice and Conclusions

The results of this study contribute to the current practice regarding international students' services at the university level. Although Chinese students share the same skin colour as South Korean residents, many have experienced bias and discrimination based on their nationality and spoken

languages. In order to improve this situation, university departments should read the students' comments in this study and take into account the results of this research in order to reform and improve the university experience of all international students.

Further, government agencies may reform their current plans for international students and foreigners in the community, as South Korea is a popular destination for international education purposes. The satisfaction and experiences of these groups of expats are important.

Finally, the results of this study may contribute to extant literature and theory. Currently, only a few studies focus on international students' experiences in South Korea in relation to the Sociocultural and Psychological Racism. The results of this study may fill gaps in the literature regarding Chinese international university students' comments and opinions about their South Korean university experiences.

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